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Stages of the Sea
20th Century Theatrical Entertainment in the Royal Navy

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Theatre Studies

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Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theatre Studies. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

Abstract

This thesis is the first full-length study to exclusively examine theatrical entertainment in the Royal Navy and the first study to put forward historical and contextual evidence of a 20th century shipboard theatrical repertoire. This thesis documents and analyses shipboard performances created for and by serving personnel on the upper decks, the aircraft hangars, and the messes of naval vessels at sea. This thesis draws upon written evidence from diaries and memoirs in formal archive holdings, interviews with naval personnel, and visual materials including photographs and commission books to provide a detailed historical, contextual analysis of a limited number of case studies in order to illustrate a broader nexus of theatrical practice within the Royal Navy.

Chapter One reveals theatrical entertainment to be an important aspect of the navy's unofficial heritage and pinpoints how theatrical productions and the activities associated with them including 'spinning dits' and sketch writing help to forge an exclusive naval identity among shipboard companies. Chapter Two investigates the shipboard entertainment produced by the Special Service Squadron (SSS) during the World Cruise (1923 -1924) and the production of children's parties during the latter half of the 20th century. This chapter highlights the strategic value of entertainment at sea in enabling displays of soft power that counter hard power displays in gunboat diplomacy. Chapter Three examines the motivations for and functions of Crossing the Line and SODS opera; two theatrical forms that both endorse and subvert naval hierarchies. The final chapter examines theatrical entertainments produced during the First World War on SS *Gourko* and by R.F Scott's company during the British National Antarctic Expedition (1901-1904) and considers the value of theatre-making as a survival strategy.

By adopting a case study approach, this thesis aims to not only consider the functions different theatrical forms in different sites, times, and situations serve for performers and their audiences but to open up new meanings of the theatrical in each context and to reveal what these practices tell us about naval shipboard communities more broadly.

Introduction

In April 2014, I was sitting in the auditorium of the Warwick Arts Centre theatre watching a Union Theatre production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore* directed by Sascha Regan. To my surprise, Regan had decided not to stage the production in its original 19th century setting. No longer were the men of *Pinafore* jolly jack tars aboard a sailing ship anchored at Spithead. Regan's all-male cast were the troops of a Second World War aircraft carrier. Waiting for orders, the men of the mess deck set out to entertain each other by staging one of their most popular tales, 'HMS Pinafore'. Whilst singing 'Little Buttercup', the leading hand of the mess slowly applied makeup and put on a wig and dress to play the role of the 'bum-boat' woman, Buttercup. Meanwhile, the men of the mess became a lively chorus of scantily clad women. This narrative frame was an inventive device that breathed new life into a well-known 19th century tale of a sailor and his love for the captain's daughter. However, perhaps unbeknownst to many in the audience and even to those on stage, was that this narrative frame of naval personnel staging a theatrical production at sea had a basis in truth. It was not until the following years of researching theatrical entertainment in the 20th century Royal Navy, I realised how true to life this representation of the social and cultural life of naval personnel at sea had been.

Across the 20th century, members of the Royal Navy have repeatedly produced shipboard theatricals; performances created for and by serving personnel on the upper decks, the aircraft hangars, and in the messes of naval vessels at sea. This is the first study that shines a spotlight on these practices and puts forward historical and contextual evidence for a 20th century shipboard theatrical repertoire. By investigating the origins and development of a wide range of theatrical forms, I argue that shipboard theatricals are not one-off events but are naval performance traditions that, operating within a broader nexus of entertainment at sea, play a significant role in the social and cultural life of the Royal Navy.

Surprisingly, very little has been written about shipboard theatricals and even less has been written about the theatrical practices of the 20th century Royal Navy. One of the earliest and widely circulated examples of theatrical shipboard entertainment by a British naval company is the production of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Richard II* on board the East India Company vessel, the *Red Dragon*. According to the remaining extracts of Captain William Keeling's journal, the men of the *Red Dragon* staged these productions in 1607 to prevent

'idleness and unlawful games' on the voyage to the Spice Islands.¹ A debate over the veracity of Keeling's account has generated wide interest in recent years with some scholars claiming that these extracts, published in the 19th century, are in fact a hoax conceived by John Payne Collier.² Other scholars argue for their legitimate status and for Keeling's account as proof of the first amateur performances of Shakespeare's plays, the first ever staging of *Hamlet*, the first Shakespearean plays to be translated, and the first Shakespearean plays to be staged on board a ship.³ Whether Keeling's journal extracts are a genuine record or 19th century forgery, the staging of *Hamlet* and *Richard II* on the *Red Dragon* have become one of the most well-known and frequently referenced examples of shipboard theatricals.⁴ On account of this wide circulation, one might be misled into presuming that plays from the professional repertoire broadly constitute theatrical entertainment at sea. This is simply not the case for theatrical shipboard entertainment of the Royal Navy. Very rarely does a reference to a play from the contemporary professional repertoire surface in oral histories or in the archived material remains of ephemeral performances. Knowledge of or access to a script from the professional repertoire is not a prerequisite for theatrical entertainment at sea.

The theatrical shipboard repertoire of the 20th century does not constitute a singular, fixed body of work. There is no set list of plays or scripts from which shipboard companies knowingly extract to stage entertainment; nor is there a definitive performance manual that is passed from generation to generation that tells members of the Royal Navy what they should perform, how or when they should stage it. The theatrical shipboard repertoire continually incorporates the new. Naval personnel write original scripts and perform sketches and acts of their own invention in direct response to the needs of the company, their physical environment, and the political, social, and cultural conditions of their time. Nevertheless, there are identifiable theatrical forms such as children's parties, SODS opera, and Crossing the Line that have been devised by the Royal Navy and repeated by successive generations of shipboard companies across the 20th century. There are also dramatic

¹ London, British Library (BL), India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/MAR/A/III, 'Dragon: Fragment of journal, William Keeling. 12 Mar 1607-17 Apr 1607'.

² See Bernice W. Kliman, 'At Sea about Hamlet at Sea: A Detective Story', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 62:2 (2011), 180–204.

³ See Graham Holderness, 'The Voyage of the Red Dragon', in *Tales from Shakespeare: Creative Collisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.21-23.

⁴ See *Ibid*; Sonia Massai, 'The Wide World: Shakespeare Across the Globe', in *Shakespeare in Ten Acts*, ed. by Gordon McMullan and Zoë Wilcox (London: British Library, 2016), pp.62-80; Michael Dobson, *Shakespeare and Amateur Performance: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), and Richmond Barbour, *The Third Voyage Journals: Writing and Performance in the London East India company 1607-10* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

conventions, ensemble and solo acts, and texts embedded within these forms that have been repeated, revised, and adapted by companies in many different sites and situations. The question arises then of how and why these practices are sustained and developed over time by geographically and historically disparate shipboard companies. As a result, this thesis considers the functions the theatrical shipboard repertoire serves for performers and their audiences in the Royal Navy and investigates what each case study explored in this thesis might tell us about the functions of theatrical entertainment within naval shipboard communities more broadly.

Most of the existing scholarship on shipboard theatricals relates to late 18th and 19th century practices. Jonathan Neale, in his PhD thesis *Forecastle and Quarterdeck: Protest, Discipline and Mutiny in the Royal Navy, 1793-1814*, argues that forms of entertainment served as an antidote to mutiny and desertion in the Royal Navy of the late Georgian era. He also argues that the impact of the French Revolution broadened the horizons of possible resistance for sailors and, alongside traditional forms of protest such as letter writing, demonstration, and desertion, sailors also staged 'elaborate bits of theatre to make their point'.⁵ The fourth chapter of Mary Isbell's PhD thesis *Amateurs: Home, Shipboard, and Public Theatricals in the Nineteenth Century*, investigates shipboard theatricals of the 19th century American and Royal Navies. Isbell focuses on entertainment on four vessels to examine the role of 'sailor-manager' and the unique opportunity that theatrical entertainment afforded sailors in challenging the status quo.⁶ Another area of scholarship relating to 19th century naval theatricals - one that has been researched in greater depth - is the rich history of performances during polar expeditions. This research includes Patrick O'Neill's article 'Theatre in the North: Staging Practices of the British Navy in the Canadian Arctic' that explores theatricals during Arctic expeditions between 1819 and 1875 and Heather Davis-Fisch's chapter on the theatricals of HMS *Assistance* in her book, *Loss and Cultural Remains in Performance: The Ghosts of the Franklin Expedition*.⁷ Though these works have provided a useful basis upon which to think about the multiple functions of shipboard theatricals, they have tended to neglect the wider nexus of naval theatrical traditions to which these practices

⁵ Jonathan Neale, 'Forecastle and Quarterdeck: Protest, Discipline and Mutiny in the Royal Navy, 1793-1814' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 1990), p.38.

⁶ Mary Isbell, 'Shipboard Theatricals', in 'Amateurs: Home, Shipboard, and Public Theatricals in the Nineteenth Century' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Connecticut, 2013), 151-205 (p.153).

⁷ See Patrick O'Neill, 'Theatre in the North: Staging Practices of the British Navy in the Canadian Arctic', *Dalhousie Review*, 74:3 (1994), 356-84 and Heather Davis-Fisch, 'Disciplining Nostalgia in the Navy; or Harlequin in the Arctic', in *Loss and Cultural Remains in Performance. The Ghosts of the Franklin Expedition*, ed. by Heather Davis-Fisch (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

belong. This thesis's aim is not only to contextualise examples of shipboard entertainment spatially and temporally but also firmly situate them within the theatrical repertoire of the 20th century Royal Navy.

Above all, this thesis fills an obvious gap – the lack of any full-length study on 20th century shipboard theatricals. Academic scholarship on theatrical entertainment in the Armed Services in the 20th century focuses predominantly on the productions staged during two distinct periods: the First and Second World Wars. This scholarship has also favoured the theatrical entertainment produced on land either by the Army, prisoners of war (POWs) or by members of professional entertainment organisations such as the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) and the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA). Andrew Maunder's edited collection, *British Theatre and the Great War 1914-1919*, for example, includes contributions from scholars on entertainment produced by POWs, the arts advocacy work of Lena Ashwell, and the performances produced for Australian and New Zealand troops on leave in London.⁸ Furthermore, Jörn Weingärtner's *The Arts as a Weapon of War: Britain and the Shaping of National Morale in the Second World War* traces the founding and development of CEMA.⁹ This thesis intends to challenge the notion that theatrical entertainment in the Royal Navy was a primarily wartime, land-based activity that was conceived and produced for naval personnel, either by professional entertainers or by commissioned members of a ship's company. I provide evidence that enthusiastic and talented individuals from all messes and of all ranks proactively participated in theatrical entertainment as producers, performers, writers, scene designers, and audience members throughout the 20th century at sea. Moreover, I argue that the efficacy of this theatrical pursuit relied on the participation of the whole shipboard company in the construction of the event.

This thesis inserts a new narrative into the cultural history of the 20th century Royal Navy and, as such, introduces another strand of investigation into the growing field of 'new military history'. The term 'new military history' has arisen as a consequence of a shift in 20th century academic scholarship away from the exclusive study of 'operational history', or as Michael Howard defines it, military history that 'was written, and studied, to enable soldiers to be

⁸ See Andrew Maunder, *British Theatre and the Great War, 1914-1919* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁹ See Jörn Weingärtner, *The Arts as a Weapon of War: Britain and the Shaping of National Morale in the Second World War* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2006).

better at their jobs.¹⁰ 'Old' military history, Peter Karsten succinctly puts, is concerned with 'campaigns, leaders, strategy, tactics, weapons, and logistics'.¹¹ In contrast, 'new' military history represents

a full-fledged concern with the *rest* of military history – that is, fascination with the recruitment, training, and socialization of personnel, combat motivation, the effect of service and war on the individual soldier, the veteran, the internal dynamics of military institutions, inter- and intra- service tensions, civil-military relations, and the relationship between military systems and the greater society.¹²

This thesis, therefore, is an interdisciplinary study – one that is aligned with new military history in its primarily cultural approach to the practices of the 20th century Royal Navy and that is situated within theatre and performances studies in its exclusive exploration of shipboard theatricals. It also draws upon approaches and ideas from a wide-range of disciplines: anthropology, human geography, political science as well as history and theatre and performance studies in order to best illuminate the repertoire in relation to four overarching themes.

The first theme of this thesis is the status of shipboard theatricals as a living cultural heritage and theatrical forms as oral traditions. Consequently, I am interested to discover how the intangible knowledge and skills that theatrical companies practice is passed on from generation to generation and the role that memory and the body play in the maintenance of a theatrical repertoire over time. It is my intention to reveal how these oral traditions help to forge a cohesive and unified naval shipboard naval identity and to highlight the community-building function that they serve. Secondly, I am interested in the relationship between shipboard theatricals and discourses of power. How does theatrical entertainment function as a strategic mechanism of power and control? And to what extent does a performer's or audience member's social position affect their participation in and understanding of theatrical events? To answer these questions, I investigate the ways in which theatrical events and performative rituals function as soft power mechanisms and how they aid naval authorities and senior members of a ship's company to project and maintain hierarchies of power both within and outside of their shipboard community. Another theme

¹⁰ Michael Howard, 'Military History and the History of War', *Strategic Combat Studies Institute*, 47 (2004), 45-55. (p.46).

¹¹ Peter Karsten, 'The New American Military History: A Map of the Territory, Explored and Unexplored', *American Quarterly*, 36:3 (1984), 389-418 (p.389).

¹² *Ibid.*

of this thesis is the mobility of performers and of space in the construction and repetition of theatrical traditions at sea. How has the liminal status of the ship at sea shaped the theatrical repertoire? And how have theatrical events at sea enabled groups and individuals an opportunity to negotiate this open tension between mobility and rootedness that exists in their status at sea? Finally, this thesis asks how does theatrical entertainment maintain the operational effectiveness of a ships company? It is my contention that theatrical events are deeply intertwined with the maintenance of a company's wellbeing and, in some extreme cases, play a fundamental role in the sheer physical and mental survival of a company. Consequently, I am interested to investigate the practical implication of producing theatrical entertainment on ships at sea and the extent to which naval authorities support the cost of events in terms of the supply of financial, spatial, and human resources.

Research Methods

Documenting the development of theatrical entertainment in the Royal Navy across the 20th century has involved extensive archival research to uncover the written, visual, and aural material evidence of this practice. This thesis incorporates an analysis of materials from formal archive holdings in major national institutions that have taken custodianship of collections related to the history and heritage of the Royal Navy. This includes the Department of Documents, Film Archive, and Sound Archive of the Imperial War Museum, London; the Library of the National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth; the National Archives, Kew; the British Library, London; the Caird Library at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich and the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge. Though locating these formal archive holdings has come with relative ease, finding materials within these archives related specifically to the practice of theatrical entertainment in the Royal Navy has been a major challenge of this research. Material that solely relates to theatricals in the Royal Navy is rarely held within specialist military and naval archives and libraries. This is partly due to acquisition policies established in the 20th century, but librarians and archivists also consider the wider aims of their organisation as well as the spatial and financial implications that maintaining and preserving materials entails. As Kathy E Ferguson in 'Theorizing Shiny Things: Archival Labors' observes, 'there is no archive without a pattern of inclusions and

exclusions'.¹³ A pattern that I have observed whilst gathering evidence in these archives is that unless objects relating to theatrical entertainment have a distinguished provenance or they relate to the history of a renowned naval leader or conflict, they are unlikely to be acquired. However, whilst the materials appear to be obtained and ordered in such a way as to reflect this central tenet, I have discovered an abundance of material evidence of theatrical entertainment at sea. I have relied on the brief information provided by paper and online catalogues, searching for any hints in the object description that recreational activity has been documented, as well as the knowledge of the custodians of the archive who have directed me to possible objects of interest. Time has been the greatest asset in this research process. First and foremost, it has enabled me to scour through hundreds of documents. It has also provided me with the opportunity to become familiar with, as Jacques Derrida defines, the archive's 'consignation' – the process that 'coordinate[s] a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration'.¹⁴ By familiarising myself with the ideological biases, the internal logic and the operational tools that operate within the archive, I have been able to adapt my evidence-gathering approach accordingly.

This thesis has involved meticulous and pain-staking research into the historical records of ships, commissions, conflicts, and individual service personnel. Log and Commission Books, published to commemorate a ship's commission, for example, have provided official records of shipboard activities including performance rituals and practices such as Crossing the Line and children's parties. I have also unearthed personal accounts of theatrical entertainment at sea. For, as the historian Carolyn Steedman notes, the archive 'is not and never has been the repository of official documents alone'.¹⁵ Personal and private narratives of amateur theatre activities are captured in letters, on postcards, and in diaries of service personnel. Song sheets, publicity materials, programmes, photographs, and newspaper cuttings have been collated in scrapbooks and in boxes that document the life of a particular person and the theatricals they participated in and observed. A scrapbook compiled by Captain Rory O'Connor covering the 1933-1936 commission of HMS *Hood* battlecruiser, for example, comprises over 400 items including press cuttings, programmes, letters, poems, and

¹³ Kathy E. Ferguson, 'Theorizing Shiny Things: Archival Labors', *Theory and Event*, 11 (2008), 10-10 <<http://0-muse.jhu.edu.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/article/257578>> [accessed 1 January 2017].

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression', *Diacritics*, 25:2 (1995), 9-63 (p.10).

¹⁵ Carolyn Steedman, 'Something She Called a Fever: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust', *American Historical Review*, 106:4 (2001), 1159-80 (p.1175).

photographs.¹⁶ Materials like this have not only be gleaned for their records of theatrical events but their ability to shed light on the attitudes and experiences of their creators. As Arlette Farge observes in *The Allure of the Archives*, ‘when unveiling a drama, the archival record occupies an ambiguous position in which the words of these ensnared actors contain perhaps more intensity than truth.’¹⁷ As uncensored objects that are not subject to the scrutiny of the military censor, scrapbooks, photographs, and diaries have given me a valuable insight into the intentions, opinions, and emotions of theatre-makers at sea.

Photographs have offered the most accessible evidence of theatrical entertainments at sea with organisations such as the Imperial War Museum digitising and uploading many of the images held within their archives onto online databases. Photographs have helped me better understand the staging of theatrical events on ships, a location that until this research was unfamiliar to me. Images of performers in elaborate costumes and properties constructed from re-purposed and hand-made objects have also revealed the craftsmanship and ingenuity of personnel in the process of making. Integrating and examining multiple images in each chapter of this thesis has been a conscious choice to provide a rich, visual guide of the theatrical repertoire of concerts, ceremonies, and rituals in performance for the reader. In doing so, I have heeded Dennis Kennedy’s warning that ‘despite their apparent veracity, photos need at least as much analysis as other historical documents’.¹⁸ Photographs are not truly objective representations of theatrical events. Their production requires the photographer to be selective and to make their own aesthetic judgements about what to shoot and when. Furthermore, whilst some images within this thesis have been taken by personnel to create their own personal record of events, others have been taken by press agents who have been commissioned by the Admiralty to produce images of events for wider public circulation. In my analysis of photographs, I have signalled where possible the human behind the camera to determine what their intentions and field of view may tell us about the theatrical event.

Alongside this research process, I have employed creative research methods such as attending local Royal Naval Association (RNA) branch events and reunions. This approach to historical research has uncovered not just the history of amateur theatre catalogued in formal archives but also the personal narratives of amateur theatre-making embedded in the

¹⁶ Portsmouth, National Museum of the Royal Navy (NMRN), RNM 1993/54/1.

¹⁷ Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, trans. by Thomas Scott- Railton (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), p.27.

¹⁸ Dennis Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth Century Performance*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.18.

homes, memories, and bodies of naval personnel. Since May 2016, I have been attending RNA Coventry branch meetings at The Royal Warwick Club House, Tower Street. These meetings have enabled me to build relationships with naval personnel and their families in my local community who have let me view their archives at home. Accessing these collections of home movies and photographs stored on desktop computers, unpublished memoirs on shelves, and Ministry of Defence (MOD) policy documents and Service Records in folders, has meant that the home has been another vital site of digital and physical archival material for this research. These meetings have also led to invitations to local events. In February 2017, I was invited to the laying up and dedication of the RNA Coventry's Standards service at Holy Trinity Church, Coventry. The service was followed by a 'Rum Tub and Entertainment' event at The Royal Warwick hosted by Shep Wooley, a naval entertainer who had served in the Royal Navy and performed on ships at sea in the 1970s. This event enabled me to experience first-hand the affective quality of participating in a naval ritual and to observe naval entertainment that involved the singing of a shared repertoire of songs. On the 10th of September 2016, I was invited to attend the Old Fisgard Artificers 9 -53 Naval Association 2016 annual reunion event held in Stratford. In the months leading up to the reunion, the Association Secretary, Ron Emerson, asked members of the association to bring along materials related to theatricals at sea. The conversations that were triggered by these materials and the discussions that were generated by my attendance at this reminiscence event were valuable to my research in that the personal significance of objects related to theatre-making at sea were brought to the fore. This research process finds accord with Sherry Turkle's conviction in *Evocative Objects* that whilst 'we find it familiar to consider objects as useful or aesthetic, as necessities or vain indulgences' they can also be considered 'as companions to our emotional lives or as provocations of thought'.¹⁹ Having an informal group discussion involving the sharing of objects has enabled the oral testimonies and memories about the Association's participation in theatrical entertainment to come to the surface, to be shared and recorded.

From the very beginning of this research project, I have conducted and recorded semi-structured interviews and been in correspondence with serving and retired naval personnel. Most of these exchanges were carried out in 2016 after I released a Call for Participation (CfP) in April 2016. I had a two-pronged approach to the release of this call; first, distributing a downloadable CfP via online networks, naval association email addresses, and social media

¹⁹ Sherry Turkle, *Evocative Objects* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007), p.5.

platforms including Facebook and Twitter; secondly, publishing the call in the 'Noticeboard' page of the monthly navy newspaper, *Navy News*. This approach helped me to circulate the call widely and to access people who were not computer literate. Some participants completed a questionnaire that I devised to elicit commentary on their experiences of entertainment at sea. Other participants preferred to communicate via letter or email exchange. Interviews took place either in person at the participant's home, via phone, or via Skype, depending on their preferred method of communication. In total, the contributions to this research cover the major part of the last six decades of the 20th century. It is notable, however, that though the call was widely circulated, all the people who came forward to share their experiences of entertainment at sea with me are male. This oral history work has nonetheless been exciting and endlessly promising, it has enabled memories of theatrical entertainment to come to the surface and, in the case of my first interview with Commander Edward Norfolk, theatrical 'turns' to be recited. Participants have been very generous with their time and forthcoming with information, usually putting me in contact with other people that might be willing to participate in this research project. One of the advantages of being put in touch with personnel who served in the same ships at the same time is that I was able to record accounts of the same events. I have been able to compare these recollections and provide a fuller, richer account of proceedings. Participants have also directed me to websites and naval forums that document or discuss entertainment in the navy. They have brought to my attention both the formal and informal networks of personnel that exist and the value to which they ascribe the practice of sharing and documenting their histories at sea. Furthermore, discussions with naval personnel have been a valuable safeguard in preventing me from misreading the historical record in specialist naval archives and from misinterpreting naval slang and colloquialisms in written documents.

Above all, semi-structured interviews and informal exchanges with naval personnel have prompted me to reconsider the body, not only as a vessel that transmits social memory but, as Rebecca Schneider asserts, as a site of tension between archive and repertoire, between what remains after a performance and its reappearance, where an engagement with the past can occur.²⁰ Schneider follows Diana Taylor's assertion that archives are not just captured in written and visual materials, but the body is an archival repository as well. She argues that performances not only 'function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity' but also function 'as an epistemology [. . .] a way of

²⁰ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactments* (Routledge: London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

knowing'.²¹ Discussion around the efficacy of embodied practices as an epistemology are part of a much wider, ongoing debate regarding scholarship's "affective turn".²² Vanessa Agnew for example, questions the capacity re-enactment has to further historical understanding, which, according to her argument, collapses temporalities, emphasises affect, and privileges individual experience over historical event and structure.²³ Nevertheless, reminiscence and oral history work have been powerful tools in order for me to grapple with and learn about theatrical practices of naval personnel. They work not simply through reason but through emotion, the body, and memory and they have allowed me to fill in the gaps when other documents fail to provide the evidence.

Other primary research methods include an analysis of published material including national and local press coverage of events, MOD policy documents, TV documentaries of life on board naval vessels, and autobiographies by naval personnel. Newspaper articles have yielded second-hand accounts and commentary, illustrations, and photographs of theatrical events and they have revealed the value that is ascribed to shipboard theatricals by local, national, and international audiences. These dated records have also been vital in helping me to check and complete original historical information yielded from other sources, enabling me to provide a more accurate account of events. MOD policy documents have offered a valuable insight into the laws and procedures that govern the actions of naval personnel and have helped me to better understand the limitations on creating theatrical work at sea. Policy documents that relate to the value and ethos of the Royal Navy have been also been gleaned for information that indicates the basis upon which entertainment may be legitimised at an institutional level. Television documentaries, which incorporate video recordings of theatrical events at sea, have yielded perhaps the most veracious record of shipboard theatricals. Yet, like photographic evidence that purports to truth, these video recordings have their limitations. The camera and sound equipment determines the limits of what the viewer can see and hear, and the editors, writers, and narrator play a fundamental role in scripting and communicating their own narrative of events. Nonetheless, unlike photographs, video recordings provide alternative viewpoints and close-ups that give the viewer a much more intimate, detailed, and temporal perspective of events. Lastly,

²¹ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), p.2-3.

²² See Patricia Clough, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

²³ Vanessa Agnew, 'History's Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and Its Work in the Present', *Rethinking History*, 11:3 (2007), 299-312.

autobiographies by naval personnel provide reflective first-hand accounts of life at sea. My analysis of the anecdotes and thick descriptions of theatrical events embedded within this published material has enabled me to provide a fuller and richer analysis of theatrical forms.

Research Parameters

Today, the Royal Navy is a large organisation made up of an incredibly diverse group of personnel, both male and female, of different ages and experience. Personnel are recruited from all over the country and have different ethnic, class, and cultural backgrounds and even different nationalities.²⁴ As John Mack suggests in *The Sea: A Cultural History*, the diverse composition of navies arguably make ships ‘the first truly cosmopolitan spaces’.²⁵ The Royal Navy is also made up of five different Services known as Arms; Surface Fleet, Submarine Service, Fleet Air Arm, Royal Marines and Royal Fleet Auxiliary. Additionally, members of the navy therefore occupy many different ports, harbours, colleges, and vessels around the world. As well as belonging to an Arm within the navy, every member will belong to a sub-group according to their skill and specialism. Engineers, aviators, chaplains, warfare and medical specialists all function as separate units. Personnel are also divided by a strict hierarchical chain of command. There are three basic divisions of rank. There are officers who hold a commission and take on a management role. Ranks include Lieutenant, Captain and Commander. Within this rank there are also Midshipman who are essentially officers in training and are recruited in the belief that they will eventually be commissioned. There are ratings, collectively and colloquially known as the “lower deck” who comprise most of the workforce and perform the essential tasks of the navy. There are also non-commissioned officers, known as Petty Officers (POs), who are inferior in rank to officers but have been promoted from the lower deck. However, the size, composition, and role of the Royal Navy has changed considerably across the 20th century.

At the beginning of the Second World War, the Royal Navy was the largest navy in the world, but its size has steadily declined. By the beginning of the Falklands Conflict (1982) the navy had approximately 60 destroyers and frigates but after the 2010 Strategic Defence and

²⁴ The Royal Navy MOD UK website states; ‘To join the Royal Navy you will need to be a national of Britain, Ireland or the Commonwealth. If you have dual nationality, you can still join’. Royal Navy MOD UK, ‘In the Royal Navy You Become Part of Something Bigger’

<<https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/careers/joining>> [accessed 10 November 2017].

²⁵ John Mack, *The Sea: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), p.137.

Security review (SDSR) that number was cut to just 19.²⁶ Unsurprisingly, this decrease in the number of ships has impacted the number of personnel needed to serve them. The strength of the Royal Marines, for instance, had reached over 78,000 by the end of the Second World War but by 1962 only one sixth of the Royal Marine Corps was serving aboard HM ships. By 1980, the Corps strength was at 7,500 with the Royal Marines Reserve providing support with an additional 1000 men.²⁷ The 20th century also saw the establishment of the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS). At the outbreak of the First World War the WRNS was formed as a land-based force to replace men required for active duties afloat. In 1949, the WRNS became an integral and permanent part of the Royal Navy, but it wasn't until 1990 that women could serve at sea.²⁸ After the abolishment of the colour bar in 1948, it was decreed that 'coloured candidates', in the words of the Admiralty record, 'were now eligible to join the royal navy'.²⁹ Ethnic minorities, however, did not join in large numbers and the passing of the Race Relation Acts of 1965 and 1968 in the UK forced the Armed Services to confront issues of diversity within their work forces.

The navy's role and responsibilities across this century were extremely diverse; from conducting "goodwill" tours of the British Empire and meeting NATO obligations to fighting drug trafficking and piracy more recently. The Royal Navy also fought in military campaigns including the First World War and Second World War, the Falkland's War, and the Gulf War. Whilst the objectives of the navy changed across the 20th century, technology advanced; guns were replaced with guided missile launchers, communications changed from morse code to satellite-transmitted computer systems and nuclear weapons were introduced. This has meant substantial changes in working conditions and the reform of posts and working relationships. It is important to remember therefore that whilst personnel have joined a profession in which the fundamental purpose is to apply pressure, sometimes lethal, to achieve political ends, some members have participated in conflict and others have not. The naval community is not a homogenous one and there is no single, typical naval life. Yet,

²⁶ 'Royal Navy's size and structure', *BBC Academy*

<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/journalism/article/art20130702112133721>> [accessed 1 March 2018]. For more information on the SDSR see 'Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review' (2010)

<www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62482/strategic-defence-security-review.pdf> [accessed 21 March 2018].

²⁷ See, Glen O'Hara, 'Decline of the Royal Navy', in *Britain and the Sea since 1600* (London: Palgrave, 2010), pp. 201-206.

²⁸ The WRNS formed in 1917. In 1919 the WRNS was disbanded only to be reformed at the start of the Second World War. On the 2nd of November 1993, the WRNS was formally integrated into the Royal Navy. The post of Director of WRNS ceased on the 15th October 1993.

²⁹ London, The National Archives (TNA), ADM 1/20318.

despite these observable differences and literal divides between members of the Royal Navy across the 20th century, theatrical entertainment has remained a valued and valuable part of naval life.

As this research involves a very large time parameter – incorporating examples of theatrical entertainment from as early as the turn of the 20th century to the early 1990s, three major limitations have been made to produce a manageable result. This thesis examines practices that take place during a ship’s commission on deployment and, except for one example, that take place upon or at sea. This excludes performances in Nissen huts and shore-based canteens, in dockyards, in naval colleges, and in professional theatre venues. Secondly, this thesis investigates events that take place on vessels, primarily that of the Surface Fleet such as aircraft carriers and destroyers as opposed to assault vessels or submarines. I incorporate examples where members of other branches are integral to the theatrical production, namely members of the Royal Marines, but only because those members are operating from the vessel in question and are part of the shipboard community. Finally, in previous academic studies of the Royal Navy’s social and cultural history, scholars have used the term entertainment to refer to both shore-based and shipboard activities that are identified as “entertaining”. These activities include but are not limited to watching a film on the flight deck, playing Uckers in the mess, drinking beer in the ship’s canteen, and participating in sports competitions.³⁰ I do not focus on these other forms of entertainment that may be considered theatrical or performative. Instead, I investigate forms of entertainment that conform, to a lesser or greater extent, to a sense of the theatrical. Crossing the Line ceremonies, concert parties, SODS operas, and children’s parties do not adhere to the same formal conventions, but they are all mimetic and incorporate a level of artifice in some form of *live* performance. It is this liveness and, the interactions between performer and spectator in the process of making within the spatial confines of the ship, through which the value of these performances for the naval community are manifest.

This thesis adopts a case study approach to the organisation of my research. I do not intend to provide a history or comprehensive overview of theatrical practice at sea in the 20th century Royal Navy. Rather, I apply all the written, visual, and aural materials I have uncovered to provide a detailed historical, contextual analysis of a limited number of case studies in order to illustrate a broader nexus of theatrical practice and use. I have deliberately chosen case studies that investigate different theatrical forms in different sites, times, and

³⁰ Uckers is a traditional Royal Navy board game that can be played by two or four players.

situations to demonstrate the continuation of theatre-making at sea and the value to which the navy has repeatedly ascribed the practice across the 20th century. By investigating different theatrical forms within the repertoire, I aim to open up new meanings of the theatrical in each context and to illuminate different motivations for and functions of performance.

Following Jim Davis's proposition in *Theatre & Entertainment* that academics must expand on definitions of entertainment that describe it as mere amusement or diversion away from more meaningful activities, each chapter of this thesis investigates a different function of theatrical entertainment.³¹ Thus, the thesis is structured thematically, and the examples are grouped according to the function they broadly serve. Implementing Laurajane Smith's theorisation of heritage as performance, Chapter One: Shipboard Theatricals: Heritage, Repertoire, and Memory, seeks to expose 'the cultural work' that theatrical entertainment at sea does.³² This chapter highlights the intangible and tangible heritage of amateur theatre-making at sea to reveal how it contributes, in the words of Benedict Anderson, to the construction of an 'imagined' naval community and to a sense of cultural identity and belonging for naval personnel.³³ I begin by looking at the invention of naval rituals and oral traditions and how a company's mass participation in these events helps to forge an exclusive and collective naval identity among shipboard companies. I examine the role of branding and the practice of writing sketches, dits, and songs that reference contemporaneous events in forging a unified shipboard identity and how these narratives and symbols become caught in the heritage of a ship. Lastly, I consider the digital and material traces that these ephemeral events leave behind, and the tangible heritage work that personnel do so that the repertoire may be preserved for future generations. Above all, I intend to highlight the vital role of memory and the body not only in forging the web of mutual understanding between potential audiences and players in the moment of performance but in sustaining and developing theatrical practice at sea over time.

Chapter Two: The Soft Power of Entertainment, investigates the shipboard entertainment produced by the Special Service Squadron (SSS) during the World Cruise (1923 -1924) and the production of children's parties during the latter half of the 20th century. This chapter

³¹ See Jim Davis, 'Defining Entertainment', in *Theatre & Entertainment* (London: Palgrave, 2016), pp.1-8.

³² Laurajane Smith, 'The Doing of Heritage: Heritage as Performance', in *Performing Heritage*, ed. by Anthony Jackson and Jenny Kidd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 69-81 (p.69).

³³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 2006), p.6.

provides the first in-depth study of the theatrical entertainments of the SSS and the first ever study of shipboard children's parties. Drawing on theories of soft power developed by Joseph S. Nye Jr., this chapter argues that theatrical entertainment has been repeatedly used as an effective diplomatic lever by the Admiralty to enhance the public reputation of the navy internationally. By signalling the formal and aesthetic elements of these events as well as the craft and creative practices of shipboard companies, I argue that performances became potent expressions of hospitality, benevolence, and altruism. I also explore the subsequent documentation and strategic communication of these events and how this affected the Admiralty's ability to attract the public of other countries to their navalist agendas. More broadly, this chapter considers how the navy used entertainment as a soft power asset to re-situate its role in relation to the maintenance of the British Empire.

The focus then turns to the emergence of theatrical forms that only take place on the wide-open expanse of the sea. Chapter Three: *Performing on the Move*, investigates the origins and development of two theatrical forms; *Crossing the Line*, a rite of passage that is activated when a ship crosses the Equator and *SODS operas*, a hybrid theatrical form that takes influence from 19th and 20th century theatrical forms such as music hall and concert party entertainment. I argue that these theatrical forms evoke a carnivalesque atmosphere that encourage patterns of interaction outside the norms of everyday shipboard behaviour, dress, and activity and facilitate the temporary suspension of a rigid naval hierarchy. Situated within mobility studies and the work of cultural theorists including Kevin Hetherington and Victor Turner, this chapter identifies the ways in which participants confront and contest structures that restrict movement aboard ship to pinpoint the limits of their transgression within this floating performance arena. By investigating the literal as well as social and imaginary mobilities of people and space within performance, I argue that both of these unique naval traditions function as a means of control and provide Commanding Officers (COs) valuable insight into the health and wellbeing of personnel.

The final chapter considers the value of theatre practice in the Royal Navy as a survival strategy, one that enables companies to endure extreme and potentially life-threatening environments. In contrast with previous chapters, Chapter Four: *Theatre for Survival* focuses on two theatre spaces. I begin by looking at the theatrical events that took place in the Royal Terror Theatre – a theatrical space constructed by the company of *Discovery* during R.F. Scott's British National Antarctic Expedition (1901-1904). Lastly, I provide the first study of the entertainment produced on the SS. *Gourko* that was commissioned during the First World War and colloquially known by members of the Grand Fleet as "the theatre ship". By

exploring the role of naval authorities in the conception, construction, and management of these theatres, I intend to expose the overarching strategy behind the active encouragement of theatre-making in these sites and times. Drawing on Michel Foucault's theory of the disciplined body, I argue that theatre was an effective tool that bolstered the men physically and mentally, but, above all, was chiefly employed as a disciplining mechanism. Collectively, these case studies will further academic scholarship in moving beyond the surface level interpretation of theatrical entertainment at sea. By drilling down into the detail of theatrical performances, spaces, and times they show the depth and breadth of the repertoire and reveal the value and necessity of theatre-making in the Royal Navy.

Chapter One: Shipboard Theatricals: Heritage, Repertoire, and Memory.

In *Uses of Heritage* Laurajane Smith boldly asserts, 'there is really, no such thing as heritage'.³⁴ Heritage, she contends, is performance:

It is a process of remembering and forgetting, and while particular things or spaces may be used as tools in that remembering, it is not the things or places that are themselves 'heritage', it is the uses that these things are put to that make them 'heritage'.³⁵

This argument opposes the traditional understanding of heritage as an identifiable 'thing' – an object that is waiting to be discovered, managed, and curated so that it may be preserved unchanged for future generations.³⁶ This traditional definition of heritage is echoed in the *OED* that defines 'heritage' as 'property...valued things such as historic buildings that have been passed down from previous generations'.³⁷ In contrast, Smith is interested in the 'cultural 'work' that heritage does' and how this performance of remembering and forgetting when dealing with the object of study, be that a material thing or an embodied practice, constructs meaning in any society.³⁸ Using Critical Heritage Discourse (CHD) as a methodological approach, Smith's re-theorisation of heritage also recognises heritage as a discursive practice.³⁹ For Smith, the performance of heritage not only reflects ideologies and values but is also a process that constructs what heritage is and what it is not. Smith argues that the traditional understanding of heritage, which, in its preoccupation with 'the materiality and innate value' of things 'stresses the monumental and grand national narratives and values', is one of many discourses within heritage studies.⁴⁰ But, she emphasises, it is also the dominant discourse and a predominantly Western one at that. It is not a common-sense reflection of reality but instead works to de-legitimise competing discourses and performances of heritage thereby obscuring a range of other values and

³⁴ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, (London: Routledge, 2006), p.11.

³⁵ Smith, 'The Doing of Heritage', p.69.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Oxford English Dictionary, 'Heritage' <<http://0-www.oed.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/>> [accessed 3 December 2015].

³⁸ Smith, 'The Doing of Heritage', p.69.

³⁹ See also Stewart Hall, 'Whose Heritage? Un-settling the Heritage, Re-imagining the Post-Nation', in *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of 'Race'*, ed. by Jo Littler and Roshi Naidoo (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 21-31; Denis Byrne, 'Western Hegemony in Archaeological Heritage Management', *History and Anthropology*, 5:2 (1991), 269–76.

⁴⁰ Smith, 'The Doing of Heritage', p.71.

narratives. She labels this hegemonic discourse of heritage as Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD).⁴¹

Smith's theorisation of heritage has compelled me to question the status of shipboard theatricals within naval heritage; are shipboard theatricals recognised and valued by the Royal Navy as heritage, or are they ignored? On the 'Royal Navy Heritage' page of the official Ministry of Defence (MOD) website, it is abundantly clear that the ideas of heritage communicated on this page largely conform to AHD. The two and only lines of text on the page read:

The Royal Navy has a proud and rich history spanning hundreds of years. As an island nation, the sea has always been a vital factor; as a barrier to invaders, a highway for trade and the basis for a once-global empire.⁴²

Below this text are three links that direct you to the websites of historic dockyards, monuments, and national museums. Royal Navy ships are the chief focal point of these websites. Horatio Nelson's flagship HMS *Victory* in Portsmouth Historic Dockyard and First World War cruiser HMS *Caroline* in Belfast harbour are just a couple of the ships that are highlighted as playing a vital role in materially and visually projecting and transmitting the heritage of the Royal Navy. By foregrounding these ships and sites of tourism for their national symbolic significance, the MOD page clearly produces the AHD that Smith outlines. It also projects, what Rodney Harrison in his book *Heritage* calls, 'official heritage' that

refer[s] to a state of professional practices that are authorised by the state and motivated by some form of legislation or written charter [...] what we could recognise as a contemporary operational definition of heritage as the series of mechanisms by which objects, buildings and landscapes are set apart from the 'everyday' and conserved for their aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or recreational values.⁴³

Although the navy's cultural heritage at sea is, in part, defined in terms of the materiality of these ships, as 'official heritage', it can also be defined by the intangible knowledge and skills that shipboard companies practice and pass on as part of a constantly evolving intangible heritage. Intangible heritage is a living process and one succinctly defined by William Logan

⁴¹ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, p.6.

⁴² Royal Navy MOD UK, 'Royal Navy Heritage' <<https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/our-organisation/where-we-are/heritage>> [accessed 17 February 2017].

⁴³ Rodney Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches* (London: Routledge, 2013), p.14.

as 'heritage that is embodied in people rather than in inanimate objects'.⁴⁴ The contention of this thesis is that shipboard theatricals are part of a broad and deeply rooted nexus of embodied practices; naval rituals, ceremonies, customs, and oral traditions, that are passed on and remain part of the navy's living cultural heritage today. These include but are by no means limited to sailors' speech, colloquially known as 'Jackspeak', Divine Service, Royal Fleet Reviews, Ship Launching and Commissioning, Trafalgar and Pickle Nights, and Christmas rituals at sea.⁴⁵ These practices find accord with Harrison's idea of 'unofficial heritage'. Unofficial heritage he explained

[M]ay manifest in the rather conventional form of buildings or objects that have significance to individuals or communities but are not recognised by the state as heritage through legislative protection or may manifest in less tangible ways as sets of social practices that surround more tangible forms of both official and unofficial heritage.⁴⁶

The official heritage of a ship, therefore, can be understood as residing in its tangibility and legislative protection but its unofficial heritage may be seen as residing in the practices that take place within it. Acknowledging this, museums such as the National Museum of the Royal Navy (NMRN) and the National Maritime Museum (NMM), have attempted to move away from an exclusive emphasis on material culture in their preservation and curation of the objects under their custodianship by organising events and tours that illuminate the intangible cultural heritage that surround these tangible forms of the navy's official heritage. Trafalgar Night, for example, is one of the most celebrated rituals of remembrance within the Royal Navy. Every year on the 20th of October, a ship's company celebrate Horatio Nelson's triumph at the battle of Trafalgar by holding a dinner imbued with various naval rites and practices. In reverence to this tradition, the NMRN host a Trafalgar Night for members of the public on HMS *Warrior*. However, if one plans to search for evidence of or reference to theatrical entertainment in naval and maritime museums, one must look incredibly hard. In the 2017 exhibition *Pioneers to Professionals: Women and the Royal Navy* in the Babcock Galleries, for example, I found only one image relating to theatrical practice

⁴⁴ William Logan, 'Closing Pandora's Box: Human Rights Conundrums in Cultural Heritage Protection', in *Cultural Heritage and Human Rights*, ed. by Helaine Silverman and D. Fairchild Ruggles (New York: Springer, 2007), pp.32-52, (p.32).

⁴⁵ Today, a sailor's vernacular is commonly referred to by members of the Royal Navy and civilians alike as 'Jackspeak', a term coined by Rick Jolly in his dictionary *Jackspeak: The Pusser's Rum Guide to Royal Navy Slang* (1989).

⁴⁶ Harrison, p.15.

– an image of the cast of *The Thrice Promised Bride* getting ready for their performance at the WRNS headquarters.⁴⁷ More often than not, information relating to any theatrical form at sea is decidedly absent from exhibitions or public engagement activities. This, I suggest, is because unlike traditions such as Trafalgar Night and Royal Fleet Reviews that are deeply intertwined with narratives, dates, and symbols of national significance, theatrical entertainment holds a more ambiguous position in relation to the ‘official’ heritage of the Royal Navy. Consequently, the researcher must uncover the material residue of these ephemeral events in the archive holdings dispersed among diaries, scrapbooks, letters, and commission books as discussed in the introduction. The marginalised place of these material traces of shipboard theatricals stresses the marginal position of this theatrical heritage in relation to authorised heritage. Furthermore, the fact that these materials, despite their abundance, rarely make it to the exhibition floor or provide the basis for a public engagement event, highlights the failure of national museums to recognise theatrical events and performance rituals as part of the wider social and cultural history of the navy. It is a situation which, throughout my research process, I have actively sought to remedy by speaking at events in museums and bringing the heritage and histories of the theatrical shipboard repertoire to the fore.⁴⁸

Though shipboard theatricals have been largely ignored as part of authorised naval heritage, service personnel of the Royal Navy across the 20th century have shown unwavering dedication in preserving this part of their intangible cultural heritage. These practices of theatrical preservation can be understood in terms of what Harrison describes as ‘the ‘bottom up’ relationship between people, objects, places and memories which forms the basis for the creation of unofficial forms of heritage (usually) at the local level.’⁴⁹ My central assumption, therefore, is that though shipboard theatricals are a part of the navy’s unofficial heritage and they reside at a local level, the labour undertaken by personnel to shape and sustain the repertoire over time demonstrates that it is understood to be an incredibly valuable part of their naval heritage. Following Smith’s theorisation of heritage as performance, this chapter foregrounds ‘the cultural work’ that personnel perform and aims

⁴⁷ NMRN, ‘Pioneers to Professionals: Women and the Royal Navy:’ <<https://www.nmrn.org.uk/women>> [accessed 17 February 2018].

⁴⁸ I gave a PechaKucha presentation, ‘Terrors of the Line’, at the ‘Dark and Stormy Late’ public engagement event at the National Maritime Museum (NMM) in July 2014. I gave a talk on ‘Festive Theatricals’ at the Christmas coffee morning at NMRN in December 2017.

⁴⁹ Harrison, p.8.

to identify what this ‘meaning-making’ performance of heritage by shipboard companies does.⁵⁰

By incorporating Benedict Anderson’s seminal work *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, I intend to reveal the role that both the intangible and tangible heritage of amateur theatre at sea plays in building a sense of community and locality.⁵¹ I investigate how a company’s mass participation in the production and re-production of a theatrical repertoire of naval traditions and rituals forges a unique Royal Navy identity and promotes feelings of belonging and allegiance to the Service. I also look at the ways in which specific theatrical events have helped to conceive the Royal Navy in the minds of personnel as limited, sovereign, and as ‘a deep horizontal comradeship.’⁵² I then highlight the ways in which branding and writing within theatrical practice create a unified shipboard identity and how these narratives and symbols become caught up in the heritage of a ship. Lastly, I consider the digital and material traces that these ephemeral events leave behind, and the tangible heritage work that personnel do so that the repertoire may be preserved for future generations. Above all, I intend to highlight the vital role of memory and the body not only in forging the web of mutual understanding between potential audiences and players in the moment of performance but in sustaining and developing theatrical practice at sea over time.

Inventing and Maintaining Traditions

The Royal Navy is an imagined community. In striking similarity to Anderson’s formulation of nation, the Royal Navy is not an organic community that is underpinned by ‘lived’ spaces and immediate forms of social face-to-face interaction.⁵³ Members of the seafaring navy will occupy many different ports and vessels around the world. They will not meet or indeed have any form of communication with every other member of the fleet to which they belong, let alone every other member of the wider organisation. The naval community is an artificial construct. It depends on embedded cognitive and symbolic structures so that, regardless of the differences between members of the organisation, ‘in the minds of every member is an

⁵⁰ Smith, ‘The Doing of Heritage’, p.69.

⁵¹ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 2006).

⁵² *Ibid*, p.6.

⁵³ *Ibid*.

image of their togetherness'.⁵⁴ This idea of comradeship and homogeneity is intrinsic to the current Royal Navy dictum 'One Team. One Identity' that is highlighted in bold under the 'Our People' tab on the Royal Navy's official MOD website:

We are a highly functioning team that includes front line forces capable of going anywhere. Seaborne strength and submarine stealth. Logistical and emotional support that keeps us effective – and the thousands of reinforcements that swell our ranks. Whether in the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, the Royal Marines Band Service, the Royal Naval Reserves or Royal Marines Reserves. Day in, day out, every single person is vital to the smooth running and success of our missions.⁵⁵

This statement emphasises the unity of this organisation in spite of its members' occupational differences. Each member is part of a 'high functioning team' that together adopts 'one identity' irrespective of the Arms and rank to which they belong.⁵⁶ The very idea of the navy evokes a very powerful sense of fraternity and solidarity among its members and it is for this reason, Anderson explains, 'why people are prepared to kill and die for their nation at war'.⁵⁷ There are many naval traditions and customs at sea that help to forge both a unified institutional and cultural naval identity. The production and re-production of theatrical entertainment at sea, I argue, plays a vital role in this process because this cultural work evokes powerful feelings of belonging, camaraderie, and community.

The invention and maintenance of theatrical traditions that are exclusive to the navy enables participants to collectively re-imagine themselves as rooted to a finite community that has a distinct naval culture and identity. For instance, SODS opera, which I explore in greater depth in Chapter Three, is a form that has only ever been performed by members of the navy at sea. The use of the term 'SODS', supposedly meaning 'Ship's Operatic and Drama Society', emphasises this fact and distinguishes the practice from other similar forms of theatrical entertainment that have been performed by members of other Armed Services.⁵⁸ SODS opera is, in the words of Eric Hobsbawm, an 'invented tradition' that seeks 'to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by reputation, which automatically implies continuity

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Royal Navy MOD UK, 'One Team, One Identity' <<http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/our-people/one-team-one-identity>> [accessed 17 February 2018].

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Anderson, p.7

⁵⁸ Rick Jolly and Wilson Tugg, *Jackspeak: the Pusser's Rum Guide to Royal Navy Slang* (Cornwall: Palmanando Publishing, 1989), p.269.

with the past'.⁵⁹ As Captain Stevan Jackson reveals, 'SODS opera goes back a long way and is tradition. Sailors having a singsong is not unusual and I expect the SODS opera has developed from there'.⁶⁰ References to SODS opera in diaries and memoirs have been made by personnel from as early as the First World War but it is not until the mid-20th century that SODS opera becomes formalised and firmly embedded into a shipboard company's repertoire. SODS opera is a form that has been continually revised and remade in the present through the repetition of its performance in the 20th century. It exemplifies Hobsbawm's idea that many cultural practices perceived as traditions are in fact, constructed in an 'attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within... [the modern world] as unchanging and invariant'.⁶¹ Personnel have recognised the fluid and dynamic aspect of SODS opera and, as I will later explore, it is celebrated and valued for the inventive and original scripts that personnel devise. However, the significance of this form as cultural heritage has also been attributed to the oral traditions that blossom around this culturally marginal activity. As Godfrey Dykes reveals, when discussing the etymological origins of SODS opera in his online memoir, 'it did not really matter what it meant, as long as it happened and the Sailor Songs, Ballads, and skits on a sailor's lot were kept alive'.⁶²

Dykes's comment signals a vital productive role of shipboard theatre heritage more generally. Theatrical entertainment at sea is a means through which the naval art of storytelling, be that through song, skits, or dits, can be maintained. I align my approach with Diana Taylor, who, in *The Archive and the Repertoire*, argues that the body is an archival repository of knowledge whereby 'traditions are stored in the body, through various mnemonic methods, and transmitted "live" in the here and now to a live audience'.⁶³ Unlike the tangible artefacts that are housed in buildings that constitute formal or informal archive holdings, the naval traditions of singing and dit spinning are passed on by the body *in* performance. Theatrical entertainments are, in the words of Taylor, vital "acts of transfer" that 'transmit information, cultural memory, and collective identity' from one generation of naval personnel to another.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.1.

