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ARTICLE

The British Council and the *Marat/Sade* Controversy

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One of the world's most enduring and successful cultural diplomacy organizations, the British Council (BC) has played a prominent role in promoting and exporting British theatre, literature, and language across the globe since its founding in 1934. A key component of the BC's self-proclaimed remit of "forging links between Britain and other countries through cultural exchange,"[1] the organization's Drama Division has over its lifetime worked to sponsor and facilitate the overseas touring of a significant number of British theatrical enterprises, exporting both large-scale national company productions with substantial casts and a repertoire of shows, as well as individual actors, directors, and academics embarking on speaking tours. From the stage, renowned actors and star names such as Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson, Vivien Leigh, Peggy Ashcroft, and John Gielgud were routinely chosen by the BC to appear in series of "theatrical manifestations," serving in dual capacities both as actors in productions and ambassadors for a nation—the word "manifestation" being the BC's own preferred terminology used to refer to the export of a cultural event during the middle of the past century. Yet unlike comparable accounts of the relationship between the Arts Council and theatre, we possess no systematic study of the BC's involvement in this field, meaning that fundamental questions about the nature, range, and impact of the BC's cultural activity remain unanswered.[2] Indeed, until comparatively recently, the history of the BC has failed to generate much scholarly interest at all, but the nature of its imbrication within British theatrical culture in particular remains severely occluded.[3]

It is still relatively rare to find the theatrical activities of the BC foregrounded in scholarship, with Jen Harvie's work on its initiatives exporting "Cool Britannia" under the New Labour government's branding of artistic output as an economically generative "creative industry," and Brian E. G. Cook's recent recovery of the positive relationship between the BC and Cherub Theatre Company in the last two decades of the twentieth century being two notable exceptions.[4] Every case study of the BC's involvement with the export of a theatrical venture adds to an emerging composite picture of how UK theatre has operated within the determining parameters of British cultural diplomacy techniques as envisaged by its state actors: situating exports within their wider political context allows us to better understand what

priorities and principles—aesthetic, political, pedagogical—motivated the British state's attitude to theatre and its deployment of it as an agent of so-called soft power and the putative projection of a national identity. As Caroline Ritter has expertly shown, the BC was one of a number of major institutions that continued the work of neocolonial co-optation in Africa and India well after the end of formal British rule, with cultural manifestations, the teaching of English, the publication of textbooks, and the attraction of students to the UK all engaged in the project of relegitimating perspectives of hegemonic imperialism in postindependence contexts. As Ritter demonstrates in her example of the Nottingham Playhouse Company touring a version of *Macbeth* in Lagos in the early 1960s: first, the choice of Nigeria was a consequence of the BC's pivot toward a more globally encompassing strategy of making interventions in decolonial and Cold War contexts rather than merely in Europe; and second, the deliberate choice of Shakespeare was an extension of Eurocentric canonicity and linguistic dominance to a newly postcolonial context intended to supplement the teaching of English—what Ritter calls "using one expression of hegemonic power to justify another."[5]

Although the BC achieved many successes in its export of theatrical assets in the postwar period—being the organizing force behind seminal tours by the UK's prestige national companies with its sponsorship of The Old Vic's world tour of 1961–2, Laurence Olivier and the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre's tour to Europe in 1957–8, and the National Theatre's (NT's) tour to the USSR, West Berlin, and Italy in 1965—one failed venture stands out above all in its incendiary nature and its overall instructiveness about the institution's role as intermediary between national and international theatre companies and the logic of cultural exchange: the abortive attempt to send the Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC) production of *Marat/Sade* to Paris in 1965–6. Although little known, the affair was long-running and highly contentious, and is deeply illuminating of institutional practices regarding the BC's attempted use of theatre as an agent of soft power in the period.

This article constructs a comprehensive account of what occurred, and in doing so adds much to our understanding of the priorities, prerogatives, and methods employed by the BC in fostering international networks and partnerships between UK and European theatre artists and organizations in the service of reaching and hopefully affecting a foreign public. As a whole, this examination of the affair allows for a much fuller appreciation of the precariousness of the BC's role as a nexus between culture and politics, and the inherent fault lines in its position as a supposedly disinterested broker amid an increasingly competitive ecology of artists, agents, and institutions. The methodology applied here is primarily archival, using files drawn from the BC's Drama Division and Executive Committee (EC), and includes analysis of minutes, memoranda, and correspondence, supplemented by related policy documents, tour reports, and Advisory Committee minutes distributed across its holdings. Further, these sources from the BC's archive have been cross-referenced and augmented with material drawn from the archives of the Foreign Office (FO) as well as the personal archive of the Labour MP and vice-chairman of the BC, Maurice Edelman, alongside contemporary newspaper articles. The article shows how the BC itself, even though an autonomously functioning organization not under FO control and priding itself as operating without parti pris, had its

approach to cultural exchange shaped within a complex and constantly evolving web of political objectives, ideological presumptions, bureaucratic protocols, and financial considerations. As much as any UK theatrical cultural export that was successfully exported, the *Marat/Sade* controversy is revealing about the relationship between contemporary perceptions of national culture, theatrical culture, and the convergence of the two in the service of promoting British interests abroad in the Cold War period.

The Establishment of the British Council and Support for Cold War Drama Touring

Although Sharon Memis, the BC's Director of North America, has written that it was established in 1934 "to counter the fascist propaganda of that period,"[6] it is at least equally true to say that the organization's early work was underpinned by tangible economic imperatives, extending to opening up British trade with Scandinavia and countering competing German and Italian commercial interests in South America in 1935.[7] Initially considered a somewhat amateurish attempt to emulate the pioneering models of national self-promotion by the French that had been in operation since the 1880s, the UK's Treasury initially saw the BC merely as a tool to assist the Department of Overseas Trade in the way of an "advertising campaign for British industry and commerce."[8] Nevertheless, at the BC's inception, the FO saw an opportunity for a more innovative approach to international affairs that allowed them, at arm's length, to direct policy while maintaining the appearance of independence.[9] As Alice Byrne notes, the organization was inaugurated in the belief that British interests could be served abroad by what "was initially termed not 'cultural diplomacy' (a term rarely used by the British at the time) but 'cultural propaganda:'"[10] interventions in international cultural and educational relations to bolster prestige and economic outcomes against its competitors. As Philip M. Taylor says, "cultural propaganda [was] broadly interpreted as the dissemination of British ideals and beliefs in a general rather than specifically political form."[11] Following the Second World War, this propaganda operation was undertaken by what had become, in the words of Anthony Haigh, "the most professional body of cultural diplomats in the world,"[12] and involved the continual overseas deployment of preeminent British cultural assets in tandem with initiatives of educational cooperation—primarily English language teaching, but also sending British periodicals abroad and hosting foreign students on scholarships. The exploitation of art and of education were the dual prongs of the BC's approach to cultural relations developed in order to fulfill the objective of its oft-quoted founding statement: to "promote overseas an enduring understanding and appreciation of British culture."[13]

During the Cold War, the BC's operations served a variety of functions in a context where international tensions were apt to fluctuate considerably. Prosecuting the anticommunist "Mission"[14] in Iron Curtain countries proved particularly difficult, with many of the BC's orthodox approaches neutralized by the censorious sensibilities of satellite countries: humanities periodicals were likely to be confiscated upon entry, and proposed art exhibitions were sometimes ditched in favor of ones on industrial design.[15] Later in the Cold War, artistic tours exported to the USSR, be they theatre, music, or dance, had to be coordinated on the basis of the strict

reciprocity protocols established by Article VIII of the Anglo–Soviet agreement on Cultural Relations from 1965; this meant that for every cultural event that was sent to Russia, the UK had to host an equivalent artistic manifestation from the Soviet Union.[16] Nonetheless, it is clear that the visit of a British theatre company was considered a significant cultural intervention in the context of the Cold War, as the letter that Paul Grey, the British ambassador to Czechoslovakia, wrote to the BC in 1959 attests. Arguing that in Prague, "the biggest single mark we could make would be the visit of a theatre group," Grey appealed for ever more cultural exports, adding:

> Our cultural, like our political effort here, is essentially in the nature of a holding operation. The hope and belief is that, if we hold on, those interested in politics and the arts in Czechoslovakia may be able to hold on too. They require, however, that minimum of encouragement from us that we can easily afford to give them: they require ammunition with which to continue their guerrilla war of resistance against the communist drive to stifle interest in and sympathy with Western culture. . . . [W]e should not allow ourselves to become discouraged, because that is exactly what the communists would like us to be.[17]

