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Looking Behind the Scenes
**The History of the Royal Court Theatre Through the Lens of Prominent
Productions**

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Arbeit zur Erlangung des Dokortitels

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1. The Royal Court Theatre Conundrum

The Royal Court Theatre opened its gates on 24 August 1888. The first Royal Court Theatre building, a converted chapel, was demolished during improvement works in Sloane Square in 1887. The theatre was rebuilt as a Victorian theatre, designed by Walter Emlen and W.R. Crewe (Browne 14). The English Stage Company signed the lease in 1955, and the Company's establishment at the Royal Court Theatre became one of the most important events in the history of British post-war theatre. Philip Roberts writes: "to define the Royal Court is in many ways to define the modern stage" (Roberts, *Stage* xiii).

When founded in 1955, the English Stage Company was the only company in Britain that had a clearly formulated policy of promoting new work and of inviting the writer into the theatre. But it was not only this novelty for which the Royal Court was praised. It was John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* – which premiered on 8 May 1956 – and the play's social concern, often labelled as Angry Young, that made for the theatre's early popularity. This concern formed an image of the theatre, which coined its history and became a constant challenge for the theatre to keep up with: the Royal Court as a radical, socialist, and foremost oppositional theatre. John McGrath, a director and writer associated with the Royal Court in the late 1950s and early 1960s, analyses:

[The Royal Court's] greatest claim to social significance is that it produced a new 'working-class' art, that it somehow stormed the Winter Palace of the bourgeois culture and threw out the old regime and turned the place into a temple of worker's art. Of course it did nothing of the kind. (McGrath 9)

McGrath does not give the Royal Court credit for having changed the 'old' theatre audiences: "the 'new' audience for this kind of theatre was, if not in origin, certainly in ultimate destination, merely a 'new' bourgeoisie, mingling in with the old, even indulging in miscegenation" (12). The uncertainty about the Royal Court's achievements and policy, as mirrored in McGrath's critique, are a constant in the theatre's history. Even if the Royal Court always remained an important theatre for new writing in Britain, its image was never quite clear or simple to describe.

Throughout the decades, the Royal Court fought to keep up with the reputation it had gained during its 'golden age' in the mid-1950s. In 2007, David Lan, Literary Manager at the Royal Court in the 1990s and later the Artistic Director of the Young Vic, reflected upon this:

It's a very difficult theatre because everybody who's ever had anything to do with the Court thinks they are the only person alive who really understands what the Court ought to do, and I'm one of them. Everybody thinks that they are the soul of the Royal Court. But the heritage of the Royal Court was very particular. It was a socialist theatre, and that's what it was designed to be. When people now say, 'Oh, you know, the Royal Court ought to be more oppositional,' I want to smack them really because that just feels to me like opportunism. If you are oppositional, you just are. The socialist commitment of the Court was powerfully important in the lives of the artists who were working there. But

simply to think that being quite oppositional is a good way of establishing your ‘niche’, is just embarrassing and dishonest, it seems to me. (Little and McLaughlin 439)

After the ‘Angry Young’-hype around John Osborne had ebbed down, it did not take long for the Royal Court’s conundrum with its own history to surface. An article in the *Spectator* from 15 April 1966, with the title “Angry Middle Age”, describes the theatre as “touchy, lugubrious, embattled, inflexible, middle-aged in outlook if not in years – aren’t the company’s attitudes precisely those of an establishment, and not so very different from the ones attacked so gaily all those years ago?” (Roberts, *Stage* 114).

The Royal Court had to find new ways to keep up. In the mid-1960s, this was the battle against the Lord Chamberlain. Yet, after the abolition of stage censorship in 1968, the fringe movement grew and new writing became a prominent feature of this new movement. The Royal Court, again, had to find ways to prevail. The theatre’s battles of the 1970s and 1980s were, accordingly, largely circling around building a valid argument to ensure their funding. In the 1970s, these were the various grants from governmental and municipal funding bodies. In the 1980s, more and more private sponsors became necessary to back up the subsidized theatre.

When Stephen Daldry in the early 2000s understood the Royal Court as “the centre of British cultural life for the past 50 years” (Daldry in Little and McLaughlin 480), his statement thus clearly cannot go unchallenged: the Royal Court had its ups and downs. It went through many crises and often had to struggle mightily for its survival – particularly in the economically challenging late 1970s and 1980s. Since the success of the ‘in-yer-face’ in the mid-1990s, which is sometimes hailed as the ‘new Angry Young’ (Bayley), the Royal Court managed to establish a strong standing in British theatre that still holds into the present. On its homepage the theatre describes itself as

Britain’s leading national company dedicated to new work by innovative writers from the UK and around the world. The theatre’s pivotal role in promoting new voices is undisputed – the *New York Times* described it as ‘the most important theatre in Europe’. (“About Us”)

The Royal Court certainly is “the oldest new writing venue, so for that reason alone, it is, and will always be, significant and central [...] the new market leader in new writing” (Aleks Sierz in Aragay et al. 150). It must, however, be questioned whether it is “the most intense, committed, free, relaxed, contradictory, constant, tawdry, glorious theatre to exist in memory” (Robin Fox in Little and McLaughlin 4) or “the most persistently seminal, significantly productive and stubbornly controversial place in British – perhaps Western theatre” (Findlater, *25 Years* 7).

What is certainly true, is that the Court is “constantly changing” (Stuart Burge in Doty and Harbin 56). It cannot be the theatre of 1956 anymore, even if the myth of 8 May 1956 is understood by many as the origin of what is today known as ‘modern British theatre’ (Bull 37; Findlater, *25 Years* 7; Little and McLaughlin 26; Roberts, *Stage* 49; Sierz, *Look Back* 1).

Graham Whybrow, Literary Manager of the Royal Court in the 1990s and early 2000s, points out that “the new writing culture is a precarious one. It’s easily created

and lost” and “[The Royal Court] exists in this strange mixed economy, mixed value system of challenging yet entertaining, of innovating but continuing a tradition. It’s riddled with contradictions, which at best help propel it forward” (Little and McLaughlin 453). Playwright Meredith Oakes commented in 1994:

A theatre that puts on new plays, and actively keeps in touch with many of its writers, is a mass of competing realities.... I like the fact that the Royal Court’s current artistic policy is broad, because it’s an institution now, rather than the spearhead of a movement. However, its fame, the conjuring trick it worked years ago, of becoming the eye of the world in terms of new writing, didn’t spring from a broad artistic policy. The plays that made the Royal Court famous were avant-garde as distinct from new writing in general. (Little and McLaughlin 300)

Rob Ritchie, first Literary Manager at the Court in the 1970s, simply says: “The Royal Court, of course, has never actually been what it used to be” (Little and McLaughlin 4).

But it is not only the contradictions in the continuation of tradition that appear to be characteristic of the Royal Court. Max Stafford-Clark, Artistic Director of the Royal Court from 1979 to 1993, explains: “[...] asked if there was any aspect of the Royal Court that we [most of the Royal Court’s Artistic Directors and prominent staff members] could agree on. It turned out there wasn’t [...]” (Roberts, *Stage* xi).

It is the Royal Court’s conundrum, it seems, that nobody knows what it actually is. This study aims at taking a de-mystifying look at the Royal Court. It will be argued that most of the statements on what the Court actually ‘is’ and can be are PR or grant writing rhetorics. The Royal Court has been through many existential struggles. It had to fight its way through the decades to prevail. It had to find ways to survive and to justify its existence. It had to be artistically outstanding enough to be worth its funding. Therefore, the Royal Court’s artistic journey, like that of any subsidized stage in Britain, is intrinsically linked to the funding landscape surrounding the theatre and to the expectations of certain funding bodies.

This study takes a closer look at the ties that link together the Royal Court’s artistic output and its funding efforts and strategies to prevail. As part of this, new perspectives on prominent Royal Court productions will be gained by analysing previously undiscussed information from various archives. All these productions held a high degree of importance and dangers for the survival of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court. The ways in which their roles and effects were communicated and handled will give insight into the narratives that were put in place to ease funding bodies. It is at this intersection of actual production policies and narrative that the Royal Court Theatre’s strategies to prevail shall be examined. The conundrum will be broken up for the production contexts of John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* (1956), Edward Bond’s *Early Morning* (1968), Caryl Churchill’s *Cloud Nine* (1979), Jim Allen’s *Perdition* (1987), Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* (1995), and Debbie Tucker Green’s *Stoning Mary* (2005).

2. Before the Royal Court. George Devine and the Early English Stage Company

The English Stage Company's tenancy at the Royal Court Theatre began in November 1955. The idea of a writers' theatre, however, began earlier and took a few turns before it arrived in Sloane Square. For the English Stage Company the focus on the writer came in from two directions. One was the playwright Ronald Duncan, who had started the idea of a company to tour new plays – mainly his own – and have a base in London to show them. The other was George Devine. While Duncan's focus was simply on producing new plays, Devine's idea of a writers' theatre was an artistic attitude, deeply rooted in his previous work.

In 1945, the Old Vic Theatre scheme¹ had been initiated by Devine, his teacher, Michel Saint-Denis, and Glen Byam Shaw, as a post-war version of the London Theatre Studio (L.T.S.). The L.T.S. had opened in January 1936 and had offered courses for actors in speech training, mime, improvisation, and mask exercises – then unknown in England's drama schools. It had the blessing of Jacques Copeau, the famous French theatre maker and teacher, and Saint-Denis' uncle. At the L.T.S., Saint-Denis continued Copeau's policies as he had done in France before, when leading the troupe Quinze:

Copeau's Vieux-Colombier, [...] dedicated to reinstating the playwright to a position of primacy, had instituted basic reforms in scenic design, which he simplified to the point of symbolism. His stage had a fixed setting, and locations and atmosphere were indicated by props, screens, small set-pieces and lighting. The same permanent-set idea was basic to Saint-Denis' ideas for the Old Vic Theatre Centre and central to the philosophy of the project. (Browne 15)

Peter Ustinov and John Gielgud had trained at the L.T.S., as well as Alec Guinness, Michael Redgrave, and Laurence Olivier. After Saint-Denis was drafted in 1939, and Devine in 1940, the Studio was closed (Wardle 51-88). It was re-opened as the Old Vic Theatre School as part of the Old Vic Theatre Scheme after the war. This new version, however, collapsed for Devine, Saint-Denis, and Byam Shaw, who were also called the 'Three boys', when the plan to create a National Theatre, with the Old Vic at its heart, was introduced by the Arts Council in the late 1940s (Rebellato, 1956 64). It was soon clear that Saint-Denis, being French, could not direct the National Theatre of Britain. According to Roberts, the pressure that the initiators of the plan put on Devine, Saint-Denis, and Byam Shaw eventually made them resign in 1951 (Roberts, *Stage* 1-2). Rebellato, contrarily, explains that internal power struggles between the Old Vic's administrator Llewellyn Rees and the 'Three Boys' culminated in 1953, and eventually resulted in Rees' announcement of their departure (Rebellato, 1956 64). A letter Devine wrote in 1951, however, suggests that he had already left the Old Vic Theatre School behind at the time:

1 For a detailed account of Devine's years before the Royal Court see Wardle 25-166.

I am still smarting under the humiliation of those incidents. Certain of them were to serve me in the future. I had learnt, for example, that to carry out one's job seriously and with dedication, producing the results was not enough in subsidised venues in England. A more generous application of soft soap, a few lunches and dinners with the right people would have safeguarded our interests. I had learnt that even in artistic enterprises a certain kind of snob success was still essential. I had learnt that the theatrical profession was essentially conservative and not to be trusted to take collective action until it was too late. All this experience was to fortify my cunning for the future. (Devine in Roberts, *Stage 4*)

After this lesson, Devine worked freelance for a year. Then in mid-1952, he met the young Tony Richardson. The two men had a common understanding of new theatre, and set out to find a theatre building; Devine set his eyes on the Royal Court Theatre. He worked out a scheme for the Royal Court, which had been reopened in 1952 under the lease of Alfred Esdaile as a theatre club, and by 1953 was under the artistic directorship of Oscar Lewenstein. Devine wrote in 1953: "The policy of the Royal Court will be to encourage living drama by providing a theatre where contemporary playwrights may express themselves more freely and frequently than is possible under commercial conditions" (Devine in Roberts, *Stage 8*). In this, the policy sounded quite similar to that of the Stage Society, forty years before.

The Stage Society had been founded in 1899 to produce plays that fell through the cracks of commercial theatre: they were of artistic merit but not worth a full scale West End production. The Stage Society produced them for one or two performances, usually on Sunday nights. Amongst the over 200 productions of the Society were also works of foreign dramatists like Hauptmann, Gorky, Gogol, Wedekind, Pirandello, and Cocteau (Browne 4).

Devine's scheme went through various drafts, taking shape according to the wishes of financial backers that Devine sought for his project. A later draft shows well how much Saint-Denis' ideas were still inherent in Devine's own independent course and that he did not understand the promotion of new drama as a new phenomenon of the 1950s:

For dramatic development, the urgent need of our time is to discover a truly contemporary style wherein dramatic action, dialogue, acting and method of presentation are all combined to make a modern theatre spectacle, as definite in style as it has been in all the great periods of theatre. [...]

Of all the theatres in central London, the Royal Court is by far the best suited for such a purpose. The work of Harley Granville Barker, his revolutionary productions of the classics and his presentation of a new school of dramatists give the Royal Court a fine and appropriate tradition. (9)

Under the Granville Barker regime from 1904 to 1907 new work – particularly by Bernhard Shaw – had very prominently produced at the Royal Court². Given that

2 The Granville Baker seasons at the Royal Court directly grew out of the efforts of the Stage Society. Browne refers to further schemes promoting a new theatre and productions of non-commercial character: Sherek Plays Ltd. from 1945 to 1949, the Company of Four

Devine's words here are part of a grant application to the Arts Council it is important to look behind his words.

In the Granville Barker regime's presenting works of Ibsen and Shaw, Richard Findlater sees a strong link to Devine's later work at the English Stage Company. Sarah Grochala points out that Findlater even suggests "some sort of mystic link" (Grochala 1) between the two regimes at the Royal Court. Donald Howarth comments on this 'mystic link':

[T]here's always the romantic association that it was Harley Granville Barker's theatre, and Bernhard Shaw directed his own plays there; it's a writers' theatre, and there is a literary heritage and all that. Although one may mock it and say that the Court isn't that, there is a literary tradition which writers touch their cap to now and then. (Doty and Harbin 196-197)

A link with an important theatre, for Devine, in 1953, was a highly relevant argument in a grant application to the Arts Council. That it was largely a grant writing rhetoric comes to light when hearing William Gaskill, the second Artistic Director of the Royal Court, comment on Howarth's statement: "George Devine always said that the reference for the past is a lot of rubbish" (197).

Devine's scheme further included the ideas of a permanent company, a permanent setting, an audience-built organization, and training courses for writers and actors. Wardle finds that "Saint-Denis would have approved down to the last detail" (Devine in Wardle 161). But not only Saint-Denis: suggesting a style in theatre "as it has been in all the great periods of theatre" strongly echoed the Arts Council's efforts to introduce a renaissance in the arts, a 'new Elizabethan age', so shortly after the coronation in 1952 (Rebellato, 1956 65).

The Arts Council was indeed very much in favour of Devine's 1953 schemes. Yet, on 22 April 1953, under the management of Oscar Lewenstein, Laurier Lister's revue *Airs on a Shoestring* (1953) opened at the Court. It was to become a two-year success, and, accordingly, Alfred Esdaile was not willing to sell the theatre to Devine. The Arts Council suggested Devine take his plans to the Westminster Theatre, but Devine could not be convinced. When the Shakespeare Memorial Group – as the Royal Shakespeare Company was formerly called – approached Devine with the intention of having him run the company's base in London, Devine suggested the Royal Court. Devine and Anthony Quayle – the company's Artistic Director in Stratford – opened negotiations with Alfred Esdaile, and the Arts Council backed them up. Eventually, Esdaile agreed to sell the theatre for an outrageous sum of £70,000 and the Royal Court was lost to Devine. Thus, in early 1954, it looked like Devine's plans of his writers' theatre – or any theatre endeavour at the Royal Court for that matter – had been crushed.

at the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith from 1945 to 1951, and the Old Vic Theatre Scheme with the Young Vic Company and the school led by Saint-Denis, Byam Shaw, and Devine from 1946 to 1951 (4-6).

Independent of Devine, in early 1954, Oscar Lewenstein and Ronald Duncan entered into a correspondence “about plans to launch a management for the performance of non-commercial plays” (Roberts, *Stage* 16). Duncan had, in 1953, together with Lord Harewood and Edward Blacksell³, initiated the Taw and Torridge Festival of the Arts, later known as the Devon Festival. It was hard for the festival to attract professional theatre companies, and Duncan decided on founding his own theatre company: largely to promote his own plays, to tour them to other festivals, and to now and again rent a theatre in London to do so (18; Wardle 163). Thus Duncan wrote to Oscar Lewenstein at the Royal Court, who had apparently had a similar idea of a touring company for new plays for quite some time (Browne 3).

On 2 June 1954, the company, still without a name, took office at the Royal Court. By 16 July 1954, ‘The English Stage Society Ltd.’ was born. The Earl of Bessborough, formerly Eric Duncannon, as well as Lord Harewood, Sir Reginald Kenneth-Cox, Alfred Esdaile, Ronald Duncan, Oscar Lewenstein, and Greville Poke were the seven directors of the company (Roberts, *Stage* 20), which was renamed in October as ‘The English Stage Company Ltd.’ – after the name ‘The English Stage Guild Ltd.’ had been refused by the Registrar (Roberts, *Stage* 20-21). Neville Blond, a Manchester businessman, husband of Elaine Marks of Marks & Spencer, and soon the financial stability of the company, became chairman in November, and Oscar Lewenstein approached the man whom he remembered from a couple of years back to become the company’s Artistic Director – George Devine.

The Council of the English Stage Company held its first meeting on 26 October 1954. This meeting was still held under the name of the English Stage Society (Royal Court Theatre, 26 Oct. 1954). It was at the second meeting on 19 November 1955 that the company’s solicitor, Isador Caplan, reported that the Registry had accepted the name change, but “the official documents had not yet come to hand” (Royal Court Theatre, 19 Nov. 1954). On Neville Blond’s mention that the company definitely needed a London base, one started to look for a theatre. Negotiations with Esdaile about the company’s plan to rent the Kingsway Theatre⁴ commenced. Harewood and Duncan met Devine on 20 January 1955 to discuss the plans they had for the company and for the Kingsway. Devine liked the idea of becoming the Artistic Director of this new company. He pretended to be in complete agreement with the two men’s ideas, holding back his

3 Harewood’s full name was George Henry Hubert Lascelles, Earl of Harewood. He was the son of Mary, the Princess Royal, a cousin of the Queen and eleventh in succession to the British Throne. Harewood held an M.A. in musicology from Cambridge and had a strong interest in the arts. He had helped found the English Opera Group and sponsored other artistic enterprises (Browne 1). James Edward Blacksell was a school master at a large boys’ school in Barnstable (2).

4 The Kingsway Theatre, which was demolished in 1956, was located on Great Queen Street and thus in the theatre district of Central London.

own ideas, as put down in his earlier schemes: he “told the truth but not the whole truth” (Harewood in Roberts, *Stage* 24).

The renovation of the Kingsway was well under way when Devine, in February 1955, turned down the offer to head the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts and agreed to become the English Stage Company’s Artistic Director. He laid out his terms on 26 February 1955: a salary of £1,560 per year, “the right to study the planning and budget before confirming, and that Tony Richardson become his associate” (27). The minutes of the Council meeting of 21 February 1955 show that the ceiling of salary negotiations was actually £2,000 (Royal Court Theatre, 21 Feb. 1955).

Devine was officially appointed Artistic Director on 3 March 1955. Even though Browne claims Devine was officially appointed Artistic Director on 19 December 1955 (Browne 16), the minutes of the Council Meeting on 7 March 1955 show that Devine had at this point already agreed to be the company’s Artistic Director (Royal Court Theatre, 7 March 1955). Devine, however, did not receive his contract until July 1955 (Royal Court Theatre, 5 July 1955).

On 20 July 1955 (Royal Court Theatre, 18 July 1955), a reception was held at the Kingsway. Different dates of the reception are given in the literature on the Royal Court. Browne and Findlater mention 7 July 1955 (Browne 12; Findlater, *25 Years* 15). Roberts and Little and McLaughlin speak of 21 July 1955 (Roberts, *Stage* 33; Little and McLaughlin 14). The minutes of the English Stage Company Council meeting on 25 April 1955, however, show that Devine was abroad from 19 June to 15 July 1955 (Royal Court Theatre, 25 April 1955).

Soon after the reception it became clear that the damage the Kingsway had taken during the Blitz was more severe than expected; renovation costs were estimated at £150,000. Esdaile offered to let the Royal Court Theatre and by 8 August the company accepted the invitation (Roberts, *Stage* 33)⁵. At the reception, the English Stage Company announced its foundation and intentions. Also at this occasion, the company put forth more aims than the touring to provincial theatres and festivals. They included touring contemporary English plays abroad, inviting provincial theatres to present new plays in London, and creating a contemporary style in production, décor, acting, and dramatic work. They further intended to stimulate English authors to write for the theatre by inviting them into this artistic environment. It was planned that a permanent acting company, playing in repertoire,

5 Roberts suggests the reason for Esdaile’s offering the Court to the English Stage Company instead of the Kingsway was not due to the high rebuilding costs of the latter, but to the Masons – who owned the adjoining site to the Kingsway – making Esdaile a “fantastic offer” (Roberts, *Stage* 32): “He made money from selling the Kingsway; he could appear to be acting generously in offering the English Stage Company the Court. And he could off-load a theatre which, since *Airs on a Shoestring* had closed, had not done particularly well” (32).

would afford the nucleus for experimenting in new methods of presentation and would carry out the aim of revitalizing the whole of English theatre; that it would, by working and experimenting as a group, develop a tradition, a style. (Browne 12)

Devine's scheme of 1953 begins to shine through in aspects like style, décor, acting, and dramatic work. Yet, Browne also puts emphasis on the fact that "[i]t was stressed in the original announcement and later reiterated to the press that 'we are not going in for experiment for the sake of experiment. We are not *avant-garde*, or highbrow, or a *côterie* set. We want to build a vital, living, *popular theatre*' (12; Browne's emphasis). This statement was made by Ronald Duncan⁶.

When reading the brochure on the English Stage Company as issued in April 1955 by the English Stage Company's Council, of which Devine notably was not a member, Duncan's own agenda for the company can be seen more clearly. The brochure states, just as Devine's early schemes did, the company's "purpose of promoting the production of new plays by contemporary authors" (Royal Court Theatre, "The English Stage Company Limited"), but then takes off into a different direction. The "policy of advancing the State of English Theatre" is here understood in a more geographical and educational way:

As a national organisation we intend

- (a) To present plays not only at the Kingsway Theatre but also at the Festival of the Arts now established in various parts of the country which cannot by themselves bear the full production costs of a new play.
- (b) To play at those towns which do not maintain a live theatre but could support an occasional visit from a first-class company.
- (c) To tour contemporary English plays abroad.
- (d) To encourage children to develop a genuine enthusiasm for and critical appreciation of good theatre. To achieve this our repertory at the Kingsway Theatre will include seasons of plays intended for younger theatregoers; these will also be toured wherever educational authorities and schools offer facilities.

As artists that the company wished to work with T.S. Eliot, Christopher Fry, Peter Ustinov, John Whiting, Ronald Duncan, Berthold Brecht, Gabriel Marcel, Benjamin Britten, and John Piper were named. It was Ronald Duncan who had made this list, without consent of either the English Stage Company's Council, Devine or the artists themselves (Roberts, *Stage* 29). The minutes of the Council meeting on 21 February 1955 mention that Duncan was asked to contact T.S. Eliot and Christopher Fry (Royal Court Theatre, 21 Feb. 1955). There is no mention of him having done so in the minutes of following meetings. In fact, only Duncan was in favour of working with Eliot, Fry, Whiting, and Ustinov. Oscar Lewenstein remarks: "Ronny was interested in Eliot,

6 Duncan states in full: "we are not going in for experiment for the sake of experiment. We are not *avant-garde*, or highbrow, or a *côterie* set. We want to build a vital, living, popular theatre which, in time, will develop an approach and an acting-style of its own" (Marriott, "A Theatre for Playwrights and for the People").

Whiting, Fry and Ustinov. George Devine, Tony [Richardson] and I were less than enthusiastic about these” (Lewenstein 15). An earlier version of the brochure also included the aim “to encourage theatre of imagination and poetry as against the theatre which predominates today” (Roberts, *Stage* 28). This was not surprising as Duncan was writing poetic drama. Irving Wardle, Devine’s biographer, even refers to Duncan as the “high priest of the poetic drama movement” (Wardle 168).

When the *Daily Telegraph* interviewed Devine in mid-March of 1956, what he says about his new venture is not far from his early aims: “I want [...] dramatists to look upon the Court as a workshop and have invited them to come to any rehearsal, not only of their own plays but of other people’s” (“George Devine”). The article presents the endeavour of the writers’ theatre as far from risky: “The English Stage Society⁷ has a very influential board and strong backing and its budget is based on half-capacity audiences. Mr. Devine is facing the next two years with a good deal of confidence” (“George Devine”). While Devine’s confidence before the first season had even started can be debatable, it is certainly true that the English Stage Company’s board was influential and in a position to attract financial backers – not least the Arts Council.

Another article that is most frequently cited when referring to the company’s early policies, is T.C. Worsley’s article on the founding of the English Stage Company in the *New Statesman & Nation* on 24 March 1956. In it, Worsley looks forward to the opening of the company’s season on Easter Monday 1956 as “one of the most exciting and important events in English Theatre for a great many years. [...] Not since the famous Court Theatre season in the nineteen hundreds has anything so adventurous and so full of promise been planned and executed” (Worsley). He lays out that the company devotes itself to discovering and producing “new plays of literary and aesthetic merit primarily, if it can find enough of them, ones in the English language”. He explains that the company will present them in repertory and attract writers to the theatre by inviting them into a “magnificent” working environment. Devine is referred to as having emphasized welcoming writers at his rehearsals to help them develop techniques, as hoping to inaugurate double-bills if writers have problems with the full-length format, as being proud to read every play sent to the theatre within a week, as directing his theory of acting towards the author’s style and giving that full weight. Worsley quotes Devine: “Ours is not to be a producer’s theatre [...] or an actor’s theatre; it is a writers’ theatre”. While these writers faced hard conditions in the West End that, as Worsley explains, could only afford to produce an original play if a crowd-drawing actor is attached to it, Devine “[can] offer promptness and an understanding of writer’s problems and point of view, and also conditions of work which will make their entrance into theatre exciting and stimulating”.

The idea of the writers’ theatre in its beginning was thus not of a theatre that was purely production-oriented, or focussed on plays written by a writer on the company’s board respectively, but of a theatre in which writers could grow, a theatre writers could

⁷ The English Stage Society is here confused with the English Stage Company.

make their own – rather than being owned by it. Another noteworthy aspect in Devine’s early concept is that the writers that he talked of in 1956 were novelists and poets, not dramatists.

Worsley assesses that plays by new writers – new because they are new to writing for the stage – are well served in a repertory, where they can be nurtured and financially secured by other productions. He then lists the plays to be presented in the first season – including “*Look Back in Anger* a new play by a quite new author Paul Osborne⁸” of which the directors speak in the most glowing possible terms: “they are confident that they have made here a real discovery”. Devine’s new style in stage design – reflected in the permanent set and the permanent costumes – is also referred to as a “wittingly christened ‘essentialism’”. The last point mentioned is the permanent company that Devine established. In May 1956, this permanent company consisted of fifteen actors (Looker-on).

While Worsley’s account shows strong resemblances to Devine’s original scheme, *The Star*’s announcement had a slightly divergent focus from Worsley’s in the left-wing *New Statesman*. Expectations may have been different towards the theatre that is described here:

The Earl of Harewood, the Earl of Bessborough, Mr. Oscar Lewenstein and Mr. Ronald Duncan are on the committee of the English Stage Company who, under the chairmanship of Mr. Neville Blond [...] intend to make the Royal Court well-known for high-class repertory. (“Repertory Plan”)

A month later, just after the opening of the first season, *The Daily Mail* published a similarly misleading article: “Two Earls Take over a Theatre” (Wilson, “Two Earls Take over a Theatre”). It explains that “the Earl of Harewood and the Earl of Bessborough went into management last night. They have taken over the Royal Court Theatre, in Sloane-square, with other members of the newly-formed English Stage Company”. While the article does not mention Devine or Richardson, it adds: “Chairman of the English Stage Company is Mr. Neville Blond, an industrialist who was British trade adviser in Washington at the end of the war. Serving under him are Alfred Esdaile [...] and amongst others Mr. J. Blacksell, headmaster of a school in Barnstaple”.

Throughout February and March, the press added more and more attributes to the English Stage Company’s policy and plans. By the end of March, and with the opening of the season, a political and social agenda in general was attached to the English Stage Company at the Royal Court for the first time: “Modern English plays which concern themselves with current problems, political and social, are rare. It is for this reason that the debut tomorrow week of the English Stage Company has become one of the most eagerly awaited events of the present season” (“Plays and Players”).

It was very clearly excluded from Devine’s early ideas to take to the star system – for writers, as well as actors, designers or producers. While Devine was against it, the rest of the Council, foremost Neville Blond – with an eye on finances – were constantly

8 Worsley here misquotes Osborne’s first name.

promoting all aspects that would bring more money in. As such Peggy Ashcroft's promise to appear in the first season was from very early on widely advertised (Worsley; "Plays and Players"), and the first play of the company *The Mulberry Bush* featured Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies "a famous West End actress" (Handby). In the *Shields Gazette*, on 2 May, the Royal Court productions were said to feature "a repertory company and visiting stars" (Hobman). The *Sunday Express*, on 8 April, however, highlighted Devine's idea of a writers' theatre as a workshop, school, and place for new and experimental – not political – theatre:

Through years of acting and producing at Stratford, and teaching at the Old Vic, he has dreamed of a theatre in London where new playwrights could be trained and encouraged, and new plays, modern, experimental, or simply exciting but 'uncommercial' could be put on played in repertory, and given their chance. ("His Dream")

Another mainstay in Devine's initial concept was the repertory system, and as such it was one of the major aspects in the advertising campaign; it ranked second in importance to the press, right after the idea of the writers' theatre. Once the first season opened, on 2 April 1956, the *Daily Express* wrote: "a bold group of optimists [...] will put on new English plays by first-class writers... and will play them in repertory" (Barber, "A New Theatre"). Devine is further quoted, highlighting the non-commercial character of the enterprise: "This venture is privately financed with no possible hope of financial gain". Four weeks into the season, on 13 April, Richard Findlater celebrated the English Stage Company in *The Tribune*. Findlater highlights how extraordinary and new it was in British theatre to put the writer first – not the actors or the scene-painters. For Findlater, the significant sign for this policy was that the author was billed in larger type than the actors on programmes and posters. He further emphasized how helpful the repertory is in being able to give writers a chance to learn by experience ("At Last"). Indeed, it must be acknowledged, how much of a novelty the English Stage Company's approach was in the 1950s. *Plays and Players* described the enterprise where writers were invited to attend rehearsal to learn new techniques as a "Nursery for Drama", a dramatic "Repertory Workshop" ("Nursery for Drama"): "The value of such an opportunity cannot be over-stressed, for the best drama has always come into being when there has been close co-operation between author, producer and actors." The ideas, picked up in both articles, were at the core of Devine's idea of a theatre, not Duncan's. But the clear line Devine presented in his scheme of 1953 was not the direction the company was following.

How broad the early plans of the company were is shown in an article of 6 April. Not only the policy to attract writers to start writing for the theatre is highlighted, but also a theatre club, which will include preview facilities, dining and meeting rooms for members, play readings and Sunday performances as well as discussion groups and lectures with and by producers and well-known dramatists ("Court Goes Repertory"). It is not clear, if the club referred to here, with dining and meeting rooms for members, was the separately run club by Clement Freud in the upstairs space of the Royal Court; no other such facilities existed. The members club of the English Stage Company – in

actuality, the English Stage Society⁹ – would provide for readings and Sunday performances, the Sunday Nights without Décor, which they produced, and would further invite its members to previews. Talks with dramatists and the cast would take place, for example for *Look Back in Anger* and *Cards of Identity*, in July 1956 (“Audiences at the Royal Court Theatre”). Another outlook mentioned in this article, which was never realized but can be found in the brochure for the reception at the Kingsway as formulated by Duncan, was a plan by Neville Blond and his Council to “take up the cause of children’s theatre” (“Court Goes Repertory”). The introduction of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court was not only applauded in the press. Much of the early Royal Court – from policies to personnel – “dovetailed beautifully with the policies of the Arts Council” (Rebellato, 1956 65).

The Arts Council had grown out of the CEMA, the Committee for the Encouragement of Music and Arts, which had aimed at bringing art and music mainly to the rural areas of Britain during the war years. In 1945, a year before it was turned into the Arts Council, CEMA was funding 46 art organizations (Arts Council, “Our history”), mainly outside of London. When the Committee was turned into the Arts Council in 1946, it became an independent body, separate from the Board of Education (Rebellato, 1956 48). Further, the advisory panels were extended from six to sixteen and the organizational structure was changed. Every subsidized organization now had to appoint a representative to the Arts Council and present it with detailed budgets, balance-sheets, and trading returns to the Council in order to justify its non-profit status; every organization had to lay open their figures and forecasts (49).

Over the next few years, the Arts Council’s policy focussed more and more on London as a centre of professionalism and excellence in theatre. The capital’s theatre landscape was to serve as “ambassadorial” (60) to the whole nation. In this effort of centralizing British theatre, the Arts Council was working towards a “National Theatre” (61), and the Old Vic theatre was groomed to take up the post (65). The negotiations, however, did not go as the Arts Council had hoped – it was during this time that the “Three boys” left the Theatre School at the Old Vic. Rebellato writes: “The ground had been prepared, but by the mid-fifties, no company seemed able to occupy it” (65). It was this void that Devine’s scheme of 1953, with its idea to create “a modern theatre spectacle, as definite in style as it has been in all the great periods of theatre”, played into. Rebellato draws an analogy between the development of the Arts Council’s policy and the English Stage Company’s mandate:

9 The English Stage Society was originally founded as the Kingsway Theatre Club, when the English Stage Company had still thought to take over the Kingsway Theatre. Members of the Club were asked to become patrons of the theatre and support it financially. When the English Stage Company moved into the Royal Court Theatre, the name of the Society was changed first to Royal Court Theatre Society and later to English Stage Society. Original membership fees were one guinea for a full membership and five shillings for a student membership (Browne 37).

The acclaimed ‘right to fail’, was exactly the plan that the Council had for the National Theatre, and it is part of the same move away from touring and amateurs and towards metropolitan professionalism that characterized the first ten years of CEMA and the Arts Council. (65)

While it is certainly true that the English Stage Company’s residence at the Royal Court was an effort that could clearly be reduced to central London, Rebellato’s analogy must be looked at more carefully. First, ‘the right to fail’ came from Devine’s right hand Tony Richardson, and only emerged in the late 1950s, as a reaction to productions of new plays that had failed at the box office or with the critics¹⁰. It was not part of the original mandate. Second, and more importantly, it must again be remembered that Devine’s efforts and those of the English Stage Company, by 1955, and in 1956 still, were not always identical.

It became more and more clear throughout the first year that the company’s Council had an utterly different understanding of who was to run the Court than their Artistic Director. Devine had been engaged by the English Stage Company in his function as a theatre maker, who had good connections, a good reputation with the Arts Council, and knew about practicalities such as stage design, lighting and casting. When looking at the Council Minutes of 1955 to 1956, it becomes clear that Devine was not considered an artistic advisor; his artistic opinion was acknowledged but also easily overruled. All artistic decisions were made by an Artistic Sub-Committee consisting of Ronald Duncan, Lord Harewood, and Oscar Lewenstein, with Greville Poke as the Committee’s Secretary. In fact, when, on 17 January 1955, it was reported that Lewenstein had approached Devine on being the company’s Artistic Director, it was suggested that Devine from hereon be invited to the Council meetings. The Council, however, eventually decided that he should not be invited until closer to the completion date of the Kingsway (Royal Court Theatre, 17 Jan. 1955). The minutes of the meetings of the following months show that Devine was consulted concerning scheduling and stage design. In a similar same way the planning of the season was a matter he was merely consulted on, but could not veto (Royal Court Theatre, 28 April 1955).

In contrast to Roberts’ claims (Roberts, *Stage* 29) that Devine did not attend any Council meetings in 1955, the records show that he did in fact attend the meetings on 28 April 1955, 16 May 1955, 8 August 1955, and 13 September 1955. He further attended all meetings in 1956, but the ones in March, April, May, and November. Yet, as becomes clear in the minutes of the meeting on 9 January 1956, he was not happy with the role assigned to him by the Council. In a letter preceding the meeting, concerning the position of a business manager, Devine had asked for more artistic freedom (Royal Court Theatre, 9 Jan. 1956). It was made clear by the Council that this was not wished for.

10 “I’d asked Tony Richardson [...]: what had we *really* established? He said, ‘I’ll tell you what: *the right to fail*’ (G. Devine, “Directing” 132; Devine’s emphasis).

The major artistic struggle, however, remained between Devine and Ronald Duncan. Duncan was not only a founding member of the English Stage Company¹¹, a huge aspect of the company's policy, for him, was the distribution of his own works in London and across the country. The main point of debate, however, eventually became the two men's contradicting ideas regarding the kind of plays the Royal Court should present. Duncan writes: "My real difference with George Devine and his supporters on the Artistic Committee was on what drama should be about" (Duncan 385).

Devine not only opposed Duncan's poetic drama, he also rejected Duncan's ideas on national touring, children's theatre, and supporting the Festival of the Arts. Lucky for Devine that Duncan's ideas did not meet much enthusiasm at the Arts Council (Rebellato, 1956 65), which had, by 1955, completely moved away from CEMA's initiative to bring art into the rural areas of Britain. In regard to a renaissance of theatre stirred from a nationally relevant company firmly located in London, the Arts Council completely agreed with Devine. Also, Devine's early policy of encouraging novelists to write for the theatre had been Arts Council policy for three years prior (66). No wonder Devine's plans landed well with the Arts Council, just as his 1953 scheme had done. And when the Royal Court had not been available in 1953, with the English Stage Company's help, it was now. Further, the English Stage Company's board was made up of "just the kind of people the Arts Council liked" (67) – they were well-educated, well-connected, and some of them extremely well off. And again, Devine, it seems, was presenting a scheme just in line with the funding bodies' wishes. Clearly, Devine "was not a break with the previous structures. He was a link with them" (66).

When the Arts Council, in its effort to strengthen London as the theatre centre of Britain, increased the amount of grant-receiving organizations to ninety-two in 1955, not only the Royal Opera House was included, but also the Royal Court Theatre (Arts Council, "Our history"). Reballato adds: "[D]uring 1956-1957 the ESC was already the fifth largest recipient of money from the drama panel. By the second year only the Old Vic theatre and company got more" (67). With the Arts Council being so highly in favour of the English Stage Company and the Company's own Council being in a position to financially support the Royal Court, the situation was indeed not bad for a newly founded venue. Findlater sums up:

Neville Blond advanced £8,000; guarantees of £1,000 each came from Harewood, Esdaile and Poke; £2,000 from the John Lewis Partnership, owners of the Court's Sloane Square neighbour, the Peter Jones store; the Arts Council gave £2,500 as production grant and £7,000 as a subsidy for the first year¹². (*25 Years* 16)

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- 11 How important a member of the English Stage Company Duncan considered himself can be seen in letters he wrote to Peter Ustinov and John Whiting respectively on 11 March 1955: "As you may know, I have formed the English Stage Company" (Roberts, *Stage* 29).
- 12 According to Browne, the Arts Council received £820,000 from the Treasury in 1955/56; the English Stage Company received £5,000 from the Arts Council in 1955/56; the Royal

Rebellato sums up: “The Royal Court was everything the Arts Council had been waiting for, in its project of national-cultural renewal” (1956 68). After 1951, Devine knew better than not to attach the Arts Council’s ideas of national-cultural renewal to his artistic concept for the Royal Court

Opera House received £250,000 in 1955/56 (Browne 54-55). Council meeting minutes actually show that in 1955/56 the English Stage Company, as Roberts rightly reports, only received £2,500 (Royal Court Theatre, 9 Jan. 1956).

3. The 1950s. A Writers' Theatre

Before George Devine's emergence, it is fair to say that British theatre seemed stuck somewhere between the late '20s and the Empire. To the foreign eye every play was more or less the same one, I suppose because the mannerisms were as fixed as Japanese Kabuki. To have swept all that crockery away took a mighty arm. (Arthur Miller in Little and McLaughlin 16)

[...] the year of 1956 in which the Royal Court legend was born. (Wardle 167)

The '8 May 1956' is not just an inert historical marker; it is animated, made to play a role by the discourses that throng around it. (Rebellato, 1956 3)

3.1 The First Five Years

Throughout the winter of 1955/56 the first season of the English Stage Company was planned. Early plans had foreseen a season of "three original plays by British authors, one revival of a modern play by a British author, two translations of plays written in English by foreign authors, one mixed bill of short plays, and one classical play of topical interest" (Royal Court Theatre, 25 April 1955)¹³. When a choice of plays was eventually attempted, it was planned to open with Sartre's *The Devil and the Lord* (1951), to then show "a play or plays by Ronald Duncan" (Royal Court Theatre, 17 Nov. 1955), *Look Back in Anger* (1956) by an unknown actor called John Osborne, which had arrived at the Royal Court answering to an advertisement in *The Stage*, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953), Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1943), and Nigel Dennis' *Cards of Identity* (1956). In December, Angus Wilson's *The Mulberry Bush* (1955) arrived at the theatre and replaced the Sartre. Eventually, on 2 March 1956, the season was announced (Browne 16) with *The Mulberry Bush* opening the season, followed by *The Crucible*, *Look Back in Anger*, Ronald Duncan's double bill of *Don Juan* (1953) and *The Death of Satan* (1954)¹⁴, *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, and *Cards of Identity*. It is noteworthy that in the spirit of the Royal Court being a theatre for contemporary British writers, the Sartre was replaced by Wilson's play. It is further striking that Ronald Duncan's plays were scheduled to open after *Look Back in Anger* – which was a play by a newcomer.

Browne writes that Devine – having no bias for Duncan's work – had asked for the two full-length plays *Don Juan* and *The Death of Satan* to be cut down to be fitted into one evening (Browne 21). Eventually, the Duncan double bill proved to be the weakest link in the season and was taken off after only seven performances (Royal Court

13 This programming referred to a period of time of two seasons; one season being 20 weeks (Royal Court Theatre, 25 April 1955).

14 Both of Duncan's plays had originally been full-length plays. They had been performed at the Devon Festival in 1953 and 1954 respectively (Browne 21).

Theatre, 4 June 1956) on 30 May (Hallifax 22), having made only £367.19.10¹⁵ (Royal Court Theatre, 16 July 1956) at the box office. *The Mulberry Bush* was also taken out of the repertory after a shortened run, in May. Unsurprisingly, the situation with Duncan's plays had a different impact on internal politics at the Royal Court than the shortened run of *The Mulberry Bush*.

The treatment of Ronald Duncan's work by Devine was not a mere trifle in the planning of the first season and the outlining of the Royal Court's policy. Devine had a very different taste in plays than Duncan. Duncan claims that works of writers he favoured were ignored: "If, on the other hand, a play appeared with a working-class background however illiterate it was, the rights were quickly acquired and a cast engaged" (Duncan 379). When it came to the double bill, which Devine had not only cut down, but was also directing, Duncan considered the casting "as outright sabotage" (Wardle 182) and felt that the rehearsals were poisoned by Devine.

With Devine and Richardson, at the time, being the only two directors at the Royal Court, and Richardson directing *Look Back in Anger*, Devine had no choice but to direct Duncan's plays. According to Wardle, Devine fulfilled his obligation and was happy to thus give the poetic drama movement its death blow. Wardle, however, also suggests, that Devine regretted the part he had played in this: Duncan's own friends had seen Devine close to tears after the opening, reproaching himself to have ruined Duncan's work (182-183). John Osborne does not remember any self-reproach on Devine's part. He recalls that Devine and Richardson were fully aware of what they were doing (Osborne, *Almost* 16). The production and early withdrawal of the double bill was only one in a row of events marking the clash of George Devine and Ronald Duncan, and the struggle for power that was actually at the centre of their animosities.

In the months and years to come, Devine worked towards gaining more power by increasingly cutting off the English Stage Company Council's influence (Roberts, *Stage* 42). He did this in two steps. First, after a strong artistic debate about Osborne's *The Entertainer* (1957)¹⁶, Devine, with Neville Blond's approval, brought Peggy Ashcroft and John Osborne on the Artistic Sub-Committee: "I put my own people in" (Wardle

15 The cost of a production at the time was estimated by Devine at £1,000-1,500 (Royal Court Theatre, 9 Jan. 1956). With runs with between 20 (*Cards of Identity*) and 37 (*Look Back in Anger*) performances, the shows in the season that were kept on until the summer had made between £2,548 (*Cards of Identity*) and £5,762 (*Look Back in Anger*) by July 1956 (Royal Court Theatre, 16 July 1956).

16 As a reaction to the success of *Look Back in Anger*, Sir Lawrence Olivier had expressed interest to star in Osborne's next play at the Royal Court. Osborne finished *The Entertainer* as fast as he could to match Olivier's schedule, yet, the Artistic Sub-Committee voted against the play two to one (Wardle 214). As becomes clear in Wardle, it was Duncan and Lewenstein who voted against the play. Lord Harewood, as the third member of the Committee went to see Neville Blond the next morning, who consequentially made sure that *The Entertainer* was programmed, and Olivier was offered the part of Archie Rice.

214). Second, a few months later, and because all new plays were now to be read by five people, which made for quite a prolonged play choosing process, Devine demanded that he was to choose plays without having to consult the Committee. But, it was not until 1959 that Devine eventually gained artistic freedom and the Committee lost its right to veto (214).

The struggle for control was the central internal dilemma of the Royal Court throughout the 1950s. In Devine and the English Stage Company, with Ronald Duncan and Oscar Lewenstein¹⁷ as two of its driving forces, very different concepts of theatre – both on a theoretical and practical level – clashed. Wardle explains how Devine manoeuvred through this: “In his dealings with the Council and the Management Committee of the E.S.C., he would preserve a mask of subservience behind which he kept his main purpose intact” (Wardle 168). When it came to finding an ally and financial backer for his purposes, Devine turned to Neville Blond: “there are two truths, the truth and what you tell Neville” (168). Ronald Duncan recalls:

Indeed, [Devine's] ideals were so broadly based that I was really shocked driving him home one night shortly after his appointment when he confided in me that he didn't care whether his programme and estimate eventually bankrupted the English Stage Company. (Duncan 379)

Duncan quotes Devine:

‘If we get a year out of it and stage three plays,’ he said, ‘we shan't have done too badly and Blond and his rich friends can easily pay the bills. Jews always help each other out.’ I should have reported this declaration of high socialist principles to our Chairman. I didn't know how to do so. (379)

Devine had similarly clear rules for Duncan and Alfred Esdaile. According to Wardle, Devine “was applying the lessons he had learnt at the Vic Centre. He and his colleagues knew their trade; governing boards did not. (169).

Devine's treatment of Duncan's plays had caused the clear dispute that laid open Devine's intentions to go through with his idea of the Royal Court's identity: “It was a writers' theatre: it was not a literary theatre” (Wardle 183). In a letter to Saint-Denis, after his first months at the Royal Court, Devine's understanding of his position as opposed to disagreeing forces in the English Stage Company becomes clear:

We have managed in four month to build up an artistic reputation which is far beyond the means at our disposal... As my backers not only do not understand what we are doing but really dislike it, they are in the strange position of being obliged not to let down something which I think they would like to abandon... Fortunately we have such a reputation that they dare not get rid of us. (186)

17 Lewenstein did not agree with critical observations of Britain as they could be found in plays like *Look Back in Anger*. David Hare quotes a conversation he had with Lewenstein, in which the latter explained: “With my personal history as a Jew who came to Britain in the 1930s, I'm not going to put on work which is so savagely critical. You must understand that for me this country is a haven...I just don't accept the version of England you have” (Little and McLaughlin 155).

Devine's letter to Saint-Denis shows how strongly he was still connected to his former mentor. And indeed, Devine brought a lot of this artistic background to the Royal Court. To establish his new ensemble, Devine brought in actors he had worked with at the Old Vic. Wardle writes: "Virtually everyone in the production team came out of the L.T.S. or the Vic School" (173). Devine also brought with him from the Old Vic the concepts of education and workshops, and the respect – as he had learnt in Saint-Denis' 'craftsmen theatre' – for the 'artist-technician' (174). In many regards, however, his attitude towards directing was more open and dynamic than Saint-Denis'. Devine's mentor "did not allow any freedom to his actors or to his designers" (Margaret 'Percy' Harris in Roberts, *Stage* 43). Angus Wilson commented on Devine's policy at his very beginning at the Royal Court: "Devine's heart was in the past even though his mind was fixed to the present. He wanted the theatre to make a serious contribution to British intellectual life" (Wardle 177).

Another influence on Devine certainly was the work of Bertold Brecht¹⁸, whose *Good Woman of Setzuan* (1943) was part of the English Stage Company's first season. In 1956, the Berliner Ensemble visited Devine at the Royal Court Theatre. Devine had been to the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, the Ensemble's Berlin home, when on tour in 1955 (Little and McLaughlin 28), and was more than impressed by the décor and the mode of production used by Brecht and his company.

When *The Mulberry Bush* opened on 2 April 1956, it was received as neither spectacular nor revolutionary in bringing forth a new style in theatre – one of the prominent aspects in the company's mandate. *The Crucible* opened on 9 April, and received good reviews. It was staged in the permanent set and with permanent costumes – which were planned to be seen in every production of the season from there on, but were dismissed after this production (Roberts, *Stage* 46).

Before Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* opened on 8 May, debate arose that *The Mulberry Bush* be taken out of repertory. It was playing to a half-empty theatre, and was eventually withdrawn on 19 May (Hallifax 22). *The Crucible*, despite better reviews, also only made for forty-four per cent of the box office capacity (Browne 18). As both plays had been 'imported' from Bristol (Wardle 178, 180), *Look Back in Anger* was the

18 Brecht's works in particular are often strongly linked to the Royal Court, also due to the Berliner Ensembles' visit to London in 1956 that coincided with Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. In 1960, William Gaskill – who followed Devine as Artistic Director – asserted that the Royal Court were the first company to professionally stage Brecht in Britain (Gaskill in English Stage Company, *Ten* 30). But Brecht's works had made their way to Britain before that. In 1955, Joan Littlewood directed and acted the lead-role in *Mother Courage* (1939) at the Taw and Torridge Festival (Aragay et al. 137). In its first season, the Royal Court staged – not under the management of the English Stage Company, but under Oscar Lewenstein's management, who had acquired the rights for Brecht's play – *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (137). In July 1956, the *Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944) was staged at the Royal Academy of the Dramatic Arts (138).

first original production of the English Stage Company. Osborne's play was not an instant success, and it took a few months until it sold well. However, once it did, the repertory system did not allow for the play to be kept at the Court for longer than three weeks: it transferred to the Lyric Hammersmith (Findlater, *25 Years* 27).

Look Back in Anger was to give the Royal Court a whole new direction: the label of the Angry Young Men surfaced, and the Royal Court was famously politicized. Still, the only production to be a financial success in the first year, and to keep the company alive, was Devine's production of *The Country Wife* (1675), which transferred to the West End (27).

In 1957, several novelties were introduced to the Court. As early as September 1956, George Devine suggested rehearsed readings for promising plays that were not yet to be performed. In May 1957, these became the Sunday Nights without Décor (Roberts, *Stage* 34). Plays that were put on as a Sunday Night were rehearsed up to a final run through and staged with very simple scenery (58), sometimes on the set of another production. While a large full-scale production at the time cost £5,000¹⁹, a Sunday Night was produced for £100 (Findlater, *25 Years* 48). They were sponsored by the English Stage Society.

Another new introduction were the Associate Directors. The Sunday Nights were not only to function as a scheme to promote new writers, but also to give a young director a chance to work. In summer 1957, William Gaskill, John Dexter, and Lindsay Anderson were taken on as Associates; Anthony Page followed in 1958 (48). Also in 1958, the Writers' Group was installed. It met for two years on Wednesdays. The first Writers' Group included Devine, Saint-Denis, Gaskill, Ann Jellicoe, Lindsay Anderson, John Dexter, and Miriam Brickman, the Court's casting director (Little and McLaughlin 43). From autumn 1957 on, writers had been able to attend rehearsals and performances for free with the Writer's Pass. It was through these programmes that a few writers – like Edward Bond – made contact with the Royal Court, before or without having their work produced there.

The first couple of years of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court were a time of hard work and tight schedules, but also of artistic and cultural-political entrepreneurship. William Gaskill speaks of late night set-ups after the end of a production, followed by the lighting, a rehearsal on Sunday, a preview on Monday and press night on Tuesday, the scratched old tape with the National Anthem that used to be played before each performance (25), the staff being involved in marches and sit downs²⁰, and

19 Osborne's *The Entertainer* was planned out on a budget of £1,400 and weekly running expenses of £1,300. Beckett's *Fin de Partie* (1957) was planned on a budget of £740 and weekly running expenses of £1,200 (Royal Court Theatre, 19 March 1957).

20 Dan Rebellato writes: "The relations between the Court and the New Left were mutual – and intimate" (20). For a more detailed account of the Royal Courts close relationship with the New Left see Rebellato 18-25.

arrests of theatre people after demonstrations in the late 1950s (38-39)²¹, and the meetings in Ann Piper's room – the fire, the coffee, cheese and bread and improvisation – as the beginning of the Writers' Group (36).

Also, in 1957, the Royal Court had its first mayor run in with the Lord Chamberlain's Office over Samuel Beckett's *Fin de Partie* (1957). While Beckett's play in its original French version had been granted a licence, the censor was reluctant to allow a production of Beckett's own translation of the play into English. Devine wrote in the English Stage Company's 1958 brochure *A Record of Two Years Work*:

Important points arise. We are here dealing with one of the acknowledged major writers in English. London is deprived of his work on a stage except under what is known to be a hypocritical device for the evasion of censorship – presentation under 'Club conditions'. This, in itself, is shameful enough.

We must also assume that things may be said in public in French which cannot be said in English. This leads us to conclude that, in the opinion of the Lord Chamberlain's office, persons who understand French are less likely to cause a disturbance. Why? French is taught in every type of school. Could it, therefore, be that French is a language in which misdemeanours may be forgiven, with a knowing smile that would not be permissible in sterner English? If this sixth form logic is really at work, the situation is not only shameful, it is ridiculous. (English Stage Company, *Two* 25)

Devine was very firm in his critique of the Lord Chamberlain and the 'hypocritical device' of the club production. Yet, another incident involving a ban by the Lord Chamberlain's Office, this time concerning a play by Ronald Duncan – *The Catalyst* (1958), did not spark any such reaction in Devine. *The Catalyst* opened on 25 March 1958 at the Arts Centre as a club production. In the 1958 brochure, however, the incident is not mentioned. Only in the chapter summarizing Duncan's biography it says: "*The Catalyst* has been presented in association with the Arts Theatre Club in March 1958" (4). Duncan's play had received a ban, because it mentions a love triangle (Browne 58). Roberts suggests that at the Arts Theatre Club, Duncan's work for Devine was "conveniently out of the way" (Roberts, *Stage* 64). Wardle writes: "Devine headed it off to the Arts Theatre" (Wardle 215). Browne explains: "George Devine had thought it would confuse the public if the Royal Court were to be turned into a club theatre at that early stage of the company's history" (Browne 59)²².

Devine's central early aim, as formulated in his scheme of 1953, was to create a new theatre. It seems, in 1958, he had succeeded in this, on a much larger scale than the mere supporting of new writers. He writes in the English Stage Company's 1958 brochure:

21 Even if the younger theatre staff were frequently involved in political activities, Devine was not. "Personally, Devine was shy of demonstrations in any case" (Wardle 210). Wardle continues: "So politically, too, he held an isolated position; though, aside from the fact that he voted Labour, there is not much agreement on where he did stand" (211).

22 *The Catalyst* was granted a licence in 1963 to be produced in the West End without any alterations being made to the text (Browne 59).

We have established a method of presentation of our own, based on a dramatic rather than decorative attitude. The more meaningful a play, the more truly dramatic the dialogue, the more truly theatrical the acting, the less production 'gimmicks' and fanciful décor are required. (English Stage Company, *Two* 3)

Devine concludes: "We have big plans for the future to establishing and developing of this policy. We think we have earned the right to plan extensively for the establishment of such a way of thinking and working" (3). Yet, he had to let go of many essential parts of his early scheme in order to keep the theatre – with its financially important transfers – running; one of it being the employment of a permanent ensemble. "However much we may desire this we have not the means so far to form such a group" (3). He adds: "we are now planning to form a group of actors and a 'school of acting' especially suited to our needs" (3). The 'school of acting' did not materialise until years later though: in the Court's Actors' Studio at the Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre, from 1963-1965. The permanent ensemble would never return while Devine was in charge, no matter how hard he tried. Minutes of a Council meeting on 28 August 1956 further show how hard it was to keep playing in repertory:

Mr. Devine said that in the Spring it was proposed that the ESC present two or more new English plays from the group of writers gradually collecting around the theatre, or any others who may turn up in the meantime. At the same time we should take up again the principle of playing in repertory. (Royal Court Theatre, 28 Aug. 1956)

The letting go of policies, and in fact all decision concerning the operations of the English Stage Company, were, of course, not merely a matter of artistic policy. It must not be forgotten that the Arts Council's support for the English Stage Company was crucial. As such Jo Hodgkinson, the head of the Arts Council's drama panel, was present at many Council meetings. At the 26 November meeting, he warned the company of the consequences of its programming:

Apart from the fact that an evening of one act plays does not command great public support the Company must also consider that if these plays are done we shall have produced a German translation, followed by a Restoration Revival, followed by an American play, followed by two French plays. Criticism can be made that we are not the English Stage Company. (Royal Court Theatre, 26 Nov. 1956; emphasis as indicated in the original document)

Hodgkinson then commented on the dropped repertory policy and the dangers to the Royal Court's indecisiveness: "He said a change of policy would not necessarily prejudice our application, but advised that we could not just let the matter drift as Arts Council Councillors would require a definite statement".

The dropping of the repertory policy was only one change the English Stage company was forced to accept. Findlater states: "The English Stage Company began its regime [...] with a permanent company, a permanent setting and a policy of 'true' repertory. Within a year it was forced to discard two of these planks in its platform, and the permanent set was finally abandoned a year after that" (27).

Besides this, it were the political labels, in connection with *Look Back in Anger* that hugely changed the Royal Court's policies. In the 1958 brochure, Tony Richardson speaks of both developments: "We had to pay a price" (7). In envy, he refers to the Berliner Ensemble with its permanent company of a hundred actors and months of rehearsal time, and adds about his own work: "Sometimes you have to work more dialectically, to sacrifice immediate results for future effects". He justifies that he and Devine gave up on central aspects of the initial scheme: "What we needed to do was to explore, to question, to raise the issues usually ignored rather than to achieve anything permanent. It is this which has made sense of the heterogeneous group of writers we have presented" (7). Richardson does not mention that it was the flexibility needed in order to allow for transfers to the West End or abroad, rather than the focus on a heterogeneous group of writers, that led to the abandoning of the permanent ensemble.

Next, Richardson turns to the changes in the artistic rather than the production policy, and explains what happened to the artistic perception of the Royal Court during its first two years: "The popular press has already fixed a very firm image of the Royal Court" (7). Partly referring to the rather unloved Duncan-element in the English Stage Company, Richardson explains the press' approach to the Royal Court:

When we announced our first season we were expected to churn out Iron Curtain melodramas washed up by vague metaphysics and sprinkled with rumples, helpless *gamines* wiser than Zen or expressionist verse dramas where agonised mothers march in stylised make-up from spotlight to green spotlight. (7)

But what happened was *Look Back in Anger*. Richardson continues:

Now we are expected to turn out equally long, equally humourless, definitely subversive grouches by impoverished red brick discontents to a sweated and unshaven audience almost as at odds with the world as the plays they devour. (7)

What becomes most clear in Richardson's words is not the turn the Royal Court had made, but how much this turn was caused by the popular press fixing "a very firm image of the Royal Court" (7): the press came to expect the Royal Court to bring forth working class topics and cater to a young, discontent audience. Along with these expectations, a label was attached to the theatre. The theatre that the Royal Court had become – the non-conformist, radical, socialist theatre that the Royal Court would 'be' for many decades to come – was thus constructed through the voice of the press. Richardson adds: "Yet despite the ludicrousness of the stereotype that has often been created around the Court, some tone, some flavour, thank God, remains" (7).

It is highly noteworthy that the Royal Court's reputation in 1958 was nothing but a ludicrous stereotype, to Richardson. Devine's associate captures what was to become the legend of the Royal Court in its 'golden age' in a very sarcastic way. To do so, he chooses the terms 'impoverished red brick discontents' and 'a sweated and unshaven audience [...] at odds with the world' to refer to the young generation that was associated

with labels like the Angry Young and the kitchen sink movement²³. For Richardson, all this apparently was an image imposed on the Royal Court by the press. What the theatre, however, really was about, the 'tone' and 'flavour' that 'remains', Richardson finds hard to define. He tries to explain:

Like the commitment of many artists, it is not less strong by being implicit, rather than explicit. It does not push any political or ethical dogma, though its morality – and its political sympathies – are usually evident. What is often dismissed as being vaguely anti-Establishment is pro-all that liberates the human spirit and body from social and material pressures of any kind. (7)

Rather than attributing a political movement to the Royal Court with Osborne, Richardson sees the playwright as having broken the hermetic seal, which separated the British society, in the words of Arthur Miller, from life. Due to Osborne's work, theatre has been forced back to the life and society it serves, Richardson writes. In this, he sees an "essential perpetual revolution" (7).

Richardson explains that there has been a lot more to the Royal Court's programme than just the work that followed Osborne. He mentions the different new areas and the new poetry that entered the theatre with the works of John Arden, Michael Hastings, Doris Lessing, Kathleen Sully, Nigel Dennis, and N.F. Simpson. Richardson finds that what all the writers at the Court have most strikingly in common, is that the prose in their work "has reached an authority and a subtlety which has not been heard since early Shaw" (7). He concludes: "So much for the past. We have made many mistakes, many errors of judgement. We are very conscious of how far we are from the production standards we would like. We must plead guilty to all kinds of cautiousness and confusion of policy" (7).

Richardson thus acknowledges that the work at the Royal Court has deviated from the early schemes of the English Stage Company's work, as based on his and Devine's schemes, and the aims and goals put forth at the launch at the Kingsway. The challenge for the future, Richardson sees as lying in binding all achievements into "something more lasting and positive" (7). He ends: "The theatre has a vital part to play in any society and in its shaping. But it must know to what it is groping. That is our challenge for the future. We are determined to meet it" (7). In relation to Richardson's statements, George Goetschius had a distinctly different perspective on the Royal Court and its policy in retrospect.

In *Ten Years at the Royal Court 1956/1966* (1966), Goetschius comments on the 1950s Royal Court in its social context. Goetschius' essay is labelled by the publisher of the brochure "an outsider's opinion" (English Stage Company, *Ten* 33) – that "does not represent the views of the English Stage Company" (33). Goetschius is introduced as "in on the Court from the beginning" (33): a personal friend of the Devine's and

23 The term 'kitchen sink' relates to the 'kitchen sink school' in painting, the major subjects of which were ordinary people in everyday life contexts. (Farson)

therefore of Jocelyn Herbert, Tony Richardson, and William Gaskill. His notes on the Royal Court – as presented in the 1966 brochure – were initially to be presented at a dinner with Michel Saint-Denis that Devine had organized, and that never took place. Goetschius, having witnessed the foundation of the Court, gives reflected insights into the original initiative behind the endeavour.

He describes the Royal Court in the first phase – which he calls the “founding (pre-Osborne) phase” – as following a very different outline than its later left-wing reputation. “The original aim of the Court was to become an illustration of ‘the unity of the theatrical craft’” (33), which clearly related to Michel Saint-Denis’ idea of the craftsmen theatre. In this environment the writers – after all, the Court defined itself as a ‘writers’ theatre’ – would then be initiated, “naturally responding” (33) to the environment by offering material that “would itself be the basis for a new ‘organic theatre’” (33). Goetschius rejects the idea that there had been any attempt in creating a theatre with a socio-political concern; the attempt was to create an ‘organic theatre’ that could be capable of significantly renewing the theatre craft, “‘outside’ the theatre as we knew it” (33).

During the Court’s alleged second phase – labelled “the ‘Look Back’ and after phase” by Goetschius – the attempt to create an ‘organic theatre’ had turned into “a more generalized movement in the theatrical community” (34). The Court was the power house of this movement. This was due to a couple of factors, Goetschius writes, “the need for the new opportunities for a whole range of theatrical practitioners [...] who, like other elements in the middle class, needed both the opportunity to practise their profession and adequate recognition in doing so” (34),

the content of the theatre – the very content of new theatre – ‘kitchen sink’ – the emphasis on the provinces, especially the North, the variety of physical types and patterns of speech necessary in the new theatre – made opportunities for working class and provincial artists (34),

“the cultural lack in the West End theatre (34), and “the success of *Look Back in Anger*” (34). While understanding the Royal Court as being a tool of the middle classes (33), Goetschius does not deny that “the revolution at the Court was the jumping-off point for similar activities elsewhere” (34) and that “the overall effect was exactly what it was heralded as; a revolution in British theatre, TV and films” (34). Goetschius concludes:

by the end of the second phase, the Court had become a theatre for the theatrical community and was beginning, in its later days, to elicit from the new theatrical elite it helped to create the same lack of piety it has itself shown the establishment only a few years before. (34)

Goetschius thus explains the theatre’s journey from “the idea of an avant-garde theatre” to a “theatre of the theatrical community” (34). It is obvious that Goetschius makes a distinction between a theatre for the community and a theatre for the theatrical community. For Goetschius, the Royal Court had become a middle class establishment. He makes it clear that in spite of the ‘kitchen sink’, and the work opportunities this new kind of theatre opened for artists – especially actors – with a provincial or working class

background, the Royal Court was really creating a new theatrical elite. By analysing and uncovering the social context and the utilization of the Court for middle class causes, Goetschius shows, how much the Royal Court has continuously been diverted from its original aims throughout the first ten years. Goetschius' is a unique perspective, as it operates on the 'outside' of the Royal Court. His opinion is not in any way designed to please a funding body.

Regardless of labels, individual tastes of company members and divergent policies, by the end of the 1950s, the Royal Court had established itself as a venue for new British drama and as an outlet for new writers. In 1960, Devine stated: "there is [...] a large amount of constructive work with writers taking place on a less noticeable level. I think we are unique in this field of theatre" (English Stage Company, *1958-1959* 26). As one of the early Royal Court writers, Ann Jellicoe praises Devine's support for the writers he had faith in, even if their plays had failed at the box office or with the critics, thus referring to the Court's policy of 'the Right to Fail' (Doty & Harbin 42-43). But, being a writers' theatre was not that simple. Roberts comments:

It thus illustrated the perennial difficulty of most innovative theatre. Producing new plays logically means the productions of available new plays. The theatre is driven by what arrives. What has to be done erodes what might be done and with it the identity of a specific theatre. What is available dictates what is done. What is unavoidable (Duncan) damages the constancy of a particular audience. Sometimes, what is done is done for economic reasons (*The Country Wife*, December 1956, or, disastrously, *Look After Lulu*, July 1959). In all this, an artist such as Devine must work to maintain his purpose. To say it was an uphill struggle is to put it mildly. (Roberts, *Stage* 50)

In *A Record of Two Years Work*, Devine makes a similar assessment as Roberts. He explains the company's journey as a writers' theatre that has given writers an opportunity "to see their work acted on a stage in good, if not lavish, conditions" (English Stage Company, *Two* 3). By opening this field of work, Devine feels the Royal Court has encouraged other theatres to be more adventurous, too. He continues: "The relationship between dramatist and director, dramatist and rehearsal, has been carefully cultivated" (3). However, Devine is aware that

the real result of our work will not be seen for many years yet, although there have been half-failures and failures, although we have had success with two classical revivals, although the proportion of English plays is still smaller than we would wish, we have begun to find the way to create conditions wherein new drama can grow and thrive. (3)

He continues: "The regular audience of the Royal Court is regrettably small. Far more people in London support the English Stage Company as an idea rather than buy seats at the box office, except for obvious successes" (English Stage Company, *Two* 3).

Accordingly, by 1960, the financial standing of the English Stage Company was still difficult. For its first five years, Wardle states, the Royal Court was constantly on the brink of going bankrupt, and it was only film money from the Richardson-Osborne *Tom Jones* (1963), and a subsequent increase in the Arts Council grants, that eventually raised a certain sense of security (208). Osborne's plays, the sales of their film rights,

and their transfers did indeed significantly help in securing the English Stage Company's finances. Neville Blond puts the precarious existence of the Court in a nutshell: "After the first eight productions we were broke" (English Stage Company, *Ten* 4).

Frank Evans, the English Stage Company's accountant in 1965, explains in retrospect that from the start, the Royal Court's only chances of survival were subsidies and transfers to the West End, tours, and the sales of television and film rights. With a capacity of 407 and tickets at a maximum of one guinea, the theatre yielded £339.2.6 at full capacity (5). In the first nine years, with a total of £858,000 of annual operating costs, the Royal Court only had an accumulated income of £572,000. Evans highlights that it is thus largely owed to John Osborne that the theatre was able to meet the operating deficit. The subsidies from the Arts Council amounted to a total of £114,000 over the first nine years, and the grant from the London Country Council and Chelsea Borough Council amounted to £10,000; £28,000 came through donations (5). In the English Stage Company's 1960 brochure, *The English Stage Company 1958-1959*, Blond writes:

Anyone experienced in the difficulties of theatrical management will realize that this has not been achieved without considerable financial worry. We continue to be immensely grateful to all those artists who give us their services for far less than their commercial salaries, both in the main productions and on the Sunday nights²⁴. But costs are tending to rise all the time and the risks involved in a production of a new play by a new author are very heavy. The Arts Council of Great Britain do what they can for us, but it is perfectly clear that exploitation of our successes outside the Royal Court itself is our only means of survival, and it may interest those who think that we have the appearance of prosperity, simply because we do go on doing experimental work which no-one else would dare to undertake, to know that out of the thirty-six productions which have been done in the main bill in the last four years, only six have been commercially successful. I am told this is a fair average, but it makes for a hazardous existence. (English Stage Company, *1958-1959* 3)

Surely, the seasons were planned to promote British playwrights. Yet, the two other departments in repertory, besides 'home-grown' plays, were plays by modern French dramatists and 'pylons' (Wardle 201). It was the 'pylons' that were to fix the budget. They usually ran with a star taking one of the major parts. As such, these classical revivals were clearly as artistically predictable as could be, but also balanced the books in ways that world premieres never would have; *The Country Wife* with Joan Plowright was such a 'pylon', and it transferred into the West End. Lindsay Anderson explains: "Although it was not at first the policy of the English Stage Company to transfer productions to the West End, the forced abandonment of the repertory principle meant a

24 In a memorandum, on 6 January 1961, George Devine wrote: "The Sunday Night shows are not completely satisfactory because the rehearsal time is limited and it is becoming increasingly difficult to persuade actors to appear unpaid" (Roberts, *Stage* 80). The actors received only two guineas per performance and no rehearsal pay – for a rehearsal time of three weeks. The playwrights received only five guineas, on account of ten percent royalties. This was raised to £15 on account of royalties in 1968 (Browne 38).

change in this policy, too" (English Stage Company, *1958-1959* 24). Devine had already commented in 1958:

The Royal Court is our base, to be maintained at all costs. It now commands a small but comprehensive organisation suited to the policy. But it is by tours and transfers that this organisation is mainly sustained. This puts a great strain on the organisation but it is essential. The pattern of a theatrical management in a commercial sense springing from and giving support to a non-commercial artistic policy is now clear for the English Stage Company. (English Stage Company, *Two* 3)

For their obvious running against original Royal Court policies – “the Royal Court was supposed to be storming the commercial citadel, not doing deals with it” (Wardle 202) – West End transfers more than once triggered conflict and debate at the Court (202). In fact, the dependence on West End transfers has prevailed as a major point of debate in the work of the Royal Court Theatre leading up to the present day.

Revivals and West End transfers – much like the politicization of the artistic output – had not been part of the company's initial policy. Besides being pushed to adapt to new policies, Devine had to fight off many “sort[s] of ignorance” (Roberts, *Stage* 69) towards the artistic work at the Royal Court – from inside and outside the theatre: critique about the restrictive policy on the choice of plays, the exclusiveness of the Royal Court²⁵, the attitude of his Associate and Assistant Directors²⁶ (71), and the wish of parts of the Council – most obviously Ronald Duncan – to replace him as Artistic Director (73).

The decision of the Artistic Committee not to produce *Curtmantle* (1961), a play introduced by Olivier, finally caused a final row between Duncan and Devine. Duncan put forth that producing plays like *Curtmantle* was the reason he had formed the English Stage Company in the first place. The company Duncan was referring to, however, no longer existed in 1960 (75). In his last attempt to reclaim the Royal Court, Duncan failed.

25 John McGrath analyses the production of a new play as a Sunday Night at the Court: “The director will be one of the three or four associates – Lindsay Anderson, John Dexter, William Gaskill, possibly Anthony Page. The play will have been chosen, or picked up, by one of them, because he was excited by it. The author will have been brought to the attention of George Devine or one of the directors by an agent, a critic, or some personal contact, perhaps via a university connection or an introduction effected by an actor, or another writer. Rarely will the play have been an unsolicited manuscript, read with oaths-of-joy by a ten-bob-a-time reader. Even if it had been, it would have stood no chance of production unless one of the directors had been thrilled by it. (McGrath 12-13)

26 Lindsay Anderson proved to be the most troublesome in this respect. Appointed as an Associate Director, Anderson aimed at being an essential part of the Royal Court, rather than an on-and-off employee. In 1960, Anderson eventually resigned from the Artistic Committee of the Royal Court. “Anderson declined frequent invitations over the years to become the Court's Artistic Director and consequently never had to manoeuvre and change face as Devine did. To be critical from the sidelines became in Anderson's case a fine art” (Roberts, *Stage* 78).

Wardle also draws attention to the many problems Devine faced in wanting to create a good working space for new talents: disputes amongst the Assistant and Associate Directors, a leaky roof, political activities and views that kept the staff away from work, and the presence of Clemens Freud's dining club upstairs, which amongst other disturbances, deprived the company of desperately needed rehearsal space (209). Adding to that, Richardson, Gaskill, and Page were often absent, leaving Devine alone to handle the enormous workload of the artistic directorate (Roberts, *Stage* 66).

Devine's last years at the Court saw many plans of expansion – even for the rebuilding of the theatre. But, not all of his plans managed to miraculously work their way as Devine's scheme in becoming the Royal Court's Artistic Director had. In 1960, the Royal Court set out on its first attempt to take over a bigger theatre: the old Metropolitan Music Hall, Edgware Road. It remained – like many efforts to follow – an attempt. Also in 1960, the school schemes started. Students came to see performances at the Royal Court and were introduced to theatre in general (Browne 40).

The Royal Court's policy, by 1960, could still not be clearly defined. A clear policy about what the English Stage Company did not want, rather than what it wanted, had evolved. This was based on the kind of theatre that had 'happened' at the Court since 1956: the social realist kind. Osborne and his influence on drama could not have been foreseen at the beginnings of the company. Accordingly, the early policies could not stand anymore in 1960.

Devine's assessment of the Royal Court's situation in 1960 shows how the theatre had to adapt to given circumstances. In the English Stage Company's 1960 brochure, he writes that "in spite of this dedicated hard work, always under conditions of financial stringency, of a small administrative and technical team, and the underpaid collaboration of actors, directors, designer and musicians, the cost of such operations is inevitably high" (26). For the sake of the brochure, he tried to focus on the positive though:

[...] the impact of our policy is beginning to show in the West End and the provinces. Openings for new dramatists are greater than at any time in my 30 years experience. Theatre is slowly beginning to be a force in society. To achieve this we have had, till now, to sacrifice certain artistic ambitions, especially the formation of a permanent company, but we believe this will come in time. The main problem in front of us is to raise the aesthetic level of the 'new movement'.

Meanwhile it is my contention that the continued existence of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre is the most important thing to be said for it. (26)

Devine speaks of sacrifices that were made and of raising the aesthetic level of the 'new movement'. Material, produced by Roberts, shows that in order to keep the Royal Court running, Devine considered many new options. As such, Devine stated in 1959/1960 that he wishes to introduce a new form of theatre that comprises music and dance in order to compete with the new trends in the media (9): an idea that was never put into effect. Still, it shows that the first years at the Royal Court were very experimental.

Roberts captures the Court's ambivalent position between its struggle for a modern new writing theatre and the commercial schemes assuring the company's existence, as

well as pushing forward its institutionalization in a quote by Devine: "I suppose in our minds we know that to be accepted completely by the middle, to be smiled upon by the top, is the first sweet kiss of death. So we carry on, flirting with death in order to live" (11).

The Royal Court had not yet found an identity. Surely, it knew it was a writers' theatre and that it wanted to distribute something new; a policy to do so had, however, not yet been found. In this, the Royal Court was torn between its hard work as an underfunded writers' theatre and the temptation toward a stronger commercialization of its policy: a struggle that it would have to confront throughout its entire history. Osborne's plays were immense successes and the Angry Young Men had been an inspiring force. The Royal Court, however, even by 1960, was still fighting to be commonly accepted, or merely agreed upon, by the artistic landscape.

3.2 The Birth of the Angry Young Royal Court

The popular press has already fixed a very firm image of the Royal Court. [...] How happy some of us would be [...] [if we] had so distinctive a voice. (Tony Richardson in English Stage Company, *Two* 7)

Through an extraordinary constellation of circumstances, the Royal Court had come to occupy a symbolic role quite beyond its theatrical function. The building had become a rallying point for the whole youth protest movement that exploded in the late 1950s and which centred on the word 'establishment'. (Wardle 191)

I'd better not start to get into the history of *Look Back in Anger* because it's been mulled over. (Michael Hallifax in Doty and Harbin 38)

The story of British theatre in 1956 had been so often retold that its shape, its force, its power and meaning have been lost in the familiarity of the telling. (Rebellato, 1956 226)

There are many versions of the story of the early years of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court. Following Tony Richardson's assertions in the 1958 publication that the angry, young and political mandate of the Royal Court was imposed on the company by the press, it will in the following be traced how the press' influence developed, and how the alleged mandate of the Royal Court was formed. After a quick outline of *Look Back in Anger* and its production is given, the various aims and goals of the English Stage Company before and after 8 May shall be looked at. A special focus will then lie on the newspaper coverage on the production and the Royal Court respectively.

Following his policy to encourage British writers to write for the stage, George Devine ran an advertisement in *The Stage*. Roughly 700 plays²⁷ were sent to the Royal Court but only one was considered worth producing by Devine, Richardson and the Artistic Sub-Committee Duncan, Harewood, and Lewenstein: John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. In 1955, when the company had not even moved into a theatre, let alone the Royal Court, Osborne met with Devine and Richardson. Devine had visited Osborne before: he had rowed to Osborne's houseboat which was inaccessible due to the tide and offered Osborne a deal – £25 for one year's option on *Look Back in Anger* with a £50 renewal clause (Little and McLaughlin 24). Osborne had until then acted with a provincial repertory company. When he met Devine, he was twenty-seven, had no job and no money (Browne 18). When being offered the £25, which he got the feeling Devine considered slightly insufficient, he "tried not to appear grateful" (Little and McLaughlin 24). Osborne himself recalls his first encounters with Devine:

I had no money, no job, nothing; and he hadn't even got a theatre. But I just felt, I really did, 'This is it. It's alright.' And I lived from then on, for about nine months, on the idea of something that hadn't yet arrived. I already felt looked after. He gave me plays to read – I'd take 40 of them home at a time – and got me to stage-manage auditions (at ten bob a time) to keep me going until we actually got into the theatre. I don't believe that anybody, not even George, had a very clear idea of what, exactly, was going to happen. (Osborne in Findlater, *25 Years* 19)

Before *Look Back in Anger* joined the repertoire on 8 May, as the English Stage Company's third production, Osborne was involved with the Royal Court in various ways. Claire Jeffreys recalls how Osborne helped out in the prop department, making the mulberry bush for the eponymous play: "he was absolutely unknown then, and he was an actor in the company and he came and helped" (Jeffreys in Roberts, *Stage* 44). Michael Hallifax, the first stage manager at the Court, recalls meeting Osborne during auditions that the Court held at the Palace Theatre: "he [...] desperately wanted to join the company as an actor" (Hallifax 9). Devine engaged him: "His first job was to understudy the role of Jimmy Porter in his own play" (9).

The Mulberry Bush had not fared very well at the box office, *The Crucible* had done a bit better, yet, the Court was still waiting for the huge success that had to kick in, in order to make the endeavour successful. But the first night of *Look Back in Anger* felt dull. It had been produced with a set by Alan Tagg, which showed a realistic attic – the first 'real' set after the first two productions had been staged on the permanent set, according to the company's initial concept that "scenery was not allowed" (Hallifax 31). The show further had a trumpet with every curtain, mood music, was rawly acted and

27 There are several opinions on how many plays actually arrived at the Court: 675 (Browne 19) or 750 (Wardle 180). Roberts quotes both: 675 (Roberts, *Stage* 33) and at another point 750 (47). A newspaper article of 26 June 1956 quotes Devine: "I've read 675 plays since we first announced our production plans" (London).

had suffered a few cuts by the Lord Chamberlain – nine changes in total²⁸ (Sierz, *Look Back* 60). Osborne recalls the opening night:

I remember little. I was sitting in the front row of the unfilled dress circle between Oscar Lewenstein and the writer Wolf Mankowitz. Wolf laughed loudly, and alone. Oscar glanced around him like a managing clerk anticipating a disastrous verdict from the jury foreman. [...] By the end of the evening I was very drunk as, for the first time, I went through the playwright's lap of dishonour round the dressing-rooms. This entails fawning upon an actor in front of his hostile and resentful relatives and agents while they look on with contempt for the ordeal you have inflicted on their idol. I was unaware that Binkie Beaumont, most powerful of the unacceptable faces of theatrical capitalism, had been in the theatre and had walked out in the interval. Or that the critic TC Worsley had persuaded Terence Rattigan to stay. (Osborne, "50 Years On")

Michael Hallifax recalls:

Tony Richardson's first production for the company, *Look Back in Anger*, got mixed reviews, most of which were against the play and the unlikeable main character Jimmy Porter, very well played by Kenneth Haigh. However, Kenneth Tynan, the widely read and brilliant drama critic of *The Observer* [...] was stoutly for the play and gave it an excellent review. (Hallifax 20)

Osborne further recalls:

When I arrived at the theatre, still nauseous from the early-hours drinking, George attempted to brace me up but his own disappointment seemed clearer and more stricken than my own. He told me there was quite a good notice in the *Financial Times*. Tony pretended to be astonished by both of us. "But what on earth did you expect? You didn't expect them to like it did you?" His affected scorn was preferable to anyone's encouraging nod. (Osborne, "50 Years On")

Osborne's perception of the critical response is, however, pretty one-sided. The same goes for Hallifax's statement. There were in fact quite a few newspapers that welcomed Osborne's writing and praised his talent, as this chapter will show. Hallifax and

28 The file on *Look Back in Anger* in the Lord Chamberlain's Correspondence Files quotes the following alterations. In Act I, on pages 43 to 44, a speech by Jimmy Porter, in which he refers to his wife's lovemaking, two passages were cut: after "devours me whole every time", "and lies back afterwards like a puffed out python to sleep it off" was changed to "She has the passion of a python" after "her own kind of passion", and "the peaceful coil of that innocent belly" was changed to "smothered in that peaceful coil". In Act II, Scene 1, on page 15 "There's a smokescreen in my pubic hair" was changed to "You can quit waiting at my Counter, Mildred. 'Cos you'll find my position closed"; on page 16 "I could try inversion, but I'd yawn with inversion" was changed to "This perpetual whoring gets quite dull and boring. So avoid that old python coil and pass me the celibate oil"; on page 19, Jimmy's description of Alison's mother as being "as tough as a night in a Bombay Brothel and as hairy as a gorilla's behind" was changed to "She's rough as a night in Leicester Square and tough as a matelot's arm". In Act II, Scene 2, on page 14 "deep loving bull" was omitted. In Act III, Scene 1, page 14 "short arsed" was changed to "sawn off". (*LCP CORR*)

Osborne, however, generalize in a way which is not too uncommon when hearing stories about *Look Back in Anger*: the opening of the play has become the material of theatre legends. As such, there are various versions on how *Look Back in Anger*'s success kicked in, and how much Kenneth Tynan²⁹ was responsible for it. As early as 1962, John Russel Taylor commented:

Though in recent years the legend has grown up that when *Look Back in Anger* opened it was greeted with almost universal incomprehension and dislike until Kenneth Tynan in the *Observer* saved the situation with a glowing recommendation, this is, in fact, far from being the case. (J. R. Taylor 31)

In the mid-1970s, Browne wrote: "It is not true that *Look Back in Anger* was an immediate success. On the other hand, the popular myth that its merits were overlooked by all except Kenneth Tynan [...] is not true either" (Browne 19). Findlater, in 1981, was more one-sided again: "Osborne's play did not score an immediate hit with the public or the press; several derisive reviewers attempted to give it an instant burial" (*25 Years* 27). In 2008, Aleks Sierz commented: "Despite the legend that most critics hated the show, many of them welcomed Osborne's new talent, even when they deplored the tone and content of his play" (Sierz, *Look Back* 62).

The success of *Look Back in Anger* was not primarily held back by alleged bad reviews. The repertory system made for a constantly interrupted run of the play, which left the public confused. Halifax recalls that the play was only playing for three days after its opening night, and was then back on 24 May (Halifax 22). Sierz gives an outline of the schedule:

Devine had programmed four slots of four performances (starting 8 May, 24 May, 4 June and 14 June), and then it was brought back into repertory on 26 July, and ran until 1 August. Then it played on 9-15 August and, following the withdrawal of Nigel Dennis' *Cards of Identity*, it ran for nine and a half weeks nightly after 23 August. (Sierz, *Look Back* 63)

Sierz' list gives a good impression of how the play 'limped along', in box office terms. Halifax writes: "Londoners were not used to such a style of presentation" (21). Accordingly, audiences stayed away. But, the theatre needed a success.

Osborne matched well with Devine's idea of a writer: he had been discovered, invited into the theatre, and had been involved with the company by taking on all kinds of jobs – like Saint-Denis' much-liked theatre craftsman. Osborne was the young British playwright that Devine had sought, and *Look Back in Anger* had the 'new' that Devine felt eager to establish. Different ways were found to promote the play.

29 Kenneth Tynan, Gaskill, and Richardson had known each other since their time at Oxford University. William Gaskill who was from the same village as Richardson recalls: "When [Tony and I] arrived in Oxford we found it dominated by Kenneth Tynan in his purple suit" (Gaskill 4).

George Fearon, who had previously been the press officer at the Taw and Torridge Festival, and had been in charge of the English Stage Company's press relations from 1954 on, did not particularly like Osborne's play (Little and McLaughlin 25). He found it very difficult to market and thus came up with the term 'Angry Young Man'. Findlater states: "Business improved after the eruption of the 'Angry Young Man' publicity" (25 *Years*, 27). The publicity was, however, not to erupt immediately after the first night, and the iconic term was not Fearon's; Fearon had borrowed it from Leslie Allen Paul. Paul's autobiography *Angry Young Man* was published in 1951 (Roberts, *Stage* 236). Osborne says about Fearon:

The English Stage Company now employs a full-time press officer and assistant. In 1956 this job was served part-time and just as ineffectively by a man called George Fearon. He was overpaid, but less so than his successors at £10 a week. Mr. Fearon was given a copy of the play and invited me for a drink at a pub in Great Newport Street. He equivocated shiftily, even for one in his trade, and then told me with some relish how much he disliked the play and how he had no idea how he could possibly publicise it successfully. The prospect began to puff him up with rare pleasure. He looked at me cheerfully as if he were Albert Pierrepoint guessing my weight. "I suppose you're really – an angry young man..." He was the first one to say it. A boon to headline-writers ever after. An Angry Young Man. "...Aren't you?" I could see no help coming from that quarter. (Osborne, "50 Years On")

A second attempt to promote the play, was an article about the English Stage Company in the *Picture Post* in June 1956. Hallifax recalls that a spread in the popular magazine was promised. Unfortunately, and Hallifax cannot fathom why, Kenneth Haigh, who played Jimmy Porter, simply did not feel like being interviewed or photographed for the magazine. While the reporter was apparently trying to do his best to help the play and the company, Haigh was unresponsive and uncooperative. Eventually on 23 June 1956, the *Picture Post* featured a "sympathetic, supportive, and upbeat article, accompanied by several photographs. This was a miracle" (Hallifax 23). Titled "Angry Young Man. Moments in the bitter life of Jimmy Porter" it opens with stating what a huge success Osborne's play is:

so far, the only profitable play in the English Stage Company's repertoire at the Royal Court Theatre, and extra performances have been scheduled for the late June and early July. It has sent English critics to the barricades with eloquent volleys of ardour and apoplexy. And its author, John Osborne, is being pursued by the head of film companies. ("Angry Young Man")

In the article, Jimmy Porter is portrayed as "the Rebel without a cause [...] [who] like so many young men of our time [...] feels that he is living amongst the dead" and thus speaks for the angry young man of 1956. Osborne, who was the only to be interviewed, is claimed to have created Porter in his image. A photograph showing him sitting on his house boat comes with the caption: "Jimmy Porter – as lived by John Osborne. 'Nobody cares about ordinary people. Nobody gets through to them. The stage hands lapped my play up. The critics can think what they like.'" In accordance with this, the article also defends the play against its critics: "Mr. Osborne has not perhaps fully succeeded in

explaining what makes this particular Jimmy Porter the way he is.” Yet, “if, like the more prissy of our critics, you find him objectionable, remember that Hamlet and Faust were angry and objectionable young men too.” Promoting the play’s upcoming slots in the repertory run as ‘extra performances’ that were scheduled due to an enormous success, was another helpful gesture of the article. And indeed, according to Hallifax, the article, despite having a not too great impact on the box office, did lift the morale of the company enormously. While Devine had, in June 1956, believed that the company would not last beyond July, he made up his mind after the article: “Whatever dire thoughts George may have had, we went ahead with the next production” (Hallifax 25). Eventually, in a third attempt, Neville Blond wrote to Cecil Madden of the BBC and arranged for a 15-minute extract of *Look Back in Anger* to be aired³⁰. Hallifax states that the extract was aired in the BBC’s weekly programme of twenty-minute live extracts from West End shows (Hallifax 26), which had also shown an extract of *Cards of Identity*. The excerpt was shown on 16 October and “the effect on the box office was magical. At once, the phones started ringing and queues formed at the theatre” (27). Hallifax recalls his surprise at the wide spectrum of public that came to see the play, especially young people.