⁶⁰ Stevan K. Jackson RN, questionnaire, 27 June 2017.

⁶¹ Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, p.2.

⁶² Godfrey Dykes, 'Scouse Goes Down to the Sea: The Start of a Life on the Ocean Waves' <<http://www.godfreydykes.info/>> [accessed 17 February 2018].

⁶³ Taylor, p.17.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Sailors' songs and ballads have a long tradition in the navy and a huge body of literature exists on the songs and sea shanties of the 18th and 19th centuries.⁶⁵ It is understood that the antecedents of this oral tradition stem back as early as the 17th century, when songs with definite rhythms allowed companies to co-ordinate their work so the ropes and lines of the ship could be pulled to time. When the Age of Sail came to an end with the introduction of steam in the 19th century, there was a widely held assumption that naval song would die out.⁶⁶ In the late 19th century, for example, John Ashton asserts that

[T]he day of real sailor songs is long since past and gone. They died out with the old French war, and its consequent peace. In the old war they were at their best, and they died in their prime. They were odorous of the sea, because they were of it, and they were part and parcel of the life thereon. They are dead, and the songs sung by sailors nowadays come direct from music halls.⁶⁷

Over three quarters of a century later this view is echoed by Rupert Hart-Davis when he insists, 'Today's sailor on leave, in his civvy clothes could be mistaken for a salesman or an off-duty policeman. He doesn't know any yarns, really, and he couldn't tell a shanty from a shoehorn'.⁶⁸ These statements demonstrate that sea shanties, songs, and patriotic ballads were part of an oral tradition at the very heart of the navy's seafaring culture. Crucially, they highlight the centrality of songs to the construction of naval identity, with Hart-Davis asserting that their absence from naval life renders personnel of the 20th century almost unrecognisable from their predecessors. As intangible heritage that relies on the inheritance and maintenance of the practice through performance, navy songs always run the risk of dying out or being re-discovered, modified, and adapted as future generations interpret and re-produce the repertoire from memory. Nevertheless, the idea that a naval repertoire of songs was not retained in the 20th century is a falsehood. Cyril Tawney's book, *Grey Funnel Lines: Traditional Songs & Verse of the Royal Navy 1900-1970* collates songs from the 20th century navy. Having conducted extensive oral history work, Tawney argues that 'the modern sailors' repertoire was not a second hand one, borrowed from other sources and

⁶⁵ See Frank Shay, *Deep Sea Chanties, Old Sea Songs* (London: W.H. Heinemann Ltd, 1925); David Proctor, *Music of the Sea* (London: HMSO, 1992); Paul A. Gilje, *To Swear like a Sailor, Maritime Culture in America, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁶⁶ The Age of Sail is a period dating from the mid-16th to late 19th century when sailing ships were used for international trade and naval warfare.

⁶⁷ John Ashton cited in Cyril Tawney, *Grey Funnel Lines: Traditional Songs & Verse of the Royal Navy 1900-1970* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), p.2.

⁶⁸ Rupert Hart-Davis cited in Tawney, p.2.

only slightly adapted for his own use'.⁶⁹ The biggest change, he argues, is that singing in the navy, unlike the practice in previous centuries, has become a predominantly off duty pastime. Tawney makes fleeting references to SODS operas in his introduction, but it has become clear through my oral history work that theatrical entertainment, as Dykes also points out, provides the most dependable vehicle for this oral tradition to be passed on from generation to generation. Concert parties, SODS operas, and even children's parties incorporate some form of naval music and song.

Another oral practice that is closely intertwined with storytelling and that has shaped the theatrical repertoire of the 20th century is the long unbroken tradition of 'spinning dits'. The etymology of the phrase 'spinning dits' is very recent. The term dit is a shortened version of the term ditty meaning a sung poem or song that is recited. Sailors have been telling tales long before the term 'spinning dits' ever appeared in print in naval memoirs. Spinning dits, David J B Smith explains, 'is something all sailors do, past and present - one starts with a topic, then goes massively off track but ends up at the start to finish off the dit'.⁷⁰ The practice of dit spinning within close-knit shipboard communities is comparable with Paul Connerton's discussion of village life in *How Societies Remember*. Comparing village life with that of a modern city he explains

Most of what happens in a village during the course of a day will be recounted by somebody before the day ends and these reports will be based on observation and first-hand accounts. Village gossip is composed of this daily recounting combined with lifelong mutual familiarities, by this means a village informally creates a continuous communal history of itself; a history in which everybody portrays, in which everybody is portrayed, and in which the act of portrayal never stops.⁷¹

Like the gossip within the village that Connerton describes, spinning dits acts as an informal, internal network. As Andrew St George explains, 'information in the form of long winded narratives also known as dits are exchanged [...] between tiers of management, generations, branches and social groups'.⁷² Spinning dits and the dits that are spun become part of a shipboard company's social memory and theatrical entertainment becomes a vehicle through which this memory is sustained. Dits about shipboard life are often woven into the

⁶⁹ Tawney, p.2.

⁷⁰ David J. B. Smith, email exchange with Sarah Penny, 20 June 2017.

⁷¹ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.17.

⁷² Andrew St George, 'Leadership Lessons from the Royal Navy', *McKinsey Quarterly* (2013) <<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/leadership-lessons-from-the-royal-navy>> [accessed 17 February 2018] (para. 12 of 18).

narratives of comedic acts and sketches written by personnel – something that I will later discuss in this chapter.

Some dits, through the repetition of their telling over time, have become part of a shared naval repertoire and are often chosen for performance by individuals and groups at theatrical events. Jim Stroud who wrote to me regarding his experience of theatrical entertainment in the navy in the 1960s, recalls how his ‘party piece’ was to recite a popular naval dit called ‘Bridge at Midnight’. ‘Bridge at Midnight’ is a well-known naval dit in four verses that tells the story of an exchange between a sailor and a prostitute on a bridge at midnight.⁷³ Stroud reveals that his choice of dit was informed by two factors. I chose this dit, he explains, because ‘I could perform it from memory and jack loves anything with a female in it!’⁷⁴ Stroud highlights the importance of memory and performance in sustaining the repertoire of naval dits. He also hints at the productive role of entertainment in communicating themes and tropes that are interconnected with the social and cultural construction of a “sailor identity”. Narratives that revolve around male sailors’ interactions with women ashore, drinking culture, and naval battles are particularly prevalent. As Mark Time reveals in his memoir *Going Commando*, dits can be set ‘at the Battle of Trafalgar or in the Battle of Trafalgar pub’.⁷⁵ Dits are by no means a true reflection of a person’s lived experience. Some dits, Time points out, ‘may be factual, some a little embellished and some a total fabrication’.⁷⁶ In addition, spinning dits is a highly performative practice. Though a dit may be years old, a dit’s meaning and how it resonates with others will change according to the context in which it is performed and how it is remembered and presented by the performer. Though the veracity of dits is widely contested, they still play a significant role in narrating, constructing, and projecting an exclusive naval identity, albeit a stereotypical one, that attempts to homogenise an extremely diverse group of people.

The practice of spinning dits is also cited in modern naval doctrine. In ‘Royal Navy Ethos’ within the *British Maritime Doctrine*, ‘A Sense of Humour’ is identified as a key factor that gives the navy its distinct character and identity.⁷⁷ Listed before ‘Teamwork’ and ‘Can do Attitude’, ‘A Sense of Humour’ is outlined as the following:

⁷³ This dit goes by alternative titles that include but are not limited to, ‘She Was Poor but She was Honest’ and ‘It’s the Same the Whole World Over’.

⁷⁴ Jim Stroud RN, questionnaire, 20 May 2016.

⁷⁵ Mark Time, *Going Commando* (London: John Blake Publishing, 2015), p.107.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ MP. Colley, *Joint Doctrine Publication 0-10: British Maritime Doctrine* (Swindon: The Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, MOD, 2011), p11.

Maintaining the unique British sense of humour is a vital component of ethos and to the navy way of life. It helps in adversity, whether it is physical hardship, fear or uncertainty; it breaks down tensions, allowing events to be seen in a more balanced perspective. The ability to exchange anecdotes or 'spin dits' about all aspects of naval life is a crucial means by which ethos is both sustained and instilled into successors.⁷⁸

Spinning dits, as this passage acknowledges, plays a vital role in keeping personnel operationally effective. This oral tradition helps personnel to maintain a 'a sense of humour' in the face of adversity, as the doctrine outlines, but it also assists personnel in developing improvisational skills and the confidence to speak with members of their shipboard community in an impromptu fashion. The ability to adapt, to improvise, and to communicate effectively with others are interpersonal skills which, as Andrew St George acknowledges, 'are especially prized in an organization that moves people quickly and often [...] and requires them, perhaps as a matter of life and death, to hit the ground running in their new posts'.⁷⁹ These skills are also ones that personnel need for and develop in performance on the stage. The cultural work of theatrical entertainment, therefore, plays a crucial role in enabling interpersonal skills that are highly valued by the Royal Navy. Furthermore, by emphasising that understanding, upholding, and passing on 'the ability to exchange anecdotes or spin dits' is imperative to morale and operational effectiveness, this doctrine actively encourages all service personnel to create a socially active environment.⁸⁰ It emphasises the importance of integrating light-hearted, informal moments in daily routine and provides the rationale for large-scale theatrical events. The maintenance of a theatrical repertoire is deeply intertwined with the preservation of naval ethos and the promotion of an institutional naval identity.

This notion that dit spinning acts as an informal network of knowledge that helps to instil an ethos into successors, also signals a wider system of transmission whereby the theatrical repertoire may be passed on without the need for personnel to be present in the moment of performance. In a forum discussion about SODS opera on the *Navy Net – Royal Navy Community* forum, a post from a person with the moniker 'Levers Aligned' hints at the productive role of dits in sustaining the theatrical repertoire over time when he remarks:

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ St George, 'Leadership Lessons from the Royal Navy', (para. 7 of 18).

⁸⁰ MP. Colley, p.11.

Looking out over a flight deck full of happy people after a night of entertainment generated from the minds and hands of matelots and know that they will dit on about it for years to come is a reward in itself.⁸¹

As personnel move from ship to ship during the duration of their service, the dits about theatrical entertainment that they store and then repeat ensures that ephemeral performances have an afterlife, existing anecdotally among the navy's members. Dit spinning thus plays a part in safeguarding the songs, skits, and dits that comprise the repertoire for future generations.

Other invented performance traditions are the rituals at the Equator and at the Arctic Circle, known as Crossing the Line and the Blue Nose ceremony respectively. These traditions have remained unbroken for centuries and resonate strongly with Hobsbawm's theorisation of tradition as 'a process of formalization and ritualization, characterised by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition'.⁸² Crossing the Line, which I investigate further in Chapter Three, is a rite of passage. It involves performers donning costumes, identifying uninitiated members of the company, and submerging those personnel into tanks of water so that they may become part of the "Ancient Order of the Deep". The completion of the initiation is formally symbolised in the handing over of an elaborate certificate at the end of the performance. These certificates are prized possessions and become a means of signifying to shipmates on future commissions that they have been initiated and can take on a new role in forthcoming performances. Moreover, personnel keep these certificates long after their naval service has ended. In an online discussion about Blue Nose and Crossing the Line certificates on the *Navy Net* forum, one anonymous member of the forum remarks that both certificates 'are somewhere in the depths of my wardrobe, [I] suppose I should be cheesy and get them out and actually frame them and put them up on my wall'.⁸³ This comment reveals that despite the various trials that members have to endure to become fully initiated, the reward for participating in the performance and owning such a document far outweighs any temporary embarrassment that may be experienced. When companies observe these rites of passage, its members not only become symbolically tied to this "Ancient Order", but also to the wider naval community. As Kevin Jackson revealed in a questionnaire, 'there is a

⁸¹ Navy Net - Royal Navy Community Forum, 'Sods Opera', (2006) <<https://www.navy-net.co.uk/community/threads/sods-opera.30646>> [accessed 17 February 2018].

⁸² Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, p.4.

⁸³ Navy Net - Royal Navy Community Forum, 'Blue Nose Certificate', (2007) <<https://www.navy-net.co.uk/community/threads/blue-nose-certificate.35921>> [accessed 17 February 2018].

certain feeling that Crossing the Line is something that only real sailors do'.⁸⁴ They are a marker of an explicitly naval seafaring experience because to obtain both one must have served at sea and travelled to the Arctic Circle and the southern hemisphere. These certificates are a visual representation of a person's service at sea and when discussing them with personnel, I found that, in a similar fashion to the online comment, they often elicit feelings of belonging and pride. Conversely, members who have not been initiated often express regret that circumstances did not enable them to participate and to be honoured with such a document. Reflecting on his service on board HMS *Eagle*, for example, Harrold J Siddall remarks

I have a "Blue Nose Certificate" to show that I have served north of the Arctic Circle when I was in the H.M.S. Eagle but have never possessed one of the coveted Neptune's certificates. It was worth possessing, a highly decorated affair, filled with "heretofores" and "wheretofores" in coloured inks, ship's stamps all over it and dated and signed by King Neptune.⁸⁵

Siddall's words stress the value that is ascribed by members to these performance rituals. By participating in performance, personnel are not only able to demonstrate something unique about themselves, something worthy of weaving into their own personal narratives of life at sea but they also become signifiers of acceptance within the wider naval community.

Theatrical events have also played a fundamental role in perpetuating the idea of sovereign Service in the minds of participants. The naval community is imagined as inherently sovereign, one that is under the control and command of the British monarch. The navy is the "Royal" Navy and has been attributed this title ever since its inception in the 16th century by King Henry VIII.⁸⁶ Since the navy's development in the 17th century into a fully professional institution, British monarchs and their families have played key roles in the Navy as commanders, strategists, rulers, administrators and patrons. As Sovereign today, the Queen is Head of the Armed Forces and members of the Army, Royal Air Force, and Royal Marines are required to take an oath of allegiance to the Queen on enlistment and recite the Royal

⁸⁴ Kevin Jackson RN, questionnaire, 13 February 2017.

⁸⁵ Harold J. Siddall, 'D/KX91819 (Prisoner of War)' <http://www.hmsmedusa.org.uk/HDML_Boats_1001-1050.html> [accessed 15 February 2018].

⁸⁶ During his reign, Henry VIII built a Navy of approximately 50 purpose-built warships, constructed the first naval dock at Portsmouth in 1546, and established the Navy Board. He was later honoured with the title 'Father of the Royal Navy'. Nevertheless, the Royal Navy was not formally established until 1660 following the Restoration of Charles II. During the 17th century, the Navy completed the transition from a semi-amateur Navy of private royal fighting vessels to a fully professional institution of dedicated warships only.

Navy's motto, 'Fear God and Honour the Queen'.⁸⁷ Although members of the navy have never been obligated to swear an oath, their institution's very existence stems from the sovereign's prerogative. Explaining how a naval vessel occupies a sovereign space at sea, Howard Bailey informs us that,

The Armed Forces are her Majesties Forces so we are backed by the opinion, by the thought that what we are doing is for the Queen and she would overrule anything if the Armed Forces were being used for the wrong purpose. Theoretically therefore, if the prime minister wants to use the Armed Forces he [*sic*] has to have the permission of the Queen and if she thought the government was doing something wrong she could intervene. We are therefore still Her Majesty's Forces.⁸⁸

The recital of the National Anthem at the end of theatrical events is perhaps one of the main ways in which this image of the sovereign Service is affirmed. At the bottom of every theatrical programme I have obtained, there is text indicating that the singing of 'God Save the King' or 'God Save the Queen' is planned at the concert's end. I have also found information in theatrical programmes that events have been planned to honour the monarch's birthday. During the theatrical season of events by the company of *Discovery* in the Antarctic, a case study that I examine in greater depth in Chapter Four, a concert was performed on November 8th, 1902 to mark King Edward VII's birthday. On the front page of the programme the text in bold typeface reads: 'Programme of Concert held in Honour of the Birthday of our Patron HM King Edward VII'.⁸⁹ In the centre of the programme is an illustration of the King.

The most compelling example of theatrical entertainment used to reinforce the idea of the sovereign Service, is the concert that was held during the two-day inspection of the ships and companies of the Home Fleet in Portland, Devon in November 1936 by King Edward VIII. An article entitled 'The King among His Sailors: A Royal Visit to the Home Fleet' in the *Illustrated London News* reveals that, as was custom, the inspection began with a visit to the flagship upon the Admiral's barge.⁹⁰ This review, however, deviated from the royal fleet

⁸⁷ The Royal Navy's motto derives from: Honour all men, love the brotherhood, fear god, honour the king'. Peter 1.2.17.

⁸⁸ London, British Library (BL), Sound Collection – Millennium Memory Bank, 1999-01-20, Howard Bailey.

⁸⁹ Cambridge, Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI), loose programme in MS 1518/2; D, Michael Barne, Diary Volume II 16 April 1902 – 29 December 1902.

⁹⁰ Our Naval Correspondent, 'The King among His Sailors: A Royal Visit to the Home Fleet', *Illustrated London News*, 21 November 1936, p. 901.

reviews that had preceded it because of the rare inclusion of theatricals. The potent public theatrics of this fleet review provided the stage for a real theatrical event. For the first and only time in the history of British fleet reviews, a theatrical concert was staged by the Home Fleet to entertain the monarch and his entourage. Described by *The Observer* as ‘the outstanding event of the whole day’, the concert entertained the King and over two thousand ‘lower ratings’ of the fleet in the aeroplane hangar of *Courageous*.⁹¹ A correspondent from the *Manchester Guardian* reveals that were twenty-three items from different theatrical troupes in the programme;

from a blindfold pianist to sea shanties, from a Lancashire comedian to a hornpipe and a Russian dance, several ships of the fleet had contributed turns and some officers were among the performers, a commander playing the part of a grandmother in one sketch, another commander doing a Russian dance and a midshipman masquerading as a film star.⁹²

It was further reported by Samuel Hoare, First Lord of the Admiralty, that during the concert, the King ‘walked to the end of the hall and started community singing to the accompaniment of a seaman’s mouth-organ’ after which he ‘made an impromptu speech that brought the house down’.⁹³ The inclusion of a concert in the two-day programme created an exceptional opportunity for both the reigning monarch and the men of the fleet to engage with one another in a way that a formal fleet review or any other official naval ritual involving the monarch had not previously permitted. The concert acted as a social leveller that enabled genuine and familiar exchanges to take place between the lowest ranked members of the fleet and the Royal Sovereign of the Service. This event reminded the Fleet of their allegiance to the reigning monarch and re-consolidated the idea of a “Royal” Armed Service.

Alongside the maintenance of theatrical traditions, theatrical shipboard companies have embarked on fund-raising by soliciting donations from the rest of the ship’s company for service related charities. This fund-raising function is more commonly employed on land where theatrical companies are able to command a much larger audience of service personnel and civilians and can raise money from ticket and programme sales. Programmes of shipboard theatricals have indicated that companies used theatrical events to raise money

⁹¹ Our Naval Correspondent, ‘The King and His Fleet: Two Strenuous Days at Sea’, *The Observer*, 15 November 1936, p.26.

⁹² Our Naval Correspondent, ‘The King Visits the Fleet’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 13 November 1936, p.12.

⁹³ Viscount Samuel Hoare Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (London: Collins, 1954), p. 218-9.

from the shipboard community for service charities, particularly in times of war through donations rather than ticket sales. A SODS opera programme, forwarded to me via twitter by Paul Hollins in response to my call for participation, reads; 'HMS *Hermes* presents a musical evening or SODS opera in aid of the South Atlantic Fund'.⁹⁴ It is not a coincidence that the company of *Hermes* decided to raise money for this cause. The South Atlantic fund was an Armed Forces benevolent fund, set up in 1982, to support personnel who required financial assistance as a result of the operations and work relating to the Falkland's War. *Hermes* served as the flagship of the British forces during that conflict. Many of the companies of the Grand Fleet during the First World War also gave proceeds to service and wartime charities. HMS *Cyclops's* concert party on Saturday 19th February 1916, for example, produced their event, according to the programme 'in aid of the funds of the women's organisation for providing comforts and for the Naval and Military expedition forces'.⁹⁵ Theatrical events, as the examples show, provide a means through which personnel can show their care for and a willingness to better the lives of members of the wider naval community to which they belong.

All of One Company

Shipboard theatricals not only tie personnel symbolically to the wider naval community but also play a crucial role in forging and maintaining a deep sense of 'horizontal comradeship' within shipboard companies.⁹⁶ Descriptions of unity between a ship and crew are prevalent in all the interviews I have conducted. For example, to describe working at sea, Edward Norfolk likens himself to a 'cog in a large machine'.⁹⁷ Similarly, in an interview with Robert Brown, he describes 'a ship's company' as 'a family where you live on top of each other for long periods of time'.⁹⁸ The use of metaphorical language to describe a company as cogs in a machine and a family not only attempts to reflect the physical proximity of people and a company's affinity with one another but emphasises a profound sense of belonging and camaraderie. Interviewees, however, have also expressed the difficulty of maintaining morale and a sense of camaraderie during a commission and highlight the crucial role that

⁹⁴ The South Atlantic Fund was registered on 19 Aug 1982. It was removed from the register on 25 May 1993.

⁹⁵ Portsmouth, NMRN, loose concert programme in RNM 2006.68/2, HMS *Cyclops* Album Volume II.

⁹⁶ Anderson, p.7

⁹⁷ Edward Norfolk RN, interviewed by Sarah Penny, 22 September 2013.

⁹⁸ Robert Brown RN, questionnaire, 9 June 2014.

entertainment has played in keeping spirits high. Whilst the navy has changed considerably across the 20th century, the conditions of life at sea for personnel have remained largely the same. Personnel live in confined spaces and the experience of life at sea is primarily defined by a rigid and repetitive routine. When discussing the need for entertainment in the navy, Kevin Jackson declares 'it is worth stating the obvious that long sea voyages are pretty dull'.⁹⁹ Similarly, Robert Brown reveals, 'In many ways there is not much to do at sea other than work, eat and sleep. Whole ship play is a great way of letting off a bit of steam, particularly if the ship has not had a run ashore for a while'.¹⁰⁰ Theatrical entertainment, as I have previously explored, arguably plays a fundamental role in keeping shipboard companies operationally effective during long periods of time at sea. Finding rehearsal space and time, the budget and means to create props and sets, as well as willing and available participants to take part in a theatrical event without jeopardising working life requires flexibility, ingenuity, and enthusiasm. Skills that, in turn, feed back into operational matters. Producing theatrical events keeps, William Ashton reveals, 'our minds and bodies stimulated and socially active...it not only passed the time'.¹⁰¹

Shipboard theatricals also build foundations for and reinforce strong social bonds between members of the whole company. Although the physical limits of a ship promote face-to-face exchanges, members of a company are partitioned according to the status and the role of their labour and this intimately affects the relationships they build. Every rating belongs to a sub-group according to their skill and specialism: the marines, technicians, engineers, and medical professionals all function as separate units on a ship. These units, according to the size and facilities of the ship, will be allocated separate messes; areas where these specialist service men and women eat, socialise, and in some cases sleep. The hierarchical structure of the ship also dictates that the senior and junior officers have their separate mess areas known as the Wardroom and Gunroom respectively. Within these messes members of the crew intermingle only amongst those of an equal rank. Each mess on a ship is also managed and regulated by a mess committee - a democratically elected group who ensure that any issues relating to the mess are raised and resolved. Roles in the committee include president, chairman, vice and deputy president, secretary, and treasurer and are fulfilled only by members of the mess, creating a chain of command separate to that of the ship. This election process ensures that matters relating to the mess remain private from other company

⁹⁹ Jackson, questionnaire, 13 February 2017

¹⁰⁰ Brown, questionnaire, 9 June 2014.

¹⁰¹ William Ashton RN, questionnaire, 9 May 2016.

members of other messes. These physical restrictions and procedures not only substantially limit a company member's movements and determine potential face-to-face interactions, they also affect an individual's experience and understanding of the shipboard community to which he or she belongs. Discussing the differences between mess deck life for the ratings and his own experience as an officer, Howard Bailey explains

[Ratings] all report at times that mess deck life is very very good but at the same time, I'm sure they all yearn for just that little bit of privacy once in a while [...] I can always close my cabin door [...] Being the navigator as well, the navigator's cabin is another two decks up from this deck. I'm at the back of the bridge, so that I can, if necessary, dash on to the bridge in only a couple of seconds. My cabin is quite isolated and remote from everyone else's. My cabin is in the heavens. This deck is called one deck where all the officers live but you have to go down another two decks to find where all the ratings accommodation is. So I am four decks away from the all ratings.¹⁰²

By structuring the ship's community according to the role and status of the individual, some members, as Bailey reveals, can become isolated. Only the CO, who maintains the right of veto over every mess and must be consulted when changes are made, or events need approving, can enter any mess at any time. Yet, even the CO must approach these private messes with caution. To enter a space that you do not belong to without knocking on the door first is viewed as a sign of disrespect. Consequently, each mess becomes a locus of connection where specific groups not only foster professional working relationships but develop meaningful friendships. Hence the use of the affectionate term "messmates" by ratings to describe one another. When "messmates" are enjoying times of relaxation, sharing food, and participating in group activities, Bailey has only the privacy of his cabin. He does not learn the same daily practices and routines, experience the same group ethos or abide by the mess rules formalised by a rating's mess committee. The naval expression: 'messmate before shipmate, shipmate before a stranger, stranger before a dog' also demonstrates an allegiance that is fostered within the mess that trumps the commitment towards a shipmate outside of it.¹⁰³ Bailey's experience of being segregated from this mess culture on the ship reveals the potential for alternate experiences and imaginings of the same community in the same space. Arguably, shipboard entertainment, to a limited extent, tries to rectify any

¹⁰² BL, Millennium Memory Bank, 1999-01-20.

¹⁰³ Gerard Wells, *Naval Customs and Traditions* (Tonbridge Wells: Solis Press, 2014), p.66.

growing separation between members of the shipboard community. Theatrical entertainment is usually a compulsory, whole ship activity and only those who must remain in a state of operational readiness such as watch duty or those who are sick or injured are excluded from attendance. Shipboard theatricals take place in some of the largest spaces on a ship, enabling personnel of all ranks and roles to occupy the same space at the same time. That is not to say that shipboard auditoriums are absent from a social ordering. The CO always sits in the front row along with other senior personnel with the rest of a ship's company occupying the seats behind. Furthermore, senior members of a ship's company who occupy the auditorium tend to remain in uniform, a powerful material signifier to the rest of the company that they hold a top-level position within naval hierarchy. An example of the variation in dress can be found in Figure 1, a photograph of audience members enjoying a concert on HMS *Queen*.¹⁰⁴ It is striking that an officer remains in a shirt and tie while others audience members are bare chested. Though theatrical events reinforce power relations in play through a spatialised ordering of the auditorium and the maintenance of uniform codes by senior personnel, they still position, as Figure 1 shows, members of different ranks, roles, and messes side by side. One of the largest spaces used for theatrical events is the aircraft hangar. Most notably, the company of the flagship HMS *Ark Royal*, a commission that was documented as part of BBC documentary series *Sailor*, moved aircraft to the flight deck to stage their SODS opera in the hangar below.¹⁰⁵ Shipboard theatricals have also taken place within purpose-built recreational spaces. During the Falklands War the recreational space on SS *Uganda* was used as the auditorium for a SODS opera. SS *Uganda* was a cruise ship that was commandeered by the Royal Navy in 1982 to serve as a hospital ship during the conflict. Despite 'little downtime at sea', Petty Officer David Paul Reed organised and took part in a SODS opera 'to alleviate boredom and boost morale' on passage to Port Stanley.¹⁰⁶ These spaces facilitate the coming together of personnel and reinforce a sense of camaraderie and fellowship as personnel from all messes of the ship sit side by side and experience the same theatrical event from moment to moment. In Figure 1, for example, we can see the faces of the audience appreciating a joke together, exchanging looks, gestures, and comments as they smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol. Crucially, these moments help members of different messes to build friendships with one another. In a letter

¹⁰⁴ HMS *Queen* was a British escort carrier commissioned during the Second World War.

¹⁰⁵ *Sailor* (BBC, 1976) [on DVD].

¹⁰⁶ David Paul Reed RN, questionnaire, 12 May 2016.

to me, Jim Stroud reveals that friendship was one of the main impacts of shipboard entertainment. Getting involved he explains,

impacts the working environment: relaxes the mind and body and makes new and lasting friendships. You discover crew have different talents (act – sing – play an instrument deliver monologue etc.) Returning to your normal day, in my case aircraft maintenance, the conversation takes on a new dimension. Topics explore new avenues of interest.¹⁰⁷

In his letter Stroud emphasises the importance of participation be that as a member of the audience or on the stage. Shipboard entertainment affords personnel an opportunity to build new friendships and to build upon existing ones. They provide an insight into the personal as opposed to the professional lives of the members of their company, helping to build trust, cooperation, and solidarity with others. It is important to stress here that this community-building process also takes place during the preparation of events as personnel write, rehearse, and create costumes together. 'Levers aligned' describes producing theatrical events as a 'trade' that must be 'learned from the old hands', alerting the readers of the online forum to the orality of theatrical traditions.¹⁰⁸ 'Old hands' is a naval expression that refers to the more experienced members of a ship's company. This comment signals the vital role that personnel play as custodians of theatrical practice. 'Levers aligned' goes onto explain that, as an experienced sailor, he has advised younger members on ideas for theatrical sketches. The maintenance of the theatrical repertoire is reliant on the willingness of older members of the community to share their practice orally and this handing down of knowledge fosters teamwork and trust between generations of personnel.

¹⁰⁷ Jim Stroud, letter to Sarah Penny, 14 June 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Navy Net - Royal Navy Community Forum, 'Sods Opera', (2006) <<https://www.navy-net.co.uk/community/threads/sods-opera.30646>> [accessed 17 February 2018].



*Figure 1 A ship's concert on board HMS Queen, Scapa Flow.
IWM. A 29178.*

Participation in theatrical events also signifies a desire to be an integrated and committed member of the shipboard community. It is not, in the main, an opportunity to show talent but, more importantly, an opportunity to fit in - to be seen and heard by fellow shipmates. Nevertheless, performing on stage still involves an element of risk taking for the performer because they are ultimately exposing themselves to judgement and potentially ridicule. This idea of risk on stage can be illuminated with reference to Harold J. Berman's discussion on the risks of speech in *Law and Language: Effective Symbols of Community*.¹⁰⁹ The speaker, he argues, 'must commit himself [*sic*]; and he [*sic*] must incur the risks of being misunderstood, disbelieved, resented, ignored'.¹¹⁰ The listener too, he continues:

...exposes himself [*sic*] to hazards. He [*sic*] may be deceived, offended, frightened, subverted, or, worst of all, bored. Yet the risks of not speaking and not listening are greater. They are the risks of isolation, loneliness, and ultimately hatred, violence, and death.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Harold J. Berman, *Law and Language: Effective Symbols of Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹¹⁰ Berman, p. 36.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

The risks of not speaking within a community such as the navy, in some circumstances, could quite possibly amount to violence or death. Within the context of speaking or performing on stage, the risks are not as severe. Not speaking or not socialising with others in everyday shipboard life certainly risks being disliked or ostracised by shipmates. In *When I was on the Tartar. Black Cat Sea Stories as told by Jack*, Michael Payne describes ‘the hundreds more worries and fears’ he had upon joining his first ship HMS *Zulu* in the 1970s.¹¹² The ‘only way forward’, he concludes ‘was to fit in. If not, you’d have a very lonely future ahead of you’.¹¹³ Similarly, participating in theatrical entertainment is seen as an opportunity to fit. The performer who recites, sings or speaks on stage runs the risk of being misunderstood or embarrassed. Likewise, audience members risk being bored or offended. This is expressed by ‘Levers Aligned’ who reveals that younger members of a community are often hesitant to participate because they are concerned about ‘self-image, and many lads these days are shit-scared of losing credibility when asked to dress up as a lass’.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, their participation shows their desire to be a valued and respected member of the shipboard community.

One of the key ways that theatrical entertainment further consolidates a sense of a cohesive shipboard identity is through branding. Naval personnel often claim that they not only inhabit a ship but also speak of a deep attachment to it. For example, at the beginning of *HMS Brilliant*, a BBC documentary series about the lives of men and women on board HMS *Brilliant* in 1994, the viewer learns that Captain James Rapp, CO, is to leave the ship in five days’ time to take a new position in the MOD.¹¹⁵ In an interview Captain Rapp admits ‘it’s going to be an emotional time to leave, always is. The ship becomes part of you and you become part of the ship’.¹¹⁶ At the very beginning of this documentary, the viewers’ learn of the emotional attachment that is built over time by personnel towards the ship they inhabit. Unsurprisingly, therefore, theatrical troupes and bands throughout the 20th century have adopted the tradition of naming themselves and the concerts they participate in after the ship to which they belong to symbolise unity between themselves and their ship. John Beardmore, for example, a navigating officer on HMS *Poppy* during the Second World War, recounts his experiences on winter convoys to Russia in 1943. Whilst awaiting a return

¹¹² Michael Payne, *When I was on the Tartar. Black Cat Sea Stories as told by Jack* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1999), p.40.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Navy Net - Royal Navy Community Forum, ‘Sods Opera’, (2006) <<https://www.navy-net.co.uk/community/threads/sods-opera.30646>> [accessed 17 February 2018].

¹¹⁵ Chris Terrill, *HMS Brilliant: In a Ship’s Company* (BBC, 1995) [on DVD]

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, (1:19).

convoy from Russia, Beardmore describes how 'we entertained ourselves and chummy ships with a ship's concert party, called 'Poppycock'.¹¹⁷ Other examples of this practice during the Second World War can be found in Eric C.B. Lee's book *The Cruiser Experience*.¹¹⁸ Within this collection of Second World War testimonies, Leading Signalman R. Fleming of HMS *Hermione* describes how 'we had a trio of Royal Marine bandsmen who played for us in the Rec. space; piano, violin, and bass fiddle. They called themselves 'The Hermione Three'.¹¹⁹ William Ashton, who served from September 1965 to August 1968 as a mechanical engineer on HMS *Hermes* wrote to me regarding his participation in a folk band. Although Ashton's band did not have a name at the time, during one concert, he recalls, 'the M.C. was told to announce us as 'Her majesty's ship Hermes English Folk Dance and Song Society Glee Club Singers and Ceilidh Band'.¹²⁰ These symbolic linguistic markers provide a means for theatrical companies to differentiate themselves from other theatrical troupes on other ships. They are also suggestive of cultural continuity as all productions during the lifespan of the vessel will maintain the same tradition of adopting names that signify an association between performers and their ship.

As well as adopting names that link these bands and performance troupes to the ship, personnel also create costumes and programmes that incorporate the ship's logo and name. Every theatrical programme I have obtained includes the name of the ship and, on occasions, the ship's emblem. The ship's emblem is very often placed at the very centre of the front page of the programme which suggests a clear intent to draw attention to the ship as the unifying force that defines the performers socially and culturally. During the concert for King Edward many of the twenty-three troupes in the programme created plaques with their respective ship's emblem and troupe name on. Figure 2 shows an image of the Tiger-Ragamuffins, a theatrical troupe from HMS *Tiger*, who performed at the concert on HMS *Courageous*. To the far right of the photograph, a plaque with an image of a tiger can be seen and each member of the troupe has attached a patch to each leg, which, when read, spells tiger-ragamuffins. These logos were employed by the troupes on *Courageous* as a way of marking their distinctiveness from other performance troupes belonging to other ships of

¹¹⁷ John Beardmore, 'HMS Poppy - After PQ17' <<http://www.cbrnp.com/RNP/Flower/ARTICLES/Poppy/Beardmore-2.htm>> [accessed 28 December 2017].

¹¹⁸ See Eric C.B. Lee, *The Cruiser Experience: Life Aboard Royal Navy Cruisers during World War Two* (London: Arcturus Press, 2000).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.57.

¹²⁰ Ashton, questionnaire, 9 May 2016.

the fleet. The use of branding, although a simple device, could become an effective mechanism in building a powerful affective attachment between the ship and its people.



*Figure 2 The Tiger-Ragamuffins Troupe on board HMS Courageous. 1936.
NMRN. RNM 776.83 (2) 6.14.*

The stage itself also provides a visual representation of the coming together of the shipboard community. The majority, if not all, of the materials and objects on the theatrical stage are sourced from within the ship. Jim Stroud reveals that for a concert on HMS *Hermes* in the 1960s ‘the materials on stage were from the entire ship’;

we carried Chinese laundry staff and tailors and cobblers that were in great demand, however there was a designated social committee who would scrounge from every ships department, anyone who was asked for ideas etc, would always help. Materials could be discarded; old kit shirts, shorts, socks, shoes etc, parachute material from the safety equipment section, officers’ old uniform shirts were very attractive.¹²¹

Stroud indicates that objects and materials from the ship were re-fashioned and re-purposed to construct the theatrical scene and all members of the company were part of this creative process as they lent and made properties and suggested ideas for costumes and sets. Stroud’s observation is typical of the many responses I received in questionnaires from

¹²¹ Stroud, questionnaire, 20 May 2016.

personnel about the creation of costumes. Describing his involvement in a SODS opera on board HMS *Ark Royal* in 1977, for example, Tim Stoneman reveals that for his performance of 'Lurch', a character from the fictional 'Addams Family' popularised by the 1964 television series, the ship's engineers agreed to make neck bolts for him.¹²² This comment signals that the skills personnel practice in their working lives are transferred to this process of costume making. Peter Brierley's comment about the costumes during a SODS opera on board HMS *Manchester* in 1991, also serves as a poignant reminder that this process of recycling and repurposing of objects is not a choice:

No budget was ever considered for costumes. They were generally made from what we could find. The more outrageous or colourful the better. Often, we would raid rag bins and bails rags looking for what we required.¹²³

Due to the limited resources on board, personnel must recycle materials and re-purpose objects from within the ship to create the desired effect. Yet, the expectation of theatrical traditions being upheld during a deployment also results in many personnel bringing items onto the ship to explicitly serve as props and costumes. 'I often wondered', Brierley writes, 'whether the ladies underwear used for sketches was at the back of the [performer's] locker for six months or if it was purchased ashore'.¹²⁴ Once made or purchased ashore, props and costumes can be kept in lockers or, as Kevin Jackson reveals, in the 'Buffer's store' and recycled for future performances.¹²⁵ When frigates were committed to Falkland Island patrols during the conflict, Jackson explains, a Crossing the Line was 'carried out regularly enough to make it worthwhile keeping the trident, big razor and so on'.¹²⁶ Whilst many of the props and costumes can be kept in private lockers, the stage itself, should the top deck be chosen as the performance arena, has to be built by the company and dismantled at the end of the event. 'Levers aligned' describes in his forum post how he built 200 square feet of stage 'from 18mm marine ply, 4x4 DC timber and beer barrels' and footlights using 'inverted bean cans with a gangway necklace running through them'.¹²⁷ Together, the sets, costumes, and properties as well as the stage itself that are conceived and built by all members of the company become a powerful symbol of shipboard community, signifying the successful

¹²² Tim Stoneman RN, questionnaire, 23 March 2016.

¹²³ Peter Brierley RN, questionnaire, 20 June 2016.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Jackson, questionnaire, 13 February 2017.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Navy Net - Royal Navy Community Forum, 'Sods Opera', (2006) <<https://www.navy-net.co.uk/community/threads/sods-opera.30646>> [accessed 17 February 2018].

outcome of a collaborative and creative whole ship effort. Furthermore, this production process develops a transferrable skillset. It requires personnel to find creative solutions to problems, to be resourceful, and to plan ahead, skills that are highly valued by the Royal Navy.

A collection of two bound volumes of illustrated diaries, loose papers, and photographs relating to the naval service of Phillip Needell, held at the NMRN archive, reveal that the set designs for the theatricals on HMS *Almanzora* marked the literal journey of the ship and its company.¹²⁸ Needell was an amateur artist before being called up to serve on *Almanzora* that was commissioned to escort merchant ships during the First World War. Needell continued his hobby throughout his service and was asked by the captain of the *Almanzora* to design the sets for the theatricals held on the stage of the ship's Lower Smoke Room. Within Needell's diary there are many sketches of the places he visited, and these became the basis of his set designs. When 'we gave a concert', Needell reveals in a letter to his wife, 'I was relieved from watch keeping to paint two large landscapes, one on each side of the stage'.¹²⁹ His initial designs of the landscapes can be seen in Figure 3. His annotations signal that both images show scenes of Rio de Janeiro, one of the places the *Almanzora* visited when escorting merchant vessels to Brazil. The image on the left quite clearly depicts Sugarloaf Mountain. The image on the right, Needell indicates, is inspired by a previous sketch he made whilst walking around the city catching 'many delightful glimpses of houses built up the hillsides covered with tress and flowers'.¹³⁰ Needell's sketches and annotated illustrations affirm the great care and attention to detail that Needell took to create sets that would resonate strongly with his company. Hanging upon the walls left and right of the stage these painted scenes would have served as large visible markers of the company's time spent in Rio de Janeiro. Furthermore, his diary entries reveal the value that was ascribed to this practice by the captain, who was prepared to relieve Needell from his duties to fulfil his role of set designer.

¹²⁸ Portsmouth, NMRN, RNM 1977.233.

¹²⁹ Portsmouth, NMRN, RNM 2004.63.3, Diary of Phillip Needell (18/08/17-11/05/18).

¹³⁰ Ibid.

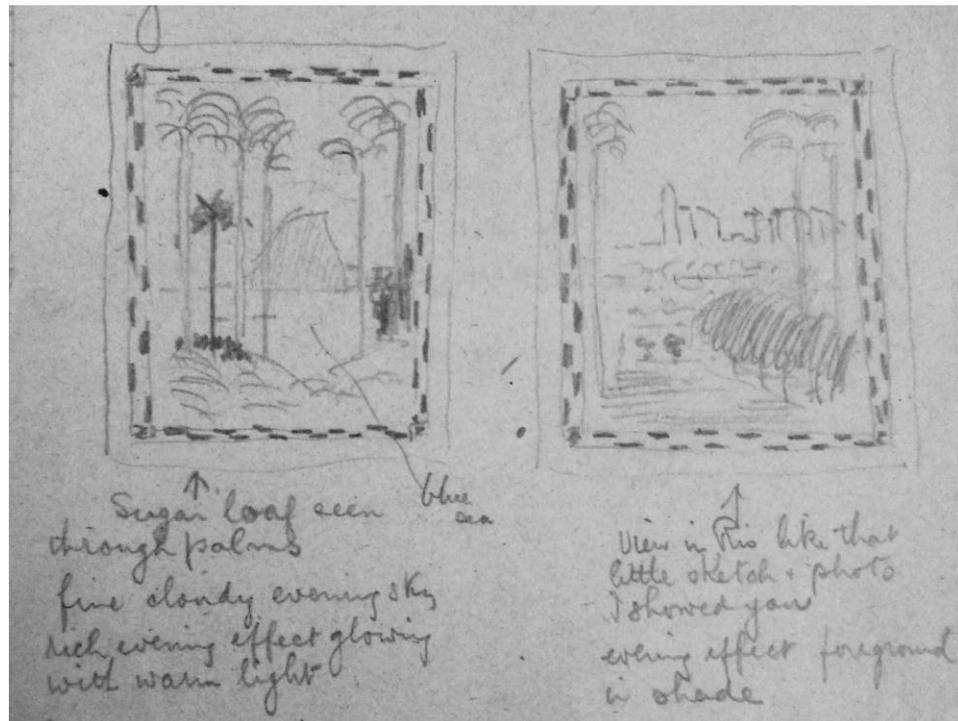


Figure 3 Set designs for the theatre on HMS Almazora. 20 November 1917. Further Papers of Phillip Needell. NMRN. RNM.2004.63.

Another tradition employed by theatrical companies is to write and perform sketches and dits that reflect a company's experiences at sea. John Pooley, who served on the aircraft carrier HMS *Ark Royal* in 1976, devised and wrote his own show during the ship's five-and-a-half-month deployment to the east coast of the United States. Every Saturday evening on *Ark Royal's* journey, the company of over 2000 men would turn on their mess deck television sets to watch the latest installment of the 'Wilf Show'. As a closed-circuit television programme broadcast live from the onboard studio, the Wilf Show was for the exclusive amusement of the company. It was one of the most highly anticipated events of the week namely because of the infamous reputation of the presenter and star of the show - Able Seaman Wilf, a ginger-haired Mr. Parlanchin ventriloquist dummy. Named after the CO of *Ark Royal*, Captain Wilfred Graham, and accompanied by his house band 'The Winkers', Wilf achieved notoriety through his brazen use of foul language, vulgar dits about members of the company, and his slurs towards members of the officer class. Wilf's catch phrase 'Hello you Winkers!' was loudly exclaimed to camera at the beginning of every show and left little to the imagination as to the phrase's true meaning, not least because a regular feature entitled 'Wanker of the Week' involved Wilf inviting members of the ship's company to

nominate messmates or colleagues for the award. 'If anybody fouled up or made a fool out of themselves', Pooley explained in a recent interview, 'the message would get to me and I would take the mickey and make them wanker of the week'.¹³¹ The Wilf Show also incorporated filmed features, usually an interview with a member of the ship's company or a visitor to the ship. In his memoir, *Life on the Ocean Wave* (2007), for instance, Rear Admiral Sir James Eberle, recalls his first impressions of the Wilf Show and his subsequent interview on the Bridge:

On Wilf's first Saturday show after I had joined he referred to my arrival adding that I was most welcome now that my balls were at the top of the mast. A Rear Admiral's flag was the Saint George's Cross with two red circles. He went on to comment 'and have you seen that hat he wears? He looks like a f***ing jockey'. I did not wear a normal naval beret but preferred an American model. During the week I was asked if I could do an interview with Little Wilf on the Admiral's Bridge. Of course I agreed...I started off by explaining what I did and why I was in the ship. I also talked a little about the ship's general programme. As the interview was coming to its normal end, the puppet turned to me and asked, 'Could I borrow your hat, sir?' 'What! After what you said about it last week on your show?'

'I said you look like a jockey'. 'No, you didn't. You said I look like a f***ing jockey'.

'That's sailors' language, sir' 'Alright Wilf. You may borrow my hat'.

I turned to little Wilf and put my hat on the head of the puppet. Looking first at me and then at the camera, Wilf asked, 'How do I look?'

I replied 'You look like a f***ing jockey'. 'Oh', he responded, 'I thought I looked like a f***ing Admiral'.

I was not going to win that one!¹³²

Pooley had no talent for ventriloquism and made little effort to conceal that fact. Planned camera angles and Pooley hiding behind some carefully placed prop was the extent of the illusion if one was crafted at all. The company who watched intently were not fooled. 'We all knew that Pooley wasn't a ventriloquist' reveals Stevan K. Jackson, 'but we ignored that. Wilf was one of the team'.¹³³ The puppet's impish looks and Pooley's characterisation of a cheeky

¹³¹ John Pooley RN, questionnaire, 29 December 2017.

¹³² Admiral Sir James Eberle, *Life on the Ocean Wave* (Durham: Roundtuit Publishing, 2007), p.250

¹³³ Jackson, questionnaire, 27 June 2017.

matelot in naval uniform was all that was needed to capture the imagination of the company. Crucially, however, it was the presence of the puppet alone, not the stagecraft of ventriloquism that provided the license Pooley needed to write scripts uncensored about shipboard life and to perform without fear of disciplinary action from the Master-at-Arms, the ship's regulator. Wilf 'could say anything to anyone from the Captain down', remarks Graham May, 'subject matter was never restricted...no matter how embarrassing'.¹³⁴ As Eberle's account reveals, Wilf served as the mouthpiece of the lower deck - a vehicle through which members of the company at the bottom of the chain of command could critique upwards. The Wilf Show not only provided a welcome distraction for the company from the routine of their deployment at sea but provided a platform from which to comment upon and critique it, a function of theatrical entertainment that I explore in greater depth in Chapter Three. Theatrical entertainment, as this example shows, was a way that personnel could narrate and maintain their *own* oral histories of a ship's commission.

Material and Digital Traces of Shipboard Theatricals

Companies and individuals have taken great care and attentiveness in recording theatrical events as a means of safeguarding the repertoire for future generations. The most compelling example of this heritage work is the production of ships' entertainment packs. During a ship's commission, it is usual although not always the case, that an entertainments committee is formed – a democratically elected group of personnel from different departments within the ship who are charged with organising whole ship events. These events may include sporting competitions, flight deck village fêtes, and theatrical events.¹³⁵ One of the committee's duties is to keep a record of whole ship events and to compile these records into a document known as an entertainment pack. A pack might include, Graham Street explains in an interview,

sketches from a SODS opera, the dimensions of the water bath used in Crossing the Line, a running order of an event, information on where and how personnel rigged a stage on the flight deck, and a copy of the Crossing the Line certificate.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Graham May RN, questionnaire, 16 August 2016.

¹³⁵ For more information on what a flight deck village fête involves see Royal Navy MOD UK, 'HMS Kent Hosts Village Fête at Sea', (2016) <<https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2016/july/20/160721-hms-kent-hosts-village-fete-at-sea>> [accessed 23 March 2018].

¹³⁶ Graham Street, interviewed by Sarah Penny, 3 January 2018.

Once this information is recorded and compiled into the pack, the pack is then kept with the ship for the use of future entertainments committees, who in turn add to the document. Unlike commission books which, once printed, are an immutable historical record of events during a ship's commission that serve a largely commemorative function, entertainments packs are a continually evolving and expanding record of events that serve a vital practical purpose in the maintenance of the theatrical repertoire. Essentially, these packs function as a kind of handover docket that gives tips and advice on *how* to stage events within a specific vessel. Entertainments packs, as Street reveals, 'do not tell us what to do or when to do it' but are, nonetheless, 'a helpful guide and used to assist in the planning of different of events'.¹³⁷ A ship's entertainment pack finds strong accord with Laurajane Smith and Emma Waterton's definition of heritage as a 'cultural tool' that 'cannot be defined by its materiality or non-materiality, but rather by what is done with it'.¹³⁸ This sustained tangible heritage work of recording, compiling, and interpreting this valuable production information plays a fundamental role in helping personnel practice and thereby preserve the shipboard theatrical repertoire. The fact that entertainment packs exist at all is also highly significant. Whilst, as Taylor recognises, the 'value, relevance or meaning of the archive, how the items it contains get interpreted, even embodied' may change over space and time, the archive's very existence is indicative of its importance to the people who compile and access it.¹³⁹ Furthermore, as this tangible heritage work is part of the entertainment committee's shipboard labour and undertaken as a duty, the creation of these packs signals the value that is ascribed to entertainment at sea and, by extension, shipboard theatricals by naval authorities.