To date the most detailed scholarly examination of the BC's support for touring drama is Zoltán Imre's account of the RSC's East European tour of Peter Brook's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1972. Imre maintains that the tour was a "cultural-political mission . . . utilised as cultural propaganda by means of which the British (and the West) could demonstrate their cultural, social, and of course, political achievements."[18] Imre's contention is broadly supported by examination of the BC's archival holdings, which demonstrate throughout a desire for the show to have a significant cultural impact but without the tour becoming associated with any specific political valances of any kind. As Imre correctly points out, Brook's version of the *Dream,* suitably timeless and universalizing in its approach, with its white set, circus paraphernalia, and magic tricks, was considered a perfect cultural export for such purposes, and it was accompanied with the strong caveat that the company adhere to the BC's policy of the total avoidance of any direct address of political issues. Even so, the dispatches from cultural attachés reporting back from Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Poland communicated various degrees of disquiet about the play's bawdier elements, particularly the infamous "phallic Bottom" scene,[19] and it is perhaps worth noting that while the production's more unbridled elements were reflective of a society that had recently become substantially sexually freer, this in itself was not considered a political achievement—to use Imre's words—that the British were at all keen to advertise in the Iron Curtain countries. Early in the tour the BC felt it had averted a diplomatic contretemps when members of the RSC were caught in Poland giving out unredacted copies of the production's program that had been distributed in the UK, which dedicated the forthcoming tour to the suppressed Za Branou Theatre of Prague. After this, BC representatives continually waxed apprehensive about the potential for the production's reflection of an increasingly sexually permissive culture to cause offense, particularly before its visit to the USSR, even going so far as to suggest an approach to the RSC's governors was necessary in order to reign it in:

> The attitude of their management was most unaccommodating to our request that the performance be toned down in Romania just as it had about the souvenir programmes, and it might be worth drawing the Governors' attention to the political consequences of a refusal to do anything to placate local official susceptibilities.[20]

Ultimately, the performance remained as it had been performed throughout, and the BC's director of Eastern Europe operations was left to muse: "we should not lose sight of the distinction between public acclamation and official disapproval" in drawing up the balance sheet of the tour's overall catalog of effects.[21] In making such judgments, BC staff often did accompany the theatre companies on their touring schedule, but the most valuable feedback tended to come from ambassadors and cultural attachés stationed abroad, who were considered reliable interpreters of the local mood and who sent back cuttings of reviews, as well as offered their own opinions on the artistic merit of the piece in question. Writing to the BC from Warsaw following the visit of Brook's *Dream*, T. F. Brenchley, the UK's ambassador to Poland, rated the production

> an unqualified success. . . . There was a general feeling in theatrical circles in Warsaw that the visit could contribute to a resurgence in the Polish Theatre, and one critic told us that he was sure it would indeed prove to have been a crucial turning point. Paradoxically it may have taken this visit by a foreign production that owes much to Grotowski's experimental theatre group in Wroclaw to open up the rest of the Polish theatre to the full impact of Grotowski's influence.[22]

Brenchley's insight encapsulates the complex dynamics and often unlikely resonances behind the mechanics of cultural exchange, whereby the Polish theatre culture at large was finally able to metabolize the pioneering approaches of Jerzy Grotowski's Poor Theatre only via the visiting production's distillation of those same patented theatrical techniques.[23] The brief example of the RSC's Eastern Europe tour provide here is illustrative of abiding tensions at the heart of the BC's cultural policy, not only in the potential conflict between its own putatively politically neutral soft power stance and the British state's more overt foreign policy objectives, but also in the inherent unpredictability of the outcomes of intercultural encounters.

In the mid to late 1950s, the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) had nailed its colors to the mast in the reinterpretation of its charter concerning support for theatre, and instead of distributing its funding evenly across the sector, opted instead for the heavy subsidy of the RSC, the establishment of the National Theatre, and the deliberate picking of a winner by supporting the English Stage Company (ESC) at the Royal Court.[24] The BC's Drama Division in the 1950s and early to mid-1960s shared the same affinity for leading stars, prestige institutions, and acclaimed shows, and understood its objective principally in terms of attempting to export what it considered the best possible examples of theatrical art so as to create the best possible impression of British culture on foreign audiences. This overriding belief in excellence was genealogically inseparable from the mandarin tendencies that had been implemented by John Maynard Keynes in his role as chairman of CEMA (Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts), forerunner of the Arts Council, where a focus on quality above all else had meant an association with established metropolitan theatre companies and an overall disregard for the

provinces.[25] Although later in its lifetime, during the 1970s and 1980s, the BC would be more flexible in its interpretation of its brief, sending overseas smaller, more agile, region-based companies as well as those from the burgeoning alternative theatre scene, during the 1950s and 1960s—particularly before Jennie Lee's modernizing reforms under her 1964 appointment as Minister for the Arts—it was thoroughly committed to implementing the export of its elite theatrical art: indeed, throughout this period, there is nothing to suggest that any consideration came close to dislodging this central tenet. Whereas the corollary between the notions of elite and quality provided axiomatic undergirding for what work was to be sponsored—a corollary not always automatic in the BC's mind, which could in its internal correspondence be scathing even of prestige exports regarded as less than first-rate[26]—as the *Marat/Sade* controversy showed, it was not an impregnable rationale. Moreover, though the *Marat/Sade* affair gives a picture of the BC as an organization with an inchoate definition of what may rightly be characterized as a British cultural product, it gives an equally valuable insight into the way that its bureaucratic operations functioned: both internally, in terms of how its structures enabled it to achieve its aims, and externally, as facilitator and go-between in the worlds of art, commerce, policy, and the distribution of power. If anything, the *Marat/Sade* affair was a contretemps not only because the institution was forced to examine its ideological priors in an ad hoc way in the full glare of publicity, but also because its exposure of flaws in BC's organizational structure that impaired the mechanics of its bureaucratic functioning made it particularly difficult to resolve in a satisfactory way.

Brook's version of Peter Weiss's *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade* was premiered by the RSC in 1964 and represented the first tranche of the director's famous Theatre of Cruelty season that was performed to the public at large at the Aldwych, rather than at the LAMDA Theatre Club solely to RSC members. Weiss, German-born but living in Sweden, wrote the play to stage the clash of ideas between Jean-Paul Marat's revolutionary commitment and de Sade's unfettered espousal of individual liberty, but Brook used the piece as an opportunity to detonate the ideas of Antonin Artaud on the British stage and to fuse it, unexpectedly, with supposedly incompatible Brechtian techniques. Brook was a unique combination—among many things—of showman and provocateur, who had, as he wrote in *The Empty Space* (1968), an "irresistible urge to assault [the audience],"[27] alongside a dazzling reputation for creating richly rewarding and successful shows. While Susan Bennett has written that Brook's work at the RSC was a "determined attack on the expectations and tolerance of the mainstream, middle-class theatre audience";[28] at the same time, theatre critic Charles Marowitz's review of the New York production of *Marat/Sade* accused Brook of "intellectual slitheriness," seeing him as less of an iconoclast and more a purveyor of avant-garde novelties to those same middle-class audiences.[29] In his book *The Shifting Point* (1987), Brook wrote of *Marat/Sade* that "one of the London critics attacked the play on the ground that it was a fashionable mixture of all the best theatrical ingredients around—Brechtian, didactic, absurdist, Theatre of Cruelty. He said this to disparage but I repeat it as praise."[30]

Set in the cold white light of the bathhouse of the asylum of Charenton, the piece is a play within a play staged by de Sade about the killing of the revolutionary leader

Jean-Paul Marat, performed at the encouragement of the institution's director, so that the real audience watches a stage audience of aristocrats as they watch the inset performance played by the inmates themselves. Manipulated by de Sade as a live dramaturgical presence, the patients perform nonverbal vocalizations and a mixture of free and rhythmic verse alongside acting out processions, dances, as well as shockingly realistic and grotesque mimes of beheadings and dismemberments, each conveyed through their pathological illnesses and mental afflictions, as they simultaneously chant slogans of political freedom and howl in despair at their incarceration. In the final cycle of convulsive hysteria, the patients overpower their guards and advance threateningly upon the real audience, whereupon they are halted by the stage manager of the Aldwych Theatre blowing a whistle, ending the play. As the audience applauds the performance at the end of the play, they are ironically and mockingly clapped by the actors themselves, whose slow and ominous applause drowns out the "free" applause: there is discomfort as it appears that the line between the spectators and those inside the world of the play is perhaps not so very wide. The renowned production is now considered an artistic milestone, "the paradigmatic work of the post-avantgarde"[31] that, as Anne Beggs has said, "became a staple in the western dramatic canon almost immediately."[32]

A Short Trip to Paris

The genesis of the *Marat/Sade* controversy is innocuous enough, but is in its own way revealing about the fundamentally improvisational way through which British theatrical work was typically backed for export by the BC. The original idea of sending Brook's *Marat/Sade* to Paris was broached by Patrick Donnell, general manager of the RSC in September 1964, who wrote to the BC asking if they would be interested in sponsoring "a short trip to Paris"[33] following its scheduled provincial tour of the UK. Jane Edgeworth, head of the BC's Drama Section in its Drama and Music Department, responded positively, but with an important caveat:

> I am absolutely mad about the production, I think it would be ideal for Paris, but at this stage of the game do not think the British Council is going to have any money to play Paris . . . particularly as Larry [Laurence Olivier] has proposed a National Theatre tour, which can take in some of the Council priorities. . . . However, clearly 'Marat' ought to be got to Paris somehow. . . . As you know, the play is going to be done in Paris anyway, so it would be essential to get your production there first.[34]

Edgeworth's instinct was to place a primacy of importance on the export of Olivier in terms of addressing the BC's requirements for sending a production to France, but her reply should also be credited for her awareness of other productions of the Weiss play already in circulation and appreciation of the importance of getting in ahead of the competition. To expedite it, Edgeworth moved to try to place *Marat/Sade* in Paris, writing to Peter Brook later that September that Jean-Louis Barrault, then director of the Théâtre de France (formerly Théâtre de l'Odéon), was keen to host the production in March 1965.[35] Donnell demurred the invitation in a letter to the French impresario André Guerbilsky, then acting on behalf of Barrault, on 20 October, citing "other commitments" but remaining hopeful of a visit later in the year.[36] That October, Edgeworth had been in communication with Charles

de Winton, cultural attaché to the British ambassador in Paris, who had suggested that "good relations with Barrault would in the end prove more advantageous to us,"[37] even at the cost of turning down an accommodation from the rival Théâtre des Nations, which had shown an interest in staging Brook's production. Although the Théâtre des Nations, "a 'rendezvous' of theatres of the world, [created] in order to enhance knowledge of and respect for performances from other cultures"[38] might have seemed the ideal destination for a foreign production, Barrault was preeminent in de Winton's mind.