It seems to be widely acknowledged that with the BBC broadcast the success of *Look Back in Anger* fully kicked in (Wardle 185; Billington, *State* 97). Only six weeks after the BBC showed the excerpt Granada live broadcasted the entire play. John Wyver writes: “Both the BBC excerpt and the Granada production from the company’s studios in Manchester on 28 November 1956 were broadcast live and no recording exists of either. [...] Alan Bates remained from the initial cast, with Richard Pasco replacing Kenneth Haigh. [...] Granada claimed that an audience of 4,387,400 people watched the broadcast” (Wyver, “From the ‘50s”).

Due to the high demand in tickets that followed the BBC broadcast, *Look Back in Anger* transferred to the Lyric Hammersmith where it ran from 5 to 26 November. And while the next Osborne³¹ – *The Entertainer* with Sir Laurence Olivier as Archie Rice –

30 While Wardle writes the extract was five minutes long (Wardle 185), Roberts corrects him in stating that the excerpt was actually eighteen minutes long (*Stage* 48). Referring to Madden’s memoirs, John Wyver, writes: “Committed to helping the theatre, Madden, as documents in the archive at Caversham support, identified in the script a 15-minute section ‘then considered suitable for a family audience’”. What the Caversham record does not contain, however, is that Madden was able to commandeer an Outside Broadcast unit that was on call for a current political story and ‘steal’ twenty minutes from the weekly *Picture Parade* series to squeeze the extract from *Look Back in Anger* into the schedule” (Wyver, “Madden”).

31 To call a play by its author’s name was a practice that George Devine had introduced at the Royal Court as part of his idea of the writers’ theatre. Michael Hallifax recalls: “When we started, we didn’t call the plays by their titles. They were known by the author’s name because we were a writers’ theatre. So we had the Wilson, we had the Miller, we had the Osborne, and there was a slight sort of worry when we had the Osborne Two. We stopped

opened on 10 April 1957, and transferred to the 1,400 seat Palace Theatre on 10 September, *Look Back in Anger* went on a short tour to Russia for the 1957 Moscow Youth Festival in August, and to the Lyceum Theatre on Broadway in September. It opened on 1 October at the Lyceum, where it ran until 15 March 1958. It then transferred to the John Golden Theatre, where it ran from 17 March until 20 September 1958, making for a total of four hundred and one performances while playing in New York ("Look Back in Anger", *Internet Broadway Database*).

It has often been debated, what would have happened to the Court and British theatre had Devine not discovered John Osborne. 8 May 1956 has become one of most well-known dates in the history of British Theatre. John Taylor wrote in 1962 that "the event which marks 'then' decisively off from 'now' is the first performance of *Look Back in Anger* on 8 May 1956" (J. R. Taylor 9) – an assertion that not all can agree on.

The importance of *Look Back in Anger* has been challenged on various levels; the major ones being that the success of Osborne's debut was neither a sudden eruption of an all new trend in theatre, nor a marker between a British theatre that did not have any impact on the 'hermetically sealed' society and a new British theatre that 'changed it all'. Taylor writes: "Then, on 8 May 1956 came the revolution" (J. R. Taylor 28). In *1956 and All That* Dan Rebellato, however, argues there was no such revolution. Taylor's argument that writers, who wished to write for the stage, simply had nowhere to go, is read by Rebellato as the assertion that there was no new writing before 1956, but simply a silence. Rebellato further understands Taylor's argument that the signs for the revolution of 1956 could have been seen beforehand (19) in the way that the spirit of 8 May 1956 was continuously existing before the date, yet in a repressed state (Rebellato, 1956 4). Rebellato laments that via Taylor's understanding of the 'pre-*Osborne*' period in British drama, all drama before 1956 is rendered insignificant and without value. While Rebellato sets out to prove that "the theatre of the forties and fifties was unlike the theatre we have been told it was" (8) and that the theatrical revolution had its roots in different concerns than the conventionally proposed ones, he also notes that "it is striking how often the picture slips between suggesting that the theatre was changed by *Look Back in Anger*, and that it was destroyed by it" (9).

Rebellato's approach questions the myth of *Look Back in Anger* and the role of the Royal Court in the history of British theatre. His questioning of a firmly standing idea of the 1956 revolution sparked many reactions. Yet, what Rebellato says, as Nicholas de Jongh rightly remarks, does not "detract [...] from the fact that the theatre of the London 1950s transformed the stage" (Aragay et al. 135). De Jongh continues:

Was there [...] a theatre revolution, launched by the snarl of John Osborne's clarion-call in *Look Back in Anger*? In form, character and even in its sympathies, *Look Back in Anger* now seems a startlingly traditional sort of play. Its significance lay in that it joined in a

it because nobody could get Sir Laurence to talk about an Osborne Two; so it came to an end with *The Entertainer*" (Doty and Harbin 50).

class war and a battle of the generations, between ruling-class elderly Conservatives and a post-war lower-middle-class generation of have-nots. (134)

Look Back in Anger's significance as a socio-political catalyst, rather than a revolutionary agent, is an idea that not only de Jongh shares, as George Goetschius' interpretation of the effect of *Look Back in Anger* showed.

Michael Billington, even though he disagrees with "almost every aspect" of Rebellato's *1956 and All That* (116), also has problems with the importance that is credited to *Look Back in Anger* in general. He writes: "Enshrined in countless academic texts, is that you have to wait until the premieres of *Waiting for Godot* in 1955 and *Look Back in Anger* in 1956 for British theatre to shake off its post-war sloth and get down to serious business" (*State* 5). He suggests that considering either *Waiting for Godot* or *Look Back in Anger* as ushering in a 'revolution' in British theatre would be misleading (84). Billington points out that "while it is absolutely true that 1956 opened the doors to a new generation who reflected the escalating turbulences in British society" (87), the myth around *Look Back in Anger* overlooks two very important aspects: the fact that drama since right after the war had been dissecting British society, and the average successes that the Royal Court saw at their box office. Further, Billington does not credit the revolution, in which the "tight-lipped reticence of the well-made play and the smooth snobberies of drawing room drama" (87) were "forever banished" (87) solely to the Royal Court, but also to the Theatre Workshop of Joan Littlewood. This is an aspect that Aleks Sierz has also commented on.

Sierz explains that Littlewood's contribution to new writing ran parallel to that of the Royal Court (*Nation* 22). And indeed, while the Court was presenting *Look Back in Anger* as a novelty in being a play by a young British playwright, Littlewood was presenting *The Quare Fellow* by Brendan Behan in May 1956, another new play by a young British playwright (22). But Littlewood's work was not as broadly acknowledged as the Royal Court's³². This may have had to do with figures like Harewood, Blond, and Devine who had outstanding connections into society, the industry, the media, the theatre world, and certainly to the Arts Council. The Royal Court's audiences, according to John McGrath, were thus largely built from the circles that the English Stage Company members belonged to, plus the newly attracted celebrated young middle class³³. Littlewood's work, in contrast to that, was actually attracting the working classes (Elsom, *Post-war* 76; McGrath 16-17).

32 Rebellato compares the Royal Court's 1956 Arts Council grant of £2,500 to the Theatre Workshop's 1954 grant of £150 (67).

33 McGrath shows that the Royal Court's audience did not include the working classes by looking at a theatre event at the Royal Court in 1960. In the audience McGrath finds George Devine in the front row of the circle, around him his Associate Directors, a few chosen writers, personal friends, designers, the casting director, and the dramaturge. The supporters of the theatre – businessmen and solicitors with their wives – sit amongst them. In the stalls, one finds the other actors, writers and directors who wish to be associated

Before turning to the reception of *Look Back in Anger*, and the role it played in the history of the Royal Court, the play itself shall be looked at: it is in the character of Jimmy Porter, and John Osborne's apparent likeness to him that the idea of the Angry Young Man John Osborne was born ("Angry Young Man. Moments in the bitter life of Jimmy Porter").

Look Back in Anger opens to a "one-room flat in large Midland town" (Osborne, *Look Back* 9). Jimmy Porter and his friend Cliff are hidden behind newspapers as the curtain rises. In the stage directions Jimmy is described as:

A disconcerting mixture of sincerity and cheerful malice, of tenderness and freebooting cruelty; restless, importunate, full of pride, a combination which alienates the sensitive and insensitive alike. Blistering honesty, or apparent honesty, like his, makes few friends. To many he may seem sensitive to the point of vulgarity. To others, he is simply a loud-mouth. To be as vehement as he is to be almost non-committal. (9-10)

Jimmy's wife, Alison, is ironing. As soon as Jimmy speaks, a strong discontent with the repeating patterns in his life and British culture, as represented in the newspapers by book reviews, shines through: "Why do I do this every Sunday? Even the book reviews seem to be the same as last week's" (10). It is Sunday, Jimmy is not working, but engaging in a pastime activity that could be enjoyable, yet to him, it is not. It doesn't take Jimmy long to turn his unhappiness into personal attacks on both his friend – "Well, you are ignorant. You're just a peasant" (11) – and his wife – "You can talk, can't you? You can express an opinion. Or does the White Woman's Burden make it impossible to think?" (11). Jimmy is strongly encroaching on both Alison's and Cliff's personal spaces. But Cliff, too, breaks with appropriate codes of conduct, as he engages in rather intimate encounters with Alison, in which he not only overtly comments on her beauty, but also kisses her hand, and puts her fingers in his mouth stating what a "lovely, delicious paw" (13) she has got. Jimmy's reaction to his friend approaching his wife is not very big. He rather turns his attention to the newspaper again. Eventually, he comes back at Alison and Cliff for their lack of enthusiasm and cries out: "I want to hear a warm thrilling voice cry out Hallelujah! [...] Hallelujah! I'm alive!" (15). But Cliff and Alison do not bother.

It soon becomes clear that Jimmy's discontent is directed at a larger picture: "I must say it's pretty dreary living in the American age – unless you're an American of

with theatre, as well as agents, radio and television producers, other theatre directors, film company casting directors, young film producers and directors and, of course, the critics as well as the talent scouts for the international agencies. McGrath sums up: "In short, in the stalls are the ingenious captains of an industry, the entrepreneurs of the new international culture market, the buyers and sellers, the purveyors of acceptable theatrical experience to the bourgeoisie of the Western World" (McGrath 14). Behind these, in the back rows or in the upper circle, McGrath continues, are the unknown public: "students, young actors, technicians, schoolmasters, theatre freaks, the innocently interested and green-eyed aspirant" (14).

course. Perhaps all our children will be Americans" (17). Jimmy is clearly fed up with British society as it is, but does not take a clear political position either. He attacks Alison for her aristocratic background – "You're no peasant, are you?" (11) – and at the same time rejects going to the movie, because of the working class people in the front row – "And have my enjoyment ruined by the Sunday night yobs in the front row? No, thank you" (15). Jimmy himself has a working class background (30), but he also has a college education (42), and owns a sweet stall in the market (64). Accordingly, his hatred is not simply addressed at one social group. Only his discontent at women is clearly articulated: "Have you ever noticed how noisy women are? [...] The way they kick the floor about, simply walking over it? Or have you watched them sitting at their dressing tables, dropping their weapons and banging down their bits of boxes and brushes and lipstick?" (24).

Alison, finally, reaches a breaking point after having been accidentally burned with the iron as a result of Cliff and Jimmy grappling (26). Jimmy apologizes, but she yells at him to get out – which he does. In the following, Cliff binds Alison's arm and she confides in him and tells him that she's pregnant (28). At the end of their conversation, Cliff and Alison kiss. As Jimmy walks in on them, he's not surprised (30), instead he instantly provokes them: "Why don't you both get into bed, and have done with it" (31). The scene eventually takes an absurd turn as both Jimmy and Alison start commenting on Cliff's looks – "CLIFF: He gets more like a little mouse every day, doesn't he? [...] He really does look like one. [...] ALISON: [...] That's because he *is* a mouse." (31) – and Cliff agrees and starts dancing and squeaking: "I'm a mouse, I'm a randy little mouse!" (31), which leads into another mock fight. When Cliff then leaves to get cigarettes, Jimmy and Alison are alone, for the first time in the play.

While Alison is still not certain of Jimmy's mood, they do make jokes and call each other nicknames, and kiss passionately; Alison even says that she's happy (34). Just before Alison can tell Jimmy that she's pregnant, Cliff comes back to tell them that Alison's friend Helena is on the phone. As soon as Alison has left the room, Jimmy reveals what he thinks of Helena: "That bitch [...] one of my natural enemies" (35). So when Alison comes back, announcing that Helena will visit, he lashes out at her for inviting Helena. This time he is more vicious than before: "Oh, my dear wife, you've got so much to learn. I only hope you learn it one day. If only something – something would happen to you [...]. If you could have a child, and it would die" (37). Next, Jimmy comments on his and Alison's lovemaking – "She has the passion of a python. She devours me whole every time, as if I were some over-large rabbit" (37). Then he leaves, but not without blaming Alison for his misery: "She'll go in sleeping and devouring until there's nothing left of me."

Act II is set two weeks later, also in the Porters' apartment. Alison, only sparsely dressed, is making tea and Jimmy plays jazz trumpet. A few moments later, as Alison is just putting on her stockings, Helena enters. She is a very attractive woman, with a certain "royalty" (39) about her: "In this case, the royalty of that middle-class womanhood,

which is so eminently secure in its divine rights, that it can afford to tolerate the parliament, and reasonably free assembly of its menfolk". The conversation between Alison and Helena – about the primitive living arrangements – soon reveals that they have the same social background.

Jimmy keeps playing the trumpet; his vicious attitude towards Helena has not changed. Helena comments on the trumpet playing: "It's almost as if he wanted to kill someone with it. And me in particular. I've never see such hatred in someone's eyes before. It's slightly horrifying. Horrifying [...] and oddly exciting" (41). Next, Helena asks Alison about her close relationship with Cliff, and they start talking about the early days of Jimmy's and Alison's marriage.

Jimmy had just left his redbrick university after a year of studies – "According to him it's not even red brick, but white tile" (42) – and they had moved in with Jimmy's friend Hugh Tanner – "He takes the first prize for ruthlessness" (43) – with Alison feeling like both men "came to regard [her] as a sort of hostage from those sections of society they had declared war on" (43). It becomes clear that by marrying Jimmy, Alison not only became a member of a lower class, she also had to sign her inheritance over to her mother (44). Through Jimmy's and Hugh's "guerrilla warfare" to "gatecrash" parties of the better off, she was eventually not welcome in her former circles anymore. One learns that Alison's brother is a politician and that the family, only shortly before she married Jimmy, had returned from India.

As Alison comments on Jimmy's love for Hugh's mother, Jimmy's attitude towards society becomes clearer: "Jimmy seems to adore her principally because she's been poor almost all her life, and she's frankly ignorant. I'm quite aware how snobbish that sounds, but it happens to be the truth" (46). Helena tells Alison that she cannot understand how Alison can be with Jimmy and urges her to tell Jimmy she's pregnant, which she has not done yet, or to "get out of this mad-house. [...] This menagerie" (47). Finally, Helena tells Alison "to fight him. Fight, or get out. Otherwise, he *will* kill you" (47).

Cliff enters. He calls Jimmy, and the four of them sit down to eat. Alison mentions that she and Helena are planning to go to church and Jimmy starts to attack them instantly. He insults Cliff, Alison's friends, Alison, and Helena in particular. Eventually Helena reacts: "Do you have to be so offensive? JIMMY: You mean now? You think I'm being offensive? You under-estimate me" (50). He answers Helena's statement: "I think you're a very tiresome young man", by commenting on her social background: "Pass Lady Bracknell the cucumber sandwiches, will you?" (51).

Helena's stepping up only makes matters worse and culminates in a rant, in which Jimmy not only attacks Alison's mother – "Mummy may look over-fed and a bit flabby on the outside, but don't let that well-bred guzzler fool you" (52), but also desperately tries to offend everyone else in the room with his choice of words: "She's as rough as a night in a Bombay hotel, and as tough as a matelot's arm". Cliff tries to calm Jimmy, and Helena cuts in: "You've no right to talk about her mother like that" (53). But Jimmy pushes on: "I've got every right. That old bitch should be dead". As Alison does not

react to this, but only gazes at her plate, he adds: "I said she's an old bitch, and should be dead!" Alison still does not break. Helena again comes to her help, declaring how sick Jimmy's behaviour is making her feel. But Jimmy only declares that he will write a book: "Written in flames a mile high. And it won't be recollected in tranquillity either, picking daffodils with Auntie Wordsworth. It'll be recollected in fire, and blood. My blood" (54). This is dismissed by Helena: "You think the world's treated you pretty badly, don't you?" Alison now comments with a yet unknown sarcasm: "Oh, don't try and take his suffering away from him – he'd be lost without it". Jimmy is surprised, but would not have his attention diverted from Helena, whom the entire attack – whether directly or indirectly – is addressed at.

As such, Jimmy questions Alison's interest in Helena: "Are you going to let yourself be taken in by this saint in Dior's clothing? I will tell you the simple truth about her. [...] She is a cow" (55). It's Cliff who comes to Helena's aid: "You've gone too far, Jimmy. Now dry up!" Jimmy then begins to attack Helena on grounds of her representing a world that is stuck in the past (56): "She's moved long ago into a lovely little cottage of the soul, cut right off from the ugly problems of the twentieth century altogether". As Helena threatens to slap Jimmy and he tells her that he'll hit back, he suddenly changes the subject, and talks about his father's death. A wounded veteran of the Spanish war, his father had died a slow death. As a 10-year-old, Jimmy had sat by his father's bed for a whole year, watching him die. Jimmy concludes: "You see, I learnt at an early age what it was to be angry – angry and helpless" (58).

Helena leaves to collect her things to go to church and Jimmy turns to Alison, accusing her of betraying him by going to church with Helena: "You Judas! You phlegm!" (59). Alison exclaims that all she wants is a little peace, but Jimmy rages on: "My heart is so full, I feel ill – and she wants peace!" As Jimmy then leaves to take a phone call, Helena tells Alison that she sent a cable to Alison's father to come and pick her up, and Alison agrees that she will leave with him. Jimmy comes back, having just learnt that Mrs. Tanner, Hugh's mother, has had a stroke. Jimmy is seriously shaken by this and decides to go see Mrs. Tanner in the hospital immediately. He becomes soft and recollects positive memories about Mrs. Tanner. As he is devastated, he asks Alison to accompany him to the hospital. Alison, set to leave with Helena, wavers, but then leaves nonetheless.

The second scene is set on the following evening. Alison is in her apartment packing her suitcase. Her father – the Colonel – sits at the table, waiting for her. He is clearly disapproving of his daughter's lifestyle: "I'm afraid it's all beyond me. I suppose it always will be. As for Jimmy – he just speaks a different language from us" (64). It becomes clear that Jimmy's and Alison's world is not that of the Colonel. He cannot understand how an educated young man would occupy himself by owning a sweet stall. Alison sides with her father's world rather than with Jimmy's, when she answers the Colonel's question "He really does hate us doesn't he?" (65) with "Oh yes – don't have any doubts about that. He hates all of us." To Mrs. Tanner, who Jimmy greatly admires,

she refers as being: "Rather – ordinary. What Jimmy insists on calling working class" (64).

As father and daughter discuss the circumstances of Jimmy's and Alison's marriage, the parents' disapproval, the mother's extreme resistance, and Jimmy's ways, Alison eventually says that she believes Jimmy only married her to take revenge (67). When the Colonel in the following mourns his time serving in India, where he was happy and everything was "purple and golden" (68), Alison sums up: "You're hurt because everything is changed. Jimmy is hurt because everything is the same. And neither of you can face it". Finally, Alison says good-bye to Cliff and Helena – who has decided not to leave with Alison, leaves a letter for Jimmy, and takes off with her father.

When Jimmy comes home, he only finds Helena. He knows that Alison is gone as the Colonel "that old bastard nearly ran [him] down in his car" (72). It is after Jimmy has read Alison's letter that Helena tells him of Alison's pregnancy. His reaction is a violent one: "I don't care if she's going to have a baby. I don't care if it has two heads!" (73). The only person he has empathy for is himself: "For eleven hours, I have been watching someone I love very much going through the sordid process of dying". Consequently, Helena slaps him, only to then kiss him passionately.

Act III takes place several month later. All of Alison's belongings in the apartment have been replaced by Helena's. And while Jimmy and Cliff sit reading their newspaper on what is a Sunday afternoon, it is now Helena who stands by the ironing board. The stage directions describe her as "more attractive than before, for the setting of her face is more relaxed" (75). She wears one of Jimmy's old shirts.

Jimmy's behaviour towards Helena is not as well rehearsed as with Alison. Helena clearly is not as exhausted by Jimmy as Alison was, but Jimmy is not much nicer to her either. He calls her out on her social background, when talking about sacrifices: "Your [blood] would be much better – pale Cambridge blue, I imagine" (77) and mocks her for living with him: "Do you think it's living in sin with me that does is? [...] Do you feel very sinful my dear?" (78). Helena quite obviously is not as used to Jimmy's attacks as Alison was, and Jimmy catches her in an insecure moment: "Are you wondering if I'm joking or not? Perhaps I ought to wear a red nose and funny hat".

It soon becomes apparent that Helena is starting to feel exhausted with Jimmy – like Alison before her: "Jimmy, can we have one day, just one day, without tumbling over religion or politics?" (79). Nonetheless, as Jimmy and Cliff start a sketch that they have been practicing, Helena joins in. They end the routine with a song that, again, hits on social class: "Don't be afraid to sleep with your sweetheart,/ Just because she's better than you./ Those forgotten middle-classes may have fallen on their noses,/ But a girl who's true blue,/ Will still have something left for you" (81-82). As soon as Jimmy has had enough of it, he pushes Cliff and the two men start fighting. When Cliff's shirt gets dirty and Helena goes out to wash it, Cliff confesses to Jimmy that he thinks about moving out and finding something better (83). Jimmy contemplates:

It's a funny thing. You've been loyal, generous and a good friend. But I'm quite prepared to see you wander off [...]. You're worth a half dozen Helenas to me [...]. [...] why do we let these women bleed us to death? [...] I suppose people in our generation aren't able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us, in the thirties and the forties, when we were still kids. There aren't any good brave causes left. If the big bang does come, and we all get killed off, it won't be in aid of the old-fashioned, grand design. It'll just be for the Brave New-nothing-very-much-thank-you. About as pointless and inglorious as stepping in front of a bus. No, there's nothing left for it, me boy, but to let yourself be butchered by the women. (84)

Cliff goes to his room, as Helena brings him back his shirt, and Helena and Jimmy make plans to go out that night. Helena tells Jimmy that she loves him, they kiss and embrace passionately, and Jimmy talks of giving up the stall and starting a new life and making love to Helena; when suddenly Alison stands in the doorway.

Scene Two is only set a few minutes later. Jimmy has gone to Cliff's room to play the trumpet and it's only Alison and Helena in the room. Alison apologizes for showing up; Helena is kind and firm: "You've more right to be here than I. [...] You are his wife, aren't you?" (88). Talking to Alison, it seems, Helena's conscience catches up with her – "When I saw you standing there tonight, I knew it was utterly wrong. That I didn't believe in any of this [...]. How could I have ever thought that I could get away with it!" (90) – and she very abruptly decides to leave Jimmy. Alison confesses that she lost her child and urges Helena not to leave him. Jimmy still plays the trumpet, and as the noise becomes more and more of a nuisance, Helena calls for Jimmy. He enters, but remains cold towards Alison. He comments on the apparent bad condition Alison is in and the death of his child: "I don't exactly relish the idea of anyone being ill, or in pain. It was my child too, you know. But [...] it isn't my first loss" (92).

After Helena has left, Jimmy turns to Alison. He accuses her of not having sent flowers to Mrs. Tanner's funeral and for never having let her guts out (94-95). It is then that Alison breaks down. She tells Jimmy how losing her child has made her exactly the person he always wanted her to be:

I didn't know it could be like that! I was in pain, and all I could think of was you, and what I'd lost. [...] I thought: if only – if only he could see me now, so stupid, and ugly and ridiculous. This is what he's been longing for me to feel. This is what he wants to splash about in! I'm in the fire, and I'm burning, and all I want is to die! It's cost him his child, and any others I might have had! But what does it matter – this is what he wanted for me! [...] Don't you see! I'm in the mud at last! I'm grovelling! I'm crawling! (95)

Alison collapses at Jimmy's feet, and Jimmy picks her up, and comforts her. The play ends with Alison sliding her arms around Jimmy.

If it was that in the character of Jimmy Porter, and John Osborne's apparent likeness to him, the idea of the Angry Young Man John Osborne was born ("Angry Young Man. Moments in the bitter life of Jimmy Porter"), it must be asked: how much 'young' and

'anger' can actually be found in Porter? Aleks Sierz writes that "anger [...] [is] the central emotion powering the play" (Sierz, *Look Back* 24). It is obvious that Porter sees himself as angry: "In Jimmy's words, watching his father die taught him at an early age 'what it was to be angry – angry and helpless'" (24). However, as Dan Rebellato points out, it is hard to pinpoint, what Jimmy Porter is actually angry about: "Jimmy Porter seems to be angry about everything, and arguable political targets (say, the H-Bomb, the prime minister and the middle classes) are intertwined with his attacks on friends and lovers" (Rebellato, 1956 12).

While Osborne himself, at a later point, claimed that asking the question as to what Jimmy Porter is actually angry about is missing the point (12)³⁴, the question is still valid, as Porter's anger clearly made an impact on audiences in 1956. Especially young theatregoers felt struck by Osborne's language and Porter's candour: "[Kenneth Haigh] was saying all these outrageous things, attacking the Establishment, but that actually meant something to me" (Derek Smith in Sierz, *Look Back* 64); "Osborne was incredibly fresh and new, and had a different view of the world" (Jacqueline Glasser in Sierz, *Look Back* 64). Sierz finds that "it doesn't matter what Jimmy's angry about – what matters is that he is angry, that he feels, that he's alive" (39) – as it can certainly be seen in Jimmy's 'Hallelujah! I'm alive!'-speech (Osborne, *Look Back* 15). Rebellato writes: "The political force of *Look Back in Anger* lay not in the targets of Porter's anger, *but in the anger itself*: the experience and spectacle of someone, caring, feeling, living" (Rebellato, 1956 31; Rebellato's emphasis). As, according to Jimmy, his anger began with the loss of his father, Jimmy's anger towards Alison is explained by Sierz as follows: "To qualify as a human being, Alison must – according to her husband – suffer loss, just as he has suffered the loss of his father, and later of Mrs. Tanner. From this loss comes his anger, and his idea of being enthusiastic, alive, human" (Sierz, *Look Back* 38).

Sierz further acknowledges that Jimmy's anger is somehow rooted in his being torn between a nostalgia for the past and a coming to terms with the present:

Time after time, the past exerts its hold on Jimmy. It is one key to his character. Jimmy is angry not only because that is his way of coping with the confusion of the present, but also because he experiences the present as precarious, full of potential betrayals and agonizing emotions. (44)

A crucial point to this certainly is the missing of a clear purpose as was – in Jimmy's feeling – still existent before and during World War II: "I suppose people of our generation aren't able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us, in the thirties and forties, when we were still kids. There aren't any good, brave causes left" (Osborne, *Look Back* 84). But, as Reballato states, Jimmy's anger is also directed at the middle classes. He is not just stuck between times, but also between classes. Sierz points

34 Rebellato here quotes the middle-aged Jimmy Porter in *Déjàvu* (1991), Osborne's sequel to *Look Back in Anger*: "What's he angry *about*?" they used to ask. Angry is not *about* [...]" (Osborne, *Plays* 372).

out: "Jimmy identifies with both the working class and the aristocracy. Feeling uncertain about his own place in the world, he is drawn towards the social class that seem the most self-confident and self-assured" (Sierz, *Look Back* 25). Jimmy is of working class origin and he admires Mrs. Tanner, who he sees as working class. But he also has a university education and is married to an aristocrat. Many of his attacks towards Alison and Helena can be seen as being motivated by his sense of not belonging.

According to Sierz, it is the play's portraying lower class characters – in the Porter's case lower middle class characters (25) – and the vitality of the language that distinguished Osborne's play from the well-made play of the 1920s (33). In the England of the 1950s, Jimmy's candour, which was really Osborne's candour, shocked:

Osborne's anti-hero Jimmy is a fantasy image of himself, a feeling person who is able to articulate his frustrations in well-written speeches. Indeed, in the England of the 1950s – where expressions of feeling were frowned on and a stiff upper lip preferred – Osborne's desire to express emotions was seen as a radical act. (29)

Osborne became the real-life Jimmy Porter, and more than that: "[T]he nature of the Angry Young Man, a mix of John Osborne and Jimmy Porter turned into a figure that represents an era" (47). It was not just that Osborne was understood as angry and young, he was also labelled in political terms: "In the late 1950s, Osborne was labelled a left-wing playwright, partly because he played up to the image of the Angry Young Man and partly because he did occasionally support causes such as the Ban the Bomb marches" (10). Sierz claims that Osborne accepted the tag 'Angry Young Man' during a BBC interview on 9 July 1956 (47). During the interview Malcom Muggeride asked both John Osborne and writer George Scott about their being considered as spokesman for the young generation's social protest. While Scott denied that he was 'angry', Osborne answered: "You see, if one recognizes problems and one states them, immediately people say – oh this is an angry young man" (H. Ritchie 27). As Muggeride's question indicates the Angry Young Man Osborne was soon considered to be part of a much wider phenomenon:

As the play gradually made its mark, the Angry Young Man label was taken up by newspapers, radio and television, creating the first post-war media frenzy in culture. The result was a cultural movement that was fabricated out of a group of diverse talents, such as novelists Kingsley Amis, John Wain, John Braine, Alan Sillitoe and philosopher Colin Wilson. None of them were happy to be called Angry Young Man. (Sierz, *Look Back* 2)

The key word in Sierz' assertion here is "fabricated". Harry Ritchie, author of *Success Stories* (1988), the fullest study of the phenomenon 'Angry Young Men', finds that "the entire notion of the grouping was entirely unjustified" (207). Ritchie further quotes Lindsay Anderson, who sees the Angry Young Men as "a most extraordinary journalistic invention" (206). Lindsay continues: "I don't mean there was no basis in reality", but Ritchie disagrees: "In fact, the lack of any basis in reality for the myth of literary anger in the fifties explains why the myth did not survive, far less prosper, in the sixties". Ritchie adds that "once the idea of the Angry Young Man had developed, it seemed that

a few writers were willing to play up to their reputations and even, like Osborne, exploit the label imposed on them" (207). Ritchie concludes:

The A[ngr[y] Y[oung] M[en] were invented by the media. The idea was advanced in the *Daily Mail*, the label was taken from a press officer's chance remark about one writer, and the reputation was decided by the application of that label in the *Daily Express*. From then on the 'Angry Young Men' were a good copy. (207)

Scholars, nowadays, agree that the accounts of the impact of *Look Back in Anger* have been exaggerated for various reasons. What shall, however, be looked at in more detail here is not the truth to these exaggerations around '8 May 1956' but the publicity by the Royal Court and about the Royal Court that concerned *Look Back in Anger* and its aftermath.

Many ideas had clashed when Devine, Richardson, the founders of the English Stage Company, Alfred Esdaile and Neville Blond decided to embark on creating a writers' theatre. In its early years, the English Stage Company at the Royal Court had to define its identity on an artistic level, towards its policies, and in its social context. It is in these early years, that the legacy of the Royal Court, of the 'golden age' and of the watershed of '8 May 1956' lies. Richardson's reluctance to understand the Angry Young Men or the kitchen sink movement as more than an expectation by the press and the public (English Stage Company, *Two* 7) is therefore particularly conspicuous. It must be asked, how deep the discrepancy between the real "tone" (7) of the Royal Court's work that Richardson speaks of – and cannot really define – and the reputation that was imposed on it, actually was. Hearing Richardson speak about the alleged marker '8 May 1957', just a year later, conveys the feeling that the Royal Court was meant to be about something very different than the stories around *Look Back in Anger* and the Angry Young Men suggest. In the following, the various schemes, aims and policies drawn up for the Royal Court Theatre shall be captured and compared with what the Royal Court was eventually hailed as by the press, after the success of the first Osborne.

When recalling Devine's original plans for a new theatre, Irving Wardle speaks of Devine's time with Saint-Denis and his background in teaching acting. Wardle explains that for Devine and Saint-Denis one of the ideals was a school that was attached to a producing organization. A dream that Devine, as he writes in the 1958 brochure, had not given up on by the late 1950s (Devine in English Stage Company, *Two* 3). Wardle asserted at a conference on the Royal Court in 1981:

I don't know if this is the case, but it does seem as if he attempted to bring about reforms – he and Saint-Denis jointly – in the acting-production sphere; these had repeatedly failed for one reason or another, so he then turned his attention to writing as an alternative, to which he had not previously given first priority. (Wardle in Doty and Harbin 30)

At the same conference, William Gaskill put forth a slightly different understanding of what Devine initially saw as his aim. In his view, Devine wanted to found a serious, non-commercial arts theatre. Gaskill, trying to reconstruct schemes that he was not involved in himself, explains how schedules of interesting European plays were drawn up

and a movement “towards a poetic kind of drama” (Gaskill in Doty and Harbin 30) was initiated. This last aspect, it must be said, was certainly true for Ronald Duncan, not Devine. Gaskill adds: “They didn’t quite know what sort of theatre it was going to be, but they knew there was a need for new writers” (30). The company thus approached prose writers and poets, whom they thought could want to write for the stage. Gaskill continues:

But what in fact happened was that the play which made the name of the Court, *Look Back in Anger*, came from quite a different area than the poetic kind of art theatre vaguely envisioned, and once that had happened, it swung the whole movement in a completely different direction. Immediately, everyone realized that what they had been dreaming of, this European art theatre was no longer the kind of theatre that would be realized, but that the writers themselves would dictate the character of the new theatre. (31)

Gaskill explains that, in his view, it was Devine’s greatness at this point to turn his back on Saint-Denis³⁵ and the whole European art theatre idea, and to go with what he had – even though, as Gaskill adds, he kept dreaming of the arts theatre. And indeed, that dream was to resurface in Devine’s plans for the Royal Court’s rebuilding of 1963/64. Michael Hallifax, however, disagrees with Gaskill’s assertion that Devine and the company did not know where they wanted to go. He speaks of the early programming, which happened even before a theatre was found: *Look Back in Anger* had been chosen by 1955, there was a work of a novelist, with Angus Wilson’s *The Mulberry Bush*, and by a poet, with the Duncan double-bill. Despite the fact that Duncan’s work was wished on Devine, the European influences, like Brecht and Sartre, according to Hallifax, were very consciously chosen by the company’s Artistic Director.

Both Hallifax and Gaskill are right. Hallifax’s words show that it was not Osborne’s play that ‘hit’ the company and changed the whole concept they were working on: Osborne’s play was very much part of the company’s very early policy to promote European contemporary classics and new British writers – all kinds of writers. Devine, Richardson, and the Artistic Sub-Committee had all agreed on the strength of *Look Back in Anger*: it was to be launched cautiously as the third play in repertory, but still as a flagship of the new policy of the writers’ theatre; as such it was seen as an integral and important part of the carefully planned season – not as ‘the odd one out’. When Gaskill thus refers to a change in the theatre’s policy as induced by *Look Back in Anger*, it must be understood that it was not the play itself, nor the writer John Osborne – who was really just one of many writers who had plays in this first season – but the reactions to Osborne and his work that ‘swung the whole movement in a completely different direction’.

In 1970, George Goetschius wrote his essay about the Royal Court Theatre in its social context. Unlike Gaskill, who came to the Court in the late 1950s, or Hallifax, who joined the company when they were already casting, Goetschius was there from the very

35 In his autobiography Gaskill writes that Tony Richardson in particular did not want “any of the Saint-Denis rubbish” (Gaskill 42) in his theatre.

start. His account is one that Gaskill seems to have related to when describing Devine's aims; yet, Gaskill did not fully grasp it, it seems. According to Goetschius, Devine's attempt was to create an 'organic theatre' (English Stage Company, *Ten* 33) – Gaskill uses the term 'organic unit' (Gaskill in Doty and Harbin 32). This 'organic theatre' was aiming at renewing the theatre craft “‘outside’ the theatre as we knew it” (English Stage Company, *Ten* 33). This did not, however, in any way relate to creating a theatre with a socio-political relevance. The 'organic theatre' was moreover embedded in various concepts that went back to Saint-Denis, Copeau, and the idea of the craftsmen theatre. According to Goetschius, these concepts – that Gaskill also hinted at – materialized during the early days of the English Stage Company in the “eternal backdrop”, the “simple, cloak-like, all-purpose costumes”, mandatory movement classes, the initiative to rehearse all plays in full mask before “doing them straight”, the theatre's workshop, as well as the rejection of the star-system. Goetschius points out that these concepts “were constant references to the medieval cathedral craftsmen who did not even sign their work” (33). Goetschius further writes that not with the discovery of the play, but with the success of *Look Back in Anger*

several of these elements in the early life of the Court were hastily put aside [...]. Even the bias against commercial theatre was somewhat deflected as it was realised that 'Look Back' had real potential both in the West End and on Broadway. In addition there was a significant shift to becoming a writers' theatre, not in the original sense of a writer who wrote from within the theatre but in the sense of finding and developing writers who would have something to say about contemporary Britain. But most important of all, the Court had become a theatre of social concern, literally overnight. The posh Sundays, the middle-brow dailies, and the low-brow press, took up the Court, not as an artistic movement but as a 'revolutionary theatre'. (33)

Even if the development Goetschius describes did not set in 'literally overnight', it nevertheless means that Devine, as Gaskill put it, was turning his back on Saint-Denis and a huge part of his own ideas of a theatre for that matter. Devine was not against a writers' theatre; he very much envisioned a theatre in which writers would and could be integrated – since his 1953 Royal Court schemes. He had, however, originally not envisioned a revolutionary theatre that found playwrights with a contemporary, political concern, but an art's theatre that was also a writers' theatre. As such Jocelyn Herbert also mentions Devine's clean break with Saint-Denis' work and turn to wanting new theatre work: encouraging new writers (Roberts, *Stage* 6). Still, that Devine wanted new theatre work and new writers means that he wanted theatre outside of the known frame, not a socially concerned enterprise.

Ultimately it can be said that Devine's idea of 'his' theatre changed drastically during the first season at the Royal Court. He broke with Saint-Denis's work, even though he also desperately tried to hold on to many aspects of Saint-Denis' influence that he was forced to abandon: he tried to bring back the repertory and he never gave up on his idea of a school. But he eventually embraced the concept of a politically concerned playwrights' theatre. Certainly, this move on Devine's part felt like the whole movement swung in a completely different direction, as Gaskill put it.

It is thus not surprising that the early years at the Royal Court saw inconsistencies in Devine's policy, with which's aftermath he would have to struggle for the rest of his life. A quote from the script of Devine's never finished and unpublished autobiography as it remained in Herbert's hands illustrates this:

We tried a series of star productions to fill the gaps and make money. They didn't always work and we were said to be betraying our cause, although we never declared an anti-star policy at the beginning [but] it seemed implicit in our attitude. These misunderstandings always occur when you are dealing with idealists. (Devine in Roberts, *Stage* 60)

The anti-star policy, however, was an aspect that even Goetschius, a close friend of Devine's, believed to be his friend's original idea.

It becomes clear how willing Devine was to throw some ideals overboard once his boat was pushed into a different direction. Gaskill sees greatness in this, and it certainly shows the flexibility, and maybe even selflessness, of a leader in making the survival of his theatre his highest priority. Goetschius, however, does not understand Devine as the driving force behind these changes: he feels the Royal Court, and Devine accordingly, were instrumentalized by an emerging post-war middle class.

British society reorganized itself after 1945. The old middle class was partly cleared away by a new identity which involved "questioning the old identity and the paraphernalia that surrounded it" (Goetschius 33). This new movement, as Goetschius explains, was largely communicated and promoted in the public discourse created by the press. Accordingly, "the Court was cast by the press in the role of supplying new ideas" (33). Goetschius therefore argues:

The success of the Court I would attribute to its allowing itself after 'Look Back' to become one of the rallying points for those elements in the middle class who were attempting to clear the social scene of what they saw to be some of its impediments and irrelevancies. In this sense the Court was a theatre of middle class transition. (33)

That the Royal Court was catering to the middle classes rather than the working classes, as it claimed according to McGrath, was apparent. Martin Esslin describes the Court's audiences as a new educated middle class (Esslin in Browne iii). Elsom comments:

Look Back in Anger expressed, above all, middle-class discontent, and its class significance (if we want to consider the play in such terms) was not that it was a proletarian play but that it presented such a gloomy picture of a dispossessed ex-graduate that the truly working-class plays at the Theatre Workshop seemed cheerful by comparison. (*Post-war* 76)

Goetschius contextualizes *Look Back in Anger* as follows:

The success of *Look Back in Anger* which created an atmosphere in which the new middle classes could openly express their feeling of being hemmed in by useless traditional forms and which eventually opened the theatre itself to new drama, and so provided jobs and 'ideological cover' for the whole movement. (English Stage Company, *Ten* 34)

The Royal Court, according to Goetschius, as soon as it was understood as a socio-political theatre, allowed for its mandate – its artistic direction – to be dictated by ideology. Like Harry Ritchie, Goetschius argues that the identity that was constructed by the press was not in any way initiated by the theatre. But in contrast to Ritchie, Goetschius takes this argument to a socio-political level. For him, the new middle class needed an artistic outlet to mirror its cause, and the press, as the voice of this new class, chose the Royal Court. *Look Back in Anger* and John Osborne, as the Royal Court's Angry Young Man, proved very useful to this endeavour: "That the house was made to twitter at some titbit of dialectical reasoning was taken as evidence that the wedding of art and social commitment had in fact taken place" (33). Goetschius thus sees the Court as being controlled largely by the middle class.

John McGrath had indirectly remarked on the discrepancy that this alleged socialist theatre was catering to a new middle class. Goetschius finds: "That Marx in the process had been made into a bourgeois humourist was either missed or ignored" (33). Goetschius is clear: "I do not mean to suggest insincerity or conscious contrivance, but simply the inappropriate nature of the ideological cover chosen" (34). "The working classes" – the class that the Royal Court allegedly catered to – "itself was unimpressed by the strange noises emitting from the Court and the upper classes, unthreatened as ever, found them on occasion entertaining" (34). Goetschius asserts that when the Royal Court's famous mandate was forced upon it by the press, after *Look Back in Anger*, it did so due to a middle class calling. The Court thus exchanged its original policy of perpetuating a new movement in theatre – according to Saint-Denis' idea of the craftsmen theatre and Devine's ideals – for being a 'revolutionary' theatre for the middle class. Revolution was, however, not the aim of this new middle class: "what the new middle class wanted was not the dissolution of the establishment of the class system (in any case impossible) but a secure and respected place within the establishment" (34).

Goetschius' essay presents the Royal Court as an instrument; its identity was not self-created but pressed upon it, and in that inconsistent. Goetschius argues that the Royal Court was turned into a tool, and that the Royal Court's staff was opportunistic enough to seize the success this instrumentalization bore, and throw their ideals and original aims overboard – only to become an empty shell with labels like 'working class', 'revolutionary' or 'angry' attached to it. Goetschius' view of a socio-political, socialist Royal Court as being imagined by the middle class and Richardson's, as well as Ritchie's, understanding of the Angry Young Men as being a mere invention of a press officer and a group of journalists go hand in hand.

On 27 February 1956, *The Times* wrote about the change of policy at the Royal Court that encouraged new writing and the plans to present plays in repertory. About *Look Back in Anger* it said: "According to the author, *Look Back in Anger*, 'deals with the problems and aspirations of his own generation'" ("Change of Policy at the Royal Court"). The *Daily Telegraph* wrote on the same day: "The company's policy is to encourage new dramatists and to present plays in real repertory". It mentioned *Look Back*

in *Anger* saying that it “deals with the problems and aspirations of [John Osborne’s] own generation” (Bishop). The resemblance between the formulations in both these articles is striking. It is safe to say that they go back to the same press release, most likely distributed by George Fearon. *The Stage* eventually quotes the press release on the company’s policy as: “to stage and encourage new writing in the theatre and to present the plays in true repertory” (“English Stage Company”). They, however, go further and ask George Devine about his plans. He explains that the repertory will allow people to see several plays in the same week and give the actors the chance to play several parts at a time. He links the endeavour to the Granville Barker regime: “With their tenure of the Royal Court, the English Stage Company intends to provide the modern playwright with the stage he so urgently needs and to revive the tradition of this famous theatre” (“English Stage Company”). This rudimentary information, which does not yet include any hint at a socio-political policy or a new movement called the Angry Young, surfaces in the articles about the theatre and about *Look Back in Anger* throughout 1956. But, the story around this bit of information was consequently shaped and changed throughout the first season of the English Stage Company. Devine’s idea of a theatre – as expressed in his scheme of 1953 – was strongly linked to Saint-Denis’ artistic ideas and his concept of the craftsmen theatre. In the following the aspects of Devine’s original scheme shall be traced in the press coverage around *Look Back in Anger*.

In the early months of the season, and also around the bad reviews of *The Mulberry Bush*, the policies of the theatre constantly resurfaced (Worsley; “George Devine”; Looker-on; “Repertory Plan”; Wilson “Two Earls Take Over a Theatre”; “New Hope for Playwrights”; “Plays and Players”; “His Dream”; “Nursery for Drama”; Barber “A New Theatre”; “At Last”; “Court Goes Repertory”). George Fearon’s publicity of the ‘Angry Young Man’ went out in March 1956, a month before the first season at the Royal Court opened. John Osborne was advertised as “the angry young new author” (“New and Angry”, “A ‘New and Angry’ Play”, “New Hope for Playwrights”), but the specificity of the political and social agenda of the Royal Court only grew once the Court’s own publicity of the ‘Angry Young Man’, who was to speak for ‘his own generation’ had sunk in. It was not until June that this happened. Still, *Look Back in Anger*, once it opened, largely diverted the press’ attention. While the English Stage Company at the Royal Court had, during April 1956, mainly stood for being a writers’ theatre, playing in repertory and sometimes even in being a workshop-like endeavour with an essentialist attitude towards design, in May, the focus fully shifted towards the ‘angry’ and ‘young’. *Look Back in Anger* joined the repertoire and the Royal Court was no longer the theatre run by Lords, but the theatre with the ‘angry’ and ‘controversial’ new play by an unknown young actor. Yet, it took until June for the ‘Angry Young Man’ and the attached mindset to eventually make an impression, and not to be a label merely recited from Fearon’s press release.

When Osborne’s play opened, the reviews were mixed. *The Times* wrote: “This first play has passages of good violent writing, but its total gesture is altogether inadequate” (“Look Back in Anger”, *The Times*). It is thus not true that Kenneth Tynan was

the only one to be aware of the play's importance. Derek Granger of the *Financial Times* found the play "arresting, painful and sometimes astonishing" and stated that

Mr. Osborne communicates no sense to us that he has taken even three paces back from the work that has so hotly and tormentedly engaged him. But for all this it is a play of extraordinary importance. [...] Its influence should go far, far beyond such an eccentric and contorted one-man turn as the controversial 'Waiting for Godot'. [...] For the first time [Osborne] has raised the curtain to show us those contemporary attitudes that so many of the post-war generation have adopted [...] which is the result of a calm but absolute disillusionment. It is life, in fact, as many representatively dour and graceless people now live it.

The *Daily Mail* titled: "This Actor is a Great Writer" (Wilson, "A Great Actor"). Yet, while Wilson praised Osborne's talent, the character of Jimmy Porter for him justified that Osborne had wasted it on the wrong play: "[The English Stage Company] may not have discovered a masterpiece, but they *have* discovered a dramatist of outstanding promise: a man who can write with searing passion, but happens in this case to have lavished it on the wrong play". This strange criticism, that speaks up for Osborne while it speaks against the play, runs through most of the reviews and makes them, at times, hard to comprehend.

John Barber of the *Daily Express* found Osborne "an exciting new English writer" ("This Bitter Young Man"). The play, he felt, was "intense, angry, feverish, undisciplined. It is even crazy. But young, young, young". Barber's 'young' was no compliment, and so he completes his argument of accusing Osborne of adolescent rebellion when he adds Terence Rattigan's remark on the play: "Look, Ma, how unlike Terence Rattigan I'm being". Harold Conway of the *Daily Sketch* commented: "That it turned out the most exasperating play I've seen for years does not alter the fact: Mr. Osborne is a new dramatist of importance". Patrick Gibb's of the *Daily Telegraph* found it "a work of some power, uncertainly directed". Harold Hobson was yet another reviewer who did not like the play at all, but still praised Osborne for it:

Mr. John Osborne [...] is a writer who at present does not know what he is doing. He seems to think that he is crashing through the world with deadly right uppercuts, whereas all the time it is his unregarded left that is doing the damage. Though the blinkers still obscure his vision, he is a writer of outstanding promise, and the English Stage Company is to be congratulated on having discovered him. ("A New Author")

Some critics were, however, outspokenly certain that they did not like either the play or the writer. Robert Tee of the *Daily Mirror* found this "angry play by an angry young writer [...] neurotic, exaggerated and more than slightly distasteful". The critic of the *Birmingham Post* felt the Court had signed its death warrant with *Look Back in Anger*: "If more plays like to-night's *Look Back in Anger* are produced, the 'Writers' theatre' at the Royal Court must surely sink. I look back in anger upon a night misconceived and misspent" ("Look Back in Anger at the Royal Court").

Probably in another press release by the Court's press officer, Osborne was claimed to be speaking for his generation: "The dramatist, we are told, feels that 'as a representative of a younger generation, he has every right to be very angry'" ("Alan

Tagg"). Some reviewers commented on this alleged relevance of the play – yet not to inaugurate a new mindset, but to question Osborne or his character Jimmy Porter respectively. Milton Shulman of the *Evening Standard* saw Osborne as a role model for his generation, yet not in a good way: "*Look Back in Anger* [...] sets up a wailing wall for the latest post-war generation of under-thirties. It aims at being a despairing cry but achieves only the stature of a self-pitying snivel" ("Mr. Osborne Builds a Wailing Wall"). Shulman continues: "the failure of *Look Back in Anger* is its inability to be coherent about its despair". Osborne, however, "when he stops being angry – or when he lets us in on what he is angry about – he may write a very good play". Philip Hope-Wallace of the *Manchester Guardian* – as the *Guardian* was called until 1959 – was not wholly convinced that Osborne really spoke for a maddened, lost generation. He adds that "the evening must have given to anyone who has ever wrestled with the mechanics of play-making an uneasy and yet not wasted jaunt, just as it must have woken echoes in anyone who has not forgotten the frustrations of youth". The *Northern Echo* whilst seeing "a bright gleam of promise" ("Rebel Without Cause") around Osborne, saw Jimmy Porter as a rebel without a cause, unfit to be the spokesman of a frustrated post-war generation.

Few reviews granted Osborne – some only half-heartedly – a connection to the post-war generation. In *The Stage*, Osborne was described as "a young man in a tearing temper. Looking back with what seems to be genuine anger on the troubles and disillusionments that have beset the youth in Britain's post-war world" (R.E.L.). Osborne, it says, "has had the courage to create a character vigorously expressive of a modern attitude towards a world at odds with itself. He will write a better play in time". The *New Statesman & Nation* found that in the play "you can hear the authentic tone of the Nineteen-Fifties, desperate, savage, resentful, and, at times, very funny. This is the kind of play which, for all its imperfections, the English Stage Company ought to be doing" ("Look Back in Anger"). *The Star*'s Robert Wraight was impressed: "In 'Look Back in Anger' Mr. Osborne rakes a muckheap with the talent of an immature Tennessee Williams and wraps up his findings in a virtuoso display of passionate over-writing that makes us look forward in high hope to his next play". A comment by the *Newcastle Journal*, published only two days after the opening night of *Look Back in Anger*, already portrays Osborne as "being hailed as a writer of immense promise" ("Bolt From the Blue").

Kenneth Tynan's article "A Voice of the Young" was published in the *Observer* on 13 May. Tynan not only praised the play, he also took the wind out of his fellow reviewer's sails:

The fact that he writes with charity has led many critics into the trap of supposing that Mr. Osborne's sympathies are wholly with Jimmy. Nothing could be more false. Jimmy is simply and abundantly alive; that rarest of dramatic phenomena, the act of original creation, has taken place; and those who carp were better silent. Is Jimmy's anger justified? Why doesn't he do something? These questions might be relevant if the character had failed to come to life in the presence of such evident and blazing vitality. I marvel at the pedantry that could ask them. There will be time enough to debate Mr. Osborne's

moral position when he has written a few more plays. In the present one he certainly goes off the deep end, but I cannot regard this as a vice in a theatre that seldom ventures more than a toe into the water.

Furthermore Tynan highly politicizes Osborne and his play:

Look Back in Anger presents post-war youth as it really is, with special emphasis on the non-U intelligentsia who live in bed-sitters and divide the Sunday papers into two groups, 'posh' and 'wet'. To have done this at all would be a signal achievement; to have done it in a first play is a minor miracle. All the qualities are there, qualities one had despaired of ever seeing on the stage – the drift towards anarchy, the instinctive leftishness, the automatic rejection of 'official' attitudes, the surrealist sense of humour (Jimmy describes a pansy friend as 'a female Emily Brontë'), the casual promiscuity, the sense of lacking a crusade worth fighting for and, underlying all these, the determination that no one who does shall go unmourned.

As such, he pictures the youth of the 1950s and identifies Osborne as their spokesman:

One cannot imagine Jimmy Porter listening with a straight face to speeches about our inalienable right to flog Cypriot schoolboys. You could never mobilise him and his kind into a lynching mob, since the art he lives for, jazz, was invented by Negroes; and if you gave him a razor, he would do nothing with it but shave. The Porters of our time deplore the tyranny of 'good taste' and refuse to accept 'emotional' as a term of abuse; they are classless, and they are also leaderless. Mr. Osborne is their first spokesman in the London theatre.

Tynan saves his little critique for the end and then argues it away:

That the play needs changes I do not deny; it is 20 minutes too long, and not even Mr. Haigh's bravura could blind me to the painful whimsy of the final reconciliation scene. I agree that *Look Back in Anger* is likely to remain a minority taste. What matters, however, is the size of the minority. I estimate it as roughly 6,733,000, which is the number of people in this country between the ages of 20 and 30. And this figure will doubtless be swelled by refugees from other age-groups who are curious to know precisely what the contemporary young pup is thinking and feeling. I doubt if I could love anyone who did not wish to see *Look Back in Anger*. It is the best young play of its decade.

Even if Osborne's play had not been liked by most, Osborne had convinced most of the critics. They praised the young writer, while not finding many good things to say about Jimmy Porter. The most frequently quoted line from Tynan's review is: "*Look Back in Anger* is likely to remain a minority taste. What matters, however, is the size of the minority. I estimate it as roughly 6,733,000, which is the number of people in this country between the ages of 20 and 30". Aleks Sierz remarks:

The audience for 1950s new drama is usually characterized as young, lower-middle class and left-liberal. For this group, the working class was an object of fascination and the idea of anger as exemplified by Jimmy offered a radical identity which helped them cope with the insecurity of rapid social change. (Sierz, *Look Back* 10)

He adds:

For the older generation, the fear of youth was applied indiscriminately to teddy boys and university leftists alike. Of course, Jimmy is not a typical teenager: he's too old, and he's

too snobbish. He calls working-class lads 'yobs' (8), and instead of rock'n'roll, he prefers jazz, a much more intellectual respectable music, popular with students. But he was certainly seen as a spokesman of the new generation [...]. (15)

By 12 May, Osborne had his first offers to write for TV and films ("Luck Turns"). The aversion to *Look Back in Anger*, in the following months, slowly dispersed. In a similar way was the movement of the Angry Young Men inaugurated.

The English Stage Company, with the success of Osborne, had to adapt its policy, and while the Council seemed to opt for the strategy of making the theatre popular, Devine opted for the strategy to attract the – not so popular, and not so wealthy for that matter – young to concern themselves with contemporary issues. An article in *The Stage*, on 10 May, about Ronald Duncan, reveals the Royal Court's policy from the perspective of a Council member. Not only are the ideas of the writers' theatre and the advantages of the repertory repeated, but the permanent set, as a device of an extreme economy, is also mentioned. It is in this article that Duncan states: "we are not going in for experiment for the sake of experiment. We are not avant-garde, or highbrow, or a coterie set. We want to build a vital, living, popular theatre which, in time, will develop an approach and an acting-style of its own" (Marriott, "A Theatre for Playwrights and for the People"). These are Duncan's words, and the idea proposed here, of a popular theatre that is opposed to the avant-garde, certainly bears more of the Council's visions than Devine's: financial stability and a widely accessible programme were opposed to the highly risky endeavour of the totally new and experimental theatre for new writers. As such, Duncan's words not only mirror the divergent ideas within the early English Stage Company, but also already hint at the Royal Court's eternal struggle to be popular without being commercial, to – over the years, over and over again – find the new without experimenting too much, to find an approach and style of its own without being exclusive, highbrow or a coterie set or avant-garde³⁶.

Meanwhile the turn towards contemporary issues and politics became apparent in the formulations that Devine chose to present his aims for the Royal Court. At an Equity meeting in early May, he declared:

I want to see people so involved in the play and its subject that they are prepared to stand on their seats and fight about them. This is an exciting time in which we live. The theatre

36 The term 'avant-garde' was often used to describe the novelties in the Royal Court's policy and programme. While Duncan here is very clear that their endeavour should not be considered 'avant-garde' or highbrow or a 'coterie set' one must ask what the term stands for – for him. Clearly, he refers to avant-garde as being exclusive and opposed to vital and popular enterprise. George Goetschius, as a close friend of Devine, uses the term to describe Devine's early ideas of the Royal Court as an arts theatre linked to Devine's work with Saint-Denis (Goetschius in English Stage Company, *Ten* 34). In this context, it can be asked if Duncan, by setting his endeavour apart from being avant-garde, was rejecting ideas by Devine that did not agree with his own ideas for 'his' company.

should reflect it. [...] By reflecting contemporary ideas and issues it must seek to attract the young. (C.M.P.)

Due to the repertory schedule, the reviews of *Look Back in Anger* kept coming in throughout May. On 17 May, *The Morning Advertiser* already commented: "Few new plays in recent years have created immediately such deep an impression as 'Look Back in Anger' by John Osborne" (Tarran). It is added that the company can be proud of the production, that the play is extremely well written and the acting brilliant. Another review, in the *New Statesman & Nation*, on 19 May, was harder on the play: Osborne made mistakes in the construction, did not make his intentions clear, built up characters that never appeared, failed to base his hero's character on valid motives, and ended with a phony reconciliation. Yet, it is "a most exciting play, abounding with life and vitality, and the life it deals with is the life as it is lived at this very moment" ("A Test Case"). The review concluded: "All the same, don't miss it. If you are young, it will speak to you. If you are middle-aged, it will tell you what the young are feeling". Similarly, Kenneth A. Hurren blames the play for all its inaccuracies and makes a U-turn at the end:

Looking back over all this I find I may have easily given the impression that *Look Back in Anger* is an empty and tiresome play. In fact, with all its defects, it is often exciting, amusing and even touching, and I don't think that there can be any question but that Mr. Osborne is a young dramatist worth keeping an eye on. ("Theatre")

After Tynan's article, the mood had shifted. Osborne's technical mistakes were still mentioned, but the play was recommended as being exciting and worth seeing. The longer *Look Back in Anger* was playing, the better the reviews got. Slowly the disappointed critics – some out of respect for other critics even – gave in: "I feel that this play is inept and banal, some people whose opinion I respect find it compelling and 'promising'" ("What Marlon Brando"). Maybe a similar mechanism was applied here, as was the case with Sir Laurence Olivier.

Olivier had seen *Look Back in Anger* and had hated it. Only when he went to see it again with his friend Arthur Miller, who loved it, he started to like it, too. Osborne referred to Olivier's change of heart as "a characteristically intuitive U-turn" (Osborne in Findlater, *25 Years* 19). Michael Seymour, stagehand at the Royal Court in the 1950s thinks that "*Look Back in Anger* [...] had been reviled by a number of critics when it opened, but then became a considerable success after being reviewed enthusiastically by Kenneth Tynan, subsequently to be applauded by those same critics when it was shown again at the Court" (Seymour). And indeed, after Tynan's article many outspokenly positive reviews followed. Anthony Hartley wrote:

It has not been very often in recent years that we have seen a good first play by a young author on a London stage. Still rarer have been plays dealing convincingly with contemporary types and problems. It was, therefore, a pleasant surprise to encounter one at the Royal Court Theatre the other evening.

Hartley summarizes the plot and concludes: "Out of these complex psychological and social themes Mr. Osborne has made a powerful and sombre play relieved every now

and then by flashes of humour". Rosemary Anne Sisson found *Look Back in Anger* "brilliant, witty and outrageous, sometimes sentimental, often unjust to the 'middle classes' against whom the hero is in revolt, this play is so full of life, that it crackles with electricity". A "special correspondent" in *The Times*' Literary Supplement found the play "extremely well constructed and written" and concluded: "Fine as the playing is, and the production, it is to the author that the honours go. Good new plays have been demanded for long enough. Here at last is one" ("Living in the Fifties").

By early June the fact that *Look Back in Anger* was "an instant box-office success" (Goring) by an "angry young man" named Osborne was firmly standing on its own feet. Edward Goring interviewed Osborne, who had risen "almost overnight" from obscurity to success, and noticed that Osborne was wearing a new pair of shoes and had thus been saved from starvation. The success of the play was also apparent to Goring:

Fashionable lowbrows and sloppily dressed highbrows are flocking to the Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square, where the English Stage Company had the courage to produce the play. It has become such a box-office hit that the number of performances have been doubled. It is expected to be staged on Broadway this year and there are plans for a film version.

The Times reported, on 4 June, that "*Look Back in Anger* has aroused such interest at the Court Theatre that there are to be extra performances of it. [...] The double-bill by Mr. Ronald Duncan has been temporarily taken out of the repertory to allow for this" ("Mr. John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*").

Tynan went for a second round of praise in the *Scotsman* on 6 June. Special about the Royal Court, he said, was that it set out to present new plays or those previously unseen in London. While the article describes the first two plays of the English Stage Company's repertory as "boded miserable", it continues, "then, three weeks ago, a third play entered the repertoire, and from it there sprang at once a fuss, a gaping cleavage of critical opinion and proof positive that the new company meant business" (Tynan, "Long Run Habit in the London Theatre"). Tynan falsely states that *Look Back in Anger* was instantly greeted with great interest: his first article had changed the outlook of many a critic. Further, even though the play technically did not deal with youths, Tynan states: "It deals honestly and recognizably with post-war British youth; and it admits the existence of a lower middle-class intelligentsia". Tynan again worked hard to promote the play by politicizing its intentions:

The play presents the younger British intelligentsia as it really is, not as its parents, aunts, and uncles see it. All the qualities are there – the drift towards anarchy, the instinctive Leftist-ness, the automatic contempt for 'official' attitudes, the surrealist sense of humour, the feeling that all the crusades worth fighting in have been either won or discredited, and, underlying all these, the determination that nobody who dies shall go unmourned.

Four weeks after the opening night, what remained of the harsh critique was: "One or two knowledgeable theatregoers have been heard to say that 'Look Back in Anger', by

John Osborne, is the best play to appear since 'Musical Chairs', by Ronald McKenzie, in 1931" (Pendennis). On 1 June, Richard Findlater again took a stand for the company:

I have already made clear [...] that I am a partisan of the English Stage Company. Its regime at the Royal Court is likely to make theatre history, if it gets the support it deserves. But its existence is already justified by one play alone – John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. ("This Monster Really Lives")

Findlater saw the anger in Porter and wit, truth and dramatic intensity in Osborne's writing. For him the play had an unwonted accuracy of social tone.

Come June, almost no reviewer wrote negatively about *Look Back in Anger*. *The Indicator* wrote: "The only fault in the writing is its extremity" (R.M.W.). Alan Dent of the *News Chronicle* felt that "for all its asperity this talk has freshness and wit and is well worth heeding. *Look Back in Anger* is intensely timely". Only the reviewer for the *St. Martin's Review* was one of the almost extinct species of *Look Back in Anger* critics: "At the Royal Court the English Stage Company's first presentation of a first play by a new playwright is disappointing; and I cannot think that 'Look Back in Anger' by John Osborne is anywhere near the best that can be found" (F.C.).

While Halifax, as the company's stage manager, claimed that Devine was not sure about the company's future in early June, the Artistic Director did not let it show in an article published on 15 June. In it Devine spoke up against the rumours that the company was to close in July: "As far as I know, we are carrying on indefinitely" (Thipthorp). Devine also explained: "In the short time we have been going we have created an extraordinary interest and reputation". He again clarified a matter dear to him: "Everybody interested in the theatre talks about us as if we were an established institution. We are not doing commercial plays. We are taking risks – risks that others would not take".

On 16 July, the *News Chronicle* quoted Devine: "We are now covering our expenses [...] and our audiences come from all over London – not, I am delighted to see, from only beard and corduroy circles" ("Living"). Devine is further referred to as being interested in plays whose writers probe and question established values. This social awareness was clearly a new aspect in Devine's concepts.

According to the press, by July, two months after the opening night of *Look Back in Anger*, the English Stage Company was breaking even and people from all over London came to see the play. The initial negative reactions by the press had either been forgotten or were considered wrong. The critic of *Twentieth Century* was surprised at the cool reaction *Look Back in Anger* had initially received from the press: "They had forgotten the excellences of the piece and remembered only that it was verbose and untidy, that its ideas were chaotically arranged and inadequately developed and that all the characters were unadmirable" ("Unlucky Jim").

Look Back in Anger was considered the play that the company needed, and that worked well to define what the Royal Court stood for. Even *Vogue* described the "newness of theme" and the writing of Osborne as "exactly the qualities George Devine set out to find" ("The English Stage Company"). In its third month, the company's policy of presenting plays that are all new to London in repertory, and the "production and

staging aim at simplicity and economy, so that the emphasis falls on the spoken word and the acting" (Joblin) was hailed as having paid off. "The stormy *Look Back in Anger*" was seen as "right-up-to-the-minute" (Joblin).

During late June, July and August not only the facts about *Look Back in Anger*'s success had changed, but the mindset behind the Angry Young Men had also sunken in. When, on 24 May, *The Londoner* wrote "The author, Mr. John Osborne, is obviously a very angry young man" ("A very promising new actor") it was a mere copy and paste of the Court's press release. A month later, the label was discussed, questioned and justified. On 25 June, Paul Grahame, in the *Daily Worker*, explains the Angry Young movement and states: "No play in the English Stage Company's repertory can compete with it at the box-office". According to Grahame, droves of the young generation "that considers itself lost" can be found at every performance of the play. "Mr. Osborne's rant against society in general and middle-class respectability in particular is paying off". Grahame recalls the poor initial reactions to the play, but finds that members of the post-war generation have decided to see an echo of themselves in this play. In this way, they find Osborne's voice remarkably like their own; they make him 'their' dramatist, much like they make Colin Wilson 'their' philosopher and Kingsley Amis 'their' novelist. Grahame writes: "Mr. Osborne is in fact the authentic voice of the Espresso age, serving up disillusion by the coffee-cupful". He eventually finds that one cannot be harsh with this young generation. The generation's spokesmen, however, should not be let off the hook so easily, Grahame finds. As such, he accuses Osborne of not being able to see past his laments and his anger and really change society. In spite of Grahame's critique of Osborne, Grahame strongly establishes the mindset of the Angry Young Men. He further describes the Royal Court as the place where herds of this angry young generation do not feel lost. The success that Grahame attaches to the Royal Court, as a powerhouse for the ideals of this new generation, is clearly not mirrored in Devine's view of the Court's success, as is shown by his belief, as quoted by Hallifax in early June, that the Royal Court was about to go dark for good – even if he stated different in the newspapers. When Richardson and Goetschius claim that a role was pressed upon the Court that it did in fact not represent, this is proof for it. It also shows how Devine played along.

The Angry Young movement was proceeding. Only very few were still at odds with the concept: "I refuse to regard John Osborne's play, *Look Back in Anger* (Royal Court) as a penetrating comment on the Younger Generation, which is what a lot of people consider it to be" (Robinson); most others were not: "This play is a fascinating and undoubtedly accurate exposure of what many young people are thinking to-day" (Outram). Harold Hobson agreed that *Look Back in Anger* puts on the stage the outlook of 'That Uncertain Feeling' which was inherent in the young generation of the 1950s ("Two Worlds"). The highly anticipated *Picture Post* article came out on 23 June 1956, and referred to Porter's tirades: "Thus speaks the angry young man. And if, like the more prissy of our critics, you find him objectionable, remember that Hamlet and Faust were angry and objectionable young men, too" ("Moments in the Bitter Life of Jimmy").

It is worth remembering that Hallifax regarded the *Picture Post* article as a strategy to help promote a not very successful *Look Back in Anger*. In mid-June, Devine was feeling the theatre was facing premature closure. The press, here, however, already heralds Osborne's play a major success.

In late June and early July, it seemed that "the post-war generation has suddenly arrived" (Farson). Farson declares: "It is the age of the mixed-up kid, of the rebel without cause". He asks what the 1950s will be known by in the 1980s: "It is a fascinating but disquieting thought that we may be pictured crying into our kitchen sinks". "Unfortunately this seems to be the adolescent age of the angry mixed-up kid", he continues. In the theatre, Farson declares, this post-war type to be Osborne's "angry young man" Jimmy Porter and links the whole idea to James Dean, yet another 'rebel without a cause', calling it "James Deanery". The *Daily Express* tried to capture the concept of the Angry Young Men as angry rebels, raw and outspoken, and without money and not wanting it, either: "they distrust 'gentlemanly' ways. They are suspicious of soft bourgeois jobs" (Barber, "Today's Angry Young Men"). The *Yorkshire Post* described the angry young writers and names Osborne their most eloquent spokesman:

They come from a generation whose development was seriously interrupted at the end of their teens. One of their most eloquent spokesmen is Mr. John Osborne, whose play 'Look Back in Anger', at the Royal Court Theatre, not only presents the hopelessness of modern 'mixed up kids' but also specifically attacks the older generations. ("Young Writers")

In August, *Plays and Players* called Osborne, Michael Hastings, Nigel Dennis, and Brendan Behan "rebels with a cause" ("Rebels With a Cause"). About *Look Back in Anger* the magazine wrote: "Then a harsh voice suddenly raised itself, shattering the dull, placid atmosphere of gentility. John Osborne had arrived, angrily protesting against the modern society and the soft-boiled drama it had produced". *The Tatler* wrote: "'Contemporary' is the boss word in the theatre today, and Sloane Square is the place where we hope to learn how its magic syllables sound when they are pronounced properly" (Cookman).

And truly, even if Devine had had an utterly different perception of the Court's success, he still went along with the hype. Devine is quoted in June 1956: "Main fault with all the plays I have read is that what they have to say has nothing to do with the life as we live it today" (London). And while Osborne's play is referred to as presenting "post-war youth as it really is", Devine, they write, wants to produce plays that make people "sit up and notice".

On 17 August, the literary supplement of *The Times* highlighted the Royal Court as a writers' theatre that had shown "a great deal of enterprise and no lack of courage. "They have made a notable effort to throw a bridge over the gap which exists in this country between the practice of dramatic art and other kinds of literature" ("A Writer's Theatre"). The article also went – somehow behind its times – back to the aspect of the original policy that intended to approach novelists to cope with the lack of playwrights. The article's argument that "they have gone for most of their plays to novelists and to a poet. They have gone to youth. And they have sought strenuously for a modern idiom

in language and ideas. They cannot in any sense be said to have betrayed their original aims", when looking at the Royal Court's first season, is not fully accurate. The Court's search for novelists and poets – who did not actually write 'most of their plays' – and their quest for youth and a modern idiom in language and ideas had actually been part of Devine's early scheme. Since *Look Back in Anger* was part of the programme as early as 1955, and thus part of the early aims, it became an asset in this scheme. Yet, while the play was chosen according to Devine's initial ideals, the reactions to it gave the Royal Court a different direction. This direction is what led to a dropping of most of the original aims.

The second half of 1956 was thus generally characterized by a more political understanding of the Royal Court. An article in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, on 22 August 1956, further shows that the waves the British press had made around *Look Back in Anger* had reached the continent. The article highlights Devine staying true to his promise of giving a voice to a younger generation and presents John Osborne and, interestingly, Nigel Dennis, as two members of a disappointed and unsentimental young post-war generation (W.V.). A commentator in the *Sketch* wrote: "The 'Angry Young Men', who are rather a cult just now, are, bluntly, a bore. John Osborne's play 'Look Back in Anger' – in danger of becoming a cult itself – seems to me ineffective in its raging, and loaded with self-pity" ("Impatience"). J. B. Priestley commented on *Look Back in Anger* and Osborne's role in British society: "The play's sole reason is the introduction of a contemporary type not to be seen on stage before. Mr. Osborne is a kind of spokesman. Technically it is a shocker" ("The Art of the Dramatist"). In an article in September 1956, Osborne complains about "being thrust by journalists into the role of angry author" (Peel). In contrast to Sierz' assertions that Osborne embraced the label of the Angry Young Man (Sierz, *Look Back* 9, 47), Osborne here rejects it. Even if not everyone agreed with the movement, it became a cult. Sierz writes: "After being hyped as an Angry Young Man, Osborne lived up to the part, writing provocative articles excoriating the complacency of British society" (*Look Back* 9). Yet, Sierz' argument that Osborne actually embraced the label Angry Young can be questioned when calling to mind that Sierz saw a proof for this in Osborne's statement: "You see, if one recognizes problems and one states them, immediately people say – oh this is an angry young man" (H. Ritchie 27). The same statement can also be read as a criticism of the label. Peel continues: "Jolly good luck, John Osborne – and stay angry if by doing so you can provide good entertainment and employment". While anger is certainly the central aspect of the play and shows in the text as much as in the title, Osborne still felt that the politicized label 'Angry Young Man' was thrust on him by journalists. The playwright's statement thus strongly echoes in the allegations of Richardson, Ritchie, and Goetschius.

Fearon's Angry Young Man publicity had not made much of an impression in February, March, April, and even May 1956. His assertion that Osborne was speaking for his generation was fiercely battled at first. Only by late June did most of the critique suddenly disperse. *Look Back in Anger* was celebrated by the press as defining the arrival of a

post-war generation, and Osborne had undoubtedly become this generation's 'most eloquent' spokesman – even if he did not agree with either the role or the label. Another discrepancy between the picture of the Court as painted by the press and the reality at the theatre can be found around the coverage of the TV extract of *Look Back in Anger* in October 1956.

While the newspapers throughout June, July and August kept proclaiming the huge success of *Look Back in Anger*, the masses of people flocking into the theatre from all over town, the importance of Osborne as the spokesman of a new generation and the financial stability of the company, on 16 October the 15-minute TV excerpt was shown by the BBC to promote the play. It was to make the public aware of the play and call people to the theatre. This simple fact surely stands in sharp contrast to the picture drawn by the press the months before, and is, furthermore, in line with Halifax's comments on Devine's mood.

Even though the press had not spoken of any difficulties the Royal Court may have had, but had turned to hailing the theatre as the rightfully chosen home of the Angry Young Men, the reality was different. Halifax recalls that it was only after the TV excerpt that queues built up in front of the theatre. This is, however, not the picture the press drew. As such, some newspapers – like the *Swindon Evening Advertiser*, the *Yorkshire Evening Press*, and the *Oxford Mail* – just before the broadcast speak of “the freak success of the London theatre season. The rich and the elderly, as well as the young and the iconoclastic have been flocking to the Royal Court to see the bitter, brilliant play of self-pitying youth” (“Angry Success”; “Long Run”; Hobman).

After the belated success induced by the broadcast it was clear that the production would move to the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith. One critic commented: “I should think that angry young man, John Osborne, is less angry now” (“Looking Ahead”). In the same article *Look Back in Anger* was described as the “outstanding success in the first season of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre”. Also, the assertion that the play had been an instant success was further strengthened. To advertise the TV excerpt the *Daily Mirror* wrote: “First produced in May this play caused more violent reactions than any other play since the war. It has shocked the diehards, amazed the conventionals” (“The Earl of Harewood”). Elsewhere it says: “that piece of intellectual rock'n'roll, *Look Back in Anger*, which so horrified the elders of the London theatre when it was first produced at the Royal Court theatre” (Wiseman).

An article in the *Glasgow Herald* shows that at the time of the TV extract the reputation of Osborne and *Look Back in Anger* had already been firmly established in the eyes of the press: “Like ‘Waiting for Godot’ this play has given a catchphrase to contemporary jargon; and in his introduction Lord Harewood said it was the play which put the present generation on the stage for the first time in England” (“On Tuesday”). The *North Western Evening Mail* summed up the hype around Osborne: “John Osborne has already earned himself the title ‘Angry Young Man’ for his plays which take a hefty crack at present day life in general. It is as a member of a generation that has inherited the aftermath of the two wars that he has written ‘Look Back in Anger’” (“On Your

Screen Tonight"). The *Radio Times* on 12 October sums up the enterprise more vaguely and devoid of ideological labels:

One of the most active and ambitious movements in London's theatreland in the post-war years had been the recent formation of the English Stage Company and its subsequent occupation of the Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square. Designed to represent a repertory of interesting plays both new and old, it has already been responsible for unearthing a number of new playwrights and bringing before the public some exciting new productions. The most controversial play so far has undoubtedly been *Look Back in Anger*, by John Osborne. ("Controversial Play")

In October 1956, the company's policy was also described as "the Royal Court Theatre [...] decided to open a season of repertory and put on plays of quality. Everyone said it would fail. *Look Back in Anger* has been the success of the experiment" ("Repertory") and a "policy of encouraging new authors and seeking out contemporary plays" ("Look Back in Anger," *Walthamstow Post*).

In an article from November 1956, the picture painted of the English Stage Company is similar. Already in the opener, the policy of the company is described as "producing controversial plays of present day dramatists" (Russell). Here, the reporter interviews Devine about the policy of his theatre. Devine explains: "The main aim of the company is to try to promote the modern dramatist. We felt that a theatre with a policy which concentrated on trying to get plays written which would have a real application to modern life [...] would have a public in London". A 'real application to modern life' much like the attribute 'controversial' were new attributes to the Royal Court's mandate or Devine's concepts respectively. When the reporter reminds Devine of an earlier focus of the company's policy – the idea of the novelists' theatre – Devine admits that the most successful play was actually written by an actor and member of the company, Osborne. He, however, still agrees that "it is called a novelists' theatre because I have tried to introduce writers to the theatre that have not written for it before".

Devine's argumentation somehow lacks coherence: the company's focus on the 'controversial' and the novelists' theatre were never part of the same concept. To make up for this, Devine thus adds that he believes novelists have access to a bigger world picture than that little world many theatre people live in, which does not have anything to do with modern life as it is. His words show how much he was sitting between the chairs of his initial project and the enterprise the Royal Court had become.

The Press Archive on *Look Back in Anger* clearly shows how the policy of the theatre changed from the early schemes to a more political mandate, with a focus on socially concerned writing. It can also be seen that it took months for the mindset around the 'Angry Young Man' to develop. Yet, once it did, the picture the press drew of the Royal Court largely differed from the actual situation it was in. Not only Richardson, Ritchie, and Goetschius, but also Osborne have asserted that the press forced certain concepts upon the Royal Court and Osborne respectively. Osborne was, by July, undoubtedly the Angry Young Man, and the Royal Court was reported to have a focus on plays with contemporary concern to attract long queues of young theatregoers. The theatre adjusted

its mandate accordingly, and Devine set out to formulate these new and modern concerns that made people 'stand on their seats and fight'.

Still, Devine tried to hold on to his initial ideas of a workshop-like theatre and an acting school. As shown before, other mainstays of Devine's early scheme – the repertory system, the permanent ensemble, the permanent surround, the permanent costumes, the anti-star policy, the original idea of a writers' theatre that introduced novelists and poets to the theatre, the craftsmen theatre – only briefly came into being, and were rendered useless once the first season at the Royal Court was in operation. This was similarly true for the popular theatre, the children's theatre, and the large focus on touring that Duncan had envisioned for his verse plays, and the more commercially run and thus financially more successful theatre that Blond and Esdaile envisioned.

Fearon's introduction of the 'angry' and 'young' into the marketing of the Royal Court was a turning point. Certainly, anger can be seen as the central theme of *Look Back in Anger*, but when the English Stage Company chose it, it was not in order to give the theatre a political direction, but because Osborne was a young, new British writer who had written a play worthy of production; 644 had not been producible, and the company was in dire need of the 'new' that was to set it apart from all other theatres. That Devine gave Osborne jobs in his theatre, alluded to his concept of the craftsmen theatre and the workshop-like working environment. Devine surely saw something new in Osborne's work: the new that he wanted in his new theatre. But the new Devine wanted was about creating a new kind of theatre, not about changing British society.

As such, the early policy statements of the company never speak of a socially concerned or political or controversial direction. When, in fact, presented with such concepts, there were no better words for it but Fearon's condescending 'young' and 'angry'. The company, not even Devine or Richardson, never intended to attack society. The English Stage Company's work at the Royal Court – when stripped of all individual bias – was to be something new in theatre land: a theatre focusing on writers – and not only on British writers, as the first season of the English Stage Company shows. And as these writers did not yet have a non-commercial stage in Britain's theatre landscape, the Royal Court was to become that non-commercial theatre.

As the suggested change in the theatre's policy also was great publicity, and certainly made for the financial success that was to keep the company going, to go along with it was not too hard a decision. Devine in particular knew how easily all could be taken away: he had seen it with the Old Vic. Roberts suggests that after quitting at the Old Vic, Devine became better at cunning (Roberts, *Stage* 4); he knew that doing one's job is not enough, 'dinners and soft soap' were more important. Wardle also comments on Devine's manipulative ways in handling Blond, Duncan, and Esdaile (Wardle 168). It had been Devine's dream since 1953 to direct the Royal Court Theatre. It was there that he wanted to establish his new theatre. All in all that was what he got, even if he had to adapt and turn his back not only on Saint-Denis, but also on his own original ideals.

Goetschius asserts that the Royal Court was soon understood as a socio-political theatre; the English Stage Company had allowed for its mandate to be dictated by the press. The Press Archives show how much the Royal Court was struggling to establish a not only new, but also successful policy during its early years. Facing the urgency to keep the company running, in spite of being a non-commercial enterprise, the Royal Court was forced to adjust to its given circumstances. This led to many inconsistencies in policy. There was no other way: success had to be valued, and if the public found a good reason to 'flock' to the Court, that reason had to be assured and nurtured.

As such, the identity that was pressed upon the Royal Court was not in any way initially intended by any member of the company. Throughout the first season, the Royal Court changed its mandate according to the picture that was drawn on Fleet Street rather than in Sloane Square. And really, the Royal Court as a non-commercial theatre was not a victim in this, but benefitted largely from the attention – as a matter of fact – until today. The Royal Court's success and reputation, throughout its entire history, can thus be traced back to what Goetschius described as the Royal Court's staff throwing their ideals and original aims overboard and seizing the opportunities that their theatre's instrumentalization by the press bore.

Tony Richardson's conviction that the Royal Court's reputation – the non-conformist, radical, socialist theatre for the young – was nothing but a ludicrous stereotype, agrees with both Goetschius' perspective and the analysis of the Press Archives. The Royal Court in its 'golden age', the legend of '8 May 1956', and the myth of the Angry Young Man are useful images in promoting the Royal Court and Osborne's work in particular. These images, however, formed the Royal Court's legacy, a legacy that it still strives to hold today. What the theatre really was about, the 'tone' and 'flavour', were the original schemes – Devine's, Duncan's, Blond's, Esdaile's – that formed the English Stage Company at the outset of its first season.

3.3 Conclusion

The 1950s saw the beginning of the Devine-Richardson alliance, the 1953 scheme for the Royal Court, the foundation of the English Stage Company, Devine's appointment as Artistic Director, the eventual lease of the Royal Court Theatre by the company, the concept of the writers' theatre and the angry, young, socialist, middle class movement that eventually gave the theatre its mandate. Rob Ritchie, former Literary Manager of the Royal Court, once remarked that "the Royal Court, of course, has never actually been what it used to be" (Little and McLaughlin 4). While Ritchie referred to the theatre's attempt to revive the 'golden age' of the 1950s in the 1970s and 1980s, it seems that even during what was later called the 'golden age', the Royal Court was already 'not actually what it used to be'. Philip Roberts asserted in the late 1980s that it is "one of the central characteristics of the English Stage Company [...] that it has always known what it was doing but normally only as far as the next few productions" (*Court* 4). Dur-

ing these early years this seemed particularly accurate. It is most striking that the endeavour of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court was never actually what it was said to be. It was actually far from wanting to be political, controversial or even angry in its initial concepts. The endeavour as in 'what it used to be' was neither angry nor young.

In 1966, George Goetschius suggested that what the Royal Court should be – instead of hiding under the various covers of political aspiration, ideological camouflage, and vague artistic policies – was “a theatre of excellence, sans theory, sans ideological pretensions, sans social programme, a theatre that would mobilize its artistic resources not to create a new theatrical form, but to express and perfect a living tradition” (English Stage Company, *Ten* 34). Devine had attempted to create a new theatrical movement and form, but ended up directing an allegedly 'revolutionary' theatre for the middle class that claimed to represent the working classes. In 2012, Max Stafford-Clark, Artistic Director of the Royal Court from 1979 to 1993, claims that he thinks

the Court never had as it were a socialist agenda. But it's always been very good at sticking its nose into areas of concern, depicting areas of society that had been ignored by newspapers and films. So it's like, you know, you lift up a stone and you see little creatures crawling underneath. I think the Royal Court has always been good at lifting up stones. (Personal interview)

George Devine, in this context, appears most opportunistic. Director James Macdonald, Associate Director at the Royal Court in the 1990s, sums this up when he remarks: “Devine wasn't rock solid. Devine had big changes of heart. There is a year; I can't remember which year it was, when Devine suddenly went: 'New plays are fucking boring, let's do musicals'” (Personal interview). However, as the artists claim in the English Stage Company's own brochures, and particularly the 1958 brochure, the English Stage Company was forced to adjust to given circumstances in order to survive. Blond, Devine, and Richardson all speak of the many inconsistencies in policy, and justify changes like the introduction of the star-system and transfers; statements that are not only addressed at critical theatregoers or journalists, but most importantly at the theatre's funding bodies – as the Art Council's Jo Hodgkinson's objections at the 26 November Council meeting show.

The whole new direction of the movement, to use Gaskill's words again, appears most noticeable in the newspaper coverage around *Look Back in Anger*. Not only can the obvious changes in the theatre's policy be traced, the press' involvement in these changes, that Richardson hinted at in his contribution to the 1958 brochure, can further be proven. The analysis of the Press Archive shows a development that saw the Royal Court as changing its mandate according to external expectations and financial needs. Richardson's essay in the brochure can be seen as the rectification he felt was necessary to explain the original endeavour and the real origin of the angry, young, political, and controversial label. Eventually, the newspapers were stronger than the brochure by the Royal Court: the legend of the Royal Court in its 'golden age' was founded in a label

that was invented by a press officer and reinforced by the press according to middle class wishes.

4. The 1960s. Fighting

Theatre is slowly beginning to be a force in society. (George Devine in English Stage Company, 1958-1959 26)

[Y]ou meet people who are used to trouble; they are used to trouble with the public, they are used to seats flipping up; they are used to critical trouble, they are used to fighting the Arts Council, they are used to fighting the government, they are used to fighting the Lord Chamberlain. (David Hare in Doty and Harbin 157)

It's thinking back to that time, but I think I am pretty sure. But I had in my mind that the Lord Chamberlain would not last long. I was gonna get rid of him. (Edward Bond, personal interview)

4.1 Continuing a Mission

At the beginning of the 1960s, “the Court [...] had outlived its heroic phase” (Wardle 235). Wardle explains: “[The Royal Court’s] pre-eminence in the 1950s derived in part from the fact that writers like Osborne and Arden simply had nowhere else to go”. After the first wave of new writers in the 1950s, no second wave emerged at the Royal Court. Devine commented in 1963: “We are supposed to be the spear-head; but how do you keep sharpening the spear? After an explosion like 1956 it’s not surprising there’s a hiatus now” (235). A second playwright, writing like Osborne, was hard to come by. Due to the influence of the Royal Court, the interest in new writing had also been raised. In the early 1960s, new plays were produced by theatres like the Hampstead Theatre, the National Theatre, which was founded in 1963, and the Theatre Workshop of Joan Littlewood. This growing diversity in the non-commercial theatre sector also had an impact on funding.

Littlewood’s workshop had co-existed with the Royal Court during the 1950s, but was not really much of a competitor when it came to fighting for subsidies. The establishment of other big non-commercial companies in London, however, had a different effect on the Royal Court. Richard Findlater notes that the founding of the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company’s coming to London had a huge impact on the work of the Royal Court: the companies were competing in the battle for audiences as well as subsidies (72). Particularly the National Theatre was a direct competitor for the Royal Court. Olivier, as the National’s Artistic Director, even tried to convince Devine to move to the National; William Gaskill and John Dexter left the Court to work with Olivier³⁷. Gaskill recalls: “we moved a lot of the Court lock, stock, and barrel to

37 Gaskill had left the Court in 1960, worked for the Royal Shakespeare Company, ran a company at the Cambridge Arts Theatre as a joint venture with the Court in 1961, started the Royal Court Actor’s Studio, and together with John Dexter joined Olivier at the newly formed National Theatre in 1963 (Gaskill 40).

the National, then located at the Old Vic” (Doty & Harbin 53); many actors, directors and designers accompanied them.

Adding to the competition of the big companies, the fringe movement in the late 1960s – particularly after the abolition of stage censorship in 1968 – made it more difficult for the Royal Court to claim its position as the leader in new writing. It was getting harder and harder for the Royal Court to attract new writers. Critics also attacked the Royal Court’s restrictive policy on the choice of plays and, accordingly, the theatre’s exclusiveness to a certain kind of writing (Roberts, *Stage* 69). New trends were needed. Also, the Royal Court had not yet made too much of an impact on British culture. Osborne’s plays were immense successes, and the Angry Young Men had been an inspiring force in 1956/57, but that was long over, and the Court was still fighting to be commonly accepted; not many people came to see productions at the Royal Court. In 1960, Devine himself stated financial losses and the artistic ‘main problem’ of a too low aesthetic level of the ‘new movement’ (English Stage Company, *1958-1959* 26).

In 1970, George Goetschius described the Royal Court’s “Post-Osborne phase” (English Stage Company, *Ten* 34). He writes: “The new middle classes who created the success have already made grade and have turned their attention to newer concerns” (34). In Goetschius’ understanding “the working class, never really aware that the strange noises were supposed to be on their behalf” (34), did not care about the Royal Court anymore. The teenager, beat-music, and the new ‘sub-culture’ had become the cause of the moment, commercial theatres had gone back – despite the revolution in the British theatre – to producing revivals, and the Court, as a publicly subsidized theatre, had been encompassed into “the era of large-scale ‘Manager of the Arts’ who behave like commercial management with an advertising executive on public subsidy” (34). For Goetschius, Britain “has moved so far beyond the Angry Young Man and the kitchen sink as to give impression that these were somehow involved in the Irish question or the Easter rebellion” (34).