Another example of a sustained impulse by personnel to capture shipboard theatricals as significant cultural heritage can be found online in social media platforms and websites. *Navy Net*, an online naval forum that I have made frequent references to throughout this chapter, is a vital digital tool through which serving and current naval personnel can connect with others within the wider naval community to which they belong and share their experiences of theatrical entertainment at sea. Within this online naval forum alone, I have found twelve different threads that relate specifically to SODS opera and thirteen about Crossing the

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Laurajane Smith and Emma Waterton, 'The Envy of the World? Intangible Heritage in England', in *Intangible Heritage*, ed. by Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa (London: Routledge, 2009), pp.289-302 (292).

¹³⁹ Taylor, p.19.

Line.¹⁴⁰ Each thread holds numerous posts by individuals that incorporate text, photographs, and YouTube links to video recordings of these traditions in performance. The frequency with which new threads are established and contributed to over time emphasises the value these two theatrical traditions have among personnel as part of their naval cultural heritage today. Within a forum post established in 2009 and entitled 'crossing thwe [*sic*] line', for example, a person using the moniker 'yorkie-s' writes

We are crossing the line next week and though there are a few of us who have done it several times we were just wondering if there is a set or laid down routine to follow.¹⁴¹

There are forty-nine responses to this initial post by 'yorkie-s'. Many of the posts are anecdotal and begin with a variation on the phrase 'I remember the time when'. Both the question posed, and the responses signal the vital role online forums play in the maintenance of the theatrical repertoire at sea. Through online forums, personnel can pose questions related to the practice of specific theatrical forms to a much wider naval community than the one located on board ship and can benefit from the wealth of experience that they hold. The various micro-histories of participation that are brought to the fore within this thread also stress the value and importance of local knowledge and understanding in the continuance of theatrical traditions. Overtime these forums become a repository of local knowledge or, as Jerome de Groot defines, a 'community archive'.¹⁴² 'Community archives', de Groot claims, can

preserve unofficial history, and provide communities with spaces for reflection, consideration, self-definition and identity formation. They give people the chance to claim their past back from official versions of events, to preserve fading ways of life, and to dissent from mainstream historical narratives.¹⁴³

Forums help personnel to connect and share memories with others and pass on knowledge about the production of shipboard theatricals in the present. Through this process of remembering and storytelling personnel also help to preserve a past that otherwise might fade. Websites have also been another popular means through service personnel have

¹⁴⁰ Navy Net - Royal Navy Community Forum <<https://www.navy-net.co.uk/community/>> [accessed 17 February 2018].

¹⁴¹ Navy Net - Royal Navy Community Forum, 'crossing-thwe-line', (2009) < <https://www.navy-net.co.uk/community/threads/crossing-thwe-line.46492>> [accessed 17 February 2018].

¹⁴² Jerome De Groot, *Consuming History: History and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* 2nd ed (London: Routledge, 2016), p.282

¹⁴³ Ibid, p.283

sought to preserve naval theatre heritage. Barry E. Scott who served in the Royal Navy between 1964 and 1993, for example, has created his own website in order to archive the many songs that he collected during his service, including those specifically related to SODS operas. The second paragraph of text on the homepage of Scott's website states

This project has originated, because these naval ditty songs along with the unique language associated with them, remains in danger of being lost for ever. I therefore challenge all ex RN sailors to contribute to this project and to assist me in saving our heritage for future generations.¹⁴⁴

Scott's use of the word 'project' here signals his sustained motivation to record SODS opera songs as a vital part of naval cultural heritage. His call for assistance and use of the words 'our heritage' also reveals that Scott perceives this cultural work as more than simply 'saving' the navy songs alone but as a means to actively engage with other personnel in the preservation of a practice that contributes to a sense of their collective cultural identity.

This chapter reveals that though shipboard theatricals are a part of the navy's unofficial heritage and they reside at a local level, the labour undertaken by personnel to shape and sustain a theatrical repertoire over time demonstrates that it is understood to be a valuable part of their cultural heritage. The theatrical shipboard repertoire of the 20th century is not a fixed body of work that is sustained by a written archive. It is primarily maintained by a network of embodied knowledge and oral tradition that is transmitted live in performance and worked upon and transformed by a theatrical praxis that simultaneously presumes an inheritance and generates a desire for new theatrical possibilities. Shipboard theatricals and the culturally marginal activities that blossom around them play a vital productive role in the construction of an 'imagined' naval community and to a sense of cultural identity and belonging. In the following chapters, I will dig deeper into the aesthetic and formal aspects of specific forms and the functions they served.

¹⁴⁴ Barry E. Scott, 'Navy Song' <<http://www.navysong.co.uk/>> [accessed 17 February 2018].

Chapter Two: The Soft Power of Entertainment

In the late 19th century two articles written by officers of the Royal Navy about entertaining civilian guests were published by *The Navy and Army Illustrated*. The first, dated 10th July 1896, is written by Lieutenant Stuart Gordon and entitled 'Amateur Theatricals in the Navy'.¹⁴⁵ The second, 'Entertainments Afloat,' is written by Commander E. P Stratham and dated 14th October 1899.¹⁴⁶ Both articles outline the practicalities of producing shipboard entertainment as opposed to organising events that take place in establishments ashore. As the title of the article suggests, Gordon exclusively examines the production of amateur theatricals. Although no specific playwrights are mentioned, Gordon's reference to melodrama, 'the selection of the play or plays,' and the assignment of character parts to hopeful 'Romeos' suggests that he refers only to a repertoire of theatrical texts, possibly Shakespeare's plays.¹⁴⁷ Stratham divides his article's attention between theatrical shows, dinner-parties, dances, and bonnet-hops.¹⁴⁸

Despite the different forms of shipboard entertainment discussed, both authors offer the same reason for its reoccurrence. The proposal 'to give a dance, or some kind of "show,"' states Stratham, 'may emanate from the captain, who will point out, perhaps, that they have received a great deal of hospitality, for which it is meet that some return should be made'.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Gordon states that 'amateur theatre' occurs when a ship's company 'have gladly welcomed a chance of returning the always ready hospitality of their friends generally'.¹⁵⁰ These articles reveal that amateur theatre in the Royal Navy, along with other forms of shipboard entertainment, was part of an established, formalised method in the 19th century of returning hospitality to civilian communities whose ports naval personnel shared. Shipboard theatricals, it appears, served a diplomatic function. They enabled members of the Royal Navy to maintain a dialogue between themselves and members of the public and to strengthen the bonds of friendship that existed between them. It was this finding that

¹⁴⁵ Lieutenant Stuart Gordon, 'Amateur Theatricals in the Navy', *The Navy and Army Illustrated*, 10 July 1896, pp.29-30.

¹⁴⁶ Commander E. P. Stratham 'Entertainments Afloat', *The Navy and Army Illustrated*, 14 October 1899, p.103.

¹⁴⁷ Gordon, p.29.

¹⁴⁸ The term bonnet-hop is not explained by Commander E. P. Stratham and its origins are ambiguous. In naval language, the term bonnet traditionally refers to a strip of canvas that is secured to the foot of a sail to increase the sail area in fair weather. Using this interpretation of the word 'bonnet', I conject that a bonnet-hop is a form of dance that took place under a canvas awning.

¹⁴⁹ Stratham, p.103.

¹⁵⁰ Gordon, p.29.

prompted me to investigate whether the use of entertainment as a means of returning hospitality to civilians ashore continued into the 20th century. Consequently, this chapter asks; what is the 20th century legacy of this 19th century practice as outlined by Gordon and Stratham? Did shipboard theatricals of the 20th century serve as a diplomatic tool, as a means through which the Royal Navy established and/or maintained a dialogue with civilian communities?

Recent academic scholarship demonstrates that gunboat diplomacy, the pursuit of a foreign policy that has traditionally depended on the direct threat of military intervention, can also involve non-military uses of naval forces. In *Navies and Soft Power: Historical Case Studies of Naval Power and the Non-use of Military Force*, Bruce A. Elleman and S.C.M. Paine argue that navies are not just hard power assets that can be wielded by governments to threaten or intimidate.¹⁵¹ This collection of 20th century examples of naval actions from conducting humanitarian relief operations to the use of hospital ships reveals that naval forces have played a significant role in international diplomacy. 'Navies', as Elleman's and Paine's introduction states, 'are not just for fighting'.¹⁵² In this chapter, I want to focus in particular on the question of theatrical entertainment as a form of gunboat diplomacy and how, like the naval operations as explored by Elleman and Paine, they functioned as an effective resource of soft power for the Royal Navy.

The term soft power was first introduced by Joseph S. Nye Jr. in *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*.¹⁵³ He asserts that, in contrast with hard or command power, 'a country may achieve outcomes it prefers in world politics because other countries want to follow it'.¹⁵⁴ This ability to get others to want what you want, he continues might be called 'co-optive or soft power'.¹⁵⁵ Nye develops the concept further in *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* to describe the noncoercive strategy of shaping the preferences of others through attraction.¹⁵⁶ Soft power, Nye outlines

is more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument, though that is an important part of it. It is also the ability to attract, and attraction often leads to

¹⁵¹ Bruce A. Elleman and S.C.M. Paine, *Navies and Soft Power: Historical Case Studies of Naval Power and the Non-use of Military Force* (Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2015), p.1.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p.31.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), p.11.

acquiescence. Simply put, in behavioural terms soft power is attractive power. In terms of resources, soft-power resources are the assets that produce such attraction.¹⁵⁷

Nye argues that political leaders have long understood the attraction that the communication of a nation's culture and values can elicit and warns not to underestimate its potency:

It is not smart to discount soft power as just a question of image, public relations, and ephemeral popularity...it is a form of power – a means of obtaining desired outcomes. When we discount the importance of our attractiveness to other countries, we pay a price.¹⁵⁸

Identifying the qualities that constitute attraction, Nye compares soft power to 'the mysterious chemistry' that is forged at a personal level between two people in a relationship or marriage.¹⁵⁹ He also states that the 'ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible assets such as an attractive personality, culture, political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority'.¹⁶⁰ His omission of a full explanation regarding the mechanisms of this 'intangible attraction' or 'mysterious chemistry', however, is one of the main critiques levelled by some of Nye's recent critics.¹⁶¹ In *The Rhetoric of Soft Power: Public Diplomacy in Global Contexts*, Craig Hayden argues that despite the centrality of attraction to soft power, Nye's 'idea of "attraction" ... rests on some unelaborated assumptions about how agent characteristics can be translated into soft power outcomes'.¹⁶² Janice Bially Mattern also proposes that Nye neglects to fully theorise what attraction entails in 'Why 'Soft Power' Isn't So Soft: Representational Force and the Sociolinguistic Construction of Attraction in World Politics'.¹⁶³ Mattern astutely points out that Nye 'theorizes attraction as a *natural* objective experience when he describes the allegedly universally attractive values of cosmopolitanism, democracy, and peace' while simultaneously implying 'that attraction is a *social construct*'.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p.6.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 129.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p.5.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p.6.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, pp. 5-6.

¹⁶² Craig Hayden, *The Rhetoric of Soft Power: Public Diplomacy in Global Contexts* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), p.43.

¹⁶³ Janice Bially Mattern, 'Why Soft Power Isn't So Soft: Representational Force and the Sociolinguistic Construction of Attraction in World Politics', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 33:3 (2005), 583–612.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p.591. Emphasis in original.

By incorporating both essentialist and constructivist approaches, Nye appears to assign opposing ontological statuses to attraction. This chapter, therefore, draws on a range of approaches to the theory and practice of soft power; that of Nye, 2004, 2011; Craig Hayden, 2012; Janice Bially Mattern, 2005; and Takeshi Matsuda, 2007, to open up new ways of thinking about how theatrical entertainment, as an intangible soft power asset, might influence or change the public opinion of other nations.

The performance space is critical to the reading of shipboard theatrical entertainment as an effective soft power resource. In *Soft Power* and *The Future of Power*, Nye emphasises the significance of context when evaluating the effectiveness of any power resource in direct response to one of his harshest critics. Niall Ferguson argues that soft power resources make little to no difference to a nation's influence in world affairs. In his 2003 *Foreign Policy* article "Think Again: Power", Ferguson states that soft power is ineffective on the grounds 'that it's, well, soft'.¹⁶⁵ To illustrate his point, Ferguson argues that the global presence of multinational companies from the United States such as Coca-Cola or McDonalds in Islamic countries do not create attractiveness towards American culture within the Islamic world. In 2004, Nye directly addresses Ferguson's criticism by contending that some scholars have misunderstood his thesis by making 'the mistake of equating soft power behaviour with the cultural resources that sometimes help produce it'.¹⁶⁶ In his counter-argument to Ferguson in 2011, Nye states that soft power is not 'a synonym for culture' and one must consider the context of any resource before labelling it an asset of power and downgrading its importance.¹⁶⁷ The theatrical events discussed in this chapter have been staged on some of the largest warships in the world. A warship, traditionally understood to be an instrument of hard power, becomes the stage for a performance of soft power. 'Soft power resources', as Nye reveals, 'tend to be associated with the cooperative end of the spectrum of behaviour, whereas hard power resources are usually associated with command behaviour'.¹⁶⁸ Theatrical events for civilian audiences aim to entertain as a means of attracting and co-opting others in a space normally associated with the hard command of military power. Staging theatrical entertainments on board warships as opposed to venues ashore has the added advantage of enabling the navy to provide an image to counter those hard power actions and behaviours normally attributed to the ship and its people. Within this spatial

¹⁶⁵ Niall Ferguson, "Think Again: Power", *Foreign Policy*, (2003) [2009] <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/03/think-again-power/>> [accessed 29 April 2017].

¹⁶⁶ Nye Jr., *Soft Power*, p.11.

¹⁶⁷ Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Future of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), p.22.

¹⁶⁸ Nye Jr., *Soft Power*, p.7.

context, I identify how attraction manifests between those who Nye pertinently labels, the 'actors' of soft power and the 'audience' of soft power in relation to two examples of shipboard entertainment.

I begin by examining the shipboard entertainment produced during the World Cruise, or Empire Cruise, as it was also known, of 1923 to 1924. I argue that the inclusion of revues, musical bands, dances, and children's parties during this goodwill tour of the British Empire was not an impromptu and frivolous exercise but a pre-planned and sufficiently financed naval operation to help the Special Service Squadron (SSS) achieve the World Cruise's objectives as set out by the Admiralty. These include emphasising dependence of British Dominions on British sea power and encouraging the nations visited to participate in the Empire's maintenance through the creation of their own naval staffs and base facilities. I consider the role that hosting theatrical entertainments on the ships of the squadron played in the shaping of exchanges between the naval entertainers and the civilian audience. In particular, I examine the integral role that HMS *Hood*, the centrepiece of the World Cruise, played in the staging and reception of events for the benefit of hundreds of thousands of civilians around the world as well as the documentation and strategic communication of these events to audiences in Britain following the cruise. In doing so, I hope to highlight the impact of both live performance and its documentation upon the effectiveness of the World Cruise's shipboard entertainment as a soft power asset.

Many books have been written about *Hood's* engagement in the Second World War and its battle with the German battleship *Bismarck*.¹⁶⁹ Less attention has been paid to the nineteen years *Hood* spent touring the oceans largely at peace and its diplomatic function as the centrepiece of the World Cruise. There are notable exceptions, however. Partly an elegy and partly a biography of *Hood*, Ernle Bradford's *The Mighty Hood: The Life and Death of Britain's Proudest Warship* provides a poetic reflection on the ship's operational history during the inter-war period.¹⁷⁰ More recently, Ralph Harrington's article 'The Mighty Hood': Navy, Empire, War at Sea and the British National Imagination, 1920-60' and Bruce Taylor's book *The Battlecruiser HMS Hood: An Illustrated Biography 1916-1941* investigate ways in which

¹⁶⁹ Accounts of *Hood's* last engagement and her loss can be found in Ernle Bradford, *The Mighty Hood: The Life and Death of Britain's Proudest Warship* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1959); Richard Hough, *The Longest Battle: The War at Sea 1939-45* (London: Cassell, 1986); Ludovic Kennedy, *Pursuit: The Sinking of the Bismarck* (London: Collins, 1974); Corelli Barnett, *Engage the Enemy More Closely: The Royal Navy in the Second World War* (London: W. W. Norton and Company Ltd, 1991).

¹⁷⁰ See Bradford.

the themes of navy, empire, and maritime power have been embedded into the reality and cultural imaginary of this particular ship throughout and long after its commission.¹⁷¹ Despite this more recent interest in *Hood's* cultural, as opposed to institutional or operational history, there is no available scholarship specifically on the civilian entertainment produced by the *Hood* or the SSS. Naval historians are quick to acknowledge the 2,000,000 people who visited the SSS over the course of ten months but fall short at analysing the circumstances in which many of these guests were invited onto the ships in the first place. While Taylor's publication makes fleeting references to dances and musical bands, Harrington's article does not mention any form of shipboard entertainment. Likewise, Daniel Owen Spence's book *A History of the Royal Navy: Empire and Imperialism* provides a section on the SSS but there is no reference to the shipboard entertainments the squadron routinely produced on the cruise.¹⁷² Consequently, the scale of shipboard entertainment by the SSS has been understated by current scholarship and its significance as an effective diplomatic lever to increase the probability of the Royal Navy achieving its desired objectives has been ignored. This chapter, therefore, inserts a new narrative into the rich history of this ship and of the SSS more broadly. This research is chiefly based on archival materials sourced at formal archive holdings including published and unpublished first-hand accounts of the World Cruise, Admiralty records from TNA, film of the World Cruise from the IWM Video Archive and unpublished scrapbooks on *Hood's* career from the NMRN.

The second part of this chapter provides the first in-depth analysis of shipboard children's parties in the Royal Navy. I argue that entertaining children on some of the largest warships in the world was part of a wider diplomatic strategy designed to enhance the public reputation of the Royal Navy both at home and abroad. By pinpointing the formal and aesthetic elements of children's parties, I identify why they were repeatedly chosen as a means of winning the hearts and minds of civilian audiences throughout the 20th century. Secondly, I investigate the skills and resources employed by companies to demonstrate that staging children's parties was a highly-valued practice as well as a valuable resource for the Royal Navy. Lastly, I consider the thoughts and opinions of participants and spectators to establish its effectiveness as a soft power resource. My research is informed by responses I received following a call for current and retired naval personnel to complete questionnaires

¹⁷¹ See Ralph Harrington, 'The Mighty Hood': Navy, Empire, War at Sea and the British National Imagination, 1920–60', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38:2 (2003), 171-85 and Bruce Taylor, *The Battlecruiser HMS Hood: An Illustrated Biography 1916-1941* (London: Chatham Publishing, 2004).

¹⁷² See Daniel Owen Spence, *A History of the Royal Navy: Empire and Imperialism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

about entertainment at sea. Alongside written responses detailing this practice from current and retired service personnel, my analysis incorporates photographic evidence from the IWM Collections and information from commission books sourced from 'Ships' Commissioning Books', an online archive created by David Axford.¹⁷³

Entertainments of the World Cruise 1923-1924

On the 29th November 1923, the Special Service Squadron (SSS) embarked on a 38,000-mile tour of the British Empire. It was a cruise unlike any other the Royal Navy had undertaken in the 20th century. The imperial cruise in 1901 of the royal yacht HMS *Ophir* and the three cruises made by the Prince of Wales in HMS *Renown* between 1919 and 1922 were far less ambitious and described by Ralph Harrington as 'more of a royal progress than specifically a demonstration of naval power'.¹⁷⁴ In ten months two battle cruisers, *Hood* and *Repulse*, and five 'Delhi'-class light cruisers *Dauntless*, *Delhi*, *Dunedin*, *Danae* and *Dragon* sailed around the world to ports both within and outside the British Empire. The ships called at, among other places, Kenya, Sierra Leone, major ports in South Africa, both the west and east coast of Canada and the USA, the pacific islands of Fiji and Honolulu, Singapore, Argentina, Brazil, major ports in Australia, and several ports in New Zealand. The cruise was planned during the Imperial Conference of 1923 (1 October 1923 to 8 November 1923) but its purposes were previously set out in an Admiralty memo dated 24 April 1923 to Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty from the First Sea Lord, Leo Amery:

I am considering the desirability . . . of sending a really representative Squadron of our most modern ships around the Empire (a) in order to follow up any agreements for co-operation at the Imperial Conference by creating Dominion interest and enthusiasm so that such agreements may really be carried out; (b) to let the local forces in Australia and elsewhere not only see our standard of work etc. but have an opportunity of doing joint exercises etc., and getting in touch generally, as a prelude to some more permanent system of interchange and co-operation; (c) to give our

¹⁷³ Online Archive, David Axford, 'Ships' Commissioning Books' <<http://www.axfordsabode.org.uk/comishbk.htm>> [accessed 8 February 2017].

¹⁷⁴ Harrington, p.176.

own ships more experience of long distance cruises and of waters practically unvisited by the Navy for nearly 20 years. . . .¹⁷⁵

The World Cruise's objective, therefore was broadly two-fold. Firstly, the cruise was designed to be a tangible, highly visible expression of British commitment to Empire in the post-First World War era. By demonstrating the reach and potential of the nation's 'most modern ships' the Admiralty intended to reassert imperial dominance to friends and potential foes alike.¹⁷⁶ This objective is most evident in the choice of *Hood* as the centrepiece of the squadron. Throughout the inter-war period *Hood* was the fastest, heaviest, and largest warship of her size and firepower in the world.¹⁷⁷ She was also extremely expensive. Newsreel coverage of *Hood's* sea trials and commissioning in 1920 refer to the ship as the '£6,000,000 warship'.¹⁷⁸ In 'The Mighty Hood': Navy, Empire, War at Sea and the British National Imagination, 1920–60,' Harrington observes that the extension of national power across the sea by means of the potent national symbol of *Hood* enabled Britain to project a renewed commitment to the imperial idea in the inter-war years. *Hood's* status as a national symbol, Harrington argues, was in part forged by the circumstances of its construction.¹⁷⁹ *Hood* was originally built in 1915 as part of a First World War emergency construction programme along with three other battle cruisers *Anson*, *Howe*, and *Rodney*.¹⁸⁰ The programme was devised in direct response to a new class of battle cruiser then under construction for the German navy. *Anson*, *Howe*, and *Rodney*, however, never appeared and only *Hood* was built. Subsequently, *Hood* became routinely referred to as 'the pride of the navy'.¹⁸¹ Lieutenant Charles Richard Benstead, for example, an officer aboard *Hood* who published his account of the cruise, *Round the World with the Battle Cruisers*, summed up the ship's national status when he commented: 'In this immaculate battle cruiser, the largest and most powerful warship in the world, the people of the Empire beheld a triumph of British engineering skill'.¹⁸² The ship also became a symbol for the survival and perpetuation of

¹⁷⁵ London, TNA, ADM 116/2219, FF.5-6, Leo Amery to Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty, 24 April 1923.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ For technical details see Maurice P. Northcott, *Hood: Design and Construction* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1979) and John Roberts, *Anatomy of the Ship: The Battlecruiser Hood* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 2013).

¹⁷⁸ 'Steam Trials of H.M.S. Hood', British Movietone News: Newsreel, 10 January 1920; '£6,000,000 warship, H.M.S. Hood', Pathé News: Newsreel, 17 November 1921.

¹⁷⁹ Harrington, p.176.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Hough, p.89.

¹⁸² Charles Richard Benstead, *Round the World with the Battle Cruisers* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1926), p.2.

Empire. This sentiment is romantically expressed by V.C. Scott O'Connor's account of the World Cruise:

In her mass and speed and perfection of armament the Hood symbolises the valorous determination of war-weary Britain to maintain intact for good of mankind the far-flung empire she has built up through the centuries. It is this symbolism that lifts Hood out of the machine, and irradiates the great grey hulk with a halo of splendour.¹⁸³

The idea that *Hood* epitomised an era of Britain's imperial greatness is also expressed by Bradford who describes Hood's eventual destruction as 'an expression of a world and of a way of life that has gone forever'.¹⁸⁴

Rather than a period in which interest in empire was in decline, the inter-war years have been characterised by historians as an era of renewed commitment to the imperial idea. John Darwin, in his chapter 'Making Imperial Peace 1919- 1926' in *The Empire Project*, suggests that despite the problematic place of the dominions in the British system and rising doubts that 'the vast world system the late Victorians had assembled would command support of British society at home', 'empire was a central element of British life'.¹⁸⁵ To illustrate this, Darwin states how the idea 'that Britain must be a global power to defend the sphere of free commerce and guard its long lines of maritime transport was argued over in detail but rarely disputed in principle'.¹⁸⁶ The fact that the World Cruise was contemporaneously coined by the Admiralty as 'the Empire Cruise' and was subsequently referred to as such by British newspaper journalists and by O'Connor in his official account of the tour, *The Empire Cruise*, testifies to this renewed commitment to the imperial idea within Britain during the inter-war period.

In *Propaganda and Empire: the manipulation of British public opinion, 1880-1960*, John Mackenzie argues that there were 'dramatic new cultural and institutional expressions' of popular imperialism.¹⁸⁷ Although Mackenzie observes that the British people 'spent much energy seeking the nautical roots of world greatness,' he pays no attention to the role of the Royal Navy in propagandising or reinvigorating Empire during this period.¹⁸⁸ This aspect is

¹⁸³ V.C. Scott O'Connor, *The Empire Cruise* (London: Riddle, Smith and Duffus, 1925), p.258-9.

¹⁸⁴ Bradford, p.29

¹⁸⁵ John Darwin, *The Empire Project* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.393

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p.410.

¹⁸⁷ John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p.10.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*. p.47.

also overlooked in Mackenzie's edited collection of essays, *Popular Imperialism and the Military*. Apart from one essay on the Royal Air Force and a couple of references to the Navy League, the collection's emphasis lies on the role of land based military forces.¹⁸⁹ In contrast, Daniel Owen Spence's books *A History of the Royal Navy: Empire and Imperialism* and *Colonial Naval Culture and British Imperialism* examine the role of British and colonial naval forces in the maintenance of the British Empire. Both books also address the role of the SSS in that process. Spence argues that the Royal Navy played 'a front-line role' in British Imperial status as 'Britain's most visible and persuasive global ambassador'.¹⁹⁰ The SSS, he continues inspired 'awe and imperial loyalty among Britain's colonial subjects'.¹⁹¹ In *Colonial Naval Culture and British Imperialism* Spence offers an in-depth insight into the emergence and political, social, and cultural impact of colonial naval forces around the world. Although Spence does not directly analyse the role of SSS in this book, Mackenzie dedicates two pages of his two-and-a-half-page 'Founding Editors Introduction' to the significance of the World Cruise for Imperial Britain. Mackenzie describes this extraordinary global display of naval might as 'the most dramatic piece of imperial 'naval theatre' in its history'.¹⁹² The use of theatre as a metaphor to describe naval displays is most commonly attributed in academic scholarship to the historian Jan Rüger. Rüger has written extensively on the development of naval reviews in his book *The Great Naval Game*. He argues that maritime rituals, warship launches, and fleet reviews were part of a 'potent public theatre' in the 19th and early 20th century.¹⁹³ By displaying and parading naval vessels on the public stage in the presence of royalty, Rüger asserts that these popular and professionally stage-managed naval spectacles became an effective way in which monarchs and governments could project their power and pride to national and international audiences.¹⁹⁴ Similarly, the World Cruise was a global parade of the nation's hard power assets - a potent and carefully stage managed naval spectacle that asserted Britain's imperial authority to the world.

The World Cruise's other primary objective was to galvanise support from the Dominions in imperial defence. Its purposes, according to Amery, included encouraging the Dominions to follow up agreements made at the Imperial Conference (1923) and to forge 'a more

¹⁸⁹ See John M Mackenzie., ed., *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850–1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

¹⁹⁰ Spence, *A History of the Royal Navy*, p.19.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. p.168.

¹⁹² Daniel Owen Spence, *Colonial Naval Culture and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p.xii.

¹⁹³ Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.208.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, p.50.

permanent system of interchange and cooperation' between nations.¹⁹⁵ The World Cruise was serving notice that Britain and the Royal Navy could not effectively sustain the naval effort required to maintain the Empire unassisted. As Darwin succinctly puts it in *The Empire Project*: 'The logic of Britain's position after 1918 was to maintain its world system but cut down its cost'.¹⁹⁶ Though the Dominions remained the primary focus, elements of the SSS were to visit dependencies such as Malaya, Penang, and Singapore in the hope that they too 'would facilitate the successful adoption of any schemes for the successful cooperation in the Naval Defence of the Empire'.¹⁹⁷ The security of dependencies had been a long-held concern of the Admiralty, particularly after the termination of Britain's military alliance with Japan in the wake of the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty.¹⁹⁸ Japan guarded Britain's possessions in Asia and the Pacific regions and the loss of the alliance meant increased responsibilities for the Royal Navy in securing Britain's dependencies. This need for investment in imperial defence from across the Empire was, once again, echoed by Amery in the preface to O'Connor's *The Empire Cruise*:

The British Empire is an Oceanic Commonwealth. It has grown by sea-power and seafaring. . . In the long run an ocean-wide system of defence in a world of great Naval Powers such as those which are coming to the front to-day, cannot be maintained indefinitely by the resources of this small island alone. The naval problem, like all our other problems, can only be solved by the co-operation of all the partner nations in the British Empire.¹⁹⁹

There is no doubt that a conspicuous display of the Royal Navy's most powerful ships around the Empire aided the Admiralty in impressing 'partner nations'.²⁰⁰ Showcasing a formidable naval force as a means of promoting investment in ships, men, and money was the navy's best advertisement. These vessels, however, were more than just glorified billboards. Whilst this approach was not intended to create hostility, the deployment of warships to support foreign policy was still a form of gunboat diplomacy and one, which Spence asserts, 'was a key psychological weapon to sway sovereign states into signing deals weighted towards

¹⁹⁵ London, TNA, ADM 116/2219, FF.5-6.

¹⁹⁶ Darwin, p.375.

¹⁹⁷ London, TNA, ADM 116/2219, to secretary, Treasury, 4 August 1923.

¹⁹⁸ The Washington Naval Treaty, signed on 6 February 1922 in Washington D.C, was a treaty designed to prevent a global arms race after the First World War. The U.S, Britain, and Japan agreed to limit the construction of warships to a ratio of 5:5:3. The terms of the treaty required Britain to terminate the Anglo-Japanese Alliance dating from 1902.

¹⁹⁹ O'Connor, p.5-6.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

British commerce and strategy'.²⁰¹ In *Soft Power*, Nye recognises the persuasive power of hard power tactics such as 'inducements ("carrots") or threats ("sticks")' in influencing the decision-making processes of other nations.²⁰² 'Everyone', Nye argues, 'is familiar with hard power. We know that military and economic might often gets others to change their position'.²⁰³ The Admiralty, however, wanted to persuade the Dominions to actively participate in the Empire's maintenance. They wanted to advocate cooperation and exchange not to intimidate or threaten their allies through the display of British naval forces. For fear of projecting the wrong message to their allies, the Admiralty had initial concerns about the inclusion of the battle cruisers in the World Cruise. A minute dated 6 June 1923, from the Admiralty Records held at the National Archives (TNA) in Kew, states that 'it is possible that if battle cruisers are sent, it may . . . discourage rather than stimulate the Dominions from making an increased naval effort'.²⁰⁴ Furthermore, an attached note from a Royal Navy officer argues that 'their presence might tend to discourage proposals to build lesser ships, which might appear to the public to be of doubtful value in comparison'.²⁰⁵ The suggestion of excluding the battleships from the World Cruise was not seriously considered.

Determined to project an image that would enable them to achieve their objective, the Admiralty looked to the intangible but observable soft power assets that the squadron could simultaneously wield on the World Cruise to appear more attractive to the nations they hoped to influence. Theatrical entertainment had already proven to be an effective resource of soft power for the companies of *Hood*. On *Hood's* maiden voyage in May 1920, the foundations were already being laid for a great theatrical tradition of men organising themselves into bands and theatrical parties ready to entertain civilians. In 1920 and 1923 *Hood* made two separate goodwill cruises to Scandinavia and represented the Royal Navy in Rio de Janeiro at the centenary of Brazilian independence in 1922. Shipboard entertainments were performed throughout these goodwill tours and became a successful means to project a humane and benevolent image of the company. Gunner "Windy" Breeze of the Royal Marine Artillery recalls the dances on the *Hood* in his memoir of the Scandinavian cruise (1920):

²⁰¹ Spence, *A History of the Royal Navy*, p.19.

²⁰² Nye Jr., *Soft Power*, p.5.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, p.5

²⁰⁴ London, TNA, ADM 116/2219, minute, 6 June 1923.

²⁰⁵ London, TNA, ADM 116/2219, note from Commander C.A. Spooner, undated, attached to minute of 6 June 1923.

We were the first British ships to visit these countries after the war and what a welcome we got...Tivoli Gardens was the highlight of this visit with all the free parties and entertainment, and here we had thousands of visitors coming aboard, including the King and Queen of Sweden and the King of Denmark[...] The quarter-deck was always rigged for dancing with the awning spread and the Marine band playing'.²⁰⁶

The performance and production skills of personnel would have been a crucial factor in the success of shipboard entertainment as a resource of soft power on the World Cruise. It is likely that some of the members of *Hood's* previous goodwill tours would later serve on the World Cruise. Their prior knowledge and experience of participating in shipboard entertainment for civilians would have been invaluable to the company. Nye emphasises that 'whether the possession of power resources actually produces favourable behaviour depends upon the context and the skills of the agent in converting the resources into behavioural outcomes'.²⁰⁷ The fact that a high proportion of *Hood's* company were from the First World War battle cruiser *Lion* is also indicative evidence of the company's previous participation in theatrical entertainment.²⁰⁸ As I explore in Chapter Four, the men of the Grand Fleet turned to organised theatrical concerts during their long confinement in Scapa Flow. If personnel had not been on the goodwill tours to Brazil or Scandinavia before the World Cruise, it is likely they would have witnessed or even participated in some form of theatrical entertainment whilst at Scapa Flow during the First World War.

According to Admiralty records held at TNA, four different forms of shipboard entertainment were staged by the squadron throughout the cruise. *Hood* hosted an 'At Home', an evening of dance, live music supplied by a marine or amateur band made up of serving personnel, and refreshment at every major port of call. The rest of the squadron meanwhile, hosted dances, revues, and children's parties at any location visited longer than a week.²⁰⁹ These entertainments were sufficiently financed. Within the 'additional expenditure' budget of refitting, fuel, and stores above ordinary service, £8,000 was allocated for shipboard entertaining.²¹⁰ Crucially, this shipboard entertainment budget was specifically for civilian entertainment. It was not, as Bruce Taylor asserts, for the entertainment of the squadron in order 'to relieve the drudgery and routine of life at sea' or 'to provide an outlet for the talents

²⁰⁶ Cited in Taylor, *The Battlecruiser HMS Hood*, p.55.

²⁰⁷ Nye Jr., *The Future of Power*, p.22.

²⁰⁸ Taylor, *The Battlecruiser HMS Hood*, p.55.

²⁰⁹ London, TNA, ADM 1/8662.

²¹⁰ London, TNA, ADM 116/2219.FF9R&24R.

of those who perhaps yearned for a different career'.²¹¹ Shipboard entertainment was a naval operation that was designed to entice civilian guests. Consequently, whilst the 'orgy of festivities' surrounding the cruise may have been, as Paul Kennedy asserts, 'the most exciting occurrence', the cruise was far from a joy-ride for personnel.²¹² Numerous first-hand accounts emphasise the hard work and steadfast commitment required from personnel to facilitate these entertainments. In *The Empire Cruise*, for example, O'Connor states:

Let no one however, imagine that the cruise of a British squadron is mere matter of junketings from port to port. Both entertainers and entertained worked hard and unselfishly to promote the common interest...on board our ships all personal inclinations and wishes were subordinated to the general interest.²¹³

One of the examples O'Connor uses to exemplify the hard work and dedication of the squadron is the maintenance of picket boats. With the ships anchored at a distance from the shore, a continuous service of picket boats had to be maintained to carry civilians to and from the ships. This required midshipman, petty officers, and seaman to remain on duty and to forgo some relaxation time ashore. Midshipman George Blundell describes this duty on board the *Hood*:

I was running a picket boat, which meant solid work from 6am to 2am or midnight, and on my day off it meant entertaining visitors or being entrained ashore. The official dances were a nightmare at which one had to stay until about 1 am. Sometimes I could hardly stand up, having had little sleep for several days. The job of laundering and keeping our clothes spotlessly clean was also a nightmare.²¹⁴

Rather than a fun activity, Blundell's experience highlights that entertaining and subsequently being entertained was continuous and exhausting labour that came at the expense of his leisure time. The relentless routine also induced boredom among the squadron. Frederick Arthur Buckley, Gunnery officer of the SSS, describes that 'the "At Home" on board *Hood* at Ceylon' was 'rather a dull affair from our point of view but the local people seemed to enjoy it'.²¹⁵ Similarly, Lieutenant Geoffrey Wells notes in his diary that by

²¹¹ Taylor, p.131.

²¹² Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Fontan Press, 1991), p330, and p.449.

²¹³ O'Connor, p.48.

²¹⁴ Cited in Alan Coles and Ted Briggs, *Flagship Hood: The Fate of Britain's Mightiest Warship* (London: Robert Hale, 1985), p. 36.

²¹⁵ London, NMM BUC/2/12, Diary of Frederick Arthur Buckley, Ceylon Wed 30th Jan 1924. p.30.

the time *Hood* sailed for Fiji, the entertainments had become so tiresome that the company had lost all enthusiasm and longed for a break:

It is very noticeable on board that now passed New Zealand everyone seems to be getting bored with the cruise. I certainly am. Going round the world is alright, in fact being paid to go round and under such circumstances as this is great but one needs a fortnight's holiday at home in the middle of it. Everything moves at such a pace.²¹⁶

The financial provision made by the navy, the scale of production, and these first-hand accounts all indicate that theatrical entertainment was not a spontaneous or frivolous idea that had arisen from individual company members. Shipboard entertainment was an integrated part of the operational plan and naval personnel had no choice but to participate in its well-drilled production.

The performance space is crucial to the reading of the World Cruise's entertainments as an exercise of soft power. As I have previously explored in the introduction to this chapter, naval vessels are traditionally associated with the hard command of naval power. By eliciting attraction through performance on board warships, personnel are attempting to establish and promote an image of themselves and their ship as a benign force, albeit a powerful one in the minds of others. The idea that the SSS was, through the process of performance, re-framed as a mighty but benevolent force in the minds of Britain's allies is, in a very literal sense, illustrated in Figure 4. This large and evocative image, printed in the *Adelaide Chronicle*, depicts *Hood's* first visit to Adelaide in March 1924.²¹⁷ At the centre of the image is a photograph of *Hood's* formidable 15-inch guns which point intimidatingly towards the perspective of the reader. However, this striking image of naval power is in dialogue with a selection of smaller images that highlight friendly exchanges between prominent members of the ship and civilians who are exploring *Hood* and dancing under the awning. These smaller images, I suggest, do not take away from the potency of the central image but they do, nonetheless, literally frame the most powerful ship in the world as a welcoming and inviting space.

Theatrical entertainment on the ships themselves also enabled the squadron to enhance the reputations of specific ships and their companies. *Hood*, the ship that had already played a principle role in entertaining civilians on previous goodwill tours, received the most visitors

²¹⁶ Private Collection, Mrs Jane Whigham, Diary of Lt E Geoffrey Wells (1923-4), p.35.

²¹⁷ 'On HMS Hood', *The Adelaide Chronicle*, 22 March 1924, p.35.

across the ten months.²¹⁸ At every major port of call the company transformed the quarterdeck into a bright and colourful performance arena for “At Homes”. The floor was prepared for dancing and a third of an acre of canvas awning was rigged to provide cover from the elements for the dancers and a Royal Marine band. Food and drink were prepared and served on tables and the ship was decorated with long lines of bunting. Figure 5 is a photograph from the official world cruise album of the *Hood* dressed for an “At Home” at Fremantle, Western Australia. An article in the Melbourne newspaper *Table talk* entitled ‘Hospitality of Naval Officers Welcome Visitors to the “At Home” on the Hood’ describes these events ‘as the most enjoyable functions in connection with the stay of the Fleet’.²¹⁹ ‘A naval band’, the reporter continues, ‘played admirably, visitors were escorted to all points of interest, afternoon tea and dainty refreshments were served, and dancing was indulged in on the quarter deck’.²²⁰ By constructing a welcoming performance space and inviting guests to listen to the band and dance with the captains and officers of the flagship just as they had done in Sweden and Brazil the previous years, *Hood’s* company were able to build upon the ship’s established, international reputation as the entertaining ship.

²¹⁸ Of the 2,000,000 people who visited the squadron, 750,000 people embarked *Hood*.

²¹⁹ ‘Hospitality of Naval Officers Welcome Visitors to the At Home on Hood,’ *Table Talk*, Melbourne, 27 March 1924, p.16.

²²⁰ *Ibid*.



Figure 4 'On HMS Hood'. Adelaide Chronicle. 22 March 1924.

Finally, the warship as performance space is significant because it requires the Royal Navy to act as hosts. In *Of Hospitality*, Jacques Derrida examines the concept of hospitality through a variety of philosophical lenses to raise questions about political inclusion.²²¹ Derrida introduces 'a paradigm of hospitality' in which he poses the question of whether it is through ownership of territory that we have a right or duty to act as hosts or whether hospitality arises when we act as hosts and appropriate space to welcome the other.²²² The significance of this paradox to my investigation is the power dynamic of guest-host that manifests when the SSS arrives in port. Although the squadron are the visitors, they immediately assume the position of host by opening the ships to public viewing and inviting the civilian public to be entertained. 'We saw our ship invaded', commented Lieutenant Benstead,

[...] by Freetown negroes who gaped in open-mouthed astonishment at a ventilating fan; by the bearded Boer farmers from the South African veldt; by white-robed Mohammedans from Zanzibar who, at sunset, spread their prayer-mats upon the quarterdeck and reverently knelt to invoke the protection of Allah.²²³

The use of the words 'our ship invaded' stakes claim on the ship's territory and positions the visiting squadron as hosts and the resident public as imperial subjects. The act of hospitality through entertainment immediately reinforces the hierarchical structure of the British imperial community. This dominant-subordination relationship problematises the use of soft power as a diplomatic tool. In *Soft Power and its Perils: US Cultural Policy in Early Postwar Japan and Permanent Dependency*, Takeshi Matsuda argues that the line between soft power and cultural imperialism is easily breached.²²⁴ In his examination of post-war Japan-United States cultural relations, Matsuda argues that a dominant position usually results in a one-way flow of influence and relations and consequently advocates the use of soft power on a bilateral cultural exchange model.²²⁵ Whilst the focus of this study is on the theatricals that naval personnel created for civilians on the ships, it is important to recognise the exchange of courtesies ashore. Shipboard entertainments usually coincided with receptions, civic functions, and theatrical events in which the men of the squadron were entertained. Within this larger context, the role of host and guest was in fact a reciprocal one between

²²¹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, trans. by Rachel Bowlby (California: Stanford University press, 2000).

²²² Ibid, p.15.

²²³ Benstead, p.2.

²²⁴ Takeshi Matsuda, *Soft Power and its Perils: US Cultural Policy in Early Postwar Japan and Permanent Dependency* (California: Stanford University Press, 2007).

²²⁵ Ibid, p.8.

civilians and naval personnel. However, given the military dominance that the SSS displayed and the British imperial power they represented, there was an unequal power relationship. The position of host was clearly assigned to the Royal Navy upon arrival who appropriated the space to welcome their colonial subjects. This naval host-civilian guest dynamic is reinforced by numerous newspaper reports. An account of the “At Home” at Perth, for example, refers to the people of Perth as ‘guests’ that ‘lingered as long as possible’ and the officers of the company as ‘courteous’ and ‘distinguished hosts’.²²⁶

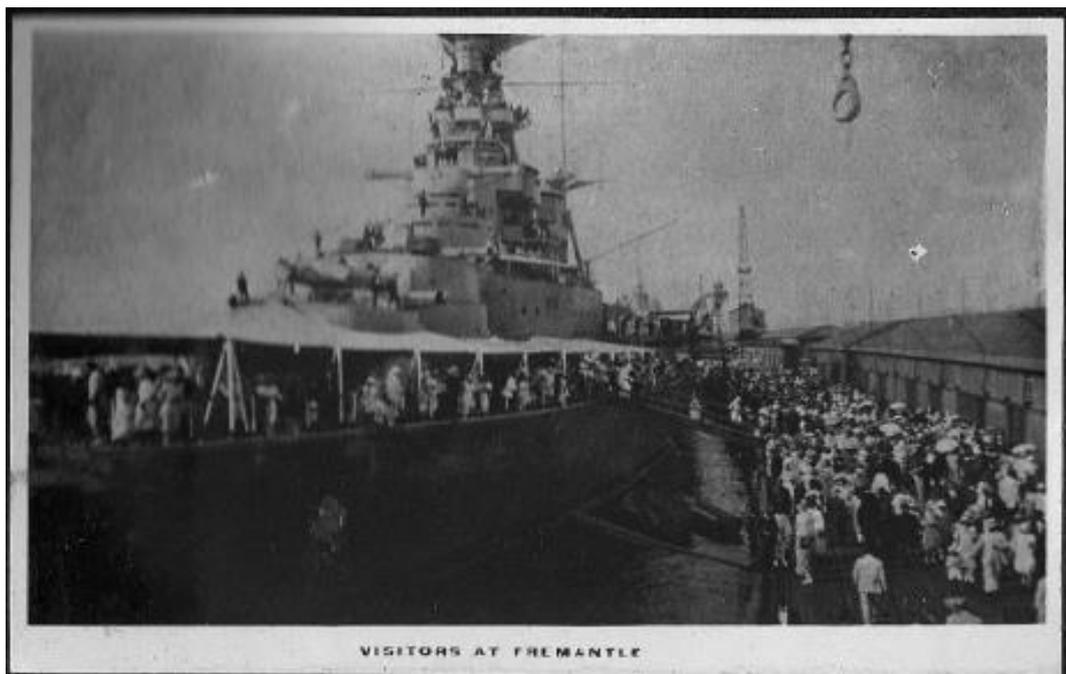


Figure 5 Visitors at Fremantle. World Cruise of British Special Service Squadron 1923-1924 Official Album.

Shipboard entertainment during the cruise was not only an effective soft power resource because it was designed to ‘communicate with and attract the public of other countries, rather than merely their governments’ but both the production and performance of these events required prior communication and cooperation between the actors and audiences of soft power.²²⁷ In ‘Public Diplomacy and Soft Power’ Nye states that:

Effective public diplomacy is a two-way street that involves listening as well as talking. We need to understand better what is going on in the minds of others and

²²⁶ ‘The Admiral’s At Home’, *Western Mail*, Perth, 6 March 1924, p.35.

²²⁷ Joseph S. Nye Jr., ‘Public Diplomacy and Soft Power’, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616 (2008), 94-109 (p.95).

what values we share. That is why exchanges are often more effective than mere broadcasting. By definition, soft power means getting others to want the same outcomes you want, and that requires an understanding of how they are hearing your messages and adapting them accordingly.²²⁸

The production of shipboard events required the squadron to coordinate with local authorities prior to the squadron's arrival. Figure 7 is a programme of events that was published in Canterbury, New Zealand before the arrival of the light cruises *Delhi*, *Danae*, and *Dragon*. To produce this programme, local authorities would have required prior knowledge of the ships' schedules and the type of entertainments the squadron were intending to produce. The separate billing of 'sports meetings' also indicates that the word 'entertainment' here was a term used to explicitly refer to theatrical amusements. Trove, the Australian newspaper archive, also holds numerous timetables of theatrical events and notices to and from Vice Admiral Sir Frederick Field and Rear Admiral Sir Hubert Brand that were published in both local and national newspapers. The production and communication of shipboard entertainment, therefore, was a joint effort that relied on effective communication and cooperation between members of the Royal Navy and local press.



Figure 6 A theatrical troupe from HMS Hood. World Cruise of British Special Service Squadron 1923-1924 Official Album.

²²⁸ Ibid, p.103.

The success of these theatrical events also rested on effective communication between participants during the events. For the dances to function both naval personnel and civilians had to work in partnership with one another in order to move together in time with the music. They also created an opportunity to intermingle and to engage in conversation over drinks and food. Children's parties, which I examine in greater depth later in this chapter, required personnel to play with local children and to work the various playground rides and games. According to Buckley's diary, the *Repulse* produced a pantomime, a theatrical form that is synonymous with audience participation, during the ship's time in Singapore.²²⁹ Soft power is being produced by these events because the reciprocal communication it engenders creates an opportunity to forge meaningful exchanges between civilians and naval personnel. Unlike the conventional visits in which thousands of civilians entered and roamed freely around the ships, shipboard entertainment afforded personnel an opportunity to be more attentive towards their guests and engage in longer face to face exchanges. Sometimes these exchanges continued outside the space and time of the theatrical event. A reporter from the *Daily Telegraph* in Tasmania describes how, on one occasion, the men of *Hood* and the civilians ashore began singing after a concert had ended:

At 10 o'clock, when the programme was completed, the crowd on Ocean Pier took up the strains of 'Auld Lang Syne,' which was vociferously responded to by the men on the ship, after which they sang the National Anthem.²³⁰

This example of communal singing demonstrates a mutual willingness by both civilians and personnel to forge a sense of togetherness despite their physical separation. The decision by the crowd on Ocean Pier to spontaneously sing 'Auld Lang Syne' loud enough for the men on board to hear them was a symbolic gesture of friendship. 'Auld Lang Syne', which translates as 'for the sake of old times', is a song which calls for the observation and renewal of old and dear friendships. The question posed by the chorus is 'Should old acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind?' to which the reply is, 'We'll take a cup of kindness yet, for auld lang syne'. This brief sing-a-long was more than a joyous outburst of song in the wake of the concert that had preceded it but a symbolic affirmation of kinship. The decision by *Hood's* men to then follow 'Auld Lang Syne' with a rendition of the National Anthem is pertinent for it was not only a national symbol of Britain but a potent symbol of Empire. "God save the King/Queen" was the imperial anthem, exported around the world via the expansion of the

²²⁹ NMM BUC/2/12, Singapore, Wed 13th Feb 1924. p.38.

²³⁰ 'Departure Tomorrow', *Daily Telegraph*, Tasmania, 2 April 1924, p.5.

British Empire and one which served as Australia's National Anthem.²³¹ By singing their National Anthem together, members of the Australian public and *Hood's* company were demonstrating their personal commitment to the imperial community to which they all belonged. Whilst singing and laughing together were minor exchanges, they nonetheless created moments that aided the Royal Navy in communicating the imperial ties that bound themselves and their guests together. It is vital to recognise, however, that like all soft power resources, shipboard entertainment had been implemented strategically. Shipboard entertainments were invitation-only events and the squadron targeted audiences that were arguably already receptive to their message of imperial unity. Hence, O'Connor describes how, whilst in Adelaide, 1000 members of the Navy League, 500 boy scouts and 200 boys from Scotch College, a school that 'embodies the ideals of an English public school' had been invited to the *Hood* over the course of a day.²³²

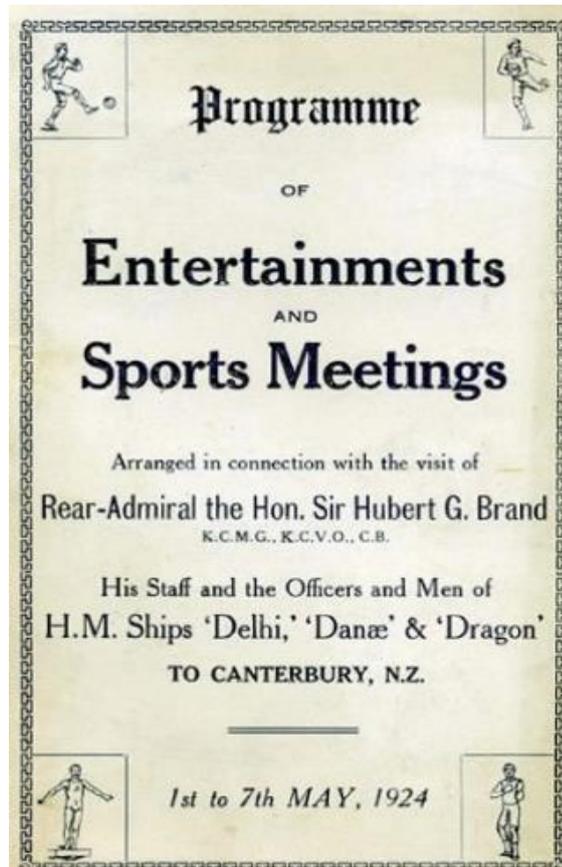


Figure 7 'Programme of Entertainments and Sports Meetings'. Canterbury, New Zealand. 1-7 May 1924.