The next time the subject of exporting *Marat/Sade* was brought up would be a year later. In the interim, moves had been made in the UK's diplomatic circles to mount Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* for a one-off performance at Notre-Dame Cathedral. The concert was the suggestion of Lady Rachel Reilly, wife of British Ambassador Sir Patrick Reilly, who had met Maurice Edelman at a social occasion in Paris and mentioned her idea to him. Edelman, a Francophile novelist, playwright, and MP for Harold Wilson's Labour government for Coventry North, was also was a vice-chairman of the BC as well as chairman of the Franco–British Parliamentary Relations Committee, and he wrote personally to the BC's director-general, Sir Paul Sinker, enthusiastically proposing what he felt would be "a most impressive Anglo–French manifestation."[39] Edelman was likely unaware that the proposal added unwelcome grit into the oil of the negotiations that were already underway between de Winton and Robin Duke, deputy controller of the BC's Books, Art and Science Division, who summed up the state of play in a letter of 10 September 1965, solidly favoring the export of Olivier with the National Theatre:

> We spoke while you were over here about the suggestion which Maurice Edelman had made to the Director-General for a special performance of Britten's War Requiem in Paris next year. I pointed out to you that it was likely that such a performance could cost as much as £5000 and you agreed with me that a sum of that size would give far better value in terms of cultural impact and prestige if it was put towards a visit by a leading theatre or ballet company from this country, for a full guest season in Paris. . . . We entirely agree with you that what is now needed for Paris is a theatre tour of the very highest quality next year, so as to compensate for the unfavourable impression given by many of the tours from this country which have been to Paris in recent years. In these circumstances we are all agreed here that it would be best to drop the idea of the War Requiem and earmark £5000 for the financing of a first-class theatre company, such as the National Theatre, with Sir Laurence Olivier.[40]

That November, Sinker confirmed to Edelman that the idea for the *War Requiem* had been scotched on the basis of its prohibitive cost for a single performance, adding "it is a work already known in France, and so there would be none of the impact which novelty brings; and that in any case Notre Dame is not regarded as a suitable place for musical performances of this kind."[41] Edelman was left to relay the disappointing news to Lady Reilly, stressing his feeling that the opportunity for a unifying cultural experience had been missed: "For my own part, I consider that £5000 would not be a bad investment in reminding the British and French of their common experience."[42] However, in Paris, the terrain abruptly shifted following A.-M. Julien's resignation of his directorship from the Théâtre des Nations after

a ministerial inquiry into the company prompted by his sacking of his second in command, Claude Planson. While Erika Fischer-Lichte maintains that this precipitated the Théâtre des Nation's "degenerat[ion] into an event of secondary importance,"[43] at the time, when Barrault became the new director of the company, moved it to the Odéon, and immediately signaled his intention to open the new season with Olivier in the NT's production of *Othello*, the BC were delighted that it fitted in with their plans. Relaying the news to Robin Duke at the BC, de Winton added: "You will note that Barrault will in any case be bringing to Paris the *Marat/Sade* production, which, though outstanding in its own way, is in my opinion unsuitable for our purposes."[44] Although de Winton was keen to see another British production playing Paris, presenting Olivier and the NT supported by the BC remained his highest priority. Unfortunately for de Winton and the BC, Olivier unexpectedly declined the invitation in October 1965, citing the NT's schedule of domestic commitments.

Having just returned from a tour of Moscow and Berlin the previous month, playing a mixed bill of *Othello*, *Love for Love,* and *Hobson's Choice* over eighteen performances, it is highly likely that Olivier was not keen to reprise the role, frustrated by the demands of having to sit through three hours of makeup every day and already sick of touring and visibly keen to get home while in Moscow, the fifteen curtain calls for the production notwithstanding.[45] The tour had been a particularly celebrated coup for international relations, the NT having been the first foreign company to play inside the Kremlin theatre. After the NT had estimated £37,856 in costs against £13,750 in receipts, the BC had agreed to pick up a deficit of some £23,000 for the tour. Not only did the BC insist on managing the travel and transport, but on advice of the FO, they also administered advance warnings to the NT cast about the importance of ideological conformity in not expressing any political views while there, as a memo prior to the tour from 6 August 1965 made clear: "[There are] some extremely left-wing members in the NT, including Lady Olivier herself, so the political briefing is particularly important."[46] In such a context, the question of the BC obtaining credit for backing the venture was of paramount importance; the previous decade, after the BC had sponsored the Shakespeare Memorial Company's tour of *Titus Andronicus* to Europe in 1957, Enid McLeod, the BC's officer for Paris, was able to ecstatically report that Olivier had begun a speech at the Hôtel de Ville in Paris with the words "au nom du British Council." The BC were particularly pleased to note the form of Oliver's address, since prior to the trip, George Hume, the general manager of the Shakespeare Memorial Company, had written to McLeod in excoriating terms after taking offense at the way that she had represented the BC's sponsorship of the company's tour to him:

> That you should have the audacity to write to me telling me that 'The British Council is responsible for Sir Laurence's visit to Paris' is, I am afraid, carrying the British council's extraordinary talent for self-deception and aggrandisement at the expense of others' enthusiasm and work just a little too far. . . . I shall take every step, in view of your letter, to make sure that the name of the British Council appears in association with ours and with Sir Laurence's by *courtesy only.*[47]

Hume himself had signed the contract with A.-M. Julien, felt that he alone had brokered the deal that included taking the company to the Théâtre des Nations, and

expected to make a profit on the Paris portion of the tour. That the BC were providing subsidy in the form of financial guarantee against loss for the remainder of the tour, which would go on to play Zagreb and Belgrade, did not enter into Hume's calculations. Hume retaliated by withdrawing permission for John Gielgud to tour France under the auspices of the BC. Given Hume's animosity, the BC were extraordinarily grateful to have featured in Olivier's acknowledgment, and did observe in internal correspondence that the contracts that had been drawn up between themselves and the Shakespeare Memorial Company had stipulated that both organizations had to be referenced in conjunction with each other in respect of the tour.

Though *Marat/Sade* had been their second choice, contingency discussions among Reilly, de Winton, and BC Director of Music and Drama R. P. H. Davis began again in earnest. On 20 October 1965, Davis wrote to de Winton regarding his reservations about *Marat/Sade*, and queried whether the cultural attaché's assumptive framework of the play's unsuitability remained justifiable:

> There seems to be no doubt that Peter Brook's production of *Marat/Sade* is in every way remarkable. . . . As a demonstration of Britain's pre-eminence in production, staging, and acting, one could probably find no better dramatic exercise in the British Theatre at this moment. . . . It may be that these reservations have arisen because Peter Weiss is a Swedish citizen of German origin and that plays of this provenance are not really suitable for export by the British Council. On the other hand, British Orchestras do of course play works by foreign composers during their tours overseas.[48]

A week later, de Winton wrote back to Robin Duke at the BC and reported that Barrault had met the British ambassador and had maintained that if Olivier's decision was irrevocable, he intended to open the season with *Marat/Sade*[49]—an outcome that Duke, in a memo to Davis, suggested that Reilly would probably be disinclined to accept if it were to mean under the BC's sponsorship.[50] Nonetheless, over the course of the next month, whatever scruples de Winton may have had about *Marat/Sade* melted away as no other viable opportunity presented itself: "Although, as you know, I have not felt happy about the Council sponsoring the MARAT/SADE play, Monsieur Barrault's plan to honour British Theatre by opening the new Théâtre des Nations with a British production does present an opportunity which we must not lose."[51] Meanwhile, the RSC received a direct invitation from Barrault to play in Paris, to which it agreed in principle. The BC had no part in brokering the engagement, but Donnell relayed to de Winton in Paris that the RSC would need £2,000 to cover the company's costs in keeping the cast on retainer during the hiatus between the end of their New York performances and the opening of the Théâtre des Nations, which was proposed for 4 May 1966. De Winton, as intermediary, made an approach to the BC for the funds, with Donnell and Edgeworth subsequently liaising over a budgetary breakdown of the cost of the trip, estimated at £11,100 against potential takings of around £8,000, with the BC expected to provide a guarantee of £2,750 against the expected shortfall, in addition to their original outlay.[52]