When entering the 1960s, the Royal Court was not only still entangled in finding its own identity, it was also expected to continue what it had begun – without really being able to define what that was, beyond the label Angry Young or kitchen sink. Surely, the Royal Court knew it was a writers’ theatre, and that it wanted to create something ‘new’; a policy to do so was still not found. Further, the Royal Court was torn between its hard work as an underfunded writers’ theatre and the temptation toward a stronger commercialization of its policy: a struggle that had manifested itself in the 1950s. Gaskill’s feeling about the Royal Court was that from the beginning on

[...] there were two kinds of Royal Court... the Court...which used the same group of actors, which had tremendous loyalty to particular writers and their relationship with directors, and there was the alternative Royal Court which was always looking towards the West End and the stars. (Roberts, *Court* 19-20)

In spite of being a hard time, the 1960s at the Court in Swinging London saw Marianne Faithful on stage³⁸, David Hockney³⁹ as a designer, and invited fringe theatre groups and American theatre companies⁴⁰ (Doty & Harbin 191-193). But, the late 1950s had been a time full of conflict and these conflicts were carried into the early 1960s: the attitude of his Associate and Assistant Directors (Roberts, *Stage* 71) and the wish of parts of the Council to replace him as Artistic Director (73) made Devine's life difficult. Further, the absence of a constant workshop and the consequence of having to contract out were making work at the Court difficult (198), as did the very restricted spaces (196). In addition to that, the Royal Court was not the same writers' theatre as in the 1950s. While John Osborne had been invited into the theatre, and other writers had met weekly at the Writers' Group, the writers' theatre of the 1960s, as reflected in the words of one of the then-Literary Managers Christopher Hampton, sounds distinctly different: "I inherited a system of standard rejection slips" (Doty & Harbin 101).

Some of the writers become very critical about the Royal Court and its strategic scheming: "[R]eviews could be too good. Young directors were fired for not getting the right kind a vitriolic attack everybody was used to"⁴¹ (Hampton in Doty and Harbin 103); "The other unforgivable sin was to write a play which was enormously successful" (103). In an odd way, the Court's young legacy, as early as the 1960s and not more than a decade after its foundation, seemed to be turning against it. Writers would still be strongly involved in the production process (151), but not many new writers were let into the Court: it seemed a set of fixed 'Royal Court Writers'⁴² had been established in

38 Marianne Faithful first appeared as Irina in *Three Sisters*, which opened on 18 April 1967, and later in Edward Bond's *Early Morning*.

39 David Hockney designed *Ubu Roi*, which opened on 21 July 1966.

40 The Bread and Puppet Theatre, the Open Theatre, and Café La Mama all performed at the Court between 1967 and 1969. Café La Mama was even given an entire season at the Court, starting 19 May 1970.

41 As Ann Jellicoe, in the following, asks Hampton to give names to prove his point, he refers to director Robert Kidd being fired after *Marya*, an adaptation by Hampton, which opened on 19 October 1967. Jellicoe asks: "Are we quite sure of the reason?" (Doty and Harbin 103). Nicholas Wright, Artistic Director of the Court from 1975-1977, replies: "Yes, I think we are" (103), and Hampton adds: "Yes, I am quite sure of the reason" (103).

42 Caryl Churchill, Christopher Hampton, Ann Jellicoe, Edward Bond, David Storey, Arnold Wesker, David Hare, and Howard Brenton all shared the same agent, Peggy Ramsay, who in some cases sent their scripts to the Royal Court without the writer even knowing about the theatre (Doty & Harbin 146), and thus nurtured what became the 'Royal Court Writers'. Yet, it is obvious that the plays Ramsay sent in were taken seriously, since Ramsay's clients were also the Literary Managers for the Court: Hampton, Hare, and Jellicoe. "[I]f Peggy sent a play, you knew she wasn't messing about, and it would be read straight away. It might even bypass the Literary Manager" (Doty and Harbin 146), Jellicoe admits. William Gaskill, in his autobiography, describes Ramsay as "She Who Must Be Obeyed" when it came to reading scripts she suggested (Gaskill 126).

John Osborne, Christopher Hampton, Ann Jellicoe⁴³, Edward Bond, David Storey, Arnold Wesker, David Hare, and Howard Brenton. It was further criticized that there was a discrepancy of certain directors annually directing the same playwrights, thus making the Royal Court Theatre more of a director's theatre⁴⁴ (152).

The early 1960s at the Royal Court thus felt not only oddly static on an artistic level; the lack of new policies, and a clear definition of a mandate thereof, made it hard for the Royal Court to attract audiences and to reassure their funding bodies – most of all the Arts Council. Devine hence tried to enforce various changes of policy – without any success. In 1959/1960, Devine wished to introduce a new form of theatre that comprised music and dance in order to compete with the new trends in the media (Roberts, *Court* 9). In November 1962, Devine was sent as a lecturer to Brazil, which left him with many new impulses and experiences. These, too, he could not put to work at the Royal Court. On his return, other problems awaited him.

Richardson had taken over the directorship of the Royal Court for the time of Devine's absence. When Devine returned after a month, the Court was under enormous financial strain; a policy of more co-operations with external managements was introduced (Wardle 241-242). One co-operation scheme was with the provinces; it did not

Even today, the literary agency Casarotto Ramsay is still strongly connected with the Royal Court. Mel Kenyon of Casarotto Ramsay – agent of many prominent Royal Court writers like Sarah Kane or Simon Stephens – used to be Literary Manager at Royal Court from 1990 to 1992 (Little and McLaughlin 304).

- 43 An episode Ann Jellicoe recalls at a 1981 conference on the Royal Court gives insights into what it felt for her, as a female playwright, to work at the Royal Court. Ann Jellicoe, who throughout the conference generally speaks as being very fond of the Royal Court and its personnel, tells a very bitter episode from her work at the Court, which she feels mirrors the disadvantages, she worked under as a woman at the Court. The passage also underlines the ambivalence in George Devine's character quite well. "I'm going now to tell a story which illustrates that bitterness that I still feel, and I have never told that story in public. [...] It must have been around 1959. Keith Johnstone and I had been lovers for nearly two years. No one at the Court knew. But George found out. There was a meeting – I must have been doing something at the time – which took place without me there. And somebody was complaining to George that I was being a bit troublesome. Like, for instance I wanted a pink wall instead of a green one, and George said, 'Oh, just say to her. 'Shut up, silly woman. Keith will screw you later'" (Doty & Harbin 158-159).
- 44 The strong regularity of directors producing their favourite playwright led to famous friendships. Hare names Lindsay Anderson and David Storey, William Gaskill and Edward Bond, Anthony Page and John Osborne, and Ann Jellicoe attests the same for Robert Kidd and Christopher Hampton (Doty and Harbin 151-152). Findlater speaks of earlier author-director "marriages", as he calls them: John Osborne and Tony Richardson, N. F. Simpson and William Gaskill, Christopher Logue and Lindsay Anderson. He also names the later unions of David Storey and Anderson, Edward Bond and Gaskill, and Hampton and Kidd (*25 Years* 43).

turn out to be very successful. With the main hardship of the Royal Court being that it was simply hard to put on new plays by unknown writers, the money coming in from these co-operations was mainly used to finance star appearances.

In 1963, the Royal Court and the National Theatre entered an official association, which had a very positive effect on funding for the Royal Court: not only did the Cadogan Estate, which now owned the Royal Court building, agree to extend the lease – it would have ended in 1991 – the Arts Council and the London County Council also chipped in large sums of money (250).

In 1963/64, Devine unsuccessfully attempted to change the policy of the house again. This ‘reformation’, as Devine called it (Roberts, *Stage* 83), included a fundamental restructuring of the Royal Court. Devine’s idea of the new Royal Court was an arts centre “where the cross-fertilization of the theatre and other arts can be carried out, and a high level of instruction and experimentation can be achieved” (83) as well as a popular theatre “where the opening up of the drama from within towards a larger public can take place” (83). Devine also introduced plans to rebuild the Court so that it could also house exhibitions, present films, and provide workshop schemes in theatrical education – as he had always wished. However, new developments on building sites adjacent to the Royal Court finally led to the abandonment of all rebuilding plans (Wardle 250). Devine considered moving into a bigger theatre, but the Arts Council stopped those plans (Findlater, *25 Years* 49)⁴⁵. The Court eventually underwent a partial refurbishment, such as the installation of a bar at the back of the stalls, the instalment of a proper

45 This plan stands in contrast to Richard Findlater’s assertion that “from the start of the ESC regime George Devine regarded [the Royal Court Theatre] [...] to be the ESC’s only home” (Findlater, *25 Years* 200). The role of the Royal Court theatre building in the English Stage Company’s fortunes is indeed a cause of controversy. In an interview with Richard Findlater in 1961, George Devine speaks about the Royal Court Theatre and his own idea of a theatre: “I’d like to rip out the inside of this [place] and create a playhouse with a different feeling. I’d like a bigger theatre – with more seats at cheap prices – which would be a very free and open place, and the old feeling of freedom that there used to be in the music hall. It could be a really popular theatre, and you could do plays there just as serious in intention as those we do to-day in our little worried boxes” (G. Devine, “Directing” 131). If Findlater – as one can only believe, still being aware of Devine’s position – in 1981 claims that Devine regarded the Royal Court as the English Stage Company’s only home, it can only mean that Devine drew a line between his and the Company’s idea of a theatre. Gaskill commented on Devine’s perspective on the tradition of the Royal Court as writers’ theatre starting with the Harley Granville Barker regime: “George Devine always said that the reference for the past is a lot of rubbish” (Doty and Harbin 197). Yet, in his ‘Royal Court Scheme’ of 1953 Devine had highlighted the Royal Court’s importance and had been inflexible when another theatre was offered to him by the Arts Council (see chapter 2.1). When already being the Artistic Director of the English Stage Company, in July 1955, and on the offer of the Royal Court instead of the Kingsway, Devine, however, felt that the company was publicly committed to the Kingsway and “only if it seems unlikely that it will be finished in time should we consider the Court Theatre” (Harewood in Findlater, *25 Years* 32). When recalling the moment of the Royal

lighting-box, a new stage floor, and repainting (Wardle 256), in 1964. While construction was going on the company moved into the West End for a not very successful season of Royal Court productions at the Queen's Theatre⁴⁶.

Devine's plan had also included a new studio space behind the main stage where workshops could take place: this idea eventually materialized in the English Stage Company Theatre Studio at the Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre from 1963-1965. In 1963, Jocelyn Herbert had discovered that the Jeanetta Cochrane was standing idle during the day. It was decided to start a theatre studio in the space. The London County Council loaned the theatre to the Royal Court free of any charge, and after two experimental terms – a term ran six to eight weeks – a subsidy of £2,500 a year for a term of three years came in from the Gulbenkian Foundation. The studio was a co-operation with the National Theatre, and was largely used for the education of actors. It was run by William Gaskill until 1963. When Gaskill went to join Olivier at the new National Theatre, Keith Johnstone took over. The Studio closed in 1965.

The last few years of his reign, before his resignation in 1965, came along with general exhaustion and many personal struggles for Devine. In 1960, he had moved into his own place, and officially began his relationship with Jocelyn Herbert⁴⁷. Additionally, Devine's health continued to decline. In 1963, he had to take three months off, following some time in hospital (255). This breakdown, together with the breakdown of his rebuilding plans, were the starting point of Devine's withdrawal from the Royal Court, Wardle suggests (257). He describes Devine's last years: the huge success of the company after the re-opening of Osborne's *Inadmissible Evidence* (1964), the finding of a 'Crown Prince' for the office of the Artistic Director, the offer of the directorship at the new Arts Centre at Sussex University, and the loss of it due to Devine openly admitting to live with Herbert without being married to her, the struggle with the censor about Osborne's *A Patriot for Me* (1965), Devine's appearance in drag in the club production of the same play, the announcement of his retirement at the New Year's lunch at the

Court offer in 1965, Devine said: "I flipped naturally, with the history of that theatre and said 'sure'" (33). It seems Devine was rather open regarding his perspective on the Royal Court. This debate became particularly important during the financial crises of the 1970s and 1980s. The Royal Court building had very high running costs, and as the Arts Council suggested a move, the English Stage Company had to find ways to justify their wanting to hold on to the building. In the context of these 1970s and 1980s debates, it is ironic that, in the 1960s, it was the Arts Council that prevented a move, stating the danger of losing the intimate ethos of the Court (Roberts, *Court* 23).

46 The English Stage Company's season at the Queen's saw the productions of Chekov's *The Seagull* (1895) and Brecht's *St. Joan of the Stockyards* (1931) both directed by Tony Richardson and Michael Hasting's *The World's Baby* (1965) (Roberts, *Stage* 97-98).

47 Gaskill refers to Devine's handling his marriage before moving in with Jocelyn Herbert: he lived with Herbert during the week and returned to his home, to his wife Sophie and daughter Harriet, on weekends (Gaskill 102). Devine and Herbert had met when she was a student at the L.T.S.. They became a couple in the mid-1950s (Wardle 157-158).

Savoy Hotel, his plans to move to Brazil and take up an appointment at the Theatre Conservatory in Rio, his agenda to write an autobiography, his collapse with a heart-attack after a performance of *A Patriot for Me* and a day of meeting with the Berliner Ensemble, and the paralysation of one side of his body following the heart-attack. Devine died on 20 January 1966.

When Devine had resigned in 1965, William Gaskill followed his mentor as the new Artistic Director. But not without hesitation. Lindsay Anderson describes the announcement of Devine's resignation at the Savoy, when Gaskill decided to become the new Artistic Director:

Nobody turned a hair. I was next to John Osborne and Jocelyn Herbert was on the other side of him and Tony Richardson was on the other side of the table. I was appalled by this and I could see that Jocelyn was very hurt by it. George of course just sat there and didn't say anything and I whispered across to Tony and to John, 'Go on, for God's sake, get up and say something.' And everybody was beginning to get up and drift off in a characteristically English way and I just got up and said something. I haven't the remotest idea what I said. I felt it had to be done. And afterwards Bill told me that he then and there decided he would take it on. (Doty & Harbin 100)

Jocelyn Herbert commented: "off the top of his head [Lindsay] made up a most wonderful speech about George. It needed saying. Bill was so moved – sentimental old bugger – by the speech that he said he would come to the Court after all" (100). Gaskill later explained that when he had moved to the National Theatre in 1963, it felt like Devine was somehow left behind. Thus, he felt obliged to take over from Devine after the retirement speech Anderson gave at the Savoy (54). But, it was not an easy task: it was hard for Gaskill to follow a tradition that was not even clearly defined.

New in office, Gaskill decided to rely on old policies and immediately re-installed the repertory system, and engaged a set ensemble of twenty-one actors (Roberts, *Court* 23); ten years prior, Devine had not been able to keep both policies alive for long. Gaskill focussed strongly on the Royal Court's legacy as a writers' theatre, as can be seen in his comment from 1965. Gaskill writes that the Royal Court has "a legacy of very warm ties with many writers" (English Stage Company, *Ten* 30) and has been able to help writers like Ann Jellicoe, N.F. Simpson, Edward Bond, Keith Johnstone, David Cregan, and Arnold Wesker to "maintain the continuity of their work regardless of financial failure and critical disapproval" (English Stage Company, *Ten* 30). But Gaskill also acknowledged the new challenges: in spite of the Royal Court having been the first venue to "professionally" (30) stage Brecht⁴⁸ and other writers, the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company had grown into competitors which the Royal Court could not match "in spectacle or in size of cast" (30). In spite of being different from other stages – Roberts remarks that in the year of its tenth birthday, "[t]he Royal Court

48 Gaskill's assertion that the Royal Court were the first to professionally stage Brecht is intricate as Brecht's work had been performed in Britain before (see footnote 18).

Theatre was perhaps the only subsidized theatre anywhere which criticized the establishment in a serious way” (Roberts, *Court* 45) – the Court had its problems and critics to face. Gaskill sums it up:

We’re often accused now of having too diffuse a policy, lacking a strong social and artistic theory. One of the main problems is knowing just what audience we are going for. [...] the younger audience which will take a risk at a new play is still very small, though devoted. We have to try to strike a balance between popular but not obvious revivals and the right new plays when they appear. (47)

Gaskill had to both finance his theatre and keep building its established reputation as a writers’ theatre. In the 1960 brochure by the English Stage Company, he gives a positive outlook:

[N]ow that we have a greatly increased grant from the Arts Council, we can face the future with more relaxation than in the past, when every production was a financial gamble and successful plays had to be transferred in order to finance new work at the Court itself. (30)

Gaskill hoped to achieve financial stability by “once again” (English Stage Company, *Ten* 30) going back to playing repertory. Frank Evans, the English Stage Company’s accountant in 1965, explains the effects that playing in repertory had on the financing of the Royal Court. Being more costly “in its first stages” (5) it will start to give the theatre more financial stability once the theatre has “a number of ‘successful plays’ within the repertory” (5), Evans writes. These productions could then balance the flops. Evans concludes: “In a good box office repertory, it should be financially possible to make some splendid mistakes, without burning one’s fingers” (5). But Evans remains cautious: he thinks that no matter how well-controlled the budget, there is no money without audiences, and that the attracting and organising of audiences is what the theatre is currently working on.

Gaskill saw a chance to build new audiences in educational and school programmes in theatres and in the provinces (English Stage Company, *Ten* 30). In 1965, the Royal Court’s school programme was started⁴⁹, which included open rehearsals, demonstrations of theatre work, introductions, productions for and with young people, and cheaper tickets – for five shillings – for students (English Stage Company, *1970* 32). Gaskill had hopes that the concept of subsidized theatre would be commonly accepted and new civic theatres would be started in the provinces (English Stage Company, *Ten* 30), as such he was working towards being “a public theatre, with free seats,

49 The Royal Court’s school scheme was initiated in 1960 based on the English Stage Company’s 1955 mandate. It was restarted in 1965, and in 1970 the scheme was renamed the Young People’s Theatre Scheme. From 1976 until 1980 the YPTS resided in a garage near Holborn Place and, in 1986, moved to a space in Portobello Road. It closed in 1998 and was renamed the Young Writer’s Programme. This new programme was first led from a desk at the Ambassadors, where parts of the Royal Court administration had settled during its refurbishment in the late 1990s. In 2000, it was situated at “The Site” next to Royal Court building (Little and McLaughlin 133-137).

not a private theatre for a minority” (Findlater 99). But his adjustments did not bring the success he had hoped for.

Even with the Arts Council’s grants, the Royal Court was seldom in the black numbers during the 1960s. As an example, the assessed financial needs of £100,000 for the 1967/68 season stood against total operating costs of £154,972 (Liebenstein-Kurtz 352). The repertory system proved to be tremendously risky and had to be financed through many revivals. As a consequence, the Royal Court presented as many revivals as new plays (Browne 75). Since this was not the mandate for which the Court was being subsidized, the Arts Council simply could not agree with Gaskill’s policy: as a writers’ theatre the Royal Court was to invest in more new plays (76-77). The Arts Council put pressure on the Royal Court⁵⁰.

Gaskill’s changes were also not welcomed by the English Stage Company’s Council. Neville Blond as the chairman, and Greville Poke, the secretary of the Council were strongly campaigning against Gaskill. Poke explains that Devine

had had many years previous experience of dealing with awkward personalities and George had a way of getting his own way. Bill wasn’t that kind at all. He took up a point of view as a matter of principle and he stuck to it and it did lead to quite considerable animosity between himself and the chairman. (Greville Poke in Roberts, *Stage* 118)

Eventually, in 1966, “After *Golden City*⁵¹ the company disbanded, and the theatre returned to straight runs” (Gaskill 75).

It was not just with the Arts Council and Blond and Poke that Gaskill had problems. Animosity was also developing against him on another front: when taking over Devine’s post, Gaskill had not re-appointed his former fellow Associate Directors, Lindsay Anderson and Anthony Page (Roberts, *Stage* 108)⁵². In his 1988 autobiography, Gaskill calls the choosing of his associates a “schematic rather than intuitive or emotional” (Gaskill 64) choice, for he did not pick Peter Gill or Desmond O’Donovan – then his lover, but Keith Johnstone and Iain Cuthbertson. By no means does Gaskill mention that he could have chosen one of his fellow directors under Devine.

50 It must be understood that the Arts Council’s influence on the Royal Court was enormous. It supported the theatre with direct subsidies as well as guarantees against loss and capital expenditure grants (Browne 50): £20,000 in 1963/64, £32,500 in 1964/65, £50,555 in 1965/66, £88,650 in 1966/67, and £100,000 in 1967/68 (Findlater, *25 Years* 250-251). In comparison, the Royal Opera House received £1,055,000 in 1964/65. Which made up one third or the £3,205,000 the Arts Council received from the Treasury in 1964/65 (Browne 54-55).

51 Arnold Wesker’s *Their Very Own and the Golden City* opened on 19 May 1966 (Roberts, *Court* 46).

52 Page, Anderson, and Gaskill had formed – together with John Dexter – the prominent circle of Assistant Directors under Devine. The season before Devine’s retirement was largely run by Anthony Page.

A year after appointing Johnstone and Cuthbertson, Gaskill realized that things did not work out the way he had imagined. He asked Johnstone and Cuthbertson to leave and “made the mistake” (75) of replacing them with O’Donovan. Gaskill’s choosing Desmond O’Donovan as his associate, as Roberts writes, “proved to be another mistake, which took a little time to rectify” (Roberts, *Court* 115)⁵³. Gaskill further had run-ins with the press.

One of these run-ins was over Gaskill’s production of *Macbeth* (1623) with Alec Guinness and Simone Signoret, in 1966, which received very bad reviews. As a reaction to those reviews, on 25 October 1966, Gaskill wrote a letter to the major periodicals, in which he suggested that the press would not be invited to any press night if they did nothing but defame the Royal Court. He wrote: “[...] we are seriously considering whether we should invite your critic to future performances. This would be a grave step for any theatre to take but we feel the present level of criticism is so low as almost to warrant it” (Browne 78). The Arts Council stepped in and blocked this action.

While Gaskill’s financial and artistic planning skills were wanting, he did, however, manage to push the Royal Court back into notoriety by fighting the Lord Chamberlain. It was the idea of the writers’ theatre and writers like Osborne that had made the Royal Court famous, and it was the Royal Court’s faith in its writers as much as its obligation to stay true to the play text that helped to abolish stage censorship in Britain. Thus, the mid-1960s with Osborne’s *A Patriot for Me* (1965) and Edward Bond’s *Saved* and *Early Morning* once again saw the Court in a quite radical position: this time by proving the Theatre Act of 1843 obsolete. Roberts explains: “Many did not [see eye to eye with Bill artistically], but in fighting for *Early Morning* he was defending everything the Court stood for” (*Court* 124).

In 1965, Gaskill saw two “persistent irritations, the critics and the Lord Chamberlain. Irritating because they deflect us from our work” (English Stage Company, *Ten* 30). Gaskill went even farther:

To shock [the critics and the Lord Chamberlain] is nothing because they do not represent society or, if they do, then we should be worried because society is fifty years behind the times. They exist as a barrier to a possible communication with an audience and so prevent us from finding out what we need to do in order to get through. (30)

In 1967, the Arts Council’s “Report on the Needs of the Subsidised Theatre in London” called the Royal Court’s artistic output under Gaskill’s directorship ‘disappointing’, and accused the theatre of not having found its role yet (Roberts, *Stage* 121). For Gaskill, however, this did not matter much: the years 1965 to 1968 were largely taken up by campaigning against the censor. In the English Stage Company’s 1970 brochure Gaskill wrote:

I was at one time fighting not only the traditional enemies – the censor, the critics and property owners, but also the Arts Council, the British Council, the Foreign Office and

53 Dermond O’Donovan suffered from a severe drug problem and depression. Gaskill eventually considered him an embarrassment (Gaskill 91, 105).

Members of Parliament, one of whom, George Strauss, was piloting his Theatres Bill through Parliament. However, in traditional English manner, George Strauss got his bill through Parliament, I kept my job, the Arts Council maintained its support and in the autumn of 1969 the British Council sponsored a tour of two of Bond's plays. The fight was a hard one, which has taken up much time and energy on the four years but totally justified in establishing an important writer. (English Stage Company, 1970 4)

In September 1968, the fight was won, with the effect that not only the Royal Court but all theatres and companies in Britain were free to put on the stage what once had been forbidden. The abolition of stage censorship thus made way for the fringe and the pub-theatre movement to grow stronger. A whole new field of radical, experimental and political theatre was to emerge. This was to affect the Royal Court as a writers' theatre immensely.

Gaskill's regime saw the Court case after *Saved*, the battle with the Lord Chamberlain, a dearth of good new plays, financial strains, the loss of the actor's studio, his rows with the critics, animosities between himself and Council, the taking over of the club upstairs as a space for experiments, the closing of the club from July '67 to March '68 due to a fire, the workshops, the establishment of the George Devine Award, and the success of the school schemes. Thus, in spite of many setbacks, Gaskill also had noteworthy successes to celebrate.

In spite of its existential struggles, the Royal Court was indeed a cultural centre in the Swinging London of the 1960s. In his autobiography, Gaskill recalls anecdotes like a reporter hiding in a cupboard in the rehearsal room to get information on the liaison between Olivier and Joan Plowright (Gaskill 54), drinking with Mick Jagger (108), Olivier plying him with whisky not to produce the *Macbeth* (92), pot being smoked in the lighting box from 1967 on (95), and Alec Guinness paying Gaskill a compliment while peeing (80). Yet, Gaskill recalls:

I remember vividly thinking that, whereas at one time I felt very centred in the theatre, I became very ambivalent about the kind of theatre I was running. For instance, the Osborne plays we put on, which made money and financed the Bond season, were two plays that I particularly disliked. I thought they were sub-West End plays and well suited to the West End but I didn't think they broke any new ground at all. (Roberts, *Court* 86)

And indeed, Bond's plays as well as Osborne's plays added their fair share to the artistic success of the Royal Court. Other successes certainly were D. H. Lawrence's *The Daughter-in-Law* (1912) as presented as part of the *Lawrence Trilogy* (*A Collier's Friday Night*, 1934; *The Daughter-In-Law*, 1912; *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd*, 1914) by Peter Gill, in 1968, and David Storey's *The Restoration of Arnold Middleton* in 1967⁵⁴. Yet, Martin Esslin commented on the Royal Court in the 1960s: "Thus do the Angry Young Men of 1956 turn into the Edwardian high Tories of 1968, the iconoclasts

54 Roberts notes that Storey was, as it turned out, a major find for the Court and, in financial terms, was "as significant to the Company's fortunes as Osborne had been in Devine's times" (*Court* 60).

of yesteryear into the satisfied upholders of established values today” (89). However, the development of the club soon proved to bring some balance to the bill, since it allowed new and experimental work into the building.

The club, the “Royal Court’s second auditorium originated from a series of experiments in spring and summer of 1968” (English Stage Company, 1970 33). After the success of these “informal presentations” (33) the fully-equipped, yet “eclectic and unpuritanical” (33) studio opened on 24 February 1969 as the Theatre Upstairs – under the artistic direction of Nicholas Wright⁵⁵. It replaced the Sunday Nights without Décor. Gaskill felt in 1970 that the Theatre Upstairs “will be the nursery of new talent in the years ahead” (4).

The year 1969 further saw the Bond season to celebrate the abolition of censorship and Gaskill’s announcement that he intended to go on leave on 12 June. The latter struck everybody at the Court with surprise. Gaskill states: “Funnily enough, I think when the battle against the censor had been won and we did the Bond season... the four years of work were justified” (95). Actor Bernhard Gallagher recalls how ambivalent working at the Royal Court felt – not only to Gaskill himself:

It was an optimistic time and you felt you were in on something special... The stage and theatre staff, too, were a bit special and the atmosphere in the place somehow engendered the feeling of a large, complicated but essentially like-minded family, all going somewhere interesting together [...] it *wasn't* all wonderful. [...] We had our fair share of late-night recriminations, weeping at parties and strong silence in rehearsals. There were times when treachery and ingratitude lurked in the wings [...]. (Doty & Harbin 27-28)

Gallagher continues: “No common enterprise, from Shakespeare’s Globe to the Berliner Ensemble, has ever held together in its original form” (28).

When, in 1969, Gaskill took a six-month leave, he left his then Associate Director Jane Howell in charge of the theatre. The Council did not think this a good idea and ended the arrangement. Jocelyn Herbert comments:

55 The Royal Court’s second auditorium was founded after a season of plays was presented in the Club Room in 1968, in order to discover whether the space would work as a studio space (English Stage Company, 1970 33). After it opened in 1969, due to fire regulation, only English Stage Society members were allowed to attend performances in the Theatre Upstairs. With the Theatre Upstairs the Royal Court became the first theatre in London with a second performance space. This second stage was largely used as a try-out space for plays by unknown writers that could – if successful – be transferred to the main stage. The Theatre Upstairs still exists today as the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs. It had to be closed in October 1975, but reopened in May 1976, was closed again that year in August for some time (Little and McLaughlin 117), and intermittently under Max Stafford-Clark (Doty and Harbin 108).

I suddenly discovered... that Bill was going away for six months abroad to do a show and I happened to see Robin [Fox]⁵⁶ and I asked did he know... and he didn't. Nobody knew and he was leaving Jane Howell to look after it all. Robin and the Council thought this wasn't a good idea. (Herbert in Roberts, *Stage* 129)

The Council asked Anthony Page to fill in, and Page brought Lindsay Anderson with him⁵⁷. However, they were to return on their own conditions and not Gaskill's: "That was simply our reaction to being elbowed out in 1965, which I think we weren't particularly pleased about. We felt [...] we're not going to just go in there and hold the fort so that he can have a holiday and then be excluded when he comes back" (Anderson in Roberts, *Court* 96). It was to be expected that this new triumvirate of Artistic Directors brought difficulties and tensions with it⁵⁸. The whole atmosphere at the Court must have been a strange one. David Hare – who had been recruited as organiser of the script department, in 1969 – recalls: "the staff were arrogant, touchy, entrenched. [...] [I] found their prickliness incomprehensible" (98). Roberts is also critical about the reign of Anderson, Page and Gaskill: "The long-term effects of the reintroduction of Anderson split the Court into factions. The wedge driven into the theatre's sense of itself was to create powerful disharmonies through the seventies. Unwittingly, Gaskill himself was partly the author of this" (130). Especially since the Theatre Upstairs caused not only a split in the work, but also further rows: "I opened the Theatre Upstairs, went away for six months, and when I came back they'd closed it. It was a bit like that because Lindsay didn't want the Theatre Upstairs" (Gaskill in Roberts, *Stage* 131).

While being largely of different opinions, the three Artistic Directors, however, clearly stood together in the Spurling-affair, another run-in with the critics. After bad reviews from Hilary Spurling of *The Spectator* and her walking out of Nicholas Wright's production of Peter Gill's *Over Gardens Out* (1968) on 4 August 1969 (Roberts, *Court* 115, 457) – "Although she had left without causing a disturbance, [Lindsay] Anderson insisted that 'in order to get out she had to climb over people'" (127) – Gaskill had decided not to extend any further invitations to *The Spectator*. Anderson comments:

56 Robin Fox had been brought into the English Stage Company by Neville Blond in 1957 as a General Manager. He was a Council and Artistic Committee Member from 1957 to 1970 (Roberts, *Stage* xx).

57 In a letter to Roberts, dated 3 November 1984, J.E. Blacksell explains: "Gaskill's decision to direct elsewhere was brought about by a clash of personalities with the Chairman [Neville Blond]. Page and Anderson were invited because of Anderson's skill in direction and Page's considerable contacts with a number of theatrical people" (*Court* 172).

58 Oscar Lewenstein recalls that the three Artistic Directors "did not work well together. The meetings were a constant battle, and quarrel. I was the chairman of the Artistic committee at the time and tried to referee the battles. I don't think any of the Minutes can indicate how stormy they were" (Roberts, *Court* 177). In his 1999 publication, Roberts also includes the following sentence from the same interview with Lewenstein: "Usually it's the decisions you get into the Minutes rather than somebody calling another person a cunt" (*Stage* 132).

[W]e were very, very annoyed about Hilary Spurling's actions... In order to get out she had to climb over people. Someone said, perhaps me, well, let's stop inviting her and everybody saying, jolly good thing, too, fuck her, and that's how we did it. Bill, Anthony and myself were totally committed to that idea. (Anderson in Roberts, *Stage* 132)

How the affair turned out to be a testing ground for the ways in which the Arts Council could control its clients is explained by Roberts. Spurling's boss, the editor of the *Spectator* "Lawson had contacted his friend, Arnold Goodman, at the Arts Council, to complain" (132). Eventually, the pressure from the Arts Council was enough to stop the Council from following the "childish course by the Artistic Directors" (Poke in Roberts, *Stage* 134). Gaskill spoke of intrigue and threats being made by the Arts Council (135): "[It] increasingly tries to control our decisions – either through blackmail of poor Neville, intrigue with Greville or, I'm afraid, Goodman's diplomacy" (135). Eventually, on 9 April 1970, Blond reported that the Arts Council had threatened to withdraw the grant for 1970/71, weeks before it was due, if the invitation to *The Spectator* was not restored (Browne 89). The Court gave in, but commented on this in a press release: "After all, the privilege of not inviting *The Spectator* was not worth the closure of the theatre. Once again the tanks have rolled and principle has to give way to force" (89-90)⁵⁹.

Apart from the Spurling-incident, the artistic team simply did not get along. Gaskill states: "I had never realized how much my old associates had resented not being asked back when I took over, as if they'd been cut out of the family firm" (Gaskill 107-108). In Gaskill's words, it becomes clear that the fate of this triumvirate was settled from its beginnings on: "I had been running the theatre autocratically for four years and found it difficult to share power. Our tastes, too, had diverged" (108). Gaskill later admitted that after Peter Gill's *Lawrence Trilogy*, which ended in March 1968, "[p]erhaps I should have left" (106). The consequences of this struggle, however, would carry well into the 1970s and last until after the triumvirate was gone in 1972: "the new generation of writers were kept away from the Court's main stage by a combination of Anderson's hostility and the work of the established writers. The loss to the Court was a whole generation of young artists" (Roberts, *Stage* 131).

Gaskill wrote in 1970: "Some years are better than others – we can never hope to equal the outburst of writing which followed the breakthrough of 1956, the fertility of writers is unpredictable and a theatre has to be patient" (English Stage Company, 1970 4). He gives examples of the new writers that had been discovered – like Christopher Hampton, John Hopkins, Jeremy Seabrook and Michael O'Neill – and the known ones – Osborne, Bond, David Storey, Donald Howarth, Arnold Wesker – whose work had been nurtured. Gaskill holds against the Arts Council's criticism of the late 1960s that his programming saw too many revivals for a new writing theatre: "we have presented several classics, which we feel we have brought something new to, and revivals of our own 'classics' which need no apology" (4). He further addresses the problems that the

59 For a detailed account of the Spurling-affair see Roberts, *Court* 99-106.

Royal Court had to face in the late 1960s, and presents the theatre as a fighter “fighting their battles” (4) and fighting for their writers.

In spite of the Royal Court’s many fights – the most noticeable of the 1960s clearly being with the Lord Chamberlain – Devine’s plans to convert the Royal Court into an art centre and later Gaskill’s return to the repertory system show that the Royal Court was lacking clearly formulated structures: it lacked a clearly formulated purpose. Yet, this it was in need of, simply because the subsidizing institutions were eager to see it. Struggles like the lack of good plays in the early 1960s and the differences between Page, Anderson and Gaskill in the later 1960s, as well as their being hostile towards the new movements added to the theatre’s lack of identity. Gaskill tries to defend the uniqueness of the Royal Court as compared to its competitors in the field of new writing:

At one time the tally of new writing in Britain was a list of Royal Court productions. Now it includes plays from Glasgow and Nottingham, from the Hampstead Theatre Club and the Traverse, Edinburgh, and from Universities who have at last started to produce new writers. But apart from Stoke-on-Trent the Court can still claim to stand alone in maintaining a relationship with its writers in the face of adverse criticism or financial loss. I think we can also say that we give writers the conditions in which their work is totally respected, uncut without their authority and undecorated by director’s fancy. This has established bonds of loyalty between the theatre and its writers which are perhaps unequalled in the world. (English Stage Company, 1970 4)

Gaskill sees the Royal Court’s purpose in its loyalty towards its writers and its fighting for their freedom. The fight against the Lord Chamberlain on behalf of Bond’s plays he sees as an example of “the fight that is sometimes necessary to establish a writer” (4). For Gaskill, it is not the Royal Court missing a purpose, but the difficulties in producing new work that lead to the Royal Court’s difficult standing. He continues: “Now writers have much greater freedom to say what they want – but to whom?” (5). He explains that Osborne is the only writer at the Court, who can actually make a living off his writing. The Court being a small theatre, the usual run for a play being eight weeks, and the growing reluctance of the West End and Broadway to start to produce new plays meant that writers did not have a large outlet for their work. In the English provinces, too, theatres shied away from producing new work. Gaskill makes an attempt at foreseeing the future:

Still, the changes in the provinces in the last few years are such that they may offer a more positive hope for the future as stages for new work than the West End.

Until that hope is fulfilled writers will still leave the theatre for films and television – however much they may feel that theatre is the touchstone of their quality. In the meantime the Court must continue as a launching pad, hoping that some of its rockets remain in orbit. (5)

Lindsay Anderson approaches the Royal Court’s dilemma of a lacking identity differently:

Of the 77 plays produced at the Royal Court during the period covered by this survey, 52 were new. Apart from the authors discussed elsewhere, these represented the work of 26

different writers. What, if anything, did these have in common? Can they, in fact, be said to represent a definable Court tradition? (19)

While Anderson acknowledges that the work of the Court has “had many different labels attached to it over the years” (19), he still isolates two distinct characteristics in the theatre’s artistic policy: “its naturalistic bias and its emphasis on social perspective” (19). Yet, Anderson points out that simply presenting the Court in terms of social drama would draw a very false picture of it; it is a writers’ theatre that never committed itself to any school of writing or political set of ideas. In spite of the contradiction that clearly marks his argumentation, he further attributes the theatre’s turn to this particular type of drama to the writers whose works simply seemed more relevant to the times than that of older, more established writers. For Anderson, Osborne is the archetypal figure in this “whole movement of writers working in a style characteristic in ethic by a kind of non-schematic progressive conscience, and in its treatment of character by passionate concern, sometimes fierce, sometimes tender, for the individual human being” (20). Anderson’s definition of Royal Court drama is vague: vague enough not to give the impression of the Royal Court as being too exclusive – a criticism it had faced since Devine’s time.

In a similar manner of freeing the Royal Court from false criticism, Anderson argues that “labels perpetuate fallacies”. One of those fallacies is, according to Anderson, that the Royal Court is understood to be a “place of grimness and severity” (21). Anderson draws on the “strong tradition of comedy which started with the delighted laughter of young people at the rhetoric of Jimmy Porter” (21). Again, Anderson cleverly makes indirect comments about the Court’s history: its attracting young audiences since *Look Back in Anger* and the fact that the new language that had been introduced to the stage – since Devine, the Court had faced the criticism that only actors speaking with a working class accent or being able to imitate one were allowed on the theatre’s stage – was delighting audiences.

Wardle writes about the policy of the Royal Court: “So any attempt to define the mysterious thing, ‘Royal Court policy’, must begin by recognizing that it grew out of an unending sequence of financial crises, and collisions between those who found the money and those who put the plays on” (210). He quotes Gaskill: “Policy [...] just means the people you’re working with” (210)⁶⁰.

The Royal Court was struggling just as much at the beginning of the 1970s, as it was at end of the 1950s: it was struggling to find a mandate, it was struggling to gain a firm financial standing in spite of producing new works by unknown authors, it was

60 Devine can be quoted on the difficulties of introducing a particular artistic policy or constant stamp for the Royal Court: “I think that in one way we suffer from a lack of stamp at the Royal Court. If I did all the productions and said ‘Right, THIS is the way we produce plays’, then we might do better at the box office. But I don’t believe that this kind of direction is very fertile for the dramatist, and what we’re trying to do here is to practice the other kind – which attempts to get the best out of each particular element in a production and make work together in realizing that play” (G. Devine, “Directing” 241).

struggling to still be a writers' theatre and not to let revivals and long-standing work alliances get in the way of new play and writers, it was struggling not to let transfers and 'pylons' get in the way of its non-commercial policy, it was struggling with the competition of other big non-commercial companies and the growing influence of the fringe movement. In the 1950s, the Royal Court had had the Angry Young label that largely shaped its reputation. The 1960s equivalent to this was the theatre's fight with the Lord Chamberlain.

4.2 Foul Play. The Ban of Edward Bond's *Early Morning*

The early 1960s saw the Royal Court in a crisis. The Court's attempts to remain the leader in new writing, after the success of the Angry Young and the 'kitchen sink' had diminished. Devine had to face internal and external criticism directed towards his policy and the quality of the artistic output of the Royal Court. Just after Devine resigned in 1965, it was William Gaskill who raised the impact of the Royal Court to a new height: it was the boldness of the Royal Court plays in the mid-1960s, the reaction these caused in the Lord Chamberlain's Office, and the Royal Court's reluctance to follow the laws of stage censorship that eventually gave the theatre back its notoriety, and backed up its importance for the British stage.

Having run into trouble with the Lord Chamberlain's Office many times before, the feud between the Royal Court and the censor eventually culminated in the total ban of Edward Bond's *Early Morning* in 1968. For the Royal Court, at the time, a total ban of a play was simply unheard of. By completely banning the play, the censor not only forbade the Royal Court the performance of Bond's play, it also prevented the theatre from making any rewrites and submitting an alternate version of the play for licence. Ultimately, *Early Morning* was the last play to ever be banned by the censor before the abolition of the Office in September 1968. It was also a chance for the censor to take one last stand and make one last attempt at prosecuting the Royal Court.

Stage censorship in Britain⁶¹ was abolished with the George Strauss's Bill, the Theatre Act of 1968, becoming law on 28 September 1968. "Though the struggle against the

61 Browne explains the procedure of stage censorship in the 1960s in Britain: "The administration of the licensing provision of the Theatres Act of 1843 was carried out by the Lord Chamberlain and his staff as part of their general duties. They were assisted by four examiners attached to the office on a part-time basis who received a statutory fee of two guineas for each full-length play read and one guinea for each one-act play. When an examiner read a play he would write a synopsis and conclude with recommendations. The synopsis and, when deemed necessary, the play would then be read by a member of the permanent staff – usually the Assistant Comptroller – who would comment on the recommendations of the examiner and add his own recommendations. The papers would then be reviewed by the Lord Chamberlain, who gave his decision. Whenever a difficult play was involved, or material cuts were in question, the Lord Chamberlain invariably

ENSOR had by no means been confined to the Royal Court, it is undoubtedly true that Gaskill and his associates conducted the main campaign” (Roberts, *Court* 85). Three Royal Court plays are generally mentioned as having been dominant in this campaign. John Osborne’s *A Patriot for Me* was banned, as Osborne refused the cuts suggested by the Lord Chamberlain. It was performed as a club performance. Edward Bond’s *Saved* was banned since Bond refused the suggested cuts, and, when performed as a private club performance, was proven to have been open to the public nevertheless. Like no club performance ever before it was prosecuted, taking the English Stage Company to court for having disobeyed the Theatre Act of 1843. Bond’s *Early Morning* was banned *in toto* from the start. Despite enormous pressure from the Lord Chamberlain, and from inside the Royal Court, it was scheduled for three club performances by Artistic Director William Gaskill, and eventually presented in one Sunday Night without Décor and a ‘secret’ press night (Roberts, *Bond* 20). Police and Scotland Yard investigations followed (Roberts, *Court* 84).

The following analysis will centre on the correspondence between the Lord Chamberlain’s Office and the Royal Court concerning Edward Bond’s *Early Morning*. It examines how fierce the censor’s actions against the Royal Court were. The total ban on Bond’s third play⁶² appears conspicuously rigorous. Some light will be shed on the reasons the Office had to take such an extreme stance. As the role of *Early Morning* can, however, not be read without explaining the general situation in the mid-1960s, and especially the proceedings following the production of Bond’s *Saved*, necessary information will also be conveyed.

With the court case accompanying the production of *Saved*, and the English Stage Company being the first to be prosecuted for having presented a banned play to the general public, though officially as a private club performance, *Saved* earned its reputation in being central to theatre’s battle against the censor. With *Saved*, the Lord Chamberlain clearly defined the Royal Court’s action of diverting the theatre into a membership club and of – in a *bona fide* manner – not checking for membership cards at the door, as illegal. As a consequence, the opposition against stage censorship rose, and the debate

read the play and frequently discussed it with the permanent staff and examiners. The decisions of the Lord Chamberlain were conveyed to the applicant by the Assistant Comptroller, who was available to discuss them with those concerned. The final decision, however, rested with the Lord Chamberlain and from the decision there was no appeal. [...] Inspection of productions was not frequent and depended on the assessment occasionally of a difficult play or resulted from complaints from members of the public” (Browne 57).

62 Bond’s first play at the Royal Court was *The Pope’s Wedding* in 1962. It was followed by *Saved* and then *Early Morning*.

was extended into parliament (Billington, *State* 183). The Lord Chamberlain, it appeared, used *Saved* as a test case to assert his power and to take a stand (Billington, *State* 183; Browne 63).

The Royal Court at the time was rather surprised by the censor's action, as it had not aggressively campaigned against the Lord Chamberlain by sticking to a practice used since the late 19th century to circumvent bans on plays: presenting them as exclusive club performances⁶³. As such, Gaskill had been fully supported by the Council of the English Stage Company in his decision to put on *Saved* (Gaskill 68). It was true that the Lord Chamberlain had sent out warnings – not only to the Royal Court – to put his foot down on this practice (Roberts, *Stage* 120-121), but nothing of the like was expected.

The situation was different with the production of *Early Morning*. Bond's play had come back from the Lord Chamberlain's Office with the short notice that the "play must not be performed" (Little and McLaughlin 111), thus having received a ban in total. Gaskill, here, aggressively and actively campaigned against the censor. He pushed to produce the play against all odds, and in spite of the legal orders that had followed *Saved*. At the time *Early Morning* was produced as a club performance, it was more than clear that this practice of circumventing the Lord Chamberlain's verdict was illegal. As such, Gaskill not only experienced pressure from outside his theatre, but also from inside: the Council of the English Stage Company and the Arts Council were not enthusiastic about the Artistic Director's plans to use governmental money – the Arts Council's grant – to produce an unlicensed play (Gaskill 98). However, the George Strauss's Bill had already been submitted to the House of Commons, and Gaskill believed that a "prosecution in the middle of parliamentary legislation might affect the Bill's chances of success" (98). It shall thus be argued that it is not the production of *Saved*, despite its spectacular court case, and its being a trigger for the debates following it, but the contentious production of *Early Morning* that can be seen as the flag ship in the Royal Court's battle against stage censorship in Britain.

After sketching the productions of both *Saved* and *Early Morning*, the Lord Chamberlain's Correspondences File on *Early Morning* will be looked at in order to learn about the severity with which the Lord Chamberlain prosecuted the play. The analysis

63 The first time a theatre ever used club performances to evade the Lord Chamberlain's power was the Shelley Society which was formed in 1886 (Browne 58). The Royal Court had for the first time produced a play under club conditions with Ronald Duncan's *The Catalyst*, in 1957. Duncan's play was performed at the Arts Theatre Club in association with the English Stage Society (Browne 58; Roberts, *Stage* 64). Little and McLaughlin write that John Osborne's *A Patriot for Me* was the first play to be shown under club conditions at the Royal Court in June 1965 (Little and McLaughlin 90). Osborne's play had been refused the licence as the suggested cuts – which would have included the most famous scene of the play, the drag ball – were not accepted by Osborne (Wardle 266). Wardle writes: "The protracted correspondence and meetings of the following months developed into the biggest battle yet fought between the Court and the censor" (266).

of the file will thus lead to insights into the agenda of the Lord Chamberlain. It will further clarify the extent to which the production of *Early Morning* put the Royal Court and the English Stage Company in danger of public prosecution and an eventual closure.

Edward Bond wrote *Saved* (1965) between March and September 1964. Having been commissioned by George Devine, the play was delivered to the Royal Court Theatre on 18 September 1964 (Roberts, *Court* 29)⁶⁴. After having gone through the hands of Keith Johnstone and Anthony Page, *Saved* was eventually picked up and directed by William Gaskill⁶⁵ (Roberts, *Stage* 108-109), and first performed at the Royal Court on 3 November 1965 (Roberts, *Bond* 14)⁶⁶. To evade censorship, it was produced as a club performance for English Stage Society members only. Since Bond had refused to include the cuts to the play advised by the Lord Chamberlain, a licence had been refused by the censor⁶⁷. The Arts Council, Alfred Esdaile, as the licensee of the theatre, and the Council of the English Stage Company had sided with William Gaskill to produce it nevertheless (Findlater, *25 Years* 91); this was not without consequences.

On 13 December, police officers attended a performance of *Saved*. Even though they were members of the English Stage Society, they reported that they had not been asked to show their membership cards, either for admission or at the bar (Browne 63). A summons was issued against the English Stage Company through its secretary Grenville Poke (Findlater, *25 Years* 91), and William Gaskill and Alfred Esdaile (Browne 63) in particular. The charge was that of presenting an unlicensed play to the general public, which was forbidden according to the fifteenth section of the Theatre Act of 1843 (Roberts, *Court* 40). The Royal Court reacted to the reports of the police officers by stating that the theatre functioned as a *bona fide* club. During the three hearings at the Marlborough Street's Magistrates Court – taking place on 14 February 1966,

64 The production of *Saved*, including the stage design by John Gunter and William Gaskill's direction, is well described in Roberts, *Court* 29-43.

65 Bond explains: "I wrote *Saved* and it was in a drawer for two years and then Gaskill became the Artistic Director and saw it and he decided on the day he read it that he was gonna do the play. It was his first day on the job. He found it tucked away in a drawer. I wouldn't have had a professional life as a writer – probably it would have been very different – without his support and the support of the Royal Court" (Personal interview).

66 Browne writes that the play opened on 11 November 1965 (Browne 62).

67 Roberts writes: "The Chamberlain's office returned *Saved* to the Court on 30 July, with a request for more than 30 cuts, including most of scenes 6 and 9. [A letter by Gaskill to Lord Harewood suggests that] at one stage the Chamberlain was pondering an outright ban" (Roberts, *Stage* 109-110). The list of suggested cuts actually comprised 53 cuts, with another three additional cuts suggested by the Lord Chamberlain himself. (*LCP CORR Saved*)

7 March 1966, and 1 April 1966⁶⁸ – the tack the prosecution thus took, was that *Saved* was not performed as a *bona fide* club production, as the Royal Court claimed.

For a long time, club productions had been a grey zone and were neither legal nor explicitly prohibited by the Lord Chamberlain. Since no club production had ever been prosecuted, the practice was believed to be immune from the powers of the Lord Chamberlain (Browne 63). The Lord Chamberlain, Lord Cobbold at the time, had fired warning shots, suggesting that he might put his foot down on the club production of Bond's second play. When he did, he eventually initiated "a test case of historic importance" (63). Yet, as Browne points out, the attack did not address club productions in general: "Seemingly the Lord Chamberlain was gunning for the Royal Court as an *avant-garde* theatre as a result of complaints from pressure groups which were forcing him to take action"⁶⁹ (64).

The court case over *Saved* saw famous witnesses in the box, such as Norman Collins, Lord Harewood, and Laurence Olivier. The appearance of the latter is broadly commented on in connection with the *Saved* case (Browne 64; Gaskill 69; Roberts, *Court* 42; Roberts, *Stage* 112). Gaskill recalls the event: "After Larry had taken the oath in faultless diction he was asked his occupation, 'I am an actor, sir, and at present Director of the National Theatre' – as if to say 'and tomorrow I shall be lucky to be touring in Scunthorpe'" (Gaskill 69). The theatricality in Olivier's testimonial was noteworthy:

He'd learnt it. He'd written it all down and [...] kept taking out of his pocket a piece of paper and was learning his lines. And he then went into the witness box and it was one of the most wonderful performances. [...] And then, when it was all over, the magistrate [Leo Gradwell] said, 'That was absolutely fascinating, but totally irrelevant'. (Poke in Roberts, *Stage* 112)

It was the English Stage Company's counsel, John Gower, who had advised the Company to get "people with as much standing in the community as possible to speak for the play" (Roberts, *Court* 41). Roberts explains that after all, the charges against the Royal Court at first seemed of a slightly obscure nature. There was a chance that the Magistrate, by possibly taking the matter to a personal level, could rage against the theatre for putting on "dirty, unlicensed plays" (41) and eventually shut it down.

The charges were based on the grounds that the public, in the form of police officers, had been able to see the performance. It was thus argued that, even though the police

68 The hearing on 1 April 1966 took place at the Marylebone Road Court (Roberts, *Court* 41-42).

69 Browne's statement is an almost exact quote of the English Stage Company's counsel John Gower. There had been confusion over why the Lord Chamberlain was so unexpectedly prosecuting on grounds of a club performance. The recorded transcript of Gower's advice to the Court reads: "I think he is gunning for the Royal Court as an *avant-garde* theatre. There are pressure groups watching the plays and presenting complaints in a concrete form and forcing him to take action. It is an attack on the Royal Court and not on club theatres in general" (Roberts, *Court* 40-41). Neither Gower, nor Browne, however, comment on who precisely these 'pressure groups' were.

officers had been members of the English Stage Society, the fact that they had not been asked for their membership cards proved that any member of the public could have entered the performance. It was demanded that the play be taken off immediately (41). Gower argued that since the Court was a *bona fide* club the performances were lawful and would continue. The central question of the hearings therefore surfaced as being whether the Court had only pretended to be a club theatre. “*Saved* was thus in the ironical position of being denied a public audience on the one hand and now being persecuted on the grounds that the public had seen it” (41).

Gaskill, Esdaile, and the English Stage Company were eventually found guilty of having presented an unlicensed play, and were conditionally discharged for a year. Fifty guineas had to be paid by the English Stage Company. The Magistrate is reported to have commented on the case at the final hearing: “I am sitting on the rock of the statute and inviting you as Perseus to come and rescue me” (41). Browne further quotes the Magistrate: “The law may be very unsatisfactory... This case will probably result in a way that nobody wanted” (Browne 65).

The Artistic Committee meeting at the Royal Court on 19 April, however, let the English Stage Society know that after the year’s conditional charge was up, it was free to stage yet another unlicensed play, with the case being retried (Roberts, *Court* 42). Findlater states: “From now on it was clear that it was illegal to stage plays anywhere without a licence from the Lord Chamberlain, whether or not they were presented under club condition” (25 *Years* 92). The Royal Court, it shows, was not afraid. Regarding that the theatre was facing the acute threat of being closed by the Lord Chamberlain due to the *Saved* affair, one could ask whether the rather mild sentence – compared to the closure of the theatre – as well as the Magistrate’s position encouraged Gaskill and his artistic team in their ensuing battle against the censor.

Gaskill sums up the *Saved* affair: “By [the time we were found guilty] the play had clocked up a tidy number of performances and had done its allotted time in the repertoire” (Gaskill 69). Roberts is more precise: “Though it played to only 36.7 percent⁷⁰ for its twenty-four performances, it did rebuild the shaky image of the Court in a quite spectacular way and placed the theatre once more in the centre of controversy” (Roberts, *Court* 24). Gaskill commented: “we were back at the centre of things” (Little and McLaughlin 88). He writes in his autobiography: “The *Saved* affair had brought to a head the case against the Lord Chamberlain’s power of pre-censorship. The following three years were dominated by the fight to break this power, a fight we actually won” (Gaskill 70).

Saved is referred to as one of the most famous plays the Royal Court ever produced, a “landmark” due to the outline and impact of its plot (Max Stafford-Clark in Doty and Harbin 73), the role it played in the battle against the censor (Billington, *State* 183), and “a masterpiece of modern drama” (Roberts, *Court* 29). *Saved* truly has a controversial plot and was perceived with much shock in 1965, and not only by the critics

70 “The play ran for 24 performances at 50% occupancy” (Little and McLaughlin 90).

– “there was verbal interruption and abuse in course of the play, and there was the odd physical punch-up in the foyers at the intervals and afterwards” (40). Bond comments that after *Saved*:

I was the sort of degenerate, ultimate, criminal, scoundrel writer who used to be abused almost in every publication. I used to get obscene letters written in what was claimed to be blood but I think actually it was just red ink. I did. And I would get letters written in shit. I was this sort of monster. (Personal interview)

At the same time, the play started “a succession of struggles with the Lord Chamberlain, extending over three years” (Doty and Harbin 10) that eventually ended with the Theatre Act of 1968: *Saved* was central to the battle against the censor due to the prosecution that followed it. Yet, it was only one of the peaks in the fight. After the controversy over Osborne’s *A Patriot for Me* and before Bond’s *Early Morning*, *Saved* was rather one of several controversial plays that the Court produced in spite of the Lord Chamberlain’s not granting a licence.

While *A Patriot for Me* and *Saved* had been refused a licence due to the playwright’s refusal to adhere to the suggested cuts, *Early Morning* received a total ban straight from the beginning. This was the second time – after Ronald Duncan’s *The Catalyst* – that a play submitted to the Lord Chamberlain by the Royal Court had received a ban *in toto*. Gaskill writes about the ban of *Early Morning*: “This was unheard of. Entire scenes had been cut before but never a complete play” (Gaskill 98)⁷¹.

The reasons for the ban of *Early Morning* mainly lay in its plot. Not only does Bond suggest a lesbian relationship between Queen Victoria and Florence Nightingale in his play, he also presents a scene of cannibalism taking place in heaven including Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, and the Royal children. Bond also makes Prince Arthur kill his Siamese twin Prince George, with whose dead corpse attached to his body he then wanders around throughout the rest of the play (Roberts, *Bond* 17-19). Rumours surfaced that bishops and the Queen herself had objected to the play (Little and McLaughlin 111). Gaskill writes:

It was rumoured that the Queen, who was known to be devoted to the memory of her great-great grandmother, had heard of the imputation of lesbianism and had said, ‘Enough is enough.’ No doubt bishops were involved, too. (Gaskill 98)

Early Morning is Edward Bond’s third staged play⁷². It was written from January 1965 to mid-1967 (Roberts, *Bond* 17). Its opening night was initially scheduled for January

71 *Early Morning* was the last, but not the only play to receive a total ban in the last months of the Lord Chamberlain acting as the censor of the theatre: three versions of the musical *Hair* (1968) were banned, too (Billington, *State* 202).

72 Bond explains: “I wrote initially five plays. But the first three were very important for me. One was a sort of a – that’s *Pope’s Wedding* – a sort of homage to the literary tradition that I was inheriting which was something like the Greeks, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and so on. I have always said that the play reads as if it had been written by Chaucer while he was walking on the seashore. And then I wrote *Saved*, which was very, very different,

1968 (Roberts, *Stage* 121), but after the play had returned from the Lord Chamberlain's Office with the note that "his Lordship will not allow it" (122) on 8 November 1967, concern about the production of the play rose and Gaskill convinced the Council to postpone the opening night (Roberts, *Court* 64). On 1 November 1967, the bill to end theatre censorship had been dropped by the government due to pressure from businesses. It was replaced by George Strauss's Private Member's Bill on 16 November (63). Roberts believes that this was the reason for Gaskill to wait until 15 January 1968 to write to the Lord Chamberlain to inquire about the total ban (Roberts, *Stage* 122). Even though it was obvious that the censor's days were numbered, the Arts Council, as well as the Council of the English Stage Company, feared his striking hard over *Early Morning*. On 4 December 1967, Robin Fox, then member of the Arts Council's Drama Panel, wrote to Neville Blond that even though they had quietly allowed the Royal Court to present three unlicensed plays the Arts Council was now "withholding agreement in relation to a fourth" (122). They decided that they "could not give agreement but [were] not saying 'you must not do this play'" (122). They feared the George Strauss's Bill to be endangered by the production of *Early Morning* (Browne 69). On 5 December, Abercrombie, the Arts Council's Secretary-General, refused Neville Blond's request to turn the Royal Court into a club once again (Roberts, *Stage* 122). As such *A Patriot for*

because I wanted to write a piece of social theatre that people would recognize. They might think it's documentary, but that would be pretty silly. They might think it's sort of social realism, but that would be silly, too. What I wanted to do was write about social reality or human reality, which is something else. That was *Saved*. And they expected me to write *Saved* mark 2. Well, what turned up was this very extravagant farce between imperialistic figures much revealed like Queen Victoria and Florence Nightingale and they have a lesbian affair and they poison the husband, Prince Albert, or they strangle him, I think. I can't quite remember. And then they go off to heaven, and heaven is inhabited by cannibals and the Prince will figure, he is a Siamese twin. And he has got rid of his – So, ehm, yeah. You couldn't imagine anything less realistic. But what I wanted to do was look at the three areas of theatre that you have to combine if you want to create drama now. There were other plays. The play that immediately followed that was set in China. And I did that because I wanted to use language in a very different, very controlled, very forceful, but simplified way. So that was part of the program" (Personal interview).

Me, Saved and Charles Wood's *Dingo* (1967)⁷³, which was performed under club conditions in November 1967⁷⁴, had been allowed to go in production. *Early Morning* was not.

On 22 January, Blond wrote to Isador Caplan to seek legal advice on the matter. In his letter to Caplan, he notes that the censor had told Lord Goodman, the chair of the Arts Council, he might decide to prosecute (Roberts, *Court* 64). Caplan's reply, dated 26 January, states that "the maximum fine would be £50, the licence was at risk and the position was a very difficult one" (64). Accordingly, Blond's pressure on Gaskill grew: as the Chairman of the English Stage Company's Council, he wanted to prevent Bond's

73 In context of the debate over *Early Morning*, Jo Hodgkinson, representing the Arts Council, at a Court's Council meeting on December 6 (Roberts, *Stage* 122), admitted that at the time the Arts Council had allowed *Dingo* to be shown under club conditions, they had not understood the full implications of the decision over *Saved* (Roberts, *Court* 64). *Dingo* had been submitted to the censor by the National Theatre. *The Stage* reported on 10 August 1967 that *Dingo* had returned so profoundly changed that it could not be put on at the Old Vic, and Gaskill decided to present it as a club production at the Royal Court ("It's Easy"). Billington writes about *Dingo*: "Wood [...] went further than any dramatist before in calling into question both Winston Churchill's mystic greatness and the motives for fighting the Second World War" (*State* 184). A confidential letter from the Lord Chamberlain's Correspondence File on *Dingo* concerning a request by the Bedford Centre to stage the play, dated 19 January 1968, explains the censor's position towards persecuting club performances: "For so long as there is any doubt as to the exact legal definition of the phrase 'acting or producing for hire' in the Theatres Act, 1843, the Lord Chamberlain proposes to continue his long established policy of accepting that plays produced by *bona fide* Private Theatre Clubs genuinely formed for the general study of the drama need not be submitted to him. The Lord Chamberlain has, on the other hand, never accepted that plays not approved by him maybe acted for hire before the general public by means of some patent evasion of the Theatres Act. A recent case involving the Royal Court Theatre, which was heard in the Marlborough Street Magistrate's Court in 1966, gave support to the view held here that the Lord Chamberlain's legal powers in this direction are very wide indeed. The Lord Chamberlain is reluctant to explore the limits of his authority in this direction, but will undoubtedly take action where, in his opinion, no distinction is made between a private gathering of those genuinely interested in the theatre generally, and the creation of some special organization, or the relaxation of the rules of an established organization, for the purpose of publicly presenting a banned play under some face saving façade of observance of the law" (*LCP CORR Dingo*).

74 Another play that ran into problems with the Lord Chamberlain was Jean-Claude van Itallie's *America Hurrah!*, performed by the famous American avant-garde company Café La Mamma (Browne 67). Little and McLaughlin write that since it was banned by the Lord Chamberlain to be produced outside of the English Stage Society's club conditions, a transfer to the Vaudeville Theatre was cancelled (Little and McLaughlin 105-106). The Arts Council, with *America Hurrah!*, was not asked for permission since the play was produced by an outside management. The application of *Dingo* was thus the first after *Saved* (Browne 68).

play from being performed. Still, it was decided on 20 February that if the Private Member's Bill got through its second reading, *Early Morning* would be produced as a Sunday Night. The censor had – according to Gaskill – stated he would not prosecute unless the play were given full production (Roberts, *Stage* 123). Yet, Gaskill still felt that “they tried to stop *Early Morning* being done, quite definitely: they being Neville and the Arts Council. The Arts Council was leaning very heavily on Neville to stop it” (Gaskill in Roberts, *Stage* 123). Also, Alfred Esdaile, as the licensee, put forward his strong concerns, eventually issuing a letter by his lawyer saying that “he proposed to take a step to ensure that it did not take place” (123). A different fear that was apparent, and put forth by Gaskill, was that if *Early Morning* was not going to be produced while the Lord Chamberlain was still in office, a prosecution under the Common Law became possible after the Act was abolished (Browne 69-70).

During the Court's Council meeting of 12 March, Gaskill and Blond finally clashed so dramatically that the meeting's minutes had to be rewritten by Lord Harewood. The draft minutes of the Artistic Committee's meeting's minutes three days later refer to the incident:

Mr. Gaskill said that at the last Management meeting he had felt dispirited, and he could not have abuse hurled at him again. He felt that some of the Committee were working against him, and he did not wish to stay if he had not the Council's confidence behind him. (Roberts, *Stage* 123-124)

Gaskill comments in his autobiography on his clash with Blond: “When it was all over [Harewood] showed me the real art of culture politics by rewriting the wholly accurate minutes of the meeting so that there would be no record of the true conflict that had taken place” (Gaskill 100).

One of the reasons for Neville Blond's attacks on Gaskill was Gaskill's tenacity to “get the play on at all costs” (98). This reflected his belief that “when the Royal Court could not put on new plays and certainly not the most important new plays, the ESC would cease to have any function” (Gaskill in Roberts, *Stage* 122). Gaskill went on with the production, and even though *Early Morning* was scheduled for Sunday Nights, Gaskill managed to sneak in a design concept (Gaskill 99). The budget for this had, however, not been run past the Council before going into production⁷⁵; a fact that Greville Poke later commented on as not being an unknown practice (Roberts, *Court* 168). Yet, at the time it caused tremendous outrage with Blond (66). It was also revealed at the meeting that the play had been sent to George Strauss M.P., who was currently reading it (66). In a letter to J. E. Blacksell, one of the founders of the English Stage Company, marked ‘private and confidential’ Blond wrote:

75 The average production costs of the two scheduled Sunday Night performances paid for by the English Stage Society were £600. The production of *Early Morning* eventually cost £2,112, leaving the Court to find a total of £1,512 (Roberts, *Stage* 167-168). Gaskill writes in his autobiography: “The production had cost £500, considerably more than an average Sunday night” (Gaskill 99).

[Gaskill] forgets he is an employee [...] for the first time in the history of the theatre I feel I would not be justified in asking the Arts Council for money which I know will be spent in such an irresponsible manner. I want a new Artistic Director and an Administrator to run the theatre. (68)

Gaskill writes: “Much of the political manoeuvring went on while I was trying to rehearse an immensely difficult play” (Gaskill 99). Not only had Gaskill caught pneumonia (98), so that rehearsals were coined by his bad health and quite apparently lain-bare nerves⁷⁶, the actors involved in the production – Jack Shepherd, Dennis Waterman, Peter Eyre, Nigel Hawthorne, and Marianne Faithfull – were also working elsewhere, too. Edward Bond wrote to his agent Toby Cole about these difficulties on 8 April 1968: “the actors were all earning their living in other rehearsals!” (Roberts, *Bond* 20). He commented on the hurried second afternoon performance for the critics: “it was a disaster, badly under-rehearsed and unconvincing. This isn’t Bill Gaskill’s fault – if he’d had time it would have been one of his best productions” (20). Bond describes the problem with Gaskill’s production:

It wasn’t a good performance. It wasn’t a good production. His production of *Saved* was brilliant. But *Early Morning* is a comedy and a satire or farce, all three of those things really, and he wasn’t good at that. So, it wasn’t a good production. But at least he stood on his principle that the play should be staged. (Personal interview)

As the Lord Chamberlain had – according to Gaskill – verbally agreed not to prosecute a performance for English Stage Society members (Roberts, *Court* 83), it went on as a Sunday Night without Décor on 31 March. While Browne writes that after the performance Gaskill was questioned by the police (Browne 70), Roberts states that even though police officers had been spotted in the audience (Roberts, *Court* 83), Gaskill and Esdaile were not questioned until a few days later, on 2 April (Roberts, *Stage* 124): “Two police officers questioned Gaskill and Alfred Esdaile. Scotland Yard admitted that an investigation had been launched that might lead to consultations with the Director of Public Prosecutions” (Roberts, *Court* 84)⁷⁷. This was enough for Esdaile, who made use of his legal right as the licensee of the theatre and banned a second performance (84).

Many were furious with Esdaile: Fox wrote to Blond suggesting “he should be asked to resign” (Fox in Roberts, *Stage* 124). Gaskill wrote to Harewood that “he must go by whatever means”, and in another letter called him “the world’s biggest liar”

76 Jane Howell recalls the rehearsals for *Early Morning*: “we never cracked *Early Morning*. I did see two rehearsals when *Early Morning* was nearly cracked, and then it all went back to the beginning again and in those two rehearsals the actors were very tired and there was a lot of pressure” (Roberts, *Court* 83-84). Howell further recalls that Gaskill was still unwell and even refused to rehearse one day because someone was two minutes late (84).

77 Bond says: “The theatre did try to stage it. They staged it for two performances. But it was all very odd. The theatre doors were locked and the police were waiting outside” (Personal interview).

(Gaskill in Roberts, *Stage* 124-125). According to Roberts, the latter document was construed as libellous and quietly filed away (125). Instead of the scheduled performance on the following Sunday, a teach-in on censorship with Kenneth Tynan, Bond, Gaskill, and John Calder, Bond's publisher, was held (Roberts, *Court* 84). Yet, Greville Poke had the idea to put on a second "non-paying, private production and call it a dress-rehearsal" (Poke in Roberts, *Stage* 124) in the afternoon of the same day. Poke recalls his idea as being a reaction to Esdaile's lawyer threatening the company to withdraw the licence:

We were frightened of it, obviously, though dubious as to whether he would really succeed.... I was puzzling out how we could deal with this thing and then I suddenly thought why couldn't we have a non-paying, private production and call it a dress-rehearsal. It was an absolute phoney thing of course, and I rang up Neville Blond, who had got Robert Fox with him at the time... and they said, good idea, go ahead and do it. (Roberts, *Court* 84)

So, on 6 April, Society members, who were mostly members of the press, were ushered into the auditorium via a side door. Michael Billington recalls:

I well remember being instructed to attend as a junior critic on *The Times*. I recall the furtive thrill of being ushered in through a side door of the theatre in order to maintain the elaborate charade that this was a not-for-hire performance. I also remember the less appetising sight of William Gaskill surrounded in the foyer afterwards by mackintoshed police officers as if he were a common criminal. (*State* 184)

Gaskill later suspected the information about the 'secret' performance had been leaked to the police. News about private performances, he says,

was being leaked all the time. We think it was being leaked by the box-office, who were absolutely treacherous... when you know the police are actually waiting for you to do something, you suddenly become aware that there are spies in the theatre. It gets very unpleasant. (Gaskill in Roberts, *Court* 170)

Despite the elaborate charade, the reviews of *Early Morning* were bad. Added to that, in the *Daily Telegraph* on 9 April 1968, Esdaile demanded Gaskill's suspension and offered his own resignation claiming that having put on *Early Morning* "had no artistic merit and I think Mr. Gaskill and Mr. Bond are doing it just for the publicity" (Esdaile in Roberts, *Court* 85). At the same time, Poke, in the same newspaper report, speaking for the Court's Council, supported Gaskill, thus showing closed ranks on the side of the Court's governing bodies to the public (Roberts, *Court* 85). Only the hostility inside the theatre remained. Gaskill recalls the time as having been "too fraught and I'd lost the support of the Council really on that. It all became too tense. I don't remember it as a period of great solidarity. I remember it more as a period of hysteria" (Gaskill in Roberts, *Court* 85). Still, during the struggles about *Early Morning*, at the beginning of April

1968, on 3 April, Gaskill already presented a fairly fixed season for 1968/69 which included three of Bond's plays – *Narrow Road to the North* (1968), *Saved*, and *Early Morning* – making for a celebratory Bond season in early 1969⁷⁸.

It was at this point that politics overtook events at the Royal Court and saved the English Stage Company from additional trouble. Roberts writes: “[T]he absolute tenacity of Gaskill in driving *Early Morning* through to a production of sorts provided the clinching argument against the Chamberlain” (*Court* 85). On 28 September 1968, the George Strauss's Bill went through and the Lord Chamberlain was deprived of his power over the stage. Gaskill's boldness had annoyed many, and it is not clear what the fate of the company would have been, had politics not intervened on a higher level.

The Royal Court was left with the fear of private prosecution under the Common Law, as the Lord Chamberlain had also shielded theatres from private claims. But nothing happened. During the crisis, in December 1967, Gaskill's contract had just been renewed for another two years (64) and Esdaile stayed on the Court's Council, last as Vice-Chairman, until the post was abolished on 1 September 1970.

When comparing what was at stake for the Royal Court in the contexts of both *Saved* and *Early Morning*, Gaskill's actions in the 1968 production were much more risky. In 1968, he knew that a club performance was likely to be prosecuted. The censor had allegedly uttered a verbal assurance that he would not step in, yet, that did not prevent him from interfering. Really, it seems somehow confusing that Lord Cobbold agreed not to prosecute, while at the same time police were sent to the Royal Court to question Gaskill and Esdaile. After 2 April, therefore, it was clear that the censor was not in favour of the Royal Court's doings. But, Gaskill did not step back. He went on in a most provocative fashion – by inviting the press to a secret performance. News of the press night would have gone out the next day in all the papers, had it not been leaked before. Gaskill's challenging the Lord Chamberlain certainly was a courageous move and he did lead a major campaign against the censor, as Roberts suggests (85). His objective to stand up against the Lord Chamberlain would newly define the Royal Court and its work. At the time, however, that was not apparent, and Gaskill was seriously jeopardizing the theatre's and the company's future.

Before analysing the correspondence between the Lord Chamberlain's Office and the Royal Court concerning the production of *Early Morning*, a short detour shall be taken in order to convey grounds for later comparisons. When *Early Morning* received a total ban, the Lord Chamberlain's Office did not produce a list of cuts suggested, but opted for the outright ban, not stating clear reasons; in the case of *Saved*, they, however, did produce a list. The Lord Chamberlain's Correspondence file on Edward Bond's *Saved* contains the Reader's Report on the play, a long list of the suggested cuts and the note: “Theatre Act 1843 Prosecution of English Stage Company (Royal Court Theatre) due

78 Together with *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, *Saved* and *Early Morning* were first publicly performed in 1969 as part of the Bond-season.

to Club production of ‘SAVED’ by Edward Bond April 1966” (*LCP CORR Saved*). C.D. Heriots’s reader’s report of 30 June 1965 reads:

STAGE PLAY SUBMITTED FOR LICENCE

Production October, 1965

A revolting amateur play by one of those dramatists who write as it comes to them out of a heightened image of their experience. It is about a bunch of brainless ape-like yobs with so little individuality that it is difficult to distinguish between them. They speak a kind of stylised Cockney but behave in an unreal way, not because what they do is false, but that their motivation is not sufficiently indicated.

Pam is a brainless slut of twenty-three living with her skittish parents who have not spoken to each other for years. Neither of them cares what Pam does, so that she naturally sleeps with whoever she can pick up, though she is ‘going steady’ with Fred. She picks up and sleeps with Len, who, as far as his moronic intellect goes is a romantic with vague dreams of marriage and settling down. She has a child; Fred’s and neglects it, so that it cries day and night. Neither she nor her parents pay any attention. Fred has given her up, but she drags after him, whining and nagging. Eventually, late at night in a park, she finds him with The Gang and after an exchange, flounces off, leaving the pram with the baby in it. The gang first kick the pram, pull the baby’s hair, punch it, and finally stone it to death and go off, leaving lighted matches in the pram.

Fred is the only one to be charged but even he seems to get off with a short prison-sentence and comes out absolutely unchanged. No one ever expresses a word of criticism. They are all moral imbeciles. Pam still hankers after Fred, but he has been sleeping with her mother while Len has watched through the floor-boards. Nobody seems to mind much except Pam’s father who has a hysterical outburst which does nobody any good. Pam does mention that life is pretty grim but nobody does anything about it. Len ~~still hope~~ half-heartedly begins to pack but in the end remains in the house as one of the family. The last scene is mostly a mime in which Len mends a chair (as a sort of symbol of domesticity) while Pam and her parents behave as they always behaved, untidy, feckless, quarrelsome and brutishly stupid.

The writing is vile and the language and conception worse, whether this could ever be considered a work of art is a matter of opinion; but it does seem that the taste of Messrs. Devine and Richardson has gone rancid – though with all the public money at their disposal, I don’t suppose anybody cares.

The tone taken in this Reader’s Report clearly shows strong disapproval. The reader used this report not only to declare Bond’s writing as amateurish and vile, he also includes political statements about Devine and Richardson that show an obvious disapproval of their work being publicly funded. It is not surprising that the list of suggested cuts comprised 53 cuts:

Alter	p.3	Alter ‘arse’
Warn	p.4	Warn about position on couch
Cut, alter, warn	p.5	Cut the reference to moving virility <u>and</u> alter ‘Chriss’ <u>and</u> about that Pam must not have unbuttoned too far
Cut all	p.6/7	Cut from ““Our blokes...” to “...over sixty <u>and</u> cut the two jokes about the woman with three tits
Cut	p.8	Cut ““Oo, yer got a lovely soft centre. First time I seen choclit around it”
Warn	p.9	Pam must not undo Len’s belt

Alter	p.14	Alter 'sod'
Cut	p.19	Cut "As 'e got 'is rudder stuck?"
Cut both	p.20	Cut "'Oo's bin 'aving a bash on me duckboards?" <u>and</u> cut 'Bashin's extra' and cut 'a bit of a grind'
Alter	p.21	Alter 'bugger'
	p.23	Alter 'Get stuffed' and cut the marked passage
Alter	p.24	Alter 'Bollocks'
Cut	p.26	Cut from "'Av 'er 'ol dad..." to "Twisted yer what?"
Cut all three	p.27	Cut "She's still got the regulation holes" <u>and</u> cut "What yer got at the top of your legs?" <u>and</u> cut "Roger the lodger" on this page
Cut	p.28	to "An' polished 'is bell" on the next
Alter both	p.40	Alter 'bugger all' <u>and</u> 'for Chrissake'
Alter	p.41	Alter 'thank Chriss'
Alter both	p.46	Alter 'Crap' <u>and</u> 'sod'
Alter & Cut	p.49	Alter 'tight arse' <u>and</u> cut from 'Skip?' to '...get that any time'
Cut	p.50	Cut from 'like the fish that got away' to 'Thass why she's sick'
Alter twice	p.51	Alter 'Chriss' (<u>twice</u>)
Alter	p.53	Alter 'Cobblers'
Alter twice	p.58	Alter 'Chriss' (<u>twice</u>)
Alter thrice	p.59	Alter 'Chriss' <u>and</u> 'bin though you' <u>and</u> 'piss off'
Alter	p.60	Alter 'get stuffed'
Cut	p.61	Cut "Buggered up. Like your arse."
Alter & Cut	p.62	Alter "piss off" <u>and</u> cut "It'll crap itself to death"
Cut & warn	p.63	Cut from "Thought they was pink" to "...take after its dad." <u>And</u> warn that there must be no indecent business with the balloon
<u>Cut all</u>		<u>Pages 64 to 73 cover the torture and death of the baby</u>
Alter & cut	p.66	Alter 'sod' <u>and</u> cut "Less case its ol' crutch" <u>and</u> cut the throwing of the napkin in air
Cut & warn	p.67	Cut from 'gob its crutch' to 'Got it' <u>and</u> warn that there must be no spitting at the baby
Cut	p.68	Cut "'Ere can I piss on it? Gungy bastard"
Cut & warn	p.69	Cut from "look! Ugh!" to "...in its eyes" <u>and</u> warn that there must be no business of rubbing the baby's face in its own excrement
Alter	p.70	Alter 'Chriss'
Alter	p.71	Alter 'sod' and alter 'slasher'
Alter both	p.72	Alter 'Chriss' <u>and</u> 'sod'
Alter	p.74	'bugger all'
Alter	p.76	Alter 'Chriss'
Alter	p.82	Alter 'Chriss'
Alter	p.84	Alter 'Chriss'
Alter	p.88	Alter 'Thank Chriss'
Alter both	p.95	Alter 'bugger' <u>and</u> 'bugger it'
Cut	p.96/98	A scene where Len mends the top of Mary's stocking while she is wearing it. I think this is gratuitously selections and the whole scene should come out.
Alter both	p.101	Alter 'shag' <u>and</u> 'sod'
Cut	p.107	Cut from "'an I 'as a little slash in 'is tea" to "...sugar in" [...]
Cut	p.108	Cut "We ain' got a crawl up yer arse"
Cut both	p.109	Cut the verse about the goalkeeper's daughter <u>and</u> cut "An tryin'

a remember whass up your legs”
 Cut p.111 Cut “Did yer piss in it?”
 Alter p.113 Alter ‘Chriss knows’
 Alter p.117 Alter ‘Chriss’
 Leave p.125 Cut from “I juss give ‘er a ‘ad” to “...she was late”
 Cut p.127 Cut “I had ‘er squeeling like a pig”

Otherwise reluctantly

RECOMMENDED FOR LICENCE

C.D. Heriot (*LCP CORR Saved*, N.B.: Underlined passages are marked red in the original document.)

In addition to this lengthy list, the Lord Chamberlain himself added a few more cuts:

The Lord Chamberlain has directed the following additional cuts be made: –

p.23 “‘E knocked’ it off in the back a ‘is car last night” and “‘E was knockin it off in the back an“

p.28 From “I knew a bloke once reckoned ‘e knocked off ‘is grannie”... to “thought it was his sister”

p.59 “You’r must be the only stiff outside the churchyard she ain’ knocked off”

Gaskill had sought advice from his mentor regarding eventual problems Bond’s plays might cause with the censor. Devine had written back in April 1965:

The intrinsic violence will automatically disturb the reader.

I have marked with pencil all the things I could spot that are likely to meet with objections. I may have missed some. It should be checked.

My advice is to cut out all the words we know will not be passed – such as bugger, arse, Christ, etc. before submission. To have them in creates immediate hostility. The problem is to get the play on with a licence: not to alter the L.C. I presume.

I suggest that Charles Wood’s technique is a good one. Swallow pride and reinvent, even one’s own swear words and phrases. Rewrite scenes, if necessary, to retain intrinsic rhythm, etc. rather than arguing over words and phrases which he will never yield on.

Cut out stage directions which suggest sexual situations. I have bracketed these.

I think you might get away with the sticking scene if you present it carefully, as I have indicated. Often things are said, which don’t always need to be said – except in free circumstances which you don’t have.

As for the baby, I don’t think the scatological bits will get through under any circumstances. Worse kinds of violence may well be passed but references to shit and piss will never pass in my opinion.

I suggest E.B. works on all this – show it to me again if you like...

The passages I have marked with a squiggle are dubious – finally it’s give and take, but the shorter the list of dubious passages and obvious disallowances (piss, bugger, etc.) the better chances you have.

P.S. a few less bloodies would help – esp. Act II.

(Devine in Roberts, *Court* 30)

On Gaskill’s and Bond’s part, however, there was no margin for diplomacy. The play was submitted to the Lord Chamberlain’s office as it stood on 24 June 1965; the reactions Devine had anticipated clearly showed. The reader’s list of suggested cuts tells that ‘E.B.’ did not work ‘on all this’.

As such, the suggested cuts to *Saved* were more than substantial. No letters were written to suggest possible different alterations to the Chamberlain in an attempt to adjust to his wishes and yet keep the play intact. Bond simply refused to change his play:

They'd said to me when *Saved* was staged, the theatre said to me 'Alright, this is what happens, so now we go along and we barter with the Lord Chamberlain. And will you allow me to say that and then we won't say that. And will you allow me to do that and then we won't do that.' Well, perhaps you could do that with a lot of plays, but it would have been grotesquely stupid to do it with *Saved* because the most important things in the play, he would not allow. So it would just be pointless. There was nothing to debate. And even if there had been something to debate, I would not debate with him, because I am not going into a room armed only with my talent and my abilities, whatever they are, and my needs, which are enormous, compared with somebody who's got the law on his side. It's ridiculous and so I said 'no'. I said, 'Look, one of us has to go. It's either him or me. And it's gonna be him. And that was the position I adopted. (Personal interview)

Gaskill and Iain Cuthbertson visited the Lord Chamberlain in his office on 3 August 1965 to talk the matter over, but the censor was unresponsive (Roberts, *Court* 30). A letter Gaskill wrote to Harewood shortly after, also suggests that the censor was at one time pondering an outright ban (Roberts, *Stage* 109). As a consequence, Gaskill proposed to the Management Committee, on 9 August, to turn the theatre into a club (Roberts, *Court* 30). It was obvious that the Lord Chamberlain was outraged over *Saved*. Bond's reluctance to make the suggested cuts only fed into this, and the famous course of events was set off.

Roughly one and a half years after the court case over *Saved*, on 4 August 1967, *The Daily Mail* reported that *Early Morning* would not be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain by the Royal Court and accordingly not be licensed. At the same time, the play was advertised as a club performance. Gaskill was quoted: "Mr. Bond feels it should not be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain. He does not want the censor's dirty paws on it – which I sympathize with" and "The Lord Chamberlain would not pass it anyway", "I will not wait the 18 months which we are told it will take to get rid of him" (Marlborough). *The Sun* reported the same, stating that Gaskill had, the day before, said that Bond's new play would not be submitted, quoting the Artistic Director: "I think [the play] is disturbing, not because of the royal sequences but because there is a lot about death in it" (Reed, "Victoria Play Takes Risk").

Even so, on 18 October 1967, *Early Morning* arrived on the desk of Mary Fisher of the Lord Chamberlain's Office at St. James's Palace, accompanied by a letter from Sarah Walton – Secretary to Helen Montagu, who was at the time General Manager of the Royal Court. The letter was dated 17 October 1967, and postal orders to the value of two guineas, to cover the cost of the reading fee, were included. Walton wrote that a presentation of the play was planned in January 1968 (*LCP CORR Early Morning*). The Reader's Report by T. B. Harward, dated 25 October 1967, reads:

This is a historical fantasy in three parts. The author, however, states that 'the events of this play are true'. While the characters are all figures from the XIXth century and mainly

royalty, the action appears to take place some time after the present. The author does not set out to dramatise real historical events but weaves a satirical fantasy around known public figures.

The characters include: Prince Arthur and Prince George, Prince of Wales, who are shown as Siamese Twins; Prince Albert, Disraeli, Gladstone, Queen Victoria and Florence Nightingale. Queen Victoria and Florence N. are shown as having a lesbian relationship and the latter, also, on occasion sleeps with Gladstone and Disraeli together.

The action opens with Prince Albert plotting Queen Victoria's assassination with Disraeli who plans to become dictator. Prince George's engagement to F.N. is announced by the Queen, although this poses a problem for the Siamese Twin, Arthur. A bizarre trial of cockneys follows held before the Queen; they are accused of killing and eating a member of public who was standing in the same queue while waiting to see a film. The assassination attempt becomes a macabre farce in which Prince George is accidentally shot; and Albert is strangled with his Garter by the Queen. The second part opens with a period of confusion and revolution and from here the plot dissolves into unrelated episodes. The third part finds the entire company in heaven where the fantasy becomes further confused and they finish by eating each other.

There may be some dramatic truth in this nightmarish plot and distorted characterisation but it is not a normal vision. It is possible to see this play as a weird phantasmagoria, making a strong sour statement about power and politics in the Victorian Age. But the defamatory treatment of the chief characters (principally royalty apart), the play appears to this Reader to be the product of a diseased imagination; cannibalism and lesbianism may be legitimate themes for dramatisation, but not in this context.

It is not recommended for licence.

Attention is drawn to the following passages which will indicate the general tone and character of the play:

Stage directions	Part I/7	“(Arthur and George come on. It is seen that they are Siamese Twins)”
First reference to alleged Lesbianism of Queen V,	I/19	“Darling, I won't hurt you.”
Ditto	I/21	“Queen V. raped me... Her legs are covered in shiny black hairs.”
Q.V. speech	I/23	“Lord Chamberlain, you are like the bishops who always said amen after he'd lain with his wife. She became frigid.”
Alleged lesbianism of Q.V.; dialogue with F.N.	I/24	from: “Darling...” to: “...He must be stopped.”
Q.V. speech	I/29	“I don't like to see them linger... (She strangles Alberts with the Garter.)”
	2/11	“... 'is balls... Chriss”
Alleged lesbianism	2/12	from: “Victoria sits and knits...” to: “The Court will go into mourning”
Indecent reference to Q.V.	2/21	“I'd rather cock 'er... dead.” “She makes yer piss run cold.”
	2/23	“...yer silly old bugger” (George shoots himself.)
Prince Arthur speech	2/25	“Undo his flies (He does so) She got her souvenirs” (He goes to Len and fastens his flies)”
Alleged lesbianism		

	2/29	from: "Florrie, you're not wearing..."
	2/32	to: "...Freddie don't leave me."
Prince Arthur still carries	2/30	"(Arthur comes on. George is still attached to him. But a leg, and the skeleton of his dead arm and half the ribs gone." Siamese twin attached to him
Indecencies	2/33	All scene seven
Arthur is being murdered for the murder of his brother.		
The jury swears itself in:		
	3/3	from: "He rapes little girls..." to: "...disease after him."
Len appears with dismembered limb. Stage directions.		
Cannibalism begins		
	3/5	"(Len runs downstage carrying a leg, It is torn off at the thigh and still wears sock and shoe. The stump is ragged and bloody. Len chews. The crowd fight round him like sparrows.)"
F.N. speeches	3/8	"...People thought I was invalided, but really I'd opened my own brothel." "I was in bed with Disraeli and Gladstone. They always shared a booking."
Stage directions	3/14	"(Albert comes in. He carries a pair of arms)"
	3/15	"(The mob starts pulling Albert to pieces. George helps.)"
Refers to Arthur		"(he takes a piece of Albert and chews.) Eat!"
s.d.	3/26	"(George comes on. He chews a bone and he has a stack of bones under his arm.)"
Q.V. speeches		"It should have gone when we ate him." "Give me those bones. (He gives her the bones, but keeps the one he is chewing.)" F.N. had Arthur's head (less the body) hidden in her lap
	3/28	"(Then she uncovers her lap. Arthur's head is in it.)"
Arthur's speech indecent		
Refers to F.N.	3/29	"I could make love to you. Now. I can feel it. Hard. That's why I like it in your lap."
F.N. talks to Arthur's head under her skirt		
	3/32	"(To Arthur under her skirt) Stop it! (She smacks him)"
s.d. refer to F.N.	3/35	"(She falls with her feet in the air. Q.V. sees the head between her legs. She graps F.'s legs and holds them up. She twists her head round so that it is in line with Arthur's)
s.d.	3/41	"(They all sit round the coffin except F.)... (They all eat.)"
Q.V. speech	3/42	"I'm working out a roster for the order in which we're eaten. There'll be no arguments then."
It is recommended that all part three be read.		
T.B. Harward 25 Oct/67/		

On 30 October, J.F.D. Johnston, the Assistant Comptroller, wrote to the Royal Court that Bond's play had been received. On the same day, Johnston sought the opinion of C.D. Heriot – the same reader who wrote the Reader's Report on *Saved* – to look at the play, since Harward had rejected it, and he himself had not yet had a chance to look at it. Heriot wrote back on the following day: "I have read the manuscript and agree with everything Mr. Harward has to say about this maniac play. I certainly agree that it should

not have a licence". Eventually, on 5 November, Johnston wrote to the Lord Chamberlain:

I have read this mad play, and I am quite sure it should not be licenced. The plot is difficult to follow, and gets more and more meaningless. I think the author must have a very sick mind, and I cannot conceive that anyone would want to see the play, except possibly in anticipation of the zany treatment of Queen Victoria and her relationship with Florence Nightingale.