²³¹ Today, the British National Anthem remains one of New Zealand's National Anthems and as an official Royal Anthem in the case of Australia, Canada, Jamaica, and Tuvalu.

²³² O'Connor, p.170.

The Admiralty also devised ways of documenting the events of the World Cruise so audiences both internationally and at home could hear and see its successes. In *Soft Power*, Nye identifies three different dimensions of public diplomacy. The second dimension is strategic communication 'in which a set of simple themes is developed, much like what occurs in a political or advertising campaign. The campaign plans symbolic events and communication over the course of a year to brand the central themes, or to advance a government policy'.²³³ V.C. Scott O'Connor, whose book *The Empire Cruise* I have made frequent references to throughout this chapter, travelled aboard the *Hood* with the explicit purpose of writing about the SSS. A 300-page book illustrated with numerous photographs and coloured plates was subsequently published in 1925. The publication of this book that was aimed at audiences at home, signals the Admiralty's desire to consolidate the centrality of the Royal Navy in the formation of the British public's imperial and national identity.

In conjunction with their arrangement for O'Connor to publish an account of the cruise, the Admiralty also organised a cinematographer to film events.²³⁴ The resulting film, *Britain's Birthright* testifies to the huge numbers of people that visited *Hood* and to those that were specifically invited to enjoy shipboard entertainment.²³⁵ The film includes a clip of the citizens of Victoria, Canada, for instance, dancing aboard the *Hood* with the company on the quarter deck. By recording and editing events, the Admiralty were not only able to project their display of soft power to audiences at home but also propagandise their navalist and imperialist agenda. This agenda is transparent in the choice of the film's title. 'Britain's Birthright' is a proclamation of Britain's entitlement to its ownership of countries of the Empire. The use of the word 'Birthright' suggests that Britain does not stake its claim on the colonies because it *can* exercise supreme power but because it is Britain's intrinsic right to do so. In *The Imperial Archive* Thomas Richards astutely points out that in facing the problem of control at a distance, an Empire's cohesion is not maintained through the exercise of force alone but through the collection, organisation, and display of information.²³⁶ Empire, Richards claims in his Introduction, 'is partly a fiction...Empires may have armies and navies, but they also have messengers, or systems for conveying messages'.²³⁷ The release of this

²³³ Nye Jr., *Soft Power*, p.108.

²³⁴ ADM 116/2219, memo, 23 April 1923.

²³⁵ London, Imperial War Museum (IWM) Film Archive, IWM 842, *Britain's Birthright*.

²³⁶ Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993).

²³⁷ *Ibid*, p.1.

film was a strategic means of communication in order to disseminate an imperial message to the dominions and to the British public at home.²³⁸ The film was released in cinemas across Britain on Empire Day 1925 and began with the following 19th century quote by Sir William Blackstone: 'The Royal Navy of England hath ever been its greatest defence and ornament; it is its ancient and natural strength, the floating bulwark of our Empire'.²³⁹ The film was yet another means through which the Admiralty could re-affirm the prominent role of the Royal Navy in the construction of a British imperial self.

The Admiralty's mass media approach, both in terms of daily communications with local newspapers and more strategic communications with film crews and writers, meant that the Royal Navy could reach a wide audience. They could generate widespread public awareness about shipboard events and elicit support from civilian communities both at home and abroad. This strategy however, was not without flaw. In *The Future of Power*, Nye states that 'the sender knows what she says, but not always what the target hears'.²⁴⁰ This idea that cultural or political barriers may distort what is heard or even produce the antithesis of attraction is echoed by Nye in 'Public Diplomacy and Soft Power' when he states:

Public diplomacy tries to attract by drawing attention to these potential resources through broadcasting, subsidizing cultural exports, arranging exchanges, and so forth. But if the content of a country's culture, values, and policies are not attractive, public diplomacy that "broadcasts" them cannot produce soft power. It may produce just the opposite.²⁴¹

It is important to recognise that while there are many published reports and accounts in newspapers and other media that are complimentary of the entertainments produced by the squadron they are not without bias. Equally, those newspapers with an opposing political view may choose to report events in an unfavourable light or decide not to broadcast them at all. An exemplary example of the latter can be found in the national Australian paper *The Bulletin* (1880-2008). *The Bulletin*, whose tag line was "Australia for the White Man" played a pivotal role in cultivating and celebrating a nationalist image, particularly at the turn of the

²³⁸ *Britain's Birthright* was sponsored by the Admiralty in conjunction with the Royal Colonial Institute and edited by Arthur Percival Newton, Rhodes Professor of Imperial History at the University of London.

²³⁹ An announcement of the film is on the final page of O'Connor's *The Empire Cruise* (1925).

²⁴⁰ Nye Jr., *The Future of Power*, p.107.

²⁴¹ Nye Jr., 'Public Diplomacy and Soft Power', p.95.

20th century when its circulation peaked at around 80,000.²⁴² Humorous stories and cartoons of men battling to overcome the harsh realities of the land was a key part of its editorial content and *The Bulletin* became known as the 'Bushman's bible'.²⁴³ There is little written content about the arrival of the SSS to Australia in this newspaper but it contains numerous provocative cartoons of the World Cruise. Figure 8 presents one of these cartoons and depicts the moment the SSS arrived in Sydney. It is a particularly damning image. It degrades members of the Royal Navy by depicting them as cattle lead by farmers as if arriving at a country show or market. It ridicules the status of the *Hood* by characterising it as a giant horse while a ticket tout calls to the public as he stands underneath the British flag next to a tent that says, 'the largest FAT battleship in the world'. This image demonstrates that even though broadcasting may generate public awareness and elicit attraction from an audience, it is difficult to control how that message is received and interpreted. In this instance the subaltern, to use Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's term, is speaking.²⁴⁴ The editors and illustrators of *The Bulletin*, who, as Australian citizens are subordinate members of the British Empire, are using a discourse of their own to ridicule and satirise their imperial masters. This image also supports Nye's claim that 'power does not necessarily reside with the larger partner, but in the mysterious chemistry of attraction'.²⁴⁵ *Hood* may be a powerful ship but its status as a tangible hard power asset does not necessarily win the hearts and minds of an audience uniformly.

²⁴² Graeme Davison, *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.94.

²⁴³ Ibid. Also see Richard White, 'Diggers and Heroes', in *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1688-1980*, ed. by Richard White (NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1981), pp.125-139.

²⁴⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.24-28.

²⁴⁵ Nye Jr., *Soft Power*, p.5.



Figure 8 'Sydney Mixes its Dreams'. The Bulletin. Thursday, 24 April 1924. Vol 45. No.2306.

After the World Cruise, *Hood* continued to establish itself as a vessel of peace - a symbol of renewed hope after the First World War and the depression that followed it. In January 1925, *Hood* represented Great Britain at the Vasco da Gama Day celebrations in Lisbon and in 1932 visited the West Indies and continued to tour British coastal waters. The impact that these tours had on the public perception of *Hood* is explored by a reporter for the *Diário de Notícias* of Lisbon at the height of the Vasco de Gama celebrations:

What, unexpectedly, was admired above all was the great amiability and formal and correct affability of the admiral and his officers towards the hundreds of guests who visited the ship. One enters, it is true, with difficulty into an English home but once there, one leaves a portion of one's heart behind.²⁴⁶

The SSS and *Hood's* following tours in the inter-war period elicited attraction from civilians around the world and, in time, the Admiralty's efforts to galvanise support from British territories manifested into tangible outcomes. Between 1923 and 1938 a naval base was constructed in Singapore at great expense. RNVR forces in many of the colonies that the SSS included in its World Cruise were also later founded. Reserve units were established in Trinidad, in the Cayman Islands, in Zanzibar, Kenya, Ceylon, Singapore, Penang, and Malaya – all of which would later serve in the Second World War.²⁴⁷ Malaya established a full-time naval force in the 1930s, the Royal Navy (Malay Section) and was colloquially known as the Malay Navy.²⁴⁸ Theatrical entertainment on the SSS played a pivotal role in the Admiralty's soft power strategy and in endearing civilians to the Royal Navy and their imperial and navalist agendas. Though it is difficult to deduce to what extent shipboard entertainment influenced the decision-making processes of those nations, the scale of theatrical production on the SSS exposes the importance which naval authorities attached to theatrical entertainment in achieving their objectives and to what might be called "public outreach" today. Children's Parties is another form of theatrical shipboard entertainment that comes under this banner of "outreach" and "public engagement". The following pages investigate how this form specifically provided a means through which shipboard companies elicited attraction from civilian communities during their service at sea.

²⁴⁶ Cited in Taylor, *The Battlecruiser HMS Hood*, p.15

²⁴⁷ For more information of the organisational histories of these units see Daniel Owen Spence *Colonial Naval Culture and British Imperialism* (2015).

²⁴⁸ During regional decolonisation, the colonial naval force became the foundation for an independent Malayan/Malaysian Navy.

Children's Parties

At the start of the Second World War, Britain was at the height of its imperial power and, as I have previously acknowledged, British colonies contributed enormously to Britain's war effort, supplying raw materials, communications, manpower, and strategic bases. However, the conflict also marked the start of a complex and turbulent process of decolonisation for nations across the globe and the steady decline of the British Empire. As Darwin reveals, when the newly elected Labour government led by Clement Attlee came into power in 1945, they were confronted 'by a mass of problems so grave as to amount to a general crisis – economic, geostrategic, political – of the British world system'.²⁴⁹ Though the decline of the British Empire and economic hardships in Britain forced the government to reduce the size and capability of the Royal Navy, the need to maintain a global reach in order to protect British interests including its vastly extended array of overseas bases remained a top priority. In the post-war era, the navy played a vital role in forging and cementing partnerships with the Commonwealth Nations and other overseas territories, establishing itself as a global but benevolent force.

It is in the aftermath of the Second World War that we see the sharp increase in the staging of shipboard children's parties on board naval vessels across the globe. The blossoming of this form in the post-war era and its continuance throughout the latter half of the 20th century, I contend, is no coincidence. Children's parties, having previously proven to be a vital soft power asset during the World Cruise aboard HMS *Repulse*, became a means through which the navy throughout the latter half of the 20th century could achieve one of its primary goals – to project benevolent interest in the citizens of other nations and engender good will among allies.

The reason children's parties, as opposed to other theatrical forms, became increasingly popular rests on the fact that they are closely tied to an ethos of public service. Traditionally, children's parties entail the invitation of local children to a Royal Navy vessel that is anchored close to or within a visiting harbour. For two to three hours, a ship's company provide entertainment in the way of live music, clown and pirate acts, fairground rides and games and "big eats".²⁵⁰ Together these elements combine, notes HMS *Gambia's* commission book (1957-1958), 'to make a most entertaining bedlam'.²⁵¹ The appeal of this form manifests in

²⁴⁹ Darwin, p.531.

²⁵⁰ William Ashton, letter to Sarah Penny, 9 May 2016.

²⁵¹ David Axford, 'Ships' Commissioning Books', HMS *Gambia* (1957-1958), p.43

two distinct but interlocking ways. Firstly, children's parties are a demonstration of altruistic behaviour. Ships' companies respond to the difficult circumstances they see local communities facing by providing relief in the form of entertainment at the expense of their leisure time and resources without the expectation of receiving something in return. While it can be argued that even within the most selfless of acts there is always some form of exchange or as Marcel Mauss observes, an obligation upon societies to give and for that gift to be reciprocated, I follow Richard Sennet's observations on altruism in *Together: the rituals, pleasures and politics of co-operation*. Sennet states that if an exchange does occur when altruism in the form of gift-giving takes place 'its rewards are internalized' by the giver.²⁵² Commission book entries about children's parties and the images that accompany them give the impression that the reward companies receive is internalised in the form of great pride and pleasure in their involvement. The company of HMS *Gambia*, for example, dedicate a page and half of their commission book (1955-1956) to the children's parties they produced 'at most of the places that the ship visited'.²⁵³ Within its prose there is a recognition of the immense fun and enjoyment had by personnel as they performed for and played with the children. Any reward that might have been gained by performers and organisers of children's parties for providing such entertainment appears to be limited to the sense of wellbeing felt by personnel. Crucially, this display of altruism ensures that the ship's companies and by extension the Royal Navy, are seen to have not just their own or their governments interests at heart but are genuinely interested in the welfare of ordinary local people. William Ashton, who wrote to me regarding the staging of children's parties on HMS *Hermes*, emphasises the importance of contesting stereotypes of naval communities:

Civilians believe that on a warship there is a crew of stern faced individuals with a strict hierarchical structure intent on nothing more than being a cold and clinical fighting force and living for nothing than killing efficiently. No way! Although this description does describe them in action such as the Falkland's war or serious training they are ordinary people, now of both sexes with needs and desires like all. We wanted and in fact needed entertainment to keep us human.²⁵⁴

By performing to civilians on warships in ways that highlight their friendliness and humanity, the company encourages their ship to be understood as more than just a powerful naval

²⁵² Richard Sennet, *Together: the rituals, pleasures and politics of co-operation* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), p.74. See also Marcel Mauss, *The gift: the form and reason for exchange in archaic societies* trans. by Ian Cunnison (New York: Norton, 1967).

²⁵³ David Axford, 'Ships' Commissioning Books', HMS *Gambia* (1956-1957), p.27.

²⁵⁴ Ashton, letter to Sarah Penny, 9 May 2016.

vessel. Shipboard entertainment, as Ashton reveals, also effects the way a company sees itself. It provides relief from the usual shipboard routine and enables personnel to gain a more humane sense of self as they work together for the benefit of other communities. Secondly, children's parties appeal to the hearts and minds of civilians because the welfare of children is a widely-shared interest. Nye argues that when a soft power advocates values that are narrowly self-serving it is less likely to be successful:

When a country's culture includes universal values and its policies promote values and interests that others share it increases the probability of obtaining its desired outcomes because of the relationships of attraction and duty that it creates. Narrow values and parochial cultures are less likely to produce soft power.²⁵⁵

In these particular circumstances, children's parties are often staged to entertain the most vulnerable members of a community such as children from orphanages and internment camps. An example of the latter can be found in the IWM oral history collection. Archie Jarvis, a British signaller who served aboard HMS *Belfast* between 1944 and 1946, describes how *Belfast's* children's party was staged to entertain the British children who had been interned in Shanghai during the Second World War.²⁵⁶ Figure 9 is an illustration of this event. By providing a party outside of the confinement of the camp, the company demonstrated an interest in improving the lives of young people around them on both a national and international scale. Children's parties, unlike any other form of entertainment therefore, are more likely to produce soft power because they not only promote an image of the Royal Navy as an organisation of selfless public servants that provide international support to civilians but the form itself places a value on the welfare of the most vulnerable.

²⁵⁵ Nye Jr., *Soft Power*, p.11.

²⁵⁶ London, IWM Sound Archive, 33724, Archie Jarvis.



Figure 9 Children of British internees at a children's party given by the crew of HMS Belfast at Shanghai. 28 September 1945. James Morris (28-09-1945). IWM. ART LD 5528.

In more recent times, ships companies have undertaken other forms of charitable work during leisure time as a means of exhibiting their interest in the welfare of children to audiences both at home and abroad. The *Navy News* for example, contains numerous articles on voluntary work by the Royal Navy abroad. Articles such as 'Sutherland's Sailors Brighten the Lives of African Orphans' and 'Children Dance with Delight after HMS Northumberland's Help in Tanzania' report on the renovation work on community centres and orphanages conducted by personnel whilst on breaks from anti-piracy patrols between 2012 and 2013.²⁵⁷ Companies also pride themselves on the relationships they forge with schools and children's charities located in the UK. The editor of HMS *Newcastle's* commemorative commission book that celebrates its service from 1978 to 2003 describes how 'links with children have always

²⁵⁷ 'Children Dance with Delight after HMS Northumberland's Help in Tanzania', *Navy News*, 9 January 2013 <<https://navynews.co.uk/archive/news/item/6725>> [accessed 28 December 2017] and 'Sutherland's Sailors Brighten the Lives of African Orphans', *Navy News*, 2 November 2012 <<https://navynews.co.uk/archive/news/item/6235>> [accessed 28 December 2017].

been important to the ship and sailors from *Newcastle* are often involved in charity work for under privileged and sick children'.²⁵⁸ Its achievements related to this work include raising a "Pudsey bear" flag in 1988 for the BBC's Children In Need appeal and documenting the life of a teddy bear mascot from Marine Park School in Whitley Bay and posting accounts of its adventures online for the school children to follow.²⁵⁹ There is a clear parallel between this "public outreach" work and the children's parties. Children's parties are comparable to this volunteering work because as forms of soft power they both function to better the lives of children and reinforce an image of the navy that holds international and humanistic values. This parallel also signals another potential positive outcome for naval personnel who participate in such activities. Involvement in charitable and humanitarian work is noted on people's personal files by senior officers, enabling service personnel to improve their promotion prospects. In a questionnaire I devised about theatrical entertainment, David Paul Reed wrote how he acted and directed the family tri-service pantomimes on a NATO shore base in Portugal because 'it was a good career move'.²⁶⁰ 'Taking on additional responsibilities and doing a good job', he reveals, 'were seen as a plus on your report'.²⁶¹ Similarly, Chief Petty Officer Graham Street revealed in interview that entertainment is often perceived as a 'promotional tool' because it gives ratings an opportunity to demonstrate their proactive and positive attitude.²⁶² Children's parties that require personnel to be productive during their leisure hours, are almost certainly viewed and treated by personnel in the same way. This information indicates that though the short-term rewards for personnel may be internalised, the long-term rewards of potential promotion may have been another incentive for their participation in children's parties.

Children's parties are also events which, like the navy's humanitarian operations, must be scheduled into ships' programmes. They are not spontaneous gestures of generosity. They require prior planning and liaison with national and international organisations. All the examples of children's parties I have discovered in archival records both online and in formal archive holdings have involved communication between the ship and local schools, orphanages or charitable organisations prior to the event to arrange the invitation of local children to the ship. For example, when HMS *Maidstone* visited Helsinki with the Home Fleet in 1957, the children's party invitations to *Maidstone* were arranged in coordination with the

²⁵⁸ David Axford, 'Ships' Commissioning Books', HMS *Newcastle* (1978 – 2003), p.15.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ Reed, questionnaire, 12 May 2016.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² Street, interviewed by Sarah Penny, 3 January 2018.

Mannerheim League, one of the world's largest children's charities.²⁶³ According to a *Navy News* article, this collaboration was also reported in the local Helsinki newspaper, *Helsinginsanomat*.²⁶⁴ This example shows that children's parties, like all soft power resources, were designed to 'communicate with and attract the public of other countries, rather than merely their governments'.²⁶⁵ It also demonstrates that any potential attraction between the public and the Royal Navy was not limited to those participating in the event or indeed invited onto the ship. Through their hard work and collaboration with children's charities, ships companies could attract the civilian members of those charitable organisations, members of the local press, parents and members of the public who subsequently read reports in local newspapers about the event. It is also important to recognise that children may not have been the only guests. According to numerous commission book entries, parents and teachers were not typically invited to the ship. My accumulative evidence supports this claim, but there are exceptions. Figure 9, to which I have previously referred, depicts both sailors and civilians watching the children swinging in the bosun's chair on HMS *Belfast*. The female and non-uniformed figures in this illustration are unmistakable and reveal that parents or guardians may have been present alongside their children. The description of the arrival of 'juveniles...along the jetty' in HMS *Eagle's* commission book (1970-1972), for example, informs us that the children were 'invariably led by a nun'.²⁶⁶ Although this information is scarce it indicates that children's parties had the capacity to communicate with and attract a wider public than the children in attendance.

Children's parties cannot be staged, however, without the hard work and unwavering commitment of the entire company. The importance of a collaborative company effort is reflected in the tongue in cheek but sincere advice within HMS *Gambia's* commission book (1955-1956). The passage identifies the different roles personnel must adopt prior to a children's party and recommends a person or group to perform them. Unsurprisingly, many of the tasks outlined reflect the ones that members of the company already execute in their professional working lives. The canteen manager, for example, is responsible for sourcing the ingredients for and making 'excellent ice-cream, buns and drinks' for the children.²⁶⁷ The electricians are encouraged 'to come to the front' and invent a variety of 'devices' for 'fun

²⁶³ 'British Trade Fair at Helsinki – Visit of Home Fleet Ships', *Navy News*, October 1957, p. 9.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ Joseph S. Nye Jr., 'Public Diplomacy and Soft Power', p.95.

²⁶⁶ David Axford, 'Ships' Commissioning Books', HMS *Eagle* (1970-1972), p.60.

²⁶⁷ HMS *Gambia* (1955- 1956), p.27.

and games'.²⁶⁸ The carpenters or 'chippies', as they are referred to in this document, must provide materials and come 'to the fore for constructional work' of fairground rides.²⁶⁹ The same commission book also includes a poem called 'Chippies Lament' that has a reflective verse on the role of carpenters in the production of children's parties:

A party for children was soon to take place,
And the boat must be ready, the holes without trace.
The shipwrights worked hard, day and night through,
They worked and they worked and they mended the screw,
They mended the rudder and the shaft that was bent,
Oh luckless Midshipman, the chippies lament.²⁷⁰

The emphasis on production and preparation before children's parties in this commission book confirms that this entertainment was meticulously planned. It required hours of labour and the allocation of sufficient resources. It also relied upon different rates contributing their individual skills and expertise to the collaborative task of entertaining and to be committed to those tasks no matter how difficult or tiresome. The tone of this poetic lament is echoed by the following prose in HMS *Eagle's* commission book (1970-1972) that describes the initial reluctance of performers to entertain.

Mention the awe-inspiring words, 'children's party' to any Eagle sailor and you will have a cringing, whining, blubbing heap who would rather go through shot, shell and Jutland over again 'free' if he could persuade his departmental regulator not to volunteer him as a pirate. But Jutland, the King's Cross patrol, grippos and even duty watches have all taken second place to pirate's duty at some time or other. No sooner has the cry of 'not me again, chief' echoed through the ship than Jack has broken out his No 1 pirate dress and is ready to put on a brave face and entertain.²⁷¹

This passage suggests that the repetition of children's parties over weeks and months of a commission is a highly-valued practice by the Royal Navy, not least because other duties and activities are deemed, on some occasions, less of a priority than performing at the children's party. This text also suggests that there is an underlining institutional coercion with regards to participation. A regulator is a member of the Royal Navy branch that polices the service.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid. p.25.

²⁷¹ HMS *Eagle* (1970-1972), p60.

The idea that a company member might attempt to persuade a departmental regulator not to volunteer them as a pirate gives the impression that personnel are obligated to entertain. It implies that a decision not to participate might have resulted in disciplinary action or, at best, disapproval. Children's parties, therefore, are fun and charitable events but they are also an embedded institutional and regulated naval practice.

The mobility of this performance platform was also an incredibly useful feature. The CO could build upon their ship's reputation as a powerful but benign force over months at a time by restaging children's parties at every port of call if they so desired. Ashton reveals that during his service between September 1965 and August 1968, *Hermes* staged a children's party 'in every major port we visited such as Singapore, Hong Kong etc. We emptied the hangar and filled it and the flight deck with entertainment for children from local orphanages and homes'.²⁷² Similarly, the commission book of HMS *Gambia's* cruise (1957-1958) makes a point of stating that children's parties 'have been given at all large ports we have visited and even some of the small ones'.²⁷³ Numbers of children 'ranged from 350 lusty Norwegian children at Bergen, to 25 decorous youngsters at Umm Said'.²⁷⁴ Between 1970 and 1972, HMS *Eagle* entertained 1,200 children during its last cruise. Figure 10 is a sketch of the route. Of the 11 ports depicted in Figure 10, *Eagle* staged children's parties in seven of them; Southampton, Villefranche, Malta, Sydney, Wellington, Perth and Durban.

Another advantage of this performance space was that companies could adorn the ship to appear as appealing to civilians as possible. Companies created bright and colourful performance arenas using paint and fabrics to fashion decorations. Although the photographs and film clips I have collated for this research are black and white, they clearly indicate that ships dressed to attract the attention of the oncoming children. The penultimate sequence of a 14-minute film about HMS *Tiger's* visit to Gdynia during a Baltic cruise in 1959 captures the arrival of local children to *Tiger's* children's party.²⁷⁵ A canvas awning is erected over the quarterdeck and bunting is suspended in many different directions across the ship. The use of decoration in the form of bunting and flags projected a bright and cheerful image that could be seen at great distances. This was particularly important if the ship could be seen by civilians at the shoreline or was near the centre of the city.

²⁷² Ashton, letter to Sarah Penny, 9 May 2016.

²⁷³ HMS *Gambia* (1957-1958), p.43

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ London, IWM Film Archive, ADM 1696, *HMS Tiger Visits Gdynia During a Baltic Cruise*.

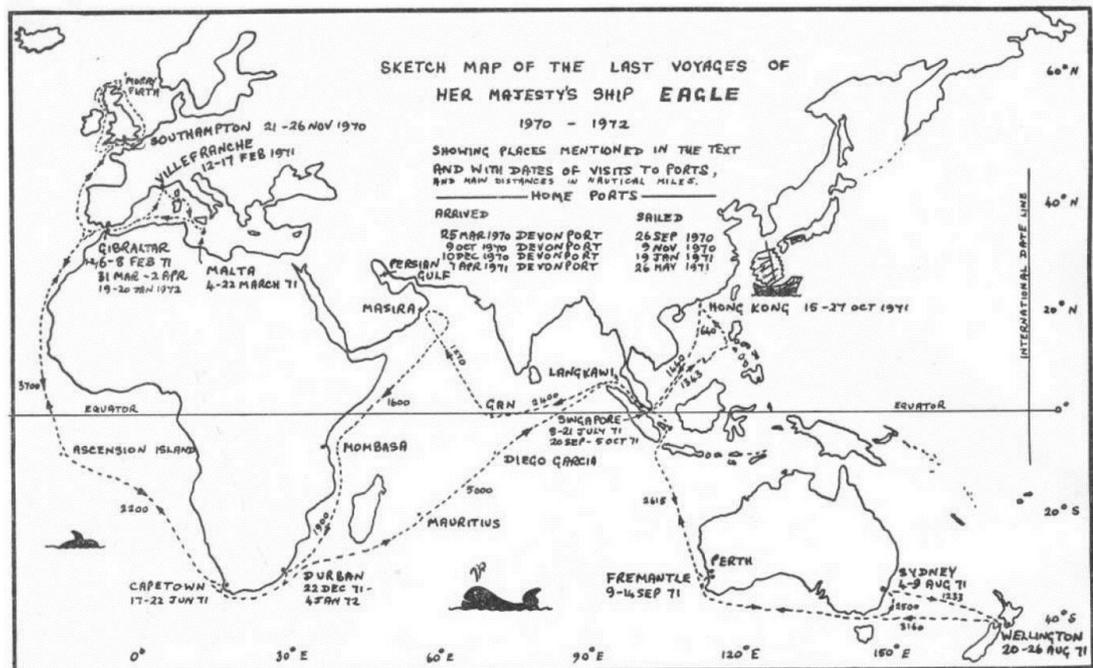


Figure 10 Sketch map of the last voyages of HMS Eagle, 1970-1972.

When the Portland squadron of HM ships *Undaunted*, *Pellew*, *Murray*, *Dundas*, and *Grafton* paid a visit to Bordeaux in 1969, the squadron was berthed on the Quai de la Douane, right in the centre of the town. Due to the ship's proximity to the centre, many visitors were welcomed on the ship and *Pellew*, *Murray*, and *Dundas* held children's parties for local orphans.²⁷⁶ Rigging up canvas and dressing the ships in bright decorations did not mask the grey metallic exterior of the squadron but it presented a warmer, more welcoming image of the squadron to both the orphans and civilians of Bordeaux. If the ship could not anchor close enough to the harbour, picket boats were used to transport children to and from the ship. Figure 11 captures the moment when 200 children from Eastbourne were transported to HMS *Indomitable* for a children's party in June 1952. The decorated picket boat with costumed personnel on board would have been an inviting site, increasing the anticipation and excitement of the children waiting ashore.

²⁷⁶ 'Landlubbers Ahoy! Navy Ships Visit Bordeaux', *Navy News*, January 1969, p. 5.



Figure 11 HMS Indomitable gives a children's party. June 1952.
Eastbourne. IWM. A 32230.

In the same way that actors of soft power must fine-tune their resources to target a specific audience, company members devise children's parties to be especially attractive to children. For soft power resources to be effective 'it is crucial', Nye claims, 'to understand your target audience'.²⁷⁷ Consequently, children's parties are not formal naval demonstrations of ship manoeuvres or company exercises, they are dynamic and playful events that treat children to an array of fun activities. Each formal element of the children's party, which I will now discuss in turn, has been repeated by many different companies all over the world.

One key feature is children's entertainers. Ships companies dress as clowns, pirates or characters from nautical folklore and entertain children throughout the party. The entertainers on *Maidstone* in Helsinki, for example, included 'Pirates, Neptune, a clown, players and a guitar playing cowboy'.²⁷⁸ Pirates, the most common characters referred to and depicted in archival sources, play a central role in the entertainment of children by performing jigs on the deck, sword fights and renditions of sea shanties. Companies perform British cultural stereotypes of pirates that have been imagined and popularised in the 20th

²⁷⁷ Nye Jr., *Soft Power*, p.111.

²⁷⁸ 'British Trade Fair at Helsinki', p. 9.

century by authors and writers of children's literature, theatre, and film. Novels such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, theatrical and film adaptations of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* and western appropriations in television and film of *Sinbad the Sailor* have had enormous influence on popular perceptions of pirates. These popular perceptions are the points of reference for personnel who, with finite resources and limited time, must craft costumes for their pirate act. Figure 12 shows a party of pirates in full attire on HMS *Dundas* awaiting the arrival of children from a Bordeaux orphanage.²⁷⁹ Typically, they wear rolled up long sleeve shirts, eye patches, and scarves. They carry properties including wooden swords and cutlasses and adopt characterful facial expressions and poses. It is likely the children were familiar with the popular western depictions of pirates that the company were performing, and this would have given the company a considerable advantage when it came to attracting their audience. By wearing costumes and adopting characters that children are familiar with personnel can forge an immediate connection with their audience. Companies also draw upon the English cultural stereotype of a pirate to create exciting ways to positively engage with the children throughout the party. Mock sword fights and duels where personnel perform the villainous pirate of the role-play are particularly common. During *Tiger's* children's party in Gdynia, pirates launched picket boats and blasted mock cannon fire at the children on the ship.²⁸⁰ On *Maidstone*, 'pirates in red scarves were running about in all directions and making enormous noise' as they fought the children on the quarterdeck with wooden swords.²⁸¹ Ashton recollects 'custard pie fights' between the pirates and children on *Hermes*.²⁸² Although these exchanges were centred around a narrative of conflict, personnel set up an opportunity for children to perform the fictional and imaged heroes of their childhood. Personnel, therefore, are much more than costumed figures. They are playful entertainers that perform a vital role in creating an immersive and exciting care-free event for the children.

It is also not a coincidence that personnel perform pirates, albeit fictional or romanticised representations of them, that in real life usually pose a genuine threat to security at sea. Deterring piracy and keeping the sea lanes open for free and safe passage of merchant vessels was and remains an important operation for the Royal Navy. By characterising pirates and aesthetically controlling the pirate image, personnel are making piracy safer in the minds

²⁷⁹ 'Landlubbers Ahoy!', p. 5.

²⁸⁰ IWM, ADM 1696.

²⁸¹ 'British Trade Fair at Helsinki', p. 9.

²⁸² Ashton, letter to Sarah Penny, 9 May 2016.

of the company and their guests. Piracy does not become a less serious proposition because of these events but the idea of piracy becomes a much easier threat to confront.



Figure 12 Pirates from HMS Dundas in full attire awaiting the arrival of children from a Bordeaux orphanage. 'Landlubbers Ahoy! Navy Ships Visit Bordeaux'. Navy News. January 1969.

Clowns are also an essential feature of the party. Figure 13 is a photograph of a children's party from an unknown navy vessel that depicts a group of children eating a meal while a senior officer chats to them. A clown sits at the table wearing make-up, a paper party hat, and a ruffled neck costume. Rather than pose for the camera or look at the senior officer adjacent to him, the clown remains in character. The image confirms that personnel embody their roles and take the task of entertaining very seriously. It also supports my earlier suggestion that there was an underlining element of institutional coercion. Senior members of the company who are not participating are still watching those that are. Entertainers that perform well, as Figure 13 seems to suggest, are likely to be noticed by senior staff. Equally, those that abstain or do not perform up to a standard could potentially be disciplined. The latter happened to Ashton when, during a Children's Party, he ridiculed naval protocol:

I got reprimanded once because we had dressed up as pirates and ferried the children on board on ships boats. It is custom for all naval vessels to tip their flag in respect of the commanding Admiral ashore when they passed level with his office. I

dipped our skull and crossbones flag we were flying on our stern. Miserable old git but the kids loved it!²⁸³

Ashton's first-hand experience is compelling for several reasons. It confirms that children's parties do not work outside of the regulations that govern the ship and its people. These are operations like any other in which personnel are obligated to participate and to perform to the standards and rules established by the Admiralty. Secondly, it shows that companies not only decide upon the activities they will provide but also pay close attention to how they intend to communicate with the children. In 'Soft Power and Public Diplomacy' Nye emphasises the importance of considering the values and mindset of your audience before an exchange occurs. He states that the actors of soft power must listen to their audience and gain 'an understanding of how they are hearing your messages and adapting them accordingly'.²⁸⁴ Dipping the skull and crossbones flag at the stern of the boat was not a scripted act intent on causing deliberate offence to superior officers. Instead, Ashton considered the mindset and personalities of the children he was trying to entertain and, to the children's delight, he adapted his performance.



Figure 13 'Guests on board a Royal Navy ship'. IWM. A 33912.

²⁸³ Ashton, letter to Sarah Penny, 9 May 2016.

²⁸⁴ Nye Jr., 'Public Diplomacy and Soft Power', p.103.

Ashton's experience along with the distribution of tasks laid out in Gambia's commission book (1955- 1956) and the uniformed senior officer in Figure 13 hint at a hierarchy of labour. The skills of the entertainers and the active role of personnel in every aspect of the event ensures that these parties are effective at attracting and appealing to the children. Yet, most of the labour appears to be carried out by ratings. An explicit example of casting that favours junior personnel can be found in the text relating to children's parties in Gambia's commission book (1955- 1956). One of the tasks outlined is to welcome the children who embark on the ship or picket boat. The author states that boys of the ship are the 'best [people] to meet the guests' because 'they don't have to think very much and they are right in there pitching with the children'.²⁸⁵ The suggestion here is that although senior members of a ship's company are used to making senior level decisions, their experience breeds detachment. Junior ratings, meanwhile, who have less experience but are more adept at conversing and interacting in a much more lively and open way are considered the ideal candidates. This advice implies that all roles that involve contact with children are cast to junior members of the ship's company, revealing a clear hierarchy of labour.



Figure 14 Children getting a ride in the ship's "train" on the flight deck of HMS Indomitable. June 1952. IWM. A 32234.

²⁸⁵ HMS Gambia (1955-1956), p27.

Another attractive quality of the children's party is that, under the supervision of personnel, children are free to explore the ship and play on the many make-shift fairground rides and games created by the company. The editor of HMS *Eagle's* commission book (1970-1972) describes the many games awaiting the children upon their arrival:

They descend into the bowels of the ship and are subjected to all the devilish means of piratical torture that could be devised: swings and roundabouts; tea and stickies; Tom and Jetties; rides on 'Jack the Flight Deck Railway' and the 'Buccaneer Bomber'.²⁸⁶

The railway and bomber described in this passage are usually constructed from flight deck vehicles and then decorated to resemble trains or aeroplanes respectively. These tangible objects are visual representations of the active creative process of re-purposing and re-appropriating materials from around the ship and signal the resourcefulness and hard work required by personnel prior to the children's arrival. During the party, children alight from the make-shift transport and then traverse the deck of the ship. These "rides" are usually only ever present on aircraft carriers that have both the space and vehicles available. Figure 14 is a photograph of the ship's train on the flight deck of HMS *Indomitable* in 1952. Flight deck tractors have been used for the train and decorations complete with Disney characters have been added to simulate a colourful children's train ride. Although HMS *Belfast* was not an aircraft carrier, its children's party included two rides. The first is depicted in Figure 9. The sketch reveals that the company rigged a bosun's chair to run from the bridge down onto the boat deck. Another sketch of this event from the same artist reveals that the crane in the background of Figure 9 lifts a lifeboat that is being used as a swing. Fairground games are also a prominent feature of the children's party. These include pin the tail on the donkey and apple bobbing. HMS *Gambia's* commission book (1957-1958) describes how 'there was always a mob of youngsters milling round the coconut shy and the Aunt Sally'.²⁸⁷ These accounts and archival images are a demonstration of the Royal Navy's resourcefulness and inventiveness as they use the materials available to craft a fairground-like performance arena. The rides and games are reminiscent of the distinctive traditional entertainments of the English seaside resort that flourished in the early 20th century. John K Walton argues that

²⁸⁶ HMS *Eagle* (1970-1972), p.60.

²⁸⁷ HMS *Gambia* (1957-1958), p.43. Dating back to the 17th century, 'Aunt Sally' is a traditional English game.

seaside towns such as Blackpool, Southend and Margate were becoming major international and 'heavily capitalised entertainment centres in their own right'.²⁸⁸ By replicating these centres on the ship, transporting them closer to disadvantaged children and by giving children free reign of the space, personnel could not only make British culture appear more enticing but demonstrate their kindness and generosity.

The cooking and serving of party food is also a generous gesture that make these parties particularly alluring to children. The food is prepared by the ship's chef and usually involves confectionary and baked goods. During HMS *Gambia's* children's party one of the company observed how children 'showed their appreciation of the bakers' cakes by each taking half a dozen home, wrapped in handkerchiefs or anything else they could find, including, in the case of little girls, their skirts'.²⁸⁹ This is a hugely important aspect of the entertainment because it gives the company an opportunity to enrich the lives of the children around them in a more tangible way. This simple gesture carries greater meaning when the children being entertained are from poorer backgrounds. In HMS *Hampshire's* commission book (1967-1969) there is a photograph of Seaman Dennis distributing sweets to the children of Callao, Lima during the children's party on board.²⁹⁰ The description accompanying the photograph emphasises how this act of generosity was influenced by the contrast that had been marked by the sailors between this 'poverty-stricken port' and 'the thriving commercial centre of Lima'.²⁹¹ This passage also reveals that the company made other similar gestures throughout their commission. Whilst in Bergen, the company 'made a collection on board and ... [took] a suitcase full of sweets and chocolates to the local hospital for those children who could not come to the party'.²⁹² The serving of food to children also required great care and attention. Figure 15 captures a moment when Dutch and Chinese children were entertained at a Christmas party hosted by members of HMS *Assistance* in Singapore. The men and the children are sitting together. Some of the children are sitting on laps or in front of the men as they pick food from the table. One man tenderly holds a toddler while another carefully feeds the child with a spoon. These careful and attentive actions come across as very genuine interactions. They would have required personnel to connect or re-connect with their

²⁸⁸ John K Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 2000), p.94.

²⁸⁹ HMS *Gambia* (1957-1958), p.43.

²⁹⁰ David Axford, 'Ships' Commissioning Books', HMS *Hampshire* (1967-1969), p.19.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² HMS *Gambia* (1957-1958), p.41.

parental sensibilities and this would have likely appealed to the hearts and minds of the children and the civilians watching the event.



Figure 15 Dutch and Chinese children are entertained at a Christmas party hosted by members of the company of the repair ship HMS Assistance in Singapore. IWM. SE 6109.

In 'Public Diplomacy and Soft Power', Nye suggests that it is possible to ascertain whether a particular asset is an attractive soft power by measuring it through polls or focus groups.²⁹³ Whilst it is difficult to obtain qualitative data from civilians who participated or witnessed these events, the voices of those civilians are, on occasions, embedded in commission books. This information gives a valuable insight into the thoughts and feelings of civilians and it signals that commission books not only documented public engagement activities but could also evidence public engagement outcomes. HMS *Gambia's* commission book (1957 - 1958) indicates that children's parties 'were usually followed by appreciative letters and comments

²⁹³ Nye Jr., 'Public Diplomacy and Soft Power', p.95.

from parents and children'.²⁹⁴ It refers to one thank you letter in which a little girl described the roller railway as 'the little car with the wheels on the road and no wheels on the car'.²⁹⁵ Sometimes photocopies of these letters are printed in full in commission books. An example of this can be found in HMS *Ark Royal's* commission book (1970-1973) that includes a section called 'As Others See Us'.²⁹⁶ These pages contain letters from civilians and civil servants including a message from the chief of police at the city of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and a letter from the owner of a motel praising the company on their good conduct ashore. Within these pages there is also a letter from St Paul's school in Barcelona thanking the company for their recent visit to the ship. The letter, which is hand written by a pupil of the school, gives a valuable insight into a child's thoughts about the event:

All of us liked very much the boat because it was the first time that we have been to see an aircraft carrier. The officers that guided us were very kind. Here in my class is a boy called Jose Ma Ortega who is all the time talking about your boat and all the Royal Navy. Perhaps he is going next year to study, for when he is older he is going to be one member more of the Royal Navy.²⁹⁷

This letter reveals that *Ark Royal's* invitation to the ship made a lasting impression on the writer and their fellow pupils. The reference to Jose Ma Ortega's future ambition to join the Royal Navy indicates that these events had the capacity to attract civilians to the Royal Navy and shape the preferences of others in favour of the navy's objectives. This comment is particularly striking because it brings into sharp focus the fact that these events created happy memories for children that could potentially last into adulthood. Children's parties therefore, had the advantage over other forms of entertainment because they functioned as part of a short and long-term soft power strategy. Children are the future of their communities. Their thoughts and impressions may not carry weight within their communities politically or socially at the time of the event, but their memories of the children's party may have a lasting influence on their preferences and interests as adults. Furthermore, children's parties would have likely held great sway for any parents and guardians watching or learning about these events second hand.

This letter from St Paul's school and the letters to which the editors of *Gambia's* commission book (1957-1958) refer, confirm my earlier claim that children's parties are known of and

²⁹⁴ HMS *Gambia* (1957-1958), p. 43.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁶ David Axford, 'Ships' Commissioning Books', HMS *Ark Royal* (1970-1973), p.116.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.116.

appreciated by the wider community. Children's parties may be for the sole entertainment of children, but they do not go unnoticed by guardians, parents or teachers. Whether the attraction of each children's party in turn produces the navy's desired outcomes is very difficult to determine and can only be judged, as Nye suggests, in each case.²⁹⁸ The fact that some children's parties were part of an exchange of courtesies alludes to their potential success as soft power resources. For example, when the anti-submarine frigate HMS *Leeds Castle* visited Emden in Germany in 1955, it was the first British warship larger than a motor launch to visit Germany for more than 17 years. As a means of creating a meaningful connection between naval servicemen and the people of Emden, welcome speeches were made by town officials and the ship's company gave a children's party for local orphans. A similar exchange occurred in November 1954 when the HM Depot ship HMS *Tyne* concluded her autumn cruise with the Home Fleet with a visit to Bordeaux. The ship's captain had been explicitly ordered by the Admiralty to help cement the 'entente cordial' by entertaining visitors on board and giving a children's party.²⁹⁹ Subsequently, the ship's company accepted the hospitality of the French women's air force at a dance.



Figure 16 Captain R H Connell and Lieut Cdr D E P D Scott with one of the orphans who were entertained by HMS Vidal. 1956. IWM. A 33553.

²⁹⁸ Nye Jr., 'Public Diplomacy and Soft Power', p.95.

²⁹⁹ Translated from the French as "warm understanding", the *Entente cordiale* was a series of formal political agreements signed in 1904 that negotiated the peace between England and France.

One example that does suggest that children's parties played a successful role in forming stronger alliances between nations over a much longer period is depicted in Figure 16. In October 1954, the survey vessel HMS *Vidal* aided Haiti after hurricane Hazel killed 400 people and caused extensive damage to the island. During *Vidal's* relief work, the company invited 100 orphans to a children's party on board the ship. In June 1956, *Vidal* returned to Haiti and the navy were honoured for their assistance. At the official award ceremony, some of the children who were entertained by the men of *Vidal* in 1954 were also present. Figure 16 is a photograph of that return visit showing Captain R H Connell and Lieutenant Commander D E P D Scott holding one of the orphans who were entertained by the men. The children's party may not have made a tangible difference to the everyday lives of the children of Haiti but this image reveals that it had made a lasting positive impression on their government.

Although there is no evidence of shipboard children's parties in the 21st century, we see a continuation of children's parties in the context of family days and festivals ashore. HMS *Sultan*, a shore base in Gosport, holds an annual children's party as part of their Summer Show. According to an article published in 2015 on the Royal Navy website the children's party at *Sultan* 'remains the only event where sailors are given permission to dress as pirates, as the children in attendance get to enjoy some swashbuckling fun, in a safe, friendly environment'.³⁰⁰ This statement signals several changes to the practice of children's parties in the Royal Navy. First, there is a move from the practice at sea to on land. Secondly, the exclusivity of this practice to the training establishment of *Sultan* as opposed to ships at sea is fuelled by a desire to entertain in a much more controlled and health and safety conscious environment. Finally, the target audience is no longer overseas communities. The children's party is more specifically focused on attracting an audience comprised of the larger naval community and their friends and family. This is echoed by Captain Trevor Gulley, the CO of *Sultan*, who reveals that the children's party 'sets out to entertain not only the children in attendance but also their families and accompanying carers'.³⁰¹ Although the context and conditions of children's parties in the Royal Navy have changed, their aim to bring members of civilian communities and personnel of the royal navy together remains. 'It's a wonderful thing', Gulley admits, 'to watch the children interact with our people, especially those who

³⁰⁰ Royal Navy MOD UK, 'Children's Party Offers Exclusive Preview of HMS Sultan Summer Show' (2015) <<http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2015/june/19/150619-childrens-party-at-sultan>> [accessed 8 January 2018].

³⁰¹ Ibid.

are dressed as pirates'.³⁰² Children's parties still promote a family orientated and benevolent public service image and as such they, remain a useful soft power asset to the Royal Navy.

This chapter recognises that entertainment in the Royal Navy has been repeatedly used as an effective resource of soft power. It argues that shipboard entertainment has had a vital strategic and diplomatic function in the Royal Navy in their bid to influence the decision-making processes of other nations. In the context of the World Cruise the term 'naval theatre' can not only be used metaphorically to describe the global display of tangible hard power assets, it can be equally applied in a literal manner to acknowledge the integral role the production and performance of theatrical entertainment played in exercising power. The Admiralty recognised the potential attraction that theatrical entertainment could elicit from the squadron's international audience and strategically staged shipboard entertainment as a non-coercive means of obtaining their desired objectives. My investigation into children's parties acknowledges the role that these events have played in forging meaningful connections between civilian and naval communities all over the world after the Second World War. Children's parties, a form that foregrounded the Royal Navy's interest in the welfare of vulnerable children enabled the Service to promote an image of itself as an organisation of selfless public servants. This analysis does not disregard the influence that can manifest from a demonstration of the navy's tangible hard power assets. Rather, this chapter seeks to recognise the equal role shipboard entertainment has had in exercising power. The next chapter also involves spotlighting the power relations at work during theatrical events. However, Chapter Three shifts the focus onto the internal hierarchy within shipboard communities and investigates how theatrical events and performative rituals could be used as instruments of control.

³⁰² Ibid.

Chapter Three: Performing on the Move

Upon Royal Navy ships at sea, naval personnel of the 20th century have maintained two theatrical traditions – Crossing the Line and SODS opera. Crossing the Line is an international seafaring tradition that is activated by companies when a ship crosses the Equator. It is a rite of passage that sees the initiation of the novices or ‘pollywogs’ of the ship – personnel who have not crossed the Equator before - into ‘shellbacks’ and members of the ‘Ancient Order of the Deep’.³⁰³ Based on customs and codes of agreement that, as Harry Miller Lydenberg’s collection of first-hand testimonies reveals, have evolved over four centuries of practice, Crossing the Line is firmly embedded into the navy’s shipboard theatrical repertoire and is still practiced at sea.³⁰⁴ SODS opera is a hybrid theatrical form that takes influence from 19th and 20th century theatrical forms such as music hall and concert party entertainment. It involves individuals and groups performing songs, sketches, and monologues as part of a sequence of vocal ‘turns’ on a stage. Like Crossing the Line, SODS opera has been widely practiced by ships’ companies at sea in the 20th century and remains part of a shipboard company’s theatrical repertoire today. However, for reasons that I will explore later in this chapter, SODS opera is often performed in the 21st century under the pseudonyms ‘Players Evening’ or ‘Deployment Review’.

As I have explored in Chapter One, both Crossing the Line ceremonies and SODS operas are valued and celebrated by personnel as part of their naval theatrical heritage. And yet, existing academic scholarship overlooks this fact. Crossing the Line has attracted wide scholarly attention from naval historians, but they do not classify or analyse Crossing the Line as a form of theatrical entertainment. Roland Blackburn’s *We Joined the Navy: Traditions, Customs and Nomenclature of the Royal Navy* and A.B Campbell’s *Customs and Traditions of the Royal Navy*, for instance, identify Crossing the Line as simply a “naval custom” and reinforce this claim by positioning their descriptions of Crossing the Line alongside other definitions of social and cultural customs and traditions such as naval salutes and Fleet

³⁰³ For the purposes of this study, I have used the term ‘pollywog’ because it has been used consistently throughout the 20th century by naval personnel to denote the novices of the ship who are initiated as part of the ceremony. However, I recognise the underlying racial connotations of its etymological origins. The term ‘pollywog’ is ambiguous because it incorporates the word ‘wog’. Derived from the term ‘golliwog’, ‘wog’ has been employed throughout the 20th century as a derogatory and highly offensive term to describe a person whose ethnicity is not white. According to the *OED*, the term ‘wog’ has been used as a racial slur since the First World War when it was first employed by military personnel as a nickname of the Indian Cavalry during the conflict.

³⁰⁴ See Harry Miller Lydenberg, *Crossing the Line: Tales of the Ceremony During Four Centuries* (New York: New York Public Library, 1957).