Painful Impressions

With everything finally in motion for the export of *Marat/Sade*, on 10 December, out of the blue, Maurice Edelman called Lord Bridges, director-general of the BC, from Paris on the phone but failed to speak to him, leaving the following message: "Would the Council reconsider the sending of the De Sade play to Paris in view of the painful impressions already existing here as a result of the sadistic Moor crimes and the widely publicised references to De Sade in connection with it. British opinion in Paris is very much opposed to sending the play."[53] The intervention caused consternation at the BC, where it was considered an insensitive intrusion into their commissioning policy: not only had the BC not actually yet agreed to sponsor the trip, but the request potentially abrogated proposals that were being implemented under the purview of the UK government's official diplomatic channels. As E. N. Gummer, the BC's deputy controller of Books, Art and Science Division, wrote to the deputy director-general:

> Purely on the dramatic side, members of the Drama Advisory Council speak of this production as a masterpiece. . . . [S]ince it is mainly from HM [Her Majesty's] Ambassador in Paris that the pressure has come, it would be helpful if Mr Edelman could speak to him direct (I am doubtful that Mr Edelman realises that we always seek to pay very close attention indeed to authoritative opinion on the spot, and I should not be surprised to hear that he believes we reach decisions about tours, repertoires, etc unilaterally at this end).[54]

The BC now found itself in a difficult bind, halfway committed to financially supporting the export of a show that it had not yet officially agreed to sponsor, with any move that it made likely either to derail the UK government's diplomatic objectives, damage the prestige of one of its national theatre companies, or sour their relationship with either Barrault or their own vice-chairman. The documentation produced at the time shows the BC to be muddled and sclerotic in its response to the deadlock. Resolving to allow the British ambassador to decide whether the BC should sponsor the production, a letter was drafted to Reilly in Paris for the signature of the BC's director-general but collectively written by its senior figures in the Arts Division. The draft letter cites both Edelman's initial objection as well as the BC's own Drama Advisory Committee's (DAC) uniformly excellent opinion of Brook's production, stressing that the only connection between the Moors Murders and the play was that the name of the Marquis de Sade appeared in both. Whereas the draft states, "I do feel this needs to be handled with some care and I incline to agree, prima facie, with Edelman, that we must take all these circumstances into account before agreeing to official sponsorship," the phrase "we must take all these circumstances into account before agreeing" is crossed out, and, in Gummer's hand, replaced with "we ought not to agree."[55] It is Gummer's addition that made the final copy of the letter sent to Reilly. Nonetheless, the letter makes clear that, notwithstanding the RSC's experience of financial difficulties and the potential damage to their prestige of not being able to fulfil Barrault's accommodation, "if you should come to the conclusion that there are serious objections to sending the play to Paris in the present circumstances, we will of course convey your views to the company."[56]

Though the letter effectively offered Reilly a veto on the production, the deliberations were undertaken by de Winton, who wrote directly to the BC ahead of the ambassador's reply with a detailed justification advocating backing the production, since although he felt that there was "no satisfactory solution, [therefore] to sponsor Marat/Sade seems to be least unsatisfactory."[57] Further to this, de Winton drafted the ambassador's reply and then called Davis at the BC, telling him what it would include. In a memo to his colleagues, Davis indicated what arguments de Winton had used to persuade the ambassador that the BC should support the export of the play:

a) The play itself is most unlikely to cause offence to the French, though it is agreed that the British Community may raise their eyebrows.
b) Paris is, of course, the home of Grande Guignol and is thus well accustomed to displays of violence and cruelty on the stage.
c) The play is written by a German about a Frenchman who is, all things considered, portrayed in a not too-unsympathetic light. The arguments of the play and its content are thus not a British responsibility.
d) As far as a 'Moors Case' is concerned, the French have long realised that the British have a penchant for horrific murders, and they know that "beneath the correct surface, a violent and brutal people." They can point both to English literature from the time of the Elizabethans onwards and to a succession of grisly murder cases in support of this. They will not therefore be ready to admit that the influence of Sade's writings had very much bearing on the present murder case.
e) Peter Brook's production of the Marat/Sade play is internationally recognised as a masterly piece of production and is certainly the most remarkable tour de force to appear on the British stage for many years. Acting, production and stage-craft must generally all redound to our credit.
f) It is almost certain that one way or another the production will appear at the Théâtre des Nations. . . . If we refuse to be associated with it, we shall be made to appear rather foolish, especially as publicity will no doubt be given to our reluctance to support the venture.[58]

In the case of that last point, the cat was out of the bag. Unwelcome publicity had already become a problem for the BC: the London newspaper *Evening Standard* published a derisory column from its Paris correspondent Sam White about the affair on 17 December 1965, suggesting that the plan was the BC's "most brilliant coup since it staged a performance of The Merchant of Venice in an Arab state. It is now an excellent Christmas game to devise a similar British Council success. I suggest that it puts on Othello in Johannesburg."[59] On 22 December, the *Daily Express* joined the fray, attempting to use the affair's cross-channel context to turn the already shopworn reactionary bromide against arts subsidy into a reductio ad absurdum**:** "It is bad enough to make the taxpayer pay for plays he does not wish to see at home. Why should he pay for the French to see them?"[60]

Reilly's letter to the BC on 22 December did not make all the points de Winton suggested it might include, but agreed that the BC should sponsor the production, citing its own DAC's opinion of the play's "exceptional merit," and balancing the

potential for public criticism against the liability of alienating both the RSC and Barrault. Reilly noted two additional things: first, that the RSC had toured Moscow in 1958–9, when he was stationed there as the British ambassador to the USSR, and that the close relationship they had developed on that occasion compelled him to support them in their endeavors; second, that it was likely Edelman himself that had leaked the story to the press, observing of the *Evening Standard* column that, "[Edelman] used the same language to me when he lunched with me that day."[61]

Even with the ambassador's adjudication, the BC could not move forward until its budgetary allocation to support tours for 1966–7 had been finalized, and Gummer had been instructed to suspend all negotiations until the matter was resolved. In preparation of a reply to Reilly, the controllers of the BC's Arts and Drama divisions reached convergence on the question of *Marat/Sade's* "suitability" over several key areas. Minutes from early January 1966 refine the potential objections surrounding the export of the show into a number of defensible propositions, all aimed at making a virtue of necessity: that since Weiss's nationality was Swedish, criticism about the play's content could be deflected on the basis that the play was not "British," thereby turning any potential misgivings about the source of its authorship and the parameters of its thematic concerns on their head; that although the BC had already been criticized in the press, withdrawing support was likely to induce further criticism from allies in the theatrical community; that the French were far more likely to be upset at the refusal to sponsor the play than by the choice of play itself; and that Edelman's reservations about the play's evocation of "painful impressions" would be experienced putatively only by the British community in France rather than the French themselves, the crimes being committed and tried in Britain. On the whole, while the heads and controllers of the Arts divisions within the BC now concurred they would inevitably have to countenance a degree of opprobrium from some constituency whatever the outcome, the congruence of thought inclined to the belief that the benefits of exporting the production would outweigh its liabilities, not only in the positive effect on the theatregoing public of Paris but in maintaining good relationships with Barrault and the RSC. As Duke put it in a memorandum from 15 January 1966, not only would sponsoring the RSC fulfill the BC's obligations to France in a major way, but it was also becoming increasingly important to maintain their relationship with the RSC:

> [T]he advantage of supporting the project is that not only should we kill the Paris bird with an inexpensive and important stone, but that we should strengthen our relations with the Royal Shakespeare Theatre [*sic*] just at a moment when this company is beginning to have doubts about the value of overseas touring for the Council.[62]

Though the mood among the BC's controllers and heads of Department remained confident that *Marat/Sade*'s outstanding quality would override all other considerations, a further hinderance soon appeared: the date for the Moors Murder trials was set for 19 April 1966, which created a danger of overlap with the proposed opening of the production in Paris. At this point, Edelman once more pushed hard for the BC to reconsider sponsoring the production, and managed to get the issue onto the agenda for the organization's EC scheduled for 1 February in

order to put across his point of view. A document summarizing the state of affairs was drawn up and put before the Committee; of the play itself, the draft states: "The title is to this extent misleading in that it is not about sadism or perversion but revolution."[63] In the meeting, chaired by the BC's director-general, Reilly's recommendation that the play be supported was read out, along with a letter from Lord Harwood, who, as chairman of the BC's Music Advisory Committee, had a seat on the Executive but could not make it on the day. Extolling the play's brilliance, Harwood wondered whether it might be best to court the condemnation of the reactionary press rather than recoil from their attentions, and wear the disparagement as a badge of pride:

> As I am quite certain that Members of the Executive Committee will have seen the play (as I have) and will therefore take the view that it is one of the most remarkable productions London has seen for many years, there will doubtless be no danger of a decision being taken against supporting this enterprise. I do feel that if there were we should become the laughing stock of everyone except the Daily Express, which will not have seen the play but whose congratulations on such a step would be more unfortunate than their customary denigration.[64]