It is a weird mixture of supposed history and modern trappings of the cinema, TV, radio, etc.

To me the cannibalism in the third act is disgusting, even if it were to be played as farce. When I began to read the play, I hoped in a way that I might be able to disagree with both Readers and recommend a licence in some form but with the best will in the world this just does not seem possible.

A short note on the letter in the Lord Chamberlain's handwriting reads: "I agree. C. 8/11". Thus, on 8 November, Johnston wrote to the Royal Court that he was "desired by the Lord Chamberlain to express regret that the stage play EARLY MORNING, by Edward Bond and submitted by you on October 18th cannot be allowed".

In the following months, the Royal Court continued its campaign against the censor⁷⁹. Yet, it took Gaskill well into the new year to react to the Lord Chamberlain's ban. He replied three months after Johnston's letter, on 15 January 1968:

Dear Colonel Johnston,

I have hesitated to reply to your letter of November 8th, 1967, in which you told us that the Lord Chamberlain disallowed Edward Bond's play EARLY MORNING. You must know as well as I that it is the first play submitted by us which you have completely disallowed. In the case of both A PATRIOT FOR ME, and SAVED you demanded drastic cuts, and in so doing showed us where you found the plays offensive.

In the case of EARLY MORNING we have no such indications and can only guess why this play should be singled out for an absolute ban. The play involves various factors which from our past experience of censorship might give offence to His Lordship:

1. Lesbianism, though this is a comparative minor part of the play, and is certainly nowhere near as important as in THE KILLING OF SISTER GEORGE.
2. Cannibalism, though this is, of course, metaphorical.
3. The presentation of the Lord Chamberlain as a comic figure, though again this only occupies one scene.
4. The presentation of royalty, in this case, Queen Victoria as not wholly sympathetic.

I cannot help thinking that it is the last point which may have produced the total ban. I hope you have not been misled by the author's statement on the title page, "The events of this play are true".

The play is an intensely subjective, poetic fantasy about the author's own experience in the world today. It is not intended to have any historical truth whatsoever, and the work it most resembles is probably ALICE IN WONDERLAND, Queen Victoria is a symbolic figure like the Queen of Hearts, always shouting, "Off with her head", Gladstone, for

79 On 1 December 1967, the *Brighton Gazette* wrote about the Royal Court visits to the New Venture Theatre club to "to talk about the vexed subject of censorship and the modern theatre" (Hanson).

instance, is a typical Trades Union Leader of today, and bears no resemblance to his historical counterpart. The very fact of Victoria having Siamese twins shows immediately there is no historical basis for the play, and that it is meant to be seen as a fantasy.

In every other way, I would consider it to be, a much less disturbing play than the same author's *SAVED*, and certainly contains no scene as violent as the stoning of the baby. This is not just my own reaction, but the considered views of many people who have read both plays.

It would be helpful if I could have some clear indication as to the reasons for this ban and to ask you whether because of the court case over *SAVED* that there may not be some undue sensitivity to this writer's work, and some possible misinterpretation of his intentions. Any play coming from this theatre and in particular by this author must be scrutinized by a commercial management, and may lead you to see harm where none is intended.

Yours sincerely,
William Gaskill

Johnston replied on 18 January:

Dear Mr. Gaskill,

I am desired by the Lord Chamberlain to acknowledge your letter of January 15th, relating to the play *EARLY MORNING* by Edward Bond, which he has refused to allow.

The Lord Chamberlain wishes me to say that whilst he understands the play to be a fantasy that fact does not absolve it from being required to conform to the general criteria upon which plays are judged.

The play *EARLY MORNING* comprises mainly historical characters, who are subjected throughout to highly offensive personalities and untrue accusations of gross indecency. They are selected for insult apparently as being nationally respected figures with long records of devoted service to their country and fellow citizens.

Whilst lesbians, hetero-sexual perversion, cannibalism and false accusations of murder may be legitimate subjects for some plays, the Lord Chamberlain does not agree that they should be falsely attributed to historical personages of recent date. If allegory is required then the characters should be allegorical.

Since the Lord Chamberlain's disallowances are of so fundamental a kind it is, I am afraid, beside the point to detail phrases which give particular offence.

Yours sincerely,
J.F.D. Johnston

Gaskill's response of 30 January 1968 clearly shows that he – despite Johnston's letter – did not consider the debate over:

Dear Colonel Johnston,

Thank you for your letter of January 18th. You have still not answered the question why the Lord Chamberlain should have placed this particular play under an absolute ban, nor do you indicate any area of compromise.

Does his Lordship mean that plays which insult "historical personages of recent date" are automatically banned outright? Would this be true of a play about Lenin and Trotsky, and how recent does the date have to be? Would the play be acceptable if it were about Queen Anne rather than Queen Victoria?

Is his Lordship's main objection to the use of these specific historical personages and if they were changed would he be prepared to licence the play? Would he licence the play if the characters were totally non-historical?

I have to know the answer to these questions before I can possibly approach the author to see if he would accept any compromise. However, at present you offer no opening of any sort of discussion. If his Lordship is not prepared to consider the matter any further, we shall present the play for Club performance in the usual way.

Perhaps you could let me know whether you think there is any point in our discussing the matter any further, which I am more that prepared to do before we take this final step. Could you also let me know whether his Lordship would have any objections to such Club performance.

Y.s.

William Gaskill

The cynicism in Gaskill's tone cannot be missed. Also, it was more than clear to him that Bond would not agree to make any changes to his play. Gaskill suggesting a club performance can be understood as an offensive move, forcing the Lord Chamberlain to put his cards on the table. Gaskill's first letter had shown that he was well aware of the tensions Edward Bond's authorship – rather than the plot of the play, as he put it – caused with the Lord Chamberlain's Office. Bond himself, however, does not see his authorship as crucial to the banning:

I am sure *Early Morning* would have been banned. There is absolutely no doubt about that. The play involves a member of the Royal family. I mean you could go back several hundred years and perhaps write a play, but anything that was in the living memory of people was still alive to do with the Royal family. That's what mattered of course to the sovereign. I don't suppose she read it herself, but her secretary did or whatever. There would be no possibility of it being staged. (Personal interview)

Still, planning a club production despite the total ban and the court case, in 1966, over *Saved*, was more than a bold move by Gaskill. Bond explains:

It was a very curious situation, because it was one of these English convention things. The law was, you couldn't put on a play if the censor hadn't passed it. So they got round this by saying 'Well, we're not putting on the play. This is a club and therefore it's not a public performance. You have to be a member of the club. Which is a sort of little contrivance. What you had to do was, when as a member of the public you went to the theatre box office and bought a ticket you also had to sign a form saying 'I'm a member of this club. My membership fee is the ticket.' It's absurd. [...] The whole thing was grotesque. It was like Gilbert and Sullivan. I don't know if the theatre did ask permission to put it on as a club performance. They were asking to do something which was illegal and a Magistrate had decided it was illegal. (Personal interview)

On 2 February, the matter of *Early Morning* surfaced again in the newspapers. The *Evening Standard* reported that the play had been postponed, yet again. After *Early Morning* had originally been scheduled for January 1968, and was postponed until April, it was said to have been rescheduled again, until the next season. Neville Blond, as the Chairman of the Royal Court's Council, was quoted in the *Standard* saying the play would be produced in autumn ("Postponement of Court Play"). It was further reported:

The Royal Court say they did submit the play to the Lord Chamberlain, knowing that he would object to it in toto, and they have therefore planned a club production. They attribute the repeated deferment to the illness of the Artistic Director, William Gaskill, but the

various people involved are extraordinarily reluctant to comment. Mr. Bond himself will say nothing. Mr. Blond says he dare not commit himself to a date.

Johnston replied to Gaskill on the same day:

Dear Mr. Gaskill,

Thank you for your letter of January 30th.

I am sorry that in my earlier letter I did not give you specific enough answers to your various questions.

I shall be seeing the Lord Chamberlain shortly and will discuss with him the alternatives you suggest. If he is prepared to consider any of these then it would be perhaps better that we should meet, as committing views to paper sometimes makes them inflexible.

Meanwhile may I please assure you that there is no undue sensibility in the Office over any play written by Mr. Edward Bond, as a result of the court case over his play *SAVED*. Each play is treated quite impartially on its own merits, and the Lord Chamberlain is always anxious to licence plays whenever possible at the Royal Court and all theatres.

Yours sincerely,

J.F.D. Johnston

(LCP CORR Early Morning)

Johnston's suggestion of a meeting was gladly accepted by Gaskill, as is shown in his reply on 5 February. Gaskill's letter of 5 February reads:

Dear Colonel Johnston,

Thank you very much for your letter of 2nd February. I am glad that you think there is a possibility of some reapproachment on this play, and I would be very pleased to come and meet you at any time.

As you can imagine we would like to know fairly soon whether we will have to do this play for Club performance or whether it might be possible to do it publicly.

Do you think it will be possible for us to meet this week?

Your sincerely,

William Gaskill

A note from Johnston to the Lord Chamberlain of 5 February suggests that he sent both Gaskill's letter, dated 5 February, and his own of 2 February to the Lord Chamberlain, and asked the censor to read Gaskill's letter and his earlier reply, adding "May I please discuss". A meeting was set for 9 February, about which Johnston later wrote to the Lord Chamberlain:

We had a long meeting with Mr. Gaskill this afternoon and put over to him the points in your note.

He is going to talk to the author and see if there is any room to manoeuvre with him. He was not too hopeful, and if he is prepared to remove the story from history to save what might turn out to be a lot of unnecessary work he will first ask a reaction to an outline idea.

We also discussed 'club' performance and I fired a warning shot, which may have landed home, as he may not be too [?] on doing this. He inevitably asked why we took no reaction on club performances since 'Saved', i.e. 'Dingo' and 'America Hurrah!'. We told him that you only interfere when you have no other option and banned plays are put on publicly under some transparent evasion.

Another document, dated 9 February, is in the Lord Chamberlain's handwriting, presumably the notes Johnston was speaking of:

I have been through this play again and read your correspondence.

The fundamental difficulty is of course the use of historical personages and their linking (even in an [?] allegorical context) with these various unsavoury practices. The difficulty is at its highest with such recent historical personages (not only Queen Victoria but the dramatic personae generally – I excluded the Lord Chamberlain who is not waned and is not attributed with anything worse than buffoonery!!).

The same difficulty would arise to a better degree with less recent historical personages. If the play were re-submitted with allegorical and non-historical dramatis personae, I should look at the play in a new light. I think that I should probably ask for a few (but not very many) alterations, but I cannot judge exactly what or where without seeing how the play would read in an entirely allegorical form without historical personages.

Mr. Gaskill asks whether I should have any objection to a Club performance of the present script.

As at present advised, and assuming the 'Club' arrangements were the same as those ruling at the Fine of the Magistrates' decision in the 'Saved' case, I should feel bound to pass the factor to the D[irector of].P[ublic].P[rosecutions]. The decision as to whether proceedings would be instituted would not be for me, but my personal view is that the Royal Court would be [?]wise to assure that action would not be taken.

9/2/68

C.

Reading through the Chamberlain's short notes on *Early Morning* and comparing them to the pages-long Reader's Report on *Saved*, one can understand that it may not have been fully perceivable to Gaskill why one play received a total ban, while the other did not. Surely, the slander of the late Queen Victoria in *Early Morning* may have made for a harsher decision from within the Royal household, of which the censor was a member. Another reason could indeed have been Bond's notoriety – even if Bond himself does not feel this. He was, after all, fairly unknown at the time *Saved* was submitted to the Lord Chamberlain. Also, in 1965, the Royal Court had not yet launched a clearly formulated campaign against the censor, as it did after the court case. Further, Bond's initial statement that he did not want "the censor's dirty paws" (Marlborough) on his play, and his general attitude towards the censor may not have helped in the licensing of the play. Bond was well aware of his position:

I had in my mind that the Lord Chamberlain would not last long. I was gonna get rid of him. And it wasn't me alone. I mean for God's sake people had been protesting for ages and ages and ages. But it was a bit like a relay race where you have a baton and the moment came when the baton was in my hand and I was gonna cross the finishing line. (Personal interview)

Thus, despite the Lord Chamberlain denying it, it does not appear to be too farfetched to say that had *Early Morning* been written by another author or produced by another

theatre⁸⁰, it may have received a different verdict than a total ban. As if to purposely prove the opposite, Johnston, in his letter, dated 2 February, feels very obliged to emphasize that there is no special treatment for either Bond's plays or the Royal Court. Gaskill's question remains: why did the Chamberlain not interfere with the club productions of *Dingo* and *America Hurrah!*? Johnston's explanation, as stated in the note to the Lord Chamberlain on 5 February – "We told him that you only interfere when you have no other option and banned plays are put on publicly under some transparent evasion", is not satisfactory as it refers to a certain capriciousness in the Lord Chamberlain's decisions.

The matter becomes clearer when reading a letter by R. J. Hill to the Lord Chamberlain in the Lord Chamberlain's Correspondence file on *Dingo*, dated 7 October 1967. Hill's letter refers to the Office's reluctance to prosecute *Dingo* in 1967. It further clearly lays out an agenda of the Lord Chamberlain's Office in handling the Royal Court and purposely keeping the theatre in the dark about the censor's position. Hill refers to the Royal Court's request to present *Dingo* as a club performance after the National Theatre had refrained from a production:

(a) They [the Royal Court] may be frightened at our Vaudeville action [in the case of Café La Mamma's *America Hurrah!*], and are anxious not to lose a large sum of money contracting for 'Dingo' and then being hauled up in court. But they know we haven't moved against 'America Hurrah'; (b) They may have taken legal advice and this is the next move in the campaign either to get us to approve the performance, when it would be open to them to revert to their original idea of taking another theatre, or quoting our approval against us, or to get us to say the terms upon which we disapprove which they could then cite against theatre clubs generally.

In present circumstances I should refuse to meet them and should confine my reply to something of the following which would still leave the burden of decision to them, and freedom of action to us. In time they will realize that we will not unnecessarily prosecute them at the Royal Court, but if we are to keep any sort of control in this interim period we must not give the Royal Court the impression that we are impotent: 'Dear Madam [Helen Montagu], I have reported the contents of your letter of 7 Oct with respect to the play 'Dingo' to the Lord Chamberlain. He asks me to thank you for the information, and assumes your actions will be guided by the findings in the recent case of D.P.P. vs English Stage Company, Esdaile and Gaskill'. (*LCP CORR Dingo*)

Hill leaves open whether there may be a better time for a prosecution of the Royal Court: "Sooner or later, unless legislation is not too long delayed, we must again come into conflict with the Royal Court, and the decision taken whether to prosecute again or climb down. But the longer this day is deferred the better." *Early Morning* was the Lord Chamberlain's last chance to prosecute and certainly a chance to prove that he was not

80 On 29 December 1967, *The Times* reported that the Tavistock repertory company was planning to show *Saved* as a club performance in the Tower Theatre in Canonbury, in February 1968. The censor stated: "Nothing that has transpired has caused the Lord Chamberlain to alter his original views about the propriety of allowing certain parts of the play *Saved*" ("Saved Again"). The company showed seven performances of *Saved* and no prosecution followed.

prepared to “climb down”. The Office was indeed very careful about putting forth definite statements concerning club performances, and afraid that the theatre might quote the censor against himself.

On 16 February, Gaskill got back to Johnston on his promise to talk to Bond:

Dear Colonel Johnston,

Since our last meeting I have had a long discussion with Edward Bond. He feels very strongly that to remove all sense of recognisable historical personage would weaken the impact of the play, I would not wish in some way to convey who the people represented were and I can only foresee endless difficulties as to whether or not we had misled you about the precise visual nature of the presentation.

Following our conversation I would be grateful if you could clarify or ask for the Lord Chamberlain’s ruling on the possibilities we discussed:

1. Would the Lord Chamberlain be prepared to allow a limited number of club performances, of this play for one, two or three weeks, on the basis that this could equal an equivalent number of Sunday night performances.
2. Would he be prepared to accept [?] Club as bonafide if tickets were only sold to existing members.
3. What would his attitude be to performances of the play at a full time Club theatre, such as Hampstead.

You may remember we touched these points in our talk and you were somewhat hesitant in expressing a final opinion without consulting the Lord Chamberlain.

Y.s

William Gaskill

(LCP CORR *Early Morning*)

Knowing Bond’s position, it is safe to say that the conversation between Gaskill and himself was not too long; there was no compromise with the censor in sight anyway. Another point that Gaskill raises is quite central: *Early Morning*, even with non-historical personages, could still be produced including clear references in costume and set, the ‘visual nature of the play’. Due to Gaskill’s various attempts to compromise with the Lord Chamberlain on the nature and possibility of club performances, Johnston sent a note “May I please discuss” to the Lord Chamberlain on 20 February. The censor replied: “In the present state of the law, I should sent papers to D.P.P. in the event of any prosecution. Subsequent action would be for their decision & not mine”. Gaskill thus received a rather vague reply to his letter on 21 February:

Dear Mr. Gaskill,

Thank you for your letter of February 16th about the play EARLY MORNING by Edward Bond.

I quite understand what you write in your first paragraph and if I may say so, I think that your conclusions and the reasons for them are well based.

I have spoken to the Lord Chamberlain about your second paragraph. For reasons which you will readily understand, he cannot commit himself as to what his attitude would be at an unknown time in the future in circumstances which may or may not have altered. But in case it may help you in making plans, I can say that if any “club” performance were put on today on the basis of the script before him, the Lord Chamberlain would feel bound to pass the papers to the Director of Public Prosecutions. Whether or not action

would follow would not be for the Lord Chamberlain's decision and it would therefore not be proper for him to give you any indication about probabilities.

Y.s.

J.F.D. Johnston

This warning that the Lord Chamberlain will pass the papers to the D.P.P. if "any 'club' performance were put on today" is the end of Gaskill's correspondence with the Lord Chamberlain's Office, as found in the file. Johnston's second warning shot, as fired in this letter, however, did not land home. The Royal Court Theatre's Council had already decided at the meeting on 20 February that if the Private Member's Bill entered by George Strauss got through its second reading, *Early Morning* would be produced as a Sunday Night (Roberts, *Stage* 123).

On 21 March, *The Times* published an article titled "Gaskill Strikes Again" announcing that Marianne Faithful was eventually cast for the part of Florence Nightingale in *Early Morning*. It further explained that "English Stage Society members have been told [that Bond's new play] will have two Sunday night club performances at the Royal Court on March 31 and April 7", adding that the originally planned three week season was cancelled due to Gaskill's pneumonia.

Gaskill claims that the theatre went forward with the production after the verbal agreement of the censor. According to Gaskill, the Lord Chamberlain had stated that he would agree with the Sunday Nights (Roberts, *Court* 83; Roberts, *Stage* 123). Strangely, nothing of the like is mentioned in both the Office's correspondence with Gaskill and the Office's internal correspondence on the play. In fact, a letter, dated 22 March 1968, by Johnston to R. J. Hill suggests a very different picture:

The Times says the Royal Court are putting this on Sunday 31 March and Sunday 7 April. The Lord Chamberlain wants us to discuss with D.P.P. I have spoken to Nugent⁸¹ and made a date to go on over there on Monday at 12 noon. Have sent him the play file. (*LCP CORR Early Morning*)

An undated letter by Hill clarifies the situation further, while at the same time complicating matters:

The *Daily Telegraph* asked me to comment upon Mr.

(a) Gaskill's statement that the Lord Chamberlain had agreed to two Sunday performances. I said that the Lord Chamberlain would not wish me to enter into any public controversy and I would limit my reply to saying that the Lord Chamberlain's decisions were always conveyed in writing and that if Mr. Gaskill had made this statement he would presumably have correspondence to corroborate it.

I agreed that the Lord Chamberlain had refused to licence the play and had reported to the D.P.P. the fact that it was intended to be produced at the Royal Court. I confirmed that that was the usual procedure.

He further adds that he gave the same information to the BBC.

Hill clearly points out that there is no proof of Gaskill's agreement with the Lord Chamberlain. As the agreement between Gaskill and the censor about the Sunday Night

⁸¹ Oliver Nugent at the time was the Director of Public Prosecutions.

performances was – according to Gaskill – only verbal, no written document exists as evidence. Hill indirectly implies that such an agreement – in the absence of evidence – does not exist. Hill’s formulation of this matter, however, raises questions. Why did he not simply call Gaskill’s statement untrue? Adding to this, it is odd that Hill did not react in any way offended by the *Daily Mail*’s inquiry. He does not mention any surprise or that he felt any offence towards the censor, when learning about an, allegedly unheard of, agreement – after all, the media accusing the Chamberlain of foul play by acting against his own word would have been an offence against a member of the Queen’s household. Sadly, Hill’s letter is undated. It is, however, safe to say that it was written at a time when the censor had already sent the file to the D.P.P.. Also, it must have been after *The Times* article on 22 March, giving the dates of the planned production.

In the whole context of these vague statements on the verbal agreement coming from Hill, as a spokesperson of the Lord Chamberlain’s Office, it must be remembered that it was the Office, namely Johnston, who suggested not ‘committing views to paper’ in his letter to Gaskill on 2 February. An agreement with Gaskill over the Sunday Nights, however, is not mentioned in the Office’s correspondence until Hill denies written proof of it. Had there been such a verbal agreement it must have been very untypical that the Lord Chamberlain did not put his opinion to paper – as he, according to Hill, always did. First, it is therefore truly odd that there is no record of a meeting between Gaskill and the censor other than the one with Johnston. According to Gaskill’s letter of 16 February Johnston had not committed to any opinion in that meeting. Secondly, it makes one wonder why there is not only no document informing the Office’s staff of a verbal assurance, but also no document speaking of the meeting. After all, the matter must have been discussed in person between the censor and Gaskill. Yet, Hill did not simply deny a meeting, as he could have easily done.

No documents concerning the agreement can be found, despite the fact that every other decision concerning *Early Morning* has been discussed – at least – between Johnston and the censor, in writing. Johnston writes about the meeting with Gaskill on 9 February to the Lord Chamberlain: “We told him that you only interfere when you have no other option and banned plays are put on publicly under some transparent evasion”. Is it possible that Gaskill misunderstood this remark as it does not refer to banned plays that are put on privately under some transparent evasion? Judging from his own letter, dated 16 February, one has to assume that he understood Johnston quite well, as he wrote: “we touched these points in our talk and you were somewhat hesitant in expressing a final opinion”.

Further, Johnston’s letter to Hill on 22 March – before Hill’s undated letter about his encounters with the press – raises questions. Johnston apparently did not give the information about the Lord Chamberlain’s wish to send papers to D.P.P. to Hill before the article in the newspaper. Also, Johnston seems to have learnt about the dates of the Sunday Nights from the newspaper. One can learn from Hill’s statement that the Lord Chamberlain’s reaction to such a move by the Royal Court had not been discussed between Hill and Johnston prior to the article in *The Times*. This makes one wonder

why. It seems Johnston was holding back the Lord Chamberlain's decision. Had he just been waiting for the Royal Court to announce the Sunday Nights publicly to come forward with it? Did he expect the Royal Court to present the play as a Sunday Night because he knew of the Lord Chamberlain's verbal assurance, and planned to take action as soon as the theatre's decision went public?

There are two possibilities. No verbal agreement existed between Gaskill and the Lord Chamberlain, here represented by the Assistant Comptroller Johnston. The censor just did as he had said he would – in writing and through Johnston during the meeting on 9 February – as soon as he learnt about the production from the newspaper, he sent the file to the D.P.P. After all, communications with the Royal Court had officially ended a month earlier on 21 February, the date of Gaskill's last letter. The note the censor's office left Gaskill with had been a clear statement that prosecution was to follow a club production. In this context, Hill's reaction to the *Daily Mail's* request must be read as odd and strangely formulated. The absence of a simple statement like 'there has never been any verbal agreement' is conspicuous.

The other option – one which matches Hill's reaction – is, however, that the censor uttered a verbal agreement, or a statement that was likely to sound like an agreement to Gaskill, made sure that there was no written proof, and waited for the Royal Court to come forward with a production that it believed the censor had verbally agreed to. The censor then proceeded exactly like Johnston's letters had suggested and sent the files to the D.P.P..

Hill's and the Office's scheming and not putting forth clear statements is evident – even if a precise order of events cannot be reconstructed. In this context, it is noteworthy that Edward Bond does not – in spite of Gaskill's repeated mention – believe in the existence of any verbal agreement or rather the trustworthiness of the same:

I cannot imagine Bill Gaskill would have taken a verbal permission from the Lord Chamberlain. I can't imagine that that was the case. When he said this, he must have forgotten what really happened. Because he would have exposed the theatre to danger on somebody's word that he couldn't count on. (Personal interview)

Johnston and Hill met with the D.P.P. a few days after the announcement in *The Times* as the minutes of the meeting from 25 March show:

The Assistant Comptroller [Johnston] and the Assistant Secretary [Hill] saw the D.P.P. Assistant Director and Mr. Oliver Nugent (D.P.P.)

The Assistant Comptroller made the following points about this play, the Director having read the papers beforehand.

The Lord Chamberlain had very strong news about the undesirability of this play, and had warned the producer.

In spite of this warning the Royal Court theatre was staging two performances on a "club" basis on Sunday night.

The Lord Chamberlain therefore submitted the papers to the Director, with a statement of his views that the case was one where proceedings should be considered. Moreover that he felt so strongly that ~~if the Director was in doubt~~ please would he consult the Attorney-General.

There seemed general agreement that any action would need to be based upon the Gradwell decision that all plays “for him” must be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain rather than on any claim against the bona fides of the club.

This being so the Director felt diffident in proceeding in circumstances that had been “consured at” by successive Lord Chamberlains especially as he thought, the Royal Court were so limiting their performances as nearly legal and acceptable to the Lord Chamberlain as past experience indicated.

The Director said

1. He would consult the Attorney-General.
2. That he wished to know if the Lord Chamberlain would feel “let down” if no prosecution followed
3. That he would have little hesitation in taking proceedings if the “Saved” presentation circumstances were repeated.
4. That it would be improper for him to threaten proceedings beforehand.
5. The Lord Chamberlain was later seen by Colonel Johnston and Mr. Hill. The facts were reported, and it was added that successful proceedings against the Royal Court theatre for Sunday evenings “club” performances would stop the private theatre in its tracks; and invalidate a policy of 80 w 90 years standing.
6. Nevertheless the Lord Chamberlain instructed the D.P.P. be informed as follows:
 - (a) The Lord Chamberlain felt that the play in question was quite unacceptable for public performance
 - (b) He had no wish to create a difficult and possibly desproportionality embarrassing situation and accordingly left the decision as to proceedings to the D.P.P. in this case;
 - (c) If however even a Sunday night performance was illegal, and if the Royal Court performance created any considerable public comment, then he would reiterate his views on the desirability of proceedings, and if questioned as to the reactions would say that he had sent the papers to the Director
 - (d) In the present instance he would not feel “let down” if proceedings did not follow consultation with the Attorney General.
 - (e) He would expect proceedings to be taken if the play was produced later in the circumstances of “SAVED”
7. On both sides, in any case, attempts should be made to acquire the necessary evidence.

R. J. Hill 25/3/68

(LCP CORR *Early Morning*; Misspellings according to the original document)

The minutes show that had a verbal agreement between Gaskill and the Lord Chamberlain existed, it was not mentioned at the meeting with the D.P.P. Thus, had the Lord Chamberlain verbally agreed to the Sunday Nights, definite foul play was at work during the meeting with the D.P.P. It is more than apparent that the Lord Chamberlain – even if he denies feeling “let down” in case no proceedings should follow – wanted to press for a prosecution. The minutes end on the notes that the D.P.P. was hesitant to prosecute the Royal Court, but would nevertheless – presumably putting his doubts forward, too – approach the Attorney General about the matter. Further evidence needed to be produced in order to prove that the production of *Early Morning* was indeed a production ‘for hire’ – like the production of *Saved*. Thus, in the days following the meeting with

the D.P.P., the Lord Chamberlain took care of both Nugent's hesitant attitude towards the Attorney General and the lack of evidence.

M. Fisher – the same woman on whose desk the script of *Early Morning* had landed in the first place – was sent to the Royal Court on 27 March to find out if she could buy a ticket for a performance of Bond's play.

At about 11 a.m. today I went to the Box Office at the Royal Court theatre, Sloane Square and enquired about the possibility of booking two seats for a performance of EARLY MORNING, either the evening of Sunday March 31st, or Sunday, April 7th.

The Box Office Clerk – a middle aged man – said that this would be impossible. I suggested that by joining the Royal Court Club it might be possible to obtain tickets: the answer was no, the theatre was fully booked for both Sunday performances. I then said that I would join the Club and thereby be able to apply for tickets if further performances of EARLY MORNING were anticipated. The clerk said I could please myself about that, but he did not think further performances of the play were likely and that the production had been extremely difficult to stage.

I completed a club membership application form and paid a fee of one guinea and was told that the membership card would be posted to me.

M. Fisher

27th March 1968

I received the English Stage Society's Membership card by post on Friday, March 29th (Membership No. 12079)

(LCP CORR *Early Morning*)

Ms. Fisher's spying was unsuccessful. The Lord Chamberlain's attempt to gain evidence about the possible admission of a member of the general public failed.

In order to make an impression stronger than the one to be expected by Nugent on the Attorney General, the Lord Chamberlain opted for the most effective weapon at hand. In a note marked "confidential" he writes:

I mentioned last night to the Queen the present position about "Early Morning". HM agreed that this should be put firmly on the Attorney's [?].

I also said I should be grateful if she would mention the Censorship bill to the Prime Minister.

I have sent over copies of this letter and my reply.

The Queen will do so.

26[?28]/3/68

C.

The rumours about the Queen's involvement in the prosecution of *Early Morning* (Little and McLaughlin 111) are clearly true. The note does not, however, tell if she was involved in the case from the beginning, and thus partly responsible for the banning of the play. Still, the Lord Chamberlain's mentioning the "present situation" could imply the Queen's acquaintance with the 'past situation'. Furthermore, the message the note sends is Her Majesty, like the Lord Chamberlain, felt a prosecution necessary and readily assisted the censor in his proceedings.

Early Morning opened as a Sunday Night on 31 March 1968. On the day of the first performance, newspapers still said that the Lord Chamberlain's Office had indicated in advance that it would prosecute, even if the production were only for club members (Brien). No one, apart from Gaskill, seemed to have heard of a verbal agreement with the censor allowing Sunday Nights. On 1 April *The Sun* reported:

A play which is technically illegal was staged at the Royal Court theatre last night – and the management are hoping to get away with it.

A theatre official said last night: "After a week of consulting our lawyers we feel we have got round a ruling by staging the play as a club performance on a Sunday, and not as a main billing. [...]". (Reed, "Illegal Play Avoids Censor")

Interestingly, in the words of the theatre official, a consultation with the lawyers about the circumstances of the production is mentioned, but not an agreement with the censor.

On 1 April, Johnston wrote to the Lord Chamberlain to report on the D.P.P.'s current position:

1. The D.P.P. tells me that having talked again to the Attorney-General their present plans are if these two Sunday night performances pass off quietly to take no action on there.
2. The D.P.P. will then write to the Royal Court and warn them that if there are any further performances they may be prosecuted.
3. This plan is provisional, and depends I gather on the police report, per reaction, to what Marianne Faithfull gets up to etc.
4. A Vice Squad Inspector joined the Club without much difficulty, being charged 7/6d for membership, and got two tickets at the same time. This surprised Nugent who was sure they would have tighter control than before. On the other hand Miss Fisher had greater difficulty. She was allowed to apply for membership, was charged 21/–, did not receive her card for 48 hours and was told no tickets were available. She is trying again for the next performance.
5. The police Inspector told Nugent he reckoned he was incorruptible, but after last night's performance was not sure. (*LCR CORR Early Morning*)

The fact that a police inspector had been able to obtain tickets for *Early Morning* without any problems alerted the D.P.P. and the Attorney General. The censor had eventually acquired his piece of evidence. Nugent rang up the Lord Chamberlain's Office. A letter from Hill to the Lord Chamberlain reports:

Oliver Nugent rang up to say:_

- (a) the Attorney General is taking a much more serious view of 'Early Morning' since it was possible for a Police Officer simultaneously to become a Member and take tickets.
 - (b) The Police are going to interview the Royal Court authorities to make them aware that the D.P.P. is aware of, and is taking note of their intentions.
 - (c) They would like us to try for next Sunday, [?] they think things will be tightened up.
- R. J. Hill x/4

On 2 April the police went to the Royal Court to question Gaskill and Esdaile. On 9 April Johnston wrote to the Lord Chamberlain:

1. You will have seen that last Sunday's performance was cancelled.

2. Nugent tells me the Police have not quite finished investigations, as they are still trying to interview Mr. Poke (the Secretary). Esdaile was co-operative and Gaskill wasn't!
3. He thinks if unlikely the D.P.P. will prosecute [?] [he] will confirm.

The police investigations continued. Yet, the D.P.P., as at the beginning of the case, was still almost certain that no prosecution was to follow; he was right. A letter from Nugent to Johnston, dated 5 May 1968, offers an explanation for the Attorney General's refraining from prosecuting the Royal Court:

Dear Colonel Johnston,

I return herewith the script of the 'play', together with your file of correspondence.

As you know the Attorney General has decided against taking proceedings. He feels that the action taken has drawn attention to the fact that the law has not yet been altered, and had the effect of cancelling the second advertised performance.

Yours sincerely,

D.P.P.

Noting the quotation marks on the word 'play', a slight regret for the lack of prosecution can be read into this note by Nugent. Apparently, prosecution did not follow as the Attorney General believed a prosecution of Bond's play might lead to stronger support of the George Strauss's Bill. Further, it is noteworthy and also ironic that he decided against a prosecution because the public seemed to believe that the second performance of *Early Morning* had been banned by the law, not by one Alfred Esdaile. On 24 May, Hill wrote back to Nugent acknowledging the return of the script and stating that "The Lord Chamberlain is most grateful for the Director's action over 'Early Morning', the outcome of which he thinks is very satisfactory".

This is the last document in the file on *Early Morning*, it closes the case, and ends the troublesome history of Bond's plays with the Lord Chamberlain. Bond's *Narrow Road to the North*, which opened at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, on 24 June 1968, directed by the Royal Court's Jane Howell, only received "minor cuts" by the Lord Chamberlain (Birmingham Post Reporter). The play opened at the Royal Court on 19 February 1969 as part of the Bond season alongside *Saved* and *Early Morning*.

It is clear that Bond's plays, foremost *Saved* and *Early Morning*, played a crucial role in the Royal Court's campaign against the censor. They "exposed the absurdity of theatrical sponsorship and helped to promote its demise" (Billington, *State* 183). After the court case over *Saved*, "the ensuing uproar" (183) caused a definite movement in parliament against the censor. The final credit Billington attributes to the Labour MP George Strauss. Billington refers to the censor's reaction on *Early Morning*: "Cobbold struck out like a wounded scorpion" (184).

The Royal Court's battle with the Lord Chamberlain was not a clean one. With *Early Morning*, as Billington quite fittingly put it, the censor – metaphorically speaking, already on his death bed – struck one last time like a wounded animal. His attack was so fierce that he did not even recoil from playing a couple of tricks. When he learnt that Nugent was hesitant about a prosecution of the Royal Court, he did not leave it solely

up to the D.P.P. to discuss the matter with the Attorney General, but also got the Queen to approach the latter. He also sent spies to the Royal Court, in an attempt to prove trespasses.

The greatest blank in the proceedings around Bond's third play at the Court, however, remains the alleged verbal agreement between the censor and Gaskill. Fact is that Cobbold initiated a prosecution of the Royal Court by sending the papers to Nugent. And the only source referring to this agreement quoted by publications on the Royal Court remains Gaskill himself. As Hill in his undated letter to the censor, however, does not deny a verbal agreement nor a meeting between Gaskill and the censor, but merely implies that the agreement did not exist in writing – as, according to Hill, the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence always did – he does not openly deny its existence. It is thus possible that a deliberately unwritten agreement existed: unwritten perhaps, as Johnston himself had advised on not putting views to paper.

If such an agreement existed, it must be understood as foul play by the Lord Chamberlain's Office that nothing of the like was mentioned to the D.P.P., and accordingly never reached the Attorney General's ear. Prosecution would then have proceeded – with the Lord Chamberlain's knowledge – on false grounds; with the Chamberlain not lying, but holding back information for which the Royal Court had no evidence but their word. Yet again, Edward Bond is right in saying that Gaskill in holding on to the Lord Chamberlain's assurance “would have exposed the theatre to danger” (Personal interview). Thus the question remains why Gaskill holds on to the existence of a verbal agreement.

That the Lord Chamberlain did not shy away from playing tricks on Gaskill and holding back information, can be learnt from yet another undated note from Hill to the Lord Chamberlain which may have either referred to a delay in the production of *Early Morning* until after the abolition of the censor or the proceedings initiated by the D.P.P., i.e. the police investigations: “1. This I think is terribly funny. 2. It is a bull point for us as Gaskill may think that a prosecution is now certain and possibly under one of the ‘Obscenity’ acts. I hope we don't rush to put him out of suspense!” (*LCP CORR Early Morning*). The Lord Chamberlain's handwritten comment under Hill's note reads: “Not me! C.”⁸².

Further, Hill's letter concerning *Dingo* still echoes: Was the censor playing cat and mouse with the Royal Court in such a well-planned fashion? The situations referred to

82 The Vagrancy Acts for ‘Obscenity’ made prosecution of plays possible even after the censor's powers were abolished. John Elsom comments on the club system and the ‘Obscenity’ acts when he describes the abolition of stage censorship as a ‘non-event’, stating that it “had lost much of its original force” (Elsom, *Post-war* 199) in 1968. He refers to the club system as being a platform for a kind of ‘free’ theatre and adds that “the theatre was relatively ‘free’ before abolition and still to some extent ‘restricted’ afterwards” (200) due to fact that managements could still be prosecuted under various Vagrancy Acts for ‘Obscenity’, a fact that Gaskill had indeed been afraid of in the case of *Early Morning*, and, according to Browne, a reason why he rather produced the play before the abolition of stage censorship than after (Browne 69-70).

before, present Cobbold and his staff as not refraining from rather deliberate and devious actions. Were they picking on the Royal Court and Bond respectively, who did not want Cobbold's "dirty paws" on his play? Did the censor consider *Early Morning* a pure provocation as it included not only lesbianism and cannibalism, but also the one topic Cobbold despised the most and was known to take hard action against, the defamation of the Royal family? After all, Cobbold also administered the Royal family's protocol (Gaskill 98). Was the Queen involved from early on, and not just after Nugent was asked for help? Did she really say "enough is enough" because she saw the memory of her beloved great-great grandmother slandered (98), and ordered the Lord Chamberlain to ban the play? It is true that Bond deliberately wanted to run into trouble with the censor by writing *Early Morning*? Did he know that his play was going to be banned when he wrote it? Bond is positive:

I think so. It's thinking back to that time, but I think I am pretty sure. [...]

I felt that by this time, the situation was so absurd that they just couldn't go on doing it. Also, I was getting a lot of support from very significant people in theatre and in society. And it was only the sort of Neo-Nazis and the establishment riff-raff who were in favour of this absurd situation. I suppose, in a way, to be absolutely honest, it's quite good to know that you are Saint George fighting the dragon. The dragon is a monster and can breathe fire and has a wicked tail and is terribly strong, and you are just little Saint George with a tiny little lance that the dragon could eat for lunch. But you're gonna rescue the maiden, which is freedom. I suppose that was my feeling. I can't say I enjoyed the fight because I was too outraged, because after all it was only a symbol of something. But it represented a whole stratum of society. I was intent in my plays to try and push over. It was the inference in that work that I found – as I say it wasn't an attack on one play, it was an attack on me learning to be a writer or to be a writer. (Personal interview)

After the action over *Saved*, it was clear that the Royal Court was a pebble in the censor's shoe; one he not only wanted gone, but wanted to crash before leaving it behind. In 1968, it was politics that saved the theatre from worse. The George Strauss's Bill was underway, a decision not yet reached, and the Attorney General did not want matters to heat up in a way that the public – or worse: people with influence on the outcome of the bill – felt the restrictions that the Lord Chamberlain imposed. Cobbold's action, however, clearly showed that he felt quite the opposite: police officers and the Vice Squad after performances at the Royal Court were what he wanted. To make it happen, he helped where he could, and eventually may have even let Gaskill walk right into a trap.

The Office certainly kept the Royal Court in the dark where it could by not making definite statements. It avoided giving the theatre anything they could hold against the censor. It left the sole responsibility concerning private performances of unlicensed plays to the theatre, only to do all in its might to later prove these illegal by sending spies and alerting Prosecutions. The Office took measures as drastic as personally involving Her Majesty the Queen. Would it have taken to measures as drastic as laying out a trap for Gaskill by verbally approving of *Sunday Nights* and then denying it? Why did Hill not clarify that an agreement did not exist, but only denied written proof of the same?

Billington's picture of the 'wounded scorpion' is more than fitting; it not only shows the weakness of a once deadly animal, but also the desperation and arbitrariness in the actions taken. While with *Saved* the Lord Chamberlain had acted surprisingly when striking down the Royal Court, with *Early Morning* he took to other tactics, ranging from a – on grounds of the reasons given, and compared to the report on *Saved* not fully conceivable ban – to scheming. It did not help him survive.

4.3 Conclusion

The 1960s at the Royal Court eventually went down in the history books as the years to fight for freedom. The abolition of stage censorship certainly changed the world of modern British theatre more than any other event in the 20th century. Even if Bond states that the battle was "a bit like a relay race" (Personal interview), it cannot be ignored that it was his plays and William Gaskill's will to fight the censor on their grounds that freed the British stage.

Throughout the 1960s, the Royal Court struggled to justify its existence and policies. It was the battle against the censor that finally took over Gaskill's focus and gave the Royal Court the chance to justify what it had not been able to justify, according to the 1967 Arts Council report: the importance of its existence within the British theatre world.

While the Royal Court's consistency during the fight, and even after the prosecution over *Saved*, is one story, the censor's scheming, as it is evident in the Correspondence Files, is another. It is hard to imagine nowadays that the Royal Court was in actual danger of being closed over its action. What is, however, even more irritating is that a member of the Royal household took to a seemingly deliberate holding back of crucial information in order to force a prosecution. Eventually, Her Majesty the Queen was involved in the matter. This indeed mirrors an influence of the Royal Court as it is truly outstanding.

5. The 1970. Fringe (Un-)Welcome

There is no longer need for quite the same sort of theatre producing new work in the same way as there used to be. That need and that function have been taken over by the fringe, and particularly in London by places like the Bush Theatre and others. [...] But it is far more new work being done than in the days when the Royal Court was at its best. (Peter Mair, Drama panel of the Arts Council of Britain, on 19 January 1977, quoted in Liebenstein-Kurtz 326)

The truth of the matter is that steadily, through the 70s, and now totally, the Royal Court has lost the trust and respect of a whole generation of playwrights. I beg you, grasp that harsh fact and act upon it. Close down the English Stage Company to let a new Royal Court form. Give a decent burial to the old successes, failures and traditions preserving only one thing – independence. (Howard Brenton in a letter to the English Stage Company Council, on 21 January 1977, quoted in Roberts, *Stage* 159)

5.1 Being Redundant

By the beginning of the 1970s, the Royal Court was still far from being a leading theatre institution in Britain. Their audiences stayed away as the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company were drawing the same middle to higher middle class audiences that the Court was targeting. The Court's mandate of a writers' theatre was no longer a monopoly it could rely on. Its politics regarding new work were extremely complex and diverse, if not to say muddled: of the eight Artistic Directors the Court saw in the 1970s, every single one had a different take on the qualities and quantities by which new work was to be presented.

While in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Royal Court stood strong in the battle for funds and was supported by the Arts Council on grounds of its championing new work, the picture soon shifted. The fringe was growing stronger and slowly taking over the field of new work⁸³, and it was to the fringe that new writers took their plays. Wardle writes about the Court's situation in the 1970s:

83 John Elsom speaks of the fringe alternatives of the late 1960s and early 1970s. He draws four categories of fringe styles: Environmental companies like the American companies 'Living Theatre' and 'Liquid Theatre' in the early 1960s, the British 'Freehold' Company that formed in 1968, the 'Great Georges' project in Liverpool and the 'Roundhouse' in London and others; Agit-Prop (deriving from agitational propaganda) with companies like 'The Red Ladder' (formed in 1968), 'Joint Stock', and '7:84'; Multi-media groups developing from pop-shows, like the 'Pip Simmons Group' founded in 1968, the 'Welfare State' from Leeds, the 'Moving Being', and the 'Black Box Theatre', which formed in 1965; the neo-Dadaists with groups like 'Ken Campbell's Road Show', 'Low Moan Spectacular' (formed in 1970), the 'People Show' (formed in 1965), 'Sal's Meat Market' (formed in 1972) (Elsom, *Post-war* 147-156). For a description of the development of the British fringe see Liebenstein-Kurtz 257-275. Liebenstein-Kurtz gives a quick overview over the 'alternative' theatre scene before 1968, and draws a clear picture of the development of the fringe during the 1970s.

For the fringe generation the Royal Court was something to be avoided. It did not create new audiences; and the effect of working inside the system was to alienate the artist from his origins and change him from an uncompromising David into a commercial Goliath. (283)

The Court collaborated with fringe companies and even organized the ‘Come Together’ Festival in 1970, as a contribution to the new tendencies in theatre, but not with much success. Peter Ansorge wrote about the festival:

Far from introducing a new generation of theatre makers to their seniors, the groups at the Come Together festival seemed for the most part to have little new to offer apart from a series of highly surrealist and frequently adolescent audience-baiting games. (Ansorge 39).

Tony Richardson commented that not all productions in the festival were “worthy of the high standards of the English Stage Company” (Tony Richardson in Roberts, *Stage* 138). Richardson thus not only regarded the Royal Court’s standards as being too high to include new trends, but also drew a hard line between the Royal Court’s work and the fringe. By refusing new trends, the Court, however, bereaved itself – be it only in the eyes of the funding bodies – of its own *raison d’être*. Terry Browne sums up the Royal Court’s reputation in the early 1970s:

The Royal has been accused of living from its past, of having developed successful playwrights who have become commercial or popular and the producing of their plays again and again, that it has become a tryout theatre for its own house writers – while ignoring its real objective, the fostering of new, undeveloped playwrights. (98)

And indeed, the Royal Court went into the 1970s without any artistic direction at all. Under the leadership of the triumvirate this was not going to change any time soon.

On 12 January 1970⁸⁴ (*Court* 173), a meeting was held at which it was officially decided that Gaskill was to be the Artistic Director and Page and Anderson his Associates. Roberts writes: “The meeting was clearly a fraught one. When Gaskill referred to the Theatre Upstairs, Anderson suggested its name to ‘The Gaskill’. [...] Anderson at this point proposed ‘that an element of instability of temperament be acknowledged in the set up’” (104). What it boiled down to was that none of the three directors was up for taking the full responsibility of organising the Royal Court. Gaskill wanted a break, and Anderson and Page saw no way forward in doing more than one thing – be it directing or organising – thus aiming at shared responsibilities; shared, however, on their own terms. The difficulties in this show well in Anderson’s statement: “When occasion demands, I can go into a meeting and be very good, but I am subject to feelings of revulsion” (104). The regime of the triumvirate lasted two years.

But the Court under the triumvirate also saw various other internal struggles and changes besides the animosities amongst the three Artistic Directors. The Company’s

84 This meeting is not mentioned in the Court’s archives. Philip Roberts had his information from Donald Howarth (*Court* 173).

Council was heavily shaken after Neville Blond died on 4 August 1970. Blond's death meant a significant weakening of the administrative structure of the Royal Court (*Stage* 137). New Council members were brought in – Blond's wife Elaine⁸⁵ being one of them – and Oscar Lewenstein and Robin Fox became Co-Chairmen of the Council; with there being two chairmen. There was no need for a Vice-Chairman any longer and Alfred Esdaile's post was finally abolished. Around the same time, Gaskill brought in Peter Gill as Associate Director, replaced Christopher Hampton as resident dramatist with David Hare, and brought in Jonathan Hales as Literary Manager. When Fox died in 1971, Lewenstein became sole chairman of the Council. Since he had also taken over the chair of the Artistic Committee from Harewood – who then became President of the Company – the year before, the Committee, still in the form as Devine had established it, was replaced. Since 1969, and largely on Anderson's initiative, the Artistic Directors had already met directly with Lewenstein to discuss artistic policies. It was this arrangement that became the new Artistic Committee (139).

Aside from organizational issues, the theatre staff grew more and more discontent with the Court's artistic position. In early December 1971, a petition was filed, signed by twenty-three staff members. The petition stated “a growing concern at the number of Royal Court productions which appear in many aspects to be designed for the West End. We feel that several unhealthy factors have appeared, and we wish to register our concern and protest” (Roberts, *Court* 138). According to Greville Poke, Lindsay Anderson's reaction to this was rather emotional. He “really lashed out at the staff over this petition and told them exactly what he thought of them and of the petition and of the season” (138). John Osborne got even more abusive on the matter. He exclaimed that all signatories “should all get the boot for crassness and treachery” (178). Gillian Diamond, the Court's casting director, who had initiated the petition, wrote to Anderson, on 3 February, to defend the petition as “not treachery or disloyalty – rather I think the opposite” (178). To the great annoyance of the Management committee, information about the meeting was leaked to the press⁸⁶.

With Anthony Page and Lindsay Anderson joining Gaskill in 1969, the tastes in plays at the Royal Court had changed. In spite of still being produced at the beginning of the 1970s, writers like Bond, but also Arden and Barker started to feel rejected at the Court; the Artistic Directors did not particularly like their work, and, as a consequence, did not want to direct it. Gaskill speaks of his work on Bond's *Lear* (1971) and gives reasons why he eventually refused to direct Bond's later plays: “It's difficult to explain why [...] I couldn't follow the path Bond was set on. [...] The plays have become

85 Elaine Blonde neé Marks, replaced Harewood as the President of the English Stage Company in 1976 (Roberts, *Stage* 156).

86 Osborne's letter is reproduced in full in Little and McLaughlin 148; in Little and McLaughlin the issue is presented from Diamond's perspective.

gloomier and more pompous and he has deliberately stopped writing about contemporary life in a direct way” (125)⁸⁷.

While some of the old generation were ‘let go’, other established Court writers, like Osborne, Storey, and Howarth, took up the slots in the programming downstairs. Nicholas Wright explains: “There was a strong split at the time; 1969 was the year when a quite coherent generation of playwrights began appearing, including David Hare, Howard Brenton and Snoo Wilson, and they were being staunchly resisted by the establishment of the Royal Court” (Wright in Roberts, *Stage* 131). Hare himself comments that Anderson and Page “developed an attitude to new work which made the championship of new scripts so arduous and humiliating that it’s a wonder people stuck their necks out at all” (Hare in Roberts, *Stage* 131). New works were sent upstairs – to the try-out stage – and were thus not part of the main bill.

Hearing Anderson comment on the Theatre Upstairs, one understands his regard for new work, and the fringe for that matter. To Anderson, Upstairs “was always [...] fringe and [he] never approved of the alternative society... a bit of a self-glorifying ghetto” (Anderson in Roberts, *Stage* 131). The simple fact that Anderson understood the new trends as an alternative society that was set apart from ‘real’ society shows that for him a merger, or even just a dialogue between the two, was unimaginable. It becomes clear that under the artistic directorship of the triumvirate, “the new generation of writers were kept away from the Court’s main stage by a combination of Anderson’s hostility and the work of the established writers” (Roberts, *Stage* 131). While co-operations with fringe theatre companies⁸⁸ (127) happened, their being produced outside of the main bill, meant that “[t]he politicization of the fringe was scarcely reflected in the English Stage Company’s own work” (128). The Royal Court’s main bill trusted in the reputation of its tried and tested writers, and happily transferred their productions into the West End if possible⁸⁹ (Roberts, *Stage* 131). Accordingly “[f]rom 1968 onwards an increasing number of new plays originated elsewhere” (132)⁹⁰.

Gaskill admits that it was not just Anderson and Page that eyed the fringe movement sceptically: “it frustrated me that so much creative energy was being poured into

87 The Royal Court today still does not produce Bond’s plays. Bond said in 2012: “My agent sent a play to the Royal Court – one of my later plays – about two years ago. I thought it was stupid, but that’s what he wanted to do. They sent it back and said ‘Oh, it was very interesting’, but unfortunately my moral purity got in the way of contact with the public.” (Personal interview)

88 Findlater mentions Portable Theatre, Traverse Theatre Workshop, the Pip Simmons group, Freehold, and Incubus as examples (127-128).

89 David Storey *The Contractor* (1969), *Home* (1970), and *The Changing Room* (1971) – all directed by Anderson, Hampton’s *The Philanthropist* (1970), and Osborne’s *West of Suez* (1971) all made between 80 and 90 per cent at the box office and were transferred to the West End. (Roberts, *Stage* 131)

90 Elsom writes: “In 1971-2, 480 new plays were produced in Britain [...] Of these new plays, 300 were staged in fringe theatres, and London fringe theatres alone staged 238 premières” (*Post-war* 147).

work outside the Court tradition” (Gaskill 118). He admits to having been very conservative when running the Court together with Page and Anderson, despite the Court claiming to be the institution to embark on the new, and shape it: “Perhaps we weren’t altogether in sympathy with the new movement. It was very ambivalent” (Doty and Harbin 166). He further takes the blame on himself for having caused the long-lasting division in the house’s policy: safe plays downstairs, experimental plays upstairs.

In spite of the Royal Court being sceptical about the fringe, the work of many fringe and touring companies was very compelling. Writers found new homes with little theatres like the King’s Head in Islington since 1971, the Bush in Shepherd’s Bush since 1972, or the Soho-Poly since 1970 – just to name a few. Playwrights also gathered together and formed their own companies like David Halliwell’s ‘Quipu’ in 1966, David Hare’s ‘Portable Theatre’ in 1968, and John McGrath’s ‘7:84’ in 1972 (Elsom, *Post-war* 157-158). The Royal Court missed the momentum. A whole generation of young artists was lost to the Court. But even after the triumvirate, the climate at the Royal Court for new British work did not improve.

Since the contracts of all three Artistic Directors were to expire in 1972, the decision to appoint a new Artistic Director was taken by the Council. Gaskill had decided to leave anyway, it seemed: “I couldn’t have gone on by myself, and I certainly couldn’t have continued with Lindsay and Anthony” (Roberts, *Stage* 139). But eventually, he changed his mind and put in an application. Both Lewenstein and Gaskill were interviewed. Yet, Gaskill slightly alarmed the Council by mentioning that he wished to go back to the repertory system again (139). Lewenstein gave a much better interview. The policy he proposed felt safer to the Council, and they invited Oscar Lewenstein to take over artistic control starting on 27 July 1972, with Anderson, Page, and Albert Finney as Associate Directors.

In the end, it had been the Council’s decision to go with Lewenstein’s idea of continuing the success of the recent seasons, which granted financial security. In other words, Lewenstein’s policy of continuing West End transfers won over Gaskill’s policy, which had been too experimental and innovative for the Council (140). Roberts feels that “what actually was happening was that the two strands of Court work, new writing buttressed by revivals and the occasional transfer, were separating both practically and ideologically” (140).

As Lewenstein became Artistic Director, Greville Poke took over as Chairman of the Council. Lewenstein soon realized that running the Court was a very different job than helping from the side-lines of the Council: “Being the Chairman and trying to keep the peace between the various directors had not been easy, but, compared to my new task it was a piece of cake” (Roberts, *Stage* 143). Jocelyn Herbert reflects on the general feeling about Lewenstein as Artistic Director from the artists’ perspective: “You always felt he’d got there by default. I know we all resented him. He wasn’t one of us. He wasn’t an artist” (143). Nicholas Wright puts it differently. For him, Lewenstein “was on the wrong side of that Royal Court snobbery which is very hard to cross and which he had

never crossed [...] he was always patronised at best and abused at worst by the Royal Court establishment” (144). And it did not take long for the Court establishment to campaign against Lewenstein: “It is true that, having been instrumental in appointing Lewenstein, Anderson spent the next few years trying to get him out, as he was to do in the case of Lewenstein’s successors, Robert Kidd and Nicholas Wright,” Roberts states (142).

Part of Anderson’s resentment were Lewenstein’s efforts regarding the expansion plans for the company. These plans were to look firstly for a second auditorium at a theatre in Hammersmith, and secondly at the Old Vic (Roberts, *Stage* 141). At a Council meeting on 27 January 1972, it had been agreed that the Company was looking for a larger theatre. When Lewenstein became Artistic Director in July 1972, he pushed the matter forward. As the National Theatre was looking to move to its new building, it was foreseeable that the Old Vic and the Roundhouse – for six months per year – would become available (141). The plans were run past the Arts Council, which approved of an expansion of the English Stage Company to the Old Vic. Lewenstein, being more of a theatre manager than an Artistic Director, put all his efforts into this plan.

A move to the 1,000-seater felt like a great opportunity for the English Stage Company – at least from a manager’s perspective. But when the move of the National was postponed in 1975, doubts were raised about the expansion scheme. Some felt that the move did not fully go hand in hand with the company’s mandate. The question actually was, as Michael Billington asked: “what business has a company devoted to new and often difficult work with a theatre seating 1,000? I suspect this could mean the end of everything Devine, Gaskill and others so tirelessly worked for” (148). Just as the Old Vic seemed a wrong choice for a company with the history of the English Stage Company, the mandate of the company felt like a wrong match for the Old Vic: not all of the Governors of the Old Vic wanted to see “kitchen sink on the boards of the Old Vic” (147).

Lewenstein’s plan was for Albert Finney and Paul Scofield, both acclaimed actors, to take over the Old Vic, and for Lindsay Anderson to run the Royal Court. Anderson, however, felt that this meant the Old Vic would become an ‘actors’ theatre’ while the Royal Court remained a ‘writers’ theatre’. It also felt likely that the Old Vic could become a financial burden, draining funds from the Royal Court. The Council eventually voted six to one against the expansion (146). The scheme collapsed. Nevertheless the expansion plans further speak to the growingly commercial efforts of the Royal Court.

As a consequence of the failed vote and Lewenstein’s policies during the expansion scheme, Anderson intensified his campaign to get rid of Lewenstein (146-147). Roberts quotes Nicholas Wright: “Lindsay accosted Oscar and I was there and he hit him, really hard” (146). Lewenstein decided to let his appointment as Artistic Director run out with his contract in 1975. Harewood commented in a letter to Anderson: “Every aspect of the Court has tended to run down... the Council is a vast shambles [...] I think the leadership must in future be artistic as it is really chimerical to think it can ever normally come for the Chair” (147).

Yet, in spite of his commercially focussed politics, Lewenstein had been more interested in new work with a focus on present day issues than the triumvirate had been. He comments: “I felt that in the period preceding me the plays of the Court had become less plays on public issues than had been the situation under Devine; the plays seemed to have narrowed in focus” (Doty and Harbin 13). But Lewenstein, too, took no big interest in the fringe. He had been a member of the English Stage Company’s Council from day one, but he was not the Artistic Director the Court needed in the 1970s: he was opposed to championing radical and critical work (Little and McLaughlin 155).

Richard Findlater finds that “cumbersome superstructures of command [...], bricks and mortar burdens [...] and creative tension” (149) led to other theatres and companies staging a lot of new work with a lot less effort. “Nevertheless”, under Lewenstein, “80 productions were staged, 60 of them world premieres, of which nine transferred to the West End” (149). Findlater highlights among these plays the production of three plays from South Africa, in 1974, and newcomers like Richard O’Brien⁹¹ as well as the stage-debuts of Robert Holman and Caryl Churchill – who later became resident dramatist. Terry Browne also mentions the newly introduced Resident Drama Programme⁹² as one of Lewenstein’s great successes in supporting new work. Browne writes about Lewenstein’s reign:

The Royal Court is crowded now. In the autumn of 1970 there were very few worthwhile new plays to be done. About a year later there was a sudden flood of good new plays and it continued into 1974 – and the plays have come from both generations at the Court. (101)

Browne’s assessment is very positive and while it is certainly right that many Court shows were successful, it must be said that they were so, because the theatre’s mandate was very commercially driven. Difficult shows, which generally did not qualify for West End transfers, did not even make it into the main bill. The influx of good new plays from both generations, as praised by Brown, therefore has to be looked at with a certain caution. The commercial drift and the disregard for radically new work, other than new plays by Court writers, had been a problem under the triumvirate, and it was not solved by Lewenstein. On the contrary. Lewenstein’s expansion plans clearly show that he was very much in favour of an expanded, commercially driven Royal Court. In doing so, he forced the chasm between the artistic policies of the Court and its claimed mandate further open. He supported a development that was to almost cost the Royal Court its existence a few years later; and his endeavours were not crowned with financial success either. He left with a deficit of £40,000 (Roberts, *Stage* 144). As such it is no wonder

91 Richard O’Brien’s and Jim Sharman’s musical *The Rocky Horror Show* (1973) was voted the most popular show at the Royal Court in 50 years, in 2006. It was originally seen by an audience of just 63, on its opening night at the Theatre Upstairs (Little and McLaughlin 162).

92 Christopher Hampton commented on the same in 1981: “I was only called [resident dramatist] to secure the grant from the Arts Council” (Doty and Harbin 97).

that when Nicholas Wright and Robert Kidd took over as Artistic Director in 1975, their short reign – until 1977 – was very crisis-shaken.

Forty-five applications for the post of Artistic Director reached the Court. Kidd and Wright, who had been trained at the Court under Gaskill, also applied, and were appointed. “Lindsay wanted to have these two and he thought he would be the *eminence grise* and they’d do all the work. He swung it, of course. I always thought it was a terrible mistake” (Herbert in Roberts, *Stage* 149). Anderson’s support for the new Artistic Directors “didn’t last any time at all [...] the whole thing became very unpleasant. The price of Lindsay’s support was unaffordable” (Wright in Roberts, *Stage* 151). And indeed, Anderson had felt that with Wright and Kidd as Artistic Directors he would still be very much in charge of the artistic side of the Court. As it became clear that Wright and Kidd had their own ideas, Anderson resigned from the Artistic Committee Kidd and Wright had formed, and also declined the offer to have a place on the Council. Kidd and Wright felt terribly let down. Yet, it was not only Anderson, but also Gaskill who turned his back. Wright comments: “A lot of people were fuck-all help” (155).

When severe financial difficulties surfaced, the atmosphere at the Court became even more tense. Voices from inside the theatre – especially from Jon Catty, the Court’s Company Secretary and Accountant – rose, stating that there was a massive overspending on budget and a “general lack of financial control” (Roberts, *Stage* 155). The Theatre Upstairs had to be closed from October 1975 until May 1976, only to be closed again in August 1976 for some time (Little and McLaughlin 117)⁹³. Still, at the beginning of 1977, a deficit of £27,000 and a bank overdraft of £6,000 were reached. As Findlater states, not only the young Artistic Directors were to blame, but also economic realities were catching up with the Court: in times of economic crisis West End managers did not risk transfers of new plays (*25 Years* 174). Wright admits that he did not “grasp clearly enough that the way ahead was co-production with other subsidized companies, especially touring companies like Joint Stock, because there was a lot of money for touring and, artistically speaking, the alliance would have been a very good one” (Wright in Little and McLaughlin 180).

Also juggling the deficit from the Lewenstein administration, Kidd and Wright struggled to lead the Royal Court. They drew up a very impressive – and not very risky – season with works by Hare, Barker, Bond, Hampton, Beckett, Storey, and O’Brien, but it was not affordable (Roberts, *Stage* 152). The heavy costs of the building and the fact that new plays rarely brought in takings exceeding 40%, did not help with paying off the deficit. Eventually, the English Stage Company Council asked the Arts Council for advance payments on the 1976/77 grant. Further, a raise in subsidies was urgently needed. In autumn 1976, a committee was formed by the company’s Council to investigate the question of a new artistic direction: the Arts Council threatened to withdraw its grant if finances were not to improve.

93 The Theatre Upstairs cost £40,000 during a full financial year (Roberts, *Stage* 153).

The situation of the Royal Court was serious: it became very clear that the funding bodies did not agree with the Royal Court's politics. The development became drastic enough to lead to the Arts Council's assertion, in 1977, that the Royal Court had become redundant. In an interview, dated 19 January 1977, Peter Mair, at the time a member of the Drama Panel of the Arts Council, admits that there was no need for a theatre like the Royal Court to produce new work. That branch had been taken over by the fringe, and to a much larger extent than the Court could ever provide for (Liebenstein-Kurtz 326). Mair states that the Court's not having been able to keep its monopoly on new writing was not only due to the mere existence of the fringe, but also to its commercial policy:

A lot of writers, for instance don't want their work done there, they'd much rather the Bush Theatre did it. [...] Why? Partly, I think, they lost confidence in the artistic ability of the theatre; they see it becoming a place where, on the whole, safe new plays are done which then transfer to the West End. (327)

He concludes:

The Royal Court is a broken reed, it's a dead organisation and it's now trying to resurrect itself by appointing new artistic directors and so on, but it's not had a very imaginative artistic policy these last years. It started to do revivals of its own recent plays. It's crazy! (327)

That Mair's assessment of the Royal Court was not too far off shows in Browne's defending the theatre on grounds of its commercialization: "The Royal Court Theatre has been attacked on the grounds that star actors support the work of new writers. It is true – star actors *do* support the work of new writers at the Court; but that would seem to be grounds for praise of both stars and the theatre" (101). He continues: "The Royal Court, from its inception, meant to popularize good, meaningful theatre. They *should* transfer plays; they should flood the West End with plays they believe in" (101).

The Arts Council eventually stepped in, forcing policy changes by threatening a grant withdrawal. A withdrawal of the Arts Council grants, however, meant a death sentence to the Court. While in 1967/68 the £100,000 from the Arts Council were standing against a total of operating costs of £154,972, the costs rose steadily. The year 1975/76 had a £196,738 grant to £381,401 of running costs, and 1976/77 £241,200 to £384,553. The total incomes of these years were, however, only £377,563 and £373,786 – leaving a deficit of £3,838 and £10,767 respectively (352)⁹⁴.

Wanting to or not, the Court had to give in to the Arts Council's threats and promise to change its seemingly hopeless financial situation. Roberts writes: "Council accepted the Arts Council's proposal. Also on the same day, Robert Kidd resigned" (Roberts, *Stage* 155-156). With Kidd's resignation Wright's contract became obsolete,

94 What must also not be underestimated in this context is the impact of the inflation. Liebenstein-Kurtz refers to the *Arts Council Report No.5: The Effects of Inflation on the Subsidised Repertory Theatre* (1975) when stating that the inflation – that had reached a rate of 22.9% in 1975/76 – hit the theatre harder than any other economic field (Liebenstein-Kurtz 250). For a detailed report on how the inflation affected the theatre see Liebenstein-Kurtz 250-256.

too. Only from the letter Kidd wrote to Poke on 10 January 1977 can one learn what the Arts Council's ultimatum was:

[U]nless we cleared our deficit by 30 June (pigs might fly) we should 'pay off outstanding creditors as at that date out of balance of available subsidy and then *cease operation...*' – in mid-summer! In other words go dark in a very real sense involving, as I see it, the probable sacking of the permanent staff. (Kidd in Roberts, *Stage* 156)

It is worth taking a closer look at how the Arts Council's ultimatum to the Royal Court, and Kidd's consecutive resignation, are presented in the various publications on the theatre. The ultimatum is also mentioned in Doty and Harbin (1990). Here Kidd's letter of resignation to the Company's Council from 10 January 1977 is quoted too (Doty and Harbin 63). Findlater⁹⁵, however, quotes a frank, but rather mild note by the Arts Council: "It is hoped that you can evolve a programme that is at once artistically exciting and financially successful" (175). There is no mention of an ultimatum in Findlater. He, quite contrarily, suggests that there never was an ultimatum, just warnings:

The Arts Council agreed [to an advance in subsidy], but it did so with what later appeared – to many Court staff, directors, actors and authors – to be an ultimatum, although it had given somewhat similar warnings in previous financial crises to earlier artistic directors here and at other subsidized theatres. (*25 Years* 175)

Findlater seems to understand the Arts Council's reaction as a common one, and feels the ultimatum merely existed in the subjective perception of the artists. Kidd's letter, however, shows that the ultimatum, even if subjectively felt, was very real; as the quote 'pay off outstanding creditors as at that date out of balance of available subsidy and then *cease operation*' above shows.

Keeping in mind Findlater's position as a member of the English Stage Company Council under the next Artistic Director, Stuart Burge, one may argue that he chose not to criticize the Arts Council in his 1981 publication – to not taint the new relationship between the two councils. His book was further the 25th anniversary publication of the Royal Court, and as such a celebratory book commissioned by the Court's Council⁹⁶.

95 Findlater was a member of the Court's Council from 1978 until 1981.

96 *25 Years*, being the celebratory publication, as commissioned by the English Stage Company, was clearly biased. Findlater, as a friend of the theatre, and at the time of publication a Council member, was consciously asked to write it. It was John Osborne who had entered the scholar's name into the discussion around the commission for the book. Osborne wrote a note on 13 November 1979: "Why on earth don't you ask Richard Findlater to do the DREADED E.S.C. BOOK? He knows the background intimately, w[oul]d do it v[ery] well (better than that B[?]RK [Simon] TRUSSLER) and QUICKLY". Findlater felt "honoured to be asked to consider the ESC book" (Findlater, letter to Harriet Cruickshank). Due to the time shortage, he proposed "a kind of anthology-scrapbook-running commentary among pictures" and suggested a fee of not less than £1,000. What is further noteworthy is the way in which Findlater edited artists' contributions to his publication. Originally, Max Stafford-Clark had written a piece that in Findlater's eyes didn't "really work" (Findlater, letter to Stafford-Clark). Findlater clarifies to Stafford-

Doty and Harbin, however, both professors at the University of Louisiana, were not in any way professionally tied to the Royal Court or the Arts Council but through a mere scholarly interest. As such, they freely quote from the letter Kidd sent to the Company's Council, which belongs to Lewenstein's personal collection.

The Arts Council's interference is also mentioned in Liebenstein-Kurtz. Like Findlater, and Doty and Harbin hereafter, she refers to the Arts Council's letter preceding the resignation of Robert Kidd. Having not collaborated with the Royal Court or its former staff on her publication, Liebenstein-Kurtz – unlike the other authors – draws her information about the letter from a newspaper article by Michael Davie in *The Observer* on 23 January 1977. She quotes Davie in the letter by saying that the Arts Council denied a raise in the grant and accepted a temporary closing of the theatre until the Court would develop a new policy, which was artistically and financially exciting (Liebenstein-Kurtz 322-323). Michael Davie's article "State and Stage Collide in Sloane Square" in *The Observer* followed a press release by Kidd, dated 13 January 1977, in which he openly quoted from the Arts Council letter to the English Stage Company's Council.

Even though Ruth Little and Emily McLaughlin, both Royal Court staff at the time, in their 2007 celebratory publication quote Nicholas Wright very extensively throughout their book, his resignation, and the circumstances surrounding it, are mentioned with only a few sentences: "Wright volunteered to follow: 'Perhaps it was a good thing that it fell apart. We didn't get on, and we irritated each other, which wasn't healthy at all. We spent too much money and kept having rows. It was an unhappy time'" (180).

In 1981, Wright comments on the situation with the Arts Council, as well as his fights with Kidd: "Consequently, I think we lost our nerve" (Doty and Harbin 62). In the press release, dated 13 January 1977, Kidd had commented on his resignation, accusing the Company's Council of selling the Court down the river (Roberts, *Stage* 175). John Osborne had a more pragmatic outlook on the Council's position during this financial battle:

If some of the rich, perhaps millionaires, and influential people on the Council were to chip in or work for a living instead of indulging themselves in committee dogoodery and

Clark: "What I had hoped for [...] was a personal piece [...]: looking forward to the future, but not in the manner of a policy statement". Findlater then suggest to Stafford-Clark "structural turns and triggers". He suggests: "how about starting with something like: 'What impressed me most in my first experience [...] OR with: Since I took over as Artistic Director of the Royal Court in 1979, its problems have looked somewhat different from those that seemed clear to me on my first visits, back in... They are different. The set-up has changed, and the Court has changed with it. But what I had not realized then...". Stafford-Clark, eventually, wrote a piece containing both personal experience and policy. Still, Findlater's interference must have been extensive as a line in Oscar Lewenstein's contribution shows: "[T]his is a celebration of the English Stage Company's 25th birthday [...] the editor has rightly suggested that we should concentrate on the positive achievements" (*25 Years* 164).

dubious charities, we would not be going around with a begging bowl to the Arts Council and the Government. (Osborne in Roberts, *Stage* 153)

Seemingly in line with Osborne's take on the situation, many – like David Hare, Howard Brenton, and Edward Bond – called for the resignation of the Council, pleading for more writers, artists, and actively attending members to rule over the fate of the English Stage Company. The Council refused self-reflexion, Jocelyn Herbert resigned, and Stuart Burge, an outsider, was appointed new Artistic Director⁹⁷. He did not have an easy task before him. Peter Mair comments on the Royal Court after Kidd's and Wright's resignation: "I wish they had the feeling of trying to find a new role, instead they're desperately trying to recreate the old role for that theatre, and that role no longer exists for that theatre" (Liebenstein-Kurtz 327).

In April 1977, Stuart Burge took over the artistic directorship and a deficit of £70,000 (Doty and Harbin 59). As the short durations of the artistic directorships forced periods of transition, Wright stayed on for a while when Burge became Artistic Director. Burge immediately managed to blow a new wind into the theatre. In spite of the Art Council ultimatum, Burge regarded the financial crisis of the Court as merely over-exaggerated by the press (Roberts, *Stage* 161). Rather than turning to the Council for advice, Burge called for staff meetings to discuss whether there was some other way of running the theatre (162). Subsequently production costs were cut, the number of visiting productions increased, and a new try out system was introduced. Burge was saving money and things slowly began to look better: Burge managed – despite the inflation – to pull the theatre out of its deficit (Roberts, *Stage* 165). In January 1978, it was reported that

Overheads were still running below budget, but not to the same extent as in previous quarters. However, the overall position was that the Company was within its Budget for the first nine months of the year and the position far from gloomy financially. [...] Looking ahead to the final quarter of the year and the possible final results for the year, things are not so bright financially. [...] the indications are that we shall incur a deficit but that it will be of manageable proportions. (Royal Court Theatre, 30 Jan. 1978)

In March 1979, the deficit was as good as gone:

[...] there is strong indication that both Overheads and Wages and Salaries will be very close to budget. The accumulated deficit with which we started the year has been covered, in three stages, by the profits from *Once a Catholic*⁹⁸ of £19,000, a supplementary grant of the Arts Council of Great Britain of £5,000 and a donation from the Royal Court Theatre Society of £2634.73. (Royal Court Theatre, 2 April 1979)

97 Burge had been the Artistic Director of the Queen's Hornchurch from 1951 to 1953 and of the Nottingham Playhouse from 1963 to 1974. He was appointed CBE in 1974 (Roberts, *Stage* xix).

98 Mary O'Malley's *Once a Catholic* (1977) had opened at the Royal Court on 10 August 1977, and was transferred to the Wyndham, on 10 October 1977 (Findlater, *25 Years* 238). O'Malley was the Royal Court's resident dramatist in 1977.

The income from private and commercial sponsorship in the late 1970s was still low, but under Burge the Arts Council grant rose to £305,000 in 1978/79 and £385,000 in 1979/80 compared to £242,000 in 1977/78 (Findlater, *25 Years* 178). Eventually, it was Burge's budgeting strategies, more precisely the "extraordinary fiction in the proposed budgets"⁹⁹ (Doty and Harbin 121) that helped handle the deficit, while he himself was left artistically frustrated: the huge deficit did not allow him to produce work in the ways he would have liked (59).

Finally, Burge also moved against the commercialization of the Court. From the later 1970s on it had become apparent that – even if much desired by the Council – the Court could not profit from West End transfers anymore. To allow the Court the extra income, but on its own terms, Burge approached commercial managements to co-produce. He was thus counteracting the instrumentalization of the Court by commercial managements and took matters into his own hands. As the 1971 petition had previously demanded, in a next step he "chucked off the commercial managers from the Council" (Burge in Doty and Harbin 137). "There was no real corruption but it looked bad, publicly, to have West End managers on the council" (137), Burge adds. Harriet Cruickshank explains: "[T]here was a lot of feeling inside the Court at the time [...] that the Court was becoming a way for a commercial manager initially to put on a show quite cheaply" (137). Cruickshank had been one of the signees of the 1971 petition. But Burge's restructuring of the English Stage Company's Council went much further than a mere 'chucking off' of commercial managers.

The English Stage Company Council's position throughout the 1970s had been a difficult one. And indeed, it had changed over the years: from people actually concerned with the theatre to mostly bureaucrats (Doty and Harbin 127). The Council had – from the beginning – formed committees of experts, but the experts who had helped back in the day were long gone by the 1970s. As soon as Burge took over, he followed Edward Bond's suggestion to form a new Council built from the people working at the Royal Court. This was welcomed by Lewenstein, and eventually led to a complete overhaul of the English Stage Company's Council (62-65).

In 1977, Burge axed the Artistic Committee and the Management Committee that was made up in part by Council Members and headed by the Chair of Council, and introduced the Executive Committee, formed by two members of the Council and staff heads of departments, chaired by the Artistic Director (Little and McLaughlin 189). This allowed for staff members and the Artistic Director to partake in all major decisions.

99 Harriet Cruickshank, at the time in charge of PR, explains: "[T]he first budget we do is what we would ideally like to have, and often we are asking for four or five times the money that we might get. And then they come back and say, 'Your grant is going to be £424,000; show us that you can work with this'. And then everybody modifies the budget to fit that figure" (Doty and Harbin 121). Burge adds: "It's always about twice what we know we're going to get when it comes back. And then you redo the figures and take 25 percent off" (121).

The extent of Burge's changes was clearly not anticipated and welcome: Peggy Ashcroft and Oscar Lewenstein – after he had initially welcomed the reorganization – resigned and shortly after, most 'old' Council members did as well. A new Council was found, including three staff representatives (Doty and Harbin 130). Howard Newby took over as Council chairman in 1978¹⁰⁰. In addition, a full-time Literary Manager, who was not a writer, was employed: Rob Ritchie¹⁰¹.

It is Rob Ritchie who gives insights into how much the administrative changes actually affected the Royal Court as a writers' theatre. Ritchie points out that with the abolishment of the Artistic Committees, plays at the Court were obviously no longer chosen by a literary committee. Instead they were read by outside readers and then transferred to his office. Eventually, they were discussed in a general meeting with directors, resident dramatists, and himself, taking into account financial considerations like the size of the cast (138). But the support for young writers, whose work was not necessarily meant for production, was also still very much present at the Royal Court: public rehearsed readings were offered¹⁰² and Nicholas Wright, who had also initiated the Young Writers' Festival, in 1973, returned to the Royal Court to work with young playwrights. The support structure for work that could go on for production, however, was strikingly different now – with financial aspects being taken into account as early as during the selection process. It meant no less than a new era for writers at the Royal Court. It is not surprising that playwrights like Christopher Hampton and Donald Howarth found the room given to financial aspects in these artistic decisions rather alarming (138). In 1981, Howarth named the problems for writers when working with an institution like the Court:

100 In 1979, the members of the English Stage Company's Council were Mr. P.H. Newby, Mrs Neville Blond, Miss Harriet Cruickshank, Miss Constance Cummings, Mr Richard Findlater, Mr William Gaskill, Mrs Henny Gestetner, Mr Richard Imison, Lady Melchett, Miss Joan Plowright, Mr Jack Raby, Lord Snowdon, Sir Hugh Willatt, Mr Derek Granger, Mr S.R.S. Boas (Royal Court Theatre, 2 Oct. 1979).

101 The changes Burge introduced were in the following years amended. In May 1983, the Management Council was established again, with more staff. Also, two staff members were voted on the Council (Little and McLaughlin 237). In 1985, however, Matthew Evans, as the new Chair of Council, stripped the Management Committee of its power and returned it to the Council (247). Another major re-structuring followed on 20 March 1990. When John Mortimer followed Matthew Evans as Chairman of Council, he and Anthony Burton halved the Council to fifteen members and ensured that "each member has a particular role and that they will get involved" (Anthony Burton in Roberts, *Stage* 264).

102 Stuart Burge explains: "[T]he rehearsed readings had a great value in that we were able to hire actors for a minimum Equity salary for a week, and they could rehearse the play for three or four days with a director and a writer and then present a public rehearsed reading on the last two days of the week" (Doty and Harbin 94). Stafford-Clark adds that the reading is merely a step in the production process; a majority of the plays presented in rehearsed readings went into full production (94).

The danger in the bureaucracy of institutional theatre (which the Court is) lies in deciding what sort of plays should be done. It has to be left to the writer, not to the theatre, to decide how many characters there are going to be, whether twenty or seven, and the theatre has to cope with that and not prescribe when they commission a play what they want to fit in their building (167).

Howarth's remark rightly criticizes all artistic institutions' battles between bureaucratic – as in mostly financial – aspects and the value of pure artistic independence. For the institution 'Royal Court' his statement, however, goes as far as to bereave the theatre of one its major aims: fully submitting itself to the writer. Howarth's statement brings up the question of whether the new work presented at the Royal Court could be independently new and authentic if the theatre took such a large part in shaping it. Max Stafford-Clark's – Stafford-Clark followed Burge as Artistic Director in 1979 – direct answer to Howarth's remark is not much of a consolation as it is proof of the narrow space in which plays are 'allowed' to develop for bureaucratic reasons. "It is unconceivable for us to do a production of a new play with more than eleven or ten characters downstairs because that would take a whole year's budget" (168)¹⁰³, he says. Stafford-Clark's position here is clearly that of a pragmatic theatre director. It is, however, also proof of the artistic impossibilities inherent to the framework of a subsidized theatre.

Having changed from a new stage, still exploring its opportunities, to a subsidized theatre with two decades of experience, the Royal Court no longer had an excuse – like the forming of a company in the 1950s, or the fight against censorship in the 1960s – to not be responsible and well organized. Like an adolescent, it was expected to act like a grown-up and didn't yet know how; there simply had been too much play and too much self-centredness in the years before – with players like Anderson and Gaskill, and the constant battles around the artistic directorship. Now, with the fringe and the touring companies being the children that needed looking after by the Arts Council, the Royal Court had to look after itself – and yet artistically still be true to its inner child. Burge, in a way, came in as an educator who was not part of the family and shook the Court a little, until it took its eyes off its old ways. Burge was the fresh wind that saved the theatre from suffocating on decade-old quarrels, but he also introduced a different artistic climate. He was the one who set the Court off on its path as a grown up, by teaching it a few tricks – mainly in the realm of finances. One being the "devious ways of storing [...] money away in capital assets and things like that" (120), as any profit the Court made over the course of the financial year could not be carried on into the next year, and

103 Caryl Churchill remarks on how the stage situation influencing scene changes also coined her writing: "My first play at the Court was a play with more than one scene and a lot of furniture, and it was a terrible problem because the Theatre Upstairs has even less space than downstairs. I learned from Max Stafford-Clark not do it, and I set my next play in one place" (Doty and Harbin 200).

part of the subsidy of the Arts Council were a guarantee against loss, paid at the end of the year in case of a deficit.

During Burge's artistic directorship – with the 1977-debacle still in mind – the Arts Council kept a close eye on the Royal Court – and not only in regard to finances. Censorship-like actions occurred: with the censor gone, it was the Arts Council that interfered. Rob Ritchie mentions a very controversial act by the Arts Council concerning *A Short Sharp Shock... for the Government* by Howard Brenton and Tony Howard: “The [Drama] panel [...] drew up a highly confidential document, which everybody, of course, saw, itemizing lines and moments in the play which they felt were in such a bad taste that they felt it might be better if they were removed” (126)¹⁰⁴.

Being the main funding body, the Arts Council would often get involved in internal decisions, and they dictated certain rules: seats had to be charged and the press had to be invited. “These have been empirically tested” (120), Wright adds rather cynically, and indirectly refers to unsuccessful campaigns by the Royal Court on which the Arts Council interfered, i.e. the Spurling-incident. He continues: “I think one discovers most of these strings only by inadvertently pulling on them. There probably are many others” (120).

Burge appointed Max Stafford-Clark as Associate Director in 1977¹⁰⁵, already seeing a successor in him (Roberts, *Stage* 164): he and Stafford-Clark were developing a policy of new work. Stafford-Clark became interim Artistic Director in 1979, as originally believed, for a time of ten months. By December 1980, it was clear that Burge was not returning from the leave he had taken and Stafford-Clark was asked to run the theatre until the end of 1980 (167). Rob Ritchie explains how Stafford-Clark was intrigued by having a base. He was not working in film or television, and a theatre as a base meant a certain security. He had seen Gaskill struggle to sustain a career after leaving the Court in 1972. “Max knew that, unless he got his act together, that was one possible future” (Ritchie in Roberts and Stafford-Clark 99). When, soon after, applications for the position of Artistic Director were invited, Stafford-Clark applied. Jocelyn Herbert asked John Dexter for the position of the Artistic Director, and initiated a competition between the Court's historical figure Dexter and the ‘new’, fringe-affiliated Gaskill-disciple Stafford-Clark. Stafford-Clark felt “shock and enormous disappointment” (Max

104 This censorship-like action of the Arts Council is noteworthy since it refers to a situation in the play that depicts a reference to a meeting between Solly Zuckerman, later Baron Zuckerman, the Government's Chief Scientific adviser, Lord Mountbatten, at the time of the meeting president of the United World Colleges Organisation, who was killed in August 1979 by the IRA, and MI 5 agent Cecil King in 1967. The meeting had been discussed in the Sunday paper four weeks earlier. The panel dismissed the meeting as pure fiction and thus wanted it deleted from the play (126).

105 The second Associate Director was Jonathan Miller. He had worked at the National Theatre (Liebenstein-Kurtz 328).

Stafford-Clark, *Diary* 28 June 1979) when he learnt that Dexter had been approached. Roberts quotes Herbert: “Unfortunately John told Bill [Gaskill]. Bill told Max who immediately applied” (168). A decision was reached in a way which Greville Poke later called “a disgraceful thing [...] we took a vote and the majority were in favour of Dexter by just one vote. So Newby¹⁰⁶ said, ‘I think we’re all agreed it ought to be Max. Besides, it will be less trouble’” (168). Still, Gaskill recalls “there was no question but that Max was a much better idea than John. Jocelyn, of course, was very strongly for Dexter, but because David [Hare] and I were so positive, it went to Max” (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 99). Dexter withdrew. The hostility against Stafford-Clark, however, did not stop. On 10 February 1980, a letter by John Osborne, attacking Stafford-Clark, was published in the *Sunday Telegraph*. Unsurprisingly, Stafford-Clark felt that he was “never given the imprimatur by Jocelyn Herbert and the old grandees of the Royal Court” (Little and McLaughlin 214). He officially became the new Artistic Director of the Royal Court in April 1981¹⁰⁷.

With the appointment of Stafford-Clark, the Royal Court, it seems, was starting to earn its reputation of a leading writers’ theatre for new work again: “Max brought with him the possibility of repairing those relationships with the Brentons, Hares and Churchills, who had been alienated by the previous regime” (Rob Ritchie in Roberts and Stafford-Clark 100). William Gaskill recalls Stafford-Clark’s time at the Royal Court: “Since I left, first the recession and then the years of Thatcher have shrunk the Court’s capacity to present full-scale work. Max Stafford-Clark, who took over in 1979, has made a virtue of this by importing the Joint Stock process to Sloane Square” (Roberts, *Court* 142). In the following it will be examined what Stafford-Clark’s taking over the Royal Court actually meant for the theatre.

5.2 The Royal Court in Exile. Max Stafford-Clark and *Cloud Nine*

With Joint Stock with Bill Gaskill and Max Stafford-Clark [...] we, the three of us, so to speak, became – I like the phrase that Bond used – the Royal Court in exile. (David Hare in Doty and Harbin 148)

When I arrived at the Royal Court in 1978, it felt as if the place had lost its bearings, and the cupboard was bare [...]. Max brought in the Joint Stock approach to organisation and management. (Rob Ritchie in Stafford-Clark and Roberts 100)

106 Howard Newby was the chairman of the English Stage Company’s Council from 1978 to 1984 (Roberts, *Stage* xxi).

107 The process of finding new Artistic Directors is described in Doty and Harbin: “Mr. Wright: What’s happened for many years is that the council formed a little subcommittee of itself to decide about the artistic directorship and how they came to their decision is—/ Mr. Speer [chair of panel]: Known only to them./ Mr. Wright: I think so.” (129)

It had become more and more obvious throughout the 1970s that the Arts Council, by wanting the Court to produce new radical work, did not simply mean mending the programming. The Royal Court's reputation, as gained in the 1950s and 1960s, was not worth much in the 1970s¹⁰⁸. The past was the past and the Court, according to the Arts Council, had to move with its times, toward the fringe. Stewart Burge had introduced well overdue organizational changes at the Court, but he was not the one to give the theatre its new role, as wished for by the Arts Council's Peter Mair in 1977. Early on, Burge saw his successor in the fringe man Stafford-Clark, rather than in his other Associate Jonathan Miller, who came to the Court from the National. The fringe, as put forth by the Arts Council, was the Court's future. Burge, fifty-nine at the time of his appointment as Artistic Director, was not a representative of this new and young movement, like Stafford-Clark was. It was clear that the theatre needed a new, strong leader – with eyes fixed on the future, not on the past – to fix this. But the Arts Council saying it wanted a Royal Court that was an influential fringe venue was drastic and, in fact, largely synonymous with it wanting no Royal Court at all.

The Royal Court had never been fringe. From day one into the 1970s, it was run by highly trained professionals, who never saw themselves as providing a try-out space for new formats; for new plays, yes, but only along the lines of their elitist training. As such, they loathed the fringe movement. How now was it that Max Stafford-Clark seemed like the 'fix-all' solution to the Royal Court's problems? Did his fringe upbringing really put him in a position to fix it all?