Reviews.³⁰⁵ In this chapter, I divert from this scholarship by firmly situating Crossing the Line as part of the rich theatrical repertoire of the 20th century Royal Navy and investigate motivations for the preservation of this theatrical form that go beyond simply maintaining tradition. More recently, there has been a noticeable shift by scholars towards establishing Crossing the Line as part of wider European maritime history and culture in order to open up new ways of thinking about what Crossing the Line accomplishes for individuals and groups of different communities and nations. Henning Henningsen's *Crossing the Equator: Sailors' Baptism and Other Initiation Rites* traces the lineage of Crossing the Line to French baptisms in European waters from the early 16th to 18th century and looks at the interrelationship between this practice and other land-based baptisms of the same period.³⁰⁶ As well as exploring the connections between a wide array of European seafaring traditions including those of the Royal Navy, Simon J Bronner's *Crossing the Line: Violence, Play and Drama* analyses contemporary practices of Crossing the Line through the lens of Russian folklore narrative structure.³⁰⁷ Furthermore, drawing principally on Victor Turner's *The Ritual Process*, Keith P. Richardson provides an analysis of two Crossing the Line ceremonies that the author participated in whilst on board the US vessel USS *Kilauea* in 1969 and 1970.³⁰⁸

Turner's work as well as Arnold van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage*, both of which are frequently cited throughout this large body of existing scholarship, have also been useful for me in considering the liminal positionality of personnel and Crossing the Line as a process of ritual renewal of the naval shipboard community.³⁰⁹ In contrast to pre-existing scholarship, however, this chapter provides an analysis of the practice of Crossing the Line in the Royal Navy as performance and, in doing so, signals the creativity, craftsmanship, and production skill that is employed by personnel to stage this event at sea. There is currently no academic scholarship that examines SODS opera and written evidence of this theatrical form is largely confined to anecdotes in autobiographies and memoirs of naval personnel. Whilst these

³⁰⁵ See Roland Blackburn and Robert Burgess, *We Joined the Navy: Traditions, Customs and Nomenclature of the Royal Navy* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1943) and A.B Campbell, 'Crossing the Line', in *Customs and Traditions of the Royal Navy*, ed. by A.B Campbell (Aldershot: Gale & Polden Ltd, 1956), pp.38-42. Also see William P. Mack and Royal W. Connell, *Naval Ceremonies, Customs and Traditions* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1981).

³⁰⁶ See Henning Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator: Sailors' Baptism and Other Initiation Rites* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1961).

³⁰⁷ See Simon J. Bronner, *Crossing the Line: Violence, Play, and Drama in Naval Equator Traditions* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

³⁰⁸ See Richardson, Keith P., 'Polliwogs and Shellbacks: an Analysis of the Equator Crossing Ritual', *Western Folklore*, 36 (1977), 154-59.

³⁰⁹ See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969) and Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. by M. B. Vizedom and G. L. Caffé (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960).

brief references to SODS opera provide a useful snapshot of this theatrical form, oral history work with personnel has been the most valuable research method in obtaining information about its formal conventions. By drawing on the information provided by personnel in questionnaires and interviews, together with evidence from unpublished accounts in formal archive holdings, fly-on-the-wall style television documentaries, and published autobiographies, this chapter offers new insight into the performance and function of Crossing the Line ceremonies and SODS operas as forms of theatrical shipboard entertainment.

There are significant differences between Crossing the Line and SODS opera in terms of their formal conventions as well as their theatrical and semantic lineage. There are, nonetheless, remarkable parallels between these two forms. In the middle of their deployment, personnel temporarily transform into performers and captive audiences to facilitate the playing out of both forms. They offer personnel a temporary opportunity to dress in costume as opposed to their obligatory uniform, to lampoon other members of the ship's company, to perform roles that position them well above their normal rank, and to act in ways that display a blatant disregard for shipboard authority. The activation of Crossing the Line and SODS opera by personnel at sea, I argue, finds accord with Mikhail Bakhtin's reading of carnival within medieval popular folk culture in *Rabelais and His World*.³¹⁰ As the performers and audience members move into the performance arena, I suggest that they enter a carnivalesque space-time within the ship. Personnel enter a licensed time out of ordinary shipboard life, 'a temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and established order' where 'all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions' are suspended.³¹¹ Furthermore, Bakhtin recognises carnival's inclusiveness. 'Carnival,' as Bakhtin observes, 'is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it'.³¹² SODS operas and Crossing the Line ceremonies require the whole ship's company to actively participate in the production and performance of these theatrical forms. The question then of why naval authorities have repeatedly sanctioned an inclusive space of freedom from the social and literal constraints that govern the ordinary working lives of personnel at sea is key to this analysis.

³¹⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by H. Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

³¹¹ *Ibid*, p.10.

³¹² *Ibid*, p.7.

In conceptualising these practices as evoking a carnivalesque freedom, it is vital to signal that the potential for the transformation and transcendence of shipboard norms within the performance arena is limited, since the carnivalesque space-time that manifests during the staging of theatrical events is a temporary one. When the last act of a SODS opera is performed and the post liminal phase of Crossing the Line is completed, the stage is dismantled, the costumes are returned to private lockers, and ordinary shipboard life resumes. In addition, Crossing the Line ceremonies and SODS operas are a *licensed* misrule, a contained and officially sanctioned liberation from the status quo. Every theatrical event at sea must first be approved by the CO on board and it must be scheduled within the ship's operational programme. The capacity to construct this rupture of shipboard hegemony rests upon permission from the very people – the officers, captains, and commanders - whose responsibility it is to maintain a disciplined company that is responsive to their command throughout the ship's commission. Therefore, whilst I find commonality between many of the formal elements of these two theatrical forms and Bakhtin's reading of the 'non-official' ritual spectacles of the Middle Ages, these forms are more closely aligned to what Bakhtin described in *Rabelais and His World* as the 'indestructible' spirit of carnival that was inherent in the transmission and practice of carnival in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³¹³ As he explains, during the Renaissance, the practice of carnival became licenced by state authorities; carnival was incorporated into the 'official calendar'.³¹⁴ Consequently, this chapter does not identify Crossing the Line ceremonies and SODS operas as a disruptive force that pose a genuine threat to shipboard authority. Rather, the events analysed in this chapter find accord with Terry Eagleton's summation of carnival as a 'contained popular blow-off', a cultural safety-valve where tensions that have built-up over the course of a ship's commission may be siphoned off.³¹⁵ It is my contention that these practices, therefore, have a deeply conservative function in aiding shipboard authorities to maintain control over their company.

It is also unwise to forget that Crossing the Line ceremonies and SODS operas are normative cultural practices. Performers and audience members may transgress the norms of the everyday within the performance arena but, as I explore in Chapter One, their participation signals their role in the maintenance of an invented naval tradition that has been passed down orally from generation to generation. The subversions enacted by personnel conform

³¹³ Ibid, p.9.

³¹⁴ Ibid, p.33.

³¹⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin, or, Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: NLB, 1981), p.148.

to expectations of behaviour within the theatrical space and time and the formal elements of a theatrical form that has developed over centuries of practice. It can be argued then that the repetition of these traditions serves to reinforce normative social behaviour. Though the activation of these forms, I argue, provides a safety valve function and does not offer a real moment of transgression comparable say to a mutiny, does it then follow that these events are mere parodic protest? Or do they offer a platform of cultural resistance upon which real communal and individual issues may be brought to the company's attention?

To pinpoint the limits of participants' transgression during Crossing the Line ceremonies and SODS operas, I have turned to mobilities scholarship that is part of what Mimi Sheller and John Urry have coined 'a new mobilities paradigm' within the social sciences.³¹⁶ The term 'mobility' within mobilities studies signifies a great many different ideas, objects, and practices. In his book *Mobilities*, Urry explores the definition of mobility as travel by offering a list of 'twelve main mobility forms in the contemporary world'.³¹⁷ His exploration of these different 'mobility forms' encompasses an analysis of the corporeal travel of pedestrians, modes of travel including trains and cars, as well as communicative travel through person to person messages. In contrast, Tim Cresswell's book *On the Move* offers a much more nuanced approach to the term 'mobility' by examining a diverse range of mobile practices. Cresswell's case studies include stop-motion photography, ballroom dancing, the Women's Suffrage Movement, and immigrant mobilities. In his final summation Cresswell emphasises that mobility signifies much more than travel:

It is important to understand that mobility is more than about just getting from A to B. It is about contested worlds of meaning and power. It is about mobilities rubbing up against each other and causing friction. It is about a new hierarchy based on the ways we move and the meanings these movements have been given.³¹⁸

Following Cresswell's assertion that we must think about the meanings behind practices of mobility, this chapter signals the literal, social, and imaginary mobilities at play in each of these performance forms and what significance these movements hold for shipboard communities. This chapter asks to what extent the practice of Crossing the Line and SODS opera enables groups and individuals an opportunity to negotiate the open tension between

³¹⁶ Mimi Sheller and John Urry, 'The New Mobilities Paradigm', *Environment and Planning A*, 38:2 (2006), 207-26 (p.208).

³¹⁷ John Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p.10-11.

³¹⁸ Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (London: Routledge, 2006), p.265.

mobility and rootedness that exists in their status at sea. I am interested to discover the ways in which the representational space of the performance arena makes visible the social relations of mobility and the powers that operate that mobility in the shipboard community. By looking at the corporeal travel of personnel, I will examine the extent to which these forms confront and contest structures that restrict an individual's social and literal mobility at sea. This chapter will also look at the mobility of these forms in terms of their origins and development to identify the boundaries of the literal, social, and imaginary mobilities that are performed.

There are clear arguments for analysing these forms in terms of the nexus of mobility that is practiced by naval personnel. First, these performances are literally on the move. They take place on a ship at sea that is travelling between two locations. This concept of mobility as travel is closely allied with Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller, and John Urry's definition of mobility in their editorial for the launch of the *Mobilities* journal in 2006. Mobility, they posit,

encompasses both the large-scale movements of people, objects, capital and information across the world as well as the more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public space and the travel of material things within everyday life.³¹⁹

Surprisingly, sea travel within mobility literature in the social sciences is not discussed as widely as other forms of transportation. As William Hasty and Kimberley Peter recognise, 'the ship, so central to the function of maritime life, remains a largely neglected feature in the literature; a regularly acknowledged but seldom considered feature of the maritime worlds'.³²⁰ In *Mobilities*, for example, Urry's exploration of 'mobility forms' does not include examples of sea travel.³²¹ Furthermore, Peter Adey, in his overview of mobility literature in 2017, remarks that 'maritime or shipped mobilities' have been 'rather ignored' by mobilities researchers.³²² Perhaps this is because, unlike other forms of transportation, there are no physical paths, roads, or distinctive markers for ships to follow. As Robert MacFarlane

³¹⁹ Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller, and John Urry, 'Editorial: Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings', *Mobilities*, 1 (2006), 1-22 (p.1).

³²⁰ William Hasty and Kimberley Peters, 'The Ship in Geography and the Geographies of Ships', *Geography Compass*, 11 (2012), 660-76 (p.660).

³²¹ John Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p.10-11.

³²² Peter Adey, *Mobility*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2017), p.239. There has been an increased interest in mobility studies within contemporary arts practices by theatre and performance studies scholars. See Fiona Wilkie, *Performance, Transport and Mobility* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015), Fiona Wilkie, 'Site-specific Performance and the Mobility Turn', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 22 (2012), 203-12, and Marlis Schweitzer, 'Networking the Waves: Ocean Liners, Impresarios and Broadway's Atlantic Expansion', *Theatre Survey*, 53 (2012) 241-67.

identifies in *The Old Ways*, 'sea roads are dissolving paths whose passage leaves no trace beyond a wake'.³²³ The voyaging ship is suspended upon a shifting and blurred space. Even when a journey is paused, the ship occupies a space between the open expanse of the sea and the sky and remains mobile as it floats on a seascape in constant flux. 'Mobile machines', Urry informs us, however, 'all rely, depend upon, presume overlapping and varied time-space immobilities'.³²⁴ The voyaging ship is no different. This mobile machine cannot be described without drawing attention to what David Harvey, in *The Condition of Postmodernity* calls the 'spatial fix': the necessary spatial, infrastructural, and institutional moorings that enable mobility.³²⁵ The shorelines, harbours, and naval bases around the world moor the ship to fixed sites during its journey. With the assistance of maps and navigational systems and instruments, ships cruise from port to port. As the ship travels between these fixed sites it occupies a liminal space: one that is simultaneously attaching to and detaching from its spatial fixes and the continually shifting space of the sea and sky around it. It is both moored and unmoored, fixed and unfixed, bounded and unbounded.

This open tension between rootedness and mobility is recognised by Michel Foucault, who, in 'Of Other Spaces', identifies the ship as the 'heterotopia par excellence,' a marginal, floating space that is both closed and open. Foucault writes:

Brothels and colonies are two extreme types of heterotopia, and if we think, after all, that the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why the boat has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development, but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination.³²⁶

Thus, from Foucault's perspective the 'extraordinary bundle of relations' of the moving ship, in its perceived distance from other networks, situates naval personnel in an exceptional set of spatial relations.³²⁷ Physically separate from society but within a tightknit shipboard

³²³ Robert MacFarlane, *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* (London: Penguin, 2013), p.88.

³²⁴ Urry, p.54.

³²⁵ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p.196. See also David Harvey, 'The spatial fix: Hegel, von Thünen and Marx', *Antipode*, 13 (1981), 1-12.

³²⁶ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. by J. Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16 (1986), 22-27. (p.27).

³²⁷ Ibid.

community, apart from loved ones but also in communication with them via telephone and letter, companies are simultaneously displaced and housed. As they move from port to port they are unsettled, encountering both a sense of freedom in their mobility on the sea yet living and working in a state of temporary exile in the confined space of the ship.

Secondly, though Crossing the Line ceremonies and SODS operas occur on ships that are moving across a vast and changeable expanse, they still take place within a given site where familiar and predictable activities occur. The ship at sea is not merely an external location that communities occupy and act in. It is also a place that shapes the identities, behaviours, movements, social mobility, and practices of people that inhabit it. Duncan Redford's edited collection *Maritime History and Identity: The Sea and Culture in the Modern World* is perhaps the richest study that investigates the maritime dimension in the shaping of seaborne communities, providing essays that examine the formation of national, regional, corporate, individual, and imperial identities.³²⁸ There is, what Urry calls, a 'system of mobilities' that is firmly established within this site.³²⁹ A Royal Navy ship is a highly regulated space and does not afford naval personnel everyday opportunities to break or bend rules without penalty. A rigid naval hierarchy, structured according to a division of labour and naval rank, is maintained by a doctrine of command and a naval discipline and conduct policy that governs how personnel act, dress, move, behave with and relate to others within a ship.³³⁰ If a rating, for example, fails to comply with uniform regulation or addresses a superior in a manner that is disrespectful; or offensive, they will be reprimanded by a member of the regulating branch aboard ship. Beverly Skeggs's observation that 'mobility and control over mobility both reflect and reinforce power [...and] is a resource to which not everyone has an equal relationship' are particularly apt here in understanding the social and literal mobility of personnel at sea.³³¹ As I explore in Chapter One, members of a ship's company do not have equal access to every space on a ship. Ratings are granted access to a single mess, a communal social area, according to their rank and position of responsibility and are barred from entering other messes. In contrast, senior members of a ship's company are usually allocated their own private cabins. A person's position within the naval shipboard hierarchy determines their literal mobility and has a strong bearing on the social interactions that consequently manifest between members of a company. There is also an established system

³²⁸ Duncan Redford, ed., *Maritime History and Identity: The Sea and Culture in the Modern World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014).

³²⁹ Urry, p.12-13.

³³⁰ See 'Discipline Policy and Processes', *Queens Regulations for The Royal Navy*, Brd 3 (2017).

³³¹ Beverley Skeggs, *Class, Self, Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.49.

of time keeping on board naval vessels known as a 'watch system'. Personnel are assigned 'watches', regular periods of work, which enable the ship to operate twenty-four hours during a voyage. This watch system forms a predictable repetition of movement that pertains to an individual's or group's day to day corporeal travel as they work within the ship. It becomes crucial then, if we are to understand how people are transgressing shipboard order when Crossing the Line ceremonies and SODS operas are performed, that we look at how this entrenched system of time and space mobilities is being contested.

Thirdly, the performance space that manifests when these forms are practiced can also be understood as a space of imaginative travel. In 'Of Other Spaces', Foucault argues that a theatre is also an example of a heterotopia because it too is a 'counter-site', a space where 'aspects of other spaces are represented, contested and inverted'.³³² A theatre is both a real, tangible space but it is also a space of representation that 'brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign'.³³³ When personnel produce SODS operas and Crossing the Line ceremonies they create a performance arena within the ship. The construction of a raised platform, the placement of rows of seating, and the presence of a curtain are material signifiers of an auditorium and stage. Within this tangible space other places are evoked as sets and props are placed on and struck from the stage. To facilitate the representation of imaginary worlds, people, and places, the performers who occupy this arena must perform movements, gestures, and voices. Thus, the production of theatrical entertainment at sea brings two heterotopias together, 'juxtaposing in a single real space several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible'.³³⁴

Finally, Crossing the Line ceremonies and SODS operas can be understood as mobile forms. The orality of these traditions makes them fluid in that they are prone to change. They have evolved in performance as successive generations of shipboard companies have revised and adapted these forms in accordance with the knowledge they have gleaned from experienced members of the ship and wider naval community as well as the spatial and material resources that personnel have at their immediate disposal. And yet, embedded within these forms there are dramatic conventions, ensemble and solo acts, and texts that have been repeated, albeit somewhat revised, by companies in many different sites and times.

³³² Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.25.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid, p.25.

Drawing upon a range of approaches to the theory and practice of mobility to analyse illustrative examples of both Crossing the Line and SODS opera across the 20th century, this chapter shows that despite their formal differences both forms are meaningfully connected because of the exceptional set of mobilities that occur within the floating performance arena. I argue that these theatrical forms offer personnel a carnivalesque space-time within a ship that facilitates the temporary suspension of a rigid system of mobilities. This enables groups and individuals to test ways of being socially, literally, and imaginatively mobile that counter the status quo. By investigating the literal, social and imaginary mobilities of people and space within performance, I intend to demonstrate that despite the temporary freedom from the status quo that these unique naval traditions offer, Crossing the Line ceremonies and SODS operas ultimately function as a means of control. I will now look at the ways this is achieved in performances of Crossing the Line.

Crossing the Line

Crossing the Line is unique from all other forms of entertainment in the Royal Navy because it can *only* be activated at the Equator.³³⁵ Not every member of the Royal Navy will cross the Equator during their deployment at sea. Thus, Crossing the Line becomes one of the most highly anticipated events by ships' companies who are bound to travel from one hemisphere to another. There is, however, no guarantee that this tradition will be activated by ships' companies upon crossing the Equator. Graham May reveals that when he first crossed the Equator on HMS *Bulwark*, the ceremony was not sanctioned by the CO. The company, May explains, 'had to carry out night and day exercises and assault training [...] everyone understood that operational duties came first'.³³⁶ When a Crossing the Line is scheduled it provokes, May continues, 'a general feeling of excitement among the company' who know they have been afforded 'a unique opportunity' to uphold a centuries old naval tradition that has been passed on from generation to generation.³³⁷ The activation of Crossing the Line, therefore, plays an integral role in instilling a sense of pride and community among personnel. As I have previously explored in Chapter One, participation in this 'invented' naval tradition affirms a sense of belonging among ship's companies to an exclusive naval community and the cultural heritage they share.

I contend that Crossing the Line evokes this sense of belonging among ship's companies to the wider naval community more than perhaps any other form of entertainment, precisely because it is a performance that observes and enacts the definite but imaginary line of the Equator. The Equator can be understood as simply a location. It has a fixed objective coordinate of 0 degrees latitude that can be identified or plotted on a map. But, it is also a place that holds a rich and meaningful set of ideas for members of the Royal Navy. Since the establishment of the Royal Observatory in the 17th century, the Greenwich Meridian has

³³⁵ Variations of the ceremony have arisen in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. According to *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*, these include; 'the Order of the Blue Nose for sailors who have crossed the Arctic Circle; the Order of the Red Nose for sailors who have crossed the Antarctic Circle, the Order of the Golden Dragon for sailors who have crossed the International Date Line; the Order of the Ditch for sailors who have passed through the Panama Canal; the Safari to Suez for sailors who have passed through the Suez Canal; the Royal Diamond Shellback for sailors who cross the Equator at the Prime Meridian off the coast of West Africa; the Realm of the Czars for sailors who crossed into the Black Sea; and the Order of Magellan for sailors who circumnavigated the globe'. See John J. Hattendorf, 'Crossing the Line', *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780195130751.001.0001/acref-9780195130751-e-0202?rsk=MW25Dk&result=1>> [accessed 5 February 2018]

³³⁶ Graham May RN, questionnaire, 16 August 2016.

³³⁷ Ibid.

served as the designated reference point from which all navy ships at sea have calculated their position. In 1873, Greenwich also became the site of the Royal Naval College and continued to serve as the training establishment of all the navy's officers until its closure in 1998. Nine years after the college's founding, delegates of the International Meridian conference chose the Greenwich Meridian as the world's Prime Meridian, making Britain the centre of the seafaring world and the centre for Standard Time. The activation of Crossing the Line reminds personnel of the grid of longitudes and latitudes, the imaginary lines of order that perform an interpretation of the world where Greenwich, the ancestral home of the Royal Navy's training colleges, is at the centre.

Arguably, Crossing the Line creates an opportunity for shipboard communities to experience a temporary fixity to their fluid and transitional status. As I have explored in the introduction to this chapter, ships' companies occupy an exceptional set of spatial relations. Suspended on the restless ocean waves, the ship occupies an unbounded and blurred space of in-betweenness that is simultaneously attaching to and detaching from the spaces around it. Activated at a threshold, Crossing the Line marks the literal displacement of personnel as they move from one side of the Equator to the other. During a performance of Crossing the Line, however, the movement of the ship is usually paused to signal the location of the Equator. This provides, Kevin Jackson reveals in his questionnaire, 'a sense of location in a space that is completely without reference'.³³⁸ This pause in the ship's journey temporarily transforms the fluid and changeable space that companies occupy into a fixed place. In *Space and Place*, Yi-Fu Tuan likens 'space' to movement and 'place' to pauses when he argues:

What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value...The ideas space and place require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom and threat of space and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.³³⁹

By stopping the ship's movement on the Equator, personnel no longer occupy an 'undifferentiated space'; they occupy a place, which through the repetition of this performance at sea, is endowed with great meaning and value.³⁴⁰ Other specific place-

³³⁸ Kevin Jackson RN, questionnaire, 13 February 2017.

³³⁹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p.6.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

making actions within the performance include the use of a rope, lights, music, and sometimes pyrotechnics, to represent the Equatorial line. When HMS *Terrible* crossed the Equator in October 1899, a correspondent of the *Navy and Army Illustrated* reported that phosphorus torches were lit and ‘a rope- supposed to represent the line – was cut with some ceremony by the boatswain’.³⁴¹ The author of *Crossing the Line*, a book that documents the ceremony of HMS *Southampton* in April 1922, describes how the ship’s searchlights were used to represent the line because *Southampton* crossed the Equator at night:

All lights on the forecastle were extinguished, and both searchlights were trained from each end of the bridge sweeping through a series of arcs extending from abreast the brief right forward over “the eyes of the ship”.³⁴²

Moreover, Kevin Jackson reveals that he witnessed the ‘tossing [of] a thunderflash over the side [of the ship] at the moment of crossing the Equator [...]to maintain the illusion that the Equator has some kind of physical nature’.³⁴³ Though the ship is always in motion, these actions forge a sense of being temporarily rooted to a place of significance. Paradoxically, then, whilst Crossing the Line foregrounds a company’s liminality as they mark a transitional phase in a ship’s journey, it also evokes a sense of fixity among a company, who, in recognising an identifiable and meaningful place, temporarily occupy a fixed location.

Origins and Theatrical Lineage

The origins of Crossing the Line are widely contested because the structure and purpose of the ceremony has been continually changing and adapting since the earliest recorded examples in the 16th century.³⁴⁴ Despite the varying origin theories, there is a consensus among scholars regarding the fluidity of this form and that the practice of Crossing the Line, within European seafaring culture at least, stems from a sacred ritual practice. Campbell suggests that Crossing the Line evolves from an ancient tradition involving acts of human or

³⁴¹ Anonymous, ‘The Terrors of the Line’, *The Navy and Army Illustrated*. IX. 150. (Dec.16, 1899), 341–2 (p.341)

³⁴² “Bunx”, *Crossing the Line in H.M.S. Southampton* (London: Arden Press, n.d.), p.19.

³⁴³ Kevin Jackson RN, questionnaire, 13 February 2017. A “thunderflash” is the common name for a pyrotechnic device that is used in military exercises.

³⁴⁴ The earliest recorded example of Crossing the Line is most commonly purported to be in May 1529 when Jean Parmentier sailed from France to Sumatra and conducted a religious ceremony at the Equator. See Lydenberg, *Crossing the Line*, p.15-6.

animal sacrifice as propitiation to a God or Gods at the passing of certain landmarks.³⁴⁵ As an example, Campbell cites the ritual practice of the Phoenicians who performed a ritual sacrifice as appeasement to the God of the Sea upon passing the Pillars of Hercules.³⁴⁶ Henningsen's argument that Crossing the Line has foundations in French Catholic baptisms in European waters is widely regarded as the most convincing origin theory. The actions of dousing in early crossing the Equator baptisms have been firmly incorporated into the practice of Crossing the Line by the Royal Navy since the early 18th century. *The Gentleman's Dictionary*, published in London in 1705, refers to a seafaring 'custom' under the term 'Line' that requires sailors who have not been to the Equator before to 'pay certain forfeitures demanded of them, or else be 'duck'd, or baptiz'd' [sic].³⁴⁷ This is the first time that the practice of Crossing the Line is codified in a referenced work. Crucially, this dictionary does not identify this practice of 'ducking' as part of a religious custom. It is described as a 'ridiculous ceremony' that parodies Christian baptism. Sailors are obliged to 'swear solemnly' on a 'Book of Navigation' after which 'tubs of sea-water' are thrown at them by the rest of the ship's company.³⁴⁸ The initiation of naval personnel upon crossing the Equator remains at the heart of 20th and 21st century Crossing the Line ceremonies. Though the initiation has a mythical framing and incorporates a baptism-like bath ritual, it is not a sacred or obligatory rite designed to enable personnel to observe religious precepts. It is a sanctioned and secular liminal performance ritual that initiates the novices of the ship.

Throughout the 18th and 19th century, the initiation has involved acts of violence, coercion, and intimidation, conduct that is commonly known within the Armed Services today as 'hazing'. Hazing is defined as

any conduct whereby a military member or members, regardless of service or rank, without proper authority causes another military member or members, regardless of service or rank, to suffer or be exposed to any activity which is cruel, abusive, humiliating, oppressive, demeaning, or harmful.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁵ A.B Campbell, *Customs and Traditions of the Royal Navy* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden Limited, 1956), p.38.

³⁴⁶ The Pillars of Hercules was the phrase that was applied in the Greco-Roman World to the land mass that flanked the entrance to the Strait of Gibraltar.

³⁴⁷ Cited in Lydenberg, *Crossing the Line*, p.29.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Cited in 'Crossing the Line, Plank Owner and Other Unofficial Certificates Acquired by Naval Personnel', *Naval History and Heritage Command*, November 2017, <<https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/heritage/customs-and-traditions/crossing-the-line-plank-owner-and-other-unofficial-certificates-acquired-by-naval-personnel.html>> [accessed 25 March 2018]

From the 18th century onwards, Campbell explains, Crossing the Line was a rough and gruelling experience because it was purposefully designed as ‘an endeavour to find out whether or not the novices on board on their first voyage could endure the hardships of life at sea’.³⁵⁰ There are numerous 19th century accounts that testify to the brutality of the ceremony and to the physical and mental hardships that the novices were forced to endure as part of their initiation. One of the most infamous examples of hazing is published in *The Literary Magazine and American Register for 1804* which provides details of a successful lawsuit against officers of the USS *Soleby Castle* for assaulting a lieutenant during a Crossing the Line on passage to Bombay:

The whole armed gang now pressed round the plaintiff, and after wresting the sword from the only hand he had to hold one, tore and dragged him upon deck [...] He was then pushed back with violence into the boat and there held struggling for some seconds, with his head beneath the water.³⁵¹

Another example of hazing within a Royal Navy ship can be found in an article published in 1859. A journalist working for *The Times* calls for an inquiry into the ‘savage ceremony’ after a fatality occurred during Crossing the Line on board HMS *Hecla*. After being ‘subjected to the infamous shaving process’, the article states, seaman Henry Green, in an attempt to escape, ‘knocked his head against some part of the vessel, and in a short time expired’.³⁵² This article goes on to state that, previous to this incident, the Admiralty had officially banned Crossing the Line, but I have since found no evidence that supports this claim. There is evidence of a growing debate about the necessity and value of Crossing the Line in the 19th century. For instance, in his diary, Charles Darwin records a Crossing the Line performed on the *Beagle* in 1832. He describes it as ‘a disagreeable practice’ that is condemned by many as ‘an absurd and dangerous piece of folly’.³⁵³ However, he also recognises that it has ‘many advocates’ because, he argues, ‘it is one of those amusements, of which the omission might be regretted’.³⁵⁴ The debate about the value of Crossing the Line has continued well into the 20th century. In 1997, amid mounting public pressure, the United States Secretary of the Navy, John H Dalton, issued a statement defending the ‘playful’ and ‘time-honoured’ tradition

³⁵⁰ Campbell, p.40.

³⁵¹ *The Literary Magazine and American Register for 1804 from April to December* Vol II (Philadelphia: J. Conrad & Co., 1804).

³⁵² ‘Crossing the Line’, *The Times*, 20 September 1856, p.9.

³⁵³ Cited in Richard Darwin Keynes, *The Beagle Record: Selections from the Original Pictorial Records and Written Accounts of the Voyage of HMS Beagle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.34.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

when recordings of the ceremony were aired on television broadcasts and were criticised as abusive behaviour by the media.³⁵⁵ In his carefully worded statement, Dalton condemns 'hazing behaviour as unprofessional and illegal' but emphasises that Crossing the Line when 'properly supervised' is 'meant to celebrate and recognize the achievements of individual sailors'.³⁵⁶ More recently, an article in *The Telegraph* published in 2011 reports that pictures of a Crossing the Line ceremony on a German navy ship caused 'embarrassment to the German navy' after they were published in the *Bild*.³⁵⁷ I have not found any British news reports that condemn the practices of Crossing the Line in the 20th or 21st century Royal Navy, nor have I found public statements issued by the Admiralty that address allegations of hazing that have taken place during the ceremony. A reason for this may partially lie in the fact that, in September 1946, the Admiralty codified Crossing the Line as a theatrical event. Concerned that this oral tradition would fade in the aftermath of the Second World War, the Admiralty issued a pamphlet about Crossing the Line. In the preface of the document it states:

with the return to peace routine [...]and the obvious necessity to foster an awareness of the old traditions in the minds of the rising generation, many requests have been received for the promulgation of an authentic order of proceedings [...]This pamphlet has therefore been produced on the clear understanding that it represents no more than a symposium of the basic features involved and in the hope that it may be of practical assistance to those who wish to observe the appropriate ceremonies with the dignity and regard for accuracy to which they are by custom and tradition entitled.³⁵⁸

Drawing upon the documentation of previous ceremonies, notably the Crossing the Line ceremonies on HMS *Renown* and HMS *New Zealand* that occurred in the interwar period, Crossing the Line is clearly framed as a theatrical tradition. Part I, 'Origins of the Ceremony', confirms that the ritual initiation that is central to Crossing the Line in the Royal Navy has long been understood by personnel as playful pretence. It refers to the ritual as 'mummery', a term traditionally used to denote a performance by an all-male amateur theatrical troupe. Part II lists the '*dramatis personae*' of the ceremony. The principal roles are King Neptune

³⁵⁵ Cited in 'Crossing the Line, Plank Owner and Other Unofficial Certificates Acquired by Naval Personnel'.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Matthew Day, 'German Navy Humiliation: Initiation Pictures Cause Embarrassment', *The Telegraph*, 26 January 2011, <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/8283869/German-navy-humiliation-initiation-pictures-cause-embarrassment.html>> [accessed 25 March 2018].

³⁵⁸ Cited in Lydenberg, *Crossing the Line*, p.204

and Queen Amphitrite followed by members of the royal court including the Judge, Judge's Clerk, Doctor, Barber, Barber's Assistants, Policemen, Bodyguard, King's Messenger, Herald, Trumpeter, Head Bear, and Bears. Part III begins with a paragraph on the ceremony's 'preliminary function'. Here it states that the initiation of the novices is the 'main' purpose of the ceremony and 'must rightly and inevitably involve an element of horseplay'. But, it also emphasises that every effort should be made to achieve an extraordinary theatrical spectacle 'as to make a lasting impression on those who witness [Crossing the Line] for the first time'. This statement is followed by three paragraphs detailing recommendations for 'properties', 'costumes' and 'rigging'.³⁵⁹ It is notable that the first footnote of Part II even prescribes the exclusion of certain characters at different points of the ceremony to ensure Crossing the Line is not 'profoundly bad theatre'.³⁶⁰ Within the section on rigging, there is also advice on how to construct the water bath in a way that will prevent injury during the ceremony;

The water should be about 4 feet deep, and it is well to place some suitable cushioning material under the baths to prevent injury in the event of any initiates receiving an extra heavy bumping. Arrangements should be made for the water to be changed at frequent intervals.³⁶¹

Part II also provides an order of ceremony including detailed scripts with stage directions. This information, which references ceremonies of the past, indicates that performances of Crossing the Line before the publication of this pamphlet had already begun to conform to a well-established dramatic structure. There are two identifiable Acts in Crossing the Line. Act I takes place on the evening or day before the ship's approach to the Equator. It observes the imaginative travel of members of the royal court to the ship. The ship is commanded to stop by one of the members of the royal court in recognition of the ship approaching Neptune's domain and the company is told to prepare for the initiations that will begin the following morning. The pamphlet recommends that this Act should only involve Trumpeters, Bears, and the Herald whilst Neptune should arrive on the day of the initiations. However, I have since discovered versions of the ceremony that include the arrival of Neptune, Amphitrite and all the members of the court during this Act. Act II takes place the following day. To begin, Neptune, Amphitrite, and the royal court 'make a processional tour of the

³⁵⁹ Ibid

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid, p.208.

upper deck', usually accompanied by a slow march from the ship's band.³⁶² After the procession and a formal greeting from the CO, Neptune and Amphitrite ascend onto a raised platform from which they preside over the initiations that are conducted by members of the court. The initiations involve three ritual tasks; the consumption of "medicine" prescribed by the Doctor, the mock shaving by the Barber, and a dunking into water by the Bears. After these acts are completed, Neptune proclaims the ship and its company to be part of the 'Ancient Order of the Deep' and the newly initiated members are presented with certificates. Crucially, this formal structure provides COs and other senior members of a ship's company a framework through which to contain and control the behaviours practiced by subordinate groups during the ceremony.



*Figure 17 A Crossing the Line on HMS Centaur. 14 January 1959.
Photograph courtesy of Jim Stroud.*

In recent times, the Royal Navy has maintained and actively promoted Crossing the Line as an event that fosters *esprit de corps* among companies during long deployments. In 2014, an article published on the official Royal Navy MOD website reports on the 'fun ceremony' that was performed on HMS *Westminster* during Operation Kipion, a security mission that

³⁶² Cited in Lydenberg, *Crossing the Line*, p.210

involved 'hunting down pirates, smugglers [and] drug-runners'.³⁶³ The article includes quotes from different members of the company who praise the ceremony. For example, Jimmy Clements, an able seaman, is quoted as saying, 'I have been in the Navy for eight years and this is by far the highlight of my naval career'.³⁶⁴ Personnel I have questioned about Crossing the Line have also spoken very fondly and enthusiastically of their involvement. When recalling his participation in Crossing the Line on board HMS *Victorious*, for example, Jim Stroud states that it 'was a very rewarding experience...[I]happily took part'.³⁶⁵ Whether interviewees have decided not to divulge information about acts of hazing during the ceremony to me or they have no knowledge of abusive conduct taking place is not easy to deduce. Nevertheless, Crossing the Line in the 20th century is not an initiation designed to cause real physical or mental harm. It is a theatrical event that incorporates a liminal performance ritual intended to foster a sense of community and camaraderie among personnel.

Performing Mobilities

Crossing the Line has a community building function because it is a process of restructuring and renewal of the shipboard community. Consistent with Arnold van Gennep's model of rites of passage, Crossing the Line sees personnel who have not crossed the Equator before symbolically 'pass from one defined position to another' – from the mythical 'pollywog' to 'shellback' – and this transition is marked by three distinct phases: separation, margin, and aggregation.³⁶⁶ Before the ship arrives at the Equator, a list is made of personnel who are crossing the Equator for the first time. They are labelled 'pollywogs' by the rest of the ship's company.³⁶⁷ On the day of the crossing, the ship becomes, as van Gennep describes, a place of transition between two 'worlds', between the shipboard community on the surface of the sea and a mythical submarine world.³⁶⁸ It is at this threshold that the procession and the

³⁶³ Royal Navy MOD UK, 'HMS Westminster Crossing the Line' (2014) <<https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2014/january/14/140114-westminster-cross-line>> [accessed 5 March 2018]. See also 'Crossing the Line' <<https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2015/november/10/151110-crossing-the-line>> [accessed 5 March 2018].

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Jim Stroud RN, questionnaire, 20th May 2016.

³⁶⁶ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960), p.3

³⁶⁷ 'Pollywog' is the term that is colloquially used by personnel to refer to the novices of the ship who will be initiated.

³⁶⁸ *The Rites of Passage*, p.18.

initiation, intended to symbolically purge personnel of their former identities, takes place. During their initiation, the ‘pollywogs’ become, as Victor Turner identifies in *The Ritual Process*, ‘liminal entities’ that are ‘neither here nor there’.³⁶⁹ They are reduced to a state of vulnerability; they are forced to perform actions that require them to be ‘passive’, to obey their instructors ‘implicitly’, and accept ‘arbitrary punishment without complaint’.³⁷⁰ The first of the ritual tasks that the ‘pollywogs’ must complete is the consumption of “medicine” prescribed by the Doctor. During an interview, Graham Street acknowledges that ‘the concoction of ingredients, usually found from the ship’s galley, is harmless but fairly disgusting....a mixture of peppers, curry powder, tobasco sauce, and warm sea water’.³⁷¹ This task is usually followed by the mock shaving performed by the Barber with a razor ‘made of carefully smoothed wood’ of ‘exaggerated size’.³⁷² Michael Payne describes this as being a particularly memorable moment when he crossed the line for the first time on HMS *Zulu*:

[You are] shaved with a giant razor, having first been foamed up with a deck mop, or being dunked in flour, or whatever, while the rest of the ship’s company laugh hysterically. You are perched on a ‘plank’ above a water-filled ‘pit’ on the quarterdeck (to be featured heavily later), while you are dealt with.³⁷³

As Payne alludes to in his description of the “shaving” ritual, the ‘pollywogs’ are finally submerged into large tanks of water that are constructed on the upper deck of the ship. Sometimes, as Payne reveals, this involves being ‘tipped into the pit’ from a plank suspended above. Other ships construct a platform upon which a chair can be placed. Sitting on the chair, the ‘pollywog’ is then pushed back into the tank below. An example of this can be found in Figure 17, a photograph that captures the moment when one ‘pollywog’ is descending into the bath during Crossing the Line on board HMS *Centaur* in January 1959. To the left and right of this image we can see members of the royal court in costume occupying the platform; the Barber with his large wooden razor, the Doctor dressed in a white coat and mask, and the Bears occupying the water tank below. The use of a raised platform from which to initiate personnel is the most common form of staging that I have discovered. The platform becomes the focal point of the ceremony and enables the rest of

³⁶⁹ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), p.95.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Graham Street RN, interviewed by Sarah Penny, 3 January 2018.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Michael Payne, *When I was on the Tartar: Black Cat Sea Stories as told by Jack* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1999), p.93.

To achieve this process of ritual renewal requires the mass participation of all the ship's members.³⁷⁴ On the day of the crossing, the constraints on the company's literal mobility are informalized. The whole shipboard community, except those who are obligated to remain on duty, move from their private messes and cabins to participate in the ceremony. Figure 19 is an illustration of Crossing the Line by the official war artist Anthony Gross. During his eight-week voyage on HMS *Highland Monarch* in 1941, Gross completed his 'Convoy Series', a collection of ink sketches that depicted mess deck life, parades, and entertainment on board. This image of *Highland Monarch's* Crossing the Line ceremony depicts a crowded scene where the entire ship is implicated as part of the performance arena. The way personnel are positioned: sitting, standing, crouching, hanging onto ladders, and perching on ledges implies that the shipboard company are not required to conform to the formalities of an established theatre space. Like Bakhtin's theorisation of carnival as an event without 'footlights', Crossing the Line does not acknowledge a clear distinction between actors and audience. Everyone is participating in the performance and is implicated in the actions that are taking place around them. By occupying the same space at the same time, COs temporarily sanction a moment where personnel can be physically mobile in a way that ordinary working life does not permit. Personnel can stand next to, intermingle and communicate with people in their community that, due to their work routine or their social position, they may not have ever interacted with before. In the commission book of HMS *Bulwark*, for example, Crossing the Line is listed as one of a number of infrequent occasions where certain members of *Bulwark* are seen by other personnel outside of their working division.³⁷⁵

The Air Department officers, Technical magicians, Mets., Phots., Ops., Writers and Leading Hands who do all the work[...] only appear when flying stops, the sun shines or the ship turns down wind , on pay days, for divisional photographs, banyans, Crossing the Line ceremonies, clear Lower Deck, prangs, tot-time, and liberty boats!³⁷⁶

The activation of Crossing the Line, therefore, opens up a space where free and familiar interaction within the ship among personnel of all positions and ranks can occur. Every example I have accumulated of Crossing the Line indicates that personnel who have not crossed the Equator before, irrespective of their social status, rank or position, perform the role of 'pollywog'. It is recorded by a *Navy and Army Illustrated* correspondent, for example,

³⁷⁴ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p.97.

³⁷⁵ David Axford, 'Ships' Commissioning Books', HMS *Bulwark* (1957-1958), p.31.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

that 'the first lieutenant, one of the second lieutenants, the chaplain, the captain and lieutenant of marines, three engineers, a paymaster, a doctor, nearly all the middies and about 200 Bluejackets, marines and stokers' participated in the initiation process on board HMS *Terrible*.³⁷⁷ I have also found that when ship's companies activate this performance on a ship that has not been across the Equator before, all the ship's members, regardless of whether they have played a 'pollywog' before, undergo the initiation. When HMS *Daring* crossed the Equator 'for the first time in the ship's history' in July 1967, the writer of *Daring's* commission book reveals, 'nearly every member of the ship became coated in an evil smelling mixture of paste, feathers and dye'.³⁷⁸ Similarly, when HMS *Newcastle* crossed the Equator for the first time in 1979, 'pleas from those who had crossed the equator before fell on deaf ears and few escaped initiation'.³⁷⁹ Furthermore, interviewees have stressed the unruly and mob-like behaviour that envelopes the ship during the ceremony. Sometimes, May reveals, the 'rough and tumble' of the initiation descends into a 'general free for all'.³⁸⁰ During the ceremony on *Bulwark*,

all involved spontaneously invaded the ducking pool and a general ducking of anyone and everyone who happened to be in reach ensued - with a great deal of water from the pool being thrown over everyone in the area. It was just a way of over exuberance and letting off steam regardless of rank - like another 'boy's game'.³⁸¹

The 'exuberance' that May describes is closely allied to what Émile Durkheim termed 'collective effervescence'; a 'kind of electricity that quickly transports...[people] to an extraordinary degree of exaltation' that manifests in a community's togetherness.³⁸² This powerful feeling of effervescence transcends social boundaries. Personnel of all ranks can be, as May reveals, caught up in the mirth and exuberance of the moment. It compels participants to be playful, to act spontaneously, and to disregard the structures that usually restrict their movements and interactions with others. This performance, therefore, is not simply about initiating the novices of the company. The rite of passage offers all personnel a marginal space, albeit a temporary one, within which they can openly and creatively negotiate their relationships with the people and spaces around them.

³⁷⁷ Anonymous, 'The Terrors of the Line', p.342.

³⁷⁸ David Axford, 'Ships' Commissioning Books', HMS *Daring* (1966-1968), p.6.

³⁷⁹ David Axford, 'Ships' Commissioning Books', HMS *Newcastle* (1978-2003), p.6.

³⁸⁰ Graham May RN, questionnaire, 16 August 2016.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), p.162.



Figure 19 'The Neptune Ceremony; Crossing the Line' by Anthony Gross. 'Convoy' series, 1941 – 1942. IWM. Art.IWM ART LD 2099.

But why, when the constraints on personnel's literal mobility is integral to the efficient working of a ship, do COs licence a rite of passage that activates a freedom of movement that unsettles social and spatial relations? First, this rite of passage plays an integral role in fostering communitarian bonding, or what Turner calls *communitas*.³⁸³ By experiencing this powerful feeling of effervescence that is evoked in their togetherness, personnel are reminded of their commonality, 'the essential and generic human bond, without which there would be no society'.³⁸⁴ This communal recognition of the company's kinship promotes mutual respect and loyalty among personnel of all ranks, positions and backgrounds – characteristics that are essential for teamwork and the maintenance of discipline within a diverse shipboard community. This sense of unity and commonality is further reinforced by the ritual renewal and totalisation of the company. Liminal rituals, as Andrew C. Wegley argues in 'Ritual Failing', are 'about levelling and forgetting differences'.³⁸⁵ Once the

³⁸³ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p.97.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Andrew C. Wegley, 'Ritual Failing' in *Ritual and Event: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Mark Franko (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 56-74 (p.57).

'pollywogs' are handed their certificates, the whole shipboard company are encouraged to collectively re-imagine themselves as a homogenous group of 'shellbacks'. Furthermore, the symbolic incorporation of the community into a mythical submarine realm creates, once again, this sense of fixity to a community in flux. The company are imagined as rooted to an exclusive submarine community – one that is not entirely moored to the place they have come from nor to the one they are traveling to but an ocean community that, while at sea, they will always be attached. This idea of personnel being moored to this submarine world during the rest of their service at sea is reinforced by the symbol of the anchor that is depicted on the illustrations that decorate Crossing the Line certificates. In 'Anchors in a Three-decker World', Miceal Ross examines the ways in which the anchor in medieval legends serves as a virtual and symbolic connection between the waters' surface and the underworld. Ross argues that anchors are commonly represented as portals between the world of the living and the dead through which people and spirits can travel.³⁸⁶ Similarly, many of the certificates I have come across incorporate an image of an anchor to represent the connection between the ship and Neptune's realm. In Figure 18, for example, *Kent* is depicted as literally anchored to King Neptune's mythical world on the sea floor.

Secondly, although the mass, and sometimes erratic, corporeal travel of personnel in the same space at the same time is highly irregular, it is nonetheless activated in reverence to custom and social obligation. Interviewees stress that participation in Crossing the Line is voluntary but that there is a strong expectation of presence. 'It doesn't matter what rank you hold', reveals Holihead, 'If you are a first timer, you are a first timer. If the Captain has not been across the line he [sic] is *expected* to participate'.³⁸⁷ Moreover, in response to the question 'What is the main purpose of Crossing the Line?', Tim Stoneman succinctly replies 'to comply with tradition'.³⁸⁸ The use of the word 'comply' suggests that participation in this ceremony is understood as an act of conformity. The thought of participating in an event that activates a moment of carnivalesque freedom from the monotony of ordinary shipboard life may compel personnel to be present. Nonetheless, the desire to comply with tradition is an important factor. There is also a familial obligation that generates the compulsion for personnel to travel and to experience the live event together. As I have previously explored in Chapter One, Crossing the Line, like all theatrical events at sea, not only provides personnel with a rare opportunity to see and interact with fellow shipmates but also *to be seen* by

³⁸⁶ Miceal Ross, 'Anchors in a Three-Decker World', *Folklore*, 109 (1998), 63-75.

³⁸⁷ Philip Holihead RN, interviewed, 23 January 2017.

³⁸⁸ Tim Stoneman RN, questionnaire, 23 March 2016.

others as valuable members of the shipboard community. By voluntarily participating in Crossing the Line, personnel have an opportunity to demonstrate their physical courage to others. Courage, as Andrew St George reveals, is 'an essential core value and informs all others [in the Royal Navy] ...it is the foundation on which bravery, fighting spirit and success are built'.³⁸⁹ If participants complete the initiation they are able to show their shipmates that they can be trusted and relied upon to carry out a task despite any discomfort they may feel.



Figure 20 King Neptune appears from a hatch at the bow of HMS Renown. 17 April 1920. IWM843.

Crossing the Line is a celebration of 'a second world and a second life outside of officialdom' whereby the well-established shipboard hierarchy is suspended, and a new aquatic order headed by Neptune prevails.³⁹⁰ The CO's control over the ship and its mobility within the time and space of the performance is gradually relinquished. During Act I Neptune and/or members of the royal court travel to the bow of the ship, command the vessel to stop, and demand to meet the CO on board. Figure 20 is a still from a film of HMS *Renown's* Crossing the Line ceremony in 1920. In this image we can see Neptune emerging from a hatch at the bow of the ship on the day of the Equator crossing. The 1946 'Crossing the Line' pamphlet published by the Admiralty contains a script for this Act, indicating with ellipsis where

³⁸⁹ Andrew St George, p.15.

³⁹⁰ Bakhtin, p.6.

information relevant to the ship and its commission should be added. The first eight lines of the script with stage directions and lighting and sound queues are as follows:

Pipe: "D'ye hear there? Ship is expected to be within hailing distance of the Equator in ten minutes time"

When spectators are mustered (all abaft the breakwater), bring up water curtain and floodlights slowly. Under cover of water curtain the following muster as quickly as possible in the eyes of the ship:

Trumpeters

Herald

Bears

Fanfare on trumpets, followed by a throaty roar of laughter through the loudspeakers.

Herald: Ahoy – What ship?

Captain (from the bridge): "Her Britannic Majesty's Ship..."

Herald: "Who commands this ship?"

Captain: "Captain... Royal Navy" (adding decoration in full e.g. Companion of the Distinguished Service Order etc.)

Herald: "Stop the ship – I wish to come onboard"

(Ring down Stop Both)

Captain: "The way is off my ship"

(Lower water curtain, bring up spotlights on Herald and attendants)

Herald: "Whence come you, and wither bound?"

Captain: "We come from ...and we are bound for ... We crave permission to clear the Line and proceed southward"

(It is sometimes the custom for the captain to descend to the forecastle at this point).³⁹¹

³⁹¹ Cited in Lydenberg, *Crossing the Line*, p.206-207

Once permission is granted, the ship is then commanded by the Herald to move once more and the Herald, Trumpeters, and Bears travel back to their mythical kingdom. In this script the transitional status of the ship's journey is clearly established. The marginal space of the water curtain at the bow of the ship becomes the site of the action, the 'eyes of the ship' acting as limen linking the real and mythical realms. The pause in the ship's journey acts as a clear marker of change from one hemisphere to the other but also from one chain of command under the control of the CO to one headed by King Neptune. This change in command is also established by the CO's compliance with the orders of the Herald and the CO's request for permission to enter King Neptune's realm. It is further reinforced by the corporeal travel of the CO away from the Bridge, the room from which the ship is commanded. The following day, a grand procession of the Royal Court across the upper deck takes place implicating the entire ship as part of the performance arena and as one under Neptune's jurisdiction. After the procession and a formal greeting from the CO, King Neptune and Queen Amphitrite ascend onto a raised platform from which they preside over the initiations that are conducted by members of the court as previously described.



Figure 21 Her Highness Amphitrite drawn by a sleuth of bears across the top deck of HMS Centaur. 14 January 1959. Photograph courtesy of Jim Stroud.