The minutes of the meeting reveal a hotly contested discussion, with some members altogether surprised that there was any question of withholding support for the play. Sir John Nicholls maintained that "too much preoccupation with moral and social questions was not the Council's business,"[65] but others were equally adamant that the BC should not sponsor it. Of the latter, Edelman's remarks flatly contradicted his original objection to the export of the play, and instead hewed to a more openly humanistic assessment that the play itself, derived from de Sade's philosophy, was ultimately the conduit for subject matter so debased that it could not be supported on fundamental moral grounds:

> The play would undoubtedly have enormous success in Paris, but the Council had to consider the criterion to be used in judging whether we should support it. He [Edelman] had discussed the matter with the Ambassador. The coincidence of the play's production in Paris with the Moors trial was not a main reason for his objection. The play, though brilliantly presented, was fundamentally morbid and basically degenerate; it could not be separated from sadism and perversion, and, however large the audience it might attract, the Council should not sponsor it, if our purpose was to interpret the British way of life.[66]

In summing up the meeting, Bridges noted the lack of unanimity, and, sensitive of the necessity for a quick decision and the lack of prospect of achieving consensus, offered a way to break the deadlock by suggesting that funds be found from an alternative source. Bridges also suggested that the lack of agreement made the matter so intractable that he would have to refer it to Minister of State George Thomson at the FO, to warn the government of the way that it could problematize international relations[67]—a meeting that was later held on 3 February and in which Thomson said it was not his place as a government minister to influence the BC's business. However, as chairman, Bridges was first among equals, and with no vote taken in the meeting, he alone determined consensus in the room as he saw it,

deciding that the majority opinion was against exporting the play. The plan to find non-BC funding to support the play's export was enough to placate both sides of the room of the EC, which would potentially enable the production to go ahead, but not under the auspices of the BC itself. Bridges asked for Gummer to draft a statement on the outcome of the Committee, the wording of which is significant for its overt suggestion that the BC would not be sponsoring *Marat/Sade*, without explicitly ruling it completely out, by relegating it in order of priority:

> The function of the British Council in the field of drama is to facilitate the display of the best of British drama abroad. The excellence of this production has been widely acknowledged, but opinions about the play itself, which incidentally is not by a British writer, have been sharply divided, and it is open to question about how far it can be regarded as representative. In these circumstances the Council is decided that other calls on its limited funds must be accorded priority.[68]

At the news that the BC had effectively declined to sponsor the *Marat/Sade*'s trip to Paris, the members of its DAC unanimously adjourned in protest at the way their expertise and role within the institution had been discounted. Standing down on 8 February, the DAC members demanded that the EC reconvene immediately to discuss the matter and reverse the decision, and refused to meet again until they had their way. That day, Duke distributed a minute that reported on the DAC's meeting in which they refused a meeting with Bridges and instead unanimously demanded a formal meeting of the EC, with Edelman in attendance, to reopen the question of exporting *Marat/Sade*. Most of the Committee had wanted to resign immediately, but Kenneth Tynan, then literary manager of the NT, had made the suggestion of standing down until a deputation of the DAC had put the case to an emergency meeting of the Executive. Ted Willis (then a Lord), who had written plays for London's Unity Theatre and also for the BBC police series *Dixon of Dock Green*, had moved it as a motion.[69] The BC's DAC was chaired by Norman Marshall, theatre director and writer of *The Other Theatre* (1947), about members-only theatre clubs so designated to avoid censorship by the Lord Chamberlain's office. It included, among others, West End impresario Hugh "Binkie" Beaumont, director Michael Benthall, former dancer and director of ballet Ninette de Valois (then a Dame), renowned socialite Pamela Berry (then a Lady), who had been part of the 1920s "Bright Young Things" crowd, and general all-rounder actor-director-dancer Robert Helpmann. On 9 February an article appeared on the front page of the *Daily Telegraph*, "Row in British Council over Sade Play," which carried full details of the affair and quoted Ted Willis, who excoriated Edelman's censorious tendencies at a time when British theatre was on the threshold of a climactic step toward freedom of expression: "When we have our debate on theatre censorship in the Lords next week I shall be tempted to say that the Lord Chamberlain is preferable to Mr Edelman."[70] The *Evening Standard* carried the story on the same day, specifically attacking the "stuffy, unimaginative thinking" of Bridges, for preventing the example of British theatre craft from being shared with the world: "It is the acting, the direction, the interpretation which Britain wants to export. It is a proud exhibit of British theatre at its best."[71] The next day the *Evening Standard* issued an apology to Bridges for the

claim that he had cast the deciding vote on the issue at the EC.[72] It is clear that the newspaper had received a stern rebuke, for while the BC was collectively appalled that the decision had been made public, they resented above all the suggestion that the specific mechanism through which the decision had been made had come down to one individual. Meanwhile, the *Guardian* declared that Sydney Bernstein, chairman of Granada Television, had made an offer to fund the trip personally, the article carrying a quote from Peter Brook, who confessed himself "speechless and amused."[73]

It is worth remembering that these disagreements were taking place at an unusually febrile time in the British theatre ecology as whole. That same month of February 1966, the ESC's director, secretary, and licensee were being tried in court by the Department of Public Prosecutions in a high-profile test case over the Royal Court's production of Edward Bond's *Saved* (1965). Although they would go on to plead guilty, it increasingly seemed that the argument for the retention of censorship was insupportable, and the 1968 abolition of the Lord Chamberlain's office was more than likely in the cards. However, the RSC had themselves been the focus of controversy not long before over its place in the "Dirty Plays" dispute. In this instance, Emile Littler—producer, impresario, chairman of the Society of West End Theatre Managers and board member of the RSC itself—had attacked the company following its "Theatre of Cruelty" season, denouncing not just *Marat/Sade* but also *Afore Night Come* (1962) by David Rudkin, as well as Joe Orton's *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (1964). Littler had condemned the RSC for staging a "program of dirty plays," and made a statement that the RSC were "ruining our Stratford image and depleting our funds by giving the public plays which they simply have no desire to see."[74] Though Littler's comments found little favor within the home theatre community, they reached an international audience, and may, however tenuously, have made a contribution to a climate of thought where the name de Sade became freed from its association with Weiss's play and instead functioned as a hieroglyphic for a broader descent into cultural depravity. Writing in 1975, Kenneth Tynan himself reflected back on the nature of the discourse that arose in the wake of the Moors Murders trial—where many were of the view that the works of de Sade should have been banned on the basis of them being a corrupting influence on Ian Brady—and dismissed the notion that the books provided Brady with fantasy scenarios to enact: "He was a practising sadist before he ever heard of de Sade."[75]

Feelings were running high in the BC both because of the deluge of publicity and the adversarial relationship that had developed between the committees. While Duke and Gummer worked as intermediaries on behalf of the DAC to convey their feelings to the chairman and director-general, the dispute immediately opened out on another front, with Edelman and Willis using the newspapers to ventilate their opinions in full. On 10 February, under the headline, "Why I, personally, am against spending your money on de Sade," Edelman expatiated, over the course of a full page in the *Daily Express*, on his prophylactic stance toward the play. Likening censorship to an appendix, "useless when inert, dangerous when active," Edelman argued that since the play was "nihilistic, destructive and compassionless," it could not fulfill its intended purpose, according to the charter of the BC, of developing closer relations between Britain and other countries "for the purpose of

benefitting the British Commonwealth." Criticizing the play as "erotic cruelty" whereby "violence tricked out with art will always find a panting audience," Edelman inveighed against the play as an attempted recuperation of de Sade: "an attempt is being made to promote him as a tolerant philosopher, who, by recognising the essential cruelty of man, purges him of it." Closing on wondering what the French would make of the rise of violent crime in Britain alongside a renewed interest in "a philosopher of cruelty they themselves have rejected," Edelman stated: "The de Sade play may illustrate a British style of acting. It has nothing to do with the way of life which the British Council was formed to promote."[76]

The very next day, Willis retorted in the *Daily Express* with a two-column response entitled "How They Must Be Laughing in Paris!" In it, Willis reproached Edelman for his hypocrisy, particularly on censorship, since the play had already been past one censor in the shape of the Lord Chamberlain, and was now arguably being censored again: "When one man, or ten men, or a committee set themselves up in judgement on the content of a play they are acting as censors." Further, Willis derided the tortured bureaucratic logic of the affair: "So we have the whimsical situation that the play by a European author has official approval when performed to Britons and official disapproval when it is performed to Europeans." While admitting that he shared, to some extent, Edelman's views about the play, Willis attacked Edelman directly: "To suggest that this play has 'nothing to do with the British way of life' really is unworthy of him. It is certainly not the opinion of the British Ambassador in Paris, who has approved the visit. And would Mr Edelman refuse to support a National Theatre tour abroad with a play of Chekhov, for the same reasons?"[77] The next day, the *Daily Express* poked fun at the contretemps, carrying a cartoon of a man and a woman at a drinks party, with the woman asking, "[I]s it true that the British Council has commissioned Mr Edelman to dramatise 'Little Lord Fauntleroy' for production in Paris?"[78]