Irving Wardle remarked on the late 1960s and 1970s: "There were these two diametrically opposite ways of pursuing radical theatre, either to operate *inside* the existing structure and manipulate it to your direction, or to go away and do something on your own" (Wardle in Doty and Harbin, 218). For Wardle, Stafford-Clark not only helped in better accommodating the two opposite movements, but also combined both when bringing his approaches to the Royal Court: "Max comes out of the fringe movement, and yet he has been able to combine what he represents with what was already established at the Court" (218). Rob Ritchie comments on Stafford-Clark taking over the Royal Court: "If Joint Stock had once been 'the Royal Court in exile', as Edward Bond had put it, it now looked as if the Royal Court had come home, taking Joint Stock with it" (Ritchie 26).

108 This was not true for the decades to come. The Royal Court's reputation as the theatre that brought forth *Look Back in Anger* and fought the Lord Chamberlain, became the backbone of the theatre's status – and funding schemes for that matter – in the 1990s. Being the oldest 'playwrights' theatre' in Britain still is its widely acknowledged role; a role that justifies funds, no matter how well the turnout of actual new trends at the Court. The Royal Court's legacy, by today, has become a marvel in British theatre history. In how far this narrative was forged by Stafford-Clark – in the 1980s – and Stephen Daldry – in the 1990s – will be shown in Chapter 6 and 7. At this point, it is important to keep in mind that whatever the Royal Court had achieved, just ten or twenty years before, did not matter in 1977. The theatre was clearly failing at what it had once been, and later would be, famous for: being a 'playwrights' theatre'.

Yet, to begin with, it was not true that all of Joint Stock went to the Royal Court. Stafford-Clark comments on his plans to bring Hare's work to the Court:

When I went to the Court, the two writers I most wanted to bring in were Kureishi and Hare. When I left, I hadn't done a single play by Hare [...]. I did see David as the outstanding writer of my generation who was writing public plays, who ought to have been at the Court. It was just unfortunate that it coincided with Richard Eyre's regime at the National, which offered him a sympathetic home and gave him a bigger stage and a much more substantial income. (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 101-102)

The example of David Hare is indicative not only of the difficult situation the Court was in during the 1970s and onward regarding the growing interest of other theatres in new writing and the resulting funding situation. It also speaks to the hardship of Stafford-Clark's settling into this theatre institution: budgets, administrative structures, and production conditions stood in the way of artistic merit and Stafford-Clark's personal agenda. Further, Stafford-Clark's Joint Stock method, which was outstanding in 1970, had grown independent of a venue. He worked with extraordinarily long rehearsal times and extensive workshops. As he was touring his plays, he was around for the run; during this time the play kept growing. The effect of an audience not liking a play did not have the same box office shattering consequence as it could have for a fixed theatre venue: it simply played in another town next week, to new reviews and new audiences. It must therefore be asked: did the Joint Stock method fit a theatre institution like the Royal Court?

The episode around Herbert's approaching Dexter regarding the artistic leadership of the Court shows that there were doubts about Stafford-Clark being a good fit for the theatre; here, in the eyes of one of its most established figures. It is possible that this animosity was merely, like with Burge, rooted in the fact that Stafford-Clark was not a member of the 'Royal Court family'. It can, however, also be argued that the Court establishment, in its fear of the fringe, was afraid that Stafford-Clark, once he had become the Artistic Director, would completely change the Royal Court according to his vision and actually turn it into a much dreaded fringe venue. And indeed, Burge had led the way for this by installing a new Council and generally altering the power structures at the Court. When Stafford-Clark took over in 1979, he could have seized the moment and turned the newly structured and still weak Royal Court into a theatre according to his fringe understanding of theatre. Looking at Stafford-Clark's career, and keeping in mind Wardle's statements about the "two diametrically opposite ways of pursuing radical theatre" that Stafford-Clark allegedly combined, it shall be analysed if Stafford-Clark's work method, as well as his 'fringe ways,' actually found a place at the Royal Court. By looking at Stafford-Clark's work at Joint Stock and at the Royal Court in 1979, it shall be understood what actually did remain of Joint Stock once Stafford-Clark took on the directorship of the Court.

From the 1960s on, Stafford-Clark had worked in artistic environments that largely focussed on the production of new work. In 1966, he became stage manager at the

Traverse Theatre, and in 1967 the assistant of the Director Gordon McDoughall. At the Traverse, Stafford-Clark directed James Saunter's *Double Double* (1962) in 1966, and three plays by Paul Foster (1963, 1964 and 1966) under the umbrella title *Dead and Buried*, in 1967.

In 1967, Foster's plays were seen in Edinburgh during the Festival in a production by Café La Mamma. The La Mamma Troupe's founder Ellen Stewart wrote to Stafford-Clark in June 1967:

Paul Foster has returned in a blaze of glory, thanks to you and Gordon. I know just what a presentation of this sort must have meant, and particularly since you were pioneering the Off-Off-Broadway movement in Scotland. You were very courageous and I am sure your efforts were not received with open arms by your public but remember, you have begun and you will in time win. What is most important is that you were the first one of your country to embrace the movement. You will receive rightful recognition. (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 5)

La Mamma's work duly impressed Stafford-Clark and implanted the wish for his own ensemble in him. In January 1968, he even went to New York to work with La Mamma.

Later in 1968, Stafford-Clark was appointed the Artistic Director of the Traverse. While encouraging the style of the new movement in Europe and America that was "groping towards additional methods of expressing emotion and feeling, through voices, through dance movement and through much greater physical involvement" (7), Stafford-Clark's plan to introduce a small cast to the Traverse that would form a permanent theatre workshop to experiment was also rooted in the idea to encourage and develop new playwrights. But Stafford-Clark's new policy was not welcomed by the Traverse's Council.

In 1969, Stafford-Clark resigned as Artistic Director of the Traverse to be Director of the Traverse Workshop Company. With the Workshop Company, Stafford-Clark toured to Boston, Amsterdam, York, Glasgow, and London. In June 1971, the Workshop brought Stanley Eveling's *Our Sunday Times* (1971) to the Royal Court's Theatre Upstairs. Here Stafford-Clark met Keith Johnstone. Stafford-Clark recalls: "What was happening at the Court was something I'd read about but knew very little of" (14). Still, Johnstone worked with Stafford-Clark and influenced his work through his improvisation techniques. The Traverse Workshop had been invited to the Royal Court's 'Come Together' Festival in 1970, but did not have a play to present at the time (14).

By the early 1970s, Stafford-Clark had made himself a name in the field of experimental theatre and in working with new playwrights. Stafford-Clark had his directing debut at the Royal Court with David Hare's *Slag* in 1971. In 1972, Stafford-Clark left the Traverse and became a freelance director. With *Hitler Dances* in 1972, Howard Brenton's collaboration with Stafford-Clark commenced. In 1973, Stafford-Clark, for a time, became the Royal Court's resident director: "I lived in a hut at the back" (16). During this period he directed Howard Brenton's *Magnificence* (1973). Lindsay Anderson hated it and his attitude "was extremely contagious" (17). Eventually, Stafford-Clark realized that "if you wanted to experiment in any way you had to have

your own company” (17). The Joint Stock Theatre Group was founded in 1974. Gaskill recalls:

I don't know why Max Stafford-Clark, David Aukin and David Hare founded Joint Stock. I was not involved in it. I admired Max's work at the Traverse and I had brought his Workshop Company to the Royal Court [...] for several visits. David Hare had been my Literary Manager [...]. David Aukin I didn't know. Max and I were sitting on the steps of the Royal Court one day in 1973 talking about the future – and so my memory of it is. Max had given up his Traverse Company and I had left the Court; we both knew – and liked – each other's work but not our working methods. (Ritchie 101)

At another point Gaskill describes Joint Stock as “the dream we all had, this wonderful thing of a great permanent group, and long rehearsal periods” (Gaskill in Roberts and Stafford-Clark 21).

Many fringe companies had been founded since the abolition of stage censorship in 1968; a whole movement had already happened when Joint Stock was founded:

The idealism that prompted an earlier generation to risk all for a play had vanished – gone, some might say, to try its luck in the British film industry. What remains of the extraordinary upsurge of talent and energy is a dense network of theatre groups, built, staffed and moulded during a decade of expansion that began some time in the mid-sixties. Joint Stock is one of a handful of groups that emerged towards the end of this period. (Ritchie 11)

Joint Stock's first production was Heathcote Williams' *The Speaker* (1964) in 1974. It had been recommended to William Gaskill by Harold Pinter. *Fanshen* (1976), in an adaptation by David Hare, was Joint Stock's second production and was co-directed by Gaskill and Stafford-Clark. Before the next co-direction of *Yesterday's News* (1976), Stafford-Clark wrote about his work with Gaskill: “I hadn't much wanted to work with Bill again. I do find myself swamped by his personality but it's also true that the joint shows have a weight I don't get by doing shows by myself” (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 23). The next show Stafford-Clark directed alone. This show was to be named *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), and marked the beginning of Stafford-Clark's famous and fruitful collaboration with Caryl Churchill.

Originally, Churchill and Colin Bennett had been engaged as writers, but Bennett withdrew (24). Churchill had worked for the Royal Court for several years by that time. Churchill's *Owners* (1972), in a production by Wright, was her Royal Court debut in November 1972. She was writer-in-residence in 1974. The workshop for *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* began on 5 May 1976, rehearsals started in August. It opened at the Traverse Theatre on 7 September and transferred to the Theatre Upstairs at the Royal Court for an extended run of nine weeks.

Not only did Joint Stock, unlike many other groups, succeed in existing as a touring company producing new plays, it also gained a name by developing their own famous method to develop plays: the Joint Stock method. Max Stafford-Clark explains:

Although I think both Joint Stock and the Court had a constant commitment to new writing, the work we did at Joint Stock took as its starting point a subject and a writer and a

group of actors, followed by a workshop where one investigated, researched, and improvised on the subject for several weeks. And then we turned the play over to the writer. It was in no sense merely improvised work. An artistic imperative was that the writer be intruded on as little as possible. (Doty and Harbin 67)

The early months of 1977 saw an identity crisis at Joint Stock. The lack of an articulated credo was criticized. Gaskill commented: “we have lost what we are doing it for, what centre we are operating from” (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 28). Meanwhile, Stuart Burge had taken over the artistic directorship of the Royal Court and had appointed Stafford-Clark and Jonathan Miller as his Associates. In May 1977, Stafford-Clark took up this appointment. Burge comments on his appointing Stafford-Clark:

I knew about him and I’d seen one or two productions of his [but] the main thing was Joint Stock and that was really where I knew him. And I just thought he was a very likely Associate Director... I think the first thing you have to do when you become an Artistic Director is seek out your successor. I thought he would be a candidate. I tried to get him to come as co-director but the Boards¹⁰⁹ wouldn’t have him. (29)

Before becoming Associate Director at the Court, Stafford-Clark had directed nine productions that had transferred to the theatre – both with the Traverse Workshop and Joint Stock – and two for the Royal Court¹¹⁰.

In May 1978, Stafford-Clark felt “a bit disenchanted with Joint Stock” (29). He wrote: “I’d rather help the Royal Court” (29). Stafford-Clark felt that “the Royal Court should be open house to the Fringe, but should also develop its own projects and its own writers. Unless there are projects, people, energy plugged into it as an organization, and depending on it, we’re fucked” (29). It is noteworthy that Stafford-Clark felt he was in a position to help the Court. It is further remarkable that what he considered help meant turning the Royal Court into a theatre, which conceptually had been opposed by the Royal Court staff since the late 1960s. Irving Wardle – in 1981 – commented on Stafford-Clark’s influence on the Royal Court:

109 This was in April 1977. The Boards, namely the English Stage Company’s Council, was reorganised by Burge consecutively.

110 In 1971 alone, four productions directed by Stafford-Clark were seen at the Court. Besides *Slag* on 24 May, on the main stage, the Traverse Workshop’s *Our Sunday Times* opened at the Theatre Upstairs on 2 June, so did the Workshop’s *Amaryllis* on 4 June, and the Workshop’s *Sweet Alice* on 25 June. On 13 June 1972, the Theatre Workshop’s *Hitler Dances* opened at the Court Upstairs. On 28 June 1973, *Magnificence*, which Stafford-Clark directed for the Royal Court opened on the main stage. On 14 May 1974, Joint Stock’s production of Stanley Eveling’s *Shivers* opened at the Court Upstairs, on 19 August Joint Stock’s production of Barry Reckord’s *X*, and on 6 November Joint Stock’s production of Colin Bennett’s *Fourth Day Like Four Long Months of Absence*; both Upstairs. On 11 May 1976, Gaskill’s and Stafford-Clark’s co-direction of Joint Stock’s *Yesterday’s News* opened at the Court Upstairs, and on 27 September the Joint Stock production of Caryl Churchill’s *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, Upstairs, again. (Findlater, *25 Years* 226-238)

I feel that one of the important things that happened between 1975 and the present is that the Court has begun to assimilate the work of the fringe movement. In its early stages, it was difficult for new writers representing change to achieve an accommodation because the policy at the Court then was to work inside the administration for change, and not to offend the Arts Council any more than was necessary, to collect capitalist backers as energetically as possible, and to do the work, no matter how subversive, while disturbing the people with the money as little as possible. (Doty and Harbin 218)

Stafford-Clark worked on two more productions for Joint Stock: Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* in 1979, and Hanif Kureishi's *Borderline* in 1981. Gaskill ended his association with Joint Stock with a production of Nicholas Wright's adaptation of Balzac's *The Crimes in Vautrin* in 1983.

Max Stafford-Clark's first production as an Associate Director at the Royal Court, Snoo Wilson's *The Glad Hand* – a co-production with Joint Stock (Ritchie 63) – opened on the main stage on 11 May 1978. Before bringing yet another Joint Stock production to the Court with *Cloud Nine* in 1979, Stafford-Clark directed Thomas Babe's *Prayer for My Daughter*, which opened at the Theatre Upstairs on 24 August 1978, and transferred to the main stage on 14 November, and Alan Brown's *Wheelchair Willie*, which opened on the main stage on 6 December 1978. Stafford-Clark recalls: "My focus began to shift towards the Royal Court" (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 68).

In 1981, Stafford-Clark called Joint Stock "a kind of tributary to the Court" (Doty and Harbin 66) and explained:

The relationship of Joint Stock to the Court is simply that it used some of the same personnel and writers who had been associated with the Court. Because Joint Stock had better working conditions (we were able to work for ten weeks on a play), we were able to take the stage of research and investigation further and feed it back to the writer. (107)

Stafford-Clark calls Joint Stock 'a tributary to the Court' when his description of the two companies simultaneously suggests that Joint Stock really was not very much like the Royal Court. The whole idea of a 'Royal Court in exile' was founded in Gaskill and Stafford-Clark also being associated with the Court. What is true though, was that the Arts Council felt that the Royal Court needed to become more like Joint Stock. As such it was important that the amalgamation of Joint Stock and the Royal Court appeared like an organic process. This could be achieved by arguing that both organizations were virtually the same – one actually being a tributary to the other. In truth, they were not. Joint Stock had partly been founded because Stafford-Clark had been fed up with the Royal Court. He had created a company that was in many ways the exact opposite of the Court. Playwright Stephen Lowe speaks about the work of Joint Stock in comparison to Royal Court work:

[A]t Joint Stock we took the entire company, including the designers, outside London for a month and divided half of the time in painting, decorating, and physical work. And that's very difficult to do; you need a structure that is not weighed down with having a theatre that has got to be open, and so on. (Doty and Harbin 154-155)

He further adds: “With Joint Stock you can tour where you want and you can pick spaces that are not theatre spaces, and so on. The Court simply can’t do that. There it is in Sloane Square, with a certain type of informed audience” (155). Caryl Churchill comments on her work with Joint Stock: “At Joint Stock you’re under the pressure of time and people are seeing the script the minute you’ve written it so you rewrite during the rehearsal. Whereas, my plays for the Court were put on virtually without rewriting” (Doty and Harbin 163). The common denominator Joint Stock and the Court, accordingly, had, was their personnel. And indeed, Stafford-Clark’s work with Joint Stock and for the Royal Court at this point was largely diffused. A good example of this is the fact that Churchill’s *Cloud Nine* is often considered a Royal Court production – even by Stafford-Clark himself (Stafford-Clark, personal interview).

It is true that *Cloud Nine* was revived in a Joint Stock Royal Court co-production, in September 1980. The original production was, however, produced by Joint Stock alone¹¹¹. It must therefore be distinguished between Stafford-Clark himself and Joint Stock – which, unlike Stafford-Clark, did not exist in two places at once. While Stafford-Clark worked in both contexts, his two work places, however, were fundamentally different in structure and artistic aim. In the following, *Cloud Nine*’s production history shall be looked at in order to understand how strongly Joint Stock’s work processes differed from those of an established theatre venue like the Royal Court.

The work on Caryl Churchill’s *Cloud Nine* began in 1978. Following the Joint Stock method, a workshop preceded the rehearsal period. After this workshop, which was running from 14 September to 6 October 1978, Churchill wrote *Cloud Nine*. It opened on 14 February 1979 at the Dartington College of Arts, and ran at the Royal Court as part of the main bill from 29 March until 24 April. Little and McLaughlin comment: “Despite the luke-warm reviews, the play was a popular hit and would become a modern classic and a school set text” (Little and McLaughlin 196).

Cloud Nine was born out of the idea for a workshop on sexual politics that Caryl Churchill had while working as a tutor for the Court’s Young People’s Theatre (195). As this was Joint Stock’s terrain, Stafford-Clark picked up the idea, and workshops began on 14 September 1978. The actors cast for both the workshops and the production were Anthony Sher, Jim Hooper, Tony Rohr, Julie Covington, Miriam Margolyes, Carole Hayman, and William Hoyland. Dave Hill and Jane Wood only took part in the workshops. Margolyes comments on her casting:

They needed a lesbian for a play about sexual politics. [...] On the first day of rehearsal Max explained the working process. I was on a high for weeks; it was the rehearsal process for me which means Joint Stock and I remember the ‘truth’ sessions – sitting in a circle each day, one of us in the middle, telling everything about our lives, our sexuality, and our insecurities. (Margolyes in Ritchie 138)

111 *Cloud Nine* opened on 18 May 1981 Off-Broadway in a separate production and ran for more than a year (Little and McLaughlin 196).

Tony Sher recalls:

The group was being chosen for their versatility not just of talent, but of lifestyle. Thus the collective assembled for the workshop [...] included a straight married couple, a straight divorced couple, a gay male couple, a lesbian, a lesbian-to-be, at least two bisexual men, no bisexual women, and then, of course, the usual large number of heterosexuals – that is, when they weren't dabbling in the other categories. Finally, observing this cross-section, this Noah's Ark of human sexuality, was our playwright Caryl Churchill, herself a committed and tolerant feminist. (139)

In the course of the workshop Stafford-Clark and the actors tried to explore 'sexual politics' through improvised exercises, and by talking about their own experiences, their sexual preferences, their families, their partners, and their own persons. Caryl Churchill attended the workshops, and used the material for her play. Yet, Stafford-Clark remarks, "it would be quite wrong to imply that the experience of the workshop was the only influence on Caryl's writing" (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 88).

The workshop ended on 6 October. During the ten-week break before the start of rehearsals, Churchill wrote the play. In the meantime, the rest of the collective met continuously and kept discussing their work and the production. On 18 October 1978, the group talked about the "Caryl Project" (Stafford-Clark, *Diary* 18 Oct. 1978) at a Joint Stock meeting at the Riverside Studios. While trying to convey how personal the material was to all of them, the issue of exploitation – though not in an artistic manner – was raised by Alison Ritchie, at the time stage and company manager. She admitted never to have worked similar hours before on any job. Other crew members also felt that they had put in extra work. Stafford-Clark asked in his diary: "Who is exploiting who? They are all working extraordinarily hard" (18 Oct. 1978). Margolyes remained positive: "I was continually astonished that we were getting paid for it" (18 Oct. 1978)¹¹².

A meeting on 1 November 1978, at the Riverside Studios, was largely about the question of how Joint Stock was to be run in the future. Gaskill suggested that the group be led by someone with continuing interest in it. He further raised the issues of controlling finances, the involvement of actors, whether there should be a permanent group of actors, and the option of smaller shows in the future. Also, Gaskill, who had directed *Macbeth* at the National Theatre in summer 1978, was keen on testing Joint Stock's techniques on classics at the National by taking some of the group with him. This obviously meant Gaskill's absence from Joint Stock. At the same meeting, Gaskill predicted, somewhat in disregard of the whole collective's work: "Sex and politics with Julie Covington¹¹³. You'll be packed" (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 88). It was further discussed whether *Cloud Nine* was to be presented as a proscenium arch show in London

112 The passage reads slightly different in *Taking Stock*: "I was continually astonished that we were getting paid for doing something incredibly interesting" (88).

113 Covington was popular due to her singing the part of Evita in the original studio recordings of Lloyd Webber's and Rice's *Evita* in 1976. 'Don't Cry for Me Argentina' had been number one in the UK charts in February 1977. She had also appeared on TV with *Rock Follies* (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 91).

at the Royal Court and if it should have a proper proscenium tour; clearly the income would have been larger; the company was in favour of it (1 Nov. 1978).

On 3 November, Stafford-Clark did a rough sketch of Joint Stock's budget: "it looks as if we'll be £1,000 short" (3 Nov. 1978). From 6 November on Stafford-Clark rehearsed Alan Brown's *Wheelchair Willie* (1978) at the Court, which opened on 6 December. Shortly before the start of the rehearsal period on 10 December, another Joint Stock meeting took place. Stafford-Clark's diary entries show how hard the work with the company was for the actors, how the commitment differed from person to person, and how the democratic organization functioned. Tony Sher felt that "actors are out under intolerable strain because of the alternative work he has now been offered"¹¹⁴ (*Diary* 10 Dec. 1978). Stafford-Clark captures the situation the actors were in: "The money wasn't much and the length of commitment demanded was considerable, with an unpaid gap between the workshop and the commencement of rehearsal" (89). He adds: "Job satisfaction very much depended on the part" (89). Again the question of who the company actually was came up.

At a meeting at the Royal Court on 13 December, *Cloud Nine* went through its second reading. The script, the structure – the first half being set in an African country in the Victorian age, and the second in London in 1979, with the characters only having aged 25 years – felt difficult to the actors. Churchill explains that this structure relates to the idea of "the parallel between colonial and sexual oppression" (Churchill vi). Stafford-Clark writes in his diary of 13 December¹¹⁵: "The actors respond so that Caryl can consider rewrites before we start rehearsal on 2 January" (*Diary* 13 Dec. 1978). Stafford-Clark tries to capture the negotiation process over the play:

Tony S.: 'One of the most brilliant pieces of political theatre I've ever read... one is constantly surprised in the first half... a shame that we have to leave the jungle at all.' Technical brilliance of the first half was very difficult to follow. Carole: preferred second half because it was more relevant to what's happening now. Felt also second half should be rooted more. Caryl: Wanted to show white male dominance in first half, and the increased role for women in the second half. Max: 'The material of the monologue is terrific.'¹¹⁶ (*Diary* 31 Dec. 1978)

114 Not so in his diary, but in *Taking Stock* the quote runs on: "He wants to wriggle out, but Miriam nails him" (88).

115 According to *Taking Stock*, the passage was put down by Stafford-Clark on 17 December.

116 The same passage reads differently in *Taking Stock*. "Carole: preferred second... rooted more" is cut and a whole paragraph added at the end after "'The material of the monologue is terrific". It reads: "The shorter scenes in the second half make it seem more fragmented, while the first half progresses in longer scenes. In the first half people avoid talking about relationships at all, and in the second half they talk about them all the time.' Caryl: 'I haven't caught a real momentum in the second half. It's hard to devise an action that will drive it along. But I will go back and start again. I have to get everybody talking about an interesting variety of problems...'" (90). This last passage cannot be found in Stafford-Clark's diary.

At the same meeting, Graham Crowley, then General Manager of Joint Stock, proposed a tour with eight weeks on the road. On the same day, Stafford-Clark wrote about his work at both Joint Stock and the Royal Court: “RC: Impossible to direct plays like I’ve been doing and also play any major part in what’s going to happen next” (13 Dec. 1978).

On 19 December, Stafford-Clark notes the mood towards *Cloud Nine*: “A tiny revolt. I stay in all day and won’t go to the Court. Rereading Act rewritten 2 of Caryl’s play” (19 Dec. 1978). Rehearsals for *Cloud Nine* began on 2 January 1979. Stafford-Clark, however, felt that the play he was to rehearse was not even created yet.

Because I lose grip on it myself occasionally or because I’m thrown because all the other influences is all the more reason why you should have a clear idea of what it is we’re doing this next week. It is getting the play right. I do not and would not be panicked into casting and rehearsing it. Because others are losing their bottle all the more reason why I should not. Danger of terrible mediocrity seeping into it.

problems: One is to expose ourselves, our problems

Two is to create a play about it

Three is to rehearse and perform that play

We are still at stage 2. (2 Jan. 1979)

More rows occurred amongst the team over the issue of publicity in regard to the opportunity for the company to appear on a TV show: the ‘South Bank Show’. On 10 January Stafford-Clark wrote: “There is only one decision we can possibly take if we are being financially responsible and shows a lack of belief in ourselves. If you don’t care how many people see it, then what’s the point in a company of this nature?”¹¹⁷ (*Diary* 10 Jan. 1979). But the actors were hesitant, feeling the publicity unfitting. Covington felt uncomfortable with the media’s attention circling around her, as she was clearly trying to escape it at Joint Stock (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 91).

Churchill delivered the remainder of the rewritten second half of the play on 15 January. By this time she was writing against the deadline of the first performance, which was scheduled for 14 February. She worked hard, while the actors took to rehearsing the first half. More rows on casting followed, as it became clear that the character constellation of the rewritten second half would not allow to rectify some imbalances in casting: some had hoped to get bigger parts in the second half for having been under-parted in the first (15 Jan. 1979). Stafford-Clark writes:

Oh dear, Miriam wants to play Lin. Carole also wants to play Lin. Send Miriam and Carole out of the room so we can discuss it. Are the criteria: 1. To serve the play? 2. To give Miriam first choice because she’s underparted in the first half. Tony R[ohr] also a problem. Is he going to leave too? ‘I’m sick of dressing in boy’s clothes.’ (15 Jan. 1979; Roberts and Stafford-Clark 91)

Lin, a strong, lesbian single mother, and one of the main characters in the second half of the play, was eventually played by Hayman. Margolyes played her love interest

117 In *Taking Stock*, Stafford-Clark allegedly quotes from his diary: “There is only one decision we can possibly take if we are being financially responsible. If you don’t care how many people see it, then what’s the point?” (91).

Victoria, a no less major part. Margoyles had been under-parted in part one as she had played the mother-in-law, and a fairly stereotypical rendition of one for that matter, with only a few lines. The person to have been sick of wearing boys' clothes here can only be Julie Covington, who played the 9-year-old Edward in Act I. Covington playing Edward, eventually, was only one of two instances where casting actually differed from Churchill's intentions. Stafford-Clark comments: "Bear in mind that [with] the exception of Julie playing Edward (written for Jane) and of Carole possibly playing Ellen (written for Julie) we h[a]v[e not] deputed from roles which Caryl wrote for people" (16 Jan. 1979). Still, the debates took up rehearsal time, leading to bad temper and exhaustion. As such the casting process further put the group through a big test.

Since Joint Stock was working in a highly co-operative way, and was run through democratic principles, everyone had a say in the casting, and any other decision for that matter. On 16 January, the discontent reached its climax. Stafford-Clark notes in his diary: "Now in a position where (almost) anybody in the company w[oul]d or will leave if they are unhappy [with] their parts. So all talk ab[ou]t what's good for the play, is tempered [with] that knowledge" (16 Jan. 1979). Clearly the debate about what was good for the play was largely influenced by various personal agendas. The danger of the group falling apart was very imminent. Miriam Margoyles was hurt: "The method should be improved. The casting process is not a good one. [...] I must say I feel hurt" (16 Jan. 1979; Robert and Stafford-Clark 92). Tony Sher felt that "the process of democracy cannot work in the end – 'as good a director as Max' will always get his way" (16 Jan. 1979; Roberts and Stafford-Clark 92). Margoyles also felt that "equality of parts is an impossible brief. My expectations were incorrect" (16 Jan. 1979; Roberts and Stafford-Clark 92). Stafford-Clark noted to himself that casting should not begin until the whole play is known (16 Jan. 1979). The discontent with the workings of Joint Stock, as well as with Stafford-Clark's leadership, is evident in the actors' comments. The principle of democracy posed several problems, and made work difficult. On 16 January, Stafford-Clark felt this sorely, as he commented in his diary, clearly exhaustedly: "It's not the gr[ou]p participation. Inexperienced. [...] 'the gr[ou]p w[oul]d fall apart'. All gr[ou]ps fall apart".

The practical execution of the Joint Stock method became a hardship to the group: they were in rehearsal, but the play was still being created. They were able to cast one half of the play, rehearse it and understand it, and when the second half came along it felt like a game changer on many levels. Under these conditions – and still being at 'stage 2', the creation of the play – rehearsals did not go very well: "Solid day on Act 1. Not very inspired" (22 Jan. 1979), "Enormous work to be done" (24 Jan. 1979).

At the same time battles had to be fought on the organizational side. The planning of the tour posed problems, particularly and surprisingly – given Stafford-Clark's affiliation – with the Royal Court's Artistic Director. Stuart Burge was keeping himself 'flexible' on whether Joint Stock could open at the Court on 19 March. As a letter by Graham Crowley dated 18 January tells, Burge had been moving the date of the London opening around to accommodate the Court's own schedule better – first from 12 to 19

March. As he decided to move it to 26 March, and even suggested a ‘week out’ if Joint Stock could not rearrange their touring schedule, Crowley got cross. This was largely an issue of financial obligation of the Court to Joint Stock. Crowley wrote asking for financial compensation during that week, but Burge did not give in:

I really must insist that the interests of the Royal Court come first. I still have not seen a script, but Caryl Churchill and Joint Stock are very close to us here and we want to be as accommodating as we possibly can be without prejudice to our own works.

I hope very much that you can find another date to fill the gap. (Burge, 19 Jan. 1979)

Crowley replied: “Moving the date of our London opening around is enormously inconvenient for us [...] Eleven weeks before it is due to happen is simply too late to change the date [...] we must stick to our agreement to open on the 19th, or be compensated for that week” (Crowley, 23 Jan. 1979). On 24 January, Crowley sent Burge the script and wrote: “Of course, as the Artistic Director, you have to put the Royal Court’s interests first. But that surely doesn’t extend to going back on an agreement to Joint Stock? After all, if *Cloud Nine* doesn’t do good business, I’ll eat my hat” (Crowley, 24 Jan. 1979). The play eventually opened on 29 March, and previews started on 26 March, like Burge had wanted. The Royal Court agreed to compensation of £650 for the week of 19 March (Jenkins, 12 Mar. 1979), which compared to a £1,300 weekly fee during the run (Royal Court Theatre, 2 Feb. 1979). This episode not only illustrates the hardship of touring and of financing an operation like Joint Stock, but also the power a theatre like the Royal Court, and its Artistic Director had.

Cloud Nine premiered in Dartington on 14 February 1979. The script in its finished form tells the story of a British family through two generations. Act I sees Clive, a British government official stationed in an African colony of the British Empire, his wife Betty, and their two children, the 9-year-old Edward and the 2-year-old Victoria. Also living with them is Betty’s mother Maud, the governess Ellen, and a young native called Joshua. Mrs. Saunders, a widow, living nearby and Harry Bagley, an explorer, are coming to visit. What is most striking about the personnel is the way in which the different characters were cast. Both Betty and Edward were cast cross-gender; Betty was played by a man and young Edward played by a woman. The black servant Joshua was played by a white man. Churchill comments in a pre-text to the script:

Betty, Clive’s wife, is played by a man because she wants to be what men want her to be, and, in the same way, Joshua, the black servant, is played by a white man because he wants to be what whites want him to be. Betty does not value herself as a woman, nor does Joshua value himself as black. Edward, Clive’s son, is played by a woman for a different reason partly to do with the stage convention of having boys played by women (Peter Pan, radio plays, etc.) and partly with highlighting the way Clive tries to impose traditional male behaviour on him. (Churchill iv)

The play opens to an evening scene and the cast singing a song to praise the British Empire: “Come gather, sons of England, come gather in your pride. Now meet the world

united, now face it side by side [...]” (1). Next, Clive and his family introduce themselves. Just as with the song, they speak in couplets: “This is my family. Though far from home/ We serve the Queen wherever we may roam./ I am a father to the natives here,/ And father to my family so dear” (1). Betty presents herself as being her husband’s creation, her single aim being to be what he looks for in a wife. Next, Joshua introduces himself. He claims to hate his tribe, to have a white man’s soul: “My master is my light/ I only live for him” (2). Edward is introduced as a young boy, struggling with growing up to be the man his father wants him to be (2). Victoria, played by a dummy, Maud, and Ellen are also presented, yet Clive comments: “No need for any speeches by the rest” (2).

The action begins with Clive returning from an excursion into the jungle. Joshua serves him a drink and Betty speaks of her long day without him, which she spent reading and playing the piano. Clive inquires: “So today has been, all right? No fainting? No hysteria” (4). Betty answers: “I have been very tranquil” (4). She complains shortly about her mother and Ellen not really breaking the monotony of her day, but is also ready to proclaim that not enjoying herself is her service to the Empire (4). A matter that’s more pressing to her though is the way Joshua treated her earlier, telling her to fetch a book herself. Clive confronts Joshua and makes him apologize to Betty, only to take the scolding back immediately by winking at Joshua amicably – unseen by Betty. In a similar display of clearly set gender roles, Clive advises Edward on being a man and not playing with his sister’s doll. But it is not just by Clive that these gender roles are enforced. As soon as Betty is alone with her mother, Maud tells her how well she has done on her marriage, how pretty she is, and to work on her patience. When soon after the neighbour, the widow Mrs. Saunders, arrives at the family home – to seek protection from attacks of the local tribes – Maud’s reaction is similarly influenced by her set views on female behaviour: “How rash to go out after dark without a shawl” (11). Surprisingly, it is Clive who is not in any way irritated by the circumstances of Mrs. Saunderson’s visit: “She has ridden here all alone, amazing spirit” (10). After Mrs. Saunders has left to lie down, Harry Bagley and Edward enter. Following a brief encounter in which Harry claims not to know Edward well – though the boy questions this, Edward goes to bed.

Harry now talks about his time in the jungle, where he took a raft up the river. When Joshua and Clive go to fetch guns to protect themselves at night, Betty joins Harry. It soon becomes apparent that there is a romantic interest between the two. Yet, as Harry takes Betty into his arms, she runs off. Joshua, who has been watching them all along, appears and Harry suggests: “Shall we go in the barn and fuck? It’s not an order” (15). Joshua agrees.

Clive’s affair with Mrs. Saunders comes out in the next scene. While she is preparing to ride home again, he holds her up, admitting: “Since you came to the house I have had an erection twenty-four hours a day except for the ten minutes after the time we had intercourse” (15). While the rest of the family are preparing for the Christmas picnic, Clive convinces Mrs. Saunders to stay, and disappears under her skirt (16). The

intercourse, however, is not to both parties' satisfaction. As he hears a Christmas carol, Clive stops. "CLIVE The Christmas picnic. I came. MRS SAUNDERS I didn't. CLIVE I'm all sticky. MRS SAUNDERS What about me? Wait. CLIVE All right, are you? Come on. We mustn't be found. MRS SAUNDERS Don't go. CLIVE Caroline, you are so voracious. Do let go. Tidy yourself up. There's a hair in my mouth" (17).

The Christmas picnic proceeds. Joshua sits guard with a gun. Presents are being unwrapped, there's champagne, Christmas crackers, and a guinea fowl, disguised as a turkey. Edward plays ball with the adults, but it doesn't end well as Clive is unhappy with his son's sportive performance. Eventually, the women leave to play hide-and-seek with the children. Harry joins them, and as Joshua and Clive are left alone, Joshua confides in Clive about the untrustworthiness of the stable boys, who are secretly meeting with their tribes, and Betty's infatuation with Harry. At the same time, Harry and Betty have hid behind the house. Betty asks Harry to run away with her. They are interrupted by Betty's mother, Maud, who has been stung by something. As Joshua takes Maud to the house to rest, Betty and Harry share another brief moment, in which Betty speaks of killing herself. Harry calms her: "Betty, you are a star in my sky. Without you I would have no sense of direction. I need you, and I need you where you are, I need you to be Clive's wife. I need to go up rivers and know you are sitting here thinking of me" (23). Edward calls, and it is Harry who goes looking for him.

Once Harry catches up with Edward, the boy asks Harry if he can come and see him at night; he also gives Harry a necklace that he stole from his mother. As Harry asks him to put the necklace back, the boy exclaims: "Harry, I love you. [...] You know what we did when you were here before. I want to do it again. I think about it all the time. I try to do it myself but it's not as good. Don't you want to anymore?" (25). As Harry retreats, saying it is a sin and a crime and plainly wrong, Edward only pursues his efforts: "Is it big now? [...] Let me touch it" (25). Harry first refuses, but then gives Edward permission to come to his bed when he cannot sleep.

As Edward and Harry keep playing hide-and-seek, Betty confides in Ellen – who is played by the same actress as Mrs. Saunders – about her love for Harry. She tells Ellen that she kissed Harry and wants to run away with him. It soon becomes clear though that Ellen's interest in Betty is not merely driven by friendship: she confesses her love to Betty, and kisses her. Betty's reaction is a very polite one, as she mostly ignores Ellen's attempt and tells her she's only a friend.

Scene Three opens with the flogging of servants off-stage. The women are inside the house. Edward plays with Victoria's doll and is immediately told off not to, as it is not for a man to play with a doll. Edward rebels, but as Clive enters with Harry, tells his father about the incident and apologizes. Edward leaves with Harry and as all start to go, Clive holds Betty back and confronts her about Harry: "CLIVE I never thought of you having the weakness of your sex, only the good qualities. BETTY I am bad, bad, bad—" (33). Eventually, Clive forgives Betty, in spite of admitting that he will never feel the same way about her as he did before. As they, however, still have duties to the household, they go on, arm in arm. Edward enters quietly to play with the doll again and

is told by Joshua that he is a “sissy” (33). Betty calls for Edward and asks Joshua to fetch her some thread. Joshua refuses, telling her that she has got legs under her skirt, and “much more” (35). It is only when Edward tells Joshua to listen to Betty that Joshua obeys. As Betty wants to hug Edward for having been so wonderful, the boy retreats. The scene ends with a song praising the importance of a mother to her son: “A boy’s best friend is his mother” (35).

It is morning as Scene Four opens. Joshua is telling Edward a religious story about the creation of the worlds that is clearly his tribe’s. As Edward asks if it is true, Joshua denies it and quotes the bible instead. Clive and Harry enter, talking about an uprising of the tribes that occurred the night before. Several tribesmen were killed. Clive and Joshua go inside and Edward confronts Harry about their relationship. Harry tells him he is going to leave, fulfil his duties to the Empire. It is with the same reason that Betty lets Ellen go in the following: “But women have their duties as soldiers have. You must be a mother if you can” (39). Clive also approaches Harry about Betty, instead of being unforgiving, as with Betty, though, he tries to mend his friendship with Harry. Harry misunderstands Clive’s approach as a romantic one and approaches him, which leaves Clive disgusted. Harry immediately admits to his sin and to suffering from a disease, and asks Clive for help. Clive refuses to protect Harry or keep silent about his sexual orientation, and suggests Harry get married. As Mrs. Saunders now enters, Harry asks her to marry him, but she refuses, admitting that she can never be a wife again. Next Joshua enters. His family has been killed in the uprising of the previous night. Clive offers his condolences, but Joshua still rejects his family; Clive and Betty are his parents now. With that settled, Harry asks Ellen to marry him. As Joshua now wants to inform Clive about Ellen’s feelings for Betty, which he also overheard, Clive tells him that he’s going too far.

Harry and Ellen are getting married in Scene Five. It opens with Joshua destroying the doll Edward is playing with, and carries on with Betty discovering that her necklace has been stolen. Edward, having stolen it for Harry, blames Joshua, but Harry exposes the boy. Mrs. Saunders arrives, announcing that she will move back to England. As Clive kisses her, Betty launches herself at Mrs. Saunders and the two women fight. Clive throws Mrs. Saunders out over this and is amazed by Betty’s behaviour – in a loving fashion though: “Were you jealous my dove? My own dear wife!” (46). Edward presents the stolen necklace and claims to have only minded it for his mother. As Harry now tries to give a speech for his wedding, he finds the destroyed doll. Edward says it was Joshua, but nobody believes him. Clive hits Edward and then gives a speech. While he does so, Joshua raises his rifle to shoot Clive. Edward sees it, but does not say anything.

The second half of the play is set in London in 1979. For the characters though only 25 years have passed. This allows for some of the characters of Act I to also be in Act II, as their older selves. As such Betty is now an old woman. Edward and Victoria are adults. Victoria is married, to Martin. Lin is a friend of Victoria’s, who also has feelings for her. Lin has a daughter, Cathy, who is four to five years old. Gerry is Edward’s lover.

In this half of the play only Cathy is played by an actor of a different gender, a grown man. Churchill comments:

Betty is now played by a woman as she gradually becomes real to herself. Cathy is played by a man, partly as a simple reversal of Edward being played by a woman, partly because the size and presence of a man on stage seemed appropriate to the emotional force of young children, and partly, as with Edward, to show more clearly the issues involved in learning what is considered correct behaviour for a girl. (v)

In the original production Anthony Sher, who played Clive in Act I, played Cathy. He also played Lin's brother Bill, simply called The Soldier. Betty was played by Julie Covington, who also played Edward. Jim Hooper played both Edward in the second and Betty in the first act. The adult Victoria and Betty's mother Maud were both played by Miriam Margoyles. Carole Hayman played Lin in Act II and Mrs. Saunders and Ellen in Act I. William Hoyland played Harry Bagdley and Victoria's husband Martin. Joshua and Gerry were played by Tony Rohr¹¹⁸.

Scene One of Act II opens to Gerry confessing how he sometimes picks up men at Victoria Station to have sex with them on the journey to Clapham¹¹⁹. The scene then moves into a children's play centre in a park, on a winter afternoon. Lin tries to play with her daughter Cathy, while Victoria reads a book. Cathy sings: "Yum yum bubblegum./ Stick it up your mother's bum./ When it's brown/ Pull it out/ Yum yum bubblegum" (49). Lin does not tell her off, so Cathy goes on in the same manner. Eventually, Lin stops her, suggesting she paint a picture, but Cathy does not know what to paint. Lin makes suggestions – house, princess, pirates, spacemen – that Cathy all refuses. Only when Lin suggests "a car crash and blood everywhere" (50), Cathy seems inspired. While Lin now tries to put an apron on her daughter, Cathy decides she does not want to paint after all. It is Victoria who eventually tells Cathy that the big bike outside is free, and Cathy runs off.

118 Churchill explains: „When we did the play again, at the Royal Court in 1980, we decided to try a different doubling: Clive – Edward, Betty – Gerry, Edward – Victoria, Maud – Lin, Mrs Saunders/ Ellen – Betty, Joshua – Cathy, Harry – Martin. I've a slight preference for the first way because I like seeing Clive become Cathy, and enjoy the Edward – Betty connections" (Churchill vi).

119 Churchill explains: "Gerry's speech in the beginning of Act II was originally in that position but after a few performances I agreed to move it to after the first Edward – Gerry scene, as apparently audiences on tour found it too startling and there was a feeling that it made them hostile to Gerry in a way we hadn't intended. I didn't think any more about it for a long time so it's stayed there through various published editions, but in recent productions I have encouraged directors to go back to the original position and it is at last back there in this edition. I prefer it because it takes us more decisively into a completely different world at the beginning of act II. Also it lets us know right away that, in this act, the characters will sometimes talk directly to us, it makes the shape of Scene 2 better, and the overall shape of the act better, and it is more satisfying for the ending when Gerry meets Betty. Hard in fact to justify its being anywhere else but the beginning of the act. All future productions should keep it like that" (Churchill vi).

Lin sits with Victoria, wondering how she can concentrate on her book with her son Tommy being around. Lin talks about a book Victoria lent her and how she did not get around to reading it. She's a single mother and it is hard. She admires Victoria, more than that, she fancies her, and even invites her out to the cinema. Cathy comes back in, shooting at and hitting other children with a toy gun. Lin encourages her: "Don't hit him, Cathy, kill him. Point the gun, kiou, kiou, kiou. That's the way" (52). As Victoria explains that she's afraid the toy gun might influence Tommy in a way that he ends up in the army, Lin mentions that her brother is in the army, stationed in Belfast. Lin also confides in Victoria about having left her abusive husband two years ago. She is grateful he allowed her to keep Cathy, in spite of herself being a lesbian. She then asks Victoria not to lecture her on how to raise Cathy: "War toys. I'll give [Cathy] a rifle for Christmas and blast Tommy's pretty head off for a start" (53).

Victoria goes back to reading her book. As Lin exclaims that she hates men, Victoria dismisses it: "Well it's a point of view" (53). Cathy has now begun to paint, without an apron. Edward, Victoria's brother, shows up, telling Victoria that their mother is in the park. Victoria is not too fond of her mother, but goes to meet her nevertheless. Lin enters a conversation with Edward by asking him if he is gay. Edward is at first hesitant and asks Lin not to go around saying it as he may lose his job (54), and then exclaims: "I wish you hadn't said that about me. It's not true" (54). Lin plays the game: "It's not true and I never said it and I never thought it and I never will think it again" (54).

As Betty now enters with Victoria, she makes conversation: praising Tommy for being a brave boy after having been beat by another boy, praising Cathy's painting, mentioning Victoria's not very *en vogue* fashion style, and Edward's being a gardener. In whatever she says, she reminisces about her life back in Africa. Eventually she comes out with her news: she is leaving her husband.

As Betty leaves, Edward and Victoria's reaction is far from compassionate: "EDWARD They're going to want so much attention. VICTORIA Does everybody hate their mothers?" (58). They all get ready to leave the child care centre. Edward asks Cathy for the painting to give it to his partner Gerry. Cathy gives it to him. Meanwhile Lin asks Victoria if she will have sex with her. Victoria considers whether sleeping with a woman would count as adultery.

Scene Two finds Edward in the garden nearby, gardening. Gerry joins him. Edward asks Gerry where he was last night. As Gerry answers, it becomes clear that he feels no inclination to inform Edward about everything he does. Gerry eventually leaves for the pub, letting Edward know that he is not welcome to catch up with him there later.

Martin, Victoria, and Betty enter. While Tommy feeds the ducks, Betty voices her concerns about living alone. Victoria and Martin discuss a job offer Victoria has in Manchester. It becomes clear that Martin and Victoria's marriage is strained: he admits to wanting to sleep with another woman and suggests new living arrangements. Eventually, he tells Victoria to do whatever she wants to do: "God knows I do everything I can to make you stand on your own two feet. Just be yourself. You don't seem to realize

how insulting it is to me that you can't get yourself together" (63). As Martin takes Betty home, Victoria embraces Lin: "Why the hell can't he just be a wife and come with me? Why does Martin make me tie myself in knots? No wonder we can't just have a simple fuck. No, not Martin, why do I make myself tie myself in knots" (65). Lin asks Victoria to move in with her and as they consequently get into a fight about Victoria bossing Lin around – "you're worse to me than Martin is to you" (66) – Lin finally admits that her brother has died and that her father has excluded her from the funeral due to her sexual orientation. Lin decides to take Cathy home, but Cathy refuses. Mother and daughter fight. Eventually, Lin hits Cathy. As Cathy runs off, Lin and Victoria realize that Tommy has disappeared. Victoria keeps searching for him as Cathy and Lin go home. Edward and Gerry appear, with Gerry accusing Edward of "getting like a wife" (70). At the end of the conversation Gerry breaks up with Edward. Victoria comes back. She has apparently found Tommy, who is now being read a story by Martin. Edward confides in Victoria that he would rather be a woman.

At the beginning of Scene Three, Victoria, Lin and Edward are sitting in the park getting drunk. They are attempting to hold a pagan ritual chanting to a goddess of many names (73). Eventually, Martin shows up, having looked for them everywhere. They pull him down and start to make love to him (75). Martin is okay with it, but a stranger shows up, a soldier. Lin believes him to be her dead brother Bill. She asks: "Have you come to tell us something?" (76). He admits: "No I've come for a fuck". Lin collapses and Edward suggests they all go home. Edward now lives with Lin, and Victoria is planning to move in with them. They all go and Gerry enters, admitting that he sometimes comes to the park at night to pick someone up (77). The boy Edward from Act I now enters, played by the same actress as Betty, telling Gerry he loves him, just like he told Harry in Act I: "EDWARD You know what we did? I want to do it again. I think about it all the time. Don't you want to anymore? GERRY Yes, of course" (77). All enter again to sing 'Cloud Nine' – a song about strolls in the park, smoking dope in the playground, a sixty-five-year-old bride having sex with her seventeen-year-old husband in the back of a limousine, and cooking in the kitchen with the "wife's lover's children and my lover's wife" (78).

In Scene Four, Victoria, Lin and Edward are living together. Martin and Betty come to pick up Tommy and Cathy to watch them. Gerry and Edward make up again, planning to have dinner together. At the end of their conversation, Harry from Act I, played by the same actor as Martin, enters and picks Gerry up.

Betty comes back on stage and meets Maud from Act I, played by the same actress as Victoria, reminding Betty that Mrs. Saunders should be a warning to her. Ellen, played by the same actress as Mrs. Saunders in Act I and Lin in Act II, enters asking Betty not to forget her. As Maud and Ellen leave, Betty reflects on how she is rediscovering her own sexuality, after having split from her husband: "Sometimes I do it three times in one night and it really is fun" (83). As Lin and Victoria come back, Betty asks them all to move in together, but Victoria has decided to finally move to Manchester.

Meanwhile Cathy has been beat by a gang of older boys and Martin comes back complaining about having to look after Cathy and not just Tommy. Victoria suggests they all talk about the new arrangements to do with her move to Manchester, but Lin accuses Martin of having neglected Cathy. They fight and Lin leaves. Soon after, all except Betty leave, too, and Gerry shows up.

Betty and Gerry start talking, and Betty invites Gerry over to her place. Gerry tells Betty that he is involved with Edward, and Betty reacts calmly: "I think Edward did try to tell me once but I didn't listen" (87). Gerry suggests that he can still come and visit Betty, and Betty answers: "I'd like that. I've never tried to pick up a man before" (87). Gerry goes and Clive, played by the same actor as Cathy, enters and addresses her:

You are not that sort of woman, Betty. I can't believe you are. I can't feel the same about you as I did. And Africa is to be Communist I suppose. I used to be proud to be British. There was a higher ideal. I came out onto the veranda and looked at the stars. (87)

As Clive exits, Betty from Act I, played by the same actor as Edward, appears. Both Betties embrace.

When looking at the two plots of the play, the element that stands out is that, in both historical contexts, various sexual identities are negotiated. Act I explores Victorian stereotypes such as the British officer of the Empire, shouldering 'the white man's burden', the male explorer sleeping under the sky and taking the raft up the river, the pretty, poetry-reading, piano-playing, servants-commanding housewife, the wild, yet frightened widow, the dangerous black man, the boy to be a proper man, and the dummy of a daughter. These stereotypes' sexualities, at first, do not seem to differ from well-known tropes: the husband of the tame lady pursues the wild widow, the explorer has his eye on the tame wife, a servant is in love with her master, here her mistress. It is thus, when homosexuality and paedophilia are introduced that the plot takes a different twist. The explorer may romanticize the wife, but he also has sexual relationships with the male servant and a 9-year-old boy. All of this goes unnoticed and unpunished, until he also makes a move towards the husband. It is then that he has to get married, to divert the 'sin' and the 'shame'.

Act II of *Cloud Nine* appears to be designed as the exact opposite of Act I. It is set in 1979, more than a decade after the sexual liberation in the 1960s (75). The Victorian concept of the family is long broken up: Lin is a single parent, Betty – the Victorian mother – is splitting from her husband, Victoria and Martin are breaking up, Edward lives first with Gerry and later with Lin and Victoria, Betty thinks about moving in with them. Similarly the concept of sexuality is more fluctuant. Lin used to be married, but is now a lesbian. Victoria is married to Martin, but is "experimenting with her bisexuality" (63), Edward sleeps with both women and men (87), and even Betty talks openly about masturbation. In the same way the concept of education and gender roles is subverted. Cathy is raised by Lin in an utterly laissez-faire fashion. Tommy is not allowed to play with guns, but Cathy is enforced to do so. Gerry accuses Edward of having become too much of a wife. Lin complains that Victoria bosses her around too much.

Martin is unhappy that Victoria will not let him give her a proper orgasm (63) and tries to convince her to take the job in Manchester. Even the idea of the British Empire is no longer represented with the example of the African colonies, but by Lin's brother Bill, who is stationed in Belfast as a soldier. Churchill comments: "[...] the bitter end of colonialism is presented in Lin's brother" (iv). Bill dies and comes back as a ghost, not to send a message, but to enjoy sexual intercourse. Yet, even in this liberal society, remnants of the old system remain. Since homosexuality was no longer illegal since 1967, Gerry and Lin talk openly about their homosexuality, but Edward is embarrassed and scared to come out to Lin; he fears he might lose his job.

With the characters from Act I showing up at the end of Act II, both acts are connected in various ways. The encounters are most clear in Betty's case. Maud appears like a voice of morale warning her of Mrs. Saunder's fate. But the 'new' Betty has a job, she earns money (82). The message is clear: Times have changed for women; they no longer need men to survive. Ellen appears and they repeat an abbreviated form of a conversation they had about men in Act I Scene Five, when Ellen asked Betty how to act in bed. Betty answers: "You just keep still" (44, 82). Ellen asks Betty not to forget her. And clearly, with Ellen showing up here, one can assume Betty has not forgotten her. The thought of her advice to Ellen though leads Betty right into her monologue about masturbation. And again the message is there: It is not even for sex that Betty needs a man anymore. How much the times have changed: not only the kind of woman Betty was, but also the British Empire has gone, which becomes clear as soon as Clive reappears. As such the reappearances following Betty's character development take the form of an arch running through the play, indicating the change society has seen, particularly in regard to women. The indicated time difference of almost a hundred years – though not felt by the characters in the play – only makes this clearer. The implications the liberation of women has had on men though are not addressed by a reappearing character.

Young Edward meeting Gerry takes a different tone when compared to Betty's meetings with characters from Act I. Simply speaking, Gerry is meeting the younger version of his lover, having a conversation that he could, just in the same way, have with the grown-up Edward. Yet, here the conversation follows a speech by Gerry regarding his sexual freedom – "There is never any trouble finding someone. I can have sex any time" (77). It is in this context irritating that when Gerry calls out to Edward at the end of this speech, the young Edward appears. Gerry taking Harry's position in the conversation can thus be understood as him being a continuation of Edward's very early sexual experiences with a man. It must, however, be said that – here as in Act I – the easiness with which paedophilia is negotiated is striking. While the narration around all other forms of sexuality welcomingly speaks for a liberation regarding those, the same dynamic cannot but seem out of place regarding Harry's taking advantage of young Edward. The message being sent is making Harry, on one side, the victim of homophobia, and on the other, a paedophile. It thus leads to an indecisive tone in Act I. This is similarly the case when Gerry meets young Edward. Gerry and Harry are sharing the

same attitude towards having sex any time and with whoever they want. In the case of Harry's sexuality, Gerry is the future of Harry, in a positive way, as Gerry does not need to fear the repercussion Harry had to fear when it came to loving men. This notion, however, makes it, again, hard to identify one clear message regarding the liberation of men's sexuality, as it is too closely connected to the paedophilia presented here.

Cloud Nine presents a manifold of sexual orientations, perspectives, and experiences. The process of creating the play, namely the workshop sessions, have left a clear imprint on the script. As such many fields of discussion regarding sexuality and sexual liberation open up. In this, the two plots of the play remain rather thin. Act I circles around stereotypes that are then broken up towards the realm of sexual desire. Act II negotiates aspects of 1970s gender roles and sexual liberation through conversations. When the two timelines are brought together – at least in Betty's case – a historical comparison is drawn. The message here is as clear as it is simple: women have it better in 1979 than they did in Victorian times.

The first run-through of *Cloud Nine* was on 10 February – only three days before its opening night in Dartington. Stafford-Clark, at this point, seemed more optimistic: "Resonance of play very good. Shape seems fine" (*Diary* 10 Feb. 1979). On 13 February, the day before the opening, he noted: "There nearly" (13 Feb. 1979). Thus, all that was left to say on 14 February, the day of the world premiere, was: "I hope the actors like performing" (14 Feb. 1979). The reception, as Stafford-Clark recalls it, was warm (18 Feb. 1979). After the opening night in Dartington, Allan Saddler wrote for the *Guardian*: "This complex play, presented with their usual high standard of acting and production, ensures that the issues it raises will have an airing" (Saddler). On 18 February¹²⁰, Max Stafford-Clark notes in his diary "a hard week".

From Dartington, where the company performed two nights, the tour continued to St. Lukas's College in Exeter on 16 February, and Honeysuckle Cottage in Ponsworthy on 18 February. Stafford-Clark summed up the first week of the show: "A hard week but the best performance was on Saturday when the first half was really controlled and the second half is a hard one. I do not think it's getting any easier" (*Diary* 18 Feb. 1979). The tour continued to Cardiff on 19 February, Hull and Lincoln on 26 February, Warwick on 5 March, and Dublin on 12 March.

Throughout the tour, Churchill reassessed her play and rewrote passages. After two weeks of performances more cuts were made, reducing running time by twelve minutes, and making both halves much tighter (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 94). On 20 February, at the Sherman Theatre in Cardiff, the company played to a full house. The success of the production could have improved the general mood. Yet, on 22 February, when the group reflected on their work, feelings were still mixed. Jim Hooper put forth that he had never felt so intimate and defensive about a play he had done. Tony Sher felt that there had never been time for him to get an overview about what he and the group

120 According to *Taking Stock* the passage was written on 15 February (93).

were doing. Julie Covington declared she was thrilled, but nowhere near enjoying the work. William Hoyland felt very depressed, partly because of his character (22 Feb. 1979) – he was playing Harry Bagley in Act I and Martin in Act II., both men who, one could argue, were not able to fully live their lives according to their own wishes and desires. 23 February was, however, a very good rehearsal day: “Everyone talked about their own happiness” (23 Feb. 1979).

At the beginning of March, while the company played in Hull, the discussion about a West End transfer of the production surfaced. Producer Ian Albery came to see the show and offered a transfer – subject to certain conditions and cuts. Stafford-Clark writes in his diary on 5 March: “I don’t want to transfer to the West End at all costs. Cautious. Didn’t like Ian Albery much, who said Joshua’s character did not work at all, and ten minutes would have to go from the first half and a further five minutes from the second half” (94). The actors did not favour a run in the West End either. Stafford-Clark wrote on 5 March: “I do not want to do it at all costs... cautious” (5 Mar. 1979). Also, he did not like Albery: “He sounds right but nonetheless a complete arsehole” (5 Mar. 1979). He opened his diary entry on 6 March with: “West End (Im) Possibilities” (6 Mar. 1979). Again the group’s opinions were mixed.

The mood, it appears, was flagging again. Stafford-Clark notes that he felt he lost his commitment to the work and remarks: “People have lost their faith in the play and are wandering around depressed” (6 Mar. 1979). Eventually, on 19 March, the group arrived in London at the Royal Court to start rehearsals. Stafford-Clark noted: “Fearing rehearsals. [...] Won’t be possible to do much” (19 Mar. 1979). Two actresses were ill. Yet, coming to London, like Stafford-Clark stated, the play’s reputation had certainly preceded. The Royal Court kept their press release rather general:

As with all Joint Stock’s work *Cloud Nine* came out of a period of workshop and research by the whole company with the author, this time on the theme of sexual politics. It is about relationships – between men and women, men and men, women and women. It is about sex, work, mothers, Africa, power, children, grand-mothers, politics, money, Queen Victoria and sex. (Royal Court Theatre, *Press Release Cloud Nine*)

What’s On added a more ‘personal’ and even cultural-political stance:

Whatever is the Royal Court’s charming and diminutive Stuart Burge thinking? [...] Stuart has distinguished himself of late at the Sloane Square culture palace with some deceptively mellow Restoration comedy, courtesy of Edward Ravenscroft. Now the erotomaniacs and sundry deviants who seem to form the majority of successful Arts Council applications these days are taking over the building for a seemingly endless round of ‘sexual politics’ [...]. To commence the torture are the ever-so-modish [...] Joint Stock, complete with herb-financier Julie Covington, ageing sexpot Carole Hayman and assortedly intense thespians of many asexual inclination. Directing them will be Court director Max Stafford-Clark, Miss Hayman’s former hubby, who was so lucky recently to be joined by his current companion Ann Pennington, who secured a post at the Court which surpassed all expectations considering Ann’s somewhat limited though very obvious talent. I must convince Max that these well-meaning flagellating antics with a lot of faintly acrid troubadours can only bring him social grief. Celtic acquaintances have told me [...] that the play in question, Caryl Churchill’s *Cloud Nine*, opening this week, was getting laughs for

many a wrong reason on its pre-Court Welsh tour, being rewritten on the way more times than the Labour Party Manifesto. It would seem that the provinces have a decidedly more radical approach to ‘sexual politics’ than is situationally on-going in NW3. A great pity: Caryl is a well-bred and polite if somewhat untidy person who has always been very nice to this particular elderly soul. (“Whatever”)

While Stafford-Clark was still critical and commented the day before previews started: “Lose the acting and the play goes all over the place” (*Diary* 26 Mar. 1979), the first preview on 27 March played to a full house and people were queuing for returns. On the day, Stafford-Clark notes in his diary:

Royal Court preview. House full. People queuing up for returns. Michael Codron here. Suddenly nervous. Julie’s punk supporters with green hair and rats in the back of their sweaters. Subdued and very respectful audience.¹²¹

Peter Hartwell, the productions designer, had, on 1 March, written into Stafford-Clark’s diary: “It is gonna go like a million bucks at the Court” (1 Mar. 1979). And indeed, the play was a financial success. With 26 performances and 94.5 per cent of seats sold, *Cloud Nine* did 77 per cent at the box office and had a total at the box office of £21,149 (Findlater, *25 Years* 253).

Stafford-Clark mentions that “reviews were broadly favourable although by no means ecstatic” (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 95) and gives Michael Billington’s disapproving review as an outstanding example. Billington had called the play ‘Cloud three and a half’. Stafford-Clark rounds up: “Billington’s disapproval and our own exhaustion were perhaps two of the reasons it took so long to realise that we were involved in a popular hit that would become a modern classic” (95). It is, however, questionable whether the reviews for *Cloud Nine* were ‘broadly favourable’. The critic of *What’s On*, highlighting the colonial backdrop of Act I, wrote:

The play if I may use the term of a work that is almost totally innocent of any formal structure, may be about nothing at all; but I shall suppose it is about Kipling, which I shall define with imprudent arbitrariness as being compounded of bizarrely indiscriminate sexual encounters with strong colonial overtones. (Hurren, “Home and colonial”)

And while the critic of the *Theatre Weekly Diary* found it “entertaining and provoking” (“London”), John Elsom seemed to strongly feel the workshop imprint on the script when he wrote in *The Listener* on 5 April: “the evening seems pretentiously self-indulgent, as superficial as an agony column, as laboured as an old manifesto – or a new one, come to that” (Elsom, “Stock exchange”). Elsom further criticized Joint Stock’s efficiency. He asked, if the group has spent three weeks workshoping, what did they do with the other 49 weeks of the year? That, in fact, the workshops had taken up almost five weeks did not stop Elsom from understanding the games and talks about sex as not much of an artistic endeavour. He concluded that a writer being present at such a “group

121 The same passage in *Taking Stock* reads: “Royal Court preview. House full. People queuing up for returns. Michael Codron here. Suddenly nervous. Julie’s punk supporters with green hair. Subdued and very respectful audience, who give enthusiastic support at the end. Invigorated again.” (95)

analysis” does not make for a more authentic play. The play – the characters and situations – Elsom found, with an eye on the admittedly rather thin plot, were neither representative nor believable. Sue Mallia found that “whatever one makes of Caryl Churchill’s new play *Cloud Nine*, it is impossible not to enjoy this riotously funny, yet also poignant production”. John Barber saw in *Cloud Nine* “a fascinating evening, but emphatically not one for prudes” (“Woman’s sex comedy”). It seems it was the tension of the blunt display of sexuality and the strong drama in that, but the lack of a strong plot on the whole that left John Walker indecisive, commenting in the *Tribune*: “the play is never more than a sketch, an outline that lacks detail”. Similarly, the *Financial Times* presented the play as being “full of good lines and effective little situations; but at the end of it I felt we had seen nothing more than an enjoyable exhibition of splendid acting of the Joint Stock Theatre Group” (Young). While stating that *Cloud Nine* is “profoundly, aggressively sexually political. Not agit-pop, but ‘art’ – with powerful, startling original images that cannot be argued with”, Catherine Itzin, other than her colleagues, closes on the note that “it is a play and a production that cannot be recommended too highly”.

In pointing out the obvious flaws of the script, Michael Billington was the most poignant. Billington called his night out at the Court “a curiously hollow evening. It’s so busy covering the waterfront and trying to provide an anthology of sexual attitudes that it ends up illuminating almost nothing”. He felt that “nothing [...] was ever explored” and finds that Churchill’s play rather opts for “a jog around the whole complex and fascinating territory of sexual relations” than attempting a detailed exploration (Billington, “Cloud 9”). In Stafford-Clark’s diary of 23 April, the day the run at the Court ended, a draft of a response to Billington can be found. Stafford-Clark admits to having been shocked and angry about Billington’s criticism. He continues:

Even with the narrow perspective gained by a month it is clear to all of us that Caryl Churchill’s play has several faults. What disturbs me however is that you dismiss the piece as frivolous and hollow with very little attempt to find out what were the play’s real aims and concerns. It also disturbs me that any play about sex seems immediately to provoke such an irritable response from critics generally and from you in particular. (*Diary* 23 Apr. 1979)

The flaws of *Cloud Nine* could not be argued away. *Time Out* had to acknowledge the weaknesses, but tried to be more consoling: “By far the most exquisite playing in London theatre [...] compulsive but flawed [...] Not to be missed” (McDerran). The *New Statesman*’s critic Benedikt Nightingale even questioned the novelty in what was the outstanding strength of the play, its outspokenness in matters of sexuality: “What does all this frolicking libido add up to?” He found that the play “will not seem particularly sensational to anyone who has read [Joe] Orton’s diaries, been to a British boarding school, or both”. The *Evening Standard*’s critic harshly felt: “Occasionally this animated caricature comes up with a funny, pointed line. But most of the times one feels the cast is getting some self-indulgent adolescent pleasure engaging in prurience for prurience’s sake” (Shulman, “The Kiss That Shocked”). And the *Daily Mail* titled: “Good chaotic

unclean fun – whatever it all meant” (Tinker, “Good Chaotic Unclean Fun”). Felix Barker wrote: “Oh boy, on *Cloud Nine* it would be one long unisex heaven. Quite a jolly evening for psycho-analysis, I’d say, but for the rest of us a trifle too elusive”.

While some of the reviews can be understood on grounds of flaws in the plot or Churchill’s attempt to fit as much workshop material in the play as possible, others dismissed the content completely: “The language can be wearily cheap [...] [the actors] should have something to act that is within the bounds of credibility” (Trewin, “New Plays”). In the *Birmingham Post* Trewin wrote: “it strikes me as superfluous [...] One must be fashionable at all cost, especially at the Royal Court” (“*Cloud Nine*”). Peter Jenkins captured the general ambivalence in the critics’ reactions more precisely, when he wrote for *The Spectator* that the play “when awful was very, very awful and when good was marvellous”. Jenkins felt that *Cloud Nine* brought out the vices in Joint Stock’s method: the danger of “degeneration into a mere sequence of acting exercises, or cabaret turns, loosely plotted together”. As such, he felt that Churchill’s play was “heavily contrived as a vehicle for the company’s and Max Stafford-Clark’s talents”. *The Stage*’s reviewer commented, in line with others and most notably Billington: “Caryl Churchill never does anything very much; she touches things. Her story-line, or really character-line, is thin, and her characterisation, while interesting, is on the shallow, obvious side” (Marriott, “*Cloud Nine* at the Royal Court”). Another review comments – clearly unaware of the cross-gender casting demands of the play:

Caryl Churchill’s comedy, ‘*Cloud Nine*’ is funnier in its first half when ridiculing British imperialism in Africa and Victorian sexual hypocrisy, than when it comes up to date and adds variation on sexual perversion, with a slight reference to women’s lib and some ghosts of the previous generation return. True, a ghost of a British soldier returns to testify to fear and boredom in Ulster, with masturbation as a substitute for sex. In Africa there is adultery, lesbianism, and homosexuality by a white explorer with a child and a black servant, and oral sex; which leaves little for modern times. Oddly Max Stafford-Clark casts a man as a wife and Anthony Sher as an obnoxious girl; but he is well served by the cast, especially Julie Covington as an effeminate boy and grandmother and Carole Hayman as an adulteress and two lesbians. (“Caryl Churchill’s comedy”)

On the BBC’s Radio 3 “Critics’ Forum” *Cloud Nine* was also discussed. Derek Malcom opened: “I’m not sure that I was looking at a great play or anything like a great play, but what I did think I was looking at was a very fine evening in theatre. I think the Joint Stock Company are absolutely magnificent”. Peter Porter saw a danger in the tailoring of a play for actors, and added about the quality of the writing: “a kind kebab skewer on which she hung almost every cliché known to men about sexual politics”. Marina Warner was “extremely upset and extremely angered” about Joint Stock’s treatment of gender issues in *Cloud Nine*. She, understandably, felt that Act I merely portrays Victorian women according to stereotypes, and criticized that in Act II a woman is only allowed to find her role “through a sexual liberation that’s interpreted here as surgery”.

In an interview with the *Evening News*, Churchill had explained that her play “is not to shock, but to question the sexual roles that people play” (“Taking Stock of Sex”).

Yet, all the reviews accord the play a different focus: “The moral seems to be that cheating only causes unhappiness all around” (Barber, “Woman’s sex comedy”), “like Rome, Britain lost her empire through sexuality; but it was the repression of homosexuality and sexual hypocrisy that did the damage” (“London”), “Joint Stock are relentlessly determined to blame British imperialism for British sexual stereotypes” (Elsom, “Stock Exchange”), “a curious comedy about sexual relationships, which comes to no firm conclusion, except that it is sometimes in favour of them, preferably if they involve people of the same gender and always providing that they are not monogamous” (Walker), “the aim is to show [...] that any kind of sexual union may be blissful” (Young), “a package-tour, ‘If It’s Thursday, It Must Be Lesbianism’ approach to the whole complex business” (Billington, “Cloud 9”), “presumably the idea simply is to show us the floundering self-discoveries of a generation still tearing itself free from the Victorian gin-trap” (Nightingale), “the author is apparently trying to tell us that women will be free only when they are capable of sexual abandonment” (Shulman, “The Kiss That Shocked”), “the play is really about role confusion” (Tinker, “Good Chaotic Unclean Fun”), “I take the message is to be that in all ages everyone is desperately searching for satisfaction, emotional and sexual” (Barker), “I surmise that Caryl Churchill’s *Cloud Nine* is about bisexuality” (Trewin), “the most important [line] is that you can’t separate copulation from economics” (Malcom), “I don’t believe the play was at all about economics [...] It’s much more to do with what job a woman is able to perform than it is to do with whether she likes lesbians or not” (Warner).

Much of the criticism for *Cloud Nine* can be attributed to its weak plot and the over-boding accumulation of sexual encounters, which clearly was a direct result of working months of workshop material into a play. Many of the above accusations, however, attest uncertainties and a lack of clarity regarding the message of the play. Some of this can be traced back to the complexity of sexual desires presented. What is, however, more irritating in the script are the quick changes of intentions in the characters as a result of these complex desires. As the case of young Edward and Harry’s relationship shows, the play’s message as being outspoken for sexual liberation was not always sent clearly. It has to be admitted though that another reason for misinterpretations can surely be that not every theatregoer was comfortable with the subject of sexuality. To sum it up, the reviews of *Cloud Nine* are not ‘broadly favourable’, but clearly mark apparent flaws in the script, and even in the Joint Stock working process. Too much material and too much respect for the same, lead to a collection of testimonies rather than a gripping plot.

Whilst still playing at the Royal Court, the subject of a West End transfer surfaced again. On 3 April the feelings about a run in the West End were still mixed. While Stafford-Clark was keen to do it, and with the group if possible, Julie Covington felt another five months would destroy everything the group had achieved so far. Tony Sher felt similarly. He did not see enough life in the production to last another five months. Miriam Margoyles put forth that even though she did not enjoy playing *Cloud Nine*, she would like to go to the West End. Tony Rohr highlighted that he did not feel passionate

about it and William Hoyland called the play a fragmentary biology rather than magic chemistry. While Jim Hooper would have tagged along if enough people would go, Carole Hayman saw a good twist for her career in playing to big audiences. When Caryl Churchill and her agent Peggy Ramsay asked about theatres that would have a gap, Gaskill suggested the National's Cottesloe; another suggestion was the Jeanetta Cochrane.

Cloud Nine ultimately did not transfer to the West End. One can argue whether a run would have been good for the play. Back in 1979, what was considered good for the play mirrored a handful of individual agendas. Stafford-Clark's notes after the Joint Stock meeting of 20 April allude to this. A vote had been taken as to whether the company would tour as much as possible; the ratio was 7 to 4. Stafford-Clark comments: "Personally I find this exhausting and also unsatisfying. Joint Stock's original premise was to play as long as we would rehearse, and to tour as long as we would play in London. I am chairman" (*Diary* 20 Apr. 1979).

Here it seems Stafford-Clark was not too happy with the democratic principle. Another episode also illustrates the hardship of democracy. On 25 March, the *Sunday Telegraph* reported that a group decision of the Joint Stock Theatre Group had voted against an interview the *Telegraph* had wanted to do with Julie Covington:

The play is the work of the Joint Stock Theatre Group. All actors are equal in the Joint Stock Theatre Group. There are no stars. *No one* must be singled out for special attention, no matter how eminent. Everyone gets the same pay¹²². Everyone even gets roughly the same length part. The Group decides everything. ("It was the decision")

The Group's democratic principle was by the article understood as "an egalitarian nightmare". Stafford-Clark – "who (for want of a better word) directs *Cloud Nine*" – is quoted in the article, admitting that "there are problems".

The groups' vote against an interview with Julie Covington is noteworthy, not because Covington had been forbidden to give an interview – she was working with Joint Stock because of her ambivalence about fame (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 91) – but because apparently nobody objected to an interview Carole Hayman gave. In an article of 13 April – while the group was playing at the Court – Hayman's great success at the Royal Court with *Cloud Nine* is mentioned. The article describes Hayman "who has a second talent as a writer, [as] a leading force in the new theatre workshop conception" ("Quick change"); further, her versatility is praised "because she plays several roles". Hayman is quoted as saying that the production was "a real challenge. Luckily I am blessed with a photographic memory – so the constant changes of text don't bother me too much". While Covington giving an interview was heavily debated, Hayman's interview seemed to be accepted.

After the run at the Court had ended on 23 April, and the tour continued to the Moray House Theatre in Edinburgh, Stafford-Clark notes: "Feeling tired, skin stretched over

122 Joint Stock paid roughly £70 per week ("You're kidding, Julie!").

face. To bed at 3.0 and up at 6.30. Morning train. Mountain had fallen in on Penmanshiel Tunnel. Bus from Berwick to Dunbar. Journey with Tony Rohr. Awful get in. Set would not fit through doors. Everybody older, tired, whiter, paler"¹²³ (*Diary* 24 Apr. 1979). The first show in Edinburgh went up twenty minutes late, was not full and people walked out. "When people start walking out you know the second half is not holding. This experience is awful" (24 Apr. 1979).

By the beginning of May, the production wrapped up. The group met to recall the experience and articulate their feelings about the production. Margoyles and Covington felt they wanted to stay involved with Joint Stock. Hooper felt terrible, betrayed even, about not being a part of the company anymore. He recalled the power he had while in the production and felt nostalgic about it being gone. The suggestion was made by Covington and Margoyles that the actors, if they wanted, could still be part of workshops. Finally, Graham Crowley stated that the production had stayed within budget (9 May 1979).

From February to May 1979 Stafford-Clark's life had focussed mainly on *Cloud Nine*. On 10 May, he wrote: "I have a show on the road and while it's been around I have not been able to focus on much else. I'm not working at the Court anymore" (10 May 1979). From 12 May, he went on a two-week holiday to Ireland. Thus, when he put down his long-term objectives a month later, he had had a well-deserved break and time to think.

By mid-June, Stafford-Clark's objectives focussed mainly on the Royal Court. He unofficially took over the artistic directorship of the Royal Court in mid-1979: "*Cloud Nine* was my last proper involvement with Joint Stock; by early 1980 I was running the Royal Court" (Stafford-Clark and Roberts 109).

When following Max Stafford-Clark during the production of *Cloud Nine* in his diaries and in the press, one realizes how ambivalent and diverse a time it was in the director's career. Joint Stock and the workshops cost Stafford-Clark a lot of strength. Working with the company also led to financial insecurities and a very unsteady life with tours and no company-owned venue. Coming from this fringe life, the Royal Court – as an institution that was approaching its 25th anniversary – appeared as the exact opposite. When starting to work at the Royal Court, naturally, the challenge for Stafford-Clark was the introduction of his own theories and methods into this 'old' apparatus. To do so, Stafford-Clark had to fight the establishment of the Royal Court, his own insecurities and very often simply the exhaustion from his job.

Originally, he wanted "to continue Joint Stock as a very necessary outlet for serious radical work and to give a consensus of taste" (12 June 1979). He was planning "a season of work at the Royal Court which puts a focus on radical writing and brings

123 The passage reads differently in *Taking Stock* and does not mention the journey to Edinburgh: "Royal Court run at an end. Feeling tired, skin stretched over face. Awful get out. We wanted to save the set in case we revived the play, but it wouldn't fit through doors. Everybody older, tired, whiter, paler" (95).

together actors, writers, etc.”. But also, he clearly wanted “to remain outside the bread-winning imperative productivity penumbra of theatre enough to champion work that is important”.

When asking Stafford-Clark today how he came to work at the Royal Court, he describes it like an all-natural process:

When I was a young man, the Royal Court was always the place I wanted to work, because it was always the primary and most important new writing theatre in this country. And quite early on, during my days at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, new writing became an area that I particularly wanted to identify with. I did a number of productions at the Royal Court, one of which had transferred from when I was working in Edinburgh. Following that I had met Bill Gaskill who had previously been a director of the Royal Court. Together with him I founded and worked with Joint Stock Theatre Company. And it was through working with him, I really learnt about the Royal Court before actually arriving to work there. And then in 1978, I became an Associate Director at the Court. When Stuart Burge left I took over as Artistic Director. (Personal interview)

Stafford-Clark’s view in retrospect does not speak of the times in 1978/79 as indecisive or doubtful; personal and professional insecurities about where to head next, uncertainties like the competition over the Artistic Director’s position with Dexter and the fight against the ‘old grandees’ remain unsaid. Also, Stafford-Clark does not mention artistic aspects like the difference between Joint Stock’s work and the Court’s approach to new writing, the necessity of this outlet for radical work and the discrepancy between directing the Court, and remaining ‘outside the bread-winning imperative productivity penumbra of theatre enough to champion work that is important’. On the contrary, Stafford-Clark highlights the synchronicity between Joint Stock and the Royal Court, thus drawing on his assertion that Joint Stock was “a kind of tributary to the Court” (Doty and Harbin 66). He does not mind if people confuse his work with Joint Stock for Royal Court work, and, despite *Cloud Nine* originally being a Joint Stock production speaks of it as a Royal Court work. For Stafford-Clark *Cloud Nine*

[...] was a Royal Court production and the work was researched and workshopped while I was at the Royal Court. So it was a Royal Court production, but it was a continuity from Joint Stock to the Royal Court, because Joint Stock was headed by Bill Gaskill and me, but then we worked extensively at the Royal Court, so there was a synchronicity between the two organizations. (Personal interview)

Yet, it was neither true that *Cloud Nine* was a Royal Court production, nor that Bill Gaskill was a huge part of Joint Stock anymore at the time. He was mostly involved elsewhere; also, he did not work at the Court anymore. Even Stafford-Clark, while working on *Cloud Nine* was “not working at the Court anymore” (*Diary* 10 May 1979). His view as presented in the interview above can therefore only be understood as a retrospect on his work that heightens the part the Royal Court actually played.

When looking at Stafford-Clark recalling his career and the synchronicity he sees between his work at the Royal Court and with Joint Stock, one understands what Irving Wardle remarked on when saying that Stafford-Clark not only helped in better accom-

modating the two opposite fringe groups but also combining both. Rob Ritchie's assertion that: "If Joint Stock had once been 'the Royal Court in exile', as Edward Bond had put it, it now looked as if the Royal Court had come home, taking Joint Stock with it" (Ritchie 26) seems to perfectly allude to the way Stafford-Clark personally feels about his two outlets of work coming together. Still, it is a whitewashed view of his transfer.

For Stafford-Clark, in retrospect, it certainly feels like his work with Joint Stock and that of the Royal Court melted together throughout the 1970s and 1980s. This process of introducing the radically different methods of Joint Stock into an institution like the Royal Court was, however, not an organic process – even if Stafford-Clark puts it that way. It must not be forgotten that Joint Stock's working methods strongly differed from what the Court could accommodate. The ability to tour, the long time together as a group, the intimacy of the workshops and the – very prominent and often difficult – democratic principle made Joint Stock unique, and rooted it in a thoroughly different patch of land in the theatre landscape than that occupied by the Royal Court. In spite of similar personnel and a shared focus on new writing, Joint Stock ventured into new directions and set up camp far away from the known territories of new writing. The two artistic policies were bound to clash as Stafford-Clark took over the leadership of the Royal Court. And sure enough the 'old grandees' were fighting hard to not allow the new in; it did matter that Stafford-Clark had not met Devine in person, for some it even was reason enough not to employ him.

Eventually the appointment of Stafford-Clark, for him as well as for the theatre, meant change, compromise and letting go of the old. The Court could not accommodate Joint Stock's method of research and lengthy rehearsal periods. Workshop times had to be reduced to two weeks, with Stafford-Clark himself commenting – regarding a workshop for Churchill's *Serious Money* in 1986 – that it was hard to conduct satisfying research and do improvisations "in the limited time we could afford on the workshop itself" (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 130). Similarly, ongoing rehearsals throughout the run, as granted under the umbrella of a tour, could not be accommodated. Stafford-Clark introduced a play development process to the Royal Court, as Nicholas Wright explains:

It was a very important moment when Max started Joint Stock, and that process of building a play up from ground level had a lot to do with empowering the director and the actors to be far more involved in the bricks and mortar of the play. Until Max's time plays at the Court were pretty much put on as they arrived. There wasn't really anything by way of the development of the play. (Little and McLaughlin 216)

But play development at the Royal Court had a different focus: fitting a play to the Royal Court. Stafford-Clark commented: "right to fail can only be risked on plays with four actors and one set" (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 180). This becomes clear in Stephen Lowe's and Caryl Churchill's assessment of their writing for Joint Stock and the Royal Court respectively (Doty and Harbin 154, 168): the audiences and the space were different, the number of actors and the set was more restricted at the Court. The writers had to accommodate this. As such all rewrites happened either during rehearsals or previews – very unlike Joint Stock. Actor Ron Cook explains in connection with the production

of Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* in 1988: "We had a lot of rewriting, right up to the wire, and during preview we were still changing it" (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 167). Wertenbaker explains: "I would rewrite in the mornings. They would rehearse in the mornings. I would come in at 1.00 p.m. with whatever rewritten scenes I'd done that morning" (167). What remained from Joint Stock artistically, was a reduced form of the workshop and the writer working on the play until opening night. Further the Royal Court most definitely could not be ruled democratically.

It is true that Stafford-Clark aimed at making his reign at the Royal Court more co-operative and non-authoritarian (Roberts, *Court* 179) by organizing staff outings in 1981 and 1982 respectively. By this, he sought his employees' opinions on administrative and programming matters. Still, "[t]here is no doubt that Stafford-Clark's sense of democracy was also a sense of control" (Roberts, *Stage* 189). A staff member recalls: "Max used to pretend to delegate. [...] We'd have staff meetings where he'd say, 'What do you think? What do you think?'" and then he'd veto the whole lot" (Lisa Makin in Little and McLaughlin 371). While Stafford-Clark had lived 'an egalitarian nightmare' at Joint Stock, Stephen Daldry commented on Stafford-Clark's reign at the Royal Court: "Max had run [the theatre] much more singularly" (Roberts, *Stage* 219) and attested a "Stalinist mode" (Daldry in Lesser 112).

Even though Stafford-Clark speaks of *Cloud Nine* as a Royal Court production, it was more accurately his last 'real' Joint Stock work – all upsides and downsides included. It becomes clear in his diaries that Stafford-Clark was having a hard time at Joint Stock. Not being able to rule autocratically had cost him nerves, and more importantly valuable rehearsal time. At the Court, he was to be 'the chairman', the clear leader he could not have been at Joint Stock. The work with Joint Stock, as much artistic freedom as it allowed, was hard. At the Court, Stafford-Clark had more means to promote new writing. Yet, he had to answer not to himself but to the English Stage Company's Council. Particularly when Matthew Evans took over the chairmanship in 1984, there was yet another force making a point of being 'the chairman'.

Working at the Royal Court gave Stafford-Clark the chance to promote plays all year round and not just in a few productions per year. Working at the Royal Court, however, also cried for unwelcome compromises and other battles as with Joint Stock's collective of artists. In retrospect, Stafford-Clark finds it hard to say whether he had a vision for the Royal Court when taking over the regime from Burge:

I think it's all very well to say that there is a vision in retrospect. I mean, at the time, you just do the next good play that's available. But certainly in retrospect, today, its women's work, plays by women have [...] featured much more largely during the years when I was at the Court. (Personal interview)

Stafford-Clark stayed at the Court until 1993. After leaving the Court in 1993, he founded his company Out of Joint, a follow-up of Joint Stock¹²⁴.

5.3 Conclusion

The 1970s at the Royal Court were mostly a time of artistic loss and weak leadership. The Royal Court fought hard to justify its right to exist beside the fringe. The new writing culture had been taken over and even the Arts Council had stopped believing in the former ‘spearhead of the movement’; it preferred to invest in touring companies and the fringe. The debate around the ‘uncompromising David’ and the ‘commercial Goliath’ was thus one that had to be won in the way that the Royal Court had to convincingly prove that it was still needed and that its commercialization – the transfers and the star-system – were simple means to secure the mandate of a true writers’ theatre.

As Mair’s statements show the mere perpetuating of success and holding on to old traditions was not enough to keep the theatre running, both artistically and financially. The Royal Court Theatre needed change, but not just any change. The Arts Council wanted it to be home to the fringe. Stafford-Clark’s work had been rooted in the fringe movement since its very beginnings in the late 1960s, and as such he was the ideal candidate to make the funding bodies put their trust into the Royal Court again. He was to bring Joint Stock to Sloane Square. All he could bring, however, was himself. There was just no chance that Stafford-Clark could actually introduce Joint Stock’s principles and methods to an institution like the Court. Stafford-Clark may articulate the Royal Court and Joint Stock as interchangeable, as his statements about the production of *Cloud Nine* and ‘the Royal Court in exile’ show, but it was only for him that boundaries blurred. The Court did not melt with the fringe, just as Joint Stock did not melt with the 25-year-old institution. But the funding bodies were pleased.

Yet, after only a year of Stafford-Clark leading the Court, Richard Findlater describes his regime as “totally traditional” (*25 Years* 179) and reads the success of *Hamlet* in 1980 as a sign “that the alternative theatre [...] was changing its attitudes towards the classical tradition”. It is true that Stafford-Clark kept attracting the writers he used to work with – both at Joint Stock and at the Royal Court. But just like him, they did not have the same freedoms anymore. Hearing Stafford-Clark talk about their work on plays at the Royal Court in 1981 shows this. Stafford-Clark explains: “It is unconceivable for us to do a production of a new play with more than eleven or ten

124 At the end of this analysis an apparent aspect must be added. Stafford-Clark’s intentions are in fact very hard to read. The way he puts his former aims and goals today is utterly different from his assertions in the late 1970s. Facts are hence repeatedly bent – as is the case with the quotes from his diary as found in *Taking Stock*. At other times, Stafford-Clark just chooses to reinterpret situations, as his belief of *Cloud Nine* being a Royal Court production illustrates. The effect that a time span of more than 30 years has on memory must therefore be acknowledged.

characters downstairs because that would take a whole year's budget" (Doty and Harbin 168). *Cloud Nine* was an independent production and worked with eight actors.

Even with Stafford-Clark at the helm, the Royal Court did not change into a fringe venue. Stafford-Clark would later say: "As far as I am concerned, the Artistic Director of the Royal Court is the leader of the Western World" (Little and McLaughlin 16). As the Artistic Director of the democratically run Joint Stock and without the security and power of the institution that was the Royal Court Theatre, he would have never been in the position to allegedly lead the Western World. Fringe touring company directors do not lead the Western World. Stafford-Clark left the fringe behind when he took over the Royal Court. As such he was only a figurehead with the word fringe written on its forehead that allowed the Royal Court a good argument with its sponsors, and the Arts Council in particular. In return Stafford-Clark finally became what his democratically run fringe company would not let him be: "I am chairman" (*Diary* 20 Apr. 1979).

6. The 1980s. Withdrawals

The Royal Court struggled through the decade, caught in the constant struggle to balance books against a shrinking subsidy from the Arts Council. [...] the Theatre Upstairs went dark, and the arena that had proved so important as a testing-ground for new talent [...] was lost. (Bull 30)

I had always taken for granted that the theatre would be subsidized. And on the whole, incrementally the subsidy increased each year. I mean, there was never enough money at the Royal Court, but during the 1980s there was certainly a consistent political campaign by Thatcher and by William Rees-Mogg, who was the Arts Minister, to reduce funding generally. They also saw the Royal Court, or William Rees-Mogg, saw the Royal Court as being redundant as other theatres put on new writing, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National and small houses like the Cottesloe and the Warehouse. So why was the Royal Court necessary? So we had to fight our corner. And it was not until the beginning of the 1990s that we received a substantial change in direction from the Arts Council that gave us a great deal more stability. (Stafford-Clark, personal interview)

6.1 Surviving under Thatcher

While the artistic output of the 1970s had suffered under the emerging fringe and sometimes indecisive artistic direction, the 1980s were artistically more successful. Stafford-Clark attracted more writers into his theatre. He became best-known for his emphasis on producing female writers like Andrea Dunbar, Caryl Churchill, and Timberlake Wertenbaker. While it had been the artistic loss and the lack of strong leadership that the Arts Council had heavily criticized in the 1970s, it was the high running costs the English Stage Company shouldered by holding residence at the Royal Court Theatre that moved to the centre of the debate in the 1980s.