As the real and imaginary worlds coincide, the company enters a space that Turner identifies as 'betwixt and between' and 'a moment in and out of time'.³⁹² This timeless heterotopic space not only relinquishes the CO of their authority but activates a blatant inversion of shipboard hierarchy. Consistent with carnival's comic crownings, lower ranking members of the ship's company play the roles of King Neptune, Queen Amphitrite and members of the Royal Court. It is the lower ranking members of the company who issue commands to the CO and who set and inflict the ritual tasks on personnel of all ranks and positions. Figure 22 is a list of the cast from HMS *Southampton's* Crossing the Line ceremony on the 12th of April 1922. In this image we can see all the roles are played by non-commissioned members of the ship including able and leading seaman, privates from the Royal Marine Light Infantry (RMLI), stokers and shipwrights. It is important to stress that the characters of the court, except the Barber and Doctor who play an integral role in the initiations, are not fixed. I have come across examples of the ceremony in the 20th century that include clowns, dolphins, and a myriad of assistants and attendants. However, though the list of characters may change, my oral history work indicates that casting members of the lower deck in these roles is a practice that has been observed throughout the 20th century. When discussing casting choice, Holihead insists that casting an officer in the role of Neptune 'would be almost wrong' because if 'the wardroom governed the proceedings it would be like receiving orders and Crossing the Line is not like that'.³⁹³ Crossing the Line, therefore, provides lower ranking members an opportunity to elevate their social status; to dress in elaborate costumes in accordance with their new role and to perform mobilities that are usually inaccessible to them. King Neptune and Queen Amphitrite, for example, dress and move in ways that are associated with their royal status. During the procession, they usually occupy a vehicle of some kind that has been modified to represent a royal carriage, symbolising their prestige and elevating them above the court and the rest of the ship's company. Figure 21 is a photograph from the procession that took place during *Centaur's* Crossing the Line ceremony in 1959. It shows Amphitrite on a flight deck vehicle that is adorned with an overhead covering and drawn by a sleuth of bears. When HMS *New Zealand* performed a Crossing the Line ceremony in 1919, Chief Gunner E. J. Whiting was cast as Neptune and was received by the company as if a real monarch was present. 'With His venerable grey beard, His ancient crown, His trident, His carmen velvet robes', Whiting reportedly stood 'as only a King could

³⁹² Turner, p. 95.

³⁹³ Philip Holihead RN, interviewed by Sarah Penny, 23 January 2017.

stand’ and ‘filled the air with all the grandeur of His aged dominions’.³⁹⁴ The company also held a ‘Royal Stately Progress’ where ‘officers and men stood rigidly to attention’ and received Whiting ‘with a Royal Salute, while the Band played “A Life on the Ocean Wave”’.³⁹⁵

THE CAST OF THE PLAY.				
NEPTUNE	..	..	W. Pope	.. Able Seaman.
AMPHITRITE	..	..	A. Old	.. Shipwright.
MAID OF HONOUR	..	..	T. Gurr	.. Canteen Manager.
CLERK OF THE ROLLS	..	..	W. G. Daymon	.. Yeoman of Signals.
JUDGE	..	..	Mr. Morris	.. Warrant Shipwright.
DOCTOR	..	..	E. Ogden	.. Private R.M.L.I.
DOCTOR'S ASSISTANT	..	..	W. Gerhard	.. Leading Seaman.
BARBER	..	..	S. Wright	.. Stoker.
BARBER'S ASSISTANT	..	..	G. Mullard	.. Able Seaman.
CHIEF OF POLICE	..	..	J. Chapman	.. Leading Stoker.
POLICE	..	..	N. Laidler	.. Able Seaman.
			R. Lester	.. Private R.M.L.I.
			A. Riddell	.. Private R.M.L.I.
			G. Stanfield	.. Stoker.
HERALD	..	..	J. Thompson	.. Ship's Cook.
OFFICIAL TASTER	..	..	J. Willis	.. Sick Berth Petty Officer.
BEARS	..	..	J. North	.. Able Seaman.
			J. Green	.. Able Seaman
			A. Turner	.. Able Seaman.
			D. Vicary	.. Leading Seaman.
			P. Massey	.. Leading Seaman
			C. Barker	.. Leading Seaman.
W. Whitmore	.. Leading Seaman.			

Figure 22 ‘The Cast of the Play’. HMS Southampton.

Another example where members of the court perform mobilities that are usually inaccessible to them is in the rounding up of ‘pollywogs’ prior to initiation. According to the ‘Crossing the Line’ pamphlet, ‘a few volunteer “reluctant participants”’ should be found by ‘direct “hunting” out by the Policeman’ in order to add ‘entertainment value’ to the proceedings.³⁹⁶ This may have involved performers moving from mess deck to mess deck, thereby travelling into private spaces of the ship that ordinarily they would have been barred from. Another action that is sometimes afforded to the royal court is the reading of “warrants” to senior members of a ship’s company before they undergo the rite of passage. Warrants for punishment in the 20th century have been issued to personnel on account of a serious breach in Naval Law. This practice is comparable to a hearing in a public court whereby the offence is read aloud by one of the senior executive officers in front of the

³⁹⁴ ‘HMS New Zealand: Crossing the Line Ceremony 1919’,
http://www.pbenyon.plus.com/NZ_Xross_Line/Index.html [accessed 2 February 2018].

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Cited in Lydenberg, *Crossing the Line*, p.207

offender and in full view of the company or division to which they belong. Relevant passages of the Naval Discipline Act (NDA) in accordance with the crime committed followed by the warrant itself are then read aloud by the CO who decides upon the necessary punishment.³⁹⁷ During Crossing the Line ceremonies, senior members of the company are issued mock warrants by the Royal Judge. These are burlesques of the real thing that are intended to cause merriment among the company. Tim Stoneman explains that when ‘well-known members of the ship’s company are charged with amusing and ludicrous “offences”’ it would cause great laughter among all who observed. As an example, Stoneman reveals that, whilst working as a Gunnery officer in 1982, he was once ‘charged with making loud noises and discharging projectiles into the sea’.³⁹⁸ On *Southampton* twelve warrants were issued to commissioned members of the company. The first was issued to the Secretary, Paymaster-Commander S.C Parsons. His warrant was read out as follows;

Name – S. C. Parsons

Rank – A posh pen-pusher

Class for Leave – Weather permitting

Character – dd (Decidedly dubious)

Class for Conduct – Abominable

Offence – Did not pay proper respect to Kin Neptune’s officials as when they asked him if he had previously crossed the Line did reply “What has that to do with you?”

I do hereby adjudge him the said S.C. Parsons to be ducked by my bears until he is quite certain that he has crossed the Line or not.³⁹⁹

These examples of the movements and actions of the royal court shows that rather than an eradication of social order, the imaginative travel of the royal court from the submarine world to the ship activates, what Hetherington describes as, an alternate ‘mode of ordering’ within the performance arena; one that has its own codes, rules, symbols, and graduated hierarchies.⁴⁰⁰ Crossing the Line, therefore, serves as a potent reminder to the company that there is no fixed social order. Rather, there is a mode of shipboard ordering that exists which,

³⁹⁷ The NDA legislation was introduced in 1957. Before this the Royal Navy abided by a discipline Act known as ‘Articles of War’.

³⁹⁸ Tim Stoneman RN, questionnaire, 23rd March 2016.

³⁹⁹ Bunx, *Southampton*, p.39.

⁴⁰⁰ Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p.27.

by Hetherington's definition, can be unfixed, resisted, and changed.⁴⁰¹ However, the inversion of shipboard order necessarily reminds participants of the ship's underlying hierarchy and, as a result, reinforces the company's prior vertical positioning. After all, this performance observes a small number of characters controlling the behaviours and movements of the many. They also maintain control by implementing the same command structure with King Neptune at the top of the chain of command and by using the same disciplining devices such as the issuing of warrants. Furthermore, the subversions that are enacted by the court are also contained within a formalised dramatic structure. Their movements and actions are scripted and perhaps even rehearsed.

Despite the seemingly anarchic behaviour that envelopes the ship, *Crossing the Line* is deeply conservative in its intention to maintain order and reaffirm hierarchical principles. The activation of *Crossing the Line* enables performers to establish a fixity to their fluid identity as they live and work in the heterotopia of the ship. Mass participation in the ritual initiation of the novices of the ship suggests that the performance is implemented specifically to prevent fractures within a disjointed community, encourage a sense of social renewal, and promote a collective identity. Furthermore, by sanctioning the temporary embodiment and enactment of scripted transgressions within the performance, the CO constructs a space and time that provides personnel a break from the norms of shipboard life without causing subversive activity that poses a genuine threat to shipboard authority.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

SODS Opera

In all the written memoirs of service personnel I accessed during my research, the concept of the 'happy ship' repeatedly surfaced. 'Every sailor wanted to be in a 'happy ship,' Sub Lieutenant E.R. Wilkinson observed, 'it grew gradually during a commission, based on mutual experiences and successful achievements. It depended on the interaction of all the members of the ship's company'.⁴⁰² Further oral history research into this elusive concept revealed that SODS opera was the most commonly cited form of entertainment when discussions around achieving a 'happy ship' at sea arose. In conversation with Robert Brown about striking the right balance between work and play at sea, he noted that 'happy ships are ones that work hard and play hard. There are many forms of entertainment at sea, but everyone looks forward to a SODS opera'.⁴⁰³ But why, when other forms of theatrical entertainment, Crossing the Line ceremonies, sporting events, and runs ashore manufactured 'mutual experiences' and involved 'the interaction of all the members of the ship's company', was this form regularly singled out?⁴⁰⁴ Unlike Crossing the Line, a form that could only be activated at an exact location, SODS opera could be announced for inclusion in the ship's programme no matter where the company was deployed. Consequently, SODS operas became one of the most widely staged theatrical events at sea and highly anticipated by ships' companies. On HMS *Manchester*, Brown explained, there was an expectation among the company that at least one SODS opera would occur during the six-month deployment.⁴⁰⁵

The exact location of the ship does not dictate the production of a SODS opera, but the event is always timed to coordinate with a specific stage in a ship's journey. According to Rick Jolly and Wilson Tugg's definition of SODS opera in *Jackspeak: The Pusser's Rum Guide to Royal Navy Slang*, SODS operas are usually staged on Channel night'.⁴⁰⁶ Derived from the expression 'channel fever', the 'excitement that grips a ship's company when approaching home port after a long period at sea', Channel night is a ship's last night before returning to home port.⁴⁰⁷ It is also known as Up-Channel night due to the ship's position on or near the English Channel. Similar to Bakhtin's theorisation of carnival as a time out of life that was 'subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom', Channel night evokes a

⁴⁰² Cited in Lee, *The Cruiser Experience*, p.109. Sub Lieutenant E. R. Wilkinson joined the Royal Navy in August 1944 on HMS *Euryalus*.

⁴⁰³ Robert Brown RN, questionnaire, 9 June 2014.

⁴⁰⁴ Lee, *The Cruiser Experience*, p.109.

⁴⁰⁵ Brown RN, questionnaire, 9 June 2014.

⁴⁰⁶ Rick Jolly and Wilson Tugg, p.269.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

celebratory 'universal spirit' that encourages profane language and behaviour, free and familiar interaction within the ship between personnel of different ranks, and acts that are normally prohibited such as excessive drinking.⁴⁰⁸ Within the forum discussion entitled 'Your Best thing in the RN' on *Navy Net*, a forum member with the moniker 'Always_a_Civvy' poses the question 'What is/was Channel night?'⁴⁰⁹ The reams of subsequent posts in response to this question go some way to explaining why there are few and brief published definitions of Channel night. Replies from different members of the forum describe Channel night as an evening of 'beer, porn, more beer, more porn, beer and maybe the odd movie!', a night of 'music supplied by the latest attaché case type multi cassette and record player', of 'non-PC dits and banter before we ever came across such a thing as PC', an excuse 'to get shitfaced' and to eat 'anything the chef had stashed away that wasn't mouldy'.⁴¹⁰ A debate continues among forum members about whether Channel nights still take place today. On a separate forum thread, one forum member with the moniker 'whitemouse' writes that Channel nights have never been 'officially sanctioned' but senior regulators 'suffer from Nelson's blind eye syndrome on that night'.⁴¹¹ Philip Holihead reveals in interview that during his time in the navy from the early 1970s, the MOD increasingly frowned upon Channel night. Personnel began to take, he asserts, subversive actions 'too far' resulting in 'dangerous conduct leading to an official ban by the Admiralty'.⁴¹² It is important to stress here that I have not found any definitive evidence that suggests SODS operas have been part of an official ban. Nonetheless, any examination of a SODS opera that occurs on Channel night should consider the carnival spirit that permeates this moment in time and the actions and behaviours that have long been associated with this night.

Every example I have accumulated across the course of my research reveals that SODS operas are an officially sanctioned event and that they are more commonly staged in the middle of a company's deployment. When setting a date for a SODS opera, Holihead reveals,

the entertainments committee have an outline of the ship's programme. They look for perhaps a fallow period but also one where the company have been away quite a while and you need to let off a bit of steam. SODS operas are usually over a period

⁴⁰⁸ Bakhtin, p.7

⁴⁰⁹ Navy Net - Royal Navy Community Forum, 'Your Best thing in the RN', (2007) <<https://www.navy-net.co.uk/community/threads/your-best-thing-in-the-rn.35412/page-2>> [accessed 17 February 2018].

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Navy Net - Royal Navy Community Forum, 'Hello alls them out there', (2007) <<https://www.navy-net.co.uk/community/threads/hello-alls-them-out-there.34716/>> [accessed 17 February 2018].

⁴¹² Philip Holihead RN, interviewed by Sarah Penny, 23 January 2017.

where you are going to write off the day and possibly have a quiet Sunday routine the next day.⁴¹³

Holihead's words show that SODS operas are not only licenced events but are planned well in advance by the entertainments committee who meticulously schedule the event into the ship's operational programme. This intention to schedule a SODS opera over 'a fallow period', however, signals that like Channel night, SODS operas that are sanctioned mid-deployment are also designed to coincide with a break from a high-pressured shipboard routine. That is not to say that SODS operas occupy a time when diligence and discipline at sea can be lax. When the company of HMS *Brilliant* staged their SODS opera in 1994, for instance, personnel were on an operational tour off the coast of former Yugoslavia enforcing a United Nations embargo in the Adriatic Sea. The journalist Christopher Terrill, who joined *Brilliant's* complement for ten weeks during this tour, released a film with an accompanying book documenting the day to day activities and experiences of personnel on board.⁴¹⁴ Within his book *HMS Brilliant: In a Ship's Company*, Terrill offers a full account of the SODS opera and includes First Lieutenant Russ Harding's announcement to the whole company in advance of the event. Harding concludes:

Finally, let me draw your attention and your energies to that most important of events- the SODS opera. It is planned to hold this feast of "heavenly" entertainment on the evening of the twenty-eighth of this month – weather permitting, on the flight deck. I know there are a lot of ideas for acts from the different messes but ideas are not enough without application and rehearsal – so get a move on!⁴¹⁵

Harding's final notice reveals that *Brilliant's* SODS opera was sanctioned by the ship's command and activities, in the form of group devising and rehearsal before the event, were actively encouraged. Before this notice, Harding reminds the company that they 'are in an environment considered medium threat but that could increase to high threat at any time' and consequently, they should 'remain vigilant at all times.'⁴¹⁶ Whilst personnel must remain disciplined at sea, SODS operas offer a special time that temporarily liberates personnel 'from all that is humdrum' within the flow of working time.⁴¹⁷ This form therefore, as Holihead also asserts, can be a valuable tool for COs because it acts as a pressure valve that

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ See Christopher Terrill, *HMS Brilliant: In a Ship's Company* (BBC, 1995) [on DVD] and Christopher Terrill, *HMS Brilliant: In a Ship's Company* (London: BBC Books, 1995).

⁴¹⁵ Terrill, p. 140.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Bakhtin, p.34.

can relieve a company's tensions that have accumulated over the course of a long and hard deployment.

Whether they are scheduled mid-deployment or on Channel night, SODS operas occur at a liminal, in-between phase of a ship's journey. On Channel night, personnel are close to land but still at sea; they are completing the last days of their deployment but, at the same time, preparing for leave and returning to loved ones at home. Mid-deployment signals the turning point of the ship's journey, when the number of days to home port become fewer than the days served at sea. Like *Crossing the Line*, the activation of SODS opera foregrounds a company's liminality as the staging of this form marks a transitional phase in a ship's journey. But, SODS operas also create a sense of fixity among a company because they mark a pause in time, a moment to reflect on what has been; the successes or failures of the deployment, and for what is to come; the second half of the journey, the plans for leave or the next deployment.



Figure 23 Performance of 'Whispering Grass'. Imitation of Don Estelle and Windsor Davies by personnel on board HMS Ark Royal. 1976.

Theatrical and Semantic Lineage

The theatrical and semantic lineage of SODS opera is a complex and ambiguous one. The term 'SODS opera' does not spring from any one person's definition or from any single influence or theatrical tradition. When definitions are provided in naval memoirs, dictionaries and interviews, the authors appear to contradict one another, choosing to cite

different forms and thematic aspects and do not give many hints, if any, as to its origins. As previously noted in Chapter One, one of the most popular definitions referred to by naval service personnel today is Rick Jolly and Wilson Tugg's definition in *Jackspeak*. According to Jolly and Tugg, the word 'SODS' is an acronym for 'Ship's Operatic and Drama Society'.⁴¹⁸ Using the term 'opera' very loosely, SODS opera can be interpreted as simply an umbrella term for any theatrical event staged by a ship's company. Nevertheless, there are many different theatrical traditions at sea across the 20th century with their own histories and purposes both for the individual and shipboard community. I do not apply the term SODS opera as an umbrella term that packages theatrical traditions together; instead, I identify key features that distinguish this theatrical tradition as a stand-alone theatrical form.

One theatrical form that is frequently cited by authors to describe the production and performance of SODS opera is the concert party. Rodney Cowton, writing for *The Times* in 1983, describes SODS opera as 'the nearest thing to a concert party that the crew can put on, with as much dressing-up as circumstances permit'.⁴¹⁹ British concert party troupes emerged at the turn of the 20th century and, as Clarkson Rose in *Beside the Seaside* and John K. Walton in *The British Seaside* reveal, became part of the repertoire of seaside entertainment.⁴²⁰ To replicate the popular entertainment on the pleasure piers and beaches of home, ship's companies staged concert parties in wardrooms, in ship's canteens as well as on land in naval bases and in theatrical venues for service personnel and civilians around the world. They were highly organised events with a planned and rehearsed repertoire, usually consisting of Pierrot troupes and black face 'minstrelsy' performers. Concert parties in the Royal Navy were also marketed in ship's newspapers and programmes as charitable events and, on occasions, included civilians in the cast as well as the audience.

In contrast to concert party entertainment, SODS operas are conceived and produced by and for a ship's company and always take place at sea. Enthusiastic and talented individuals of the ship exclusively participate in SODS operas as producers, performers, and audience members. However, the use of ensemble, chorus, and the creation of original material within the concert party tradition is replicated in SODS operas by participants who, in response to their environment, create 'musical dialogue...about recent events in the ship and fleet' and

⁴¹⁸ Rick Jolly and Wilson Tugg, p.269.

⁴¹⁹ Rodney Cowton, 'Submariners: Sinking a Few', *The Times*, 24 December 1983, p.2.

⁴²⁰ See Clarkson Rose, *Beside the Seaside* (London: Museum Press, 1960) and John K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 2000).

incorporate popular musical and comic fads of their time.⁴²¹ Furthermore, historical and contemporaneous accounts of SODS opera reveal that the words 'ship's concert,' 'concert party,' and 'SODS opera' have been consistently used interchangeably across the 20th century, perhaps signalling that SODS opera emerged from the concert party tradition. Nevertheless, it would be an unsupported assertion at best to suggest that SODS opera is a translation, not least because the two terms existed at the same time. Interviews with naval personnel have revealed that the two terms are even used to refer to different moments of the same event. Jim Stroud, who witnessed an evening's entertainment on HMS *Hermes* on the 23rd of December 1960 in Colombo, describes how the event 'commenced with the ship's concert party' only to be followed by 'a SODS opera in the dining hall'.⁴²² Whilst the concert lasted four hours, the SODS opera continued in individual mess decks till late into the night. Upon further enquiry Stroud explained the distinction:

The concert party was an overall ship's company contribution based in the hangar and attended by everyone not on duty. It had a structured programme of events within a given timescale. The "sods" opera was an opportune "drop in" event - ongoing and continually open to all sorts of offerings. It was separate in every way from the concert.⁴²³

Although an examination of the concert party tradition has been helpful in my investigation of the meaning and usage of SODS opera, the term 'concert party' is also highly problematic. In 'The Neglected Art: Trends and Transformations in British Concert Party Entertainment, 1850-1950,' Bernard Ince reveals that the term 'concert party,' pre-dates variety performance in its usage, has a complex ancestry of both classical and musical influences, and is applied in many different contexts.⁴²⁴ In addition, the use of the word 'party' in the Royal Navy complicates the suggested relationship between the terms 'concert party' and 'SODS opera' further. When used by service personnel, 'concert party' does not necessarily specifically refer to the theatrical form as outlined by Bernard Ince and Clarkson Rose, but rather is used more generally to denote any group of performers at sea. For, as W.B. Harvey reveals:

⁴²¹ Lieutenant Commander W.B. Harvey, *Downstairs in the Royal Navy* (Glasgow: Brown, Son, & Ferguson Ltd., 1979), p.92.

⁴²² Stroud, questionnaire, 20 May 2016.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Bernard Ince, 'The Neglected Art: Trends and Transformations in British Concert Party Entertainment, 1850-1950', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 31 (2015), 3-16 (p.4).

Everything was a “party” in the Navy. Side party, top party, special painting party, firing party and lastly funeral party. Any group of men automatically become a party, and so it was with the resolute gang of amateur variety artistes who banded together to form the ship’s concert party.⁴²⁵

As a consequence of this ambiguous use of the term ‘party’, discovering whether there is an overlap of repertoire that forges a reciprocal relationship between SODS operas and the concert parties in the Royal Navy, has not been easy to deduce.

One performance that best exemplifies this potential overlap is the concert shown on the 1976 television documentary series *Sailor*.⁴²⁶ After the opening credit sequence of the seventh episode the narrator reveals that after seven weeks at sea, ‘to relieve the boredom and lift morale Captain Graham has organised a concert’.⁴²⁷ Of the acts that are shown in this episode, two of them are renditions of songs from the then popular television sitcom *It Ain’t Half Hot Mum* (1975-1984). The sitcom portrays a group of Second World War British soldiers, who, stationed at a Royal Artillery Depot in Deolali, India, form the base’s concert party. The servicemen on board *Ark Royal* in 1976 perform two songs from the sitcom; ‘Whispering Grass’, the 1975 Christmas number one hit made famous by Windsor Davis and Don Estelle, and ‘Boys Will Entertain You,’ the song that accompanied the sitcom’s opening credits. This performance replicates the concert party form by adapting well-known narratives and melodies to the taste of the ship’s company. The songs are also performed in a sequence of vocal ‘turns’. The ‘turns’ include an ensemble performance of ‘The Wombling Song’ and ‘Remember you’re a Womble,’ a sketch based on *The Magic Roundabout*, and a rendition of ‘The Colonel Bogey March’ and ‘ob-la-di, ob-la-da’ by the Royal Marine Brass Band. Harvey’s definition of the navy’s concert party as ‘a series of items hallowed with age, and yet, through infinite variety of presentation and accidental effect, perpetually new’ is apt here.⁴²⁸ But, by directly borrowing from a repertoire of songs that parody a concert party troupe, the performers perpetuate a notion of the concert party as an exclusively Second World War, Army, land-based tradition as opposed to a naval theatrical practice at sea. This distinction is still widely understood today. In interview with Peter Brierly, who served in the Royal Navy from 1985 to 2007, Brierly identifies SODS opera as ‘an event arranged by crew for crew’, and the concert party as an ‘entertainment by a separate group of people more

⁴²⁵ Harvey, p.85

⁴²⁶ *Sailor* (BBC, 1976) [on DVD.]

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Harvey, p. 85.

associated to the Army'.⁴²⁹ Although the term 'concert party' has been used by both services, SODS opera is an exclusively Royal Navy invention.

One feature of the SODS opera that distinguishes it from the concert party is its 'heavy emphasis on in-house jokes and blue humour' that forms the basis of the repertoire.⁴³⁰ The oxymoronic composition of the term 'SODS opera' itself suggests that satire and parody are integral formal aspects. By coupling the word 'SODS' that has strong sexual connotations in its reference to sodomy, with a classical art form associated with the upper echelons of society, the name highlights the potential for satire in which "high" art will be mocked on base and vulgar terms. This argument is supported by the definition of SODS opera in *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*. Eric Partridge cites Robert Claiborne of Cape Cod, who in conversation with Partridge in 1976 claimed that 'the reference is, I believe, to a (probably mythical), work of that name, late 19th century, slanderously ascribed to Gilbert and Sullivan'.⁴³¹ Partridge suggests that Claiborne is in fact citing a variation of *The Buggers Opera* – an obvious pun on Gay's *Beggars Opera* (1728) - of which 'all that now remains in Service memories is the list of *dramatis personae*, including, among others: Penis, The Count, a young upstart; Test and Ickles, hangers-on to the Count; Anus, a little brown fellow, usually tight; Scrotum, an aged and wrinkled retainer'.⁴³² Terrill reinforces this definition of the crude and bawdy SODS opera by stating that 'a harmless presentation of monologues, recitals, and sea shanties' could not be 'further from the truth'.⁴³³ 'What is actually offered', Terrill asserts, 'is a series of completely uncensored and full blooded entertainments'.⁴³⁴ Perhaps a parallel can be drawn here between SODS opera and the music hall tradition. In *The Victorian Music Hall: Culture, Class and Conflict*, Dagmar Kift identifies music hall and its comic song as having an affirming role in society, providing the audience with 'a place where one could be oneself without being disciplined and "improved" by one's superiors...or having to reckon with patronising instruction'.⁴³⁵ SODS operas that sanction the congregation of personnel who perform uncensored songs and sketches together create a space that provides 'a positive confirmation of themselves and their way of life'.⁴³⁶

⁴²⁹ Peter Brierley RN (1985- 2007), questionnaire, 20 June 2016.

⁴³⁰ Cowton, p.2.

⁴³¹ Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*. ed. Paul Beale (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), p.1110.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Terrill, p.155.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Dagmar Kift, *The Victorian Music Hall: Culture, Class and Conflict* trans. by Roy Kift (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.176.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

Unlike Crossing the Line, which, over centuries of its practice, has become formalised in the publication of a script with clearly defined roles and a precise order of ceremony, SODS opera is not codified. It continues to evolve in the creation and re-creation of its practice at sea today. Due to the sexual connotations associated with the word 'sods', the term 'SODS opera' is no longer used to define this form of entertainment. SODS operas 'are still a very important part of entertainment at sea today', Graham Street admits, 'but they are now performed under the pseudonyms of Players Evenings or Deployment Reviews'.⁴³⁷

Performing Mobilities

SODS operas occur in some of the largest spaces available on a naval vessel, allowing as many people as possible to occupy the same space at the same time. As I have previously explored in Chapter One, one of the largest spaces that has been used to stage SODS operas is the aircraft hangar. Leslie George Tanner, a seaman on HMS *Savage* during the Second World War, describes in a recorded interview how 'the starboard hangar was made into the stage' for SODS operas and the audience occupied the catapult deck.⁴³⁸ The congregation of the company to a specific location in the ship provides personnel of different ranks and positions a rare opportunity to socialise and interact with one another. By bringing together people who are usually divided, SODS operas, like Crossing the Line ceremonies, enable a moment of communitarian bonding that evokes a sense of a company's kinship. Whilst SODS operas bring people of different ranks and positions literally together, the performance arena is divided in a way that reinforces the social hierarchy of the community. The audience, Jim Stroud writes in his questionnaire,

would be seated in rows as in a cinema e.g. captain and senior officers in the front row. Officers in descending seniority continuing to the rear. All others including chief petty officers, petty officer and junior rates sat in any position.⁴³⁹

The travel of audience members to an identifiable place within the performance arena signals their position within shipboard hierarchy to the rest of the company. The SODS opera may encourage audience members to connect with and have exchanges with other audience members as they experience the live event together. But the fixity of an audience member's

⁴³⁷ Graham Street RN, interviewed by Sarah Penny, 3 January 2018.

⁴³⁸ London, IWM, 12024, Leslie George Tanner.

⁴³⁹ Stroud, questionnaire, 20 May 2016.

position within the rows of seating for the duration of the event, limits an individual's interactions to those personnel of an equal rank. Furthermore, audience members tend to remain in uniform. The performance arena, therefore, becomes a powerful visual symbol of the normal social ordering of the shipboard community.

The performers who make up each act of the SODS opera also tend to comprise of personnel of equal rank. This is partly due to a practical reason. The process of devising and rehearsing an act for a SODS opera requires time and space where personnel can collaborate and work on ideas for sketches and costumes together. Officers have their own recreational space attached to the Wardroom. Ratings have only their private messes where they can eat, sleep, relax, and socialise. If mess mates work together, they can rehearse routines conveniently in their own private recreational area during leisure hours. An example of a rehearsal taking place between the bunks of a junior mess can be found in the film *All of One Company*. This film, produced by the MOD in 1980, depicts the day-to-day life on board HMS *Coventry* as the ship sails from Portsmouth to Singapore.⁴⁴⁰ Without commentary, it gives an impressionistic account of life on board ship. The 28-minute film begins on Thursday 19th May in Portsmouth as *Coventry* sets sail, waved on by well-wishers. On Friday evening a band including drums, bass, guitar and lead singer have already started to practice their rendition of 'Just What I Needed' by The Cars to the rest of their mess mates. The evening before *Coventry* arrives in Singapore the same band can be seen performing on stage during *Coventry's* SODS opera.

The compulsion to perform with mess mates is not only a matter of convenience but also one of friendship and pride. Mess mates, as Holihead reveals,

are not just the people one works with and trusts on a professional level. They will be the ones who will go to the pub together, they'll run ashore together, they'll get in trouble together, they'll perform in a SODS opera together and it's that sort of camaraderie that runs very deep.⁴⁴¹

Participation in this event is driven by a deeply engrained mess deck rivalry. SODS operas afford personnel an opportunity to not only represent their mess on stage but to taunt and ridicule anybody and everybody in a bid for the best laugh. Similar to Bakhtin's theorisation of carnival laughter, the laughter that is produced during SODS operas is 'universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone' and also highly 'ambivalent; it is gay and triumphant, and

⁴⁴⁰ London, IWM, COI 1175 *All of One Company* (1980).

⁴⁴¹ Philip Holihead RN, interviewed, 23 January 2017.

at the same time mocking and deriding'.⁴⁴² Acts are deliberately constructed, Graham May insists, with 'the primary aim of mocking and hurling abuse at all members of a ship's company'. But, there is also an expectation among all who participate, May continues, that 'the targets of this taunting will hurl abuse back'.⁴⁴³ Stevan Jackson, who wrote sketches for SODS operas with his friend and colleague Richard Earland, explains his writing process and provides an example of one of his sketches:

I would have an idea and then kick it around with Richard Earland...A sketch had to be topical, relevant, impeccably performed, and have a great punchline, preferably one that takes the audience by surprise... Richard and I did a spoof on *The Great Escape* and [we] dressed and characterised as RAF Officers complete with pipe and spiffing whizzo language. In the sketch we discussed various options for escape such as tunnelling out, but the flaw in the plan was the weight of Lieutenant John Hurry's pending tray that would cause a collapse. An alternative was to construct a balloon and use the "hot air" rising from John Hurry's office to achieve lift off. That sketch caused one of those offended to get onto the stage and assault Richard, which got a big laugh.⁴⁴⁴

In this sketch Earland and Jackson are not above the object of their mockery nor are they looking to cause genuine offence to other members of their shipboard community. This idea that SODS operas are not intended to cause harm to others is supported by the fact that sometimes stooge members are planted in the audience to hurl the mocks and taunts towards the performers on stage. David Paul Reed recalls how his act, a song called 'We've got Swarfega and a blue paper role', involved a 'stooge member complaining that the act was rubbish' after which 'the act progressed with us slagging the person in the song'.⁴⁴⁵ SODS opera sketches are designed to provoke a laugh that will boost the morale and strengthen the bonds of friendship and camaraderie between everyone within the performance arena. Despite the clear divisions that are inherent in the ordering of the performance arena, SODS operas have a social levelling function.

SODS operas are playful subversions of the established shipboard order that offer participants the opportunity to imagine and perform new identities. Personnel stage alternative roles both male and female and offer grotesque images of the body in which 'the

⁴⁴² Bakhtin, pp.11-12.

⁴⁴³ Graham May RN, questionnaire, 16 August 2016.

⁴⁴⁴ Stevan K. Jackson RN (1973-2007), questionnaire, 27 June 2017

⁴⁴⁵ David Paul Reed RN, questionnaire, 12 May 2016.

symbolism of the high and low are reversed; dirt, gluttony and waste are celebrated'.⁴⁴⁶ One of the most vivid examples of the grotesque in a SODS opera is the representation of women's bodies on stage. A prominent feature of SODS opera is the chorus. Usually comprised, according to Brian de Courcy-Ireland, of 'a dozen sailors, physically rather robust and all dressed in ladies' underwear with big bras stuffed out with footballs inside,' the men 'pounded round on the stage singing some song which [was] quite unrepeatable'.⁴⁴⁷ Sketches are also specifically designed to include female parts. Peter Brierley, who performed in a SODS opera on HMS *Manchester* in July 1991, reveals that 'people actually went shopping for more risqué items required for sketches especially if it required ladies' underwear'.⁴⁴⁸ SODS opera always, Brierley claims, include at least one drag act.⁴⁴⁹ Similarly, Harvey reveals that men were committed to masquerading as women in SODS operas by stating 'there were never enough young seaman or stokers who could be made up into a credible imitation of a chorus girl'.⁴⁵⁰ Harvey recalls one act that incorporated a continuous stream of dancing girls that required strenuous sprinting on behalf of the performers.

As sure as rain on paint-ship morning, [the producer] would arrange a piece of scenery in the middle of the stage and make the poor little blighters dance out into the wings L., nip round behind the bit of Old Vienna and dance on again R. I never saw the manoeuvre successful from the producers point of view, but it never failed to have us all rolling in the aisles...It was probably the worst and most successful opening chorus in theatrical history.⁴⁵¹

In a similar way to the role of the pantomime dame, there was no attempt to produce an illusion of womanhood here. Although there may have been a thin fictional setting evoked by these sketches, there was no desire to produce a fictional world. Performers were looking to provoke an immediate reaction from their audience and to initiate interaction between the characters they represented on stage and their seated colleagues. The men in flamboyant frocks playing women in SODS operas was a collective act of daring in a hyper-masculine context. The new-self on stage was not perceived as a permanent change but one that could be shrugged off as a joke and later undone. It had the explicit purpose of bonding a community through the tolerance of transgressive mobility of identity in the liminal

⁴⁴⁶ Hetherington, p.29.

⁴⁴⁷ London, IWM, 12243, Brian de Courcy-Ireland.

⁴⁴⁸ Peter Brierley RN, questionnaire, 20 June 2016.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Harvey, p.85.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

theatrical act, made possible by ephemerality of place, space, and time. Far from questioning the boundaries of gender, these performances re-inscribed them by playfully transgressing them.

Another essential feature of SODS operas is the mocking of the CO. Custom dictates that the CO sits in the front row, takes some form of verbal punishment from the performers on stage and then offers a performance after encouragement from the audience. During *Coventry's* SODS opera, we see a host of different performers who encourage their CO to move from the front row and take part in the act on stage. The Chief Boatswain's mate, for example, performs magic tricks before asking the CO to lend him his watch for his routine. Upon removing the watch, a member of the audience shouts 'It's only a cheap timex!' to which the CO replies 'It's all I can afford'.⁴⁵² His reply is received with dismissive groans and other undecipherable jeers from the audience. After the magician reassures the CO that he can be trusted, the magician proceeds to smash the watch with a hammer. This magic act is then swiftly followed by a rendition of 'Climb, climb up sunshine mountain'. This song, which remains part of the repertoire of rugby songs today, contains lyrics that are accompanied by specific actions. The last line of the song is 'You and I, you and I, you and I'. At this moment, the lead performer must point to someone sitting or standing close to them. They must repeat the last line until the person they have chosen stands up and joins in. Typically, the song is repeated until everyone in the room is standing and singing. The first target for participation during *Coventry's* rendition of 'Climb, climb up sunshine mountain' was the CO. Reluctantly, the CO gets up on the stage, sings, and mimics the actions of the other performers. Immediately after, as the song fades away, we see shots of the ship arrive in port at Singapore and the CO's voice is heard over the ship's speakers. His words are as follows:

I have been very pleasantly and proudly satisfied with the behaviour of my ship's company. I can assure you that it is important to me. I think it is important to the Navy and important to her majesty the Queen and to the country because we are ambassadors of our country overseas. I thank you for what you have done and how you have played it and I ask you to continue in the same way.⁴⁵³

The juxtaposition of this event and the CO's words in the film indicate that the CO did not simply tolerate the mockery but also welcomed it and recognised the value of submitting to

⁴⁵² London, IWM, COI 1175 *All of One Company* (1980).

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*

the will of the crowd. This was not a mini mutiny, it was a temporary ‘celebration of life lived upside down or inside out’ by lowering all that was high.⁴⁵⁴ The temporary suspension of shipboard norms allowed COs to show their humour and personality, traits that would have enabled confidence in their leadership to grow within the company.



Figure 24 A scene in the dressing room on board a destroyer depot ship at Scapa Flow, 18 December 1942. IWM A 13430.

SODS operas and Crossing the Line ceremonies incorporate an exceptional set of mobilities. In a very literal sense these events take place on ships that are on the move. On their journeys performers and audiences cross national borders, hemispheres, time zones, and lines of longitude and latitude. During performances, the real world makes way for imaginary manifestations of mobility. Companies observe ritual crossings of ‘pollywogs’ in their transformation to ‘shellbacks’ and follow the journeys of a variety of fictional, mythical, and literary characters. To stage these mobilities, performers must communicate through bodily movements, dance, gestures and facial expressions in the performance arena. These theatrical forms also require company members to perform literal mobilities that are usually inaccessible to them.

SODS operas and Crossing the Line ceremonies produce marginal spaces that do not adhere to the normal social ordering of a ship. Within the heterotopic time and space of the

⁴⁵⁴ Bakhtin, p18-19.

performance participants confront and contest structures that restrict movement. The established social strata of the shipboard community is also informalized and, in some cases, reversed. Ratings and petty officers tend to perform roles that elevate their status. Conversely, senior ranking members assume positions that require them to be subservient to the commands and wishes of others. Consequently, these performances evoke a carnivalesque atmosphere that encourage other behaviours and patterns of interaction outside the norms of everyday behaviours, dress, and activity. Ratings and officers intermingle in ways that shipboard hierarchies usually prohibit, performers dress in costume as opposed to their obligatory uniform, and they perform social and gender roles that are outside of their everyday experience.

This all serves a purpose: The emancipation of rigid hierarchical structures within the performance arena allows tensions on a ship to be discharged. Personnel say and do things which, in normal circumstances, would have resulted in disciplinary action. Crucially, the liberation of norms is time-bound and conforms to a dramatic structure. While it may be argued that the primary objective of theatrical entertainment in these cases is to amuse and delight audiences, participation in entertainment mid-deployment acts like a pressure valve. The communal release of tensions through laughter and song encourages tighter bonds within the ship's company. Witnessing work colleagues prepared to make fools of themselves for the enjoyment of others generates a sense of pride and confidence in the ship. Audiences and performers see their juniors, seniors, and fellow messmates around them in a new light. Even once the status quo of ordinary shipboard life is restored and the SODS opera or Crossing the Line is long over, future interactions with company members are enhanced by these experiences and the respect and trust that has been earned in performance. It also gives COs a valuable insight into the morale of the company as uncensored views are aired openly and in full view of the company. For COs the theatrical forms became an effective means of maintaining control of their company. In the following chapter, I investigate how theatrical entertainment has been a vital strategic resource for naval leaders to preserve discipline. Rather than suspend or subvert hierarchical structures, the theatre spaces I examine allow COs to apply constraints needed to preserve order in a much more discreet way and over a much longer period.

Chapter Four: Theatre for Survival

In previous chapters, I have examined theatrical forms that have served shipboard companies in times of relative peace and safety. One might presume that theatrical entertainment by personnel has only ever taken place upon calm seas or by safe harbours when risk to life is minimal. This chapter challenges that easy narrative by spotlighting the construction of two theatres by the Royal Navy in formidable and life-threatening sites and times – Captain Robert Falcon Scott’s Royal Terror Theatre and the Grand Fleet’s Theatre-Ship. Throughout the winter of 1902, the company of *Discovery* performed in the Royal Terror Theatre upon the ice of McMurdo Sound, Antarctica - the world’s coldest, harshest, and most remote continent. For the duration of the First World War, at the isolated naval base at Scapa Flow, Scotland, the men of the Grand Fleet staged hundreds of theatrical concerts and revues on SS *Gourko* - the Royal Navy’s first theatre-ship. By examining the theatrical events held within the Royal Terror Theatre and conducting the first investigation into the commission of *Gourko* and its role as a theatre-ship in the First World War, I argue that theatres in the Royal Navy have made a hitherto underappreciated contribution to the sheer physical survival and mental endurance of naval personnel.

There is an abundance of scholarship that examines performance as a strategy for survival. Patrick Duggan’s and Lisa Peschel’s edited collection, *Performing (for) Survival*, brings together examples from a range of social, historical, and political contexts to demonstrate that performance has been employed as an effective ‘mechanism for survival’ by ‘societies in crisis’.⁴⁵⁵ There has also been a recent resurgence of studies that investigate creative practices by prisoners of war (POWs).⁴⁵⁶ The edited collection *Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War* by Gilly Carr and Harold Mytum maintains that creativity is a prerequisite for enduring captivity.⁴⁵⁷ They insist that creative expressions of patriotism, nationalism, and defiance through forms such music, theatre, embroidery, and photography among many others, ensured prisoners’ physical, emotional, and psychological survival.⁴⁵⁸ Contributing to this

⁴⁵⁵ Patrick Duggan and Lisa Peschel, *Performing (for) Survival* (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), p.1.

⁴⁵⁶ See Michael Dobson, *Shakespeare and Amateur Performance: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Lisa Peschel, ‘Nonsurvivor Testimony: Terezi Ghetto Theatre in the Archive and the Second Czech Cabaret’, *Theatre Survey*, 48:1 (2007), 143-67 and Moshe Fass, ‘Theatrical Activities in the Polish Ghettos During the Years 1939-1942’, *Jewish Social Studies*, 38:1 (1976), 54-72.

⁴⁵⁷ Gilly Carr and Harold Mytum, *Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War: Creativity behind Barbed Wire* (London: Routledge, 2012).

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

field, Victor Emeljanow's chapter, 'Palliative Pantomimes: Entertainments in Prisoner-of War Camps in Andrew Maunder's *British Theatre and the Great War 1914-1919*', argues that pantomime offered a gateway for prisoners' psychological survival.⁴⁵⁹ He claims that the production of pantomimes that invoked 'a world of tradition and certainty' gave POWs agency and a narrative framework through which to express feelings of loss and anxiety amidst their state of crippling powerlessness.⁴⁶⁰

There are obvious parallels between the context surrounding the theatrical practices of POWs and the shipboard companies of the Grand Fleet and *Discovery*. Scott's men and those of the Grand Fleet, like POWs, were service personnel who endured a state of temporary exile. They experienced a prolonged separation from loved ones and enforced close habitation with personnel in unfamiliar environments which, due to severe living and working conditions, were mentally and physically oppressive. The production of theatrical entertainment, as I reveal, was a self-motivated, self-organised practice, consciously and proactively sustained by *Discovery's* icebound company and members of the Grand Fleet for months and years respectively to keep their minds and bodies healthy and active. Consequently, scholarship that investigates the use of performance by POWs as a means to give expression to and combat feelings of separation and helplessness, has been a useful springboard in the framing of this research. However, this chapter seeks to push this body of research into a new direction by providing a counter-argument to the roots-up approach in the implementation of performance as a strategy for survival.

The aforementioned studies, notably Duggan's and Peschal's collection, stress the agency and in some cases dissent of individuals and groups who, in direct response to the challenges they face, devise their own performance-based and/or performative tactics for survival, be those practices to safeguard the lives and mental well-being of themselves or others or to protect the longevity of a social group or movement. In 'Swazzles of Subversion: Puppets Under Dictatorship', for example, Cariad Astles argues that puppetry has been repeatedly used by people under oppressive regimes in the 20th century as a form of political resistance.⁴⁶¹ Underground puppet shows in Czechoslovakia during the Nazi occupation, Astles contends, became a means through which performers expressed collective fears and

⁴⁵⁹ Victor Emeljanow, 'Palliative Pantomimes: Entertainments in Prisoner-of War Camps', in *British Theatre and the Great War 1914-1919*, ed. by Andrew Maunder (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), pp. 269 - 86.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid. p282.

⁴⁶¹ Cariad Astles, 'Swazzles of Subversion: Puppets Under Dictatorship', in *Performing (for) Survival*, ed. by Patrick Duggan and Lisa Peschel (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), pp.102-20.

anxieties, 'voiced anti-fascist sentiment and kept Czech popular culture alive'.⁴⁶² This chapter also signals the ways in which the performances staged on board *Gourko* and in the Royal Terror Theatre allowed personnel to voice their collective hopes and fears. However, the construction of the Royal Terror Theatre and the commission of *Gourko* were not grassroots initiatives concocted by shipboard companies as subversive tactics to challenge naval hegemony or as pragmatic, or indeed, radical solutions to the immediate hardships they faced. Rather, they were planned operations administered by naval authorities who sought to systematically foster the sustained production of theatricals. This chapter, therefore, asks not only what impact the practice of theatre-making had on participants in these sites but why did naval authorities repeatedly dedicate precious resources, financial or otherwise, to the construction and maintenance of purpose-built theatrical venues? By exploring the role of naval authorities in the conception, construction, and management of these two theatres, I seek to highlight a top-down, deeply conservative strategy behind the practice of theatre-making by naval personnel during the British National Antarctic Expedition (1901-1904) and the First World War. Using these case studies, I present the idea that whilst theatre was an effective tool that bolstered naval personnel physically and mentally, it was chiefly employed as a disciplining mechanism.

Discipline is a fundamental part of the Royal Navy's ethos. One of the 'Six Core Values', discipline derives not only from a sense of professional commitment to obey all lawful orders from one's superiors but also from a willingness to uphold this core value for the benefit of others and the success of the mission in spite of any hardships and dangers that an individual might face.⁴⁶³ A company's self-discipline, commitment to each other, and obedience to their CO is integral to the maintenance of a disciplined ship. To act in accordance with these values for long deployments when conditions are extreme, physically and mentally challenging, and/or potentially life-threatening, can become increasingly difficult for companies over time. Yet, it is in situations of crisis and extremity that absolute discipline becomes paramount to the success of a mission and ultimately the survival of naval personnel. 'In periods of extreme and imminent danger', Andrew St George reveals in the *Royal Navy Way of Leadership*, 'good discipline can counter fear; along with loyalty and trust of others, discipline can help hold together a team'.⁴⁶⁴ It is the responsibility of the Royal Navy's leaders in these acute circumstances to find ways of ensuring that discipline is understood implicitly

⁴⁶² Ibid, p.108.

⁴⁶³ Andrew St George, 'Discipline', in *Royal Navy Way of Leadership* (London: Preface, 2012), p.16.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

and enacted by the shipboard communities they command so that together they continue to function as an effective team under extreme pressure.

In the previous chapter, I demonstrate that theatrical entertainment at sea had the potential to suspend norms and provide a space for men to vent their frustrations. The production of Crossing the Line ceremonies and SODS operas, I suggest, were advantageous to COs who gained a valuable insight into the health and well-being of their men as expressions of anxiety, longing, and relief from boredom were aired for all to hear and see. Theatricals acted like a pressure valve and ultimately a method of control. Within the two theatrical spaces explored in this chapter, however, a more sophisticated set of social interactions occurred that cannot be reduced to a Bakhtinian subversion/containment binary. Alternatively, I argue that the sustained practice of theatre-making within the Royal Terror Theatre and *Gourko* functioned as a disciplining mechanism.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault identifies 'discipline' as a general formula of control that rests on two key interlocking principles – the docility and the utility of the body.⁴⁶⁵ To introduce the concept of the docile and useful body, Foucault begins by highlighting a historical shift between two ideals of the soldier. In the 17th century, a soldier was one that bore physical, bodily signs of his superior strength and courage. By the 18th century, the soldier was understood as an individual that could be 'manipulated, shaped and trained' so that his body could be made more skilful and effective.⁴⁶⁶ It is the later example, the soldier of the 'classical age', Foucault uses to exemplify what he means by the modern disciplined body because it was then, he argues, that the body was discovered as an 'object and target of power'.⁴⁶⁷ Foucault identifies three methods that were used to exert control over the body; exerting control over the individual as opposed to the group, ensuring efficiency of movement, and the implementation of constant supervision. These methods that were new in scale, object, and modality, Foucault asserts, 'made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body' and 'imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility'.⁴⁶⁸

Foucault's theory of the disciplined body can be used as a framework through which to identify the mechanisms of control that are at work on the bodies of naval personnel. Their service, which, for its duration and trajectory, is carefully supervised and places emphasis on

⁴⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

⁴⁶⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.136.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid. The 'classical age' is the name Foucault uses for the eighteenth-century period of the Enlightenment.

⁴⁶⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.137.

the productivity and improvement of the individual, renders the bodies of naval personnel obedient to command. The core of my argument is that the Royal Terror Theatre and *Gourko* enabled the pervasive disciplining mechanisms upon the bodies of naval personnel to be sustained. Applying Foucault's theories on discipline, I frame these spaces as 'functional sites'.⁴⁶⁹ Functional sites, Foucault explains 'were defined to correspond not only to the need to supervise, to break dangerous communication, but also to create a useful space'.⁴⁷⁰ I argue that these two theatres, which encouraged personnel to be productive in their leisure hours by speaking creatively to, from, and about their challenging circumstances, enabled them to overcome their mental and physical hardships. However, rather than suspend or subvert hierarchical structures, these theatres allowed those highest in command to apply constraints needed to maintain docile bodies among shipboard companies and preserve order in a much more discreet way.

It is the use of Foucault's theories on discipline in the reading of the Royal Terror Theatre and the theatrical practices within it that distinguishes this research from previous studies that explore *Discovery's* theatricals. Mike Pearson's article in *The Drama Review*, "'No Joke in Petticoats": British Polar Expeditions and their Theatrical Presentations' explores how the production of farces and minstrel shows that brought laughter and cheer to the dark winter months played a significant role in the men's psychological struggle for survival.⁴⁷¹ In his conclusion, Pearson highlights a historiographical bias that has potentially influenced the lack of scholarship about these events. Whilst many books have been written about the British National Antarctic Expedition (1901-1904), there is comparatively scarce mention of the theatre making that took place there in 1902. This may be due, Pearson hints, to the company's apparent and prolonged engagement in play which 'challenges the easy narrative of courage, endurance and heroic survival' that has long been associated with the heroic age of exploration.⁴⁷² Elizabeth Leane's article, 'Antarctic Theatricals: The Frozen Farce of Scott's First Expedition' in *Theatre Notebook* provides a literary analysis of the company's adaptation of *Ticket-of-Leave*, a farce by the dramatist and illustrator Watts Phillips that ran for two months at the Adelphi Theatre, London between 1862 and 1863.⁴⁷³ Leane identifies the parallels between the characters of the farce and *Discovery's* company to pinpoint

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid. p.143.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid. pp.143-144

⁴⁷¹ Mike Pearson, "'No Joke in Petticoats": British Polar Expeditions and Their Theatrical Presentations', *TDR: The Drama Review*, 48:1 (2004), 44-59.