Willis's posture alarmed departmental heads at the BC, who were shaken at the prospect of the organization being yoked into the forthcoming debate on censorship in the House of Lords. An immediate meeting of the EC was impossible, as Bridges had been taken ill and the director-general was away in India, but Gummer's invitation for Marshall to meet Bridges as soon as he recovered from flu was accepted. In anticipation of the meeting Gummer immediately produced a dossier for Bridges marked both urgent and confidential, and elucidated how the affair exposed hitherto unacknowledged flaws in the systems through which productions were chosen for export:

> The Drama Advisory Committee is not just a Committee which meets three or four times a year to give a rubber stamp approval to projects we have mounted within the office. . . . It is not only that they advise us on companies etc., but they give us personal assistance in approaching them on all the frequently lengthy discussions about repertoire; on management; on casting; and even on scenery and costume. . . . We seek their personal help in influencing and even helping to settle arguments from ebullient and often unreliable managers, producers, etc. They inspect current productions on our behalf. . . . They give up their time freely to help us with the large flow of visitors in their field, entertaining and escorting them and hosting lunches and receptions. . . . We cannot do without their expert help, quite apart from the professional authority given by their backing of our overseas tours programme. . . . Feeling in the

> Committee runs very high indeed on their not being involved in the final discussion over the Marat–Sade; and on what almost all of them see simply as a piece of authoritarian censorship based on wholly inadequate grounds. The fact that the British Council always has to look carefully at every action it takes from the point of view of its effect at home and overseas my well be unseen by many of them. . . . A vital point of difference between the approach of the EC and that of the DAC is that the EC looks to the text, the DAC looks to the production. It might be said that for the EC the literary view is what matters. . . . The DAC however takes as its criterion: does this particular production demonstrate British acting and stagecraft at its best? To the membership of the DAC therefore, text and authorship are wholly secondary considerations, only rather grudgingly to be considered at all. Thus arguments leading from the nationality of a playwright will scarcely be comprehended, however large they might bulk in other areas of the Council's work. It is worth remembering that the whole of the National Theatre's immediate future programme is of plays by foreign authors; no one in the DAC would find this in the very least remarkable.[79]

It was increasingly clear that the BC itself held a conflicted notion of what constituted "British" dramatic art, with the DAC's conception substantially more advanced than its EC members were even aware. The notion of "British" theatrical work remained caught between the canonical yet increasingly outmoded idea of the playwright considered as the authorizing and authorial hand versus a more subtle appreciation not only of a wider constellation of artistic techniques, approaches, and idioms comprising a distinctive British theatre tradition, but also a more holistic view of the whole vocabulary of stagecraft, and theatre practice as a quintessentially collaborative pursuit within that. This disparity was further muddied by the play's treatment of its inherited subject matter, which for Edelman ran counter to the British state's purpose. Gummer elucidated the flaws that the affair had revealed in the BC's commissioning process and wrote revealingly about its role within the British theatrical ecology: "[T]hese funds are in no sense intended as a subsidy to the arts, the Council rather being in the position of someone who chooses to buy or not to buy his own ticket for a certain play."[80]

Prior to the meeting of the EC and the DAC, those at the BC's highest echelons became preoccupied with confidentiality, concerned that the opacity of the organization's decision-making processes had been compromised. Both Edelman and Harewood contacted the chairman and expressed disquiet, Harewood suggesting that the job of the BC's advisory councils would become impossible if they were not confidential, and Edelman concerned that the DAC could leak the outcome of the forthcoming EC meeting to the press again. Bridges agreed to meet Edelman to placate him, but agreed with his point, articulating that while the decision of who the BC chose to sponsor should be made public, the "accounts of argumentation used" to reach such decisions should not.[81] Oxbury wrote to Duke on 24 February that Tynan had been identified as the leaker in the DAC, promising to remind the group about the importance of confidentiality.[82] In preparation for the meeting, the DAC notified the Executive of a series of points they wished to discuss in order to more properly define the terms of reference by which they were to function, asking for representation on the EC when matters concerning drama or ballet were discussed, a right of reply when the Executive rejected a recommendation of theirs before the rejection was final, and for clarification of the

reasoning for rejecting *Marat/Sade*. Once more, however, the planned meeting was forestalled, this time by the Labour government's abrupt announcement of a general election, meaning that an insufficient number of EC members would have been able to attend it for the foreseeable future.

During the hiatus, a final roadblock unexpectedly relieved the BC of any further concern in attempting to export *Marat/Sade.* After the RSC's acceptance of Barrault's invitation was made public, it was discovered that they owned the English-speaking rights to the play in the United States and the UK only. For performances in France, they would require permission from the owners of the French rights to the play, and a French-language production was being prepared for the Sarah Bernhardt Theatre, the very theatre where the Théâtre des Nations had had its headquarters prior to moving to the Théâtre de France. In Paris, de Winton, with the backing of the BC, did his best to foster relations between Brook and A.-M. Julien, but it was fruitless. Barrault, at that point seriously pressed for time to finalize his program, could wait no longer. The RSC ended up extending their run of shows in New York by two weeks, and nothing ever came of the attempt to export Brook's *Marat/Sade* to Paris, falling foul of a rights issue only Jane Edgeworth at the BC had anticipated in literally her very first communication about the play almost two full years before.

After the opportunity of exporting *Marat/Sade* had passed, the DAC continued to pursue a clarification of their rights and responsibilities, but above all attempted concertedly to oust Edelman. The problem was that while Edelman served as a vice-chairman of the BC and member of the EC, he was also actually a member of the DAC, even though he had only attended one single meeting over the previous five years. The move was the Committee's reprisal for his intervention over *Marat/Sade*; going forward, they did not want to have to continue to reckon with a fellow member with the ability to go directly to the director-general in order to countermand their recommendations. Edelman had fought his case over every conceivable territory, and had defended his position in a number of personal letters both to his local constituents and the public at large, replying to those who wrote to him in his capacity as MP:

> I do not believe that the British Council, one of whose purposes is to export manifestations of British Culture, should send to Paris a play which I have described elsewhere as nihilistic and compassionless. . . . You ask me whether I believe a sophisticated French audience will be infuriated or corrupted. My answer is that I don't think so. That still does not deal with the question of whether the British Council should give public funds to express and propagate a philosophy of cruelty.[83]

The removal of Edelman from the DAC became an unusually difficult bureaucratic procedure. Edelman bridled at Bridges's fairly delicate overture to him that they privately discuss his position on the DAC to "avoid embarrassment,"[84] writing back, "I cannot think of any points which might prove embarrassing to me, though depending on your conversation with Norman Marshall and his colleagues, they may prove embarrassing to others."[85] Indeed, after Edelman refused to offer his resignation, it became increasingly clear that he could potentially prove impossible to dislodge: as a vice-chairman of the BC, he had the right to see any documentation produced by

the DAC itself and therefore veto any proposal to eject him. The meeting of the Executive and the DAC that eventually went ahead, attended by Bridges, Sinker, Edelman, and Marshall, turned out to be a postmortem on the operational and institutional deficiencies that had created the *Marat/Sade* contretemps, rather than, as it had been intended, a reckoning over whether the BC should sponsor it or not. Certain changes in the functionality of the DAC were concluded: namely, that DAC should have a voice at EC meetings, though no vacancy was yet available. Sinker himself said that he hadn't realized the DAC were so keen on sending *Marat/Sade* to Paris, and that he would have invited Marshall to that EC meeting had he known. Edelman addressed the meeting to argue that it must remain a condition that the EC retained the ability to override the DAC's "artistic" recommendations on the basis of a superseding "policy" directive, and it was agreed in future that in decisions where the EC overruled the DAC, the director-general would have to consult with the DAC's chairman.

The proceedings of the meeting satisfied everyone on the DAC and convinced them to quit their protest and resume ordinary business—which, for the wily Marshall, provided the ideal pretext to attempt to finally dispense with Edelman. Marshall's trap was to convene a meeting of the DAC, itself preceded by a private meeting with the BC's chairman and the deputy-director general, where he would personally invite all the current DAC members except for Edelman. While various BC staff warned against the difficulties of arranging such a meeting without Edelman getting wind of it, Marshall had the invitations typed up on his own notepaper and convinced everyone to play along with an informal gathering of DAC members with no agenda, minutes, or subsequent reference to it. The memo to Bridges for the meeting suggested that the DAC were to argue for the removal of Edelman on the following grounds:

> The single matter outstanding is the opinion of the Drama Advisory Committee that, since its Chairman or his representative will in future be attending all relevant meetings of the Executive Committee, it should no longer be necessary for "any other member" of the Executive Committee to attend the meetings of the DAC. This was directed at Mr Edelman.[86]

Ultimately, in the clandestine meeting, which involved Marshall, Berry, Beaumont, and Lord Willis, there was no way that the BC would sanction the removal of Edelman, instead agreeing the following provision:

> No member of an Advisory Committee of the Council who is also a member of the Executive Committee should raise at the Executive Committee a matter falling within the ambit of the Advisory Committee before the Advisory Committee, or at least its Chairman, has first been consulted.[87]

Marshall wrote back to Bridges in conciliatory tone, saying that the affair had been "time-devouring, but not time-wasting in the end."[88] Edelman resigned both his vice-chairmanship of the BC and membership in the Executive Committee on 10 October 1966.[89]

Conclusion

Nothing within the examination of the *Marat/Sade* affair contradicts Caroline Ritter's assertion that during this period the BC's arts advisors were drawn from a clique that "represented a London-centred, elite version of the stage, which they had clear financial, political, and cultural interests in preserving."[90] What is clear, however, is that the arts advisors to the BC (here the DAC) were a very long way from exercising full control over what the BC's Arts Divisions actually decided to send abroad, even if they were unanimous in aspiring to export the best-quality theatrical art possible, at least to European metropoles. As Ritter observes, those same experts were exercised by anxieties about preserving theatre as a cultural form capable of standing apart from the domination of mass culture and popular entertainment represented by the inexorable encroachments of cinema and television. Seeing themselves as "defenders of cultural standards," the BC's Arts Division and its Advisory Committees "preferred to work with elite audiences because those were the most likely to understand and be impressed by the types of culture the council wanted to promote," and this is most certainly what they had in mind with a Parisian audience.[91] An inflection point had been reached in 1961 when the BC agreed to sponsor amateur and provincial companies as well as those from London, but these were largely parceled out to tour the former empire, where audiences were regarded as less culturally educated and astute.