In 1979, Max Stafford-Clark became Artistic Director of the Royal Court while Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister. The new monetarist policy of the Thatcher administration had a strong impact on the theatre economy. John Bull writes:

The political implications of the new monetarist policy of cuts in public spending in all areas – the health service, education and the provision of publicly owned housing as well as the arts – were far-reaching. [...] For every theatre in the country in any way reliant on subsidy, the 1980s were a constant struggle for survival. (23-25)

Max Stafford-Clark described the situation of the Royal Court in 1981:

At the moment, we have just had a bout with the Arts Council. I think a faction within the Arts Council would like to see the Court's grant cut completely. [...] that has been in the air over the last nine months [...]. The country is in recession. There is going to be less money for the arts next year. New theatres, studio theatres, that have sprung up over the last ten years also give opportunities for new writing (but no proscenium theatres of the same scale as the Court exist). And for that reason there have been suggestions within the Arts Council that the Court is now expendable. (Stafford-Clark in Doty and Harbin 69)

In December 1980, the Arts Council had decided to investigate the Royal Court in order to find out if the house's commitment to new writers justified the level of subsidy (Rob Ritchie in Doty and Harbin 121). This decision seemed particularly disquieting as the Arts Council's policy of 1980 had included – for the first time ever – cuts of complete companies.

The situation became more difficult with the impending abolishment of the Metropolitan councils and the resulting cut of the relating subsidies. Harriet Cruickshank states: “[F]ourty-four companies were actually cut, and the Arts Council had not had a history of cutting companies before. And so this year [1981] everybody felt very insecure when they realized what the drama panel [of the Arts Council] might do” (122). How insecure the Court was in 1981 shows in a quote by Rob Ritchie, the Court's Literary Manager from 1978 on:

We have had unofficial assurances, that is to say, members of the Arts Council have made statements that the possibility of completely cutting the grant to the Court is not on the agenda. But that is not quite true. It was very much in the air when we met them in May. So we're going to get some subsidy next year. I expect that we will find out unofficially some time in November how much will be cut in real terms next year. (123)

Indeed, the funding debates largely surrounded the fact that a proscenium arch theatre like the Royal Court seemed outdated as a new writing venue. Stafford-Clark henceforward built the argument that the proscenium arch theatre was – in London – a unique means to help the detailed examination of new work on:

The proscenium arch allows a very rigorous examination. So most new work [...] is seen in studios. And in this country new writers often get produced in the upper room of pubs, which haven't been designed as theatres at all, to have an enclosed feel. And detail is important. Where the Royal Court allows an utterly forensic examination of work. So it's a stiffer test for new writing. And that's what's valuable about it, I feel. (Personal interview)

Not everybody agreed with Stafford-Clark, as a discussion at a conference on the Royal Court in 1981 shows. Here, Martin Esslin claims that the Royal Court also has the Theatre Upstairs as a more experimental space, suggesting the proscenium arch is not the main means to observe new work. Stafford-Clark answers: “Studio theatres are inclined to make the work intimate, to make the experience of the theatregoing warmer. The proscenium provides a much more rigorous test” (Doty and Harbin 217). Burge consequently explains that it is basically about the Court being an established theatre and there not being any other established theatre doing new work, if the Court went (217). Esslin agrees that the capacity of only 400 seats in the main stage auditorium also poses less economic strains on the Court (217). Esslin's last statement can, however, be juxtaposed; large sums of the subsidies for the Royal Court went straight into the running costs of the building (123). The question was simple: Can and must the English Stage Company really afford the Royal Court? Burge argues that it is the established name ‘Royal Court’ that has a history and speaks of success, not the ‘English Stage Company’ (217). This argument is also put forward by Richard Findlater in his celebratory book

At the Royal Court. 25 Years of the English Stage Company. He argues that “from the start of the ESC regime George Devine regarded [the Royal Court Theatre] [...] to be the ESC’s only home” (Findlater, *25 Years* 200)¹²⁵. An argument by Caryl Churchill that the work is more important than the place, and the general thinking that too many subsidies are invested in the building rather than the work, Findlater juxtaposes by saying that “it is surely premature to assume that the Royal Court must be abandoned by the ESC: the prime need is in an increase of subsidy, not a reduction in the size of its home and the scale of operations” (200).

With an eye on Findlater’s position as he formulates it here, Sarah Grochala argues that “in Findlater, we see the dominant discourse being utilised as part of a campaign for the continuance of a certain company’s use of a certain theatre within a specific social and historical context” (Grochala 2). Stafford-Clark similarly built his campaign on the proscenium arch architecture’s importance to the English Stage Company’s work on new plays, distinct from that of other companies. It was simple: an old and large theatre building like the Royal Court cost too much to be a stage for new work. Rob Ritchie explains at the 1981 conference:

[T]he drama panel of the Arts Council, which makes the recommendations, made clear to the Court that they were concerned about the relative proportion of the money that was actually used for productions. They wanted to know what percentage was actually going to the physical costs of the plays and paying the writers, and what percentage was used in paying the overhead, central heating bills, the front of house staff wages, and so on. (Doty and Harbin 121).

According to Nicholas Wright the Court was indeed spending too much money on “ush-ettes and cleaning windows” (123). Eventually, the Court received £424,000 for the 1981/82 season and £453,000 for the 1982/83 season (123). This was substantially more than the 1979/80 grant of £350,000 (Findlater, *25 Years* 253), even after taking inflation into account. The Arts Council’s argument can therefore be understood: the money set aside for all productions on the main stage in the budget planning amounted to roughly £100,000, and for all Upstairs productions to a maximum of £50,000 (Ritchie in Doty and Harbin 124).

With the funding situation being critical, the Royal Court, in 1981, for the first time in its history, sought commercial sponsorships to support itself (Doty and Harbin 118). They received £15,000 from Camel Cigarettes for Edward Bond’s play *Restoration*¹²⁶.

125 Devine was actually very flexible regarding the Royal Court as ‘the ESC’s only home’ (see footnote 45).

126 It must, however, be mentioned that even if this was the first commercial and PR involving commercial sponsorship – (“They had their logo on the poster and on the front of the house” (Doty and Harbin 119), the English Stage Company at the Royal Court had, from its beginnings, been sponsored by businesses and business-men. The best examples are Neville Blond’s never to be re-paid loans. Also, in early years, strong financial support

But having a sponsor like Camel also brought problems along. Cruickshank admits: “Edward Bond was extremely anti-sponsorship, especially by a cigarette company! I wasn’t allowed to show him anything! I had to show him the poster *without* the Camel logo on it because he refused to give his agreement to it” (119), and Ritchie adds:

Camel has done disastrously in England in terms of marketing because it’s considered to be a particularly lethal kind of cigarette. [...] Edward [...] wouldn’t have any part of an organization that accepted money from a cigarette manufacturer. But for the Court it was pure pragmatism. (119)

Still, in February 1982, the money ran out. Roberts comments: “Ironically, good new plays were now available. Four were waiting to be done Upstairs, and a complete year’s programme was available Downstairs if and when money was forthcoming” (*Stage* 178). Hence, in October, Stafford-Clark initiated a, soon to be successful, scheme with New York theatre producer Joe Papp to exchange productions. And even though these transfers cost the Court a fair amount of money, the productions could be brought back to London as having played in New York – a token for success at the box office.

In June 1983, Margaret Thatcher was re-elected, and in July the government cut public spending by £500 million (183). It helped the Court that Caryl Churchill’s *Top Girls* (1982) had enjoyed a successful run in New York. Still, productions had to be pushed into the new financial year, in order to go into 1984 with a deficit of only £10,000 (182). At the same time the Arts Council had begun working on a review of itself and its funding policies. In February 1984, before the Arts Council report had even come out, rumours surfaced that the Court was first on a list of closures (184). A campaign, organised by David Hare, Rob Ritchie, and Max Stafford-Clark, brought fifty-five members of the Royal Shakespeare Company, Olivier, Gielgud, critics of *The Times*, Howard Brenton, and many more, together to openly protest against the withdrawal of the subsidy from the English Stage Company (Roberts, *Stage* 185)¹²⁷.

The Arts Council report eventually came out in May, as William Rees-Mogg’s¹²⁸ manifesto *The Glory of the Garden*. The Arts Council’s position toward the Royal Court – still – was that it was too expensive a stage for new writing; the National Theatre’s

came from the John Lewis Partnership (Roberts, *John Lewis*). The 10-year anniversary brochure, edited by the English Stage Company, quotes £28,000 the Royal Court had received in donations from business organisations and private individuals from 1956 to 1965 (English Stage Company, *Ten* 5). In the brochure to the second anniversary, Neville Blond personally thanks Sir Frederic Hooper “who has given an example to industry by the action of his firm in sponsoring a [Sunday Night] production” (English Stage Company, *Two* 2).

127 Not only the English Stage Company at the Royal Court suffered from the crisis. In February 1984, Sir Peter Hall announced the closure of one stage of the National Theatre, job cuts, and his own departure from the company (Bull xi).

128 William Rees-Mogg was the chairman of the Arts Council from 1982 to 1989. He was an editor for the *Times* and a member of the Board of Governors of the BBC. (“Lord Rees-Mogg”)

Cottlesloe and the Royal Shakespeare Company's Warehouse were seen as more promising stages (Little and McLaughlin 216). Roberts writes: "Stafford-Clark kept the Court together in a very difficult situation. In doing so, he attracted hostility as well as admiration, animosity as well as respect" (170). It certainly helped the theatre internally that the administrative changes introduced by Burge, were furthered. Under Stafford-Clark, all Court personnel were more and more included in decision making processes. Stafford-Clark gave seminars on budgeting. Weekly meetings of a new Management Committee, including the staff of the theatre, and a weekly meeting, to include Council members, were introduced.

In 1984, the English Stage Company's Council was joined by a new chairman, Matthew Evans. Unfortunately, Stafford-Clark and Evans "got off on the wrong foot" (Stafford-Clark in Roberts, *Stage* 186). After having seen Newman's *An Honourable Trade* (1984), Stafford-Clark, himself the director of the play, asked Evans for his honest opinion. When Evans gave a rather harsh critique, Stafford-Clark allegedly "went berserk" (Evans in Roberts, *Stage* 186). In retrospect, Stafford-Clark openly admits to his detestation of Evans, hatred even (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 126).

It did not make matters easier that Lindsay Anderson, in December 1984, met up with Evans to discuss the Court. Evans recalls: "He is a 120 per cent octane trouble-maker. He's a great guy. He sent me some papers on the Court... and some letters saying what a complete cunt Max was" (Roberts, *Stage* 187). Evans got back to Anderson, letting him know that he had decided to "go in hard at once before I get sucked into alliances and the politics of the place myself" (187). It had been Anderson's goal to convince Evans to re-animate the body of the old Royal Court, which had pretty much seized to exist under Stafford-Clark: of the Council members of 1972 only two remained on the Council until 1986, William Gaskill and Jocelyn Herbert. Clearly having taken his encounters with Stafford-Clark and Anderson to the heart, early in 1985, Evans set out to reorganise the Court's administrative structure. Roberts sums it up:

Whereas, for George Devine, the argument had been about artistic autonomy, the temper of the eighties was much more to allow artistic autonomy only within reason. That latter increasingly was translated as what was financially feasible, what could be done within restraints. (*Stage* 189)

Stafford-Clark felt he and Evans were coming from opposite ends regarding their styles of management. Evans puts it a bit harsher. To him, Stafford-Clark had completely neutralized the English Stage Company's Council, leaving himself solely in charge. Roberts states:

It is the case that those days of cyclical deprivation of funding or esteem for the arts had a profoundly depressing effect across the board. It was impossible to create a policy, let alone a consistent view, when a place like the Court appeared to lurch from one financial blow to another. That it produced such high-quality work during this period is extraordinary. That the Chairman and the Artistic Director survived each other is equally astonishing. (206)

In 1985, the Arts Council informed the Court of a stand-still in funding for the year 1985/86. Stafford-Clark's reaction was a strong one (190). An open battle was fought in the newspapers, especially *The Stage*, and for many it was a war on a much greater level: the elimination of arts subsidies was in sight (190-191). Private funding schemes were arranged, and throughout the following years it became more and more apparent: "the privatising of the theatres was underway" (203)¹²⁹. And indeed, the economy had a simple effect on the productivity at the Court: "In 1975 the Court was producing 18 plays a year in its two spaces; by 1985 it could only afford a total of eight" (Little and McLaughlin 245).

1985 was a difficult year. The artistic output was strongly suffering under the financial struggles: it became harder and harder to sustain writers. In spite of the hardships and Evan's clear wish to get rid of Stafford-Clark (Roberts, *Stage* 191), Stafford-Clark's contract was renewed for three years from April 1986. 1986 saw several successful fundraisers, which eventually helped to extend the collaboration with Joe Papp (193).

The late 1980s came with another great international financial crisis, the collapse of Stock Markets on 'Black Thursday' in October 1987 (Bull xiv). In 1988, the funding pressure on the Court thus became even stronger. The Arts Council was changing its funding scheme to a three-year model, and invited applications to the Incentive Funding Scheme, which was depending on "the level of income you will earn from the private sector" (203). The Court's application to the Scheme failed. This competitiveness and reliance on funds from the private sector show how strongly the funding climate had changed.

Stafford-Clark was well aware that in the process of cutting subsidies, the Royal Court was "becoming marginalized [...] We are being pushed closer and closer to a cliff edge of viability" (*Diary* 11 Jan. 1989). He warned that "a debate about the future of the Royal Court cannot be long postponed. It seems unlikely that we can continue to operate for much longer in the manner we have for 32 years. Our funding is no longer sufficient" (Stafford-Clark in Roberts, *Stage* 204).

From April 1989, the Theatre Upstairs had to close due to the financial deficit (Roberts, *Stage* 205). Around the same time, the *Guardian* reported that at least forty companies and theatres could have their grants withdrawn in order to insure the existence of the Royal Ballet, the Royal Opera, the English National Opera, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the National Theatre, and some regional companies and orchestras (206). Luckily, in October, the Arts Council decided that the Court, too, was to be held in "high regard" (207) and "that ways [needed to] be found to increase the level of public subsidy available to the Company" (207). But even with this positive turn of events, the Court could not do without commercial sponsorship any longer. The commitment to

129 As such the theatres followed a trend also present in other fields of the public sector: British Telecom had been privatized in November 1984, plans to privatize the British Steel and Coal Industry were announced in October 1988, and, in 1993, plans were announced to privatize British Rail and the London Underground (Bull xi-xx).

sponsoring from Barclays Bank via Barclay New Stages – which was worth half a million pounds in over the course of three years (208) – was confirmed on 3 November 1989. Caryl Churchill resigned from the Council over this. She explains her feelings in a letter to Matthew Evans:

It is a serious problem and not just for me, because if the theatres are making a political statement by their acceptance of this government it's very hard for anyone who doesn't agree with that to work in them with any spirit. There's been a lot of talk in the building about 'the times' as if they were a force of nature – we are part of them just as much as the government, the city, and business interests, and our opposition can be part of them. It's been put to me that under this government the theatre can't survive without embracing sponsorship and all that goes with it but I question what it is that's surviving. I think we and others will look back at this time with astonishment at what we went along with. (209)

Other Council members, including David Hare, also resigned.

The devolution in arts subsidies saw its way well into the 1990s. The year 1990/91 saw a grant increase of £60,000 above the standard increase of 6.5 per cent. Yet, to fulfil the production levels that the Arts Council asked of the Royal Court, an increase in subsidy of £150,000 would have been required, at an average net cost of £25,000 for each of six productions (Roberts, *Stage* 209).

From 1991 on, the Arts Minister started working on a scheme to devolve most of the Arts Council's clients to the Regional Arts Associations (211). A delegation was scheduled to take place over 1992 and until 1994. Not only the Court, but also the Bush theatre, the Hampstead Theatre Club, and the Soho Poly met with the Arts Council to put in an appeal. Eventually, in 1993, it was reported that only the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company, touring companies, and the Royal Court were to be retained as clients by the Arts Council (211). 1993 was also the year in which Max Stafford-Clark's time as Artistic Director ended and Stephen Daldry succeeded him.

Roberts refers to Stafford-Clark's dismissal in an anecdote. Stafford-Clark's contract ended in March 1992, at which point he reapplied. The Council was favouring this "in varying degrees" (John Mortimer¹³⁰ in Roberts, *Stage* 212). They were generally in favour of a change, but not sure if they would find someone as able as Stafford-Clark. The position was eventually advertised on 22 July. It's not too surprising that it was Jocelyn Herbert and Lindsay Anderson who approached Stephen Daldry – then Artistic Director of the Gate – asking if he would like to run the Royal Court (213). Daldry explains:

Lindsay became quite important to me, not just within that process of appointment, but subsequent to that. I did spend quite a lot of time with him. It's a generational thing. They're my grandparents, for want of a better way of looking at it. And Max had reacted

130 Mortimer had succeeded Matthew Evans as chairman of the Council on 20 March 1990 (Roberts, *Stage* 210). Evans had voiced his wish to retire on 3 November. The same meeting that saw quite a few Council members resign. Evan's resignation, however, was not a consequence of the debate. He announced his wish before the discussion (209).

against the parents and rejected them, so the grandparents were feeling anxious and fed up that the child wasn't including them. I went back to the grandparents. (Daldry in Roberts, *Stage* 213)

And he would do so in many ways during his reign, making his time at the Court as much of a revival of the golden age of the 1950s and 1960s as he could – a strategy that will be discussed at large in chapter 7. The time of Stafford-Clark and his Joint Stock influences, however, was finally over and – much to Herbert's and Anderson's taste – the old Court finally prevailed again.

Yet, before Daldry could take over, he had to find his way into the political strategizing at the Court. Stafford-Clark was not prepared to leave. He even suggested sharing responsibilities to Daldry, with Daldry directing the main space and himself the Upstairs (215). As Daldry was not sure of his position, he spread the rumour in the newspapers that he was going to withdraw from his application. Daldry admits: "Once I'd understood the political game playing I thought I'd just do the same" (215). Jocelyn Herbert, determined to make sure Stafford-Clark and his fringe attitude towards new plays would go, delivered "the most impassioned speeches about how the theatre had been started to do new plays but it didn't mean you had to do every bloody new play that came along" (Herbert in Roberts, *Stage* 216). It was eventually decided that Daldry was taken on as Artistic Director Designate between 1 April 1992 and 30 September 1993 (216). On 1 October 1993, he was to take over as Artistic Director and Stafford-Clark was to become his Associate during the three-year reign. Roberts sums up:

Whatever is said about Stafford-Clark's reign as the longest-serving Artistic Director of the English Stage Company to date, there can be no doubt that he achieved that objective, and that he can lay a large claim to be the most distinguished director of new work that the British theatre still has. (218)

6.2 Withdrawal. The *Perdition* Affair

We must stand firm in the position this theatre has always taken. [...] You know, in the end, you are trained at the Court that it's a writers' theatre, and the writer is the authority. (Max Stafford-Clark on the Attorney General's threats concerning Newman's *Operation Bad Apple* (1982) in Roberts, *Stage* 177)

I think I am on record as saying that I did wrong to program the play in the first place and I did wrong to take it off having programmed it. And that's sort of true, I am afraid. It was not a glorious moment for me. But what happened was that I lost faith in the veracity of the play. [...] I jumped from one opinion to another. But I was then, of course, accused of suppressing freedom of speech and being over-influenced by the Jewish community. That was a very unhappy period for me. (Stafford-Clark, personal interview)

The 1980s really tested the Royal Court – and Stafford-Clark. The theatre had to stand its ground and prove itself as continuing its past, being able to grow in the present, and – most importantly – still being worth its funding. With the threat of a withdrawal of

funds and the closing of the theatre always in sight, the Court fought its external as well as internal battles. Stafford-Clark was under a lot of pressure during these years; this pressure culminated in 1987, in the affair over Jim Allen's *Perdition*.

The case of *Perdition* showed how strong an impact a play can have and how much power the Royal Court and its Artistic Director held in their hands. It adds substance to Stafford-Clark's assertion: "As far as I am concerned the Artistic Director of the Royal Court is the leader of the Western World" (Little and McLaughlin 16). The *Perdition* affair is a singular incident in the history of the Royal Court: to this day, scholars wonder what it was that made Stafford-Clark, the Artistic Director of a theatre that had always welcomed controversy, withdraw the play the day before its opening, and after it had been developed at the Court for more than two years.

In *Perdition*, Allen, in the form of a court case, examines a collaboration of the Jewish Council, the Judenrat, with the Nazis, in 1944 Budapest. The main argument is that the deportation of fellow Jews was accepted by the leaders of the community to save their own families and friends. Allen shows that the leaders were Zionists and connects the events in Budapest to a global Zionist plot to allow the Holocaust, in order to build an argument for the instatement of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Leaders of the Jewish community in London got involved and lobbied against the production of the play. This lobbying effort, however, is another aspect of the affair that is as difficult to retrace as the withdrawal itself. To the day, *Perdition* stands to be the only play that the Royal Court ever withdrew for reasons that would have normally particularly justified a Royal Court production, the fact that "going ahead would cause great distress to sections of the community" (Royal Court Theatre, "Perdition").

The following chapter focusses on the production of Jim Allen's *Perdition* from 1985 to 1988. By examining the newspaper coverage on the production and the play, and particularly the articles published in the *Jewish Chronicle*, an outline shall be established on how the lobbying effort against the Royal Court proceeded. Before this is done, the play itself will be looked at and analysed. Next, a general outline of the *Perdition* affair – as it is presented in the literature on the Royal Court and by Max Stafford-Clark himself, in his book *Taking Stock* – is given. Eventually the story, as published by Stafford-Clark or commissioned by the Royal Court¹³¹ respectively, is juxtaposed with the archive material on the case.

131 The publications dealing with the *Perdition* affair, apart from Stafford-Clark's and Roberts' *Taking Stock*, are Little and McLaughlin's *The Royal Court Theatre: Inside Out* (2007), and Roberts' *The Royal Court Theatre and the Modern Stage* (1999). Little and McLaughlin were both commissioned by the Royal Court to write this 50th anniversary book on the Royal Court. At the time of writing they were both employed by the theatre. Philip Roberts was not commissioned to write his history of the Royal Court. Yet, his research – at a time when the Royal Court Archives were not open to the public and only accessible with permission by the Royal Court – was enabled by the theatre (Roberts, *Stage* xv).

Part one of *Perdition* – called ‘The Prosecution’ – opens to a court room. It is July 1967 and a young woman named Ruth Kaplan is on trial for having published a pamphlet in which she accuses the plaintiff Miklos Yaron of having collaborated with the Nazis in the deportation of the Hungarian Jewish population. Dr. Yaron, a former member of the Jewish Council in Budapest, did not inform the majority of Jewish citizens of the impending deportations, but helped the leader of the Council, Rudolf Kastner, in safely getting a small number of Jews out of the country. These Kastner trains carried a little more than 1,600 people, mainly officials and friends and family of the Council. A further 18,000 were rescued by being sent to work camps in Austria or Romania. Miss Kaplan’s main accusation, however, is that all of the rescued Jews were, just like Yaron and Kastner, Zionists. For her, their rescue therefore falls in line with the Zionist cause of building of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

As the play continues it is Dr. Yaron who is on trial rather than Ruth – who the play text refers to by her first name. The matter to be resolved – on a smaller level – ultimately, is if Yaron really was involved in organizing the deportations. On a bigger level, Mr. Scott, Ruth’s lawyer, attempts to prove what had been stated by the judge of the historical 1953 court case against Rudolf Kastner:

The Jews of the ghetto would not have trusted the Nazis or Hungarian rulers, but they had trusted in their Jewish leaders. Eichmann and others used this known fact as part of their calculated plan to mislead the Jews. They were able to deport the Jews to their examination by the help of Jewish leaders. (Allen, *Perdition* 64)

After a short conversation between Scott, his junior counsel, Green, and Ruth, Dr. Yaron is the first to be called to the stand. He is questioned by his lawyer, Lawson, and first speaks of his life as an Hungarian Jew, whose mother and sisters died in Treblinka (3), explains how Ruth started working for him at the National Jewish Library of Judaism in London (5), and gives an account of the responsibilities of the Jewish Councils in looking after the welfare of the Jewish people (8). As soon as Scott takes over the inquiry, he asks Yaron about Zionism. Yaron agrees when Scott describes it is a political movement, namely “nationalists who directed all their efforts to the resettlement of Jews in Palestine” (10). Scott then confronts Yaron with Eichmann’s arrival in Budapest, the instalment of the ghettos, his close acquaintance with Kastner, and their full knowledge of the extent of the liquidation of the Jewish society (10-12). Yaron agrees. Scott accuses Yaron, along with Kastner and the rest of the Council, to have known of the deportations and the death camps, particularly Auschwitz (14), and having deliberately kept this information from the Jewish community to keep them calm for Eichmann (19). He then ties Yaron’s and Kastner’s alleged actions to Zionism’s goal of building a racially pure Jewish state in Palestine (21). Yaron tries to explain how the Jewish Council tried to rescue people through negotiations (16), but Scott does not let the argument hold: “While you conducted your secret negotiations with the Nazis, [the Jews] were being shipped off in sealed trains; shot, gassed and incarcerated”. Scott then quotes from an interview Eichmann gave Willem Sassen in 1955, in which Eichmann states that Kastner agreed to help keep the Jews from resisting deportation, if Eichmann let a few hundred

of Kastner's choosing secretly emigrate to Palestine (17). Scott eventually accuses Yaron and the Jewish Council of having hindered a possible resistance and selling out their fellow Jewish communities:

[T]hey were instructed to provide the SS with large-scale maps showing the exact location of all provincial Jewish communities, schools, buildings, and institutes, etc. Yes? Seven days later the final round-up began. Branded with the Star of David, herded in ghettos, factories, brick kilns and open fields, the Jews of Hungary were assembled like meat on a hoof waiting to be slaughtered.

That is how the Jewish leadership reacted, Doctor Yaron, isn't it? By flopping down on all fours. Grovelling, servile, obedient? (20)

Yaron simply claims that they had no choice.

After Scott's questioning Yaron, Lawson briefly highlights the Jewish Council's success in rescuing community members and sending them to safety, arguing that Yaron did "everything humanly possible" to save his people (22). Lawson then calls Vandor, another former member of the Budapest Jewish Council, to the stand. Lawson now asks Vandor if he thinks Yaron collaborated with the Nazis, Vandor replies: "I say it is a lie" (24). He then explains that Yaron helped others under great personal risk. When Scott next questions Vandor, he has him explain that Eichmann and the SS treated the Zionists well, better than the Jewish Council in general (25). Vandor himself is not a Zionist, but a member of the Communist Party. He was on one of Kastner's trains (25).

The next witness is Stanley Karpin. Mr. Karpin is a retired Labour MP, who also served on the Board of Deputies for British Jews and was a member of the Executive of the World Zionist Organisation (25-26). He is also a friend of Yaron's. Lawson in the following has Karpin explain to what extent the Allied failed in helping the European Jewish community (27), and how the U.S. State Department even asked leaders to keep quiet about news of the liquidations (29). Scott argues that Zionist officials deliberately kept quiet about the Holocaust to build an argument towards the establishment of a homeland in Palestine: "the Zionist needed something to bargain with, and had the refugee problem been divorced from Palestine, international pressure and sympathy for a Jewish state would have evaporated" (31). Karpin does not respond. Scott then asks Karpin to cast his mind to the events of the Reichskristallnacht on 9 November 1938. He quotes Israel's later Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion who, in a speech to Labour Zionists on 7 December 1938, said he would have preferred to save only half of all Jewish children in Germany and bring them to Israel, to saving all of them and bringing them to the UK (31). When Karpin says that this is just the opinion of one man, Scott replies: "I'm quoting Davin Ben-Gurion. The founding father of Israel. They even named a mountain after him" (32). Karpin is still angry when he leaves the witness box, but does not speak again.

The second part of the play – 'The Defence' – opens with the questioning of Ruth Kaplan by Scott. Ruth gives an account of her childhood and education in Palestine (33). She is the daughter of German Jews, who came to Palestine in 1934, and studied philosophy and Arabic. She then explains how she started to work for Dr. Yaron, whom she respected and liked (34), and explains why she understands what Yaron did: that she

believes he acted out of a deep conviction, but that it was the policies of Zionist leaders that led him into betraying the Jews. She names Chaim Weizmann, the first president of Israel, Moshe Sharett, the second prime minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, and Yitzak Grunbaum as these Zionist leaders. Scott asks her several questions and she eventually explains: “[...] what he did flowed logically from the Zionist policy of making deals with the Nazis both before and during World War Two, and that to him this act of collaboration was justified in terms of building a Jewish Homeland” (35). At Scott’s request she elaborates: “They entered into secret negotiations with the Nazis, arguing that they too believed in racial exclusiveness” (36). She explains that Zionist leaders utilized the threat of Nazism to pave the way for a creation of the Jewish state. By offering their co-operation they received patronage and support of immigration to Palestine (37). In the context of this, Ruth mentions a co-operation between a Jewish Palestinian intelligence officer who worked with Eichmann, and even met him on his trip to Palestine and Egypt in 1937. She also mentions Yitzak Shamir and his involvement in the Stern Gang – “a terrorist organization led by Abraham Stern” (38). According to Ruth it was Stern who wrote to the Nazis in 1941, “to co-operate with them in the building of a Jewish state along totalitarian lines” (38). Eventually, Scott comes to talk about the Szamosi diary, the documents on which the accusations in Ruth’s pamphlet are built. Ruth explains that it is proven genuine (39). She thought about not publishing it, but had to – “because I am a Jew” (39). She eventually closes by stating that the Israeli government “commits outrageous crimes then silences its critics by invoking the holocaust” (39).

When Lawson now starts to question Ruth, he first tries to discredit her journalistic skills and honesty: “Was this pamphlet your first venture into writing for money?” (39). Ruth did not write it for money, friends helped her. Lawson asks: “Arabs?” (40). He continues to try and discredit her, until he eventually gets her to say that she can understand that under certain circumstances co-operation can be justified (42). This is where Lawson wants to cut her off, but both Scott and the judge agree that she must be allowed to continue. This gives Ruth the opportunity to go into detail about the involvement of high Zionist officials in the “cover-up” (43) of the deportations. Again and again Lawson interjects her with questions of incredulity, but Ruth has the better arguments. She claims that Jewish officials never even attempted to publicly fight the Holocaust (44). Lawson keeps arguing that the situation in Budapest was without precedent, until Ruth finally fully corners him and he admits: “Well, doesn’t everyone take care of himself and his family, Miss Kaplan? Or do you imagine that man is composed of moral principles alone?” (45). As Lawson now sits down, Scott returns to questioning Ruth about the actual role of the Jewish Council in Budapest. Ruth explains that the Jewish Council actively worked against an uprising of the community – which would have easily been a success – in return they got to select members of their own families, functionaries, Zionists, and ‘the Prominents’ (46) for rescue.

After a cross-fade and a sound queue playing a song from the ghetto, Joseph Orzech is called to the stand. Orzech, as one learns, a survivor of the uprising in the

Warsaw ghetto, now gives testimony of how the Jewish Councils drew up the lists for deportation, and how the collaboration with Jewish Councils and the SS was generally organized (48). Orzech was a Communist and anti-Zionist. When questioned by Scott's junior counsel, Green, he explains how "the Judenrat and the ghetto police did everything to prevent mass resistance" (50). When questioned by Lawson, Orzech explains that "leadership from ghetto to ghetto varied" (52). He compares the example of the president of the Jewish Council in Warsaw, who committed suicide, to the leaders of the Skalat ghetto, who threw a party for the SS, after driving Jews from their hiding places. Lawson interjects that he is aware of a different version of the Skalat ghetto story, as researched by an Oxford scholar. Orzech replies by quoting another publication, and the secondary texts state that "*Lawson is sorry he asked*" (52). When Orzech next echoes Ruth's claim that Jews everywhere should have resisted the Nazis, Lawson asks him if he is "hostile to the policies of the Israeli government" (53). Orzech is. Again a cross-fade. This time the sound of marching.

Miriam Moser is called to the stand. Miriam is an Auschwitz survivor and an eyewitness to Yaron's actions in Budapest. She accuses him of having refused to help a young Jewish resistance fighter and British agent, who had parachuted into Hungary – Hannah Szenes, and of having distributed postcards from Auschwitz that deportees had been forced to write to their families, spreading the fake news that they were doing fine. As the postcards are a new piece of evidence, Yaron is allowed to comment on the incident. Lawson questions him, and he denies Miriam's claims only to then contradict himself: "it is possible that some individual members of the Jewish Council may have participated with the postcards" (58). When Scott questions him next, he speaks of the 1,684 people on the train he rescued and another 18,000 that were sent to Romania. Scott adds: "And approximately half a million perished". He does not give Yaron time to answer, but continues to ask how the rescue lists were prepared. Yaron claims Eichmann did not want to save children, so the lists were prepared to Eichmann's liking (59). Eventually Scott comments: "First you placed a noose around the neck of every Jew in Hungary, then you tightened the knot and legged it for Palestine, did you not?" (60). Yaron answers: "That is how a non-Jew would see it." Scott further asks Yaron about Kastner's saving 388 Zionists from his home village, Kluj, in a region three miles away from the safe Romania. In the line of this inquiry, Scott quotes from Kastner's historical trial in 1955, where it was proven that the rest of the Jewish citizens in Kluj – through false allegations by Kastner's group – were lured into trains to Auschwitz, believing they were being transported to the allegedly safe town of Kenyermeze (61). Yaron only asks: "What has all this to do with me?" (62). Scott then closes his main argument. He quotes the Israeli government, in the form of the Attorney General, regarding Kastner's actions:

If in Kastner's opinion, rightly or wrongly, he believed that one million Jews were hopelessly doomed he was allowed not to inform them of their fate, and to concentrate on the saving of a few... It has always been our Zionist tradition to select the few out of the many in arranging the immigration to Palestine. (62)

In a continuation of the argument, which was later removed from the play text due to a libel case, Scott quotes a Swiss Jew called Nathan Schwalb: “If we do not bring sacrifices to the negotiating table, with what will we achieve the right to sit at the table when they make the distribution of nations and territories after the war? Only through blood will the land be ours”. Confronted with this evidence, Yaron admits: “Our Zionist tradition compelled us to save the few out of the many. That is how our sages and leaders told us” (63) and “The creation of the Jewish state above all other considerations” (65). He eventually ends: “We picked up your habits and we hated you for it because now the world is afraid of us. Now we inflict pain and we don’t like it, but you cannot create out of an imaginary material” (66). As a reaction to Yaron’s final claims – “We are no longer in hiding [...] We shout from the roof-tops: ‘I am a Jew’ [...] and people listen with fear and respect” (66), “Our history has taught us to survive” (67) – Scott predicts a nuclear war: “The Arab countries can absorb defeat. Israel cannot. In which case the temptation to use nuclear weapons will be great. Then what? Another holocaust? Computerized, clean, more efficient? You should have stayed in Europe, Dr. Yaron... No more questions.” (67). Yaron cannot answer, as there is a cross-fade.

Scott and Lawson respectively make their closing statements. Scott asks for matters not to be clouded over by a Holocaust guilt and to actually look at the world: “If the well is polluted, do we blame the water-carrier? If Anti-Semitism is indeed ‘the Socialism of fools’, should we not ask where and how that consciousness arose in the first place? What is it in our society that generates this evil?” (67). Lawson appeals to the jury to understand Yaron’s dilemma: he himself, his own family, suffered under the Nazis, he therefore knew that the Jews of Hungary were doomed, and did his best to save the few he could (68).

After the hearing, as Ruth waits for her acquittal, Yaron joins her. He admits to Ruth that her publishing the diary came to him as a blessing (69). He only took her to court to have a platform, a tribunal, because he needed a judgement (70). The play ends with Yaron recalling a dream of standing at the gates of Auschwitz, seeing a group of German schoolchildren visiting the camp with their teacher. “She [the teacher] gave me an embarrassing apologetic smile. I said nothing. She had made her pilgrimage. A modest deposit, but not full payment.” In his dream, he is about to move away, when a child with a trusting smile hands him flowers. He finishes: “Scott was right about one thing, Ruth. If the well is polluted... RUTH: Then we dig a new well” (71).

Allen’s play attempts to present historical facts, in a seemingly broadly researched fashion, by exploring them through the fictitious characters of the play. However, while these characters are pure fiction, the people they are referring to – most prominently Rudolf Kastner and Adolf Eichmann – are not. It is at this line between fiction and non-fiction that Allen tries to negotiate the validity of the highly serious accusation against the Jewish Council in Budapest. A difficult premise that is made even more complex by the fact that the playwright openly admits to the goal of the play being “to show how

some Zionist leaders collaborated with the Nazis during and before the Second World War” (xiii).

Even when assuming that Allen tries hard to take the objective or at least non-judgmental position of the playwright, he is not successful in this. This has been widely debated by historians on the level of historical content, and actually led to several re-writes by Allen. But it also affects the play on a much simpler level, in its dialogue structure, and character work.

One of the major difficulties of *Perdition* certainly is that one of its main characters, Dr. Yaron, is given a confusing objective. It is not until the end of the play that we learn of Yaron’s plan to publicly ‘tribunalize’ himself. His reactions throughout the play showed him as weak, indifferent to the subject matter, and at times highly arrogant and blatantly vicious. According to his given objective, one has to assume that most of his actions, particularly his indifference and his arrogance, are deliberate provocations forcing the jury into judging him harsher. Not knowing about his secret agenda, which is never even hinted at, until the end of the play, one has to assume that his actions are solely following the purpose of redeeming himself. The weaknesses in his characters seem therefore like weaknesses in his arguments. The subversive intention that he carries remains too vague to be noticed until he finally confesses it. Given that the play is designed as a trial, Yaron’s confusing objective naturally highly impacts the outcome. He does not fight the defence, and loses. When really the point that Allen wants to make is that the Zionists collaborated with the Nazis, Yaron’s unclearly formulated objective allows Allen to circumvent the inclusion of a strong counter argument. That there is no intention to build any such argument is most striking in Yaron’s actions, but can be seen throughout the play.

When asked by his own lawyer regarding his work on the rescue committee in Budapest: “And if you had been caught it could have cost your life?” Yaron only nods and shrugs and then says “Yes” (9). Shortly after, when asked by Scott about how long Jews have believed that “exile in the Diaspora was a punishment for Jewish sinfulness” (9), Yaron shrugs and then answers: “Two thousand years” (9). It is difficult to understand in this dialogue that Yaron’s seeming indifference to the subject matter is not due to a resistance to be judged, but the opposite. It is also hard to read Yaron’s willingness to be judged in his ductus, which mostly appears to be a lack of rhetoric and linguistic skills. When cross-examined by Scott about the effects of Eichmann’s arrival in Budapest on Jewish life, Yaron always just answers with ‘Yes’ (11). Even though Scott’s language clearly antagonizes him – “Then how did you feel when this vulture [Eichmann] suddenly appeared spreading and flapping his wings in Hungary, the last place and refuge of one million Jews? Didn’t that tell you something?” (11) – Yaron never explains himself or elaborates on an answer. Similarly, it is therefore not his intention, but the same vagueness and seeming indifference suggested in earlier conversations that echoes into decisive parts of the dialogue that could actually save Yaron: “LAWSON: Can you say how many Jewish lives were saved by your actions? YARON: I don’t know. LAWSON: Thousands? YARON: Yes. LAWSON: Tens of thousands?”

YARON: Probably” (9). He appears not as a man battling his guilt, but as weak. This weakness is of great advantage to Scott. There are few instances in which Yaron talks back, but it is not with much force, and Scott can easily defeat him.

When Scott confronts Yaron with the fact that Eichmann’s biggest problem was to find ways to “dispel the fears of the victims” (13), Yaron agrees: “I suppose so”. When Scott then suggests that Eichmann did so by enlisting Jews like Kastner and Yaron to support him, Yaron calls Scott’s allegations a lie. “YARON: (*Angrily*) It is a lie! (*Restraining himself.*) It was not like that. SCOTT: You carried out his orders. You did everything Eichmann asked of you. YARON: We had no choice. But we did not support him, not in the way you mean” (13-14). Unsure of his outbreak, Yaron constrains himself. By taking back his reaction, he invalidates the same. When Scott goes on to confront Yaron about Eichmann’s concrete orders, Yaron only “*looks blank*” (14), and goes back to answering with “Yes” or “We had to”.

Yaron is given a strikingly narrow linguistic scope. His answers are neither intelligent nor do they speak of any kind of strong conviction. The latter can be connected to Yaron’s objective, the first cannot. Yaron’s behaviour in general is too inconsequent to build the arch necessary to feel his objective throughout the play. During the whole first part of the play, Yaron grows weaker and weaker (18), he does not respond to Scott’s accusations (14), hesitates before he speaks (14, 19), becomes sarcastic (17), evasive (18), more and more insecure (19), and withdraws himself (21). Scott, on the other hand, becomes stronger and more decisive. He quotes numerous papers and pamphlets (12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20), is factual (17), demanding (20), openly angry without restraining himself (18), and stares disdainfully at Yaron (18). Additionally, it can also not be argued that Yaron’s answers, when questioned again by Lawson – which clearly play into Scott’s hands, reveal his true objective. On the contrary, they seem just as indifferent, emotionally cold even, as anything before: “LAWSON: Well, did you at any time feel Jewish lives were expendable? YARON: In war, Mr. Lawson, all lives are expendable. We were the victims. We feared death and thought rescue possible. We were wrong. It didn’t happen. What else can one say?” (23).

When brought to the stand again in the second half of the play Yaron’s intentions are not any clearer. He is nervous – “*Tense and nervous, his eyes are fixed on LAWSON*” (58). He contradicts himself in regard to the handing out of postcards that were consequently handed down by the SS (58). He seems indifferent to agent and resistance fighter Hannah Szenes’ – “the Szenes girl” – fate (63). Finally, he is overpowered by Scott again (64), and in an outbreak offers Scott all the proof he needs when openly proclaiming his Zionist goals (65). Yaron’s outbreak culminates in a threat to, not only Scott, but the whole world: “We have other plans. You had 300 years; we’ve only been in existence for nineteen. Give us time” (66). While his early proclamation of Zionist agenda appeared to be connected to his actions in 1944, this threat, however, reveals that Yaron is not referring to 1944 Hungary, but the present state of Israel.

Surely Yaron’s behaviour can be explained at the end of the play, when one finds out that he deliberately wanted to be judged – “I needed a judgement, Mr. Scott” (70).

Having lost to Scott has finally proven to him that he did wrong. In an absurdly delayed and out of time way he exclaims: “I was wrong... now we must cry out... warn” (70). Allen’s choice to present Yaron as unsympathetic and weak in his argument throughout the play makes it hard to relate to Yaron. As a consequence, the side of the argument that he represents is weak and non-relatable. Allen’s character work, one can argue, is strongly judgemental in the way that it is biased by his own anti-Zionist views. This bias also becomes apparent in other aspects of the play.

Scott’s superiority to Yaron was already shown above. But it is not just Yaron who Scott is superior to, or – to be more precise – in contrast to whom he is given a stronger position by Allen. When comparing the number of pages Scott gets to conduct examinations to Lawson’s, one sees a clear 24 to 42 pages ratio in favour of Scott, with Scott’s junior counsel Green conducting another six pages of examinations. On a micro level, Allen thus gives the defence more than double the space he gives to the plaintiff’s cause. On a macro level, Allen gives his anti-Zionist argument twice the room than he gives the other side to prove their innocence.

Throughout the play, Scott’s tactics are always successful. He gets to elaborate on every aspect chosen – even if it is not directly connected with the case, like some character’s private life – and he wins all of his arguments. He can use any kind of force or polemic and is not stopped, not by his own sense of decency, nor by an objection or interruption by Lawson or the judge. When questioning Yaron about the deportations in May 1944, Scott asks:

SCOTT: The last year of the war in Europe. One month before the allied armies landed in France. (YARON *nods his head slowly*.) And during that period, 12,000 a day were being sent to Auschwitz. Numb, confused, lied to, they marched in columns and piled onto trains while their leaders stood back with folded arms and let it happen. This also we have established. YARON: We did protest. SCOTT *angrily snatches up a slip of paper*. SCOTT: Petition to Interior Minister Jaroszi: ‘We empathetically declare that we do not seek this audience to lodge complaints about the merits of the measures adopted, but merely ask that they be carried out in human spirit.’ This was your protest? YARON: (*Evasively*.) What I meant was... we still thought rescue was possible. (18)

Leaving aside the fact that most of the information quoted by Scott in regard to the Allied invasion and deportations was unknown to Yaron at the time, it cannot go unnoticed how highly emotionally charged and polemic Scott’s rhetoric is. Yaron, however, is not outraged. He does not explain himself. Neither does he try to build a valid argument for himself. In rhetorically plain and rather unintelligent statements, he confirms Scott’s allegations.

But it is not just with Yaron that Scott has the upper hand. In the questioning of Karpin, regarding the head of the Jewish community in the U.S., Rabbi Stephen Wise’s, failure to warn the U.S. government of the Holocaust, Scott, same as with Yaron, asks Karpin a series of questions that the latter merely answers with ‘Yes’. When Karpin explains that it was U.S. officials that asked Wise to keep quiet, Scott states:

SCOTT: Let me get this straight, and because the jury might find this hard to believe. This was August 1942. Had not the Nazis already embarked on their programme of 're-settlement'? Jews were being deported from Poland, France and elsewhere. Only one month before, 380,000 Jews were shipped out of the Warsaw ghetto. Is that correct? KARPIN: Yes. SCOTT: And presumably reports were coming in from other sources confirming Hitler's decision to liquidate all Jews? KARPIN: Yes. SCOTT: Given this amount of intelligence, would you say so, then, that Rabbi Wise must have known that what the cable said was true? KARPIN: I would think so. (*Seeing the look on SCOTT's face.*) Yes. (29)

When Karpin goes on to defend Wise: "It is of course possible that he failed to grasp the importance of what was going on around him" (29), Scott can produce a cable from Wise to the State Department, quoting that he and the heads of Jewish organisations actively worked to keep news of the deportation out of the press. It is striking how Scott controls the argument and how Karpin, after a look Scott gives him, adheres his language according to the wishes of his opponent.

Complementing Scott's strength and clarity, Lawson is portrayed as evasive, indecisive, arrogant, and often off the point. The first time Lawson is seen active in a confrontation is when he cuts into Scott's stating that the Zionists collaborated with the Nazis: "LAWSON: (*Angrily*) My Lord, is the defence then saying that Zionism helped Hitler to destroy the Jews?" (21). The judge does not answer Lawson, but Scott does. In a lengthy answer, he lays out how Zionism's and Nazism's interests coincided. When Scott closes his argument, making exactly the same point he did before – "Isn't it true that without your collaboration [Eichmann's] task would have been impossible? No more questions, my Lord" (21) – Lawson does not respond again.

Later on in the play, while Scott questions Ruth on why "collaboration with the Nazis should flow logically from the politics and doctrines of Zionism" (35), Lawson's indecisiveness comes to show: "LAWSON *rises as if to object, then sits down again.*" (35). What follows is a lengthy description of Zionist affiliation with the Nazis.

When strong, Lawson is presented as racist – "RUTH: Friends. LAWSON: Jewish friends? RUTH: Mainly. LAWSON: Arabs?" (40), arrogant – "Israel lives. The Zionist dream [...] is now a living reality. Were you wrong, Mr. Orzech?" (51), "*He shakes his head and smiles at the absurdity of this.*" (48), vicious – "Miss Kaplan, I don't wish to embarrass you [...] have you at any time received psychiatric treatment?" (41) – and clearly not well-enough informed. When Lawson presents his knowledge of the history of the Skalat ghetto, which he learned from "an eminent historian, an Oxford Don no less" (52) and Orzech quotes a different source, Lawson "*is sorry he asked*". On another occasion Ruth calls him out for only telling half-truths – "No, but finish the story, Mr. Lawson" (48) – and gets to finish the story for him.

It is not only through dialogue that Allen's bias comes to show. All characters are written by their surnames, apart from Ruth and Miriam. This cannot be explained by the fact that they are women, as Green, Scott's junior counsel, is also a woman. While Ruth, as the person on trial, is made more personable through the giving of her first name, the same is true for Miriam. In Miriam's case, knowing her first name even seems essential

to a certain point, as we learn a number of highly personal facts about her. In Auschwitz, she was subject to experiments. Radiation was used on female prisoners, to test its effect on their fertility. One of Miriam's ovaries was removed during these tests. Until now, the consequences of these tests affect her: "I was pregnant three time, but... I lost my babies because of what they did to me in Auschwitz" (54). At this point in the examination, Miriam cannot go on and covers her face with her hands. The judge interrupts and offers her a glass of water. Miriam refuses: "I'll be alright". Scott, who was examining her, understands, and stops this line of inquiry.

Furthermore, it is only the witnesses of the defence that get to tell their tragic life stories: Miriam is an Auschwitz survivor, Orzech survived the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. Karpin and Vandor, who both speak up for Yaron, do not talk about their personal lives, only Yaron mentions that his mother and two sisters died in Treblinka.

There is also a distinct difference in the way the characters are described. Alec Scott is in his forties and has "*a quality of toughness about him*" (1). He also looks jaded. His junior counsel, Green, is in her thirties. She is "*a neat woman [...] with shrewd eyes*" (1). Ruth is "*a quiet, attractive woman in her late twenties*" (2). Their witnesses have a similarly positive appearance. Orzech is "*an alert 62-year-old*" (46). Miriam "*is 41, smart, alert and very tense*" (53). In contrast to this Lawson is not described at all. Yaron is "*a tall, distinguished man [...] His voice is clear and calm, but beneath it there is fear and tension*" (3). Vandor is the same age as Yaron, "*[c]onfident and sure of himself. A man used to taking decisions*" (23). Only Karpin "*an alert 66-year-old, relaxed and self-assured*" (25) is described in a non-judgmental way.

Another way for Allen to set the tone is through songs and montages between scenes. Here, too, a clear bias can be detected. Before Yaron takes the stand for the first time, a montage of people in the Jewish ghettos of World War II is shown (3). While this can still be seen as an introduction to the subject matter, the different usages of music become clear political commentaries in the course of the play. The end of the first half of the play sees an angry Karpin, who has just been examined by Scott about the active cover-up of the Holocaust by Zionists (30-32). As the light now fades out, one hears "the harsh sound of a Nazi marching song" (33). It fades to a song of the ghetto and as the lights come up Ruth is on the stand. Given Allen's clearly judgmental take on the subject, it must be argued that what is installed here, is an audio juxtaposition of perpetrators and victims. In this, it can only be understood as a comment that Karpin is followed by a Nazi march and Ruth introduced by a song from the ghetto. A song from the ghetto also follows Ruth's words at the end of her examination: "SCOTT: And those Jews without money or status, the remnants hiding in the ghettos, did they know about the train? RUTH: They were abandoned" (46). The next time music is played it is the sound of marching. The march follows Lawson after he questions Orzech about the latter's hostility towards the present State of Israel – "LAWSON: You have no wish to celebrate their victory over the Arabs in the six-day war? ORZECH: No. LAWSON: Then the jury will have to consider to what extent your political convictions colour your observation" (53).

In a preamble to his play, Allen notes:

The characters on the stage of this play are fictitious and no resemblance to any person living or dead is intended. Jacob Szamosi and his diaries are also fictions.

Events, personalities and their statements referred to in the evidence of witnesses are to be found in the published sources given in the bibliography. The interpretation of these by the action of the play I believe in good faith to be justified. (xiii)

It is not surprising that the thoroughness of Allen's research and the accuracy of historic facts, as he presents them, have been widely debated (Cesarani in Allen, *Perdition* 111). As such it must be noted that the version of the play that is publicly accessible has been revised multiple times (112). Still, even if Allen's research has been thorough and all facts can be proven through various sources, there remain difficulties in handling the facts in the way he presents them. On page 37, Ruth claims "the Zionist banner was the only other political flag permitted – apart from the Swastika", making it sound like an older version of the script states: "the Zionist banner flew alongside the Swastika" (113). She does not explain that according to the Reichsflagengesetz of 15 September 1935 and the Blutschutzgesetz ('blood protection law') Jews in Germany were not allowed to raise the German flag (Winkler 47): it was decided that they were to raise another flag, to set them apart from the rest of the Arian population. While the way Allen puts it is not wrong, it also feels that vital information is missing in order to present an unbiased picture of a situation. To sum it up, Allen's stand point and opinion on the State of Israel and the involvement of Zionists in the Holocaust shine through the play in a way that makes it hard to ignore his bias and hear the play as a truthful comment on a highly controversial issue.

Perdition was commissioned by the Royal Court in 1985 on the suggestion of Michael Hastings, playwright, and at the time Literary Manager of the Court (Little and McLaughlin 252). The play that arrived at the Court in August 1985 depicts a verbatim court case touching on a similar subject matter as the Gruenwald-Kastner case.

Rudolf Kastner was also known as Rezsó Kasztner, and Israel or Yisrael Kastner or Kasztner. The case opened in 1954 when Malchiel Gruenwald, or Greenwald as he's called in *Perdition*, published a leaflet in which he accused Kastner, a member of the Mapai, the Israeli Socialist Party, and close to the Cabinet, of having collaborated with the Nazis in Budapest at the end of WWII. The Attorney General immediately charged Gruenwald with criminal libel. Gruenwald's lawyer, Shmuel Tamir, an extreme right-winger with affiliations with the rightwing Irgun, however, turned the tables: he showed that Gruenwald knew Kastner in 1944 Budapest, and managed to put Kastner – who was originally only the chief witness – on trial. Tamir further showed that Kastner had testified in Nuremberg in support of one of Eichmann's men, Becher. In Nuremberg, Kastner had admitted that he had failed to warn the Jews in the nearby Cluj or Kluj ghetto of the imminent deportation, and to have paid Becher one million dollars worth in gold and jewellery to allow some Jews to leave for Switzerland, while half a million others were sent to concentration camps. During the Gruenwald trial, Kastner denied these facts, yet

many inconsistencies pervaded: he claimed never to have testified at Nuremberg, but Tamir produced proof he had. In the end, Gruenwald was acquitted with a token payment, and three of the five points against Kastner were proved (Hastings, *On Perdition*).

It must be understood that the Kastner case not only functioned as a reprocessing of history, but also as a political fight between the Left (Mapai) and the Right (Irgun). In 1957, former Lehi members Ze'ev Eckstein, Dan Shemer and Yosef Menkes assassinated Kastner. Lehi, formally Lohamei Herut Yisra'e, and also called the Stern Gang, after its founder Abraham Stern – the same that is mentioned in *Perdition*, was a Zionist paramilitary organization (Pedahzur and Perliger 31).

As soon as the play arrived at the Court, a report was commissioned by David Cesarani, a “Zionist historian” (Roberts, *Stage* 196). On 26 August, the Court also sought a leading counsel’s advice concerning the accuracy of the proceedings, given that the play presented a trial (196). The Cesarani report came to the Court on 28 November 1985 saying that

[...] serious historical research [...] has given rise to a large body of material on the subjects dealt with. However, the play offends against canons of historical scrupulosity and it contains some rather nasty attacks on Jews and Judaism which it would be hard for most Jews, and many non-Jews, to accept. (196)

According to Cesarani, the play’s subjects were “part of a legitimate, ongoing debate [about] the behaviour of Jewish Councils in Nazi-occupied Europe, the contact between Zionist and the Nazi regime, ‘blood and soil’ Zionism, Zionist attitudes toward Jewish refugees” (196). Hastings himself also wrote a report on the play saying that it was

[...] a fictionalised interpretation of a notorious trial which the author has used to his own political purposes, and those are not purposes of firing up ancient Anti-Semitism but they do provide a subtext acutely aimed at discrediting Zionism, and thus this fictional account must be honestly declared right from the start. (196)

Another, seemingly unasked for, anonymous report from the Institute of Jewish Affairs also surfaced calling the play “one-sided in its attack on Zionism” (196). This and the Cesarani report were, however, not acknowledged by Stafford-Clark. In an interview with Roberts in 1996, he admits: “I didn’t read them. I didn’t think this was going to be enormously difficult. But I had no idea of the furore that would follow. And I suppose I should have done” (196). In *Taking Stock*, he further adds: “the Royal Court had staged many controversial plays in its history. [...] and I certainly didn’t signal that there would be a huge problem to the Council [of the English Stage Company] or to anyone else. This was later seen as culpable” (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 132).

The play was scheduled for a production in the Theatre Upstairs. When Allen, however, heard that his play was not scheduled for the main bill, he withdrew it (192) “for many months” (Stafford-Clark, “Letter”), only to withdraw this withdrawal later. *Perdition* was pushed into the background until October 1986, when it – once again – became clear that the plot of the play bore its dangers: the Court Council’s member Sonia Melchett had been approached by Lord Weidenfeld, according to Stafford-Clark “a self-appointed leader of the Jewish Community” (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 132),

who had expressed his concern about the production (Roberts, *Stage* 193; Roberts and Stafford-Clark 131).

George Weidenfeld, an Austrian born Jew and a committed Zionist, had moved to Britain in 1938, and worked for the BBC. He co-founded the publishing house Weidenfeld & Nichols in 1948, became chief of cabinet for Chaim Weizmann, the first president of the newly founded state Israel, in 1949, was knighted in 1969, and was made a Peer of the Realm in 1976 (Marre). He had also been married to Jane Sieff, a Marks & Spencer heiress (Calder), and was thus, via the Marks family, by marriage related to the Blond family. Neville Blond's wife Elaine, like her husband an important early patron of the Royal Court, was a neé Marks.

The minutes of the Council meeting on 20 October 1986 report:

Mr Evans reported that Lord Weidenfeld had expressed concern regarding *Perdition*, a play being produced in the Theatre Upstairs. Ms Sonia Melchett reported that concern had been expressed to her. Mr Stafford-Clark reported that reports had been commissioned regarding the accuracy of the play and had been shown to Jim Allen. He believed the play to be very serious if provocative. Both he and Mr [Simon] Curtis [Director of the Theatre Upstairs] supported the play. Mr Evans concluded that, given this commitment to the play and its historical accuracy, and since the expressed concerns appeared not to be based on a reading of the play, criticism should be resisted by Council. (131)

Before the play went into production, with the agreement of director Ken Loach, copies of the play text were sent to the press (Roberts, *Stage* 196-197). Stafford-Clark recalls that he felt that "sending out the script would defuse any argument. And, of course, it didn't defuse it. It did the reverse" (197). Matthew Evans recalls:

There was a lot of intimidatory stuff going on. I was called to a meeting with Lord Goodman¹³² and out of the woodwork came Lord Rayne [at the time chairman of the board of the National Theatre] and they sat me down and Lord Goodman, a great exponent of the free speech who I had admired, said, 'You cannot do this play. It is inaccurate. It is an insult to the Jewish community.' And he started to cry. (197)

In January 1987, the situation heated up. In early January, Dr Stephen Roth from the Institute of Jewish Affairs asked to meet with Stafford-Clark, Allen, and Loach. He had received the script through David Nathan, the theatre critic of the *Jewish Chronicle* (Roberts, *Stage* 197). The meeting between Stafford-Clark and Roth took place on 13 January in Stafford-Clark's office at the Royal Court, with Ken Loach and either Joe Beddoe, at the time General Manager of the Court (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 133), or Simon Curtis (Stafford-Clark, "Letter"; Roberts and Stafford-Clark 140) present. Jim

132 Lord Goodman was the head of the Arts Council of Great Britain from 1965 to 1972; a position in which he had dealt extensively with the Royal Court. He was also a chairman of the Theatre Trust and other theatrical bodies, as well as president of the Institute of Jewish Affairs and chairman of the trustees of the *Jewish Chronicle* (Goodman).

Allen was not available, and Ken Loach ran late for the meeting. Stafford-Clark recalls in his letter to the *Guardian* on 13 March 1987¹³³:

As I recall, Roth made three main criticisms: firstly that the work of the Zionist Resistance Organisation wasn't mentioned; secondly that efforts of the Jewish leaders had saved not merely the 1,684 mentioned in the play but further 18,000 who had been sent to work-camps in Austria; and thirdly that the sheer nightmare and agonising confusion in Budapest in 1944 was not presented in the play. He didn't deny that terrible mistakes had been made¹³⁴.

Dr Roth also indicated the powers he could use to remove the play. He could picket. He could contact 'the Royal Court's friends' in New York. He could influence funding bodies in London. On Ken's arrival the exchange between the two men became alarmingly heated. Loach was provocative and Dr Roth was intemperate. He brandished a sheet detailing, he said, 24 major errors¹³⁵. He declined to reveal them as he wished to discredit the play when it was produced.

The meeting had passed the point where it had any useful purpose. His threats could be dismissed, but he had an authority in his rage that both Simon Curtis and I found impressive. (Stafford-Clark, "Letter"; Roberts and Stafford-Clark 140)

In *Taking Stock*, Stafford-Clark recalls:

It was a civilised if fairly fruitless discussion because there was little sense of either Ken or Stephen Roth giving ground. However, with no particular provocation Dr Roth burst into an impassioned rage. He screamed at us, his frail body quivering beneath his mac. The purport of this tirade was what he was not going to do but could if he wished. He detailed this as cutting off the Royal Court's funding, and making our supposed anti-Semitism clear to Joe Papp and the American funding bodies to which the Royal Court was supposedly beholden. He stopped shouting minutes after he had begun, and although the conversation resumed on polite terms his extraordinary outburst lingered in the air. (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 133)

A piece by David Rose in the *Guardian*, on 14 January, titled "Rewriting the Holocaust" added insult to injury, so that on 16 January, Matthew Evans reported to Stafford-Clark that the Israeli Government was to make representations and the Israeli Ambassador was involved (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 132). In the same week, a historian named Martin Gilbert rang to ask for a meeting. Stafford-Clark and Gilbert met on 17 January, even though Allen and Loach were against it (141). It was then that

133 The letter was drafted by Stafford-Clark and edited by Matthew Evans and Anthony Burton, Vice Chairman of the Council, and a solicitor (Roberts, *Stage* 200).

134 The version of the play text which Stephen Roth referred to was an early draft. David Cesarani explains in regard to the published text: "The text of the play printed here is a drastically revised version of the one that went into rehearsal and which was released to the press for pre-performance information. [...] At each stage of rewriting significant alterations have been made" (Cesarani in Allen, *Perdition* 111).

135 Roth's claim was built on a claim by Martin Gilbert, who shortly later produced a list of 64 errors.

[...] the claim to the list of ‘64 errors’ was made¹³⁶. Many of these points were Gilbert’s own opinion about what the principal character might have said. He even suggested some alternative lines. He argued that for some months the Jewish Council must have believed they were negotiating with Eichmann to save one million Jews from the camps. His objective was to prove the Jewish Councils had done as much as possible to preserve lives. (141)

Stafford-Clark continues:

Jim Allen’s thesis was the opposite. There was no meeting point. But again, the horrific situation facing Jewish leaders became clearer to me. I grouped Gilbert’s major points together and relayed them to Ken and Jim later that day. Jim didn’t dispute the facts but didn’t wish to expand the play to encompass them. It was late in the day. (142)

The day after the meeting, on 19 January, the Court’s Council and Stafford-Clark were invited to Sonia Melchett’s house. The meeting was initiated by Lord Weidenfeld and had the purpose of hearing out Martin Gilbert. Stafford-Clark did not attend as he had already spoken to Gilbert (132). On the same day he wrote into his diary:

Clearly someone on the Council is leaking every phone call and discussion to the *Daily Telegraph*¹³⁷. Above all, I feel I’m involved in a quarrel between two opposing factions neither of whom I feel particularly aligned with. To be caught between Zionists and the Trots[kyists] is truly to be between a rock and a hard place. The ferocity of the lobbying has to be experienced to be believed... and meanwhile is the play, poor thing, worth the trouble? (134)

The Trots were mainly Allen, an avowed Marxist, and Loach. On 20 January, an extraordinary Council Meeting was held. Stafford-Clark recalls Simon Curtis, who came from a Jewish family, coming back from lunch break, crying. His father had accused him of betrayal for producing Allen’s play (134). Stafford-Clark further recalls his friendship with Ken Loach breaking, and Loach making clear that the Artistic Director would not be welcome at a run-through (134). The Council Meeting, which had been decided on at Melchett’s house two days before (Roberts, *Stage* 198), went on for hours. Stafford-Clark recalls:

The Council were hostile to me with the exception of Bill [Gaskill] and Caryl [Churchill]. Nobody said it was an anti-Semitic play. At the same time the Council meeting was reported in full on the front page of the *Daily Telegraph* the following morning. Someone on the Council leaked the whole debate. (198)

136 Roth had consequently never produced a list of errors. Of Gilbert’s 64 listed errors only eleven, the ones Stafford-Clark found noteworthy and put down in his diary, survived. They will be quoted in the following analysis of the archive material.

137 This sentence cannot be found in Max Stafford-Clark’s diary of 18 January 1987. The original sentence reads: “I wonder how long it will be before news of that leaks out”. It relates to the sentence before: “At 4:30 the invitation comes to go to Sonia’s house at 6:00... clearly this is turning into a full Council meeting...”.

Gaskill made clear that “the Council has to stand behind Mr Stafford-Clark and Mr Stafford-Clark has to stand behind the play [...] not to do the play would be dishonourable to the Court” (198). The Council meeting’s minutes read:

Jocelyn Herbert was aware that the Council’s role was not to interfere in artistic decisions but she... found it incredible that things had gone so far. She also asked whether, in fact, the play was of artistic merit. Mr Stafford-Clark said that the deciding factor was the combination of Jim Allen and Ken Loach... Caryl Churchill said that she had read most of the play and felt there could be no possibility of seeing the play as anti-Semitic. She felt an enormous amount of compassion came through. She would hate to think that the fact that the play was a polemic would go against it. She felt the Council should respect Jim Allen’s reputation and his right to his position... Bill Gaskill felt the play to be partial, polemical and strongly anti-Zionist. If a play is put on, the theatre is seen to be behind that play. He felt that the position should be clarified: that the theatre stands by *Perdition*, or washes its hands of it. He asked Max Stafford-Clark if he went along with the anti-Zionist stance... we must not evade the issue. The Council has to stand behind Mr Stafford-Clark, and whether Mr Stafford-Clark or Simon Curtis were one hundred per cent behind the play. Mr Stafford-Clark confirmed that he was not as anti-Zionist as Jim Allen, but that he felt as Artistic Director there was a need to broaden one’s own tastes. Simon Curtis said that he could not reassure Bill Gaskill that he was as anti-Zionist as Jim Allen, but he felt that passion makes great work... Mr Gaskill felt that not to do the play would be dishonourable to the Royal Court... Matthew Evans put forward the following proposals: that simultaneously the following happen:

Check for libel with Anthony Burton.

All Council members read the play.

An impartial historian’s view is sought.

The previews are postponed. (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 134-135)

Roberts writes: “Recalling the affirmation [...] as to the centrality of the writer, Stafford-Clark was in the impossible position, to a large extent of his own making, of being invited to endorse the great tradition of the Court’s commitment to the writer via a play he did not rate highly” (198). At 8.00 p.m. that day, Stafford-Clark decided to withdraw *Perdition* without consulting either the Council, Ken Loach or Jim Allen. He only spoke to Anthony Burton and Matthew Evans about his plan (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 136), “which they supported” (Roberts, *Stage* 198). Stafford-Clark’s withdrawal of *Perdition* on 21 January 1987 prompted a controversy he could not have anticipated and made the week “the worst week of my life. An Artistic Director has no business programming a play which in the end he cannot defend” (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 136)

When Stafford-Clark told Ken Loach and the actors about his decision they were more than devastated and called Stafford-Clark – amongst other things – “disgusting” and “craven” (136). A note in Stafford-Clark’s diary from 3 February shows the tensions he had to face confronting his colleagues:

I learn that there’s to be a Council meeting on Monday. Jo [Beddoe] hints that I may not be invited to it. If she hopes to undermine me, she succeeds. I feel so demoralised [...]. Bill said on the phone on Sunday: ‘I’m afraid you don’t come out of this well.’ He also said: ‘I think you should have fought for it’. (136)

The Council met again on 9 February. Stafford-Clark was only present for the first half of the meeting to agree to the fact that he had made “an enormous mistake and he must take full responsibility” (137). He had to leave early to attend a reception at Downing Street, and the meeting went on with Evans suggesting his dismissal. It was agreed that Stafford-Clark’s contract was to expire in April 1989, and Robert Fox, Jocelyn Herbert, Derek Granger, and Stuart Burge agreed to be members of a sub-committee implementing the replacement procedures (137). Stafford-Clark writes: “Later there was confusion over whether I had agreed that my contract would come to an end in April 1989. Some people seemed to think I had: certainly that was Matthew’s intention” (137). Evans even went so far in his lobbying against Stafford-Clark as to leak information about the Artistic Director’s weakened position and consequential steps to Peter Hillmore of *The Observer* (200, 251).

At Downing Street that day, Stafford-Clark discovered that the debate about *Perdition* had actually reached the highest ranks of British politics:

A woman in a blue suit turned from a nearby group and made her way towards me; it was Mrs Thatcher. ‘Max Stafford-Clark from the Royal Court Theatre,’ I said with no expectation that it would mean anything to her at all. ‘Oh dear what a terrible time you must be having,’ she said, ‘but it is a *very* difficult part of the world.’ We talked for several minutes on the difficulties of Israel and Palestine. ‘Now,’ she said, ‘have you met my minister?’ (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 138)

Also on 9 February, Jocelyn Herbert, Jane Rayne, the Chair of the Fundraising Committee, and William Gaskill resigned. Herbert in a letter to Evans, dated 10 February, stated that the Court “was no longer the same theatre that I had loved and worked for, for so long” (Roberts, *Stage* 200). She further suggested helping to find a replacement for Stafford-Clark as Evans “anticipate[d] – even at this stage – some reluctance on Max’s part to let go of the reigns” (200). Gaskill wrote to Evans on 18 March:

I think Max was wrong to withdraw *Perdition* and we were wrong to support his decision. The controversial nature of the play demands that it should be given a hearing, at the Court of all theatres, and to prevent this is a form of censorship. However, we may choose to gloss it, we did yield to pressure and I want to dissociate myself from that. (200-201)

Gaskill parted with the Royal Court, and his friendship with Stafford-Clark ended. Stafford-Clark writes: “He had been an inspiration and a friend, and I felt the loss keenly (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 145). Roberts quotes Stafford-Clark in a letter he wrote to Gaskill: “I can think of no colleague or friend whose approval I value more or whose disapproval causes me more dismay” (Roberts, *Stage* 201)¹³⁸.

138 The letter, as drafted in Max Stafford-Clark’s diary on 19 April 1987 reads: “Dear Bill, I was shocked and upset by your decision to resign from the Council (particularly as remarks you made during the Irish Club Council Meeting [on 20 January] led me to reconsider the play). I am frankly astonished by your recent letter to Matthew. It’s not so much that the letter makes no sense... Matthew puts out that your contribution to the Irish Club

Gaskill was not alone in accusing the Royal Court of censorship. The Writers' Union wrote to Evans on 15 March to express "that there was deep concern that the Court, of all theatres, should have taken such a step" (200). Loach and Allen started lobbying against the decision and "a debate about freedom of speech hit the correspondence pages of the *Guardian*" (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 137). On 20 February, Stafford-Clark learnt that Loach had written a letter to the *Guardian* accusing the Royal Court of censorship and another two-page article in the *New Statesman*. Stafford-Clark replied with a lengthy letter titled "Why I Axed Perdition" on 13 March 1987, in which he, sanctioned and reworked by the Council, explained the course of events.

The first point that he made went directly against Ken Loach's accusations that the play had been banned due to Zionist pressure. Stafford-Clark wrote: "This is not the case. [...] As Artistic Director, I lost confidence in the play's credibility" (139). He goes on to explain the production's process from the time the play arrived at the theatre in 1985, how it was withdrawn by Allen "who wished for a larger theatre" (139), how the Cesarani report was commissioned "to ensure that the facts contained in the play would undergo the most vigorous analysis" (139). He reports that Jim Allen rewrote the play and wrote "This is a play, not an essay... what do you expect?" (140) on the margin of the Cesarani report. Stafford-Clark further writes about his meeting with Dr Stephen Roth in January, the criticisms of the same, and the threats Roth made. He explains that after the meeting he suggested to Ken Loach that "if in fact 18,000 had been saved, and if there was an active Zionist Resistance movement, then shouldn't that be included?" (140). But Loach warned him off that "this would be asking for a different play and wasn't the one Jim wished to write" (140-141). It was agreed to include the 18,000 and

Council Meeting was decisive... you say you are resigning because you have no influence... you ask by what right I am the RC's Artistic Director but forget that you were on the Council that determined my yr old contract and that again it was your contribution that determined the length of that contract. But all that is by the way (inserted: It is of course the malicious) as the cruel and vindictive writing as to do without prior would to me [...]. But it's not what you [...]. it's the tone that you adopt. Even with your own particular reputation for betrayal this one is spectacular (inserted: about your feelings breaks the rudimentary expectations of friendship and makes this a spectacular betrayal even by your own legendary standards). I can think of no colleague or friend whose approval I would rather have or whose disapproval causes me more dismay. Please don't bother to reply." Stafford-Clark refers to Gaskill's reputation for betrayal, but does not elaborate on what betrayal exactly he meant. He could have been referring to Gaskill's not appointing Anderson and Page in 1965, though it is questionable if Stafford-Clark would have sided with his antagonist Anderson. Nicholas Wright and Robert Kidd had also felt let down by Gaskill during their time as Artistic Directors (Roberts, *Stage* 155). Already in 1976 Stafford-Clark had written about Gaskill, then in the context of Joint Stock: "I hadn't much wanted to work with Bill again. I do find myself swamped by his personality but it's also true that the joint shows have a weight I don't get by doing shows by myself" (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 23). Gaskill himself admits to having bullied Stafford-Clark (29).

some reference towards the Zionist Resistance. At this point, however, “it was clear that further pressure would lead to a breakdown of trust between us” (141). Stafford-Clark further declares that the time Roth uttered his threats was the only time “a direct threat was made” (141). He explains that theatre producer Joe Papp in New York – despite being lobbied intensively – and many Jewish trusts and families aligned with the Royal Court, never put any pressure on him. “Much of the pressure on the play was unacceptable, but because some condemnations could themselves be dismissed as distortions, it didn’t mean that all criticism could be dismissed”¹³⁹ (141). Stafford-Clark further mentions Martin Gilbert’s visit and the list of ‘64 errors’, and that there was no meeting point between Gilbert’s and Allen’s perspective. He reports the meeting at Sonia Melchett’s house on 18 January “to hear Dr Gilbert rehearse his criticism” (142), and that he did not go because he had already spoken to Gilbert. He thus missed “a heated Lord Weidenfeld, who asserted that the play was anti-Semitic” (142). Stafford-Clark explains that “the Council members remained firm in their resolve to support the theatre’s artistic policy” (142)¹⁴⁰. He further elaborates on how he “became more and more uneasy as [he] realized the extent to which Jim Allen had selected evidence” (142). For him “it became harder and harder to have much enthusiasm about fighting for a piece which was so selective” (142) and after re-reading the books, for the first time he “saw the possibility that *Perdition* was a dishonest piece of writing” (142). He writes about the Council meeting on 20 January at which “at no time [...] a single Council member suggested either that the play should be withdrawn or that it was anti-Semitic” (142). Yet, he was “unable to give the passionate defence of the play that the occasion demanded” (142). He reports that the Council decided on a two-day postponement of the previews and on having a neutral historian look into the play. Stafford-Clark, however, knew that the facts *in* the play were not the issue. Allen had named all his sources. “But many facts were clearly in dispute, and it was the facts omitted that were my principal concern” (143). He explains that he came to the point where he knew that “to defend a play which I now thought both distorted and distressingly incomplete was impossible. I thought *Perdition* fell in a spectrum of work whose views I could support. I now found it did not” (143). Stafford-Clark further adds that Evans and Burton supported his decision to withdraw the play. He writes: “In 99 cases out of 100 of course an Artistic Director must protect the work he has chosen. In the hundredth he must admit he has made a mistake” (143).

The debate continued via letters in the *Guardian*. In such a letter, on 18 March, Jim Allen questions Stafford-Clark’s version that he re-read the books and came to find

139 An earlier version of the letter continues: “Incidentally, I don’t believe the play is anti-Semitic and nor does anyone else whose opinion I value” (Stafford-Clark, “Why” TS).

140 As the whole paragraph on the meeting on 18 January is not included in Stafford-Clark’s early version of the letter, as it can be found in the Press Cuttings File of the production (“Why” TS), it is likely that this paragraph bears Evan’s or Burton’s mark.

Perdition a dishonest play¹⁴¹. He mentions that Stafford-Clark did not reproduce one quote from the play to prove his claims of dishonesty. Allen goes in hard on Stafford-Clark, but without giving any proof for his allegations: “Obviously his courtship with the Zionists has not been entirely unprofitable” (144)¹⁴². Two paragraphs of a letter, in which Stafford-Clark had quoted *Perdition* to prove dishonesty, had in fact been cut from the article by the *Guardian*. In his letter dated 21 March, Stafford-Clark, therefore quoted them to Allen again. But it was clear that there was no way to reconcile with Allen or Loach after this. Stafford-Clark’s standing had – not only with these two – been damaged. Evans made it clear that he did not want Stafford-Clark to re-apply for his post in two years time. Stafford-Clark was told that “some would have expected [his] resignation after the *Perdition* affair” (146). Here ends his recollection of the *Perdition* affair as presented in *Taking Stock*. In the following, the archive material on the matter will be read and analysed.

Perdition arrived at the Court in mid-1985. In September reports on the play were commissioned that eventually came back in October/ November (Stafford-Clark, *Diary* 14 Jan. 1987). One of the reports was by Michael Hastings, another by David Cesarani. Another report was commissioned by the Manchester Library Theatre that had initially thought about a co-production with the Royal Court. This report was written by Martin Gilbert¹⁴³, a “Zionist historian” (Radin, “Playing”).

In his report, Hastings extensively retells the Kastner case and the political backdrop of the same. Hastings further explains the founding of Zionism. About *Perdition* Hastings writes:

However the play *Perdition* is staged, there are strong grounds to place the play in a context beside the Kastner trial as it was; it may require a detailed parallel analysis of the cause of Zionism, the political infighting between the Mapai and those who support the rightwing Irgun fraction, a clear view of the Judenraete alternative to absolute morality when all are helpless, above all – this play is a fictionalised interpretation of a notorious trial which the author has used to his own political purposes, and these are not purposes

141 Notes in Stafford-Clark’s diary on the 19 January 1987 refer to books on the matter: “*Judenrat: The Jewish Councils of Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* by Isaiah Trunk. Introduction by Jacob Robinson. P. 449 Robinson is Chief Counsel for US at Nuremberg Trials & wrote back attacking [Hannah] Arendt”. On 14 January 1987, Vanessa Redgrave had suggested to Stafford-Clark to read “*Ben Hecht: Perfidy (Trial of Malachial Grünwald)* published by Messner 1961 and Hannah Arendt”.

142 If one understands the withdrawal of *Perdition* as an economical, rather than an artistic decision – as the following analysis will show – Stafford-Clark and the Royal Court did profit largely from not producing Allen’s play.

143 According to Cesarani, Gilbert is referred to in later versions of *Perdition* as an “Oxford Don” (113). His clash with Allen about the Skalat ghetto also found its way into the play as the argument between Orzech and Lawson on page 52.

of firing up ancient anti-Semitism, but they do provide a subtext acutely aimed at discrediting Zionism, and thus this fictional account must be honestly declared right from the start. (Hastings, *On Perdition*)

Hastings clearly states that the play is fictitious and only an interpretation of facts. He further acknowledges Jim Allen's Marxist agenda behind the play. After all, Allen was a well-known socialist. It is important that Hastings did not understand the play as factual in any way since a huge part of the later debate about *Perdition* was to focus on its factuality.

Jim Allen was confronted with the reports on *Perdition* in December, and delivered a new script in January 1986. In February 1986, the script was withdrawn by Allen. When the decision was taken to go ahead again, it took until July for Allen to present a new script. Directors for the project were considered, and on 21 October it was eventually agreed that Ken Loach be engaged for the project (Stafford-Clark, *Diary* 14 Jan. 1987). On 12 January 1987, Stafford-Clark noted in his diary: "Perdition Trouble Stephen Roth".

Stephen J. Roth, the director of the Institute of Jewish Affairs¹⁴⁴, was to play a major role in the row that was later labelled 'the *Perdition* affair': a row which was kicked off largely by an article about *Perdition* by David Rose that was published in the *Guardian* on 14 January 1987 called "Rewriting the Holocaust". Rose writes about *Perdition*: "Max Stafford-Clark [...] said yesterday that he realised that many people might find it offensive, and some of the Royal Court's governing council have expressed strong reservations" ("Rewriting"). Rose gives an outline of the proceedings of the production and the resulting delay. He does not, however, mention Allen's withdrawal as a reason for the delay, but lets the assertion follow the mention of 'strong reservations', thus linking the two facts together. Rose continues by quoting Martin Gilbert that the play "bore no relation to historical fact whatsoever" and explains that the Royal Court and Allen worked hard to correct inaccuracies, but ultimately stated that "the work is fiction".

For Rose "it now seems certain that the Royal Court is about to be engulfed in the deepest and most bitter controversy in its history". Rose mentions the Institute of Jewish Affairs' demand to have a note included in the programme, "a statement criticising the play", which had been denied by the Court. He then quotes Dr Stephen Roth, the institute's director – "who was present at the events in Budapest described by the play, was tortured by the Gestapo and sent to Auschwitz as a member of the underground Zionist resistance" – with saying that "the play is clearly anti-Semitic. *Perdition* is a libel against all those who lived through, fought and mostly perished in the Holocaust". Rose then describes *Perdition*'s plot and the Kastner case, eventually concluding that "Allen [...] has wilfully distorted both fact and interpretation, in order to draw conclusions not only about Kasztner but about the entire Zionist movement and the nature of the Israeli state".

144 At the beginning of his article "LIBEL!" in the *Jewish Chronicle*, published on 23 January 1987, Roth is introduced as "the director of the institute of Jewish Affairs and chairman of the Zionist federation".

He quotes Allen commenting on Israel as “a death-trap, a ghetto state” and on *Perdition* “as a small contribution to rescuing Jews from Zionism”. He refers to Mark Alfreds, who was asked to direct *Perdition* before Loach: “I don’t think *Perdition* is really a play”. Alfreds accords the play “a lack of dramatic sensibility or honesty”. Next, Rose quotes Allen that “the Zionists were Hitler’s favourite Jews. Their interests coincided on the basis of opportunism: Hitler wanted the Jews out of Europe and the Jews wanted a state in Palestine. It was almost a volkist thing: blood and land”.

Rose then turns to discussing the flaws of *Perdition* when compared to historical facts: “the conflation between the Jews in Hungary and the Judenrat established by Eichmann”, the description of Kastner as “‘the leader’ of the Judenrat” and the description of the Judenrat as being controlled by Zionists. Rose describes the work of the Zionist Resistance, and quotes Allen that he will “accept the criticism that the roles of the Jewish council and the rescue committee are not clearly enough defined in the play”. Rose then refers to a book by Asher Cohen on the Hehalutz Resistance¹⁴⁵ stating that the Zionist Resistance saved 7,000 Jews by smuggling them into Romania, 18,000 by sending them to working camps in Austria¹⁴⁶, and 100,000 through forged documents. Rose quotes Allen on the fact that the playwright had no idea the book by Cohen existed, but did instead largely make use of a book by Jewish anti-Zionist historian Lenni Brenner, which he, according to Rose, went far beyond by embellishing facts given by Brenner.

Rose further detects alleged false statements about Jewish religious law and even quotes an old letter by Michael Hastings stating that Allen’s play shows “the language of international socialism not far short of Trotsky”. Rose also quotes Hastings’ response to the question whether some may find *Perdition* offensive: “I find the state of Israel deeply offensive”. Furthermore, Rose accuses Stafford-Clark and Allen of having deliberately sought to generate controversy by quoting Stafford-Clark: “I don’t think controversy is something the Court has ever avoided”.

Rose eventually closes with two quotes by Allen. First, one out of a letter by Allen to the Royal Court, that the criticism by some historians was “pathetic, a reflection of how guilty and incapable the Zionists are in defending his dark chapter in Jewish history”. Second, concerning the allegation of anti-Semitism, Allen is quoted: “this will be their main line of attack, and defence when the play goes out. I can’t wait”.

A highly noteworthy reference to be found in Rose’s article, as well as in Rose’s later article in the *New Statesman* on 13 March 1987, is to Nathan Schwalb, later called Nathan Dror. A letter by Schwalb concerning negotiations with the Nazis is quoted: “If

145 Cohen also mentions Roth: “Dr (Siegfried) Stephen Roth [...] was a prominent leader of *Hanoar Hatzioni* [a Zionist youth movement] and represented the general Zionists” (Cohen 41).

146 It is only these 18,000 that are mentioned in the printed play text of *Perdition* besides the 1,684 on the Kastner trains. It is, however, not clearly stated if they were smuggled into Romania or Austria. On page 59, Yaron mentions Romania as the destination. On page 9 he claims to have saved 18,000 from Auschwitz by sending them to Austria.

we do not bring sacrifices to the negotiation table, with what will we achieve the right to sit at the table when they make the distribution of nations and territories after the war? Only through blood will the land be ours” (Rose, “Perdition”). Rose quotes Allen from the interview he conducted for his article published on 14 January 1987 in the *Guardian*: “Schwalb crystallizes the Zionist philosophy: they would bring blood to the table” (“Re-writing”). When the play text was printed the passages on Schwalb were excised due to a libel action filed by Schwalb. A court order was released that forbid the mention of Schwalb’s name in relation to *Perdition*. References to Schwalb had to be excised in all reprints of articles on the play and were also cut from the play itself. The published play text of *Perdition* therefore comes with pasted over passages and torn out pages.

Uri Davis, a Jewish self-declared anti-Zionist, who had assisted Loach and Allen with pushing forward the publication of *Perdition* writes:

Saqi Books returned the text to Jim Allen, who, on my advice then approached David Wolton at Ithaca Press. After consulting our common solicitor, Benedict Birnberg, on the possibility of libel, David decided to publish on the understanding that Jerusalem & Peace Service would be responsible for fund-raising to cover the cost of prospective litigation. Under UK law only individuals can claim to have been libelled, and we assumed that Nathan Schwalb was either dead or unlikely to challenge the quotation of his letter, which had been published many times since Weissmandl. (Davis, “Crossing”)

Davis writes about the libel case initiated by Schwalb:

On 18 of June A Kramer & Co of 40 Portland Place, London W1 acting for Mr Nathan Schwalb (now known by his Hebrew surname Dror) served on David Wolton a letter by hand enclosing an Affidavit: [I]n support of my [Schwalb’s] application for an interlocutory injunction to prevent the publication in book form by the Defendants [Ithaca Press and Jim Allen] of a play written by the Second Defendant [Jim Allen] called ‘*PERDITION*’. Abe Kramer was a former Chairman of the Zionist Federation in Britain and we were later told that he had been to Israel himself to see Schwalb. Our researcher in Israel Yeshaayahu Toma Sik also learned from the orthodox Jewish researcher and journalist, Shemuel Kaufmann, that in conversation, Schwalb had told him that he had been pressured into mounting the case against *Perdition* by Yitzhaq Shamir.

Shamir, born Icchak Jeziernicky, at the time was the Prime Minister of Israel. He was a Zionist and had been a member of Mossad from 1955 until 1965 (“Shamir”; “Yitzhak Shamir”). He was also a former member of the right-wing underground movement Irgun Zvai Leumi and later of the same’s split group Lehi, formerly Lohamei Herut Yisra’el and also called the Stern Gang (Pedahzur and Perliger 21), whose former members had assassinated Rudolf Kastner in 1957. Davis continues:

It was never clear who paid for the action, although the reluctance of Schwalb as Plaintiff became clear with the long delays in the pre-trial process, which was to go on for four years. We were, however, in trouble, as it was known that the original letter in Bratislava did not survive the war and Schwalb’s own archives have always been closed to researchers. (“Crossing”)

The publisher either had to withdraw the entire book or excise all passages concerning Schwalb. The latter was opted for. In 1942, when Schwalb wrote the mentioned letter –

whose existence he later denied – he was the leader of the He-Halutz, a Zionist youth movement, in Geneva. Shamir himself was also mentioned by Allen in context with *Perdition*:

This play had to be written because the Israelis are knocking seven colours of shit out of the Palestinians. And every time the world turns around and says ‘Don’t do that!’ they say ‘What are you on about? What about the Holocaust?’ I make the point in the play that the present Prime Minister of Israel, Mr Shamir, in 1941 was involved in sending a letter to the Nazis offering to work with them, and to set up a state in Israel based on Nazi totalitarian lines and which would look after Nazi interests in the Middle East. (Jackson)

The extract from the play reads:

SCOTT: Can you offer the Court any further examples [of co-operation]? RUTH: Yes. Yitzak Shamir. During the war he served as operational commander of the Stern Gang, a terrorist organization led by Abraham Stern. In 1941, Stern wrote to the Nazis offering to co-operate with them in the building of a Jewish state along totalitarian lines. The proposal offered to protect Nazi interests in the Middle East. SCOTT: Are you suggesting that Shamir approved, or was aware of this proposed alliance with Hitler? RUTH: Well, he has never denied his knowledge of the letter sent by Stern, or its authenticity and he was operational commander. SCOTT: And what happened to Shamir? RUTH: He became a close friend to Ben-Gurion and is a prominent figure in Israel. (Allen, *Perdition* 37-38).

Rose, in a later article, claimed that despite accusations by Loach that he had worked with a Zionist alliance, and had in fact cooperated with the Institute of Jewish Affairs on this article, he “never [saw] the critique submitted by the Institute of Jewish Affairs” (Rose, “Perdition”). Yet, he largely, and in great detail, speaks of the organisation of the Zionist Resistance in Budapest without naming his source. Rose further introduces Dr. Stephen Roth by giving details about the involvement of the same in the Zionist Resistance. Regarding Rose’s position, his attack on Allen and the play, and his extensive insights into Roth’s point of view, it can be anticipated that Rose’s reporting was part of Stephen Roth’s plan to discredit the play through the press. He had threatened Stafford-Clark to do so as early as at the January meeting. Even though the printed version of Max Stafford-Clark’s “Why I Axed *Perdition*” in the *Guardian* does not include a mention of Roth’s plan to use the press in order to discredit *Perdition*, a draft including notes by a second person reads: “[Roth] brandished a sheet detailing, he said, 24 major errors. He declined to reveal them as he wished to discredit the play when it was produced.” A handwritten note in the margins reads “chose” “through the press” (“Why” TS).