⁴⁷² Ibid. p.57.

⁴⁷³ Elizabeth Leane 'Antarctic Theatricals: The Frozen Farce of Scott's First Expedition', *Theatre Notebook*, 57:3 (2003), 143-57.

possible motivations behind the choice of this play. Whereas Leane and Pearson primarily concentrate on the theatrical repertoire, focusing on aspects of the text and theatrical practice respectively, this chapter focuses on the management of the theatre space and the organisation of individuals within it. This has required a close reading of first-hand accounts, some for the first time, by members of the expedition to better understand the roles that individuals undertook in the production process. I have principally relied on the diaries of Albert Borlase Armitage, Michael Barne, Louis Charles Bernacchi, Charles Reginald Ford, Charles William Rawson Royds, and Robert Falcon Scott. I have also made use of programmes and photographs that I obtained from the Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI) and the British Library to further support my conclusions concerning the participation of company members as cast, crew, and audience member. By drawing from this varied source of archival materials, I hope to give a nuanced account of theatre as a survival strategy, which not only saved the company's sanity, but also preserved naval order and a disciplined naval life.

Whilst professional entertainment that took place in the Nissen huts on the islands of Flotta and Hoy is acknowledged by various Scapa Flow heritage websites and by authors of published works of Scapa Flow's wartime history, there is scarce mention of the theatre-making that took place on *Gourko* by naval personnel. The history of shipboard theatricals at Scapa Flow is, on a website page entitled 'Entertaining Orkney – Remembering Scotland at War', reduced to the following six words: 'Shows were staged in floating theatres'.⁴⁷⁴ This chapter, then, offers the first academic study of the vessel SS *Gourko* and its role as a theatre-ship during the First World War.

More broadly, very little academic scholarship has been conducted on naval theatricals during the First World War. During my initial, wider investigation of First World War theatre, I found that the rise of professional popular entertainment dominated narratives in academic literature. Rebecca D'Monte's book, *British Theatre and Performance 1900-1950*, for example, contains a sub-chapter on First World War theatre entitled 'Theatre and the Services'.⁴⁷⁵ The section's primary focus is on practices of professional performers who entertained troops abroad. It foregrounds the work of Seymour Hicks, Ellaine Teriss, Basil Dean, and Lena Ashwell who were highly influential figures in the establishment of troop entertainment in camps and hospitals in Europe and in the founding of organisations such as

⁴⁷⁴ 'Entertaining Orkney – Remembering Scotland at War', <www.rememberingscotlandatwar.org.uk/Accessible/Exhibition/.../Entertaining-Orkney> [4 September 2015].

⁴⁷⁵ Rebecca D'Monte, *British Theatre and Performance 1900-1950* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

ENSA and CEMA in the Second World War. A much more thorough investigation into the arts advocacy work of actress-manager Lena Ashwell has been undertaken by Margaret Leask who contributes a chapter to Andrew Maunder's collection, *British Theatre and the Great War 1914-1919*.⁴⁷⁶ In 'Lena Ashwell: Touring Concert Parties and Arts Advocacy, 1914 – 1919', Leask examines Ashwell's process in mobilising professional entertainers on 'a large scale to the fighting man'.⁴⁷⁷ Maunder's edited collection, however, does not include any research on theatrical entertainment by members of the navy during this period. Where research has been conducted on the function of performance in the services during the First World War, it either focuses primarily or exclusively on entertainment by the Army. This research includes books such as J.G Fuller's *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918*, Gordon Williams's *British Theatre in the Great War. A Revaluation*, Mary Luckhurst's *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama 1880-2005*, and Heinz Kosok's *The Theatre of War: The First World War in British and Irish Drama*.⁴⁷⁸ Hence, my research provides not only the first academic study on the First World War theatre-ship but begins to fill a very obvious gap – the lack of any study on the theatre-making practices of naval personnel of the Grand Fleet.

Given this dearth of scholarship on performance by the Grand Fleet, this chapter makes special use of unpublished documents and objects from formal archive holdings at the National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth and Hull Museum Collections. By analysing previously unused photographs, sketches, and diary entries from archival records, I argue how this theatre in the Orkneys was crucial in sustaining a disciplined Fleet that would endure the hardships of war.

⁴⁷⁶ Margaret Leask, 'Lena Ashwell: Touring Concert Parties and Arts Advocacy, 1914 – 1919', in *British Theatre and the Great War 1914-1919*, ed. by Andrew Maunder (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp.251-68.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p.266.

⁴⁷⁸ See J.G Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Gordon Williams, *British Theatre in the Great War. A Revaluation* (London: Continuum, 2005); Mary Luckhurst, *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama 1880-2005* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); and Heinz Kosok, *The Theatre of War: The First World War in British and Irish Drama* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

Captain Robert Falcon Scott's Royal Terror Theatre

Is it a place where any man, with any sense would go???

I pause to hear your answer now; with one accord it's No!!!⁴⁷⁹

The above rhyming couplet from an article entitled 'About Polar Explorers' in the May 1902 issue of the shipboard newspaper *The Blizzard*, was distributed among the 46-strong company of Captain Robert Falcon Scott's British National Antarctic Expedition (1901 – 1904).⁴⁸⁰ This poetic reflection on the life, attitude, and endeavours of polar explorers was written to encourage laughter and merriment from Scott's men housed in their winter quarters on Ross Island, McMurdo Sound. Yet, despite the humorous resonances, the sentiment expressed in this anonymous submission to *The Blizzard* had a basis in truth. Life confined to a Royal Navy vessel posed many challenges for a ship's company. As I have explored in previous chapters, a long deployment meant that naval personnel were away from home and loved ones for months and enforced close habitation with shipmates was a necessary reality of shipboard life. Scott's men were governed by a rigid and repetitive shipboard routine and an itinerary involving ship maintenance and scientific research was well established. The men who read the submission to *The Blizzard* that May, however, were facing these challenges in one of the world's deadliest environments. Scott and his men were "wintering over" in the Antarctic, enduring 24-hour darkness, sub-zero temperatures, and blizzards within the icebound wooden ship, *Discovery*.

Discovery's company were confined to their winter quarters on Ross Island for just over four months. During this time, they were pushed to their physical and mental limits. Living quarters were 'constantly dripping with moisture' according to Warrant Officer Charles Reginald Ford and the ship required 'constant work to keep the sides clear of moisture and ice'.⁴⁸¹ With no steam during winter to drive bilge pumps, the burden of removing the moisture from the ship was a manual task. The repetitive labour was onerous but

⁴⁷⁹ Cambridge, SPRI, *The Blizzard* (1902), p.5. in MS 1518/2; D, Michael Barne, Diary Volume II 16 April 1902 – 29 December 1902.

⁴⁸⁰ There were 49 crew members but Seaman Charles T. Bonner, RN joined at Cape Town and died 21 December 1901. Seaman George Thomas Vince, RN died 11 March 1902. George Frederick Arthur Mulock, Lieut., RN wintered for one season only when he arrived on *Morning* to relieve Ernest Shackleton.

⁴⁸¹ Charles Reginald Ford, *Antarctica: Leaves from a Diary Kept on board an Exploring Vessel* (Melbourne and London: Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd, 1908), p.20.

nonetheless vital for the health and safety of the men. Damp conditions meant that the company were perpetually vulnerable to frostbite, chilblains, neuralgia, and hypothermia among other illnesses. Numerous diary entries record the ill-health of Scott's men during the company's first Antarctic winter in 1902. First Lieutenant Charles William Rawson Royds, for example, regularly commented upon how 'rheumatics in various joints' troubled him throughout the winter.⁴⁸² Lieutenant Michael Barne recorded in his diary on Wednesday 6th August how his own face, which, 'had turned into one large frost bite...took an hour to thaw, under the awnings'.⁴⁸³ By December 1902, even Ernest Shackleton, a man who later became a veteran of Antarctic exploration and whose name is synonymous with courage and bravery, was sent home by Scott due to a developing heart and lung condition.⁴⁸⁴ As well as these physical conditions, the crew also had to endure mental trials and tribulations. "Wintering over" meant that polar explorers were not only at risk of life threatening physical illnesses, but they had to overcome the mental challenge of enduring the same desolate, unfamiliar, and disorientating wilderness for months, sometimes years. The men aboard *Discovery* last saw the sun on the 20th of April 1902.⁴⁸⁵ Until its reappearance on the 1st of September, 'every twenty-four hours', according to Ford, was 'alike in its darkness and sombre silence'.⁴⁸⁶ This alien, eerily silent landscape with no natural light was a mentally as well as physically oppressive environment in which to live and work. The company's isolation was further exacerbated by the fact that *Discovery* was completely cut off from the outside world. With no access to resources beyond those held on the ship, food supplies had to be rationed. The meal routine was reduced during the winter months from the usual four meals a day to three. Communication with loved ones at home was not possible and the men only had each other for company. Together, this small, tight-knit group of 11 commissioned officers and scientific staff, 10 warrant and petty officers, 2 marines, 3 civilians, 6 stokers and 14 seamen, existed in a state of temporary exile. Scott's company were also recovering from a loss. Only one

⁴⁸² Charles William Rawson Royds, *The Diary of Lieutenant Charles W R Royds RN: Expedition to the Antarctic, 1901-1904* (Braidwood, N.S.W.: T. Roger Royds, 2001), p.155.

⁴⁸³ SPRI, MS 1518/2; D.

⁴⁸⁴ See Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, 'Bravery [Valor]', in *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.213-228, within which, the editors use Ernest Shackleton as their primary case study. Ernest Shackleton returned home in the relief ship *Morning* after wintering for one season only.

⁴⁸⁵ In *The Voyage of Discovery* (2009) Captain Scott notes how 'This was the last time we saw of the sun till it returned to us more than four months later. Its actual date of disappearance was the 23rd, but after the 20th we had a return to what, at this time, appeared the normal weather conditions and for the three following days my daily journal opened with the same remark: 'Wind still blowing hard with an overcast sky'.' (p.204).

⁴⁸⁶ On Monday the 1st of September Scott wrote in his diary: 'So now the long winter, with its darkness and forced inactivity, was at an end' (2009, p.277).

month before their wintering period had begun, Seaman George Thomas Vince died when his sledging party were caught in a blizzard.⁴⁸⁷ On March 13th, 1902 Scott wrote;

We had now finally and sadly to resign ourselves to the loss of our shipmate, and the thought was grievous to all. From the moment when he joined us at the Cape of Good Hope, Vince had been popular with all; always obliging and always cheerful, I learnt that he had never shown these qualities more markedly than during the short sledge journey which brought him to his untimely end.⁴⁸⁸

From the outset of their wintering period, therefore, the crew were acutely aware of the dangers they faced. Enduring a winter of extreme physical and mental challenges for a four-month period meant survival, and, ultimately, a return to home and more familiar surroundings. Antarctica in winter was not an environment 'where any man,' as the rhyming couplet recommended, would choose to go. Nor was it a place one might expect to find The Royal Terror Theatre, a stage with seating and footlights upon which minstrel shows, concerts and melodramas were produced.⁴⁸⁹

This shipboard community, in fact, sought many creative outlets in response to the harsh environment they faced. Before the construction of the Royal Terror Theatre the men regularly engaged in leisure activities together, including the production of two shipboard newspapers entitled *The South Polar Times (SPT)* and *The Blizzard*. The editors of the respective papers accepted anonymous submissions of a variety of material including etchings, water colours, announcements, light hearted correspondence, articles, humorous advertisements and poems. An example of a submission can be found in Figure 25, an image by Surgeon Edward Adrian Wilson that depicts men using guide ropes to navigate their path from the shore hut to the ship. Although described as principally 'a wardroom effort' due to editing duties undertaken by officers, there were contributions from seaman to both papers.⁴⁹⁰ On July 25th 1902, Scott wrote that 'one of the pleasant points with regard to it is that the men contribute as well as the officers; in fact, some of the best and quite the most

⁴⁸⁷ George Thomas Vince fell down a slope that was subsequently named "Danger Slope". His fur-soled boots with very little grip caused him to slip, he fell over the cliffs and into the sea. His body was never recovered. Vince is commemorated by a wooden cross erected by *Discovery's* crew and is maintained today by the New Zealand and US bases in McMurdo Sound.

⁴⁸⁸ Captain Robert Falcon Scott, *The Voyage of Discovery* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2009), p.179.

⁴⁸⁹ The Royal Terror Theatre got its name from the dormant volcano, Mount Terror on Ross Island. Mount Terror was itself named by James Ross after his ship *HMS Terror*, when he commanded an expedition to Antarctica between 1840 and 1843.

⁴⁹⁰ Louis Charles Bernacchi, *Saga of the "Discovery"* (Hertfordshire: Rooster Books Ltd, 2013), p.48.

amusing articles are written by the occupants of the mess deck'.⁴⁹¹ Furthermore, Navigator and Second-in-Command Lieutenant Albert Borlase Armitage, noted how 'on most days during the first month of the winter the clicking of the typewriter could be heard in Shackleton's cabin as he busily 'set up' the paper; and frequently a shy and conscious-looking blue-jacket would enter the editor's sanctum to ask that worthy man's advice'.⁴⁹² Significantly, this example not only demonstrates a regular exchange between the officers and ratings during leisure activities but that ratings, although with some trepidation, were frequently breaching the spatial divides determined by the hierarchy of rank. The crew also indulged in other activities as a collective. Notably, a timetable of church services was established and when the weather permitted the men played moonlight football on the surrounding ice. The crew also had access to 800 gallons of rum and over 1800 pounds of tea and coffee. Even smoking, a usually prohibited pastime on board a wooden ship was sanctioned by Scott to allow for a more relaxed mess deck.⁴⁹³

With so many ways to pass the time together and boost group morale, Scott and his men still converted the shore hut, a prefabricated building 200 yards from the ship that served as a store and an emergency shelter, into Antarctica's first theatre. But why, in the dark and threatening days at winter harbour, did the men leave the relative safety of the ship and convert such a valuable resource into a space of entertainment? This course of action begs another question; why, when food and vital supplies were finite, the route to the shore hut, which, as Figure 25 reveals, could be treacherous, and the completion of scientific tasks was a priority, did Scott sanction the production of theatricals?

⁴⁹¹ Scott, p.251.

⁴⁹² Albert Borlase Armitage, *Two Years in the Antarctic: Being a Narrative of the British National Antarctic Expedition* (London: Edward Arnold Limited, 1905), p.88.

⁴⁹³ Scott, p.250.



Figure 25 'From the Hut to the Ship in a Blizzard'. Scene showing Discovery in Winter Quarters. August 1902 issue of the South Polar Times (SPT). By Edward A. Wilson.

To answer these questions, I will begin by highlighting the origins and historical context of these practices. Despite the apparent unlikelihood of a theatre being established in such a desolate location, The Royal Terror Theatre was not the first of its kind. Scott's men were continuing a theatrical tradition in the Polar Regions that had been firmly established in the early 19th century by crews of royal naval vessels wintering in the Arctic. Captain William Edward Parry's expeditions to discover a North-West passage (1819-1825) saw the opening of the North Georgia Theatre or Theatre Royal, as it was also known, on board the upper deck of HMS *Hecla*. Situated on the aptly named Winter Island to the North of Hudson Bay, Parry's crews provided theatrical entertainment on a fortnightly basis on both HMS *Hecla* and HMS *Fury* as they wintered together in 1821. In 1850, Captain Horatio Thomas Austin headed a squadron of four ships (HMS *Resolute*, HMS *Assistance* and merchant ships *Pioneer*

and *Intrepid*) in search of the lost Franklin expedition.⁴⁹⁴ Under the command of Captain Erasmus Ommanney and later, Captain Sir Edward Belcher, the crew on HMS *Assistance* established the Royal Arctic Theatre where pantomimes and harlequinades premiered. Meanwhile, the sister ships HMS *Resolute* and *Intrepid* staged masked balls and concerts below deck. The numerous accounts of these events in journals and diaries confirm that theatre-making on polar expeditions: the set-building, the script-writing, the production of playbills, and the crafting of theatrical spaces, was not unique to *Discovery*. According to Patrick O'Neill, due to Parry's success with theatricals in the Arctic, by the mid-19th century polar expeditions began to advertise for donations of theatrical equipment as a matter of procedure.⁴⁹⁵ In fact, it is reported that the actor-manager Charles Kean supposedly presented *Assistance* with two chests full of costumes before it sailed in 1850.⁴⁹⁶ Preparation of this kind had also been undertaken by *Discovery's* crew. According to Armitage, Scott employed Shackleton to source theatrical supplies before departure.⁴⁹⁷ Among the donations to the expedition, David E. Yelverton asserts, was a theatrical kit complete with make-up and costumes.⁴⁹⁸ The idea to produce theatricals in the Antarctic, therefore, was conceived long before *Discovery* had left England and one that was building upon a theatrical heritage that had been firmly established by Parry's and Austin's men in the 19th century. Due to the documentation and dissemination of theatrical events in publications like *Arctic Miscellanies*, Scott's men would have been acutely aware that their practices were, in part, motivated by a desire to contribute to the on-going maintenance and preservation of the navy's cultural heritage in the polar regions.⁴⁹⁹ Scott hints at this motivation in his diary when quoting from a review in the *SPT*, which describes with great pride how a performance at the Royal Terror Theatre on August 4th 1902 was "one of the most successful entertainments

⁴⁹⁴ Sir John Franklin was sent in 1845 by the Admiralty to link the northern discoveries of Parry with his own further south. His men and their ships the *Erebus* and the *Terror* were never seen in England again. Their disappearance led to what became known as the Franklin search. According to Savours, during the years between 1847 and 1859 forty expeditions, public, private and two American, sought the missing expedition from both the Atlantic and the Pacific ends of the North-West Passage (2002, p. 18).

⁴⁹⁵ Patrick O'Neill, 'Theatre in the North: Staging Practices of the British Navy in the Canadian Arctic', *Dalhousie Review*, 74:3 (1994), 356-384 (p. 358).

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.* O'Neill, who mentions these two chests of costumes apparently donated to the *Assistance* by Charles Kean does not attribute the anecdote. He claims that the costumes on the *Assistance* in 1850-51 were 'the finest employed in the Arctic'.

⁴⁹⁷ Armitage, p. 90.

⁴⁹⁸ David E Yelverton, *Antarctica Unveiled: Scott's First Expedition and the Quest for the Unknown Continent* (Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2000), p.149.

⁴⁹⁹ *Arctic Miscellanies* (1852), a selection of articles from the *Aurora Borealis* published in London on the expeditions return.

ever given within the Polar Circle” – and indeed they might with some truth add or anywhere else’.⁵⁰⁰

A direct link between the Royal Terror Theatre and the Arctic theatres that preceded it can also be traced in terms of personnel. Austin served on *Hecla* with Parry when it left London in 1824 on its third voyage to the Arctic region. It is likely that Austin witnessed Parry’s theatricals in the Arctic and took inspiration from his experience when establishing the Royal Arctic Theatre with the support of his captains. The idea that Austin’s men were following the geographic and theatrical path of Parry’s men was also expressed in the prologue spoken before *Charles the Second* was staged on *Resolute* in 1852. Dr Domville, playing the Hyperborean King, reminded the audience that Parry ‘near this spot eleven months did tarry;/Ice-bound as you are now’, drawing a parallel between the men in the audience and Parry in terms of both location and experience.⁵⁰¹ Furthermore, Clements Markham, the same midshipman who sailed on the *Assistance* under Austin’s command and who witnessed the performances at the Royal Arctic Theatre, was instrumental in the set up and financing of the *Discovery* expedition. Indeed, it was Markham who personally appointed Scott as leader of both the naval and scientific agendas of the expedition.⁵⁰² The advanced preparations for and evidence of a direct lineage between these predominantly oral practices in these two different sites and times demonstrates that Scott’s theatricals were not spontaneous events but of a planned strategy.

One compelling factor that supports this argument is that historically the commitment and enthusiasm of the CO proved to be imperative when staging theatricals in the Polar Regions. When COs did not show their support, companies, no matter how enthusiastic, had great difficulty mounting productions. When Captain Robert McClure of HMS *Investigator*, for example, found refuge from the gigantic ice floes off the west and north coasts of Banks Island in September 1851, McClure and his crew did not expect to be trapped by the frozen ice for three years. Facing starvation and ill health, McClure did little to improve morale and there is no evidence to suggest he encouraged the production of theatricals or other naval cultural traditions among his men. Once rescued and on board *Resolute*, however, McClure

⁵⁰⁰ Scott, p.261.

⁵⁰¹ George F. McDougall, *The Eventful Voyage of the H.M. Discovery Ship "Resolute" to the Arctic Regions in Search of Sir John Franklin* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1857), p.159.

⁵⁰² The British National Antarctic Expedition was the first great land-based expedition to Antarctica. Although an attempt at the Pole was among the objectives, geographical exploration and basic scientific experiments were to be the prime pursuits.

participated in *Resolute's* theatricals and performed the lawyer's part in J.M Morton's *The Two Bonnycastles* on 30 November 1853. It appears that it was not for lack of enthusiasm that *Investigator's* company chose not to stage theatricals. Rather, McClure's inability to mobilise his men to perform in such desperate circumstances prevented any theatrical event from taking place.

Scott had both experience of participating in theatricals at sea and encouraging others to perform. According to Ranulph Fiennes's biography of Captain Scott, Scott's family 'never travelled outside Devon and their one annual outing was to the Plymouth Theatre pantomime'.⁵⁰³ Having enjoyed the theatre since childhood, Scott later encouraged his sister Ettie to become a professional actress. As a young naval officer, he had taken part in many shipboard productions. According to Elizabeth Leane, Scott had taken part in a production of *Bombastes Furioso* and writing to his mother stated, 'I take the part of the principle lady...what do you think of that? A gorgeous golden wig with a complete dress made on board, stays, silk stockings, buckled shoes, sleeves with lace...splendid'.⁵⁰⁴ Even before reaching the southern hemisphere naval performance traditions were being upheld by Scott and his crew. Earlier in the *Discovery* expedition Scott sanctioned a Crossing the Line ceremony. In 'British Polar Expeditions and Their Theatrical Presentations', Pearson reveals how 'there were hints of things to come in the celebrations of crossing the equator on 31 August 1901, with horseplay in the presence of "Father Neptune" involving a huge pantomime razor'.⁵⁰⁵ Theatricals in the Antarctic, therefore, took place not only because Scott sanctioned their production but because it is likely he actively encouraged them.

Conversely, Captain Belcher during his Arctic expedition actively discouraged theatricals, admitting during the season of 1852-53 that: 'I did not enter into the spirit of or admire them much'.⁵⁰⁶ According to O'Neill, Belcher ordered the removal of theatrical supplies when the ship returned from its previous Arctic voyage under the command of Captain Ommanney. Despite this preventative action, the scenery was rescued and carried back to the Arctic by Captain Keller of *Resolute*. We learn from Francis Leopold McClintock, who witnessed productions on both ships, that the performances on board *Resolute* in 1852 were the same as those on *Assistance* during its voyage of 1850-51, and that 'the principal drop scenes are

⁵⁰³ Ranulph Fiennes, *Captain Scott* (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 2003), p.15.

⁵⁰⁴ Cited in Leane, p.156.

⁵⁰⁵ Pearson, p.47.

⁵⁰⁶ Edward Belcher, *The Last of the Arctic Voyages Being a Narrative of the Expedition in H.M.S. Assistance under the Command of Captain Sir Edward Belcher, C.B., in Search of Sir John Franklin, during the Years 1852-53-54*. Vol. 2. (London: L. Reeve, 1855), p.64.

the same'.⁵⁰⁷ Although Belcher was not in support of theatricals like Keller had been, Belcher recognised the importance of supporting and promoting leisure activities:

to kill time, I shall use my best endeavours to promote them. The mere act of learning their parts frequently inculcates some moral which may prove the keystone to the future development of abilities.⁵⁰⁸

Heather Davis-Fisch asserts that this evidence proves Belcher was in fact an advocate of theatricals and contradicts O'Neill's view that Belcher had 'anti-theatrical tendencies'.⁵⁰⁹ However, the 'parts' Belcher refers to are not the character roles in a theatrical production as Davis-Fisch insists. Instead, Belcher alluded to the musical parts of the on-board orchestra he created between 1852 and 1854. Belcher devoted his leisure time to picking musicians from the crews of the Arctic squadron to create, according to O'Neill, 'the finest orchestra ever to serve in the Arctic'.⁵¹⁰ This example not only reveals that COs had a vital role in the sanctioning of theatricals in the first instance, but they exercised influence and control on the form, repertoire, and casting of any given performance event.

Theatricals in the Arctic were not just approved activities, they were also governed. Entertainment committees, the majority of which comprised of officers only, managed the construction of sets, play selection, and the sourcing of costumes and props. Captain Erasmus Ommanney of *Assistance*, Captain Henry Keller of *Resolute* and Captain George Nares of *Alert* all established and served on entertainment committees, their role in the production of events often recognised in playbills. Planning a schedule of theatrical events and establishing an entertainment committee that could control and influence activities of men both on and off the stage, I will argue, was a strategy deliberately deployed by Scott with the help of his officers as a disciplining tactic.

Unsurprisingly, instilling naval discipline among a company of Royal Navy seaman, officers and reservists met, according to Scott, little resistance. Despite the fact that the expedition was jointly funded by the Royal Geographical Society and the Royal Society and therefore 'had no more stringent regulations to enforce discipline than those which are contained in the Merchant Shipping Act', the whole company, Scott noted approvingly, 'brought with them that sense of naval discipline which they displayed so noticeably throughout the

⁵⁰⁷ London, NMM, Francis Leopold McClintock, Logbook of HMS Intrepid, 1852-54, MCL/12 (23 Nov 1852).

⁵⁰⁸ Belcher, pp. 64–65.

⁵⁰⁹ O'Neill, 'Theatre in the North', p.358.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

voyage'.⁵¹¹ The men's work ethic, routine, and structures of authority mirrored that of a typical naval community at sea under the command of the Admiralty. 'The general ordering of matters', Scott continued,

were, as far as circumstances would permit, precisely such as are customary in His Majesty's ships. We lived exactly as though the ship and all on board had been under the Naval Discipline Act; and as everyone must have been aware that this pleasing state of affairs was a fiction, the men deserve as much as the officers, if not more, for the fact that it continued to be observed.⁵¹²

Maintaining this 'ordering of matters' during a hazardous Antarctic winter, however, proved challenging. A great fear during the wintering period especially was that 'cabin fever' might lead to conflict among a company of men trapped in the Antarctic ice. Scott had reportedly read Frederick Cook's account of the Belgian Antarctic expedition of 1897-99 entitled *Through the First Antarctic Night* before leaving England. Commenting upon the illness, low morale and mental trials and tribulations of the men trapped in the ship *Belgica* for over a year, Cook quotes one of his crew members 'We are in a mad house, and our humour points that way'.⁵¹³ There were a few minor cases of cabin fever on the *Discovery*. Bernacchi reported one incident on June 17th, 1902:

...one of the sailor's eccentric behaviour...suddenly gone wrong in the attic... He threatened to "break the heads" with other embellishments, of some of his messmates on the lower deck....he got up on awning-induced to come down & put to bed by Dr. K. ... a sleeping draught being administered ... it's possible that he managed to get at some intoxicating liquor.⁵¹⁴

Preventing madness as described by Cook and behaviour like Bernacchi reported was not only challenging because of the perilous environment but because of the company's range of seafaring experience. There were naval personnel like Petty Officer Edgar Evans who had extensive seafaring experience. Born in Glamorgan in 1876 to the mariner Charles Evans, Edgar Evans followed the family profession by joining the Royal Navy as an ordinary seaman at 15 years of age and training at Falmouth on HMS *Ganges*. Conversely, there were civilians

⁵¹¹ Scott, p.261.

⁵¹² Scott, p.261.

⁵¹³ Frederick A. Cook, *Through the First Antarctic Night 1898-1899* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.334.

⁵¹⁴ Louis Charles Bernacchi cited in Andrew Atkin, 'New Light on the British National Antarctic Expedition (Scott's Discovery Expedition) 1901-1904' (unpublished thesis, University of Canterbury, New Zealand, 2008), p.46-7.

like Edward Adrian Wilson. Appointed to serve as second surgeon, artist, and vertebrate zoologist on the expedition, Wilson had no previous seafaring experience before embarking *Discovery*. Furthermore, only three members of *Discovery* had previously obtained polar experience; Louis Charles Bernacchi, Albert Armitage and Dr Reginald Koettlitz. Bernacchi was the only crew member who had been to Antarctica before on the *Southern Cross* expedition (1898-1900). Armitage and Koettlitz had been on the *Jackson-Harmsworth* Arctic expedition (1894-1897). Scott had no polar experience and had been promoted to the rank of commander in June 1900 for the sole purpose of leading the expedition. At the age of 33 with, as Scott himself put it, 'no predilection for Polar exploration', he had to lead this relatively inexperienced naval community of scientists, officers, seamen, and civilians through one of the harshest winters on earth.⁵¹⁵

To prevent transgression, Scott needed to find a way of managing the activity of his company at all times. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault highlights the historical use of the timetable, the numerical organisation of time, as a model to exercise control.⁵¹⁶ This control tactic was already functioning on board *Discovery* during work hours. There was a well-established naval routine of inspections, repair responsibilities, and scientific observation duties. Whilst there were routine social gatherings such as Sunday Divine Service, recreational hours were not regulated to the same extent as on-duty hours. If Scott could find a way of organising leisure activities into a system of sequenced actions to constitute 'a totally useful time', he could micro-manage the bodies of those around him at work and at play.⁵¹⁷ According to his diary entry on 24th April, Royds 'made out some plans for the winter evenings, and submitted them to the Captain' for his approval.⁵¹⁸ By sanctioning plans for the construction of the Royal Terror Theatre and the events within it, Scott could compose a regular routine, a timetable of play that extended far beyond the performance time.

The construction of the auditorium alone kept the minds and the bodies of the men occupied for months. Like the previous theatres of the Arctic, Scott's men spent many hours gathering resources, improvising with materials, re-purposing objects, and crafting new ones to ensure the Royal Terror Theatre visually mimicked that of the contemporary professional theatre. Stacked potato cases and biscuit boxes formed a stage, chairs and benches from the ship's messes became seating, and a sail, painted with the image of Mount Erebus and the

⁵¹⁵ Scott, p.33.

⁵¹⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.149.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.* p.150.

⁵¹⁸ Royds, p.125.

Discovery in the foreground, became a drop scene.⁵¹⁹ A curtain was also rigged using *Discovery's* rope and a row of footlights was added to line the edge of the stage. As explored in Chapter One, this theatrical space would have served as a powerful symbol of *Discovery's* shipboard community. The drop scene visually represented their literal journey to the Antarctic and the auditorium that was made from re-purposed objects from around the ship signified a coming together of the company in the making of this space. This crafting process continued long after the stage and auditorium was built. A regular routine of theatrical work could be sustained throughout the winter as objects were changed or added to according to the theatrical event. A new drop scene, for example, had been painted for the Dishcover Minstrel Troupe's performance in August. A minstrel's head and two puns in large letters on either side: "Why was the Crater (H)ill?" "Because it saw the Castle Point" and "Why did Hut Point?" "Because it saw a ski slope round the corner" were added. This on-going crafting process also entailed the writing of scripts, the printing of programmes (see Figure 28) and the creation of costumes as illustrated in Figures 29 and 30.

An entire winter season of farces, songs, and minstrel shows also helped to, 'establish rhythms, impose particular occupations [and] regulate the cycles of repetition'.⁵²⁰ The cyclical process of production established occupations from writing to casting, to rehearsing during recreational hours. Other rhythms in operation included the loading in and striking of sets. Even the theatrical events themselves, through the repetition of familiar theatrical conventions such as the interval and the curtain call, played a role in marking the passing of time. These cycles of repetition were vital during Antarctic winter when daily cycles otherwise marked by sunset and sunrise were absent due to perpetual darkness. On the evenings of productions, the audience also established a routine whereby they changed into formal clothes in keeping with the extended play acting that surrounded the performance. The audience walked the 200 yards en masse from the ship to the hut and they were handed printed programmes on arrival. The company were then allocated areas of the auditorium according to rank. 'In front', Scott observed 'stands a row of chairs for the officers, and behind several rows of benches for the men; the apartment is lighted by a large oil lamp, and when all are seated one must own to having seen theatricals under far less realistic working conditions'.⁵²¹ The theatrical space, therefore, also played a crucial role in reinforcing

⁵¹⁹ Mount Erebus, an active volcano on Ross Island, was named after Ross's second expeditionary ship, HMS Erebus

⁵²⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.149.

⁵²¹ Scott, p.260.

patterns of behaviour that conformed to the normal social hierarchy of this tight-knit naval community.



Figure 26 Midwinter Day dinner on the mess deck. 1902. Published in 'An Antarctic Evening on board the Discovery in Dundee'. 5 May 2001.

The performances also became central markers of time for the company because they were deliberately designed to coincide with various important days and times of the year. The Dishcover Minstrel Troupe performance, for example, was arranged for the 6th August to mark the one-year anniversary of their departure from England. This idea of celebrating various days through performance was established at the very beginning of the season. The opening of the Royal Terror Theatre took place during the Mid-Winter Festival between the 23rd and 25th June. When their adaptation of Watts Phillips's *Ticket of Leave* was performed, the crew were immersed in a three-day festival of events. The farce was preceded by a concert of songs and followed by feasting, drinking and dancing (see Figure 26). Our great winter festival' Bernacchi reveals,

was on midwinter day, and like old-time pagans we celebrated with feasting and music the commencement of the return journey of the sun. It was two months since

its red disc had disappeared below the northern horizon, and never was pagan jubilation in honour of the returning life-giver more heartfelt than ours.⁵²²

In the marking of days, which, to men enduring an Antarctic winter, were indistinguishable, Scott's theatricals assisted the maintenance of a cyclical order of time in the minds of *Discovery's* men. They symbolised time's passing, the eventual end of Antarctic winter, and most significantly, the company's survival.



*Figure 27 The Discovery behind the Royal Terror Theatre.
Reproduced by permission of the SPRI.*

As a separate stand-alone building, The Royal Terror Theatre, unlike other examples I have explored in this thesis, removed the company from the confines of their ship. Crucially, by rehearsing and performing in this space, the ratings of *Discovery* were made visible to the officers in their recreational hours and vice versa. Due to the allocation of separate messes for officers and ratings cross-rank social interaction during leisure time was not the norm. In his diary, Scott reflected on both the pros and cons of these mess arrangements:

That officers and men should mess apart, and that the officers should have the privacy of their cabins for their work is all very right and proper, and marks the distinction which is in the best interests of discipline; but in other respects it is an

⁵²² Bernacchi, p.55.

advantage on such an expedition as ours that all should have the same hardships, and, as far as possible, live the same lives.⁵²³

Scott revealed in this written reflection how normal forms of naval discipline were 'right and proper' for conventional shipboard circumstances. Yet, in the environment that he was operating in, Scott also saw an advantage to applying a different strategy. Exceptional circumstances required exceptional methods to maintain discipline. The Royal Terror Theatre fulfilled its functional and aesthetic purposes as a theatre, but it also meant that throughout the winter, officers and ratings alike were cooperating with one another, rehearsing together, and finding creative solutions to problems in the production of the theatrical event. The skills and qualities displayed in these exchanges - motivation, commitment, problem solving, and cooperation were later to prove vital to sledging expeditions in the spring. 'When we come to the hard sledging work that is before us, Scott observed during winter, 'officers and men must live and work alike in every respect'.⁵²⁴ Arguably, the Royal Terror Theatre provided a space where Scott's company could rehearse these beneficial behaviours together over an extended period.

To produce docile bodies Foucault also introduces the concept of hierarchical observation, the idea of controlling people's actions by observing them. Observation by a person or people at the top of the hierarchical chain induces 'a state of consciousness and permanent visibility' that Foucault argues assures 'the automatic functioning of power'.⁵²⁵ In order for Scott to induce this state of consciousness and permanent visibility, an entertainment committee of officers was established to govern activities. Hence, the men were subject to official supervision at every stage of production. The entertainment committee was chaired by Barne who acted as theatre manager. According to his journal, we know that he was present in rehearsals 'working the curtain and prompting' in the two weeks leading up to and during the opening night of the Royal Terror Theatre.⁵²⁶ It is also likely that Barne was made responsible for adapting the scripts because, according to Scott, Barne 'had a great gift for writing and localizing plays'.⁵²⁷ As Royds was the only crew member on board 'musically sufficient' to play the pianola, he 'got the names of men singing' for performances and directed rehearsals.⁵²⁸ 'Towards the end of the winter', Scott writes, Royds 'succeeded in

⁵²³ Scott, p.211

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.149.

⁵²⁶ SPRI, MS 1518/2; D.

⁵²⁷ Scott, p.259.

⁵²⁸ Royds, p.141.

getting them together and in rehearsing their various parts through many a cold hour spent in the freezing theatre'.⁵²⁹ Although Scott was not on the entertainment committee, the hierarchies of shipboard authority were replicated and legitimised in the production of the theatrical event. The men's voices and bodies were directed at all times by officers. Through this supervision, direction and management of men by the committee, Scott could maintain hierarchical observation, gaining maximum control of his men with minimum input.

The Royal Terror also had a transforming effect on the space around the men. Theatricals provided an abundance of colour and music to their desolate, ice-bound, silent surrounds. The Antarctic, Ford remarked, was an 'unreal place shrouded in snow' where the 'silence transcends the silence of the most silent sea. There is not the cry of a bird, not the lap of a wave, not the murmur of the swell, nothing but a deathlike and fathomless quiet. It is almost overwhelming'.⁵³⁰ Troubled by his temporary exile, Bernacchi described himself in a letter to his brother as a 'kind of Polar Ulysees' who longed to return home to familiar surroundings, 'find a Penelope, and settle down in London'.⁵³¹ By creating a theatrical space both literally and imaginatively, the prolonged theatrical intervention transformed the dangerous, oppressively silent foreign territory of the Antarctic into a vibrant space of friendship, noise, and frivolity.

Hand crafted costumes and decorations provided an array of shapes and colours to winter harbour. In August 1902, for example, Scott noted in his diary how suits of 'grotesque form and vivid colour', shirt fronts and large collars from paper, enormous buttons and boots, and wigs from frayed rope had been prepared for the opening performance of the Dishcover Minstrel Troupe. "'Bones" and "Skins", Scott remarked, 'had even gone so far as to provide themselves with movable top-knots which could be worked at effective moments by pulling the string below'.⁵³² During the festival, within which *Ticket of Leave* was performed, the wardroom and mess-deck were also decorated with ice carvings illuminated from the inside with candles, 'pictures, fans and coloured paper'.⁵³³ Moreover, the playbills, comical drawings and satirical writings in the shipboard newspapers continued to provide colourful, tangible, material objects that the men could enjoy long after the performance event.

⁵²⁹ Scott, p.262.

⁵³⁰ Ford, *Antarctica*, p23-24.

⁵³¹ Bernacchi cited in Atkin, p.49.

⁵³² Scott, p.262.

⁵³³ Royds, p.142.



*Figure 28 The “Dishcover
Minstrel Troupe”
Programme, 6 August
1902. Reproduced by
permission of the SPRI.*

The adaptation of songs and scripts for comical purposes played a key role in creating a space of laughter, cheers, and friendship during the dark and freezing winter months. Phillip’s original version of *Ticket of Leave* that ran for a two-month London season over the winter of 1862-3 at the Adelphi Theatre, did not feature a female character. To the delight of the audience, the version performed at the Royal Terror Theatre introduced a maidservant called Mary Ann, the hero’s long-lost love. This certainly would have stuck a chord with the audience who had not seen women for six months. Seeing marine Gilbert Scott and civilian Horace C. Buckridge on the stage cross-dressing caused great laughter among the company. ‘There is no need for the actors to speak’ remarked Scott ‘their appearance is quite enough to secure the applause of the audience; and when the representatives of the lady parts step on to the stage it is useless for them to attempt speech for several minutes, the audience is

hugely delighted'.⁵³⁴ The effect of the audience's affirmation on the performers should not be underestimated here. To receive intermittent praise for their comedic performances would have been a huge morale boost. Another comical adaptation can be found during the concert of songs that preceded the performance of *Ticket of Leave*. Page, a stoker, parodied the contemporary music-hall favourite "Oh Mr Porter" to provide a humorous summation of his exchanges with his colleague Mr Skelton. According to Barne;

the ruse went something like this "Oh Mr Skelton, what shall I do? You've sent me to the boiler when I'd rather be in the flue. Send me in the bilges as quickly as you can, Oh Mr Skelton you're a very nice young man." After this tune dissolved in to the tune of the hymn Holy! Holy!! Holy!!! And wound up with Amen. The most extraordinary song I ever heard.⁵³⁵

Scripting mocking jibes at members of the company was a feature of songs that continued throughout the winter. In *Pilgrims on Ice*, Baughman identifies how during the Dishcover Minstrel Troupe performance 'Koetlitz was chided for his thirst for blood while Armitage's penchant for staying indoors was satirised'.⁵³⁶ These examples demonstrate a company who were resolutely determined to be flippant and funny in the face of their adversity. The use of puns, parody, farce, and cross-dressing enabled them to poke fun and laugh at their exile together, enhancing their ability to cope with their situation. Through the process of performance, feelings of intense longing for home and for various places could be channelled in a productive and positive way. The 'Polar Ulysees', as described by Bernacchi, could return home and surround himself in the familiar sights and sounds of the British theatre.

⁵³⁴ Scott, p.261.

⁵³⁵ SPRI, MS 1518/2; D.

⁵³⁶ T.H. Baughman, *Pilgrims on the Ice: Robert Falcon Scott's First Antarctic Expedition* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), p.144.



Figure 29 The cast of Ticket of Leave. 25 June 1902. Reproduced by permission of the SPRI.

By replicating the repertoire of the Edwardian British stage in the Antarctic, the men were also assimilating an imperial perspective generated by performers and audiences at home. The performance of the Dishcover Minstrel Troupe was a clear reflection, as Pearson identifies, of the 'manifestations of minstrelsy particularly popular in British seaside towns'.⁵³⁷ The men blackened their faces, crafted colourful striped costumes, and printed programmes with two minstrel heads on the cover, both in high collars and bow ties. The performance included renditions of songs popularised by Christy's Minstrel's, the well-known minstrel troupe of the mid to late 19th century, including *I Long for my Home in Kentuck*:

I long, how I long for my home in Kentuck,
Wid de field, whar I la-bor'd, so green,
Whar de possum, de coon, and de juicy wild duck,
And de 'bacco so prime I hab seen.
Dar I've fish'd from de banks ob de Masella creek,
And oft in de shade of de night

⁵³⁷ Pearson, p.55.

Have I watch'd wid de gun, nigh de old salt lick,
For de game as it come to my sight.
Dar is my old cabin home, Dar is my sister ans brother,
Dar am my wife Joy of my life
My child, and de grave ob my mother.

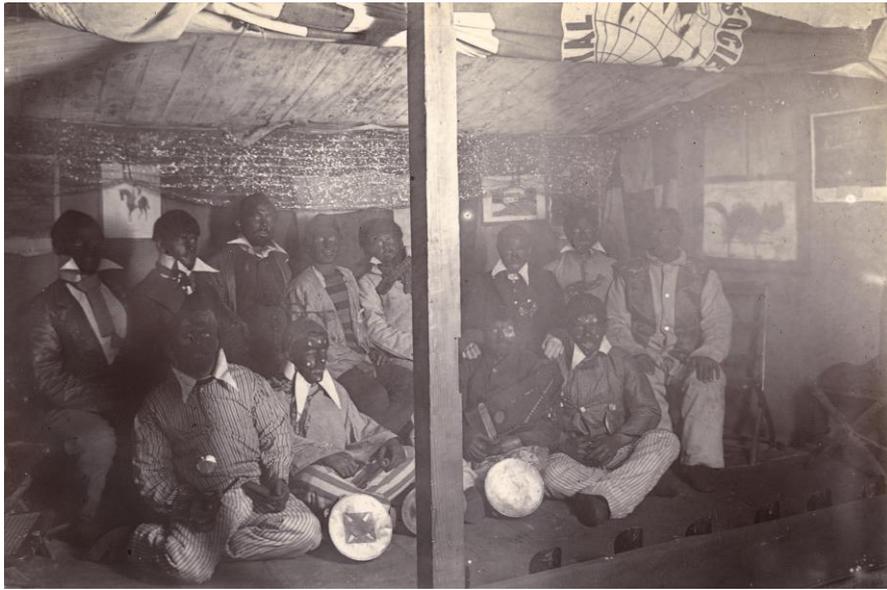
In the midst of an Antarctic winter, a homogenously white company of English, Welsh, and Irish men did not sing of their own homes. They sang of the 'banks of Masella creek' and an 'old cabin home' in Kentuck in an attempt to imitate a distant theatrical repertoire that required black face performers who had, in the words of Barne and Scott, the ability to tell jokes in "nigger language" and deliver songs in "nigger fashion".⁵³⁸ As the London theatrical repertoire travelled to Antarctica so too did its attitudes of contemporaneous racial prejudice. This was a performance of Empire, one that satisfied the company's notions of British global superiority and control as the performance crossed geographical and racial boundaries.

In his examination of the term 'imperial theatricals', Marty Gould reveals that London theatrical venues brought the imperial centre and periphery together. 'Imperial theatrics' he argues 'animated the empire and publicly disseminated its operational ideologies of racial difference, political domination, military conquest, cultural interventionism, and commercial opportunism' to home-bound Victorian audiences who would not visit the colonies or military posts.⁵³⁹ At the Royal Terror Theatre, however, the men observed theatrical animations of empire on the periphery, not at the imperial centre.⁵⁴⁰ By repeating 'imperial theatrics' at the very edge of Empire these performance practices were not just assimilating imperial attitudes but encoding and legitimating a widening of the imperial centre.

⁵³⁸ Scott, p.262.

⁵³⁹ Marty Gould, *Nineteenth-century Theatre and the Imperial Encounter* (London Routledge, 2011), p.15.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.



*Figure 30 The Dishcover Minstrel Troupe. 6 August 1902.
Reproduced by permission of the SPRI.*

By understanding these events as encoding a widening of the imperial centre, the far-reaching symbolic value of this company's words and deeds is brought into view. The men may have not been battling enemy ships or strategising against shore batteries but their survival at the edges of Empire was a matter of national pride. Second Secretary John Barrow, who ran the Admiralty from 1804-1845, stated that if Britain failed to discover the Northwest passage and 'the completion of the passage be left to be performed by some other power, England by her neglect of it[...]would be laughed at by all the world for having hesitated to cross the threshold'.⁵⁴¹ Subsequently, dozens of ships in the 19th and early 20th centuries were cheered out of English harbours on a quest to map uncharted territories, make scientific discoveries and plant flags in the name of British 'maritime enterprise'.⁵⁴² As the explorers mapped, researched, and discovered, their characters, as Janice Cavell reveals, were transformed into 'men whose deeds and words exemplified the British national character'.⁵⁴³ In *Gender On Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions*, Lisa Bloom develops this argument further by asserting that polar exploration was designed as a 'testing

⁵⁴¹ Cited in E.C. Coleman, *The Royal Navy and Polar Exploration. Vol 2: From Franklin to Scott* (Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2007), p.9.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Janice Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative: Arctic Exploration in British Print Culture, 1818-1860* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p.19.

ground to keep alive displays of moral courage and physical bravery'.⁵⁴⁴ This agenda was a key part of Markham's intentions for the *Discovery* expedition. In a letter to Scott he stated that as well as advancing 'the maritime enterprise' the expedition was to afford men the opportunity 'to perform deeds of derring doe'.⁵⁴⁵ When winter slowed down the advancement of their scientific and geographic research, The Royal Terror Theatre became that testing ground where endurance, skill, and courage could be exemplified. Constructing a stage with limited resources in snow drifts, adapting comical scripts in spite of the horrors they faced, and performing 'lightly clad' in the freezing temperatures of Antarctic winter, displayed a resilience to and a mastery of their environment. The theatre enabled Scott to keep Markham's agenda of men performing 'deeds of derring doe' alive in another sphere of activity.

So, arguably, Scott's sanctioning of these theatricals played a key role in the survival of these men and the survival of Markham's ambition. The Royal Terror Theatre had a disciplining effect on the men over the winter months that ensured this inexperienced company's commitment to Scott's leadership did not waver. Yet, according to some, Scott's legacy as a leader and his use of more subtle and creative tactics as part of a disciplining strategy have been overshadowed by the success of his predecessors in historical narratives of naval leadership. In the first paragraph of the introduction to *Royal Navy: Way of Leadership*, for example, Andrew St George quotes Edmund Hilary who ranks Antarctic leaders in the following way: 'For fast and light, Amundsen; for scientific research, Scott; but, when things go badly wrong, for hope, Shackleton'.⁵⁴⁶ Despite the lack of scholarship that examines the strategic use of theatricals in disciplining the navy, its use by COs in times of crisis is not confined to this one case study or solely polar exploration. The Admiralty continued to use theatre as a strategy for survival in the 20th century. Separated from society, away from home comforts, and with limited communication with loved ones, sailors of the Grand Fleet during the First World War were also faced with enduring a state of temporary exile for years with very little to do off-duty. The Admiralty's response to this set of circumstances was to deploy a purpose-built theatrical venue to serve as part of the mechanisms deployed to enable the Fleet's survival.

⁵⁴⁴ Lisa Bloom, *Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p.120

⁵⁴⁵ C. R. Markham, *Antarctic Obsession: A Personal Narrative of the Origins of the British National Antarctic Expedition 1901-1904* (Norfolk: Erskine Press, 1986), p.2.

⁵⁴⁶ St George, *Royal Navy*, p.1.

The Grand Fleet's "Theatre Ship"

At the outbreak of the First World War, the Admiralty assembled the largest naval fleet Britain had ever created. Known as the Grand Fleet, it comprised of up to forty at any one time of the Royal Navy's capital ships.⁵⁴⁷ To house such a formidable force, the Admiralty chose Scapa Flow, a large body of water situated between the Mainland and South Isles of the Orkney Islands, Scotland, as its base. The furthest point in the British Isles from the German High Seas Fleet, Scapa Flow was of vital strategic importance to the Admiralty. From Scapa Flow the Grand Fleet patrolled the North Sea, blockaded goods to Germany and engaged in battle with the German Fleet. Consequently, Scapa Flow hosted thousands of naval, military, and civilian staff who lived and worked in and around the base from August 1914, when the fleet was formed, until April 1919 when it was disbanded.

In the first year of war, Scapa Flow was a hive of activity. Little had been done before the start of the First World War in the way of securing the base and much time was spent building coastal defences. Sailors sank old merchant ships to protect eastern and western channels, suspended anti-submarine nets between long lines of drifters, laid controlled minefields, and mounted various guns on coastal positions. Once the early work of organisation was over, life at Scapa Flow for the thousands of sailors became incredibly tedious. The German Fleet refused to engage for most of the war with only two naval engagements, the Battle of Dogger Bank (24th January 1915) and the Battle of Jutland (31st May 1916 - 1st June 1916), commencing between the two opposing Fleets. The first years of waiting for naval action coupled with the monotonous routine of shipboard life created, as Lieutenant Oswald Frewen observed, a 'War-weary, Scapa-weary' attitude among the fleet.⁵⁴⁸ As the base grew to hundreds of vessels of all types including battleships, destroyers, submarines, hospital ships, store and ammunition ships, the men's war weariness became even more pronounced. 'The fact is that', wrote Frewen in his diary, 'I am "weary, in the uttermost part of the Sea" ...weary of seeing the same old damned agony of grey grey grey, grey sky, grey sea, grey ships.'⁵⁴⁹ The isolated and barren landscape of the Orkney islands, which, in the first years of the war provided little in the way of distraction, only escalated widespread apathy

⁵⁴⁷ Capital ship is a large warship such as a battleship or aircraft carrier.