The *Marat/Sade* contretemps shows the difficulties inherent in the BC using the notion of elite quality as its sole calculus of exportability, with the whole affair being mired in improvised jurisprudence related as much to aspects of taste, sensitivity, and potential ethical ramifications as much as to what aspects of a theatrical production properly qualify it as "British." Moreover, taken as a whole, not only do the accumulation of accounts of the various theatrical manifestations that the BC sent abroad suggest only a provisional conception of the attributes, qualities, and values that a work reflective of the British national culture might be expected to demonstrate, but there is also an equal indeterminacy about how questions related to a piece's authorship, its chosen topic, and the interplay of influences upon its production and realization might lead to its assignation as "British": even an overall reluctance to send plays not written by British playwrights had still not been fully overcome. Conversely, here, the invocation of the name of de Sade further problematized all of these assumptions by placing a purely functional conception of what constituted "quality" work in tension with a broader palette of countervailing discourses regarding indecency and morality within art. These not only jostled for order of priority with the BC's "quality" maxim, but additionally, were intrinsic to the debates about the justification for theatrical censorship that were being played out in the courts, media, and legislature at the same time. Only *after* questions were raised about the suitability of the *Marat/Sade* for sponsorship by the BC were notions about its proper designation as an artifact of British culture broached; even then, those discussions were oriented more toward achieving a suitable classification as something originating from and ascribable to a national culture rather than as something that propagated particular values or adhered to conceptions of a recognizable national character. Indeed, when forced to interrogate its own definition of what could permissibly constitute British dramatic art and what fell outside

that boundary, the BC found itself only ever partially engaged in an intellectual exercise to set a designation informed by cultural and aesthetic parameters, since the proper attribution of the provenance of the *Marat/Sade* was also bound up with establishing legitimate excuses for a strategic maneuver designed to prevent blame and embarrassment should the worst happen.

The inquisition around the issue of the "Britishness" of the *Marat/Sade*'s aesthetic provenance served only to obscure the more profound dilemma with which it confronted the BC: namely, whether British interests could be served by exporting a work that was at variance with British values as they themselves construed them. It is far from clear, on the basis of the evidence available, that the *Marat/Sade* affair expanded the aperture by which the BC considered what productions it was to export and examined what rationale motivated those decisions. What is certainly clear is that although the BC would have preferred the productions that they sent abroad to be politically neutral as they themselves conceived it, in the end they could not escape becoming critics—and moreover, they themselves could not avoid engaging in the same kind of maneuvering that they professed to be the business only of diplomats and cultural attachés, as much as they habitually deferred to the state's governmental actors and diplomatic corps. Furthermore, the affair demonstrates a central contradiction in the BC's self-conception and overall raison d'être, in that it was simultaneously thirsty for credit to be accorded to its own activities, and at the same time intensely paranoid about all publicity: so far as sending theatre abroad went, it was divided between being sponsor and silent partner, the first of these a potential liability, the second an unthinkable occlusion of its own activities.

Finally, not only did the Cold War BC appear to maintain a self-image of Britishness that was fixed, stable, and unified, but it also extended little thought to the fundamental logic of intercultural meetings as an exchange: a productive dialogue with its target public and host nation. Ironically in this instance, it was Peter Brook himself who was to take this notion far more seriously. In 1970, Brook founded the International Centre of Theatre Research in Paris, and became a pioneer of intercultural theatrical exchange that circumvented models of statecraft and soft power. Brook's search was for a mode of theatre that would be a true fusion of cultures, with a reconstitution of globally spanning styles and a layering of traditions that could evince a performance whereby individual elements could be universally understood by any given audience. As Margaret Croydon points out, as Brook set up shop in the old vaudeville house Les Bouffes du Nord, Britain's loss was France's gain:

> Brook's survival was also linked to his having already built an international reputation, which enhanced his prestige and made him attractive to the French. Parisians were happy to support him and his creative efforts, for they regarded it as a privilege to do so. It was also no doubt a source of pride that France was instrumental in supporting some of the most brilliant theater work to be seen on the Continent.[92]

Endnotes

1 "The Betrayal of the British Council," *Burlington Magazine* 149.1248 (2007): 147.

2 For an account of the early history of the Arts Council and its methods of distributing funds, see John S. Harris, *Government Patronage of the Arts in Great Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). For

an overall view of the relationship between the Arts Council and the allocation of funding throughout its history, see Olivia Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House: The Crisis in Britain's Regional Theatres* (Bristol: Intellect, 2008), esp. 47–66. John Bull points out that the Arts Council archive was made available for consultation only in the early twenty-first century, having been presented to the V&A in 1996, so all accounts of its activities predating this were by ex-employees whose only sources were its published annual accounts. For an account of this, see John Bull, *British Theatre Companies: 1965–1979* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017), 56–60. For accounts of the relationship between the Arts Council and specific theatre companies, individuals, and movements, see Sandy Craig, "The Bitten Hand: Patronage and Alternative Theatre," in *Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain*, ed. Sandy Craig (Ambergate, Derbyshire, UK: Amber Lane, 1980), 177–86; Nadine Holdsworth, "'They'd have pissed on my grave': The Arts Council and Theatre Workshop," *New Theatre Quarterly* 15.1 (1999): 3–16; and Taryn Storey, "Devine Intervention: Collaboration and Conspiracy in the History of the Royal Court," *New Theatre Quarterly* 28.4 (2012): 363–78.

3 Alice Byrne notes a lack of interest in the history of the British Council in her article on the BC's interwar policy concerning overseas students. See Alice Byrne, "A 'Sound Investment'? British Cultural Diplomacy and Overseas Students: The British Council's Students Committee, 1935–1939," *Contemporary European History* 30.2 (2021): 265–83. For a history of the BC up to 1984, see Frances Donaldson, *The British Council: The First Fifty Years* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984).

4 See Jen Harvie, "Nationalizing the 'Creative Industries,'" *Contemporary Theatre Review* 13.1 (2003): 15–32; and Brian E. G. Cook, "Shocking the System: The Arts Council, the British Council, and the Paradox of Cherub Theatre Company," *Theatre History Studies* 35 (2016): 73–94.

5 Caroline Ritter, *Imperial Encore: The Cultural Project of the Late British Empire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 45.

6 Sharon Memis, "The Impact of International Cultural Engagement: The British Council's Approach to Evaluation," *Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society* 39.4 (2009): 292–7, at 293.

7 Philip M. Taylor, "Cultural Diplomacy and the British Council: 1939–1939," *British Journal of International Studies* 4.3 (1978): 244–65, at 248.

8 Ibid., 246. In the 1880s French propaganda had been operated through the Service des Oeuvres des Françaises á l'Étranger, which operated through the Alliance Française. The Germans had also established the Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland. British entry into the field of cultural diplomacy is seen as late compared to its competitors.

9 See Byrne, "'Sound Investment'?" 269 and Taylor, "Cultural Diplomacy," 257.

10 Byrne, "'Sound Investment'?" 265.

11 Taylor, "Cultural Diplomacy," 244.

12 Anthony Haigh, *Cultural Diplomacy in Europe* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1974), 36.

13 "Betrayal of the British Council," 147.

14 The word "Mission" is capitalized in all BC correspondence and memoranda throughout the Cold War period, functioning as a shorthand for activities undertaken against communism.

15 Activities in Iron Curtain Countries, The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), BW 1/328. The BC had reopened their offices in Prague and Budapest in 1945, Warsaw in 1946, and Sofia in 1947 but were expelled from all of them by 1950. Often local BC office administrators remaining in those countries following the expulsion of British staff were accused of espionage. In March 1963 the British government set up a special "East Europe Committee" jointly backed by the FO's Cultural Relations Department and the BC to improve relations with the Soviet satellite states.

16 John Beaglehole, "Anglo–Soviet Relations: A British Review," *New Zealand International Review* 12.3 (1987): 22–6, at 25.