How strongly Rose’s theses go hand in hand with Roth’s allegations can be understood when reading Roth’s article “LIBEL!” as published in the *Jewish Chronicle* on 23 January 1987 (Roth). Roth, without mentioning Rose’s article, repeated several flaws in *Perdition* Rose had brought to light: the numbers of 18,000 saved Jews in working camps in Austria, “tens of thousands” with Swiss protective passports, untrue remarks about Jewish family law and the slander of Jewish religious law, the conflation of Zionists and the Judenrat, the exaggeration and contortion of facts lifted from Brenner’s

book, the one-sidedness of the trial and the lack of a defence, Allen's political bias towards Trotskyist ideology and his violent anti-Zionism (Roth).

The one-sidedness of Rose's article takes even more shape when looking at the reactions to his article by the people quoted in it. Both Michael Hastings and Jim Allen reacted to Rose's article claiming that they had been misquoted. Hastings wrote:

I did say to David Rose, "I find the state of Israel deeply offensive", but my sentence continued "in its present role as an extension of the American arms machine." What happened to the end of my sentence? I understand that David Rose is a sympathetic and equally anguished commentator on Israel, but please don't take a phrase out of its content. ("Letter")

Even though Hastings repeatedly claimed to have continued his sentence as quoted, Rose claims that Hastings' memory is faulty. Rose quotes from his shorthand notes that the sentence continues: "You are missing the broader view that Zionism has created a very dangerous place to live in" (Rose, "Letter to the Editor"). Hastings continues his letter to the *Jewish Chronicle* saying that

in the week before the play was due to open, I attended a run-through, albeit hastily put together, and although I could live with the rigid interpretation on Zionism [...], I found in production a relentless resonance. There is a subtext here which cannot be found in the words themselves, call it an unconscious force behind the typewriter perhaps, but there is a sense here that the target is Jews – Jews living within their own community and responding as Jews to a unique and appalling pogrom of annihilation. This subtext seems to target on Jews to the exclusion of all other peoples. And in this sense alone I realised 'Perdition' could be looked upon as an anti-Jewish play, no matter how unintentional this was in the writing, and no matter how much I agreed with the polemic. Such implications in a play cannot necessarily be found from just a reading; it has to be seen in some form in its full theatrical force. I believe the script of a play is akin to an architect's drawing. I did then go back to the text and, further to that, I took some legal advice. Shortly after, in my personal and very limited capacity at the Royal Court Theatre, I withdrew my support of the play. (Hastings, "Letter to the Editor")

Hastings's letter infuriated Loach who called it: "a thoroughly disreputable intervention". He says: "It was with Hastings that we made cuts to the script. He said 'we'll get it on, and this is *how* we'll get it on. [...] The letter was supposed to be the RC's intellectual justification, and it wasn't" ("Perdition Reprised?"). Allen, too, reacted to Rose's article in the *Guardian*'s letter section. He writes:

Rose claims that in the interview Allen denied the existence of an underground Zionist organisation. This is a misquotation. Reference is made in the play to Zionist resistance, as I pointed out to Rose. Rose writes in his article that I confuse the Zionists in Hungary with the Judenrat (Jewish Council) and that a witness in *Perdition* described Kastner as 'the leader of the Judenrat.' This is simply not true.

At no point in the play is Kastner referred to in these terms. With regards to the 'confusion' between Zionists and the Judenrat, the language in the play is precise. At every meeting with Eichmann, Jewish leaders are described as council members. I informed Rose that the lines are distinct, but that I would look at it again. (Allen, "Letter")

Allen's claim, at least on the grounds of the printed play text, is true.

In his article, Rose had further mentioned that the Jewish British agent Hannah Senesh – or Szenes, as she is called in *Perdition* – who parachuted into Hungary had made an appearance in the play, and a meeting between her and Kastner is described. Allen explained that Senesh never appeared in his play. Senesh clearly appears in the printed version of the play text. She is first mentioned by Miriam (54-55) and in Scott's second cross-examination of Yaron (63).

As a matter of fact, Rose had mentioned various inaccuracies that Allen, in his letter to the *Guardian*, explained were not in the play. Rose later commented:

That 'Guardian' letter from Mr Allen, was, I believe, instrumental in the theatre's eventual decision to call the production off. It took issue with various historical points I had made, claiming that the incidents on which I had focussed were not in the play at all.

But, as the Royal Court management and press office – which gave me the 'final' text before I met Allen – knew only too well, they most certainly were, up to the publication of my article.

Here I speculate: but it is known that various historians had submitted detailed criticism of the play many months before, and that Allen had assured the theatre that these had been incorporated in the text.

I suggest the discovery that they had not come as a shock to the Royal Court, which had taken the author's assurance on trust. His letter to the 'Guardian,' claiming that the play did not contain sections which the management had in black and white in their copies, was, therefore, the final blow to his credibility. (Rose, "Letter to the Editor")

Rose had further quoted Allen on racism: "Allen rebukes the charge of racism by speaking of fights in pubs with racist 'building' workers as a labour organiser" ("Rewriting"). In a letter, Allen states: "I spoke of the need to combat racism at the sharp end. Council estates, dole queues, building sites and pubs. Out of a long conversation comes his reference to fights in pubs, which he isolates and, I suggest, blows out of proportion" ("Letter"). Allen gives one further example of misquotations, eventually speaking about a situation after the interview with Rose: "As we waited for a taxi, Rose asked: 'Do you enjoy controversy?' I told him no, but whatever I wrote seemed to cause controversy. In his piece, he writes, 'Jim Allen may, it seems have welcomed it'" ("Letter"). The row in the *Guardian* following Rose's article eventually found its way into the printed version of *Perdition*. While a line of Ruth Kaplan in the second version of the play text read "a small piece appeared in the Guardian", the printed version includes the following line: "The Guardian misrepresented and distorted" (Cesarani in Allen, *Perdition* 112).

On 13 January, Stafford-Clark noted Rose's phone number in his dairy and added some notes that seem to be taken from a conversation with Roth, whom Stafford-Clark met that day. The notes show that Stafford-Clark, too, was admitting to seeing inaccurate representations of events in Allen's script:

[...] the defence is written by the prosecution [...] the row had begun. If u pass on private letters... question of ethics [...] Jewish Council were Zionists is a mistake [...] distortion that only so many thousands were saved [...] Giving both sides of the trial same point of view [...] Kastner tried to save millions [...] does not mention Zionist resistance.

Some of these aspects surfaced in Rose's article. Stafford-Clark wrote in his notes: "The characters and the site in the play *Perdition* are fictional but the public events referred to are facts".

On 14 January, Max Stafford-Clark had noted in his diary "Debate: where? Jewish Cultural Society, Upper Woburn Place" and "Protestors: Dean Cowan/ Lesley Cowan Pamela Manson Bruce Hyman (Lord Goodman)", and on 16 January he noted: "Goodman Lobby Fyrce". He further notes: "Matthew: Israeli Govt will make representations and Israeli Ambassador is involved. There is evidence that the reasonable historic evidence that... if 6m Jews had not been ext → then Israel would not have been founded". Also on 16 January, the *Jewish Chronicle* published its first article on *Perdition*:

A play called 'Perdition' which opens at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs next week, has prompted Royal Court writer Michael Hastings to circulate a five-page memo among the theatre's workers asking that it should be acknowledged that the play's purpose is to discredit Zionism.

[...]

Allen's fictional account [...] indicts Zionism as a willing accomplice to the deaths of millions of Jews in order to hasten the establishment of a Jewish state and of saving or trying to save only those Jews who were Zionists.

Next week the 'Jewish Chronicle' will publish an analysis of the play's startling claims by Hungarian born Dr. Stephen Roth, director of the institute of Jewish affairs, who was himself in Budapest at the time and was tortured by the Gestapo.

A bust of Neville Blond, the first Chairman of the English Stage Company, stands on the pedestals of the Royal Court's foyer and after his death, his widow, Elaine became vice-chairman of the company and was seen at most first nights. She was the joint president of Wizo¹⁴⁷.

The play has been awaiting production for two years. ("Discrediting Zionism is the Intention")

Amongst the various aspects noticeable about this article is the fact that the author of the *Jewish Chronicle* found a way to learn about a clearly internal memo by Hastings. The note is not mentioned elsewhere and its sole purpose may not have been to make staff aware of an attack on Zionism, but to make – as in various other statements – a distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, as would fall in line with Hastings' earlier statement. Also noteworthy is the – seemingly out of place – mention of the Blonds and their Zionist background.

On 17 January, Stafford-Clark met with Martin Gilbert. After the meeting, he noted in his diary "Factual errors... and the misleading assumptions" (*Diary*) and mentions eleven of the 64 errors Gilbert had found:

- 22 Red Army stopped: British had asked them to not obscure members. Every[one?] waiting for Red Army to move
- 24 Nature of Zionism.

147 The acronym WIZO stands for Women's International Zionist Organization.

- 26 “We know something about the camps yes” He had known the camps had been set up in Poland, Chelmo and Treblinka had ceased operation in '43. Figure of 5m would be astonished by it. First of all they thought the killing process had stopped. Eichmann informed them in meeting that he was the technician “the man whose Berlin office organized” well we always thought these were labour camps. We heard rumours. These 3 Yes are misleading. He could not have given in that form. “A man to whom you give government knowledge he could not have had.” Eichmann said when told Hungarian Fascists attacked Jewish leaders that the 1 m Jews held in special camps would be sent to Pyrenes in return for particular demands.
- 31 no way [Yaron] could have known facts about Auschwitz. News brought back on April 25th that Verba had escaped. Rosenberg changed his name to Verba. [Yaron] would have believed they were going to special camps in fact were going to Auschwitz.
- 32/102 Why should they have fled when [Yaron] would have thought they had a deal. Minority of Kastner’s train were Zionists and some turned down places. When Eichmann entered Hungary there were 374 m. So around ¼ were saved. There is no sense I would see Zionists always did [no?] thing.
- 78 Gruenbaum’s son was in Auschwitz and until end June would not know it was a death camp
- 119 would challenge Jews of Sklad (Raul Hilberg)¹⁴⁸
- 63 Karpin’s response
- 69 on the contrary they pressed for resettlement anywhere, e.g. the Afghan Scheme to escape resettle refugees in Afghanistan. The British government declined.
- 98 Jewish technicians.

Although Gilbert refers to an early version of the script, some of his remarks still concern the printed play text. Others seem to have been taken into account by Allen and have been cut. A reference made about the Red Army cannot be found in the first half of the play anymore, instead the only time it is brought up is in the second half, when Ruth establishes a timeline of when the killings in Budapest took place – May and June – and when the Red Army arrived – in December (46). The nature of Zionism is still discussed by Yaron and Scott (10), however, it has changed from an earlier draft, as Cesarani remarks: “Several lengthy passages relating to the origins of Zionism, the State of Israel and Judaism were dropped” (112). Yaron’s line “We knew something about the camps, yes” (10) is still in the play text. Yaron also still agrees to having known about Eichmann being the technician (11). Yaron’s knowledge of the liquidation of five million Jews and the role of the extermination camps is also precisely formulated. Scott quotes Kastner: “We knew more than was necessary about Auschwitz and the other examination camps” (12). According to the printed text of *Perdition* both Kastner and Yaron read and acknowledged Verba’s reports from Auschwitz. When Scott asks Yaron if Verba “knew every aspect of the killing operations” (15), Yaron answers with “Yes”. All other aspects of Gilbert’s critique that Stafford-Clark noted – that around one quarter were saved, that Gruenbaum’s son was in Auschwitz and did not know until the end of

148 Raul Hilberg’s *The Destruction of European Jews* (1961) is a historical study of the Holocaust.

June that it was a death camp, the different version on the party in the Skalat ghetto, and the Afghan Scheme – did not find their way into the final version of the play either.

As also mentioned in *Taking Stock*, the invitation to go to Sonia Melchet's house came on Sunday, 18 January. Stafford-Clark notes "this is turning into a full Council meeting¹⁴⁹... I wonder how long it will be before news of that leaks out" (*Diary*). What is not mentioned in *Taking Stock*, is that Lord Weidenfeld was reading the play for libel, "Sonia [Melchett] [...] [is] in a real panic", "Weidenfeld's ferocity and objective were to stop the play before it went on but objective was to frighten and alarm [...] 'It's in your hands till 7.00 on Thursday' Weidenfeld". What becomes apparent here is that Weidenfeld set Stafford-Clark some sort of ultimatum – 7.00 on Thursday, 22 January. Stafford-Clark at this point believed Weidenfeld's objective was merely to "frighten and alarm" (*Diary*). Still, Weidenfeld was Peer of the Realm, a former member of the Israeli government, and an avowed Zionist. He was good friends with many important figures, including world leaders (Calder). His influence, even if unmentioned by Stafford-Clark here, was wide reaching, to say the least. If he had sued the Royal Court for libel or supported any such court case, the same would not have gone unnoticed; it might even have become an official state affair.

Just a day after Stafford-Clark's meeting with Gilbert, the *Mail on Sunday* wrote about it, quoting Gilbert on the fact that Stafford-Clark had listened, but had not made any firm assurances. Allen was reported as having decided to ignore Gilbert and to not make any alterations to his play. The article further states that Jewish groups were planning to demonstrate outside the theatre should the play go ahead unchanged ("Author defies protests").

On 20 January, the day of the special Council meeting, Stafford-Clark notes "The Blond family and the Sieff family are quintessential Zionists" (*Diary*). Elaine Blond had died in December 1985. The Sieff family was not only through the Blonds connected with the Court. Mrs. Lois Sieff had been a member of the Royal Court's Council from 1970 until 1980 (Royal Court Theatre Archives).

At the special Council meeting, Burton asked if any of the people mentioned in *Perdition* were still alive. If all of them were dead, he saw no problem. Stafford-Clark continues:

'[P]eople who will stop at nothing to finance an action.' 'It is arguable that what is said in the play could stir up hatred against Jewish Zionists.' My view is that a conviction would not succeed... risk is minimal. [...] There are no facts in the play which Jim cannot

149 The Royal Court's Council at the time were Stuart Burge, Anthony C Burton, Caryl Churchill, Harriet Cruickshank, Simon Curtis, Allan Davis, David Lloyd Davis, Robert Fox, William Gaskill, Henny Gestetner, Derek Granger, David Hare, Jocelyn Herbert, David Kleeman, Sonia Melchett, Joan Plowright, Greville Poke, Jane Rayne, Alison Ritchie, Toby Whale, Sir Hugh Willatt, and Matthew Evans as chairman (Royal Court Theatre Archives).

justify. Libel... issue.’ ‘in error by not taking the Council into confidence.’ ‘inadequate information and I think I’ve got to withdraw the play’ thinks MSC. ‘I do not think the RC will come out of this with honour.’ ‘Kleeman¹⁵⁰, ... leading the firing? ‘potentially this is explosive issue. M[atthew] E[vans] postpone previews... ‘public hostility that can only do us harm’

Postpone opening till Monday

Libel

Reassuring evidence

Reading the play. Council members read it. ‘travesty’

Discussion with Jim Allen

Why are we postponing? Exploring libel

[...]

8.0 Decision to withdraw play taken

In his diary Stafford-Clark marks Wednesday 21 January as “Withdrawal Day”; a day earlier than Weidenfeld’s ultimatum. Meanwhile, the row in the papers continued. More letters concerning Rose’s article followed. On 21 January 1987, David Cesarani wrote to the *Guardian* to say that his report had not been “taken to the heart” by the Royal Court. Despite the Artistic Director’s assurance that many revisions had been made to the play, Cesarani stated that many errors still remained and argued that Allen had “ignored all warnings that the play contains statements that were offensive to Jews” (Cesarani, “Letter”). To Cesarani the Royal Court had in fact not done “its utmost to ensure that the criticism of historians were incorporated in the text” as claimed by Hastings. Another letter published in the same paper was by Uri Davis. Davis wrote: “as an anti-Zionist, Israeli-Jewish academic, I very much welcome the Royal Court’s decision and the public debate/ controversy it is likely to generate. Public discussion of this aspect of Zionist history has been evaded or suppressed in many significant quarters” (Davis, “Letter”).

The official press release signed by Stafford-Clark that went public on 21 January at 12.00 noon names distress to some sections of the community as the reason for the withdrawal:

We have re-examined our position in the light of the representations made to us and we do not accept that there are factual inaccuracies in Jim Allen’s play or that the play is in any way anti-Semitic. We have the highest regard for Jim Allen’s integrity, but we do accept that going ahead would cause great distress to sections of the community which finally outweighs our determinations to proceed with the production. (Royal Court Theatre, “Perdition”)

On 22 January, the *Daily Telegraph* wrote in its leader:

[T]he combination of scholarly objections, the danger of a loss of subsidies (private and public) and – who knows? – perhaps a twinge of conscience at the prospect of distress

150 Together with Lord Weidenfeld and members of the Sieff family, Derrick Kleeman served on the board of governors of the Weizmann Institute of Science, which was founded by the Sieff family (“Board of Governors”).

and disquiet inflicted upon hundreds of thousands of British Jews, not to mention gentiles, evidently sufficed to persuade the Royal Court to cancel the play (“Abuse of History”)

The *Daily Telegraph* concluded: “The issue here is not artistic freedom, but the right to travesty the past and to slander a nation”. In the same paper an article by Martin Gilbert called “Travesty of facts” can be found. Gilbert again states that Allen’s assertions about Zionists in 1944 Hungary and the Zionist leaders in Israel are lies. He speaks about the over 60 errors he found when reading the play for the Manchester Library Theatre. Gilbert further recalls internal information about the Royal Court Council meeting on 20 January:

On Monday night, following a four-hour meeting, the Council of the Royal Court laid down several conditions for the play to be performed. First, they wanted to see the script, which despite the controversy around it, which had begun more than eight months ago, they had still not been shown. Nor had the Council been informed of the withdrawal of the Manchester Library Theatre coproduction last May. Yet the Manchester director [...] had withdrawn because he felt the play presented such a serious distortion of the Jewish response to the Holocaust [...]

The second condition laid down on Monday night was that the Council of the Royal Court wanted to see the analysis of the play which the Artistic Director, Max Stafford-Clark, had apparently called for and received three to four months ago from historian Dr. David Cesarani. The Council had not even been informed of the existence of this analysis, according to which the basic themes presented by different characters in the play were a travesty of historical fact.

The above conditions proved unacceptable, and late on Monday night the play was abandoned. (Gilbert)

It is not surprising that Gilbert, and the *Daily Telegraph* respectively, had information about the Council meeting that took place two days prior to the article. It was the *Daily Telegraph* that had printed the full proceedings of the Council meeting the day before. Stafford-Clark assumed there was a leak in the Council (*Diary* 18 Jan). Stafford-Clark wrote in his diary on 23 January:

An Artistic Director has no business programming a play which in the end he cannot defend. [...] I did not take the Cesarani report seriously [...] nor did I make sure its terms were passed to Ken and Jim. I had always known [the play] was a fiercely partisan piece of polemic and that a playwright was free to raid history and to use any facts he can authenticate [...] to pursue his thesis. A play is no essay and canons of historical scrupulousness [...] did not seem to apply in the sense that I believe Jim has used only facets that he can authenticate he has made no errors but in the end he has excluded so much that is not germane to his argument that the picture is partial and certainly a “distortion” of the agonizing dilemma which forced Jewish leaders in 1944. [...] I withdraw the play not because there were inaccuracies that could be “proved” by opponents but because my own further reading showed that the agonizing complexity facing Jewish leaders was not represented and I no longer believed that Yaron [the character representing Kastner] was permitted by the author to want a satisfactory justification of his own position. [...] In the end I can no longer defend it. In fact I should have followed my instinct with it in the first place. Have had to judge on the spectre of the play foreseen by Lord Goodman but on the play itself emerging from rehearsal. Why did you withdraw it? Because normally I would say a play was free to raid any fact from history. I came to understand that the agonizing

and horrifying subject of this particular play and the serious nature of the charges it made demands the same canon of scrupulosity that you would apply to any history book... and that the simplifications and omissions necessarily involved in creating a play... particularly the simplification of the issue facing... would the play open to charges of distinction from which I felt I could no longer protect it.

The leader in the *Guardian* of the same day, however, mainly focussed on the atrocity inherent in Allen's attempt to blame the Jews for the Holocaust and the Royal Court's abandoned plan to support such an outrage: "The Royal Court would not entertain a play which put the blame for the slave trade on the Yoruba chiefs in West Africa" ("Paths to Perdition"). *The Evening Standard*, on 23 January, featured an article by Lord Goodman, in which he declared that *Perdition* was a lie. Yet, according to Goodman, the problem with the play did not lie in its controversial character. Answering his own question "Why all this fuss? It is only a play" (Goodman) he finds "Jews have a more formidable answer [...] The Jews have suffered over the centuries from the dissemination of historic lies which, have also, never been caught up or dispelled by the truth". These lies, Goodman argues, were used to create reasons for anti-Semitism. He is therefore satisfied that the dropping of *Perdition* was not an act of official state censorship and says that he advised the Arts Council not to intervene. Goodman concludes that on behalf of the Arts Council

No threat was made to the theatre, no suggestion of a withdrawal of subsidy. The decision was by no means brought about by the protest of Jewish members of the theatre boards. I understand that the powerful objection to the play came from Gentile and Jew alike. I find this very satisfactory.

When recalling Stephen Roth's early threats to Stafford-Clark and Lord Weidenfeld's panic-causing involvement, which happened strikingly close to the actual withdrawal day, Goodman's statement seems a little too light; in the following weeks the actual involvement of the Jewish community in the withdrawal was heavily debated. As a matter of fact, Stafford-Clark's decision to cancel *Perdition* caused many debates: over the rightfulness of the censorship of a play (Goodman; Fowler) – causing an internal row in the Director's Guild of Great Britain (Atwood; Glenister; "New 'Perdition' Row"), over Stafford-Clark's resignation, both from inside and outside the theatre ("Director Should Quit, Say Perdition Protesters"), about historical factuality ("Abuse of History"; Cesarani, "Letter" *New Statesman*), over *Perdition*'s attack on Zionism (Woolfson), and over the "blood libel" the play had committed against individuals and Jews in general ("Jewish Anger at Royal Court's 'Blood Libel'"; Manson).

Allen and Loach had difficulties in finding another 'home' for the play ("Almeida Theatre Says No to 'Anti-semitic' Play"; "Curtain Up At Last?"; "Jim Won't Give Up"). Pamela Manson warned them in the *The Stage*:

Wherever they'll go, we'll find them [...] Any theatre which allows this play is taking a tremendous risk because there are six people mentioned who are still alive and will press for libel. What fringe or pub theatre can afford to have a libel case slapped on it, which there will be. (Manson)

A production of *Perdition* by the Olympia Theatre in Dublin was cancelled: historians had not approved of the alleged historical accuracy of the script. The *Manchester Evening News* reported:

Meanwhile Sinott [the Olympia's managing director] reports [...] his car, containing his briefcase packed with all his notes on the play, the phone numbers of everyone connected with it, and the script itself was stolen on Tuesday night. Sinott tells me he has had several conflicting reactions to the play from different experts and has been approached by the Jewish community not to put it on. ("Jim Won't Give Up")

More debates about accusations of anti-Semitism followed (Radin, "Playing Dirty"; Chilvers). Allen, Lenny Brenner, Marion Woolfson [an anti-Zionist Jewish writer], Dr. Stephen Roth, Martin Gilbert, and Rabbi Hugo Gryn [an Auschwitz survivor] were featured on a Channel 4 discussion about the historical accuracy of *Perdition* on 18 March 1987, ending in more accusations of anti-Semitism by one party, and of Zionist lobbying by the other (Winner, "Bitter TV clash on 'Perdition'"). And indeed the central issue in many of these debates was the question of how much pressure the Jewish Community really had asserted, and whether the cancellation of *Perdition* could be seen as their achievement.

Goodman states that "the decision was by no means brought about by the protest of Jewish member of the theatre boards" (Goodman) and Stafford-Clark admits in his article "Why I Axed *Perdition*": "throughout its history, the Royal Court has received generous help from a number of Jewish trusts and prominent Jewish families. In the course of this affair, none of them put any pressure on me. As for any other 'undeclared pressure', there was none" (Stafford-Clark, "Why"). During the Channel 4 debate on *Perdition*, Allen, however, mentions that "one London producer [...] had been threatened that his career would be jeopardized if he staged *Perdition*" (Winner, "Bitter TV clash"). In a letter to the *Guardian* on 18 March, the day of the TV debate, Allen elaborates: "We know that one producer was told: 'I own nine theatres, my friend owns six.¹⁵¹ Put the play on and you're finished'". With Goodman and Stafford-Clark stating

151 There is no proof, other than Allen's and Loach's word, that the latter threats were actually made. As such it can only be seen as a noteworthy coincidence that the only person who owned precisely six theatres in London in 1987 was Sir Stephen Waley-Cohen: the Albery (now named the Noël Coward), Criterion, Donmar Warehouse, Piccadilly, Whitehall (now Trafalgar Studios), and Wyndham's theatres. There was no theatre owner who at the time actually fully owned nine theatres. During the 1980s, and before Delfont Mackintosh, Nimax, the Ambassadors' Group or Nederlander Ltd. entered theatre land, the only instance that a larger group of theatres than Waley-Cohen's could be ascribed to a single ownership was the Stoll Moss group. Stoll Moss owned ten West End theatres – the Cambridge, The Duchess, the Palladium, the Queen's, the Gielgud, the Apollo, the Garrick, the Lyric, Her Majesty's and Theatre Royal Drury Land – when it sold to Andrew Lloyd Webber's Really Useful Group in 2000 ("Stoll-Moss Theatres"). The Duchess was purchased in 1986, already under the ownership of Robert Holmes à Court, an Australian business man. Holmes à Court had bought 51% of the Stoll Moss shares

that the withdrawal of *Perdition* was by no means motivated by any pressure from the Jewish community, Allen's word stands against theirs.

Meanwhile Loach and Allen continued their campaign to prove the existence of a Zionist conspiracy that had sabotaged the production of *Perdition* via secret pressures and blackmail ("Perdition' Damned"; Loach and Hornung). Loach claimed that "what we got from the press was straightforward propaganda from the Zionist lobby" (Loach and Hornung) and speaks of an organised Zionist lobby:

A whole series of articles by Zionists and their apologists appeared in one paper after another: Martin Gilbert in the *Telegraph*, Stephen Games in the *Independent*, Lord Goodman in the *Standard*, and Bernhard Levin in *The Times*.

It is worth remembering at this stage that no one outside the immediate circle of the production had seen the script that was to be presented. We can only assume that Zionist organisations, possibly the Institute of Jewish Affairs, were circulating an early draft of the script, with copies from hostile historians sympathetic to their cause. Certainly the Institute itself presented its own anonymous report attacking the play.

[...]

The play's opponents used their influence to lobby and manipulate behind the scenes. We know, for example, that there was a meeting between some members of the Royal Court Council and Lord Weidenfeld and Martin Gilbert four days before the play was due to open. Its purpose could only be to bring pressure to bear on the Court¹⁵².

[...]

And so the play was banned, apparently on the sole authority of Max Stafford-Clark, the Artistic Director, just as we were preparing for our dress rehearsal. Did he fall, or was he pushed?

There have been rumours of threats of withdrawal of funds, which Stafford-Clark has refuted. Certainly the Court is financially vulnerable. It has been suggested that a valuable co-production with Joe Papp in New York might have been jeopardized¹⁵³. [...] What is certain is that the stated reason for the ban is quite inadequate: 'going ahead would cause great distress to sections of the community'.

[...]

The efforts of the Zionist campaign did not end with the ban at the Royal Court. The lobby has tried to ensure that no theatre will stage the play in London or elsewhere. [...] One producer was told that the theatre he wanted became unavailable for this play. Not

from ACC (Associated Communications Corporation) in 1954. ACC was owned by impresario Lew Grade whom Holmes à Court forced to cede control as soon as he took over in 1984. ACC, however, remained in charge of Stoll Moss ("Associated Television"). Given that Lew Grade in 1987 still owned his shares to nine of Stoll Moss's theatres that Holmes à Court had purchased from him, he would have been the only person in London to technically own, even if not fully, precisely nine theatres.

152 The meeting referred to is the one that took place at Sonia Melchett's place on 18 January (Stafford-Clark, *Diary* 18 Jan. 1987).

153 Stephen Roth had threatened to contact "the Royal Court's friends' in New York" (Stafford-Clark, "Letter"; Roberts and Stafford-Clark 140).

only that, he would not be allowed to rent any theatres belonging to that particular proprietor in the future. Another was telephoned from New York and told if he produced the play, his future career on Broadway would be in jeopardy¹⁵⁴.

[...]

We have to remind ourselves that we are talking here about censorship, where a political group has used every device to prevent discussions of its own political past. In fact these people provoke the very anti-Semitism they seek to prevent, because it appears a powerful clique has, through its influences in the press and elsewhere, stopped the play from being performed.

In an article answering this one by Hornung and Loach, Victoria Radin comments on quite a few facts: she claims the copies of *Perdition* Loach and Hornung speak of, were sent to journalists by the Royal Court's press office. She says that the early, circulated version does not differ much from the rehearsal script, that Allen always knew about the critical reports on his play, meaning the ones by Gilbert and Cesarani, and adds that she took this knowledge from a copy of a letter Allen wrote to the Royal Court about the Cesarani report "18 months ago". Radin continues:

The play was not 'banned', 'censored' or 'suppressed' [...]. The Court's Artistic Director, Max Stafford-Clark [...] *cancelled* its production at his theatre. The real story is that very late in the day indeed, in fact five days before the scheduled opening, Stafford-Clark rang up Martin Gilbert and asked if he could come to see him in order to go through the text together¹⁵⁵. Gilbert spent three hours pointing out inaccuracies. The text was constantly being changed by Allen and Loach right up to the moment Stafford-Clark pulled it. How could he 'stand behind it', when it was mutating moment by moment? (Radin, "Totalitarian Rabbit Hole")

Radin further adds that the Court's Council, of which four members were Jewish, did not assert any pressure, and that they, in fact, only saw the script and the report three days before the scheduled opening night. Radin quotes a 'non-Jewish Council member': "Max realised that he was putting his reputation on a third-rate play" and that the *Perdition* affair was "an internal cock-up of the highest order". She then quotes from the 20 January meeting minutes, and adds comments clearly rateable as internal information: the decision to postpone the play for four days, that the play should be read by a third historian – Dr Norman Stone of Oxford, the reading of the play for libel, and that all Council members should be provided with the script. Concerning allegations of a Zionist lobby, Radin adds a quote by Nicky Pallot, then the Artistic Director of the Bush saying: "What worried me was that the author seemed to take a view without discussion or

154 Just like with Allen's comments on threats above, there is no actual proof of these alleged calls.

155 The meeting Radin refers to was the one on 16 January at which Gilbert presented the list of 64 errors. Stafford-Clark writes about it: "Martins Gilbert, the historian, who had claimed the play was a 'travesty', rang saying he would like to meet" (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 141).

dialectic” and states that “Sinott of the Olympia Theatre was the only post-Royal Court casualty named by Loach and Hornung”.

Sinott, however, according to Radin, was surprised to hear a political group may have pressured the Court into not producing *Perdition*: “I certainly did not come in touch with it. The fact that we decided not to put it on was based on a *legal* problem. Because the actors wanted to be free to make other commitments and also because of our scheduling”. As such, he did not feel a lobby had sabotaged the production, but named legal problems and time pressure as preventing factors¹⁵⁶. Radin does not refer to the threatened producers Loach and Hornung mentioned. Instead, she leads over to Max Stafford-Clark, who said there were no threats from sponsors to withdraw funds, and quotes Evans, who told her:

At no stage did anyone suggest that *Perdition* be taken off. There were absolutely no threats. All that people were arguing was that, given the extraordinary complexity of the material, would the Court please ensure that there were no significant inaccuracies in the play.

Radin adds that Mike Alfreds, when approached to direct the play by the Royal Court found the play anti-Semitic, and that Michael Hastings did not support the play anymore. She quotes his letter to the *Jewish Chronicle* from 30 January, and states that every person who had read the script and was unconnected with the production shared her, Alfreds’ and Hastings’ opinion. Given that all these people, without even having met, share the same point of view, Radin asks how Loach and Hornung can really believe in a conspiracy.

It must be noted that Radin’s article does not always line up with other information and facts on the *Perdition* affair. Radin argues that the early version of the script of *Perdition* did not differ much from later versions, while she at the same time argues that the script was “mutating moment by moment”. The latter assertion appears to be closer to the actual development of the play as an essay by David Cesarani shows (Cesarani in Allen, *Perdition* 111-113). Cesarani states: “At each stage of rewriting significant alterations have been made” (111). Radin’s opinion on Allen’s ignorance of the reports is, however, true. Several sources and particularly a note by Allen on the margin of the Cesarani report reading “This is a play not an essay” as mentioned by Stafford-Clark (Stafford-Clark, “Why”; Roberts and Stafford-Clark 140), show that Allen knew and did not care. What stands out is that Radin had learnt about this fact from a personal letter Allen had written to the Court: a letter that could have only been addressed to Michael Hastings or Max Stafford-Clark. The meeting between Stafford-Clark and Gilbert, which Radin knows about, and falsely reports as a meeting initiated by Stafford-Clark to go over the historical facts with Gilbert, is presented in a fashion that induces a notion of doubt on Stafford-Clark’s part – almost a week before the withdrawal of

156 At this point it can be called into mind that in the *Manchester Evening News* Sinott had stated that the Jewish community had approached him, and that the play text and all production files had been stolen from his car (“Jim Won’t Give Up”).

Perdition. It cannot be clarified who eventually called whom, yet Radin's article clearly attempts to shed a very bad light on the production team of *Perdition*. This is further proven by the way she quotes the anonymous Council member on the "cock-up". Radin's knowledge about Royal Court internals is surprising, as she also had background information, like the choice of the historian to re-read the play, that are not in the written minutes or to be found anywhere else in the archives and publications.

This is not the only time information was leaked out of the Royal Court throughout the *Perdition* affair. Not only were Council meetings habitually leaked to the press, warnings about the cancellation of the play also went out. The latter is particularly surprising as Max Stafford-Clark claims to have reached his decision at 8.00 p.m. on 20 January, to have broken the news to Evans, Burton and Loach, after the Council meeting, and to have told the actors, Allen and Loach the next morning. The press release was dated 21 January 12.00 noon. In a letter to the *Guardian* on 29 January, Chris Barlas writes: "I myself was contacted by Jim Allen's agent shortly before the withdrawal of the production at the Royal Court. I was warned that the cancellation was about to be announced and was asked for support" (Barlas). There is only a very short time span in which Barlas could have been contacted. This episode further shows that not only the Council, but also Allen and Loach leaked confidential information to the press.

As such, Radin's article is only one more in a line to prove that with the *Perdition* affair too many of the Royal Court's internal documents were being circulated and that many things were said only to be denied, re-interpreted or read out of context by opponents. Personal and cultural-political spinning, make it hard to see through the actual events. A good example of this is that Stafford-Clark's diary mentions the highly important meeting at Sonia Melchett's house on 18 January, and reports Lord Weidenfeld's reading the play for libel and giving a deadline of when he expects a decision that quite frankly reads as an ultimatum. The latter information is not included in Stafford-Clark's *Taking Stock*. While the editing on Stafford-Clark's part can in this case easily be traced when going back to the archive material, the spinning is much harder to see, when it comes to Allen's and Loach's mention of threats, as made against producers who wished to put on *Perdition*. The case of Sinott of the Olympia Theatre in Dublin here is one of the clearer ones, as it was publicly reported. It's more difficult when Allen and Loach speak of hearsay: the times they were told, producers were told that they were not to produce *Perdition*. No interview with any producer but Sinott exists, and Allen's and Loach's word stands against that of Stafford-Clark, Goodman, Radin, and others. The question is: is *Perdition* merely a third-rate play distorting history that did not deserve a production or did Allen actually hit a nerve, a truth, a story that was not desired to be told by some, by a "clique", maybe, an organised group or a powerful lobby?

It is out of question that there is no artistic merit to *Perdition*. The entire team from Allen, over Byrne, Loach, Hastings and Stafford-Clark all felt the play good enough to go into production for at least two years. Many, apart from Hastings and Stafford-Clark,

even after that. Accordingly, it was not the quality of the play that stood in the way of a production, but the content of the political and historical message it was sending. And it was this message that was fought, as was proven, with the threat of libel cases and discrediting the artists and the play. Mr. Schwalb's, Lord Weidenfeld's, Dr. Roth's, and even Pamela Manson's libel threats are known. What is still up for debate is the existence of an organized lobbying effort against *Perdition*.

Allen and Loach are convinced of a clearly formulated, far-reaching lobby. What at first seems like a conspiracy, too far-fetched to be true, soon has its traces found when reading the press cuttings. Even if often denied by the Jewish community, members of the community were repeatedly reported as being responsible for the withdrawal of *Perdition*. As such, an article in *Today* reports: "the Board of Deputies of British Jews, who demanded the ban, said they would fight moves to stage 'Perdition' elsewhere" ("I'll Stage Zionism Play Says Director"). Further, Michael Man, the assistant director of the Institute of Jewish Affairs, and thus the assistant of Dr. Stephen Roth, and directly connected to Lord Goodman, the Institute's president, publicly described the withdrawal of *Perdition* as the right decision, but not a day of joy. He was quoted: "In a way Jews have lost twice. [...] First they have been decried by the author and now, because they exerted pressure over it which led to its withdrawal, they appear an illiberal element" ("Jewish Protests Halt Play"). Even before *Perdition* had been cancelled, an article in *The Stage* quoted a spokeswoman of the Royal Court: "We are told that some people want to picket but whether they do or not the play will go on" ("Jewish Anger at Royal Court's 'Blood Libel'"). The article further quotes Pamela Manson: "Every time the Royal Court's roof falls in they come whining to the Jews for money – members of the board are Jews and many of the patrons are Jewish – then they have the audacity to put on this libellous play" and "I wouldn't try to stop the play going on but I'd like to burn the theatre down".

The weekly *Jewish Chronicle* first picked up the issue in an article dated 16 January, which claimed that *Perdition*'s sole purpose was to discredit Zionism ("Discrediting Zionism"). On 23 January 1987, when the play was already taken off, Philip Kleinman refers to Rose's article in the *Guardian*. Kleinman calls it a "great service to the cause of public debate" ("Propaganda in the name of Art"). He continues by summing up Rose's critique and the reactions it generated. His column, however, takes a more explanatory character than a judgemental one. Kleinman concludes: "I hesitate to judge any text I have not read." Kleinman later noted that the last sentence of his column was cut. In the edition of 23 January he adds that "I hesitate to judge any text I have not read" should have been followed by "As of now, though, it is difficult to believe Allen's play will do anything but harm" (Kleinman, "Perdition Faces Firing Squad"). Stephen Roth, in the same edition of the weekly newspaper, is not as diplomatic.

In "LIBEL!" he stands his ground in accusing Allen of a distortion of facts and outright anti-Semitism. He calls *Perdition* "a fictionalised treatment of one chapter of the Holocaust [...] in which we hear only the author's voice through the characters" and accuses Allen of having used the play as "a vehicle for political view", which shows Allen as an anti-Zionist and Trotskyist. He states that *Perdition* is "the carbon copy of a

libel case in Israel”, yet with fictional characters. Roth explains the plot and the background of the Kastner case. Eventually, he presents his personal version of the events in 1944 Hungary and discredits Allen’s “very different way” of presenting the story. He defends himself and Zionism

I write these lines as an eyewitness, as someone who was active in the Zionist underground and rescue work in Hungary. I did not spend several months in a Gestapo prison in Budapest and suffer the interrogation methods of the Gestapo [...] because of our happy well-protected collaboration with the Nazis, as Jim Allen suggests in his play.

The libel case against Yaron which Allen puts on the London stage becomes a libel against all those who lived through, fought and mostly perished in the Holocaust. It is not Zionism which stands accused, but the playwright himself.

Roth also adds the errors, as found by Gilbert, and quoted by David Rose (“Perdition”). In this he used his own knowledge to back Gilbert. As such, Roth claims that Allen’s statement on the fact that children from mixed marriages were legally bastards and that in Israel children born to non-Jewish mothers can neither be married nor buried was “untrue to the point of obscenity and plainly anti-Semitic” (Roth). In a letter in the *Jewish Chronicle* on 30 January 1987 Benjamin M. Kuras writes: “One is astonished how this plain fact, which can be confirmed by any Israeli rabbi, could have remained unknown to the chairman of the Zionist federation” (Kuras). Roth was indeed wrong. Hannah Arendt writes in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963):

[I]n Israel [...] rabbinical law rules the personal status of Jewish citizens, with the result that no Jew can marry a non-Jew; marriages concluded abroad are recognized, but children of mixed marriages are legally bastards (children of Jewish parentage born out of wedlock are legitimate), and if one happens to have a new-Jewish mother he can neither be married nor buried. (7).

A week later, on 30 January 1987, the *Jewish Chronicle* printed “On Perdition”. The author of the piece, Chaim Bermant, openly admits to the lobbying effort against the production of *Perdition*:

In order for justice to be done the truth must be established. It is the axiom which lies at the heart of Jewish protests over ‘Perdition’, the play which was taken off by the Royal Court management under Jewish pressure of which the community has no reason to be ashamed. (Bermant)

The author understands *Perdition* as “a group libel which the Jewish community could not allow to go unchallenged”. It is further explained that this ‘not allowing to go unchallenged’, is hard to explain to an outsider, as it is

[...] not censorship, but a concern that the most tragic events in the modern history of Jewish people should not be so viciously perverted as to portray the victims as the guilty ones and, on the back of a monstrous lie, to mount an assault on the only country to afford the survivors unfettered refuge.

Bermant further comments: “One comes, finally, to the question of poetic license, but poetic license requires poetic talent. Allen asserted as truth what a million witnesses

know to be lies". Bermant also suggests that the Royal Court, as a publicly subsidized theatre, should not produce work of such low quality: it has become "a punk theatre for punk playwrights".

On 6 February, the only mention of *Perdition* was in an article by S. Levenberg. Levenberg had been sent one of the copies of the script, which had been sent out by Michael Hastings in August 1985; it had reached him via the Institute of Jewish Affairs and he was "highly critical on the one-sided and politically motivated play" (Levenberg). He claims to have mentioned in a letter to Hastings that many important achievements of Zionism had been left out of the play, and that "many members of the Jewish community and survivors of the Holocaust may resent, too, the tendentious character of the play". Levenberg's opinion, as well as his letter to Hastings, is not mentioned elsewhere. In fact, the only report by the Institute of Jewish Affairs mentioned is the anonymous one, which turned out to be Martin Gilbert's, originally written for the Manchester Exchange.

Kleinman's column on 13 February talked about Bernhard Levin¹⁵⁷ defending the play for freedom of speech in spite of it being "littered throughout with inexcusable errors and lies" (Kleinman, "Levin on Path to Perdition"). Two weeks later, however, a letter by Rodney Saunders heated the affair up again. Saunders writes that there is: "[...] no need to 'ban' the text. There is, however, every justification for hounding it off stage wherever and whenever its sponsors attempt its production or publication. There is certainly no reason why any Jew should feel uneasy about that". On the next page, Kleinman comments on Ken Loach's assertions of a Zionist plot behind the lobbying. He refers to a letter by Loach to the Royal Court's Council, in which he accused the theatre of censorship and the Council of "having succumbed to Zionist pressure, exerted at a meeting some Council members had with Lord Weidenfeld and Martin Gilbert¹⁵⁸, to cancel the production" (Kleinman, "Director Sees Zionist Plot"). He further mentions Loach's belief that a Zionist lobby put pressure not only on the Royal Court, but on all other theatres interested in the play. Kleinman comments

According to Loach, lobbying against the play is liable to provoke anti-Semitism. On the contrary, nothing throughout the ages has provoked anti-Semitism so much as the spectacle of Jewish weakness.

Would that the 'powerful clique' with 'influence in the press', of which Loach complains, really were powerful and influential. Then perhaps one would not see items like the 'news' story in the Independent a while ago that unblushingly bracketed Israel with South Africa and Taiwan as the "polecat alliance". A bit of what Loach calls censorship would have done no harm.

On the same page as Kleinman's column, a letter by Larry Adler read: "A theatre in a democracy isn't *obliged* to put on anything. However, once the management schedules a play for production, it ought not to cancel the play because of the pressure from the

157 Levin at the time was a columnist for *The Times*.

158 The meeting referred to, was on 18 January 1987 at Sonia Melchett's house.

group, any group” (“Perdition Furore”). Unsurprisingly, a week later, reactions to Adler’s letter followed. Colin Shindler, the editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, answered:

Virtually all Jewish people who read the play were outraged by its crude distortions and depth of ignorance. Is it wrong to protest or to make representations if you feel that you, as a Jew, have been defamed and misrepresented? This is the crux in the matter. (Shindler)

Kleinman took Adler’s assertion to a more personal level. He argues that a theatre should cancel and asks Adler if a play with a character resembling Adler himself appeared, and his friends ask the theatre not to produce it, would Adler then speak of censorship or would he sue for damages. “But presumably even he would not argue that the existence of libel laws entitles theatres or publishers deliberately to peddle lies after they have been shown to be such. Or perhaps he would” (Kleinman, “Letter”). It shall not go unnoticed that Kleinman here compares the campaign against *Perdition* to a case of friendship loyalty, and suggest that the whole campaign is just friends fighting to protect their friends who are mentioned in the play¹⁵⁹. As such he not only relates to the mentioned libel threats, but also explains the dynamics of a campaign that, officially, never happened. In this context, and as yet another answer to Adler, appears the letter from the Secretary General of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, Hayim Pinner:

There is no such thing as freedom in democracy, and the decision to withdraw the highly offensive and historically inaccurate play ‘Perdition’ was correct. This was the view not only of the Board of Deputies, representing the organised Jewish community, but of British public opinion in its overwhelming majority as expressed by the media. (Pinner)

Not only does Pinner say that there is no freedom in democracy, it is remarkable that he goes on to state that even before the withdrawal, the Board of Deputies, which according to Max Stafford-Clark’s post-withdrawal statement never got involved, held the clear opinion that *Perdition* was highly offensive and inaccurate.

Naturally, Adler answered. In his letter dated 20 March 1987 he says: “a principle is only a principle when tested and held under pressure [...] Mr Kleinman seems to think that it is a theatre’s business to offer the truth [...]. Are we even sure that Shakespeare was historically accurate about Richard III?” (Adler, “Letter”). Addressed to Pinner, Adler continues:

Neither Mr Pinner, Mr Kleinman nor even Mr Shindler mentions the recent opinion of the Israel Supreme Court, which was against *all* censorship. It referred to a play that likens the actions of the Israel Military Government to that of the Nazis. The Board of Censors banned it and the court’s opinion was to suggest abolishing the Board of Censors.

P.S.: I’ll take Shindler, Kleinman and Pinner any time against the lady who wrote, from Bournemouth, after reading my letter: “A Jew like you fills me with shame and disgust.” Who, me?

Despite Adler’s plea for tolerance, a letter by S. Summer concerning the publication of *Perdition* read in the following week:

159 The only living persons, who were mentioned in the play, were Nathan Schwalb, later Dror, who actually sewed for libel, and Yitzak Shamir.

‘Perdition’ will be produced and, furthermore, will be a tremendous success. [...] Eventually, ‘Perdition’ will join ‘the Protocols of the Elders of Zion’, ‘Mein Kampf’, and other similar masterpieces on the bookshelves of the most dedicated anti-Semites. (Summer)

On 3 April, Kleinman informed about the BIPAC (Britain/ Israel Public Affairs Committee) 20-page booklet on *Perdition*¹⁶⁰, and on 10 April, David Winner summed up the last news on *Perdition*: he speaks of Equity’s motion defending “the right of any member or group of members to perform the work of their choice” (“Perdition Move by Actors Deplored”), Michael Winner’s – the Director’s Guild of Great Britain’s chief censorship officer, “who was leading the anti-Perditionists” – decision to let the matter rest, the publication of the play and the lobby. It is reported that “Al-Saqi Books [...] dropped the idea. But Ithaca Press, a small, radical South London house specialising in Middle East subjects has taken over the project”. David Winner adds:

An Al-Saqi representative refused to discuss its decision but an Ithaca director, Mr David Wolton, said: ‘like a lot of liberal Jews, I feel it ought to be published so that people can make up their minds on it. I am part of the campaign to change Israel’s behaviour. This book raises people’s awareness of different aspects of the history of Palestine settlement.’¹⁶¹

Winner concludes with mentioning an intervention coming from David Cesarani:

A scathing attack on the Jewish community’s leadership’s ‘ramshackle’ handling has come from David Cesarani [...] Dr Cesarani said: ‘While official communal leadership did little about the play until very late, it nevertheless managed to create the damaging idea that it had exerted influence via the backstairs. Subsequently, the Board (of Deputies) leaders resolved to rewrite history and claim that it had indeed acted to suppress the play. ‘It is ironic that only Jim Allen and the Board of Deputies have a shared interest in perpetuating this fabrication’.

Cesarani, who had set off the controversy over *Perdition*, here claims that the Jewish community’s working against *Perdition* is a fabrication. He asserts that the Board of Deputies did little about the play until very late, and only claimed to have acted to suppress Allen’s play – when it, in fact, did not.

Former articles in the *Jewish Chronicle* clearly show a will to suppress and discredit *Perdition*. Hayim Pinner, as a member of the Board of Deputies, even found words harsh enough to deny democracy its freedom to illustrate his position. Why would the Board of Deputies merely claim to have acted against the play if they had not? And given the fact that they had acted, why would Cesarani deny it? As many times before with *Perdition*, there are two different stories: only this time they are both being told by Zionists and strong anti-Perditionists alike.

It is not clear how deeply the Board of Deputies was involved and how ferocious the lobbying was. Max Stafford-Clark says: “there was a great deal of pressure put on

160 The booklet is Britain Israel Public Affairs Committee, *To Stage or Not to Stage: The Case of Perdition*. London: Britain Israel Public Affairs Committee, 1987. Print.

161 Uri Davis’ research on Nathan Schwalb’s libel case and the involvement of Yitzak Shamir in it, can be called into mind again.

by the Jewish community, including the Board of Deputies asked to see me and indeed send a representative to talk to me” (Personal interview). Stafford-Clark’s remark stands out, since in his 2007 publication *Taking Stock* he writes that there was no meeting with the British Board of Deputies, despite them having sought for it (Roberts and Stafford-Clark 133). When asked about the “ferocity of the lobbying” (134) Stafford-Clark recollects the anecdote about Mrs. Thatcher:

[C]ertainly I was aware of the lobbying and in the middle of the controversy I went to a reception in Downing Street that Mrs. Thatcher gave. And I arrived late because I had been in a meeting. And as I came in. I mean there had been headlines in the paper every other day. If you are in a controversy, what happens is they run it one day and then they take a day off. If a politician is in a scandal there is always a day off, right, because the newspapers want to gather fresh information for making it a lead story again. I knew that every other day I would be attacked in a newspaper and the *Telegraph* particularly. [...] And I came in late to this gathering and there was a butler at the door who announced your name but he had already gone so I came in and it was mostly men in the room in suits. And Mrs. Thatcher detached herself from a group and came up to me and I said ‘Max Stafford-Clark, Royal Court Theatre’ and she said ‘Oh, poor you! It’s such a difficult part of the world. You’re always getting into trouble there! Let me show you my pictures’. And she showed me her pictures on the wall. But, she knew about it, that’s how far it had gone. (Personal interview)

6.3 Conclusion

Perdition is a play that is not designed to negotiate contrasting opinions, but to build and defend one single argument. Allen uses his play to distribute his views on Zionism and the State of Israel. Due to criticism, Allen worked towards making the argument of the play more bilateral through different versions of the play – with the printed play text being the final edit. As Allen comments, editing is an essential part of writing a play: “Only an idiot would choose to ignore this necessary creative process” (Allen, *Perdition* 114). Yet, it has been shown that even the printed play text is very clear in its purpose. Cesarani comments: “the basic structure has remained intact. It is still a drama based on the revelation of a Jewish conspiracy in which stereotypes of cruel Jews and Jewish power abound” (114). It is therefore hard to understand that the reader of an early version of the script did not grasp its mission. The fact that the Royal Court commissioned and backed Allen’s text for two years shows that they were both aware of its message and still artistically supportive of it. Even after the Cesarani report, they trusted in the text enough to send it out to the press to disperse criticism. One can admit that the artistic staff at the Court did not know the full extent of the one-sidedness in Allen’s presentation of historical events. They trusted Allen, who had certainly been very thorough in his research. That Allen was, however, using this research for his own politically motivated purpose cannot have escaped any reader. As such it is perceivable that implications of the historical distortion in the play and the fierceness of the reactions to them were a surprise to the Court. Yet, the mere controversy following such an open attack on Zionism cannot have been surprising – if one calls in mind, for example,

Vanessa Redgrave's Oscar acceptance speech of 1978. And, after all, it was the main pillar in the Royal Court's history to stir controversies, with the most controversial aspects of the theatre's history usually having been articulated as 'golden ages' in retrospect.

It must therefore be argued that it was not the controversy that the Royal Court did not expect, but the lobbying. When Stafford-Clark claims to have taken down the play due to the distress it would cause in sections of the community, this can only be translated into a surrender, not in the face of controversy, but of a fierce lobby. In this context certain aspects that were brought to light in the archive analysis gain particular importance. The three crucial bits of information here are Weidenfeld's ultimatum, which is never explained in its full scope by Stafford-Clark, Roth's threats to break up the Court's connections into the West End and Broadway and with important Jewish sponsors, and the mention of – by Roth – and eventual execution of libel charges – regarding Nathan Schwalb.

In 1987, The Royal Court had barely been able to ensure its collaboration with Broadway producer Joe Papp through fundraising. There had been a stand-still in public funding for 1985/86. The money from private and commercial sponsors, as well as the profit made from transfers, were essential to keeping the Court running. In short, they could not do without it. Similarly, they could not have afforded to lose a libel action taken against them, which was supported by both the leaders of the Jewish community in England and the Israeli government.

It seems natural that the poor quality of the play became a good enough argument to cancel its production. After two years of continuous work on the play and repeated assurances of trust on part of the Royal Court, it is, however, a very weak argument. Stafford-Clark was cornered. Even if some leaders of the Jewish community denied any kind of lobbying effort, there is enough proof of it both in the articles found in the *Jewish Chronicle*, in Stafford-Clark's diaries, and in his mentioning a long-denied meeting with members of the Board of Deputies in a recent interview.

In a rejoinder to Cesarani's text in the appendix to the published play text, Allen writes: "The orchestrated efforts of the Zionist lobby, its elementary lack of honesty and its attempt to stifle debate, especially in the Jewish community reveals a trait of falsehood and duplicity in every step" (114). One does not need to take Allen's drastic stand point on the matter to acknowledge the efforts of Weidenfeld, Goodman, Roth, et al.

For Stafford-Clark the situation with *Perdition* was black and white, as his withdrawal of the production shows. Still, the play was published only a few months later, including a selection of critical articles, from both sides of the argument. As such a disclaimer on behalf of the Court, running alongside a production of *Perdition*, appears to have been possible. The Royal Court and Stafford-Clark could have opened the debate to the public. They could have produced the play and debated the controversy in talk backs and the media. But, for Stafford-Clark, this option clearly did not apply. Since a controversial reputation or the attachment of political labels had never held the Court back from producing plays, the powers that are crucial here are of an economic nature.

That a publication of the text could happen and the production could not shows that the publishers were clearly not affected in the same way as the Court. Stafford-Clark saw no middle ground. The lobby was too fierce. He had – as the Weidenfeld ultimatum suggests – a gun to his head. As such it must be assumed that the threats that were made were real, and for the Royal Court they would have meant severe financial consequences, maybe even the end. Stafford-Clark's withdrawal of *Perdition* was not a matter of conscience, nor was it an artistic decision; it was an economical one.

7. The 1990s. The Institution

A theatre like the Royal Court [...] has a chance of becoming an established institution. As I write these words, I shiver at the very deadliness of their implications. (G. Devine in Little and McLaughlin 454)

[I]n the first years or so of Stephen's regime, he came up with the memorable idea that the Royal Court was a pirate ship, and that what we were was somehow a bunch of subversive and naughty pirates in this leaky, brown-painted vessel, being naughty and challenging bigger ships and making off with prize goods and so on. [...] What we've done [to the Court] has shifted that equation considerably. It's an extremely beautiful building. An audience can't come in to a £27 million building and think it's a pirate ship. It's more like a slightly eccentric but expensive powerboat. (James Macdonald in Little and McLaughlin 394)

7.1 Re-creating the Royal Court

The situation of the Royal Court in the 1990s was complex. The theatre had survived Thatcherism, welcomed a new Artistic Director with Stephen Daldry in 1992, managed to double its bill, experienced the hype around Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995) and the rise of a new trend in theatre – the 'in-yer-face', received a £15.8m Lottery Grant¹⁶² in 1995 to refurbish the theatre, had to campaign for £9m of matching funds, and played on three stages in the West End while it had its building in Sloane Square completely rebuilt. In the first half of the 1990s the theatre thus faced very different challenges, with welcoming the new Artistic Director and his new approach, than in the second half that saw the actual rebuild of the house and the company's interim move to the West End.

The fundamental changes the Court underwent in the mid-1990s can intrinsically be linked to the changes in the arts funding landscape in Britain. Even though the 1990s were to become a very exciting time for the Royal Court, things were – after Thatcher – only slowly beginning to look better. While the 1980s had brought artistic as well as financial crises, the Arts Council's Appraisal Report of 1989 had been greatly in favour of the Royal Court, and it was decided that the grant for 1990 would increase. Still, the grant was not sufficiently covering the costs of the production level asked for in the report. It was clear that the end of Thatcherism did not mean an end to private and corporate sponsorship in the arts. The Arts Council's decision in 1993 to keep only the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company, touring companies and the Royal Court as its clients clearly showed that the standing of the arts under John Major was

162 In 1994 the National Lottery was established by John Major. The lottery money went into health, education, sport, arts, and heritage funds. In 1995, a £15.8m grant was at the time the biggest grant ever to go to a theatre. Since then, other theatres have received much higher grants to refurbish or extend their buildings: the National Theatre received an award of £31,590,000; Sadler's Well an award of £47,275,496; the Royal Opera House £78,500,000 (Arts Council England, *Lottery Report 2005*) – just to name a few.

not too strong either. For the Royal Court, the Arts Council's decision, however, meant that it was eventually and inevitably granted the status of a leading theatre, or to put it differently, a well-established institution.

In 1994, the Arts Council of Great Britain split up into three separate bodies for England, Scotland, and Wales (Sierz, *Nation* 29). The Arts Council of England consequently sent a team to the Royal Court to work out an Appraisal Report for the theatre. This report worked not only to "help spread knowledge of best practice" (Arts Council of England, 1994 6), but also to clarify whether the institution worked at its best possible level, accordingly justifying the Arts Council's support. Acknowledging the Court's history as one of its strong suits, the report of 1994 understands the Royal Court as "pivotal for a major change in style, mood and content of British Theatre" (3) in the 1950s, being "principally responsible for bringing an end to the theatre censorship in the late 60s" (3), and decades later deserving "its international reputation and to produce some of the best new writing" (3). It further reads:

Indeed, in the mid-90s, there is much to be excited about at the Royal Court. Not only has its director Stephen Daldry won major awards, but more new plays are going on the stage than ever before in the theatre's history. Although there is much to applaud, the appraisal team is concerned that without better planning, the current happy state could prove to be all too temporary, especially if the income from West End transfers dries up and if the new artistic director's commitment is not secured for a longer period. (3)

As such the report gives two reasons to support the Royal Court: one is its history, the other Stephen Daldry. Because of these two "the team would like to see the company receive further grant-aid to help it develop" (3). As much of the debate with the Arts Council in the 1980s had circled around the high running costs of the building, the team saw the urgency in putting an end to these struggles and suggested an application for the National Lottery "for urgently required capital improvements and replacement of equipment" (3). The team also suggested that the theatre "must take a more proactive approach to marketing and better celebrate its accomplishments" (3). The report formulates the main recommendations as follows:

1. The English Stage Company's council should take steps to extend the artistic director's contract.
2. Long-term planning should take account of the current enhanced season.
3. A comprehensive, research based marketing strategy must be developed in order to present a convincing vision of who it wants to reach.
4. The securing of the lease must be an important priority.
5. ESC's council must ensure that the theatre is working safely. (4)

Other recommendations mainly included a broadening of the Young People's Theatre's approach and a clarification of staff agreements (4). The Appraisal further strongly highlights Daldry's position as a successful Artistic Director of a theatre with its priority on new writing: "The Court has long had a reputation for producing some of the best new writing. The structures are in place to support a new writing policy, and these have been strengthened since the arrival of Stephen Daldry" (11). The report was largely in favour of the Royal Court, it fully supported Daldry, and it strengthened the Court's reputation

in a way that suggests that the theatre should celebrate its accomplishments more fully – and rebuild. The narratives that are the backbone of the report are both the history of the Court and Daldry's persona and policies. Unlike in the 1970s, transfers into the West End were also not a problem according to the theatre's mandate anymore. They were wished for.

Stephen Daldry was only thirty-three when he became the Artistic Director of the Royal Court. Wendy Lesser writes: "For a director who had made his London reputation re-suscitating Spanish dramas and German expressionist plays, this was considered something of a challenge" (Lesser 60). Daldry's succeeding Stafford-Clark was also not an easy process. Lesser quotes an article from the *Guardian* from November 1991:

The trouble started in 1988 when Stafford-Clark was reappointed to the job. Some felt that he had done it for quite long enough and Stafford-Clark himself said that after another three years it would be time to move. When his three years were up, he changed his mind and reapplied, throwing the theatre's board into a state of confusion which has, after a little faffing around, resulted in a compromise-cum-dream-ticket whereby Max stays as Artistic Director for 18 months, with Stephen under his wing. Then Max moves on to be associate director for 18 months, while Stephen finally gets the hot seat. (89-90)

Time Out put it more brutally in January 1993 when commenting on Stafford-Clark's departure from the Royal Court:

They were ringing out the old – or should have been – at the Royal Court last night as departing director Max Stafford-Clark offered the unlikely choice of *King Lear* as his farewell production at Sloane Square, but where precisely stands the new man in the confused machinations of life at the Court?

It is more than a year since a little-known theatre director called Stephen Daldry was appointed new Artistic Director of the Royal Court... in a bizarre deal which included a year in joint harness with his predecessor and indications that limpet-like Max will never go away at all. (90)

Despite the press being very critical about Stafford-Clark and Daldry sharing the artistic leadership of the Court, they seemed to be getting along well. James Macdonald, one of Daldry's Associate Directors, recalls:

Stephen would sit on the one side of his partner's desk and Max on the other. It was a very clear image of the way those two people operate. Max's side of the desk, relentlessly neat and organised, piled and regimented. Stephen's side of the desk was paper everywhere and chaos and half full ashtrays and underwear and what have you. (Little and McLaughlin 263)

Daldry admits: "Max was a fantastic teacher. He was very warm and very generous and the assumption that this shotgun marriage was going to end in some kind of terrible divorce simply didn't happen" (263). Graham Crowley, then General Manager, explains: "I think, they surprised each other by how well they got on because they are very, very different. But the changeover worked very smoothly and I think it was because both of them were damned if they were going to let the world see them quarrel" (263). Playwright Meredith Oakes recalls the time she walked into Daldry's and Stafford-

Clark's office: "My surprise at finding Max Stafford-Clark and Stephen Daldry, who according to the press were engaged in a ruthless battle for supremacy, comfortably sharing a cigarette-strewn office the size of a cupboard" (300).

During his time as Artistic Director, Daldry pursued a radical course of expansion. The surplus of £350,000 that Stafford-Clark had left Daldry with (Little and McLaughlin 278) was helpful; the general approach on the subsidization of arts in Britain had, however, not changed much since Thatcher; Daldry had to find new ways to acquire money through sponsorship. John Bull writes about Daldry's early years:

The Royal Court is currently actively pursuing commercial sponsorship from America and British companies. [...] The Arts Council has already announced a cut of £5 million in funding for 1994, and the results will not simply be a thinner slice of the cake all round. (Bull 211)

The expected 1994 cut of £5m by the Arts Council did not – due to the Arts Council Appraisal Report – affect the Royal Court:

The Royal Court is one of the only three producing organisations, theatres that are directly subsidized by the Arts Council, and that is the Royal Shakespeare Company, The Royal National Theatre, and the Royal Court, so I think we sit in a fairly secure [...] If we weren't funded, if there wasn't a Royal Court, we would have no Royal National, Royal Shakespeare Company, or Royal Opera House, in simple terms, if we wiped the cultural map of the country out we would be the last, one of the last ones to go. (Daldry on BBC roll 35 9)

Yet: "the current position of the Court is that it is doing what all good arts organisations do, which is to break even" (7). Lesser comments: "Daldry had taken on a hard job, as the Artistic Director of an underfunded, understaffed, but none the less extremely prominent British theatre [...] and he made it even harder by expanding the number and range of the Court's activities" (93). 1994 had seen nineteen premieres, Daldry was expecting record-breaking numbers at the box office for 1995 and the Arts Council grant was "about a million pounds per year, which accounts for 36 per cent of our income. I'm pleased to say it was 53 per cent when I arrived" (Daldry in Lesser 93).

It was no wonder that the numbers had gotten better since Daldry had taken over the artistic directorship. Daldry was an amazing fundraiser: "Daldry had a way of making financial sponsorship seem like an adventure, an exciting risk, a brave gamble – and this free-fall attitude had its payoff in terms of artistic freedom" (94). He secured the Royal Court's finances by finding sponsors and funding in W. H. Smith, the *Evening Standard*, Sky TV, the Audrey Skirball-Kenis Foundation, the Jerwood Foundation and many others. This is how he, not only built up a new structure of sponsorship, but also achieved what no other Artistic Director before him could, even though they had all longed for it: the refurbishment of the building in Sloane Square.

In spite of Daldry's successes, ambivalences and controversies also marked Daldry's reign at the Royal Court. Same as during Stafford-Clark's time, these were caused by the theatre's policy towards private sponsoring. While Lesser writes about Daldry's handling funds: "If there are strings attached to a cheque, we return it" (94),

history shows that this was not always true. The renaming of the Royal Court according to the wishes of the Jerwood foundation after the rebuild or the Jerwood foundation being informed on artistic decisions, as was the case in regard to the production of *Blasted* (Lesser 94) show this.

Besides this, Daldry's own art – of directing – at the Court was not crowned with the same success as his fundraising efforts. Daldry's production of Meredith Oakes's *The Editing Process* in November 1994 flopped. A staff member at the Court, who chose to remain anonymous, told Lesser about Daldry: "He really lost his confidence with *The Editing Process*. [...] He hasn't directed anything since then, and it's been months" (95). Lesser points out that everyone who works in theatre is now and again confronted with failure. But for Daldry this was particularly hard to handle since he had been so used to success (96). "Stephen is very, very lucky. If you follow him around for a while, you'll see. Five-dollar bills will drop into your paths" (96), an old friend of Daldry commented.

Daldry is described as a person whose luck rubs off on those around him, and who helps others in forging their careers. The latter has also been said about George Devine (Wardle 193-195). And indeed, Lesser clearly refers to Daldry's strong interest in Devine and his ideas, as well as his seeing the first Artistic Director as some kind of idol (111-112). Lesser further points out Daldry's reintroducing of Devine's 'plurality of tastes' to the theatre (112). In fact, Daldry's artistic concept resembled Devine's in quite a few ways: he appointed Associate Directors, he hunted down and commissioned writers, and by this allowed for a new movement in new writing to find its place.

Little and McLaughlin quote James Macdonald and Ian Rickson when describing Daldry's start at the Royal Court as showing "a sense of benign compromise" (Rickson in Little and McLaughlin 284). Macdonald explains: "There was a while early on his tenure in which he was really searching for a direction and seeking to push the boat out but not quite knowing the right direction to push it out in" (284). Likewise, Roberts had stated that the Royal Court at the end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s had problems finding a role and direction (*Stage* 174). This was true not only for the Royal Court, but for new writing in Britain in general. By the end of 1994, eighty-seven prominent playwrights had jointly signed a letter in the *Guardian* complaining about the lack of new drama (Saunders 2). Accordingly, Daldry and his new Literary Manager Graham Whybrow set out to "hunt down and commission writers, rather than waiting for their work to arrive" (284).

Whybrow's policy set out to change a very prominent aspect in the Royal Court's way of promoting new writers during the 1980s and early 1990s: new plays had during those years usually been produced Upstairs. Whybrow explains:

The Royal Court's studio Theatre Upstairs opened in 1969 as a place of experiment, but I considered that the programming of the studio theatre had narrowed into a kind of kindergarten for first-time playwrights. Former RCT AD Max Stafford-Clark [...] used to say that new playwrights should have their first three or four plays in the studio and then 'graduate' to the main stage. I vehemently disagreed with this: an artistic policy designed to enable new playwrights was functioning to thwart new playwrights or constrain their vision for new plays. If young or new playwrights perceive that their horizon is only a

studio theatre, then it is likely to limit their ambition and their imagination, and to inhibit their possibilities and their choices for their plays, in subject, scale, cast size, style and gesture of any new play they are poised to conceive and write. (E-mail to the author)

Max Stafford-Clark comments on his alleged policy of presenting new work Upstairs rather than Downstairs by talking about the proscenium stage of the Royal Court's Downstairs space: "The plays that can survive on intimacy in a studio can be rather exposed at the Royal Court. So, the decision that the Artistic Director has to take is whether a play should go upstairs or down. Where is it crucial?" (Personal interview). On the fact that during the 1980s the majority of young writers were produced Upstairs, Stafford-Clark comments: "And still are". Even if Stafford-Clark claims that this was still the policy at the Royal Court, Graham Whybrow claims to have changed that. Whybrow explains:

It is vital to question the artistic policy of theatres and their decisions to programme new plays by new playwrights in a studio theatre or on a main stage. When I started as Literary Manager at the Royal Court in 1994, I actively challenged the twin-track thinking about programming the main stage and the studio.

He explains how the famous 1994/1995 season in the Theatre Upstairs eventually led to a programming of young playwrights:

We launched the now-legendary Autumn 1994 / Spring 1995 season with an expanded programme of new playwrights in the studio Theatre Upstairs: Joe Penhall *Some Voices*, Michael Wynne *The Knocky*, Rebecca Prichard *Essex Girls*, Nick Grosso *Peaches*, Judy Upton *Ashes and Sand*, Sarah Kane *Blasted*, Judith Johnson *Uganda*, Anthony Neilson *Heredity* and Sebastian Barry *The Steward of Christendom*. The Royal Court's programming of new playwrights then gathered momentum and force, and, with renewed confidence, by early 1995 the Royal Court was actively searching to programme new playwrights on the main stage: the first was Jez Butterworth *Mojo* in July 1995. Also, at my suggestion, we re-named the 'main stage' the Theatre Downstairs, so that the theatres would be distinguished by their location (Theatre Downstairs, Theatre Upstairs) rather than by their status ('main stage' or studio).

Yet, Whybrow also admits: "It is true that we often felt it was better to launch a new playwright in the studio theatre, so that the play and the playwright were 'discovered'". And as such *Mojo*, in spite of Whybrow's proclamations, did remain the only writer's debut to go straight to the Downstairs Theatre in the 1990s. Whybrow explains that launching a play on the main stage is not always the best strategy:

We sometimes planned in advance to transfer the play to the main stage once the play had profile, recognition and public value. Sometimes this is a better strategy than launching the play on the main stage, which is high-status and risks over-promoting the play. We pursued that policy successfully with many new playwrights: Sebastian Barry *The Steward of Christendom* (1995), Martin McDonagh *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1996), Mark Ravenhill *Shopping and Fucking* (1996), Ayub Khan-Din *East is East* (1996), and Conor McPherson *The Weir* (1997).

In rare cases this policy even led to extremely successful transfers:

Martin McDonagh *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (Royal Court/Druid Theatre co-production) ran in the (then) 60-seat Theatre Upstairs for 3 weeks, but it transferred to the 900-seat Walter Kerr Theatre on Broadway where it ran for a year. Conor McPherson *The Weir* opened in the (then) 60-seat Royal Court Theatre Upstairs (RCT 'Stage' space at the former Ambassadors) and transferred to the 600-seat Duke of York's Theatre where it ran for three and a half years.

Whybrow mentions another important way he found to distribute more Royal Court plays:

In addition, early in 1995 I approached the leading UK drama publishers and secured a commitment to publish new plays programmed in the studio Theatre Upstairs. Historically the drama publishers had only published plays programmed on the main stage, and the theatre placed a firm order for a large number of copies of plays for discounted sale as 'programmes' (then at £2.00) by ushers and in the theatre bookshop. I offered firm orders for programme play texts for the Theatre Upstairs, which made it viable for the publishers to publish and print a small run; the theatre would plan to recoup that advance order within a year or two of the first production. I started this in 1995 and, from that year, publication of Royal Court plays increased from 7 plays to up to 19 plays a year, and has continued ever since. Publication helped promote new playwrights, add status to the plays and increase their distribution. I also insisted that programme play texts were 'perfect bound' (with a spine with author and title, rather than a stapled edition). New playwrights then had their new plays published and on the shelves of bookshops and libraries, so the plays had the endorsement and imprimatur of published drama. To a reader, the significant factor is that the play is published; it is subsidiary or irrelevant that the play was produced on a main stage or in a studio theatre. A play produced in a studio theatre and seen by 1,000 people (such as Sarah Kane *Blasted*) may have more cultural impact and enduring value than a play programmed on the so-called 'main stage'.

The UK system produces new plays on a straight run of four or five weeks, and the play ends after the run because there is no repertoire; a production is evanescent. So, if a new play is to have enduring cultural impact, it is essential that the play is published and readily available. When the 'single edition' of a play is exhausted and out of print, the UK drama publishers are then motivated to publish collections of plays by an individual playwright (Penhall: Plays One, Plays Two etc.).

Little and McLaughlin note that the attitude behind Daldry's "legendary season of new playwrights" (Rickson in Little and McLaughlin 298) in 1994 laid the ground for the 'in-yer-face' movement of the 1990s (284). As such, they attest that Daldry "set out deliberately to disorientate audiences and critics with a flood of unpredictable new work" (284). When it comes to the new kind of theatre and drama that emerged at the Royal Court in the mid-1990s, Little and McLaughlin distinguish between "in-yer-face", or 'blood and sperm' plays, and others. They quote Whybrow, who finds that

[...] 'blood and sperm' were part of a narrow tributary which ran through the Court for just three years and many 'remarkable plays didn't fit that definition', in particular three of the 'legendary' plays of the '90s, Martin McDonagh's *Beauty Queen of Leenane*, Jez Butterworth's *Mojo* and Conor McPherson's *The Weir* (295).

And indeed, it was plays like *Mojo* – a young writer’s debut that won the Laurence Olivier Award, an Evening Standard Award and the George Devine Award – and *The Weir* that were the largest successes for the Royal Court in the 1990s.

The new policy in producing new work can be directly linked to Stephen Daldry’s policy of expansion and his return to George Devine’s strategies in championing young writers. Whybrow explains his take, as a Literary Manager, on the Court orienting itself towards the 1950s:

In my view, the Royal Court should programme on the main stage or in the studio theatre according to the nature of the play, not the status of the playwright. In 1995 my argument for programming new plays on the main stage was easily corroborated by the Royal Court’s programming from 1956 onwards, when there was no studio theatre. Many of the defining plays of the 1950s and 1960s were first plays and plays by young playwrights: John Osborne *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer*, Arnold Wesker *The Kitchen*, *Chicken Soup with Barley* and *The Wesker trilogy*, John Arden *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* and Edward Bond *Saved*.

In the 1990s the Royal Court recaptured that pioneering spirit, programming many new playwrights and increasingly producing new plays by new playwrights on the ‘main stage’. The decision to produce a new play by a new playwright in the studio was either cautious or strategic. (E-mail to the author)

During the “new writing revolution of the mid-1990s” (310), the Royal Court appeared to many who were working there like a tight-knit family: “it’s extraordinary that you could walk into the back of the stalls and have a bowl of soup with what are now some of the finest writers, actors and directors in the English language” (Lloyd Hutchinson in Little and McLaughlin 310). Lisa Makin, head of casting at the Royal Court, remembers:

From time to time Stephen delegated so much that he didn’t know what I was doing. [At one point] I was struggling [...] I thought, I can’t possibly do that on my own, so I tore around to Stephen and said, ‘I need to talk to you right now’, and he said, ‘Darling not now; I’m going to do a photo shoot for *Vogue*’. (311).

But Daldry’s strategy worked. In 1995, the Royal Court was producing twice as many plays as four years earlier (102), and a season of ‘Royal Court Classics’ went to the West End – in post-Thatcher fashion, sponsored by the *Evening Standard* (102). Also in 1995, the Royal Court won the Prudential Award for the Theatre and the Peter Brook Empty Space Award. Daldry’s greatest achievement, however, was the seeing through of the refurbishment of the Royal Court building.

The £15.8m was an outstandingly huge amount of money to be awarded to a theatre. Even old friends of the theatre raised their eyebrows at the importance the Court was suddenly given by the grant, Lesser attests (107): not everybody took its prominence for granted. An anecdote told by Lesser about Daldry and a taxi-driver show that not only the theatre scene felt this:

[W]hen Daldry asked the driver to pull over at the theatre in Sloane Square I heard the cabbie mutter, ‘Oh the place that just got that bloody huge chunk of money.’ ‘Yes, what do you think of that?’ responded Daldry, always ready to engage. ‘I think it’s bloody

awful,' said the cabbie. 'The money should be going to cancer research instead.' 'But those charities are going to have their chance later,' Daldry began [...]. (Lesser 108)

For the Court the £15.8m, however, came with a condition: the grant had to be matched with £9m.

At a fundraising dinner recorded for the BBC's Omnibus Special on the Royal Court¹⁶³ Daldry comments on his funding plans: "Partnership funding is 25%... 25% of the money we need to raise for our project in this case is going to be 24 million pounds, which is rather a large amount" (BBC tape 36 51). In order to hit £24m, Daldry had to raise more than one quarter of them. That such an amount of money could only come from private sponsors becomes clear when looking at the Royal Court's financial plans.

Vicki Heywood, the Court's General Manager at the time, describes the Court's general viability apart from the lottery award: "[W]e received just over a million pounds of subsidy a year. The turn-over of the Company is about three point five million, and the rest of the money that we make through the box office and sponsorship and donations" (BBC roll 35 8).

The fight for money was not easy, as can be told from yet another example in 1996. Even though the lottery money was exclusively to be spent on the rebuild, a very important branch of sponsoring for the Royal Court, more precisely the Theatre Upstairs, withdrew its support: the London Borough Grants Scheme. This was particularly unexpected since the Royal Court held a confirmed offer of grants through to March 1997 (Joynson, 22 Feb. 1996). Heywood wrote: "The removal of the grant will temporarily close and substantially curtail the activity of the Theatre Upstairs – one of the very few producing studio theatres left in London" (Heywood, 6 Mar. 1996). Daniel Silverstone, director of the London Borough Grants Committee, argued that it was not due to the Royal Court having received lottery funding that the grant of £37,027 (Joynson, 22 Feb. 1996) – "two percent of the theatre's annual turnover" – had been withdrawn (Silverstone, 19 Apr. 1996). The Royal Court was given the chance to appeal, and on 31 May 1996 – after months of correspondence and a hearing – it was decided that the grant would be re-instated for the year 1996/1997 (Joynson, 4 June 1996).

It becomes apparent that the money hunt – in spite of having been granted a huge amount of it – was becoming a main priority to Daldry and his team:

1 Who are your sponsors? [Besides Pathe].
S[tephen Daldry] We have a number of different. In terms of the large chunks of money that are coming in, [...] at the moment, the only ones are the ones we are announcing and there are others that we are not announcing because the companies don't wish to be announced [...]; Hugo Boss, we will be announcing; the New Yorker magazine.

163 The flyer for the program announces it as *An Insider's Guide to Surviving a Major Lottery Award*. It was aired in autumn 1996, directed by David Lan and produced by Stephen Daldry and David Lan. On unreleased material for the program, Royal Court staff are joking that a suitable working title might have been "A boy and his building" or "A boy and his theatre" (BBC tape 23 37).

- 3 Oh.
 S We'll be announcing. Good old M[arks] and S[pencers].
 3 Well M and S have paid for over many years for the Young Writers
 Festival.
 S Oh yeah.
 3 – W H Smith we've a relationship, although that's slightly tenuous at
 the moment because they've got, they're having a tough time them-
 selves.

(BBC tape 45 9)

It was a long list of sponsors that Daldry and his team could secure. The extent to which fundraising became Daldry's second nature can be seen in the sponsorship by Hugo Boss: in expectation of a £100,000 donation for the Royal Court bar Daldry agreed to only wear Hugo Boss suits in public for the rest of his life (BBC tape 42 6). Speaking of 'strings' attached, in regard to securing funds from Audrey Skirball-Kenis Daldry commented: "I spent a lot of time watching her horses race at Santa Anita track in Los Angeles, and that was instrumental in making that 1994 season happen" (Little and McLaughlin 286). For Daldry – the director and Artistic Director – the refurbishment of the Royal Court became "the most important – certainly the most expensive and certainly the most exciting production probably" (BBC tape 42 6-7).

Not only the refurbishment of the Sloane Square home of the English Stage Company but also the company's move to the Ambassadors Theatre and the Duke of York's¹⁶⁴ had to be financially secured. Furthermore, the West End seasons had to be programmed and contracted. Money for the Royal Court meant careful and sometimes complicated politics. Aspects – beyond the usual Arts Council's report – restricted the handling of the Lottery money. As mentioned, the Act of Parliament that had transferred the lottery money into the hands of the Arts Councils foresaw that the money was only to be used for capital projects: "the money can only be spent and that's by act of parliament it's not by our choice or the Arts Council, it's an act of parliament that it can only be spent on capital projects throughout the building" (Stephen Daldry on BBC roll 4 3). As such, many building projects in the arts sector – not only the Royal Court – flourished after 1994. At a conference at the Royal Institute of British Architecture, Daldry pointed out that "[i]t's [...] an extraordinary moment. The National Lottery has provided us with probably the most important means of cultural regeneration since the war" (BBC tape 42 7). Yet, he also adds that

[...] it may not last, the pressures from the Treasury are very real, this might just be a window of opportunity, rather than a cultural regeneration. There is the real problem that [...] we are building these fantastic kitchens, that don't seem to have any food to cook in them. (BBC tape 42 8)

164 Productions meant for the Theatre Upstairs went to the Ambassadors. It was divided into two spaces (Daldry in Aragay et al. 6, 10). The Duke of York's accommodated productions for the Theatre Downstairs.

The lights went out in Sloane Square after the performance of Howard Korder's *The Lights* (1996) in July 1996, and the rebuild of the Royal Court began. The plan was to return in 1999. Due to building work and problems with raising the matching funds required, the initial date of return in September 1998 had to be postponed (Roberts, *Stage* 227).

As mentioned, the matching funds agreement asked that the Court raise another £9m in order to be granted the Lottery money. The Court managed to gain another £2.5m from the Arts Council. A deadline said that by April 1999 another £7m had to be raised. Another four were, and the remaining three were taken on by the Jerwood Foundation. The strings attached to the latter fund added the phrase 'The Jerwood Theatres at the Royal Court' to the façade of the building, just above the 'Royal Court', respectively the auditoria were called 'The Jerwood Theatre Downstairs' and 'The Jerwood Theatre Upstairs'. Daldry stepped down as the Artistic Director in 1998, but still oversaw the building process, which took until 1999. Rickson was appointed Daldry's successor in August 1997.

Tony Blair took over office from John Major in 1997 and the government began to put more money towards the arts. However, when taking a closer look, one sees that the early years of Labour rule saw a cut in the Arts Council funds – despite Blair's pre-election promise to invest in the arts – leaving many theatres close to bankruptcy (Billington, *State* 363). In the summer of 1998, the National Campaign for the Arts stated that since 1992 the value of Arts Council grants to producing theatres had fallen by twenty percent and the cumulative loss in core funding over the last decade totalled £12m (364). Thus, from 1997 to 1999 the theatres suffered under what must be seen as a crisis in public spending.

After this "destructive two-year straightjacket on arts funding" (375), there was a drastic turn-around in 1999: the four years following that period saw an expansive growth in funding as public spending rose. Billington writes: "It was Blair's and Gordon Brown's eventual commitment to increased spending that rescued the theatre from the doldrums" (365). In September 1999, the Arts Council of England had announced a review of the regional theatres – the Boyden Report – and in the early 2000s it published a National Policy for Theatre in England based on £25m of additional governmental arts funding (375). The effects following the Boyden Report were visible in the regions and London leading to rises in grants all over England¹⁶⁵. Most theatres profited from the report (377).

Even though the Royal Court was not in the Sloane Square building between 1996 and 2000, the new artistic policies on the programming of plays Downstairs continued to

165 "The Manchester Royal Exchange got a rise of thirty-six percent, Derby Playhouse eighty-two per cent, London's Almeida ninety-six per cent, Salisbury Playhouse a hundred per cent, the Palace Theatre, Watford, 147 per cent, London's Gate Theatre (admittedly starting from a tiny base) a staggering 381 per cent" (Billington, *State* 377).

show an effect during the Court's time in the West End. As such, Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* (1998) was programmed for the main stage at the Duke of York's. Not only was this – according to Ian Rickson – a very brave decision, it was also one of the most expensive productions ever done by the Royal Court (Little and McLaughlin 374). Graham Whybrow explains the situation between 1996 and 2000 and the problem at the end of the 1990s:

From 1996 to 1999 the Royal Court was producing in its temporary Theatre Downstairs (at the Duke of York's Theatre) and Theatre Upstairs (two theatres, the 'Circle' and 'Stage' spaces at The Ambassadors) during the redevelopment of the Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square. Completion of the new building was incrementally postponed, delayed from May 1999 to February 2000. The artistic team's offices were still above The Ambassadors during that time, but we had contracted to return the theatre itself in May 1999 to Ambassador Theatre Group. With the delays, we were frustrated that the Royal Court had no theatre to produce plays for what became a nine-month period.

In 1999, the Royal Court Theatre Downstairs reverted to the Duke of York's Theatre, that is, a 'West End' commercial theatre, where we transferred (from the Theatre Upstairs at The Ambassadors) the Royal Court production of Conor McPherson's *The Weir*.

In May 1999 the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs reverted to the (temporarily renamed) New Ambassadors Theatre, which from that month was programmed by Ambassador Theatre Group. (E-mail to the author)

The rebuild of the Royal Court Theatre was a major milestone in the history of the theatre. A dream, decades old and dreamed by every Artistic Director of the Royal Court, finally came true under the supervision of Stephen Daldry. Yet, the question remained whether the new "Jerwood theatres at the Royal Court" were still the "Royal Court".

In January 2000, the reopening performance of the Royal Court – Conor McPherson's *Dublin Carol* (2000) – had to be relocated to the Old Vic due to delays in the building process. In February 2000, "the building known as the Jerwood theatres at the Royal Court" (386) finally reopened. The level of anticipation for the reopening of the building, however, can be said to have matched the level of criticism over the renaming of the theatre. Vicki Heywood recalls the Court had reached a "bit of a nemesis on fundraising" (387) when the Jerwood foundation stepped in. They offered a contribution of the missing amount of money in exchange for the renaming of the building in Sloane Square as "the Jerwood theatres at the Royal Court". The renaming was – compared to a full renaming into Jerwood Theatre, as originally suggested by the foundation – a rather mild solution to the name issue, yet at the same time, it showed a clear peak in the debate about private sponsorship in the theatre and the involvement of sponsors in the arts. Roberts quotes Peter Hall on the circumstance: "The Royal Court isn't the Jerwood theatre. It has a hundred years of history and Jerwood are buying those one hundred years for £3 million" (228-229). John Mortimer, as Chairman of the Council replied: "this is the age we live in. Like it or dislike it, we have got to live with it" (229). Little and McLaughlin opened the debate by quoting Heywood:

[A]s people started to use the building, they would come up to you and say 'It's wonderful, it's different, but you haven't changed it at all.' That, I think, is the secret of the

success. That was Steve Thomkins' [the architect] brilliance, in that he'd held on to all the atmospheres that he needed to, all the ghosts. (393)

However, not everybody felt the same about the new place. Graham Cowley recalls:

One of the reasons I left when I did was because I couldn't bear the thought of what was going to happen to the building. I loved it exactly as it was. I loved the fact that every wall had soaked in the atmosphere of all this great stuff that had gone on, almost uninterrupted, since 1880. (393)

It becomes clear that the lives of Daldry and his team in the mid-1990s largely circled around building and decoration plans, architectural meetings, dinners with sponsors, the Company's move to the West End, and the constant fear of not being able to match the Lottery grant on time. But the 1990s also brought a new movement in new writing to the Royal Court.

7.2 Renaissance. *Blasted* and the New Royal Court

[...] [There was] a threshold moment in British theatre in the mid-1990s, often seen as a renaissance in contemporary playwriting, as a new generation of young writers emerged with enormous energy. (Ian Rickson in Little and McLaughlin 433)

[T]he [...] trick – which was a technical trick – was figuring out how we could produce twice as much work from the sort of last days of Max's time in charge. And when the plays came through that really did create an impression of, an explosion of a new generation. Which is what you want to happen, really.

So it was both a technical trick of producing more to create a set of energy. But also the plays happened to be written by younger writers. (James Macdonald, personal interview)

Throughout the 1990s the Royal Court changed drastically – as a building, an institution, and artistically. And while embracing the new, it held on to its old myths. The myth of the early years of the Royal Court¹⁶⁶, from Devine's policies, to the Angry Young and the discovery of radical new writing found their way into the 1990s: into the policies of Stephen Daldry, into Daldry's fundraising speeches, into the label of the 'new Angry Young', it echoed in the rebuilding plans, and the move to the West End.

As the Arts Council report of 1994 has already shown, the narrative of the Court's pivotal role in British theatre from the 1950s on, as well as Daldry's role as the strong leader of this theatre were seen as the back bone of Daldry's efforts. In the following it will be analysed to which extent Daldry communicated the early years of the Royal Court – the 'golden age' of the 1950s – as a blueprint for the 1990s and the changes that the theatre went through, and how he positioned his own persona in this narrative. It will be argued that Daldry's policies were designed to be direct references to the Devine era to install a strong narrative about the theatre's legacy to promote the Royal Court to

166 See chapter 3.

sponsors and funding bodies. Daldry commented on the changes he introduced at the Royal Court:

I changed the organization of the theatre from Max towards what I thought Devine had done. George had run it with his Associates.... to make sure there was never any single dominance of taste. [...] What I thought I do was set up a series of satellites who actually had much more freedom, not just in producing but also in commissioning. (Daldry in Roberts, *Stage* 219)

And just like Devine, Daldry pursued a line of full artistic independence. He channels Tony Richardson:

I'm in the enviable position to determine the direction myself. And we don't have to be audience-led. There is still a delight on my board when we have a flop. We're in the unique position of being able to fail. (Daldry in Lesser 95)

Here it seems that Daldry not only borrowed his artistic policy from George Devine, but also the rhetoric of the 'golden age'. Ian Rickson comments when referring to the picture of Devine behind Daldry's desk: "He seems to be turning into George Devine [...]. He's even getting to look like him" (113). David Lan comments:

The big difference between the Court in the first 20 years and the Court in the '90s and beyond was in the sense of its past. It became very self-referential and developed a sense of the importance of its legacy. Stephen used that very cannily to the Court's advantage: it was very good for supporting the massive fundraising activities that Stephen began, both in terms of the re-development but also just in order to support the theatre. (Little and McLaughlin 322)

Strongly following the guidelines Devine had once set for his work, Daldry and his Associates ventured out to discover new ways of expanding the theatre both on an artistic level and as a building. In the mid-1990s – much like back in Devine's time – this led to amazing and certainly unexpected successes. Only this time, there was more money involved: more money than had ever been granted to a theatre.