⁵⁴⁸ Private Collection, Mrs Lena Frewen, Diaries and Correspondents of Captain Oswald M. Frewen (1903-57).

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

and frustration among the fleet. In his post-war reflections, C.W. Burrows, the cashier of the dockyard section of the base, describes the islands thus:

Certainly, even the most enthusiastic Orcadian has to admit that the islands have few natural features to commend them, and even less artificial amenities of civilisation: country practically bare of trees and vegetation, days in winter when the sun hardly seems to rise at all, and a climate that seems to hold the record for rainfall, storms and unreliability.⁵⁵⁰

The unrelentingly harsh weather conditions and the lack of opportunities for men to relieve the tedium of their agonising confinement in the stuffy, crowded environment of their ships was causing a crisis in morale. The Admiralty could not afford the Fleet to lose operational effectiveness. This was a perilous time. Whilst in retrospect the experience of naval action is described by Burrows as mere 'spasms of excitement' in contrast to the 'somewhat monotonous routine' of life at the base, the threat of German U-boats and mines to the lives of the men was alarmingly real and ever-present.⁵⁵¹ Four months into the war, the German U-boat, *U-18*, reached Hoxa Sound, a large sea inlet between South Ronaldsay and Flotta and proceeded through the boom defence net with little difficulty until, damages to the hull forced the CO to surface and surrender. The Battle of Jutland ensured the German High Seas Fleet never ventured out in force again but the loss of 14 British ships was hard felt by the Fleet. Losses were also experienced in Scapa Flow. On the 5th June 1916, HMS *Hampshire* struck mines which had been laid by *U-75* off Marwick Head. Only 12 of the 610 company members survived. The fleet could be called to action to handle an oncoming threat or crisis at any time. To ensure the operational effectiveness and ultimately the survival of the men, the Admiralty needed to maintain a disciplined Fleet and one that was not only committed to the tasks at hand but to the overall intent of command.

Just as Captain Scott had done for his crew on *Discovery*, the Admiralty anticipated the effect the environment of Scapa Flow would have on the men and put a strategy in place within a month of the war's announcement. On the 7th August 1914, two Russian steamships were purchased and attached as auxiliaries to the Grand Fleet – SS *Borodino* and SS *Gourko*. On the 15th October 1914, Capt. C. F. Lambert, Fourth Sea Lord requested Mr. Warwick Brookes, Managing Director of the Junior Army Navy Stores Limited to supply the ships. *Borodino* was

⁵⁵⁰ C.W. Burrows, *Scapa and a Camera: Pictorial Impressions of Five Years Spent at the Grand Fleet Base* (London: Country Life Ltd, 1921), p.4.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.15.

'fitted with a Grocery and Provision Shop, a Laundry, and also a Hairdressing Saloon'.⁵⁵² SS *Gourko* also acted as an amenities ship supplying frozen meat to the Fleet. However, on the bequest of the Admiralty, 'the space above [*Gourko's*] cold storage holds and immediately below the main deck forward', remarks Captain Kenneth Swan of HMS *Cyclops* in his memoir,

was cleared of all lumber; planks were placed athwartships for seats, and a stage, fair-sized, though rather lacking in head room, was erected at one end, and so the place was converted into quite a decent theatre.⁵⁵³

For the duration of its commission in the Royal Navy, *Gourko* was a permanent, purpose-built theatrical venue and it became informally and affectionately known by the Fleet as simply "The Theatre Ship". According to Admiral Chalmers every effort had been made to create a space equal to that of London theatres. 'Costumes and wigs were hired from London', Chalmers boasts, 'lighting effects' were 'devised by the ships torpedo party' and 'an augmented orchestra from the Royal Marines band was ensconced in the orchestra pit'.⁵⁵⁴ Unlike Nissen huts or canteens on shore bases or aircraft hangars and decks of ships that were temporarily converted into stages for the purpose of a one-off theatrical event, *Gourko* was deliberately and specifically designed by the Admiralty to encourage a sustained practice of theatre-making and presentation throughout the war. When *Gourko* left Hull for Scapa Flow on the 13th of August 1914, it would return five years later to be honoured by the Admiralty on the 24th July 1919 for its service as a theatre ship. A 'News in Brief' item in *The Times* documents that Captain Lo Hunt Ward of Immingham presented a silver shield 'on behalf of the officers and men' of the Grand Fleet 'to mark their appreciation of [*Gourko's*] service as a theatre ship at Scapa Flow during the war'.⁵⁵⁵ Two images of the presentation depicting Captain S.R. Owen receiving the shield on behalf of *Gourko's* officers and men were also published in the *Hull Daily Mail* the following day.⁵⁵⁶ Today the words 'theatre ship' are formally attributed to *Gourko* in Eric Partridge's *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵² William J. Allen, *SS Borodino: A Short Account of the Work of the Junior Army and Navy Stores with H.M. Grand Fleet December 1914 – February 1919* (London: The Fleetway Press, 1924), p.5.

⁵⁵³ NMRN, RNM 2006.68/2, p.118.

⁵⁵⁴ Rear-Admiral W.S. Chalmers, *The Life and Letters of David Beatty* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1951) p.306.

⁵⁵⁵ 'News in Brief', *The Times*, 25 July 1919, p.9.

⁵⁵⁶ 'Presentation on SS *Gourko*', *Hull Daily Mail*, 25 July 1919, p.3.

⁵⁵⁷ Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*. ed. Paul Beale (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), p.1217.



Figure 31 SS Gourko. Image produced by Tim Wolter.

There were other forms of recreation ashore, notably sports that both men and officers engaged in to keep physically and mentally fit. Whilst enthusiasm for recreational activities was high among the fleet, the lack of sports facilities on land and the unreliability of the weather posed significant challenges to regular participation. Swan records that ‘there were no less than nine football teams’ on *Cyclops* but ‘the difficulty was to get football grounds’.⁵⁵⁸ Once grounds had been found on Longhope and Lyness, a football league was formed amongst the various ships of the base but water-logged pitches and poor visibility often halted play. Similarly, despite the construction of two ash and gravel tennis courts at the shore batteries, tennis, reveals Burrows, ‘was hardly a possible game, owing to the inclement weather and the continual winds’.⁵⁵⁹ Athletic and boxing competitions were incredibly popular. According to Burrows, the Grand Fleet Boxing Championship contests outside the YMCA Hut at Flotta were witnessed by as many as 10,000 men.⁵⁶⁰ In spite of their popularity, the organisation required to coordinate these Fleet-wide events meant that they scarcely took place more than twice a year. In summer, golf was played on courses in Kirkwall and Stromness, but it was an officer-only activity. Perhaps most surprisingly, gardening became a popular and profitable recreation in the early years of the war with one enterprising ship raising chickens and pigs on one of the islands. Yet, the challenging climate and the uncertain

⁵⁵⁸ NMRN, RNM 2006.68/2, p.110

⁵⁵⁹ Burrows, p.18.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.20.

movements of the ships eventually rendered tending to plants and feeding animals near impossible.

In comparison to these other recreational activities, the logistics of producing theatrical entertainment came with relative ease. With a fully functioning mobile theatre within the base, ships companies began organising themselves into theatrical troupes and bands. No time was wasted searching for venues or finding materials to rig up make-shift stages and auditoriums. Nor did companies have the concern of organising drifters to the shoreline or of finding a suitable time to leave the ship en masse. The men simply waited for the theatre to come to them. 'When a ship wanted to give a show' reveals Swan, 'a signal was made for the *Gourko* to come alongside - and so had your theatre brought to your very door; a most convenient scheme'.⁵⁶¹ Ships' companies effectively had a theatre on demand and it afforded them many opportunities to participate in theatricals as both performers and audience members throughout the war. As William J. Allen insists, 'many excellent shows have been given on board by ships' companies, for the benefit of the entire Fleet, and we have seen performances that would have done credit to many a London house'.⁵⁶² *Gourko's* proximity to the vessels of the Fleet also encouraged service personnel from other ships to travel the short distance by drifter to watch productions. This claim is supported by Swan who records that the auditorium held approximately 600 spectators of different stations and of different companies from neighbouring vessels.⁵⁶³ *Gourko* quickly became a crucible of theatrical exchange where personnel could perform and share their stage craft and interact and socialise with hundreds of different members of the Fleet.

The demand for *Gourko's* services only increased as the war went on. 'By the second year of the war,' reveals Swan, 'there was scarcely a battleship in the Grand Fleet that did not produce a theatrical or musical party'.⁵⁶⁴ According to the engraved inscription on *Gourko's* silver shield, now contained in the Hull Museum Archives, '700 entertainments by performers from the Fleet were held on board *Gourko* during the War and witnessed by over 300,000 officers and men'.⁵⁶⁵ Although these are astonishing numbers, especially when one considers that these performances took place during war, their frequency and popularity is backed up by numerous contemporaneous accounts in formal archive holdings. A large bound scrapbook held at the National Museum of the Royal Navy created by Able Seaman

⁵⁶¹ NMRN, RNM 2006.68/2, p.118.

⁵⁶² Allen, p.46.

⁵⁶³ NMRN, RNM 2006.68/2, p.118.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ Hull, Hull Museum Archives, KINCM:2007.2074, SS *Gourko* plaque 1919.

Horace Beaven Good, entitled *Reminiscences of the Grand Fleet in the Great War* contains materials including letters, telegrams, postcards and certificates relating to Good's service on HMS *Agincourt* from 1914 to 1918.⁵⁶⁶ Between his account of *Agincourt's* commissioning and its service at the Battle of Jutland, Good dedicates nine pages of the scrapbook to photographs, newspaper cuttings, and playbills relating to *Agincourt's* minstrel shows, amateur orchestra, and pierrot troupe (see Figure 32). Within this document alone there is evidence of at least 15 separate theatrical events that were performed by *Agincourt's* company.⁵⁶⁷ In light of this evidence, Lieutenant Commander W.B. Harvey's argument that the activation of ships' concerts in the Royal Navy is comparable to a 'disease' that breaks out among a ship's company during a significant length of time in harbour, is convincing.⁵⁶⁸ The metaphor, however, does not account for the controlled and highly regulated environment these performances were emerging from. These theatricals did not, as the metaphor implies, become an overriding or disruptive force to naval order but facilitated those highest in command to subtly maintain it.

The scheme Swan describes in his account of *Gourko's* operations was as strategic as it was convenient. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that discipline, in the first instance, proceeds from the organisation and fixing of 'individuals in space'.⁵⁶⁹ Foucault calls this aspect of discipline the *art of distributions* and identifies techniques to achieve this. The first technique involves 'the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself'.⁵⁷⁰ This requires enclosing individuals in a place that is separated from public view so that the movements of individuals within may be controlled and supervised. By providing the men with their own mobile theatre, there was less incentive for men to seek entertainment ashore and the movements of performers and audiences were limited to travel between two distinct areas – from the relative safety of their own vessel to that of *Gourko*. Prospective performers and audiences of *Gourko* remained within the confines of the base and this enabled an increased mode of control to occur.

⁵⁶⁶ Portsmouth, NMRN, RNM 1999.76. Able Seaman RNVR Horace Beaven Good 'Reminiscences of the Grand Fleet in the Great War',

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Lieutenant Commander W.B. Harvey, *Downstairs in the Royal Navy* (Glasgow: Brown, Son, & Ferguson Ltd, 1979), p. 85.

⁵⁶⁹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.141.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.



Figure 32 The Agincourt's Pierrot Troupe. 1916. *Reminiscences of the Grand Fleet in the Great War*. NMRN. RNM 1999.76.

As an auxiliary vessel attached to the Grand Fleet, the theatre was not only an enclosed place but one that was highly regulated. Unlike the YMCA huts ashore, *Gourko* was for the exclusive use of naval personnel and under the jurisdiction of the Admiralty.⁵⁷¹ The COs of the Fleet and members of the Admiralty not only governed the movements of the theatre ship but also the actions of the men within it. A regulations document entitled 'Regulations Concerning "Gourko" as a Theatre Ship' was circulated among the ships of the Fleet.⁵⁷² *Gourko's* duties as a provision ship, according to the document, were 'to take precedence over all arrangements made in connection with the theatre' and the ship's movements were at the discretion of *Gourko's* Captain. The document also reveals that the Chief of Staff played a significant role in the governance of the theatre and requested to be alerted of all complaints concerning the theatre and informed by the Master of *Gourko* if rules were not adhered to. Rules such as the fact that all permanent fixtures and fittings on stage and in the auditorium, were not to be 'removed or altered without the written authority of the Chief of

⁵⁷¹ The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) built a hut ashore at Longhope that contained a large hall, which, on occasions was used for concerts and dances.

⁵⁷² NMRN, RNM 2006.68/2, p.119.

Staff'.⁵⁷³ Whilst these rules may seem somewhat inconsequential, Foucault contests that discipline 'is a political anatomy of detail'.⁵⁷⁴ The attention to detail in the regulation of the theatre ensured that discipline was exercised consistently, by which I mean that the degree of control exercised in this place was no different to any other vessel of the Fleet. By creating seemingly minor rules concerning the conduct of individuals, naval authorities encouraged the habituation of rules regardless of environment, a tactic that would enable COs to manage their companies more efficiently and with less resistance.

The pervasive regulation of the men within the base and within the theatre ensured that the Fleet remained in a constant state of readiness for action. At any given moment the Fleet could be called upon to proceed to sea, to engage in warfare or to handle an enemy threat. If "action stations" was called during a performance on the *Gourko*, both performers and spectators could board their ship alongside and respond to the situation with efficiency. This is exactly what took place on the 9th July 1917 when men of HMS *Royal Oak* were entertaining the Fleet on *Gourko* with their revue, *Dreamland*. According to the writing on a surviving *Royal Oak's* programme, an image of which can be seen in Figure 33, HMS *Vanguard* blew up during the last bars of the final verse of the revue. The explosion killed all but two of the 845 men on board *Vanguard* at the time. The other officers of *Vanguard* were on *Gourko* watching *Royal Oak's* performance. Captain Swan, who was on *Gourko* at the time of the explosion reveals how the men's response to the sound was immediate. After 'an officer entered the theatre' and reported "heavy explosion astern, Sir" to the Captain, 'the company broke up as quickly as it could...and passed on board the "Royal Oak"'.⁵⁷⁵ Swan records how 'picket boats had been ordered off at once' to pick up any survivors, 'the bugles sounded "action stations" in preparation for a torpedo attack' and 'parties of the ship's company bustled about to take up their respective action stations'.⁵⁷⁶ This account suggests that theatre was indeed a functional site from a logistical point of view. The proximity of *Gourko* to *Royal Oak*, enabled the company to move with haste to their respective action stations. Swan's account also reveals that the personnel within *Gourko* adapted to the crisis instantly. The men acted with precision and efficiency as if they had not been audiences and performers at a theatre at all. Whilst a different set of rules was applied to *Gourko* because of the theatrical activity within it, their very existence and application enabled a disciplined naval culture to thrive. This space housed performers and spectators but it did not allow

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.139.

⁵⁷⁵ NMRN, RNM 2006.68/2, p.119.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid, p.119-120.

individuals to lose sight of their function as disciplined and focused members of the Grand Fleet. This was certainly true of Admiral Beatty, Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet, who was a regular attender of performances.⁵⁷⁷ On one occasion, Allen observes;

[Beatty] kept going and coming quietly, visiting his room in case of the receipt of urgent messages, and whilst he was apparently enjoying the play before him, it was difficult to realise that he was engaged in the greatest play in the world, in which he was the principal actor.⁵⁷⁸

This observation reveals that personnel demonstrated a continuous adherence to naval order and discipline whilst occupying this site. Far from a hindrance to his administrative duties, *Gourko* positioned Beatty in a way that allowed him to conduct his work with ease and remain operationally effective. The way in which Allen articulates his observation is also telling of the value that was placed on theatrical entertainment by members of the Fleet. Allen uses none other than a theatrical metaphor to liken the war and the movements of Beatty to a play and the direction of a player on stage. He also describes a scenario whereby Beatty is being diverted from theatrical entertainment as opposed to being diverted by it. Rather than a frivolous distraction, theatrical entertainment was understood as another, distinct yet important part of service life.

The theatre space also enabled the disciplining mechanism of hierarchical observation, as outlined by Foucault, to occur. *Gourko* was a theatre for the use of the entire fleet, so officers and ratings of different ships occupied the stage and the auditorium together. The lowest ranking members of the Fleet community were visible to their superiors. With the knowledge that Beatty, the Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet, might also be present, the men both on and off the stage undoubtedly modified their behaviour to suit and maintained self-discipline. Crucially, even when Beatty was not in the auditorium, the theatre still assured the automatic functioning of power because both spectators and performers remained highly visible to one another. There was always the potential they could be observed by high ranking officers of the Fleet.

⁵⁷⁷ Admiral Beatty succeeded Admiral John Jellicoe as C-in-C of the Grand Fleet in 1916.

⁵⁷⁸ Allen, p.46.

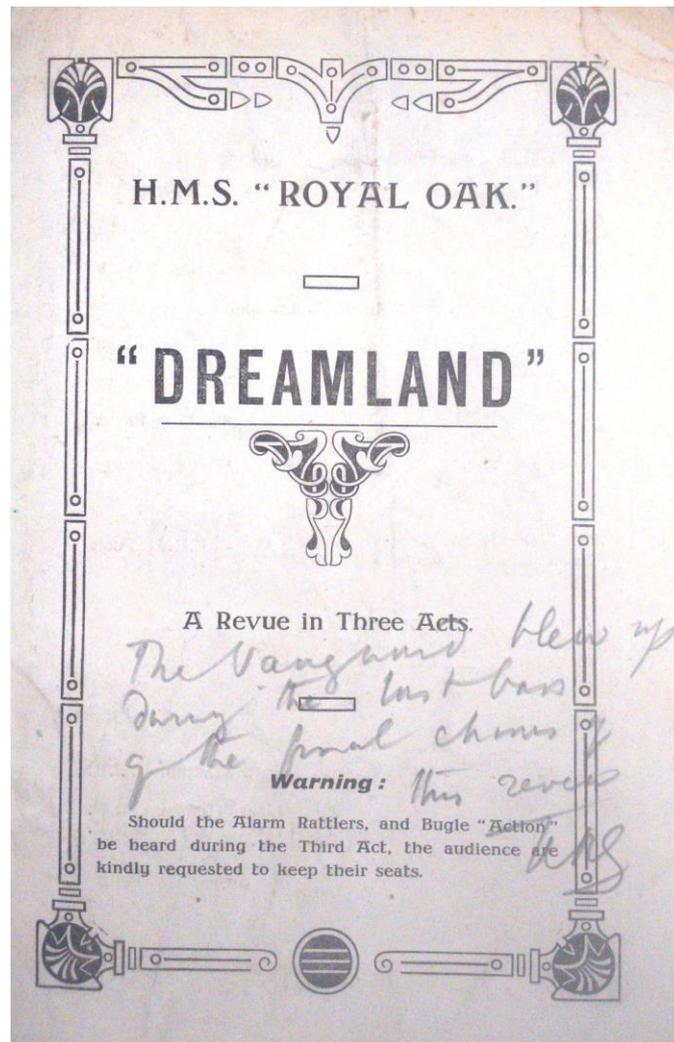


Figure 33 HMS Royal Oak 'Dreamland' programme.
HMS Cyclops II 1914-1918 NMRN RNM 2006.68/2.

Figure 34 is the only visual representation of a stage and auditorium on a vessel of the Grand Fleet that I have uncovered. Whilst the sketch, from a cutting of the shipboard newspaper *The Erin Echo*, contains no proof to argue unequivocally that this image is indeed of *Gourko*, it can give an indication of how men of the Grand Fleet may have acted during a performance upon Scapa Flow. Dated July 1916, the image shows an auditorium crammed with audience members sitting, standing, and watching from the warship birthed alongside. The image depicts some unconventional and risky tactics of viewing including balancing on beams and sitting on rafts. In the foreground we can also see some of the audience members exchanging looks, gestures, and comments. The overriding impression of this image however, is not of a disorderly company. All the audience members are in their uniform and the majority are sitting in long rows of seats watching the show intently.

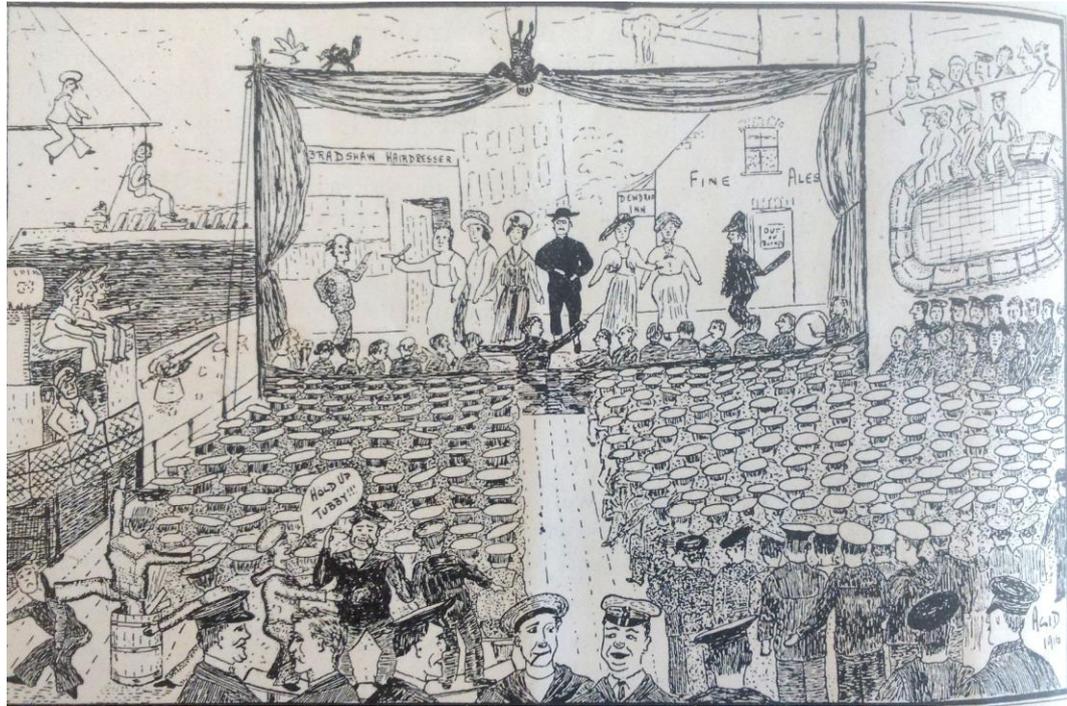


Figure 34 Sketch of auditorium. *The Erin Echo*. July 1916. *Reminiscences of the Grand Fleet in the Great War*. NMRN. RNM 1999.76.

A distinctive feature of Foucault's thesis on modern disciplinary control is the concept of 'normalizing judgement'.⁵⁷⁹ For this pervasive means of control to function, Foucault argues that people are not judged by the intrinsic rightness or wrongness of their acts, but instead are placed on a scale that compares them to everyone else. The availability of a theatrical space instigated a competitive response within the Fleet. Members from neighbouring ships, having seen an event on the *Gourko*, began planning their show to outdo the previous production. Even when other ship's companies were not present, the naval tradition of spinning dits, as I explore in Chapter One, ensured that the ephemeral performance event had an afterlife, existing anecdotally among the Fleet. The act of exchanging 'black cats', a competitive form of dit spinning, perhaps further motivated listeners to produce their own event. Blackcatting, Michael Payne reveals, is designed to provoke a competitive response with one person telling their sea story only to be 'followed by others, all trying to outdo, or 'black cat' each other'.⁵⁸⁰ The sheer number and proximity of men in this site meant the transmission of dits and black cats about performances was fast. Ships became known for their talent on *Gourko's* stage and companies began vying with one another for the top spot.

⁵⁷⁹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.183.

⁵⁸⁰ Payne, p.xi.

HMS *Warspite*, for example, was one of five Queen Elizabeth-class battleships that gained a high reputation among the Fleet for presenting a complete light opera based on Edward German's 'Merrie England'. Not wanting to be outclassed by one of its own ships, the lead battleship HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, responded by astonishing the Fleet with its 'Russian ballet to the music of Liszt'.⁵⁸¹ Theatrical companies of the Fleet were not judged on their talent in relation to professional acts or performers but in comparison with one another. Ships were ranked, albeit informally, by the rest of the Fleet on the basis of their productions. Subsequently, ships' companies staged shows not only to perform but to be seen and judged as the best performers of the Fleet. This drive to succeed is highlighted in a review by *The Erin Echo* of the *Erin's* concert party, which states:

Naturally the latest bid for popularity is the result. Success with a capital S was the outcome. This was only to be expected when one takes into consideration the amount of hard work and concentration put into the business in hand by each and every one of the concert party.⁵⁸²

Engaging in naval warfare required personnel to have the willpower to succeed as well as the mental stamina and resolve to overcome the difficulties inherent in uncertain and dangerous operations. By demonstrating a commitment to achieving successful results on the stage, the men of the Fleet had an opportunity to prove their commitment to one another and to affirm their determination as a community to succeed in their endeavours. In their quest to outdo other ship's productions, men were competing on a scale that had no upper limit of achievement. There was no way of escaping this kind of judgement – there would always be another performance from another ship to surpass. Crucially, the normalisation of judgement in the production of theatricals fostered the spirit of competition that helped keep the minds of the Fleet focused. Their drive to be the best and their sense of pride in their accomplishments encouraged companies to perform again and again. It motivated them to challenge themselves physically and mentally; to write new scripts, create better costumes, and rehearse longer when other workloads at Scapa Flow were decreasing.

By engaging in these activities for an extended period of time, the base itself began to change and so too did men's attitudes towards it. The theatre literally and imaginatively transformed the barren and grey landscape of Scapa Flow. Off stage, the circulation of colourful, tangible

⁵⁸¹ Arthur J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, 5 vols (Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing, 2013 - 14), V (2014), p.156.

⁵⁸² NMRN, RNM 1999.76.

materials like programmes, advertisements, written revues, and sketches were kept, shared, and displayed by company members around the base. On stage, the men were entertained by a variety of performance forms that, with the suspension of disbelief, imaginatively took their audiences to many different places and times. The sketch of Figure 34, for example, depicts what appears to be a village scene on *Gourko's* stage. Female and male characters including a policeman and priest stand on a street corner in front of a hairdressing salon and public house. Other places represented on stage included London's Marble Arch in Act II of HMS *Agincourt's* performance of *The Fool of the Force* and Restaurant Rosenthal, 'a fashionable resort in Berlin' in Act I of HMS *Iron Duke's* musical play, *The Secret*.⁵⁸³ By visually representing people and places beyond the base, theatrical productions had the capacity to evoke powerful memories of people and places before the war in the minds of performers and audience members. *Gourko* became a symbolic reminder of another world and another life outside of war and as such, it offered a key to psychological survival to the thousands of men who had been uprooted from their homes and sent to the base.

Performances that incorporated popular musical and comic fads of their time played a decisive role in this struggle for survival. HMS *Cyclops*, for example, formed concert parties that were influenced by a wide repertoire of musical forms and styles including music-hall, revue, and classical music. The concerts included a group of stokers who 'took a leading part in providing parodic shows in the nature of "revues"', a volunteer band 'capable of giving an enjoyable rendering of a Mendelssohn overture or Shubert symphony' and a party of glee singers.⁵⁸⁴ There was also a solo performer called Rosser 'who was immensely popular and successful in the rampageous type of music-hall ballads which is sung with the help of baggy trousers, a crooked walking stick and a flaming red nose'.⁵⁸⁵ His performances left a particularly positive impression on Swan who included a sketch of Rosser in performance singing a song called "Dr Shelley" within the pages of his memoir.⁵⁸⁶ *Gourko* afforded both individuals like Rosser and groups such as *Cyclops's* stokers an opportunity to continue to define themselves in a time of war by creatively responding to the popular theatrical and musical forms of their time. It enabled them to perform and maintain identities that were shaped, not by the destruction and uncertainty of war, but by a conviction in their own musical talents, unique experiences, and personal preferences.

⁵⁸³ NMRN, RNM 1999.76.

⁵⁸⁴ NMRN, RNM 2006.68/2, p. 116.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p116-117.

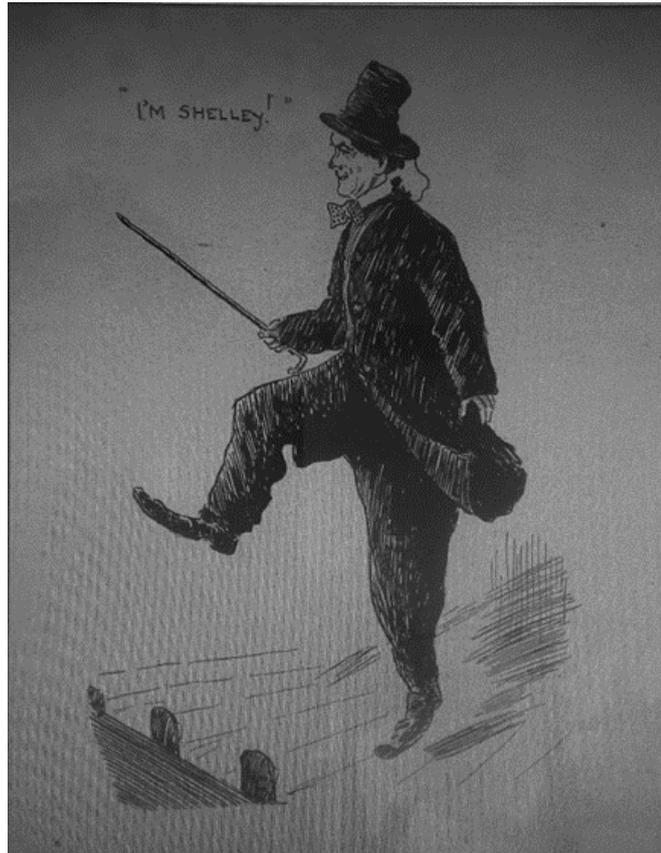


Figure 35 'I'm Shelley!'. HMS Cyclops II 1914-1918
NMRN RNM 2006.68/2.

In *Performing (for) Survival*, Duggan and Peschel argue that performance in sites of crisis, has been fundamental in preparing people for a 'post-crisis future by keeping alive their own notions of who they are and who they hope to be'.⁵⁸⁷ For many conscripted personnel, known as "hostilities", that had a previous occupation involving music and theatre, *Gourko* became a means of continuing professional theatrical and musical practice. With seemingly unlimited time on their hands and a pressing need to keep their minds and bodies occupied, hostilities ratings with technical and performance skills dedicated themselves wholeheartedly to theatrical production aboard *Gourko*. The hostilities rating W. J. Holman, for example, worked with orchestras before the war as an experienced cornet player and conductor. According to Swan, Holman 'soon discovered other musical talent' in *Cyclops* and created an amateur orchestra of eighteen players who, for three years, regularly performed

⁵⁸⁷ Dugan and Peschel, p.2.

aboard *Gourko*.⁵⁸⁸ For men like Holman, *Gourko* not only facilitated modes of engagement that signalled more familiar ways of experiencing the present but perhaps, in a more direct way, prepared them for a post-war future in the theatre.

Listening to popular and uplifting tunes and lyrics undoubtedly played a crucial role in helping naval personnel to reflect more positively on their current circumstances and to imagine a happier, brighter post-war future. According to Admiral Chalmers, theatrical entertainments 'refreshed the minds of many men...bringing them the latest song hits such as 'If You Were the Only Girl in the World', 'Roses of Picardy', 'Pack Up Your Troubles' and 'Keep the Home Fires Burning'.⁵⁸⁹ These songs, all of which were penned during the war and used as morale-boosting propaganda, would have resonated powerfully with the audiences at Scapa Flow. 'Pack Up Your Troubles' became a global hit and perhaps one of the most iconic songs of the war. Written and composed by brothers George and Felix Powell, members of a touring Pierrot troupe the Harlequinaders, 'Pack Up Your troubles' won first prize in a competition to find a marching song for the troupes in 1915. The popularity and widespread performance of this song by sailors and soldiers alike was in part due to the song's simplicity. As a marching song it had a straightforward time signature of 2/4 to replicate the sound of marching feet. Performers and spectators, including those without musical training, would have been able to pick up the timing of the song very quickly. It was also composed in G major, a key with only one sharp. This arrangement meant it could be played with ease on a wide range of instruments such as violins, banjos, and pianos, instruments that we know were available to ships' companies at Scapa Flow as depicted in Figure 32. The catchy melody and the use of plain language within the song, made the chorus instantly memorable:

Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag,
And smile, smile, smile,
While you've a lucifer to light your fag,
Smile, boys, that's the style.
What's the use of worrying?
It never was worthwhile, so
Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag,
And smile, smile, smile.

⁵⁸⁸ NMRN, RNM 2006.68/2, p.117.

⁵⁸⁹ Chalmers, p.308.

Sailors would have immediately connected with this chorus. The actions of packing up a 'kitbag', an item all service personnel owned and lighting a cigarette with a 'Lucifer', a type of match, were familiar every-day actions of sailors and soldiers alike. Whilst the tempo of any song can be slowed to give a more melancholic, sentimental feel, the lyrics of 'Pack Up Your Troubles' are aspirational and morale boosting. The song is a direct call to service personnel to disregard troubles and worries and 'smile, smile, smile' in the face of adversity. Upbeat refrains and choruses are a fundamental feature of all the songs Chalmers lists. 'Keep the Home Fires Burning', for example, includes the refrain 'there's a silver lining though the dark clouds are shining' and the chorus of 'If you were the only girl in the World' describes 'a garden of Eden' where there is 'nothing to mar our joy'. These optimistic lyrics encouraged the men on *Gourko* to stiffen their resolve in seeing that brighter more joyful future. They were also a rousing reminder to the theatrical companies of the Fleet that their service, despite the monotony of their labour and lack of engagement with the German Fleet, was, nonetheless, a vital part of a collaborative war effort of Home and Allied Fleets and Armies across the globe. Singing together on *Gourko's* stage of their communal experience of war, provided the men a sense of belonging both to the Fleet who they were literally serving alongside and the soldiers at the front they were fighting with.



*Figure 36 Tirpitz and 'His Last Hope'.
Reminiscences of the Grand Fleet in the Great
War. NMRN. RNM 1999.76.*

Popular entertainment also provided an opportunity to create work that made light of their situation. The parodic and farcical elements of songs and sketches on *Gourko* allowed the men to confront the trials of their exile and laugh at the many worries, fears, and anxieties the Fleet shared. The most prevalent anxiety was over the lack of action. When news of casualties and loss of life on the Western Front reached the base, Beatty became frustrated in his inability to engage the German High Seas Fleet. In a letter to his wife, Beatty wrote 'It frets me terribly that with all this terrible fighting going on that we cannot help'.⁵⁹⁰ This feeling was widespread in Scapa Flow. In his post-war reflections, C.W. Burrows wrote 'to many, "Scapa" is a name that they would like to eradicate forever from their book of

⁵⁹⁰ Admiral Beatty cited in Marder, p.154.

remembrance'.⁵⁹¹ As a way of expressing their communal concern and defiance of their circumstances, a song known as the 'Scapa Hymn of Hate' was sung by the Fleet. It became so popular in Scapa Flow that it was published in the *Orcadian* newspaper on the 5th December 1918. The last verse is as follows:

Now the Navy's been at Scapa ever since we've been at war,
And whenever it is over, they won't want to see it more.
But for years and years to come, whenever sailors congregate
You may bet your life you may hear them sing that Scapa hymn of hate.⁵⁹²

This song was not an invention, but a parody of the then well-known German song 'Hassgesang gegen England', which was based on the First World War poem by Ernst Lissauer, 'Hate Song against England', that was officially used as German war propaganda. Although the performance of this song was an act of defiance in its damning critique of Scapa Flow, the parody allowed it to take on a more ambiguous quality. When sung by the Fleet it fostered 'a spirit of comradeship which', as Burrows identifies 'made exile endurable'.⁵⁹³ Despite the weary months of waiting for an engagement with the German Fleet, the commitment of the Fleet to one another and to winning the war did not weaken. As a young American officer in the battleship *Arkansas* observed;

the outstanding characteristic of British Sea Power was its extraordinary high morale in the face of great handicaps. At a moment when Allied military morale was at the breaking point, and the refusal of the German High Seas Fleet to come out and fight imposed heavy burdens on [Beatty]...Grand Fleet morale was at such a peak that it was a joy to serve in it.⁵⁹⁴

Gourko undoubtedly played a crucial role in maintaining this high morale. Theatricals not only became a diversion tactic but allowed men of the Fleet to gain creative control of their fears and frustrations. Although the full script of HMS *Iron Duke's* 'The Secret' has not yet been discovered, its list of characters including Graf Adolph von Splitzentrausen, Captain Dropoff, and General Studlebent, clearly indicate that this musical play in three acts was intended to satirise the actions of their enemy. Satirising enemy tactics through performance was prevalent throughout the war. In 1917 the winners of a fancy-dress ball held on one of

⁵⁹¹ Burrows, p.3.

⁵⁹² Ibid, p.4.

⁵⁹³ Ibid, p.6.

⁵⁹⁴ Eugene E. Wilson cited in Marder, p.154.

the base's super-dreadnoughts, depicted in Figure 36, was a duo dressed as Alfred von Tirpitz and a U-boat with the words 'his last hope' painted on the side. At the outbreak of war in 1914, Tirpitz was Commander of the German navy and an advocate for the German policy of unrestricted U-boat warfare. This policy proved highly controversial and by 1916 Tirpitz was forced to resign. The failing German leader was, as the journalist writing for the *Daily Mirror* on the fancy dress ball admitted, 'a likely subject for our sailors to make fun of'.⁵⁹⁵ Performing the role of German leaders and ridiculing their efforts through costume and song was an effective means of boosting morale. It was both an opportunity to laugh in the face of their enemy and, in a light-hearted fashion confront their greatest fears. Whilst there was a severe shortage of newly built submarines by 1917, German U-boats still posed a very great threat to the lives of the men. On 28th October 1918, for example, the German submarine *UB116* tried to enter Scapa Flow through Hoxa Sound. By visually and aurally aestheticising perceived dangers on stage, personnel could manipulate and contain those threats, and potentially dissipate anxieties and fears held by the Fleet.

Maintaining naval discipline within the Fleet not only rested on dissipating unrest or concern about external threats, it also relied on sustaining the Fleet's confidence in their own naval leaders. Admiral of the Fleet Lord Chatfield argues that the Fleet's confidence in Beatty as a leader was paramount in maintaining the high spirits till the end of the war:

[The Fleet] had confidence in him, that he was a fighter; that he would take the fleet out whatever the circumstance of weather or other dangers, and that he would not let the enemy go once he was in contact...it is to David Beatty's everlasting credit that during these monotonous and testing two years he maintained the spirit of the grand fleet, its efficiency, harmony and cheerfulness at the highest possible level and enthusiasm.⁵⁹⁶

Gourko played a vital role in building the Fleet's confidence in their COs. At the end of performances, COs would often take the stage and deliver messages of encouragement. When the *Erin* performed *Revue Mania*, for example, 'the President, Commander Henderson RN in a few words applicable to the occasion welcomed our destroyer friends in the name of the officers and men of the *Erin*'.⁵⁹⁷ According to Chalmers, Beatty also regularly made inspiring speeches on *Gourko* to boost the Fleet's morale.⁵⁹⁸ Soon 'the High Seas Fleet',

⁵⁹⁵ *The Daily Mirror*, 3 September 1917, p.12.

⁵⁹⁶ Admiral of the Fleet Lord Chatfield, *The Navy and Defence* (London, Heinemann 1942), p.172.

⁵⁹⁷ NMRN, RNM 1999.76.

⁵⁹⁸ Chalmers, p.307.

Beatty announced 'will have to come out and there is only one thing for us to do. Annihilate them'.⁵⁹⁹ *Gourko* provided a space where Beatty's personality could become known outside of his own flagship and his optimism and determination, according to Marder, 'was infectious and could be felt throughout the Fleet'.⁶⁰⁰ The theatre, therefore, not only rendered the lowest ranking members of the community visible to COs; observation of the lowest and highest in naval hierarchy worked both ways. *Gourko* was a strategic space that not only facilitated the continuous adherence of naval discipline but in times of crisis, enabled the Commander-in-Chief to be seen and heard, and confidence in his leadership to grow.

By reading purpose-built theatrical venues by the Royal Navy as part of a disciplining strategy, this chapter demonstrates that naval theatricals, intended to boost morale in situations of survival, were also effective as instruments of control. There was an early recognition by authorities that theatrical entertainment could be used to both strengthen the mental and physical health of their men and as a device to indirectly modify and regulate behaviour. The Royal Terror Theatre and the *Gourko* were built, in the words of Foucault, as 'functional sites' that served both purposes. Performance was a corrective mechanism that contained and transformed threats such as cabin fever, boredom, nostalgia for home, and fear of the unknown and for their own lives, threats that posed a great challenge to naval discipline. The theatres were more than just places of play. They were tactical 'acts of cunning endowed with a great power of diffusion'.⁶⁰¹ With a theatre at their disposal and under their own jurisdiction, naval leaders were able to subtly press upon the men a routine and timetable of activities during their leisure hours. Participants were observed and either directly or indirectly supervised at all stages of production by their superiors. The rehearsal and performance of the repertoire may have allowed for some acts of transgression to occur but the theatrical space, that made them clearly visible to senior members of their company, ensured the automatic functioning of power. By approving and occupying the theatres themselves, COs also showed that power could be exercised to the benefit of its subjects and, as a result, confidence in naval leadership grew.

These theatres were instrumental in maintaining disciplined shipboard companies and a crisis-enduring naval workforce. It may come as no surprise therefore, that there is very strong circumstantial evidence that a theatre-ship was also commissioned for service at Scapa Flow during the Second World War. A cross-channel steamer that transported holiday-

⁵⁹⁹ Admiral Beatty cited in Marder, p.156.

⁶⁰⁰ Marder, p.156.

⁶⁰¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.139.

makers to and from France was commandeered by the navy and became a recreational ship for the crews of the Home Fleet auxiliary vessels.⁶⁰² Furthermore, the destroyer depot ship HMS *Tyne* had a stage upon which the ships company regularly performed shows for the men of the destroyer flotillas of the fleet. Whilst little is known about these recreational spaces and the theatricals that took place within them, this is yet more compelling evidence that the Royal Navy have historically and repeatedly built theatrical spaces in sites and times that posed a threat to the wellbeing and physical survival of naval personnel.

⁶⁰² London, IWM, A 17406, 'Cross Channel Steamer now Recreation Ship for Sailors' <<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205016094>> [accessed 27 February 2018].

Conclusion

Throughout my research process, I have become well-rehearsed in answering the same and seemingly inevitable question posed by new acquaintances; 'so, what's your PhD about?'. Like many PhD students who are acutely aware that not every person they meet hopes to engage in a lengthy discussion about their research, my succinct answer has invariably been 'theatrical entertainments produced at sea by the Royal Navy'. More often than not and to my continual surprise, I have been prompted to go into greater depths about my research findings and discussions, longer than I had initially anticipated, about shipboard theatricals have ensued. During these conversations, I would often begin pondering what it is about theatrical entertainment in the Royal Navy that engenders such intrigue. In all the years I have been a theatre and performance studies student from undergraduate studies to PhD research, never have I seen what usually and quite obviously begins as polite interest from the person I am chatting to turn so regularly, almost routinely, into genuine enthusiasm. Is it that this research is about the Royal Navy, a military organisation that holds social and moral authority for many in British society that peaks their interest? Is it the inter-disciplinary nature of the research, the fact that a theatre and performance studies student is delving into naval history that incites their curiosity? Whilst these aspects may have had a bearing on the responses I received, above all, it has been the discovery of the practice of theatre-making at sea itself that has captured the imagination of others. For many, it has been astonishing to learn that the Royal Navy has ever contemplated let alone staged large-scale theatrical events on ships throughout the 20th century and continues to do so today. What has been an extraordinary revelation to others has served as a poignant reminder to me that the practice of theatre-making at sea in the 20th century is not common knowledge and that this thesis is shining a spotlight on and unpacking a hidden theatrical practice that is not widely recognised.

Through extensive archival research and oral history work I have uncovered a rich theatrical naval culture and I have discovered that the theatrical in this context encompasses a great many different forms; SODS operas, Crossing the Line ceremonies, minstrel shows, farces, children's parties, dances, and concert parties. The abundance of visual, written, and aural material within formal and personal archives that documents the production of these theatrical forms by the Royal Navy has revealed that there is much more to be explored that lies beyond the scope of this investigation. Research into the wider theatrical practice of the British Armed Services, might have led me to focus on specific land-based recreational sites

to examine the interconnections of different service and theatrical histories. The canteens in major naval ports and British Overseas Territories including those in Malta and Gibraltar, for instance, have served as theatres throughout the 20th century and many tri-service theatrical events have been staged within them. Interest in the professional stage may have encouraged me to study the entertainments that personnel produced in national theatres and professional theatrical venues for civilians and military personnel around the globe. Within the commission book of HMS *Gambia*, for example, the author makes a fleeting reference to a theatrical production called 'Up Spirits' that was staged in Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and at the Kenya National Theatre in Nairobi among other places.⁶⁰³

My investigation into theatrical entertainments at sea has nonetheless been a fruitful and rewarding one. Interviews and correspondence with serving and retired naval personnel have provided a valuable insight into how shipboard life at sea has not only shaped theatrical practice but helped to establish and maintain an evolving naval theatrical repertoire. Staging theatrical events at sea requires service men and women to overcome the challenges of a confined and segregated yet mobile space as well as restricted time and limited resources. Rather than hinder the practice of theatre-making at sea, I have found that these constraints have played a vital role in ensuring its continuance. It is because of shipboard conditions that serving personnel are compelled to create a workable and repetitive repertoire that can be easily remembered, replicated, and inherited by the next generation. Every interview I have conducted has helped me attain a better understanding and appreciation for the remarkable ingenuity and creativity of naval personnel as anecdotes involving them finding both the space and time to write scripts, rehearse acts, fashion costumes, and construct stages all within the confines of the ship, and without disruption to work duties, have come to the fore.

In unmasking the hidden creative processes and theatrical talents of naval personnel, it has become increasingly apparent that this research has strong resonances with the renewed and growing contemporary interest in everyday creativity. On the 15th June 2016, 64 Million Artists published its Arts Council England report, proposing new ways in which the arts council can support, invest in, and encourage widespread participation in everyday creativity.⁶⁰⁴ Similarly, in partial response to the Warwick Commission's investigation into the Future of Cultural Value, the BBC launched the Get Creative campaign 'to celebrate and

⁶⁰³ HMS *Gambia* (1955- 1956).

⁶⁰⁴ Laura Dyer, 'The Value of Everyday Creativity', *Arts Council England*, 14 June 2016 <<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/blog/value-everyday-creativity>> [accessed 1 March 2018].

support the everyday creativity happening in homes and public spaces'.⁶⁰⁵ Amateur creativity has also been enjoying a renewed relevance. Prime time television is awash with creative competitions in a bid to find the next best amateur baker, potter, painter, chef, and interior designer.⁶⁰⁶ Digital technology has perhaps provided the most accessible gateway for amateur performers, writers, musicians, and critics of all kinds to reach global audiences. This thesis demonstrates that naval personnel have long been keen to share with and pass on their creative skills and knowledge to others within and outside of their immediate shipboard community via social media platforms and online forums, written documents and through the activation of the repertoire itself. I have also been surprised by the willingness of personnel to share their experiences of theatrical entertainment with me. Amateur and everyday creativity is assuredly becoming part of the cultural zeitgeist of the 21st century and this research is clearly allied with it. This thesis reveals that the ship has not only been a place of work and place of living but also the site of an embodied theatrical practice that is firmly integrated into the everyday shipboard lives of personnel. Though a theatrical event at sea may be an hour or two in length, its preparation requires weeks, sometimes months, of planning and rehearsal. When the event is over, personnel create entertainment packs, document their participation in diaries and commission books, and spin dits about the best and worst acts for years to come.

The Royal Navy values theatrical entertainment at sea as an important part of its cultural history that spans centuries. The theatrical repertoire is made up of predominantly oral traditions and personnel see themselves as custodians of the repertoire and theatrical performance as the key means through which they can both connect to and pass on their cultural naval past. The production of shipboard theatricals is more than mere entertainment – a diversion from other more important duties. It is vital heritage work. It enables companies to forge a unified and cohesive naval shipboard identity as they work and play creatively and tirelessly together on and off the stage. Simultaneously, participation in theatrical events allows personnel to express their individuality and uniqueness as individuals and groups, sing their favourite song or share a theatrical or musical talent with their company. Shipboard theatricals serve as a potent reminder to every participant that they are more than a sum of

⁶⁰⁵ 'About Get Creative', BBC, 1 February 2018
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/3P7n390cZc3VBpn7cPn0F5T/about-get-creative>>
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their technical skills or just a cog in a well-oiled naval machine but part of a much larger naval community of personnel with varied interests, abilities, and talents.

The activation of the repertoire, however, depends not only on personnel's creativity, ingenuity, and their willingness to perform. Crucially, it requires permission. This signals an unexpected narrative that counters a general assumption that theatrical entertainment in the navy has been staged to serve a social and cultural function only. By going beyond the surface level interpretation of theatrical entertainment in the Royal Navy as a morale booster, I have exposed the vital strategic and operational function that they serve. This thesis recognises that whilst entertainments are good fun, the motivations behind these activities can be deeply conservative and intertwined with the maintenance and projection of power. Shipboard theatricals have historically played a role in the projection of Britain's imperial and naval power. Gunboat diplomacy, as I assert, has not only rested on the global, theatrical display of hard power assets but has also firmly relied on the attraction that ship's companies have cultivated through the performance of shipboard entertainment. I have also demonstrated that the performances arenas that are created mid-deployment at sea have offered naval authorities a marginal space from which to allow tensions on a ship to be discharged in a highly controlled and regulated manner. In both overt and more discreet ways theatrical entertainment has served as a corrective mechanism that contains and transforms threats such as cabin fever, boredom, nostalgia for home, and fear of the unknown and for their own lives, threats that pose a great challenge to naval discipline.

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The respondents to my Call for Participation are listed alphabetically according to surname. The dates in brackets correspond to the years participants served in the Royal Navy. Some participants completed a questionnaire on theatrical entertainment at sea that I devised. Other participants have preferred to communicate via letter, email exchange or Skype. Details and dates of correspondents are listed below.

William Ashton RN (1965-1968), questionnaire, 9 May 2016, and letter, 9 May 2016

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12243 de Courcy-Ireland, Brian, British officer served aboard HMS Bellerophon with Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow, 1915-1916

33724 Jarvis, Archie, British signaller served aboard HMS Bickerton, 1943-1944; served aboard HMS Belfast, 1944 – 1946

25240 Jones, David Ernest Henry, British boy seaman and seaman served aboard HMS Belfast in GB coastal waters, in Arctic, during Normandy landings and Far East, 1942-1946

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