17 Letter from Paul Grey, British Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, 15 September 1959, TNA BW 1/328.

18 Zoltán Imre, "Theatre, Propaganda and the Cold War: Peter Brook's *Midsummer Night's Dream* in Eastern Europe (1972)," in *Theatre, Globalization and the Cold War*, ed. Christopher B. Balme and Berenika Szymanski-Düll (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 107–29, at 109.

19 Ibid., 108.

20 Memorandum, TNA BW 1/606.

21 Ibid.

22 Letter from T. F. Brenchley, British Ambassador to Poland, December 1972, TNA BW 1/606.

23 As Jennifer Kumiega makes clear, up until that point, Polish authorities had maintained an equivocal attitude toward Grotowski's work and methods. See Jennifer Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski* (London: Methuen, 1987), 39–53.
24 See Andrew Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures: The History of the 50 Years of the Arts Council of Great Britain* (London: Sinclair–Stevenson, 1995), 51. For an account of the relationship between the ESC and the ACGB, see Storey, "Devine Intervention," 368–75.
25 For a full account of this, see Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House,* 24–34.
26 To take one example, the BC engineered the visit of the Shakespeare Festival Company to Paris for performances of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Merchant of Venice* with Ralph Richardson, with the BC delegate in Paris castigating the former as "less than mediocre." TNA BW 1/440.
27 Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: McKibbon & Kee, 1968), 55.
28 Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception,* 2d ed. (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1997), 96.
29 Charles Marowitz, "*The Marat/Sade,* A Review," in *Peter Brook: A Theatrical Casebook*, ed. David Williams (London: Methuen, 1988), 70–2, at 71.
30 Peter Brook, *The Shifting Point: 40 Years of Theatrical Exploration, 1946–1987* (London: Methuen, 1987), 48.
31 David Roberts, "*Marat/Sade*, or the Birth of Postmodernism from the Spirit of the Avantgarde," *New German Critique* 38 (1986): 112–30, at 117.
32 Anne Beggs, "Revisiting *Marat/Sade*: Philosophy in the Asylum, Asylum in the Theatre," *Modern Drama* 56.1 (2013): 60–79, at 60.
33 Letter from Patrick Donnell, Royal Shakespeare Company, to Jane Edgeworth, 1 September 1964, TNA BW 31/52.
34 Letter from Jane Edgeworth to Patrick Donnell, 17 September 1964, TNA BW 31/52.
35 Letter from Jane Edgeworth to Peter Brook, 25 September 1964, TNA BW 31/52.
36 Letter from Patrick Donnell to André Guerbilsky, 20 October 1964, TNA BW 31/52.
37 Internal BC memo from Jane Edgeworth quoting Charles de Winton, 28 October 1964, TNA BW 31/52.
38 Erika Fischer-Lichte, "European Festivals," in *The Cambridge Companion to International Theatre Festivals,* ed. Ric Knowles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 87–100, at 92.
39 Letter from Maurice Edelman to Paul Sinker, 2 July 1965, MSS 125/2/5/2, Maurice Edelman Archive, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (hereafter Edelman Archive). Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* (1962) was performed for the consecration of the new Coventry Cathedral after the original structure had been destroyed by bombing. It is tempting to speculate that Edelman was moved to make the suggestion in order to produce some kind of symbolic link between his parliamentary constituency as MP and Notre-Dame itself, although there is no direct evidence of this.
40 Letter from R. A. H. Duke (deputy controller, Books, Art and Science Division, BC) to Charles de Winton, 10 September 1965, TNA BW 31/52.
41 Letter from Paul Sinker to Maurice Edelman, 15 November 1965, MSS 125/2/5/2, Edelman Archive.
42 Letter from Maurice Edelman to Lady Reilly, 23 November 1965, MSS 125/2/5/2, Edelman Archive.
43 Fischer-Lichte, "European Festivals," 92.
44 Letter from Charles de Winton to R. A. H. Duke, 18 September 1965, TNA BW 31/52.
45 For an extensive eyewitness account of the National Theatre tour to the USSR, see Virginia Fairweather, *Cry God for Larry: An Intimate Memoir of Sir Laurence Olivier* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1969), 115–50.
46 National Theatre Tour to USSR, West Berlin, and Italy, 6 August 1965, TNA BW 1/442.
47 Letter from George Hume to Enid McLeod (BC Officer Paris), 6 April 1957, TNA BW 1/436. Emphasis in original.
48 Memorandum from R. P. H. Davis, Director of Music and Drama, 20 October 1965, TNA BW 31/52.
49 Letter from Charles de Winton to R. A. H. Duke, 27 October 1965, TNA BW 31/52.
50 Memorandum from R. A. H. Duke to R. P. H. Davis, 29 October 1965, TNA BW 31/52.
51 Letter from Charles de Winton to R. A. H. Duke, 24 November 1965, TNA BW 31/52.
52 Letter from Patrick Donnell to Jane Edgeworth, 6 December 1965, TNA BW 31/52.
53 Memorandum to Paul Sinker, transcript of telephone call from Maurice Edelman, 10 December 1965, MSS 125/2/5/2, Edelman Archive. The so-called Moors Murders were carried out by Ian Brady and Myra Hindley between July 1963 and October 1965 and included the killing of five children. The crimes were the subject of extensive and worldwide media coverage, with much interest focusing on Brady's possession of a

paperback of de Sade's *Justine*, newly available at the time since the obscenity trial over D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1960). The trial took place on 19 April 1966.
54 Memorandum from E. N. Gummer, Deputy Controller, Books, Art and Science, BC to H. F. Oxbury, Deputy Director-General, 10 December 1965, TNA BW 31/52.
55 Draft letter to Sir Patrick Reilly, 14 December 1965, TNA BW 31/52.
56 Paul Sinker to Sir Patrick Reilly, 15 December 1965, TNA BW 31/52.
57 Letter from Charles de Winton, 21 September 1965, TNA BW 31/52.
58 Memorandum from R. P. H. Davis, 21 December 1965, TNA BW 31/52. It is not clear whom de Winton was quoting in point (d), nor to what he was referring.
59 Sam White, "The Council Chooses Sade," *Evening Standard,* 17 December 1965.
60 Robert Pitman, *Daily Express*, 22 December 1965.
61 Letter from Patrick Reilly to Paul Sinker, 22 December 1965, TNA BW 31/52.
62 Memorandum from R. A. H Duke, 15 January 1966, TNA BW 31/52.
63 Draft Confidential for Executive Committee, 1 February 1966, TNA BW 31/52.
64 Lord Harwood, letter to Executive Committee, 1 February 1966, TNA BW 31/52.
65 Minutes of Executive Committee, 1 February 1966, TNA BW 31/52.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 "Marat-Sade Draft Statement," E. N. Gummer, 2 February 1966, TNA BW 31/2.
69 Memorandum from R. A. H. Duke, 8 February 1966, TNA BW 2/695.
70 "Row in British Council over Sade Play," *Daily Telegraph*, 9 February 1966.
71 "Stuffy Decision," *Evening Standard*, 9 February 1966.
72 "Londoner's Diary," *Evening Standard*, 10 February 1966.
73 "Guarantor for Shakespeare Company's Trip," *Guardian*, 10 February 1966.
74 "Shakespeare Group Tied to 'Dirty' Plays," *New York Times*, 26 August 1964, 33.
75 Kenneth Tynan, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), 191.
76 Maurice Edelman, "Why I, personally, am against spending your money on de Sade," *Daily Express*, 10 February 1966.
77 Ted Willis, "How They Must Be Laughing in Paris!" *Daily Express*, 11 February 1966.
78 Osbert Lancaster, "Pocket Cartoon," *Daily Express*, 12 February 1966.
79 Memorandum from E. N. Gummer to Lord Bridges, 10 February 1966, TNA BW 2/695.
80 Ibid.
81 Memorandum from Lord Bridges to H. F. Oxbury, 3 March 1966, TNA BW 2/695.
82 Memorandum from H. F. Oxbury to R. A. H. Duke, 24 February 1966, TNA 2/695.
83 Letter from Maurice Edelman to George Wall, 9 March 1966, MSS 125/2/5/2, Edelman Archive.
84 Letter from Lord Bridges to Maurice Edelman, 18 March 1966, TNA BW2/695.
85 Letter from Maurice Edelman to Lord Bridges, 24 March 1966, TNA BW2/695.
86 "Notes for the Meeting of Lord Bridges with Members of the Drama Advisory Committee," 23 May 1966, TNA BW2/695.
87 Letter from Lord Bridges to Norman Marshall, 8 June 1966, TNA BW 2/695.
88 Letter from Norman Marshall to Lord Bridges, 12 June 1966, TNA BW2/695.
89 Letter from Maurice Edelman to Paul Sinker, 10 October 1966, MSS 125/2/5/2, Edelman Archive. Edelman effectively resigned *all* his roles within the BC, including on the DAC.
90 Ritter, *Imperial Encore,* 25.
91 Ibid., 27; 26.
92 Margaret Croydon, *Conversations with Peter Brook: 1979–2000* (London: Faber & Faber, 2003), xiii.

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