At first glance, the 1990s seem to bear a very strong resemblance to 'that great golden age of the Royal Court' in the 1950s. This was largely enforced by the 'new Angry Young' – the 'in-yer-face' movement – and Daldry's strategy to allow Devine's words and policies to shape his work as an Artistic Director.

The 1950s saw the Royal Court of 1888 and of the Granville Barker regime of 1904-1907 becoming Devine's writers' theatre of 1956. The building, Devine and the Angry Young Men are the key elements of the narrative of the early years, of the first season and the *annus mirabilis* (Findlater, *25 Years* 20) of the Royal Court. In the 1990s, the golden age seemed to repeat itself in a new building, a 'new Devine' and a 'new Angry Young'. Burton, however, in contrast to Daldry, states that the Court was not in a position anymore to follow the same kind of ideals Devine had followed. They did not have the same right to fail, they had to secure success in order to survive (Little and McLaughlin 385).

Stephen Daldry was the Artistic Director who built the 'new Royal Court' and allowed for new plays, and a new movement respectively, to enter his theatre. Daldry's

artistic policy had a clear focus on its referencing the narrative of the ‘golden years’. Daldry further presented himself as having a strong bias toward Devine concerning both policy and rhetoric – especially in the context of funding campaigns. What rounded off this image was the Angry Young. The new Angry Young is often connected with Sarah Kane’s *Blasted*, its production, and particularly the hype created in the press concerning it. It will be looked at how Daldry strove to enforce a narrative of a renaissance of the 1950s in the 1990s, with himself at the centre and as the initiator of a new golden age. In relation to this enforced image, the institutionalization of the Royal Court will be traced through the changing structures in leadership, sponsorship and artistic policy.

Daldry’s attempts to link himself to Devine (Lesser 114) strongly echo in the coincidence that the advent of a new Royal Court building happened almost at the same time as the much anticipated arrival of a new Angry Young. Graham Saunders speaks of a longing for new political plays in Britain’s theatre world of the mid-1990s:

It was during this atmosphere of nostalgia for another *Look Back in Anger* that less than three weeks after Osborne’s death, on 12 January 1995, a new play called *Blasted* would premiere at the Royal Court’s Theatre Upstairs by an unknown 23-year-old woman that would share some striking similarities with *Look Back in Anger*. (Saunders 2)

Dan Rebellato similarly speaks of the link between *Blasted* and *Look Back in Anger*: “*Blasted* had something close to the *Look Back in Anger* effect” (Aragay et al. 167). With the production of Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* in the Theatre Upstairs, the Royal Court experienced an unexpected hype: the press were storming the theatre and bombarding Kane. *The Independent* commented: “*Blasted* [...] has re-established the Royal Court as the home of Angry Young writers” (Bayley).

Blasted was – in an early draft – first premiered in July 1993 at Birmingham University where Kane was still an MA Creative Writing student (Iball 5-6). This production was attended by Mel Kenyon of the literary agency Casarotto Ramsey, who became Kane’s agent. When Kenyon sent the play to James Macdonald at the Royal Court, Macdonald

[...] thought it was extraordinary, so I arranged to meet Sarah. [...] We offered to do a reading of the play straight away, for a small invited audience. After we’d done the reading a couple of members of staff came up to me ‘I found that so difficult that if you did programme it in the end, I’m not sure I can work on it.’ (Little and McLaughlin 305)

Blasted, similar to *Look Back in Anger*, was by many not recognised as the success it became. The controversy, however, was well expected: Daldry even warned the sponsors of the season in the Theatre Upstairs – the Jerwood Foundation – about a possible commotion (Lesser 94). Ian Rickson comments: “Initially we didn’t value *Blasted* as highly as we do now. It took some encouragement from people like Caryl Churchill to give us the ultimate confidence to programme the play” (305). Sarah Kane herself felt that the Royal Court was rather unsure in the handling of her play:

The Court had programmed the play into a dead spot. They didn’t really know what to do with it. A lot of people in the building didn’t want to do it – they were a bit embarrassed

by it so they put it into a spot right after Christmas when nobody was going to the theatre and hopefully nobody would notice. (Saunders 305)

Mel Kenyon agrees:

The Court read the play and acquired the rights relatively quickly but kept not programming it. Sarah and I got quite distressed because we increasingly got the feeling there was some kind of dissent in the building. [...] However, there wasn't a battle with them to do the play, there was just this delay. Then they programmed it for January. (Kenyon in Saunders 146)

Dan Rebellato sees a reason for the hype that followed the play in this programming. He states:

Blasted was almost accidental. Half of the Artistic Committee at the Royal Court didn't want *Blasted* on. One of the reasons why it created that commotion was that it was programmed in January, which is a quiet month for London theatre, so that a few theatre critics made a really big splash out of it and caused a sensation. (Rebellato in Aragay et al. 167)

This is a fact Phil Gibby of *The Stage* already saw on 9 February 1995:

If *Blasted* hadn't had a press night in a very quiet week for news, then you'd probably never have heard about it at all. [...] The real revelation of Kane's first play is that while the Royal Court is still blissfully capable of courting controversy, the nation's theatre critics are completely unequipped to deal with it. Now that's what I call a shocker.

It is true that the press's reactions to *Blasted* were enormous. Most famously Jack Tinker of the *Daily Mail* called the play a "disgusting feast of filth" (Tinker, "Feast of Filth"). Nick Curtis of the *Evening Standard* wrote on 19 January "I don't think I have yet seen a play that can beat Sarah Kane's sustained onslaught on the sensibilities of sheer, unadulterated brutality" (Curtis). He goes on: "Rape, torture, cannibalism, death: they are all here, over two uninterrupted hours. It might be a savage indictment of a society bereft of values and incapable of compassion, but it feels too random and relentless for that"; and eventually closes, "this is no more than an artful chamber of horrors, designed to shock and nothing more". Michael Billington wrote: "I simply left wondering how such naïve tosh managed to scrape past the Court's normally judicious play-selection committee" ("The Good Fairies"). Billington sums up: "By the time the blinded hack is reduced to digging up the floorboards to devour a dead baby (I did warn you) we have supped so full with horrors that we are reduced to bombed-out indifference". Charles Spencer of the *Daily Telegraph* wrote on 20 January:

[*Blasted*] is a grave error of judgment by the theatre's Artistic Director Stephen Daldry. *Blasted* isn't just disgusting, it's pathetic. Miss Kane may kid herself that she has written a searing indictment of Britain today. What she had actually produced is a lazy, tawdry piece of work without an idea in its head beyond an adolescent desire to shock. [...] *Blasted* is a work entirely devoid of intellectual or artistic merit. ("Awful Shock")

Sheridan Morley for the *Spectator* took a rather broad approach to the critique on *Blasted*:

The real scandal is that it is a truly terrible little play [...]. This would not much matter were *Blasted* being staged commercially, or at the expense of the cast and author: there is no case, even here, for censorship, though those who quote [Howard Brenton's] *Romans in Britain*¹⁶⁷ and Edward Bond's *Saved* in mitigation might care to remember that those two were truly awful little plays which have rapidly and rightly been consigned to a non-revivalist scrapheap. No, the issue here is one of judgment: Stephen Daldry, and if he is to be believed an entire panel of other dramatists, actually read this play and decided it merited production. Even if no other play had been sent in to them for the last decade, they would have been better off not doing this one.

Jane Edwards of *Time Out* felt that until Kane “learns to create a world that has some conviction and to go easy on the pile-up of horror, all she is going to do is send audiences laughing into the night rather than stirred or thinking” (J. Edwards).

Yet, not every member in the audience was sent laughing into the night. Paul Taylor of the *Independent* commented: “Sitting through *Blasted* is like having your face rammed into an overflowing ash tray, just for starters, and then having your whole head held down in a bucket of offal” (“Courting”). The correspondent of the *Sunday Times* found that “the audience sat in stony silence throughout – but for the one obligatory walk out – and the applause at the end was muted” (Doughty). Charles Spencer – on 19 January – felt that “hardened theatre critics looked in danger of parting company with their suppers at the Royal Court Theatre last night. [...] You would need to be deaf, dumb and blind, not to be disturbed by [*Blasted*]” (“Theatre Critics Cracked”). Roger Foss commented, “it’s a bit like trying to turn freshly-used toilet paper into art” and asks – in Spencer’s sense – “Pass the sick bag!” (Foss). *The Observer* wrote: “It does not deserve attention, but it demands it. It made me feel sick and giggly with shock” (“It does not deserve attention”). *The Times* put it more mildly: “Artfully constructed and distressingly watchable, [*Blasted*’s] unmitigated horrors and numbing amorality leave a sour taste in the mind” (“Shocking Scenes”). The *Daily Mail* on 27 January called the play “a bucket of bilge dumped over the audiences at the Royal Court in the name of new writing” (“Killer Thriller”). Aleks Sierz – the scholar who was to invent the label ‘in-yer-face’ – found:

It is a pity that [the media] have set their sights on *Blasted* – they have made a rather dull play notorious. Part of a season of first plays at a venue which exists to encourage experimental new writing, *Blasted* turns out to be not so much a hot spot as a dud.

With its scenes of rape (male and female), masturbation, defecation, eye munching and baby eating, *Blasted* is a sequence of vile and violent acts. Mostly unexplained, they are not gratuitous so much as unrelenting. The simplicity of the message – that violence begets violence – shows how easy it is to write a feel-bad play.

Though Kane understands the psychology of violence – and shows it without a trace of glamour – she is unable to do more than shock. She makes you feel but fails to make you think. There is no story, no explanation, no motivation. The horror is mind-numbing –

167 Brenton’s play (1980) was produced by the National Theatre. It was investigated by the police after Mary Whitehouse CBE had initiated a private prosecution due to a scene of homosexual rape (Brenton).

and boring. Although brilliantly acted, the play will never be a classic. (“Hysterical Clichés”)

Sierz would later explain that his review was written under shock: “I wrote ‘Kane’s play makes you feel but it doesn’t make you think.’ This turned out to be wrong: it does make you think, but only after you’ve got over the shock of seeing it” (Sierz, *In-Yer-Face* 99). In his 2000 publication, he comments: “*Blasted* is Kane’s best work. Harsh, humane and grimly humorous, it’s not an easy play, but it’s written with passionate intensity” (106). Back in the day though, few papers offered such a positive perspective. The *Guardian* took a more neutral stance, when it argued against Tinker’s remarks, and titled on 20 January “Blasted: A deeply moral and compassionate piece of theatre or simply a disgusting feast of filth?” (“Blasted: A deeply moral and compassionate piece”).

Unlike with *Look Back in Anger*, the explosion with *Blasted* came literally overnight. Stephen Daldry recalls:

We had two press nights for *Blasted*. I was there on the first press night and I came away with the impression that there was nothing that anyone could really get upset about legally. We were not doing anything particularly outrageous in terms of public decency. I went to New York for the day to raise some money and I missed the second press night. That was when the *Daily Mail*’s Jack Tinker saw the play. I remember coming back from New York overnight on the day after the second press night; the first paper I read was the *Guardian* and I realized that the review took up the whole of the back page. Then I went into the other papers and I knew that we were in trouble. I literally went straight to the theatre and the BBC radio van was already parked outside. And it did not stop for days and days. (9)

James Macdonald recalls the first press night:

I sat next to Jack Tinker. The evening was grim as fuck. In a theatre seating 62, a serried wall of 45 critics failed to grasp the gallows humour and strange magic of Sarah Kane’s *Blasted*.

The following day, in what was obviously a quiet week for genuine news, every editor and their dog put a journalist on that case looking for the author. (Little and McLaughlin 306)

Kane went into hiding and the papers kept discussing her play. The *Daily Express* even quoted Royal Court staff on Kane’s reluctance to comment on her play: “She is gone into hiding which is a bit rich. If she had so much to say in her plays, surely she should have the backbone to explain why she did what she did” (Graham). Anne Mayer, at the time press officer at the Royal Court, remembers: “The Royal Court was under siege – phones ringing every second, interviews in every type of media, Sarah in hiding, the play instantly sold out. It was horrible but exhilarating too” (Little and McLaughlin 306). Aleks Sierz later commented on the commotion:

I do not think that there is one reason, or even five reasons, why Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* created the enormous fuss that it did. In a sense, it’s a mystery. All I can say is that, objectively, it was written with a new sensibility, and that the play’s shock value became

amplified when the media started talking about it. The Royal Court were amazed; they had not publicized the play at all. It was a total surprise to them. (Aragay et al. 149)

Playwrights like Edward Bond, Caryl Churchill, and David Edgar defended Kane's writing and her play. Bond wrote: "The humanity of *Blasted* moved me. I worry for those too busy or so lost not to see its humanity. And as a playwright, I am moved by the craft and control of such a young writer" ("A Blast"). Eventually Kane answered the critics and gave interviews: the media now focussed on the young woman. Clare Bayley of *The Independent* spoke to Kane and quotes her: "Sick? Who are you calling sick? What's really sick is the reaction to my play". Bayley concludes: "The seriousness of Kane's intentions cannot be doubted, and the Royal Court is standing by her". The myth of the 'new Angry Young' at the Royal Court materialized. That the controversy over *Blasted* was big can, however, easily be understood. It is not only (porno-)graphic, but also extremely violent in its plot.

Blasted has 4 scenes. All scenes are set in a very expensive hotel room in Leeds (3). Scene one and two portrait the 43-year-old Ian and the 21-year-old Cate, in their abusive relationship. Ian insults her (5), forces himself onto her several times (15, 17, 22), and once simulates having sex with her while holding a gun to her head (27). Cate first rejects him, plays along, and finally performs oral sex on him (29-30), finishing it off by violently biting Ian's penis (31). Shortly after, there is a knock on the door, Ian opens and it is a soldier with a sniper rifle (36). The soldier enters the room and inspects it. Meanwhile, Cate escapes through the bathroom window (38). While the soldier stands and urinates on the bed, there is a huge explosion (39).

Scene three shows the same hotel room, only now it is blasted by a mortar bomb. Ian and the soldier are alone. The soldier talks about his raping (43) and killing (47) people. He then rapes Ian at gunpoint (49). Finally he sucks Ian's eyes out and eats them (50). Scene four opens to the dead body of the soldier, who killed himself (50), and the blinded Ian. Cate enters, carrying a baby (51) that was given to her. She looks for food for the baby, but the soldier ate it all (53). When Ian tries to shoot himself with an empty gun (56), Cate realizes that the baby has died (57). At the beginning of scene five, Cate is burying the baby (57). She leaves again, leaving Ian behind. He masturbates, tries to strangle himself with his bare hands, shits, laughs hysterically, has a nightmare (59), cries, lies weak with hunger, digs up the baby and eats it (60). Cate returns with some food and feeds Ian. He thanks her (61).

Blasted gave the Royal Court a new direction in the eyes of critics and academics. Graham Saunders comments on the success of *Blasted*: "*Blasted* reenergized the theatre in the 1990s when it had gone through a lean patch" (Saunders in Aragay et al. 174). As such *Blasted* was eventually stylized as the starting point of a new movement, a movement that was thereafter often referred to as 'in-yer-face'.

The term 'in-yer-face' was coined by Aleks Sierz in his book *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (2000). Sierz describes 'in-yer-face' as:

Any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message. It is a theatre of sensation: it jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm. Often such drama employs shock tactics, or is shocking because it is new in tone or structure or because it is bolder or more experimental than what audiences are used to. Questioning moral norms, it affronts the ruling ideas of what can or should be shown onstage; it also taps into more primitive feelings, smashing taboos, mentioning the forbidden, creating discomfort. (*In-Yer-Face* 4)

Alison Robert wrote in the *Evening Standard* on 26 January 1995: “the latest brand of violent art is putting amorality and random brutality centre-stage”. Referring to Kane’s *Blasted*, Oliver Stone’s film *Natural Born Killers* (1994), Roger Avary’s film *Killing Zoe* (1993), and Tracy Lett’s *Killer Joe* (1993), she argued that “it is interesting to ask why, all of a sudden, a significant number of young writers and directors are employing apparently senseless violence as a means of expression, and what they are trying to say by doing so”. Robert does not give an answer, only concludes: “Whatever the reasons, Daldry, Kane, Dromgoole [the Artistic Director at the Bush Theatre, that had produced *Killer Joe*], Tarantino, Avary et al. will ignore the so-called moralists; an awful lot of blood has yet to be spilled” (Robert). And surely, these new pieces of theatre set a new trend. Saunders writes:

Another notable effect of *Blasted* is that it came to be seen, in much the same way as *Look Back in Anger* over thirty years previously, as a catalyst in restoring the fortunes of new writing to the British stage. The impact and notoriety of the play *seemed* to spawn and bring to prominence a group of young dramatists whose work, like those who followed Osborne such as John Arden and Arnold Wesker, came to be seen – rightly or wrongly – as sharing similar themes and styles. (Saunders 4)

Aleks Sierz has, however, rightly commented that to use the date of the premiere of *Blasted* as the beginning of this trend in British theatre would be wrong (“Cool Britannia?” 325). Saunders adds, “in fact the play that preceded it in the Theatre Upstairs in December 1994 (*Ashes and Sands* by Judy Upton) was perhaps the first play that provided signs of what was to come from this new group of writers” (Saunders 4). *Blasted* certainly created a hype, yet it cannot be seen as a single event triggering a specific wave of new writing. Stephen Daldry explains:

The controversy started with Sarah Kane’s *Blasted*. However, the Royal Court had been putting on ‘in-yer-face’ plays before that. For example, in my first season we staged Anthony Neilson’s *The Penetrator*¹⁶⁸ at the Theatre Upstairs. But it did not cause an uproar; people weren’t screaming yet. In that first season we also put on Joe Penhall’s *Some Voices*¹⁶⁹ and Nick Grosso’s *Peaches*¹⁷⁰ good strong plays by writers who obviously had

168 *The Penetrator* was first performed at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh on 12 August 1993. It transferred to the Finborough Theatre and then to the Royal Court’s Theatre Upstairs, where it opened on 12 January 1994; precisely a year before *Blasted* (Aragay et al. 12).

169 Joe Penhall’s *Some Voices* opened on 15 September 1994.

170 Nick Grosso’s *Peaches* opened on 10 November 1994.

enormous potential. It was *Blasted*, really, that triggered the controversy. (Daldry in Aragay et al. 9)

Kane's play as such is wrongly understood as the beginning of a new movement. Still, it quickly became a flag ship of the 'in-yer-face' theatre, and overshadowed new writing that did not fall into the same category. In this Dan Reballato sees a strong resemblance to *Look Back in Anger*:

The moment around *Blasted* and [Mark Ravenhill's] *Shopping and Fucking* [(1996)] is considered a big renaissance in British theatre writing, and that's like the *Look Back in Anger* moment in the sense that because people talked about *Blasted* and *Shopping and Fucking* and the plays that came after, there was a shadow thrown over the previous ten years, so people have stopped being interested at all in what happened in the 1980s and 1990s. There are very few interesting playwrights from the pre-Sarah Kane period, such as Philip Ridley, Robert Holman or Chris Hannan, who are now totally obscure because the attention is so much on what Aleks Sierz calls 'in-yer-face' theatre. (Aragay et al. 159)

Nicholas de Jongh sees another similarity between 'in-yer-face' and the 'Angry Young Man' in the marketing value of these labels:

'In-yer-face' is a wonderful marketing idea in the same sense that the press officer at the Royal Court devised the wonderful slogan, the 'Angry Young Man'. One could gather a collection of totally unrelated artists with this designation and create the illusion of a movement. Similarly, one could do this with 'in-yer-face theatre', but its subversive force and potency is absurdly exaggerated. (Aragay et al. 131)

He argues instead that Bond's *Saved* and *Early Morning* are much stronger "in-yer-bullocks" (131). De Jongh agrees with Saunders, Daldry, and Reballato that the attention *Blasted* received, and how it was heightened as ringing in a new movement, was blown out of proportion. However, he is not quite right in arguing that the new Angry Young much like the old Angry Young was only a slogan devised by the Royal Court. With Kane's play it was not the Court that came up with the term, but the press itself. Paul Taylor of *The Independent* even suggests a plot behind the mischief *Blasted* faced in the press:

It's certainly the case that very few journalists come out well from the 'Blasted' brouhaha – not least this critic. Not only were the reviews almost unanimously hostile, but the play provoked an astonishing level of moral outrage which spread to the news pages of papers that normally regarded theatre as entirely superfluous. I was present, straight after the first-night performance when two of my colleagues on other papers led the charge by deciding to cook up this play as a news item. My informed guess is that: a) neither of them had been profoundly offended by the play; and b) their subsequent behaviour was not motivated by malice, but by an almost childish sense of journalistic fun – the thought that it would be a wheeze to drag the theatre out of the ghetto of the theatre pages and into mainstream public attention. (P. Taylor, "Sarah Kane was a writer")

Many had been waiting for a change – of which the letter in the *Guardian* signed by eighty-seven playwrights (Saunders 2) in 1994, clearly is an indicator – and it is true that the one who waits is more willing to see the awaited. It is, however, also true that

the Royal Court under Daldry had purposely re-directed its policy towards Devine's idea of finding and sponsoring new writing: they were producing twice as many plays as under Stafford-Clark's reign. James Macdonald describes the Royal Court's agenda in finding a new direction:

It was about finding a new generation of kids who were writing very differently. They were very often influenced by old writers, but writing in their own way. It took us a while to find those writers, but there they were. (Personal interview)

A new style – to many, and the press particularly – was certainly to be found in Sarah Kane's *Blasted*. The fact that there had been 'in-yer-face' plays before Kane only shows the Royal Court's nurturing of the new throughout the years: Mel Kenyon knew that Macdonald would like *Blasted*, so she sent it to him and he arranged a meeting with Kane. Starting with the same policy, Devine had been looking for new plays when he placed an ad in *The Stage*, received *Look Back in Anger* and arranged to meet John Osborne.

James Macdonald felt that the way the Court changed, was much more fundamental than the hype around *Blasted* suggested:

When you're in the middle of it you don't really worry about the hype, I think. You have to be aware of the wider picture of what everybody is writing. It felt very right, looking back on that moment, politically. The thing that everybody responded to was writers being incredibly angry about the world as they saw it suddenly. And that felt refreshing and honest and true and maybe that's why we had such a big reaction to it. In that sense it was a moment, wasn't it. I mean, what was that moment? How many plays were there? I mean it's *Blasted*, it's *Shopping and Fucking*, which is quite deliberately, certainly from a director's point of view trying to write, to do another play in that domain. What else was in it? I mean there has been a book in the 1960 *Anger and After* naming it or not naming it and writers are always more complicated than that. You can put them in a movement, but actually Martin McDonagh is different from Conor McPherson. So I think the hype probably under-represents what's going on really. (Personal interview)

Macdonald, however, also acknowledges the Angry Young in the 1990s as a movement:

The Angry Young thing that we had, and looking back at it, it makes sense that it was in the culture, but we didn't know that it was there, when we started. And then the plays started coming in and we had a response to them. And then obviously academics go away and say 'Uh, look, it's a school, it's a group, it's in-yer-face, it's all that stuff'. We just put on the plays that we wanted, that seemed to be speaking to the culture; and when you start to do that, of course, you encourage other people to write. So you generate an energy and it becomes possible for other people to want to join that. (Personal interview)

According to Macdonald the finding of the 'new Angry Young' writers was accidental, much like Devine's finding Osborne.

I think it's up to you to make the analogy, but it definitely wasn't conscious in the way that it happened. I mean, of course, you are interested in this story because it was successful at both occasions, but in both cases I would say, it's partly accidental. Devine got lucky that he found John Osborne, and can you imagine the history of the Royal Court if he hadn't found a couple of writers that young people had a very strong response to. That's sort of what made the theatre. Writers don't – and certainly then – didn't grow on

trees. So he got lucky there and he knew what to do with that luck over time. (Personal interview)

'In-yer-face' and the Angry Young Men movement alike speak of the Royal Court Theatre's successfully promoting the new in British drama. Even if *Blasted* alone cannot be understood as the single play responsible, the new writing of the mid-1990s was still noticeably present, to critics and academics alike. Comparing the 'in-yer-face' to the 'Angry Young Men', like de Jongh, and Rebellato did, however leads to the question why both these movements in new writing seemed to differ from others. Must they not be named alongside plays like Bond's in the 1960s and Caryl Churchill's in the 1970s and 1980s that generated a similar hype to Kane's and Osborne's?

What sets *Blasted*, like *Look Back in Anger*, apart from other productions is their value in funds. What *Look Back in Anger* did for the Arts Council, *Blasted* did for the private sponsors: it proved the English Stage Company at the Royal Court artistically and economically valuable. To put it frankly, the success, the shock-turning-into-fame both productions saw, said loudly and clearly: this theatre is worth putting your money into. In the 1950s the English Stage Company had to convince the Arts Council to put a reasonable amount of funds into the Royal Court to start their first seasons. In early 1995, the Court was still before the Lottery money grant, and at a point when support had already been advised via the 1994 report, but not seen through. What sets *Look Back in Anger* and *Blasted* apart from the other plays, is the way in which they did not just help to convince funding bodies to continue their funding, but how they helped create whole new funds. In both cases to fund a new theatre building.

Look Back in Anger's run, both at the Royal Court and away, not only financed a large part of the early years, it also built the momentum the English Stage Company needed in order to stand out and be recognized as an important new company, not only by the theatre audiences, but most importantly by the Arts Council. *Blasted*, in a similar way, gave Daldry's reign at the Court the artistic notoriety and a momentum that it was able to explore financially through the Lottery funds and with private sponsors, and artistically at two West End theatres during the rebuild. It further built a strong argument regarding the gravity and importance of new work at the Royal Court. Thematically, again, pushing into the dark underbelly of human existence and upsetting a good number of critics, *Blasted* showed that the Royal Court still had a good amount of artistic force; it could still make people turn their heads. In regard to sponsors who wished to be seen, this was essential. It can therefore be argued that it was not merely the occurrence of the plays at the Court that called for the label of a new trend – both in 1956 and in 1995 – but the importance of such a trend, financially and artistically, to the funding of a new theatre building.

While it has been established that the instalment of the 'in-yer-face' did not come from the Royal Court marketing office, in the same way the 'Angry Young Man' did, Daldry still worked relentlessly to make sure his reign was to be perceived as just as pivotal as Devine's. Daldry and the trend around *Blasted* changed the kind of theatre the

Court appeared as. This is what Stephen Jeffreys, Literary Associate at the Court in the 1980s and 1990s, suggests: “Stephen (Daldry) was very good at creating an atmosphere. The famous season, the *Blasted* season that turned the theatre round in some ways and made it, again, a real home for new writing and a great place for young writers to be” (Little and McLaughlin 308).

The 1990s had become not only the time of rebuilding the reputation of the ‘Angry Young’ for the Royal Court, but also the time of reintroducing Devine’s policy. Stephen Daldry and his Associates – Macdonald and Rickson – took hold of the theatre, just like Devine and his Associates had in the 1950s, to not only allow new work in, but to actively seek it. With Daldry’s turning back to Devine’s tactics, it is not surprising that he also picked up Devine’s rhetoric, particularly in the funding campaign for the rebuild. Devine’s words can be found in many of Daldry’s speeches. Of course, it is clear that some of the things Devine said or wrote in the 1950s and 1960s have become dicta throughout the history of the Court. Still, it is noteworthy that Daldry’s handling Devine’s words was not merely by quoting his predecessor. Daldry incorporated Devine’s words into his speech without accrediting them to Devine. He let them stand as his own, as the following analysis of voice recordings shows.

The rebuild of the Royal Court was documented in an episode of the BBC Omnibus series, directed by the Royal Court’s Literary Manager David Lan and Daldry. The unedited transcripts of the episode not only tell the story of the development of the project, but also capture the fundraising campaign verbatim. One event in this campaign was a dinner with Gerry Robinson, at the time CEO of Granada television. When Daldry opened the evening with a speech, he said:

Choosing one’s theatre is a bit like choosing one’s church, and I suppose in many senses this dinner is not the last dinner or the last supper, but it is in fact the first supper. And I suppose what we’re looking for from the Royal Court, if it is a church and in some sense it is, is the high clergy of that church if you like, it’s a confused metaphor because it’s not just about high clergy, but also about missionaries. [...] Most of the churches that will undoubtedly be approaching you or may have done so, [...] of all, this church is the first church. We are sitting in Rome. (BBC tape 36 50)

It is Daldry’s clear aim to find sponsors helping to rebuild this ‘church’, the ‘first church’. His understanding of the Royal Court as the very ‘first church’ is highly questionable. Besides theatres such as the National Theatre it was clearly not the most important theatre in Britain. Even when perceived as a historical comment, the Royal Court was never the first theatre in Britain, not even the first to produce new plays, as the analysis of *Look Back in Anger* showed. Still, Daldry chooses, and slightly misquotes, Devine’s words to make this point:

You should choose your theatre like you choose your religion. Make sure you don’t get into the wrong temple. For me, the theatre is really a religion or way of life. You must decide what you feel the world is about and what you want so say about it, so that everything in the theatre you work in is the same thing. This will be influenced partly by the

man who is running it and the actual physical and economic conditions under which he works. (G. Devine in English Stage Company, *Ten* 1)

Daldry applies a rhetoric that invokes another era: Devine's era. As such, Daldry, here, creates a narrative that presents the Royal Court as a mythic theatre (BBC tape 36 52). He goes on by naming the great achievements of the Royal Court since the time when theatre was reinvented in Britain under the Granville-Barker regime. In Daldry's mirroring Devine, it is important to note how he, in his aim to fund the rebuilding of the Royal Court, not only refers to it as the home of the English Stage Company, but goes further back in its history to explain the legacy that is attached to the building. The Granville Barker legacy, after all, was the reason why Devine had set his eye on the Royal Court in the first place. He formulated this in his 'Royal Court Scheme' of 1953. Daldry continues his list of achievements by mentioning *Look Back in Anger*, the Angry Young Men, stage design and the great writers, directors and actors it brought forth. He continues:

What's important about the Court is that it is a theatre that's very much infused with the mythic quality, very much infused with its ghosts we call them, and I say I talk about ghosts because it's something that we're very keen to preserve. When I came to the Royal Court I was very anxious about the ghosts, I always thought that ghosts were there and not necessarily benign and I know that talking to Bill Gaskill – Bill Gaskill who's one of the artistic directors a very powerful one in the 60s – also felt the same and he actually burnt the archive in the alley, in his way of trying to exorcise the ghost, or the false gods perhaps of his new church, we all try to build on these ruins. What we've come to discover is these ghosts are benign and in fact trying to develop a project which the Royal Court encompasses, embraces and enhances that history, not destroys it enhances it as being terribly important. (BBC tape 36 52-53)

Daldry's invoking the ghosts of the church that is the Royal Court further builds on his strategy behind his quoting Devine. It is highly questionable that Gaskill burnt the entire archive, since it was never, in any of the publication on the Royal Court, not even in Gaskill's autobiography, mentioned, and a large part of the early archive can still be found at the Theatre and Performance Museum. Still, Daldry's rhetoric is successful as an invocation of Devine's ghost: he embraces Devine's 'benign ghost' and lets him join in with the new project. Daldry describes the Royal Court's aims in a fashion that strongly calls the original aims of the English Stage Company, as well as the corresponding Arts Council policies, in the 1950s, into mind: "It's not just about our church it's enabling the whole of the national theatre, the broader national theatre to flourish" (BBC tape 36 57). Daldry links this approach to the situation new writing was in during the 1990s:

Its importance is that it is about cultural regeneration and it's about cultural confidence. People in the press talk at the moment about 'why is there this huge energy in new writing in this country?' It's because simply the structures were there and the money was there to enable them to flourish. And you need to get those two things right at the sort of enabling end but also make sure that the plays go on. We are at the we are currently managing to... we make mistakes all the time, and we fail at the time and the writers fail... theatres have always held on to it's a controversial theatre it's not an easy church because we do

have, but we flirt with death if you like in order to survive, the only way that we possibly can survive. (BBC tape 36 57)

Not only does Daldry again invoke the famous ‘right to fail’, the contextualization of another phrase, originally used by Devine, also finds its way into Daldry’s assertions. When talking about the institutionalization of the Royal Court as a radical and opposing force to society, Devine had said: “I suppose in our minds we know that to be accepted completely by the middle, to be smiled upon by the top, is the first sweet kiss of death. So we carry on, flirting with death in order to live” (Roberts, *Court* 11). Daldry, unlike Devine, was not afraid of the institutionalization of the Court. He had already accepted the theatre’s role within the national theatre and even welcomed it for the sake of winning sponsors. His use of Devine’s phrase here, therefore, has a different meaning: flirting with death was linked to the financial survival of the theatre.

The ghosts of the Royal Court and Devine’s ghost in particular were very present for Daldry during the time of the rebuilding. He states so at the 1996 George Devine Awards:

George Devine [...] obviously is – perhaps even more so now than in previous years, particularly as we go towards the redevelopment of this theatre – somebody that we’re very aware of and that we’re very keen and pleased that the objectives when the English Stage Company was first created are being pursued totally as vigorously as he would have wanted. (BBC roll 43 8)

James Macdonald describes Daldry’s attitude towards Devine:

I don’t think anyone sensible running that theatre would look back over what Devine actually said, particularly at a sort of fulcrum moment where you’re talking about rebuilding which just means you have to do soul searching about what the function of the building is. So I think Stephen liked to... – very deliberately – was aware of what that history was and what that thinking was and actually, of course, he enjoyed the fact that Devine wasn’t rock solid. Devine had big changes of heart. There is a year, I can’t remember which year it was, when Devine suddenly went ‘New plays are fucking boring, let’s do musicals’. So, you know, he was well aware that even for Devine, and particularly for Devine, because he was winging it on not very much money. The thing was pretty contingent, you know. If you had to do Rex Harrison in *The Cherry Orchard*¹⁷¹ he would do that to survive. Theatre is always about having enough money to do the shows that you want to do. So I think Stephen, when he was channelling Devine or quoting Devine, he was doing it out of a sense of connection to the theatre’s history. And when you think of any theatre there are some big old demons of the past, not just demons, Gods. (Personal interview)

When listening more to Macdonald, one realizes that Daldry’s channelling Devine had clear limits. Just like Devine’s policies changed according to whom he communicated them to, Daldry’s bias with Devine had its boundaries. As such Macdonald does not think that Daldry’s reference to Devine was more than Daldry connecting to the building he was to completely rebuild:

171 Rex Harrison appeared in Chekhov’s *Platonov*, which premiered 13 October 1960.

I don't think it necessarily means more than that. I doubt there was a more concrete agenda. I mean there were lots and lots of debates when we were rebuilding about how to do it. And Stephen being Stephen would push the debate: should we not down the whole theatre? Why are we in a proscenium? Shouldn't we be in a flat space? He would push that as far as he possibly could and then let other people come back at him. He is very good both in his directing work and as a producer in generating the most possible, the widest possible debate in order to help him make it growing up. (Personal interview)

It becomes clear that Daldry's use of Devine's "spirit" to create the image of the "mythical" Royal Court, as well as the reference to the original structure and purpose of the building were largely a fundraising rhetoric. As such Macdonald not only sees Daldry's talent during the mid- and late 1990s with pushing the rebuilding forward, but also with keeping the Royal Court – in the West End – running:

There was a long period during the rebuild where we had to move and that changed the landscape a little bit; in fact, politically, I think, it changed it quite a lot. We were in the West End for – I don't know now – two years, maybe more, I think, during the rebuild. [...] This was all kind of winging it and it was winging it in the early days of this thing called lottery – which is how we rebuilt – when nobody had made the rules and later it got far harder to do it and now – I am sure – you couldn't do it at all. But in the early days of the lottery they were prepared to give us the money. The argument being 'we need to get the energy of the organization going'. So they were prepared to give us the money to run, not one, but two theatres in the West End. And in fact we ran three theatres, once we'd figured out that you could cut up the Ambassadors Theatre and then you had a circle space and you also had a little studio space which was like a black box, which was the stage of the West End theatre. So we had two spaces in the Ambassadors and we had a big space down the road in the Duke of York's. So we were running three theatres. It was sort of the biggest the Royal Court has ever been. We were trying to fill more seats than we'd ever filled, and we also had to staff up to do that, because they were different sites. They were like maybe 200 yards apart. In terms of the energy of the work, there were some very good things, in terms of the size of the organization there were some things which had a long-term impact, where we had to get more staff. And that can affect an organization, I think. When you end up with a bigger staff, the danger in that is that you end up being run by the staff rather than by the plays. (Personal interview)

Macdonald clearly dismisses the idea of Daldry trying to be a 'new George Devine' to a 'new Royal Court', or building himself a monument – both ideas that Wendy Lesser touched on:

I never read Stephen as that self-conscious, I just think he is just someone who is ambitious to do the most he could possibly do. You know, the conversation about the rebuild started with the fact that there was a leak in the roof and somebody needed to fix it and it ended up costing £30m. It was this very unusual window that was open in the world of funding where the Arts Council were encouraging us to think big about what could be done. You have to know how unusual that was by the mid-1990s in that we had all lived through the 1980s and there was no money and we were being told constantly there was always gonna be less money, should we ask. And suddenly the lottery, this strange thing of a lottery, to which the British took avidly, turned that all around for a while. And that was the bike you had to jump on; and everybody did. I don't think Stephen was being very inglorious there at all. I think he was doing what everyone else was doing. This

window is open, if you wanted to grab the new money that was there. And I suppose if you made a theatre, your theatre and its company more secure by doing that, is just a sensible, political thing. And off you went, yeah. (Personal interview)

Even if Macdonald did not see Daldry as being inglorious concerning the rebuild and himself as Artistic Director, an article from the *Telegraph* comments on the BBC Omnibus episode rather differently:

Late on Bonfire Night, an unseen BBC1 announcer introduced an Omnibus documentary about one year in the life of the Royal Court theatre – a year when it celebrated a £15.8 million National Lottery grant. What the announcer didn't say was: "There now follows a party political broadcast on behalf of Stephen Daldry." Though maybe he should have. Daldry, 35, the theatre's charismatic Artistic Director, seems to dominate every frame of the Omnibus programme, titled *Royal Court Diaries*. But it is hardly surprising he is the star.

[...] [David] Lan's camera doggedly tracks him, presenting him as the Captain Marvel of British theatre; nothing seems beyond him. (Gritten)

Daldry was playing the most central part in the fundraising campaigns of the 1990s. Not only the comment above, but also his prioritizing an interview with *Vogue* over answering questions from a staffer (Lisa Makin in Little and McLaughlin 311) – slightly in contrast to Macdonald's perspective – speak of a huge investment into being widely recognized. Even if it was for the purpose of bringing in funds, and was crowned with great success, Daldry still attached a huge amount of his efforts to his persona.

Daldry used the narrative of the 1950s to reinforce the narrative of the Court in the 1990s. He did so quite deliberately, to seize as many opportunities to bring in funds as possible. The combination of Daldry's prominence, his broadly communicated going back to Devine's policies, and his repeated creation of a link between the 1950s and 1990s narratives in his fundraising campaign, however, do not let Rickson's and Lesser's assertions regarding Daldry's 'turning into' Devine seem too far-fetched. Macdonald opposes that Daldry did so for inglorious reasons, one of which could be vanity or an exaggerated sense of self-consciousness. Ultimately, it must therefore be asked how the rhetoric and the real-life seeing-through of policies, both in regard to new plays and the rebuild, actually concur with the 1950s narrative, and how they relate to each other.

At first glance the 1990s, with its bold new writing, the reintroduction of Devine's policies, and the rebuild, bear a noteworthy resemblance to the 1950s. The surprise hit of *Blasted*, Devine's words in Daldry's campaign, the Royal Court in the West End due to a rebuilding, like in the 1960s, all these coincidences add to the analogy. However, Macdonald is right to point out that – concerning policy – the artistic output of the Royal Court, the 'in-yer-face' movement in particular, and the rebuild are not connected: "The rebuild was a different thing. I don't think it had anything to do with what plays we were putting on. That was just a political thing of the option that was there, so why not seize it. I think we would have done that whatever plays we were doing" (Personal interview).

The rebuild in the 1990s was a unique and much longed for event in the history of the Royal Court; it was much needed – since Devine's days, as a matter of fact. It finally

became real through Daldry's initiative. But, no matter how much Daldry connected himself to Devine, the rebuild was not the rebuild that Devine had envisioned back in the 1960s. The Court Development Scheme in 1963 saw an arts centre in Sloane Square, consisting of an open main space with a wider proscenium and a 120-seat studio behind the main stage (Roberts, *Stage* 93).

In 1960, Devine's plan was very innovative; in the 1990s, it was not. The Royal Court's mandate had seen 40 years of development by the mid-1990s. The theatre had moved away from its countercultural radicalism of the 1950s and 1960s to a well-established institution educating the bohemian bourgeoisie – in a sometimes bold and shocking fashion. This later mandate, one can argue, is largely mirrored in the new building. By trying to maintain and honour the history of the Court and bringing the future into the building, Daldry's ideas created a delivery “powerboat” for high-end culture.

7.3 Conclusion

Daldry's strategy of holding the Court's tradition high by being reverential to Devine and his policy can largely be seen as PR – both for the theatre and himself. David Lan's comment regarding Daldry's self-referential use of the Court's history in fundraisers (Little and McLaughlin 322) comes to mind again. At the end of the day, the expansion that Daldry pushed forward was a highly risky business for a publicly subsidized theatre. By praising his own as Devine's policy, Daldry emphasized that he was not on a self-directed and personal course, but ‘going back to the roots’. After all, doubling the number of plays on the grounds of the insufficient funds of the early 1990s needed not necessarily lead to success. Had the strategy to lure interesting new writers into the theatre not worked or had the press not decided to give *Blasted* the – largely coming out of the blue and incomprehensibly harsh – publicity they did, Daldry's policy could have only too easily flopped, sponsors might have been disappointed, and the Jerwood Foundation (sponsoring the season that *Blasted* was part of) would have never made it into the papers. The foundation may consequently not have felt the urge to further sponsor a theatre that did not have much of an impact. As such, it can be called into mind that Daldry had warned the foundation of a pending commotion around the opening of *Blasted* (Lesser 94). A gesture able to mitigate any outcome on the scale from failure over shock to success, yet also speaking of the extent of daringness in Daldry's season planning, and consequently the welcoming of a certain commotion. Daldry was, as he claimed, lucky to receive such big publicity around *Blasted*, but it was certainly not as accidentally and unexpectedly as he likes it to appear. As such, programming Kane's play after Christmas was not the hardest spot for a play to be in, as Saunders claims (305). It did not have very much competition as theatres all over London were mostly dark (Rebellato in Aragay et al. 167). In this, however, the 1950s narrative was also fail proof: had Daldry's policy flopped, he could also have referred to Devine and the financial hardship of the 1950s and 1960s repeating itself, and the ‘right to fail’.

The ‘coming in of new writers’ was due to Daldry’s doubling of productions. It was a technical trick, as Macdonald puts it. Macdonald states that

[...] it sort of accidentally became this huge media event and out of that came hype and out of that came imitators and other plays that followed that in retrospect academics could call a movement. But the broader picture is what had been written and has got more nuance to it. (Personal interview)

The development he describes can, however, easily be transferred to the development of the ‘kitchen sink’ in the 1950s and 1960s, too. A development similar to the labelling of a new trend echoes in Stafford-Clark’s words as he describes the attachment of the label of a golden age, when talking about the 1980s: “When you look back you see a golden age, although at the time it seemed just the next thing we were doing. And the golden age always seems in the past” (Personal interview). For the 1990s this also holds true. And here, as in the 1950s, a new label was welcome PR. Thus, when with the 1990s, the golden age seems to repeat itself in a new building, the alleged return to Devine’s policy and a ‘new Angry Young’, one must ask why such a renaissance, or rather impression of a renaissance, occurs. The answer is finances. It is a simple fact that it is good for publicity and for convincing people to invest money to have long and established traditions, to honour the old, longstanding values, and to deliver the proof that the Royal Court is still as important as ever: in 1956 it started modern British theatre, in 1995 it was still able to put forth the Angry Young, it still shook up cosy British life.

The analysis of Daldry’s artistic policy with a focus on its referencing the Royal Court’s legacy therefore shows how he established the narrative of the Court’s legacy to strengthen and partly disguise his own agenda. Daldry’s bias toward Devine concerning both policy and rhetoric – especially in the context of funding campaigns – therefore not only adds credibility to his words, but also makes him appear as a humble servant to history rather than the adventurous – to some self-focussed – maker with the stellar career that he was.

Blasted and particularly the hype created in the press concerning it, gave the Court back its notoriety as a disturbing theatre and reckless breeding ground for new writers. The hype around *Blasted* and the academic fascination for the ‘new Angry Young’ – the ‘in-yer-face’ – proved Daldry’s artistic policy of expansion correct – just like *Look Back in Anger* had eventually been able to prove Devine’s policy of championing new writers correct. The difference between Daldry and Devine is that Devine had not set out to nurture the bold and the shocking in the new plays that the Court eventually settled on. The turn to these criteria did, as a matter of fact, strongly differ from Devine’s original idea of a new theatre. Daldry, on the contrary, set out to follow the Court’s legacy in being the 1950s home of the Angry Young *Look Back in Anger*. As such, the fate in finding the new writers of the 1990s simply lay in the fact that there were young writers who wrote plays that the Royal Court, with its wish for notoriety, would accept: plays that had the potential to cause a commotion. This is what Little and McLaughlin

commented on, when they attested Daldry “set out deliberately to disorientate audiences and critics with a flood of unpredictable new work” (284).

The writers in the 1990s can certainly be seen as bringing a golden age to the Court, much like the plays in the 1950s. They did not, however, change the Royal Court, they did not give it a new direction, and they may not even have brought a new brutalism into the theatre, but only a brutalism remodelled to fit its time. Surely, by introducing new forms, some of these writers made way for styles and topics that were a novelty to the British stage – see for example Kane’s *Crave*. The Royal Court, however, had not worked to renew itself with these new writers but to once again prove itself as the most important writers’ theatre, worthy of its funding and worthy of sponsoring. It had worked to once again be the ‘good olde’ Royal Court, only in a shiny new attire. The ‘in-yer-face’, by strengthening the Royal Court’s notoriety, helped to realize the matching funds to the lottery money. As such – and be it only in this respect – the writing movement and the rebuild do not stand disconnected. They were both part of Daldry’s agenda.

8. The 2000s. A Theatre of the World

The nature of the rebuild changes the nature of the perception of the play [...]. Well, the old model of the Royal Court, in a phrase loved by Stephen, was that it was a pirate ship, that you are in an old unloved Victorian theatre that Jocelyn Herbert had just painted brown in 1956. They didn't spend much money on it; they just painted it all brown and called it a new writing theatre. And it was always part of the tension that the theatre is in a part of London that was – slightly less in the 1950s but really from the 1970s on – always inhabited by rich people who probably wouldn't be interested in going to see the kind of theatre that it was putting on. And now that's extremely true. But the moment you rebuild it and spend £30m building it, you change the position, the perception of the theatre. It's a Rolls Royce, it's not a pirate ship, it's a speed boat. So it becomes harder to do the countercultural thing. It becomes harder to make the oppositional gesture that we used to make, I think. And, of course, the toilets work better and the dressing rooms are nicer and all of that and people have an easier life backstage and front, but imperceptibly through spending all that money, the nature, the engagement of the audience changes a bit. The seats are leather, they are expensive. In twenty years time, when they get lots of holes in them, then it'll all change again. And actually Steve [Tompkins], the architect, designed those seats lovingly based on a 1950s automobile. His idea was that there are leather seats that'd be like an old car, an old Rover, I think, was the car. That'll be true when they get old enough. The whole thing of colonizing an old theatre goes out the window when you spend £30m on it. And that slightly changes the dynamic. You just have to get over it by kicking the building about and letting it get dishevelled again. (James Macdonald, personal interview)

8.1 Being at Home at the New Royal Court

The 2000s were a decade in which the Royal Court had to redefine itself. In 2000, the rebuilding in Sloane Square came – after various delays – to an end. Thus, at the beginning of the new millennium, the company found itself in a new building, with a new Artistic Director, and had yet to find a new identity. For a theatre that had learned to build its reputation and respectively its budget on its history – a history connected with a building – it was a hard struggle to come to terms with the new modern Royal Court. The references to the past still prevailed at Sloane Square, but it was unquestionable that the Court was a new theatre. The “dump” – as the *Sunday Times* had called it in 1993 (Aragay et al. 34) – was gone and a clean and high-end venue had taken its place. Max Stafford-Clark comments on the new building:

It was certainly in need of a rebuild. Obviously when you're rebuilding you are in danger of losing some of the character of the building. But I think the most essential elements have been excellently preserved. I mean there is now a way you can take away the fore-stage and extend the audience by a row. I think that's the worst use of the Royal Court stage. So I never enjoy that, but I think that the... the rebuilding has been... very tastefully been done. (Personal interview)

The Royal Court thus entered the new century by reinventing itself and by simultaneously swearing not to have changed a bit. Rickson had taken over the Court, stating his

mission as promoting new writers that want “to disturb, to provoke and to question” (Sierz, *Nation* 30), which Aleks Sierz commented on as being cutting-edge and daring, the “more austere roundhead tradition” (31). This tradition, however, meant that Rickson held on to the writers of previous years and nurtured their talents. What was missing were new, exciting voices. Dan Rebellato eventually commented on the first years of the new century in July 2003:

My feeling is that the Royal Court seems to be in a real flop at the moment. I don't know anyone who has been excited by the Royal Court for a couple of years – there seems to be no vision, so that the building is drifting at the moment. (Aragay et al. 166)

Where Rickson described his policy as presenting plays that would provoke and disturb, Rebellato felt it was “so much about disaffected, unemployed, drug-using people in the inner city that it describes almost every play for the last few years” (166). The artistic direction the Court had taken under Daldry seemingly could not be as easily continued by Rickson. Even the voices that were trying to defend the theatre were not certain what to do with this new Royal Court. Aleks Sierz tried to defend the Court on grounds of its history when commenting in 2003:

The Royal Court has continuity. It's the oldest new writing venue, so for that reason alone, it is, and will always be, significant and central. It clearly has been the new market leader in new writing, and like all market leaders it has attracted a fair deal of criticism. (Aragay et al. 150)

Stafford-Clark, also in 2003, tried to attest the Court a certain direction, but just like Sierz, ended up with a rather vague statement that could have been said about the Royal Court at any given moment of its existence:

It is true that the Royal Court has never been a Marxist theatre and it has never had a clear political agenda. [...] But that is its strength, not its weakness. A ‘muddle’ or a mixture is a good description of what the Court should be, that is, not tied to any particular political platform. Its best work has a social concern, not a political concern. (33-34)

When further adding that “the Court does a lot of plays about working-class subjects, but it does not have a working-class audience” (31) and “you do not do a play [...] to play to that class; you do it to inform the middle-class” (31), Stafford-Clark's comment sounds like he is referring the 1950s rather than the 2000s. Two years later, not much seemed to have changed. Charles Spencer of the *Daily Telegraph* wrote in 2005:

I recently received a long, dignified and somewhat hurt letter from the Royal Court's Artistic Director, Ian Rickson, after suggesting that this former powerhouse of new writing badly needed to raise its game.

The theatrical pickings in Sloane Square have been worryingly lean of late. The Court has staged a succession of small, highly stylised one-act plays, rarely lasting more than 80 minutes that have largely failed to generate the sense of freshness and excitement that were once this theatre's stock in trade.

There has been a decline in both vision and ambition, and a worrying tendency to use production values to disguise a lack of dramatic substance. What has been crucially missing is the one big play that somehow distils the spirit of our age. You can't, of course,

merely wish such a play into existence. But you can perhaps go hunting for it with more tenacity and imagination than Rickson and his colleagues have evinced.

(Spencer, "Thin Play")

Taken together, the Royal Court in the early 2000s was seen as having neither a clear agenda, nor a lot of success. Still, Sierz argues that it was the 'market leader' in new writing simply because it was the Royal Court. But the whole new writing infrastructure in Britain had changed tremendously. The 'counterculture thing' that Macdonald felt slipping away, was taking hold in other places. Little and McLaughlin comment on the situation in which Rickson took over:

[T]he Court's position as a beacon for the new writing community was under real threat from theatres such as the Bush, the Old Vic, the rebuilt Soho Theatre, the National, the Gate and the Donmar. Jess Cleverly, then Head of Marketing, warned in 1997 that 'we cannot occupy the trendy "bad boy" ground forever. If we try, it will wear pretty thin and we will end up looking like someone's dad trying to look cool at their kid's party. The Royal Court must be seen to grow up on its return to Sloane Square.' (367)

Rickson tried to do so by nurturing the writers from the 1990s. As such, he did not let go of the "'bad boy' ground" and formulated his policy "to disturb, to provoke and to question". All this, while the other new writing theatres were growing into equal institutions. Aleks Sierz describes the new writing system in Britain in the late 1990s and 2000s: "it is composed of six new writing theatres which specialise in developing young writers and staging new plays. The big six are the Royal Court, Bush, Hampstead and Soho in London, the Traverse in Edinburgh and Live Theatre in Newcastle" (*Nation* 28)¹⁷².

The Lottery money, meanwhile, had allowed many theatres to invest in building. Not only was the Royal Court refurbished, the Traverse, Bush and Live were, too. The Soho and the Hampstead even got brand new buildings (Sierz, *Nation* 30). And the market for new plays flourished.

New plays also reached the large theatres like the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company. The National brought new writers into a temporary studio space called 'The Loft' and the National Theatre Studio set out to nurture new talents¹⁷³. The Royal Shakespeare Company promoted new writing largely through commissions. Other theatres like the Theatre Royal Stratford and the Tricycle also made themselves well-known names as new writing venues. New work was further seen at the Almeida, the Donmar or in the studio spaces of the Lyric and the Young Vic (34). Some of the

172 Sierz adds: "In theory, the big six make up the British new writing system. In practice, things are much more complex: for example, in 2008 Writernet listed more than 300 new writing production companies and estimated that there were some 25,000 play scripts in circulation at any one time" (*Nation* 32).

173 However, the National rarely produced first time writers. Sierz explains that their smallest space is bigger than the Royal Court's Downstairs space, and debuts in large spaces are risky – even at the National (Sierz, *Nation* 32).

fringe venues like Theatre 503 and the Finborough were also able to build a good reputation for producing new work (34), and theatres like the Arcola or the Battersea Arts Centre found creative ways of promoting new and experimental work. New work was also strongly supported by touring companies such as Out of Joint or Paines Plough. A whole new infrastructure of new writing theatres was created.

Following the split up of the Arts Council of Britain in 1994, the Arts Council of England had set out looking for a new policy. In 1999, Peter Boyden was appointed to look into England's theatre, and particularly the regions, to produce a report greatly in favour of funding the theatre. Thus, in the early 2000s, the environment that writers were writing in was still positively influenced by Labour's take towards the arts. As such, Rickson's regime at the Court was marked by a relative financial stability (371). Little and McLaughlin point out that he only produced three revivals in nine years, focussing mainly on new work and the career development of a cluster of writers (372).

In spite of this stability, the economic environment and the fundraising connected with the rebuild had introduced a different atmosphere and mentality to the theatre. Like Daldry before him, Rickson worked hard to restore funds, co-produced with the National Theatre, and a lot of work was supported by US funds (385). Anthony Burton is quoted, putting it in a nutshell:

We cannot subscribe 100% anymore to the right to fail. So while we continue to do what Devine set this theatre up to do and subscribe to his ideals, ensuring that the writer is central to everything, what we have to try to do is to legislate, if we can, for a measure of success, otherwise we cannot survive. That attitude has had to change. (385)

The Arts Council's grant to the Royal Court saw an increase of £1m between 1998 and 2006 – the years of Rickson's directorship at the Royal Court (Little and McLaughlin 371). The only fundamental financial struggle the Court saw during Rickson's reign was related to the rebuild. In May 1999, the Ambassadors Theatre had already been vacated by the Royal Court staff, and while the Duke of York's was being occupied by Conor McPherson's *The Weir* (1997) no new plays were produced. The Royal Court was in dire straits: the rebuilding works were prolonged as another £3m was needed in order to finish the work – the same £3m that would eventually come in from the Jerwood foundation.

Michael Billington stated in 2003: "Whatever the sins of the Labour government, one thing they have done is to increase funding for theatres in the country, via the Arts Council" (Aragay et al. 109). Yet, in the three-year period of 2003-2006 there were cutbacks again and by the mid-2000s, the Arts Council's policy of distributing grants was not always rosy or understandable. In 2004, financial problems led to a gap in the Royal Court season: April to August 2004 could not be programmed. The gap was filled by an expansion of the Young Writers' Festival to a season of five plays (Little and McLaughlin 419).

In 2005, announcing a three-year funding strategy, calling it 'hard times in a rough climate' the Arts Council had told 121 organisations nationwide that they would no

longer receive regular funds (“ACE Cancels”). The remaining 60% – some 645 regularly funded organizations, including the Royal Court Theatre – were, however, told that they were to receive a standard annual increase of 2.75% in 2006/7 and 2007/8. In 2007/8 then, with enough money given by the Labour government, according to Alistair Smith of *The Stage*, the Arts Council had done

[...] everything in their power to mess it up [...] Individual decisions were flawed (for example the decision to cut the Bush), the process was opaque and the announcement was allowed to morph into a PR disaster, culminating in an angry meeting at the Young Vic where A[rts] C[ouncil of] E[ngland]’s then chief executive Peter Hewitt was lucky to emerge physically unscathed. (“ACE”)

Nevertheless, the years between 1999 and 2005 had, after years of careful budgeting and imminent fears of deficits or even bankruptcy, eventually given theatres in England a financial basis to start planning long-term (Billington, *State* 377). A new climate in theatre had been introduced: the regional revival, the quest for new audiences by way of cheap tickets, and the expansion of the repertory (392). And indeed, Arts Council funding in general had risen from £183m in 1997, when Labour took office, to £412m ten years later (402-403). Billington writes: “If the Blair decade was defined by anything, in theatrical terms, it was the post-Boyden boost to the subsidised sector and the resurgence of political drama” (383). He explains:

More money meant it was possible for the theatre to resume its oppositional role. But the main factors in the reinvention of political theatre were disillusion with New Labour spin and dismay at the consequences of the Bush-Blair foreign policy. (384)

In December 2007, however, after Rickson had already handed over the artistic directorship to Dominic Cooke, the Arts Council announced huge cuts in the funding of some of Britain’s most significant theatres (Lane xviii). The *Guardian* spoke of the “bloodiest cuts in half a century”, mentioning cuts hitting 200 groups hard (Brown, “England’s arts”): the Arts Council was planning to shut many groups down by April 2008. The majority of theatres, of which the Royal Court was one, was to be given a rise at least at the inflation level. As always with a change in Arts Council funding, there were winners and losers: while 197 groups were being cut, another 80 were taken on. In January 2008, Equity, the trade union for actors, passed a unanimous vote of no confidence in the Arts Council (Billington, “A bold and brilliant idea”).¹⁷⁴

Also in January 2008, the Arts Council called for a new focus on ‘excellence’ in the arts in the McMaster report. The report further included proposals like:

- All publicly funded organisations should drop admission prices for a week a year to overcome the “it’s not for me” syndrome
- The board of every cultural organisation should have at least two artists as members
- Innovation and risk-taking should be at the heart of all funding

174 The Arts Council’s grants to the Royal Court Theatre read as follows £2,189,627 in 2008/2009, £2,248,747 in 2009/2010, £2,297,916 in 2010/2011, £2,139,360 in 2011/2012, £2,297,916 in 2012/2013, £2,350,768 in 2013/2014, and £2,411,888 in 2014/2015. (“English Stage Company Royal Court Theatre”).

- Aspiring practitioners should get free or discounted tickets
- Ten of the country's most exciting arts organisations should be promised funding for 10 years to give them security and encourage their ambition
- The public service broadcasting review should examine the decline in arts coverage on TV and radio
- Target-setting approach to assessing excellence should be abandoned
(Brown, "More judgement")

Michael Billington, who had been amongst the 160 questioned for the report, remarks that McMaster's proposals were certainly good. However, before asking for a renaissance of excellence in the arts an institution like the Arts Council would have to be radically reformed. Billington connects the report and Equity's vote when he comments:

I see this as a historic watershed: the workers' revolt against a set of arbitrary, unargued and often downright insane decisions by a group of largely unaccountable desk-wallahs. How can you create a culture of excellence when the funding bodies apparently wouldn't know it if they saw it? (Billington, "A bold and brilliant idea")

The Royal Court's artistic output, however well financially secured during the Blair years, did not really take much concern in British politics but adapted a more international focus. Billington comments on the Royal Court's attitude towards New Labour: "there was a detectable shift in emphasis at the Royal Court during the early Blair years" (Billington, *State* 372). Billington feels that the Royal Court felt no strong urge to dissect Blair and his politics, and attributes this to the theatre's still playing in the West End during the early years of the Blair administration. Thus, the Court in the 2000s largely followed the policies in new writing that Daldry had introduced. Yet, where Daldry had been the "flamboyant innovator", Rickson was more of a "patient, skilled consolidator" (372). Rickson had nurtured the writers from the 1990s: "my task has been to create a sustainable culture where the younger writers endure and mature" (Rickson in Aragay et al. 19). The hype of the Daldry years never repeated itself. In 2005, Ian Rickson, looking back on the last decade, tries to see the upside in this:

We are now ten years on from a threshold moment in British theatre in the mid-1990s, often seen as a renaissance in contemporary playwriting, as a new generation of young writers emerged with enormous energy. A decade later we could not have hoped to be in a stronger place. [...] We now have the strongest range of senior playwrights under 40 of any time in recent history [...]. (Little and McLaughlin 433)

It becomes clear that by 2005, the Royal Court had gotten over the 'in-er-face' and was working in a socially relevant, but non-political artistic zone.

Rickson's final production – *The Seagull* (2007) as adapted by Christopher Hampton – opened on 18 February 2007. The years 2001 to 2007 had seen one major success a year and *The Seagull* hit the highest box office advance ever in the history of the Royal Court (446-447). Vicki Heywood recalls Rickson's regime and with this the way in which the new Royal Court, after the rebuild, was perceived:

Ian's time was very committed, very honourable, very nurturing. [...] When Stephen and Max were there it really was like visiting someone in their student digs. It really was a

shitty place to be and it did significantly change through Ian's time so that I think it felt more confident, in a way, a lot more permanent. In Max's era there were moments when people would say, 'Do we really need the Royal Court Theatre? What's the Royal Court Theatre? Should it be in Sloane Square?' and all those things. By Ian's time nobody was asking those questions anymore. (447)

When Ian Rickson resigned in 2007, the Court was a widely accepted, permanent institution with no clear political or oppositional agenda. *The Stage's* Marc Shenton looks back on Rickson's directorship accordingly:

By the time he leaves, he will therefore have been there for some 8 years.

Though that doesn't rival the decade-long regime of Richard Eyre at the National or 13 years of Peter Hall who preceded Eyre, the Court is younger and more cutting-edge than the National, since its mission is almost exclusively new writing and the promotion and development of new writers. As a theatre is always first and foremost about the taste of the Artistic Director – and the collaborations he or she inspires – a turn-over in this key position could see a radical shift in the direction that the theatre takes.

Rickson's own meticulous work as a director has tended towards the small domestic canvas, rather than the large public or political stage; and while *My Name is Rachel Corrie* [(2005)] – returning to the main house this month after premiering at the Theatre Upstairs earlier this year – is a potentially political work (directed and co-adapted by Alan Rickman), as was this summer's offering of former Court Artistic Director Max Stafford-Clark's Out of Joint's touring production of *Talking to Terrorists* [(2005)], this sort of programming seems to have been the exception rather than the rule lately in Sloane Square.

But even though having to carry such a huge responsibility for setting the agenda of new writing inevitably attracts sniping, the Royal Court has consistently found worthwhile plays under him, and nurtured important careers like that of Richard Bean whose current play *Harvest* [(2005)] (running to this weekend in the main house) is the play of the year, so far, at least in my opinion. Yes, there have been some major missteps, too – such as giving house room to Tim Fountain's feebly self-indulgent (in every sense) *Sex Addict* [(2005)] – but nevertheless Rickson will be a tough act to follow. (Shenton, "Ian Rickson")

When Dominic Cooke took over in 2007, he had been an Associate Director of the Royal Court from 1999 until 2002, Associate Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company from 2002 until 2006, and Assistant Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company from 1992 until 1993 (Royal Court Theatre, "Dominic Cooke"). Rickson left the Royal Court in the same year that Tony Blair resigned. Gordon Brown became the new Prime Minister and Dominic Cooke changed the policy of the Royal Court.

In his inaugural statements, Cooke commented on his planned policy: "I want to look at what it means to be middle class, what it means to have power, what it means to have wealth" (Brown and Kennedy). Cooke's focus took him away both from the politically oppositional reputation of the Royal Court and from dissecting British politics. David Lister mentions this a year into Cooke's reign:

The lack of political playwriting now has caused the head of the National Theatre, Nicholas Hytner, to lament the total lack of right-wing plays, and the head of the Royal

Court theatre, Dominic Cooke, when he took over, to call for a move from the long-dated kitchen-sink plays to plays that look at ‘what it means to be middle class, what it means to have power and what it means to have wealth’.

Mr Cooke’s reign at the Royal Court is one worth following. He has already made inroads into the Muslim community with a new writing project and has succeeded in finding new playwrights there. And I gather he will be staging in the autumn a play with the US presidential election as a backdrop. But still there is no sign of a British play that looks at our own centre of power. (Lister)

Graham Whybrow even felt that “there are tantalising attractions to reaching back to a pre-1956 consensus of the glittering, posh but poisoning world of Noël Coward” (Little and McLaughlin 448). Whybrow, however, also saw a new movement approaching: “a theatre which is drastic rather than pathetic, presentational rather than witnessed, and which is informed by a much more creative and imaginative relationship with its material and with its audience” (449). What did, after all, remain at the core of the Royal Court was, according to Whybrow, that it is and always will be a writers’ theatre (449). Any approach made toward the Royal Court as being a radical and experimental theatre in opposition to a mainstream institution is futile, as Rickson points out when commenting on Cooke’s reign: “It is a complex issue to create a stage dynamic which is radical, progressive and at the same time fosters a new writing culture” (449). He understands that when “a hegemony of experimental form is dominant” (449), it easily becomes a doctrine.

Under Cooke’s leadership, plays like Tom Stoppard’s *Rock ‘n’ Roll* (2006), Polly Stenham’s *That Face* (2007), a revival of David Eldridge’s *Under the Blue Sky* (2000) in 2008, transferred into the West End. In 2009 – shortly before the renewal of his contract in 2010 – Cooke commented on his work at the Royal Court: “[I]t’s been steady rather than overnight and I’m grateful for that. I did have some lean years, living off baked potatoes; it was quite tough for quite a long time. But it gave me the chance to learn on the job. It was useful, even if I didn’t know it at the time” (Cooke, “Behind the scenes”). He further comments on his inaugural statements on dissecting the middle class:

To be fair, I was slightly misquoted. My point was that, mainly, plays seem to be about the dispossessed, which is important, but you can’t really understand a world if you’re only looking at one corner of it, and that kind of theatre is really just as reactionary in its way as the theatre pre-George Devine [...], all French windows and all that.

In 2009, the transfers of Lucy Prebble’s *Enron* and Jez Butterworth’s *Jerusalem* had brought the theatre some money, despite the fact that fundraising fell by a quarter (Cooke, “Behind the scenes”); both plays, same as Stoppard’s *Rock ‘n’ Roll*, went on to Broadway. Cooke commented on the situation of British theatre during the recession and his feeling about the cooperation of the country’s leading party with the then already probable change of government:

[T]hey [the Conservatives] are making all the right noises. They seem to be quite interested. All the key people go to the theatre and follow the arts. It’s not like the previous

Tory administration, where there were people like David Mellor but most weren't interested.

What has improved is that there is now an acknowledgement that culture matters, economically and in terms of who we are as a nation. However, the reality is that these are tough financial times and there are likely to be cuts in all sorts of areas. All we can do is make the case for what the increased investment has produced. The phrase "golden age" has been used. I think that's taking it a bit too far. But things in the theatre are good, and that's the result of sustained investment. It has been proven over and over that the state gets back way in excess of what it puts in. Of course, you do have to keep saying these things anyway, because there is still philistinism in Britain: 'Oh, luvvies... why should we give them money?' There is an anti-educational aspect to Britain which means that there are never any votes in the arts and that makes it too easy a thing to overlook.

Little did Cooke know then that soon after, the new government would cause the year 2010 to turn into a new 1979, with David Cameron as the new Prime Minister introducing one of the tightest art budgets since the 1980s.

8.2 New New Writing. *Stoning Mary* and the New Policies to Promote Writers

My key aim was to transfer the energy from the Theatre Upstairs to the Theatre Downstairs and help create a culture where writers could develop a body of work. (Rickson in Little and McLaughlin 370)

'Royal Court playwright' Debbie Tucker Green was 'discovered' by the Royal Court but received her professional debut elsewhere. (Whybrow, e-mail to the author)

The 2000s did not find the Royal Court in a financial fight or crisis, as all the decades before had. The 2000s were calm for the Court. It was hard to follow the shock of the 1990s, which the 'new Angry Young' writers had brought. What was left to Rickson was to nurture the talent that he, Daldry, Macdonald, and Whybrow had discovered in the previous decade.

When Leo Butler thus felt in the mid-2000s that the theatre was "turning into something new" (Little and McLaughlin 447), this had largely to do with a new orientation of the Royal Court away from its radically countercultural image: a move away from the old Royal Court and towards a new identity, as Whybrow described it to Harriet Devine (H. Devine 329). In Whybrow's eyes, "the theatre is responsible for creating a vibrant playwriting culture" (326), and in doing so it has "to respond to the present and anticipate the future, and try to bring the future into the present. [...] You can't simply be guided by the principles of the past" (326). Accordingly, he explains the changes in the Royal Court's program:

The founding moment of the Royal Court was a theatre in opposition to commercial managers setting out to please and win an audience. If the theatre had an abrasive relationship that upset the critics and emptied the house, but the work was felt to be of enduring value, which was the thing to do. Now that's the austere side of the Royal Court's remit. It can't

do it all year round – it would be miserable. It understands that there is a place for politics, a place for art, and a place for humour. (329)

This development was, in the later 2000s, given a very distinct face with Cooke's decision to dissect the middle class. During Rickson's reign, however, the development had been built on policies from the 1990s. The new new writing policies that Whybrow had introduced in 1994 were carried into the 2000s to find writers that would help the Court to define and strengthen its renewed existence in Sloane Square. But a similar group as in the 1990s never showed. Accordingly, the Court could not solely rely on its own recruiting policies anymore, but also had to look outside its walls.

This chapter looks at the production of debbie tucker green's *Stoning Mary* as a case in point for the importance of the new writing infrastructure in Britain for the Royal Court, and the effects the Royal Court's changes in policy for producing new plays by young writers in the late 1990s had on the house's approach to new writing in the 2000s.

Debbie tucker green's *Stoning Mary* opened on 1 April 2005. It was directed by Marianne Elliott and designed by Uitz. Little and McLaughlin write: "It was a rare Royal Court debut in the theatre downstairs by a relatively young writer" (Little and McLaughlin 422). *Stoning Mary* is a one act play with sixteen scenes. All scenes are written in dialogue, divided mostly in two-handers. There are seven characters, and sometimes their respective egos, which are also represented by actors. All characters speak in a Caribbean accent and the play text clearly states that all characters are white. The play is set in the country it is performed in, but the conflicts in the scenes all resemble political and social conflicts in Mid- or Southern African countries.

Scene one, titled "The AIDS Genocide. The Prescription" (Tucker Green 3) opens to WIFE and HUSBAND fighting over a single prescription for their life-saving AIDS medication. While WIFE and HUSBAND play rhetorical and emotional tricks at each other, their EGOS are continuously analysing WIFE's and HUSBAND's actions (4-9), and reveal their true intentions and feelings: neither of them is willing to give up the prescription.

Scene two is titled "The Child Soldier" (10). It is very short and merely shows two characters, MUM and DAD, at a loss for words, "trying to think" (10). The following scene returns to 'The Prescription' and shows WIFE and HUSBAND continuing their fight, with WIFE EGO and HUSBAND EGO still analysing HUSBAND and WIFE. While they are still working to give away WIFE's and HUSBAND's thoughts, the EGOS have become more hostile towards each other by not trusting their counterparts' actions (16-17).

Scene four returns to MUM and DAD negotiating, questioning and fighting over each other's love for their son. Scene five, which again shows WIFE and HUSBAND fighting over the prescription, and their EGOS now openly spurring that fight – "H. AND WIFE EGO: *Fight!*" – ends with a CHILD SOLDIER appearing, holding a bloody machete in his hands (30). In scene six MOM and DAD now talk about their son, how his head is shaven (31), and whose fault it is that they lost him (34). MOM eventually closes:

“I never lost him [...] They took him” (35). As DAD asks MOM to wash their son’s hair (35), it becomes clear that he has returned home.

In scene seven, WIFE and HUSBAND have turned to negotiating with the CHILD SOLDIER. With the imminent threat that he poses, their EGOs have disappeared. They offer the soldier food, then money and jewellery (37-39). The soldier does not react to any of the offerings. Only when they give him the prescription, he takes it and destroys it. The scene ends on the CHILD SOLDIER’s first line: “Beg” (41). With the prescription gone, WIFE and HUSBAND are left to die.

Scene eight is titled “Stoning Mary” (41). YOUNGER SISTER (MARY) and her OLDER SISTER are introduced. Most of the dialogue in this scene is taken over by the OLDER SISTER who first complains about Mary’s heavy glasses (42-45), and then about the fact that Mary has given up smoking (45-48). It is only at the very end of the scene that the OLDER SISTER admits to being upset about Mary’s situation (48), and that Mary asks how many people signed her petition (49).

In scene nine the CHILD SOLDIER now sits next to his MUM and DAD, who are first clearly upset by their son’s voice (49-50), to then turn it into a fight about the way they themselves talk to each other (50-51). It turns out they can’t sleep anymore and it is because their son is back. MUM finally admits: “He scares me” (52).

Scene ten shows Mary and her sister again. The sister talks a lot about what kind of meal she would ask for as her last request if she were Mary, and Mary starts a mock argument about what would happen if she really were her sister and her sister in her place: Mary would never cook such a meal (54), because maybe she did not get the call in which her sister asked for the meal (55). The ‘hypothetical’ argument eventually turns to the fact that the sisters do not have anyone else to call but each other: “YOUNGER SISTER: What if your – ‘you me’ – never had no one else to call?” (55). The OLDER SISTER eventually breaks the argument by telling Mary that only 12 people signed her petition (56). Mary is devastated. As the OLDER SISTER asks her what her last request was, she replies: “You. To come” (57).

Scene eleven begins with the CHILD SOLDIER/ SON sniffing. He does it to make his parents uncomfortable and enjoys their discomfort (57). MOM wants to ask the SON if he is alright, but can only do so through DAD, because she seemingly is too terrified. After the SON has ordered his DAD: “Tell her to ask me” (58), a few times, she finally admits, after long pauses, that she cannot (58). The SON replies: “Tell her she will” (59). DAD tells MOM to ask the son, but she still cannot do it. The SON then chooses to communicate through his father by telling his MOM that he is fine (59) and, after another long pause, tells his mother that she smells nice (59). DAD, also afraid of the SON, stumbles to relay the message and the SON insists: “tell her. [...] *say it.*” MOM reacts surprised and the SON smirks (60).

In scene twelve Mary and her sister finally talk about Mary’s pending execution. Mary gives a run-down of what will happen: her head will be shaved, she will be stripped down and walked out (60), good crowds and good weather are expected (61). Her sister seems to be more concerned about Mary taking off her glasses, because of the picture

in the paper (60). As she heard that groups of women have booked whole blocks for the execution, Mary asks how many marched for her (61). Nobody did. She asks: “So what happened to the womanist bitches?/... the feminist bitches?/...the professional bitches?” (61). The list continues through a number of attributes from “burning their bra”, “black”, “rootsical”, “white”, “brown”, “right-on” over “rebel”, “underground”, “under- and overclass”, “political” to “music lovin”, “lyrical”, “bitches that love their men”, “that love other men”, “that juss love bitches” (61-62) and more. Eventually, the OLDER SISTER explains: “you killed a man” (63). Mary replies: “And I’m gonna be stoned down for it” (63). The truth is, Mary killed a boy. The boy was a soldier, who killed their parents. The OLDER SISTER remarks that even the parents would not come to see her: “they couldn’t – not by now” (64). Mary urges her sister to come for her execution and, eventually, the sister nods (66).

In scene thirteen it becomes clear that the CHILD SOLDIER has died. The storylines can at this point be connected in the way that Mary killed him, because he killed her parents by destroying their prescription. MUM is crying. DAD at first says nothing, but then comments on MUM’s crying as not being real, as he claims that she is happy that Mary killed their son: “Aint working is it. [...] She did you your fuckin favour...” (66).

Scene fourteen is again titled “The Prescription” (67). This time it is the OLDER SISTER and her BOYFRIEND, as well as their respective EGOs fighting over a single prescription. While WIFE’s and HUSBAND’s EGOs never gave into each other, BOYFRIEND and his EGO give into the OLDER SISTER and her EGO. She gets the prescription (72). In scene fifteen the OLDER SISTER gives the CORRECTION OFFICER her ticket to Mary’s execution. She is not going, even though she promised Mary to be there (73). The play ends with scene sixteen, in which MUM watches Mary while her head is being shaven. It begins to rain as MUM picks up her first stone (73).

What is most striking about *Stoning Mary* apart from its clear political take in bringing ‘African’ conflicts into the context of a white community, is the language. Not only is the Caribbean accent strong and found in every character’s voice, the text also has a very strong rhythm that finds its form in ellipses, interruptions and repetitions:

WIFE	‘If you’d putcha hands – put your hands on me –
	If you’d put your hands on me then you’d know –‘
WIFE EGO	said
WIFE	‘Put your hands on me to know’
WIFE EGO	said
WIFE	‘handle me to know’
WIFE EGO	I said
WIFE	‘handle me. Handle me – handle me – go on.’ (3)

Tucker green uses this to give the text various dynamics. Speeches are cut off and overlap, and thus appear hasty and strongly emotional. Particularly in the scenes with EGO characters, the way in which the text between the primary characters is directed gets not only an additional level of information, but can also gain immense tension:

HUSBAND 'I can support/ the girls'
 H. AND WIFE EGO fight.
 WIFE 'I can raise the girls –'
 H. AND WIFE EGO fight.
 HUSBAND 'I can teach the girls –'
 H. AND WIFE EGO fight. (29)

But it is not just characters that cut each other off or interrupt. In the scenes between Mary and her sister, it is the OLDER SISTER herself, who constantly cuts herself off, giving her speeches a melodic rhythm. When she refers to Mary's glasses, she cuts herself off so many times that her speech becomes a forceful, yet coherent stutter:

OLDER SISTER They was lying – make y'look – they do, make y'look... not like you – not like you look – not like how you look.
 Usedta.
 Usedta look.
 Before.
 Looked before.
 Before you haddem you seen yourself.
 Sis? (43)

In all scenes, the interrupted language patterns indicate a reluctance to speak. WIFE and HUSBAND do not dare tell each other what their EGOs can say: they each value their own life over that of their spouse. In this, the interruptions give room for another level of violence. In the OLDER SISTER's case, however, she interrupts herself out of nervousness and an insecurity and helplessness given the situation her sister is in. The OLDER SISTER simply cannot cope. An EGO is not needed to explain this. Also, the conflict between the two sisters is not over a certain object, like the prescription, but precisely about the words that are left unspoken. The same is true for the scenes between MUM and DAD, especially once their SON joins them. It is then that the language pattern becomes almost violently destructed and obstructed by silences. While the OLDER SISTER was holding back information, MUM and DAD are at a true loss for words:

SON
 DAD He's 'fine'.
 MUM Is he?
 DAD Are yer?
 SON Tell her to ask me.
 MUM
 DAD Ask him.
 MUM
 SON
 DAD
 DAD Ask him.
 SON Tell her to ask me.
 DAD he says for you to...
 MUM
 DAD She says she –
 SON tell her to ask me.

DAD He says for / you to –
MUM tell him I can't. (58)

In the whole play the CHILD SOLIDER/ SON is the only character to not cut off his own lines or to break up the syntax. By this, and his extensive pauses, particularly in scene seven, before he first speaks, he gains a strength that can clearly be perceived as a menace.

Tucker green's style is unique in the way she applies colloquial speech patterns and accents and combines them with stylistic devices. When losing the Caribbean accent, her language can remind the reader or audience member of works of Royal Court writers from the 1990s, like the later works of Sarah Kane. Kane made use of a similar, incomplete syntax in *Cleansed*:

TINKER Whatever you want.
GRACE Sun.
GRAHAM Won't get an even tan.
TINKER Can take you there.
GRACE I know.
VOICES Burn you clean.
GRACE Hold my hand.
GRAHAM Sunshine. (Kane 134)

Another of Kane's works that is thematically very different from *Stoning Mary* and also does not follow a narrative in the same way as tucker green's work does is *Crave*. However, the staccato rhythm in the language, as well as the stylistic device of repetitions can be found in *Crave* as well:

M How much longer
B How many more times
A How much more
C Corrupt and inept.
B I am nobody's windfall.
A I'm sorry.
C Go away.
M Now.
C Go away.
B I'm sorry.
C Go away.
B I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.
(Kane 164)

While creating dialogues that circle around their conflict to then eventually get to its core only on the last few lines of the scene, tucker green gives the strong linguistic format she chose an equivalent in content that is suspenseful and psychologically sharp. In the scenes that include EGOs, tucker green plays with tension between the 'unspoken' and the spoken word through characters. In the other scenes the absence of EGOs therefore heightens the conflict emerging from the actually unspoken word. Suspense though is not just created through the character work and the evasive dialogue structure. Piecing together the scenes and connecting the various characters, as well as figuring out the

timeline of the text – Mary and her sister meet in prison even though in the text the SON is still alive – add to it.

Stoning Mary sends a clear socio-political message. By locating ‘African problems’ in a white community it asks: how would you act if AIDS, child soldiers, and mass execution, particularly the public stoning of criminals or women were part of the first – or white – world? Tucker green heightens her point by giving her characters a Caribbean, a ‘black’ accent. As such she displaces or relocates both social and political narratives. A similar sense of displacement can also be found in the helplessness of the characters when it comes to dealing with the circumstances they are in. The language, in its stylistic devices of incompleteness and repetitions, speaks not only of the uncertainties of each character, but also of the interruption of order. This is what Tucker green does in *Stoning Mary*, she turns an aspect of the world’s order upside down. As such, chaos – though highly controlled and stylized in its rhythm – finds its way into the language and the characters of the play.

Stoning Mary was Tucker green’s main stage debut at the Royal Court, and even though it was her fifth produced play, Tucker green is nowadays widely recognised as a ‘Royal Court writer’. But Tucker green’s work had already been seen and well-reviewed when the Royal Court showed an interest in her. *Stoning Mary* was given an outstanding production with a set that engulfed a huge amount of the stalls seating being removed. In the following, the reasoning and the story behind Tucker green’s being championed by the Royal Court shall be looked at and analysed as an example of the Royal Court’s policy of promoting new writers as well as a token of the theatre’s role in Britain’s new writing culture of the 2000s.

Before Tucker green had her debut at the Royal Court, she had “written six or seven plays, I think, and had three produced” fellow playwright Rebecca Prichard states (Little and McLaughlin 425). Tucker green’s stage debut was the two-hander *Two Women* (2000) for Paines Plough. It was followed by *Dirty Butterfly* in February 2003 at the Soho and *Born Bad* at the Hampstead Theatre in April 2003. For *Born Bad* Tucker green won the Lawrence Olivier Award for ‘Most Promising Newcomer’ in 2004. In October 2004, her *Trade* was presented as a project work at the Royal Shakespeare Company’s first New Work Festival; it transferred to the Soho, where it opened in March 2005, and the Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, where it opened in October 2005 as part of the Royal Shakespeare Company’s second New Work Festival (Aragay et al. 155).

When Tucker green was thus invited to debut in the Theatre Downstairs, she had already been played by other theatres, and it was decided that she need not be tested in the Theatre Upstairs. That Tucker green – with *Stoning Mary* as her biggest hit at the Royal Court – is often seen as a Royal Court writer is partly due to her style of writing. In 2003, before Tucker green’s work went to the Royal Court, Dan Rebellato commented: “*Blasted* had something close to the *Look Back in Anger* effect, but actually nobody else, except Debbie Tucker Green now, really writes like that. At the Royal Court there is not much work like it; it’s rather accidental” (167), and “she writes like Sarah

Kane, but with Caribbean speech rhythm; her plays are very fragmented, very poetic, with that undercurrent of pain you find in Kane's work" (165). Graham Saunders commented before the premiere of *Stoning Mary*: "She uses very poetic language to look at the domestic. It'll be interesting to see what her next play at the Royal Court is going to be about" (180) and states "tucker green is producing powerful work" (182). Aleks Sierz was more wary of the Kane-comparison than Rebellato:

Hailed – with pardonable exaggeration – as the new Sarah Kane, Tucker Green arrived with a bang in 2003 with *Dirty Butterfly* (Soho), which she quickly followed up with *Born Bad* (Hampstead, 2003). Her style is a mix of in-her-face directness with a freefloating poetry and an experimental attitude to form. ("Debbie Tucker Green")

When Sierz asked tucker green about the similarities between her and Kane's work, tucker green was dismissive: "I know her work but the language is completely different" ("Debbie Tucker Green"). Still, a relatively unknown writer in the early 2000s being compared to Sarah Kane did not go unnoticed. No wonder then that the Royal Court, soon after, called her one of their Court writers?

The Downstairs production of *Stoning Mary* was not necessarily daring in terms of tucker green being a "relatively young" writer – her age, according to her own wishes, in fact remains unknown (Sierz, "Debbie Tucker Green"); she had a career before coming to the Royal Court. The production itself was courageous. The design by Ultz was elaborate and also got rid of a large portion of the stalls seating and, therefore, tickets. One patron describes the set and the production:

The thing is that Ultz decided that this play required a thrust stage, painted blue; covering almost the entire stalls area. The design was described as 'exciting' in the letter from the Royal Court that told me that the seat I'd booked in the stalls was no longer available. I doubt that the finance people at the theatre found the prospect of losing almost a hundred seats a night terribly thrilling.

It isn't the first time Ultz has pulled this particular trick at the Royal Court. A couple of years ago in the play *Fallout* by Roy Williams¹⁷⁵ the stalls were once again covered over with a steep wide flight of steps leading down into them at one end. In that case I seem to recall that they built additional seating over the stage forming an oval arena for the play. Tonight we just got a blue stage stretching to the back wall of the theatre. Not a uniform blue, lots of different shades but in no particular pattern. At the edges of the stage, especially when it met a vertical surface like the boxes were outcrops of bubbles that may have been intended to be beach pebbles or stones but were too circular. That was more or less it as far as the set went. There were a few ordinary looking tubular framed chairs in each of the sections. Each of the three settings in the play occupied a different area of the stage although there was some overlap. The areas were only lit while action was going on in them and the names of the settings were projected using moving lights that swept across the stage and ended up on the black back wall of the theatre.

The actors were on stage for the whole piece, leaning against the back wall when they weren't needed anymore. When the action of their scene was interrupted by a scene in a

175 *Fallout* premiered in the Theatre Downstairs at the Royal Court on 12 June 2003.

different area the actors didn't always freeze, as you might expect, but often fidgeted or repositioned themselves.

I quite liked the device, in the play, of having somebody playing the character's ego. I thought it illustrated the arguments well. Also I think I'll just mention that the egos were both dressed in turquoise-blue clothes. (Watson)

The play's director Marianne Elliott explains the idea behind the blue ground made of plasticine: "We wanted the ground to be a bit tramped down [...] like in a square or a yard that might be in Africa. But because we've made it blue, we are saying it's not Africa, this could be anywhere. It's an imaginary place" (Little and McLaughlin 425). Ultz adds that the blue could not only be seen as a clear divergence to the red earth of Africa, but is the counterpart to the Royal Court's red dome (Ultz).

The Court – by programming *Stoning Mary* in the Downstairs space and giving up so many seats – it seems, put high hopes in tucker green, and anticipated a major success. Ultz, however, adds that it did not feel like a great success at the time; it did not receive the best reviews. The reviews, indeed, were not spectacular, but still good. Michael Billington wrote:

You can see what Tucker Green is trying to do: shock us into a new awareness by transposing three putative third world stories into a white culture. In that sense, she follows in the path of Kane's *Blasted* and Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*, which imported civil war and fascist horror into an English setting. What Tucker Green does have is a linguistic gift. At some points I was reminded of the choreo-poems of the African-American Ntozake Shange, at others of T.S. Eliot *Sweeney Agonistes*.

As she's shown before, Tucker Green has a strong ear for the sounds of domestic strife: best of all are the riffs between the soldier parents where the husband uses his wife's cheap scent as a form of vindictive triumph.

Elliott stages the piece adroitly with the actors marooned in quarrelling groups on Ultz's set. ("Stoning Mary")

Quentin Letts of the *Daily Mail* also felt positively about the play's strong message and effect:

This new playwright takes two of the many ghastly things happening today in Africa – child soldiers and shortages of AIDS drugs – and sets them in modern Britain. How would we Brits cope if our children became panga-wielding militia bullies? What would white, working-class, English husbands and wives do if both had AIDS yet there were pills enough for only one?

It is a chilling idea and makes *Stoning Mary* a theatrical event that brands the conscience as firmly as any hot rod on goatskin. The best scenes see Ruth Sheen and Alan Williams playing the child soldier parents, torn between love, relief that he is back, and despair at what he has become.

The Mary of the title (Claire-Louise Cordwell) is a girl who dares to revenge her parents. *Stoning Mary* is not pretty. It is not easy. But it will wind you with its punch. ("Stoning Mary")

Nicholas de Jongh of the *Evening Standard* agreed that “Miss Tucker’s stratagem works unnervingly well. The atmosphere is swathed in both calm and fury” (“The HIV White-wash”). Claire Allfree, in the *Metro*, like Billington, found the resemblance between *Stoning Mary* and *Blasted* in their message. Yet, she was more critical of the text’s language than Billington:

Debbie Tucker Green follows the late Sarah Kane in bringing far-away atrocities into our own backyard. [...] Against a hyper-stylised set, Marianne Elliott’s cast speak Tucker Green’s ghetto dialogue with white lower-class accents to powerfully disorientating effect. But the suspicion remains that Tucker Green has relied too heavily on a dramatic gimmick over a more deeply embedded argument to make her point about Western complacency. Happily, there is enough human drama within her tightly-scripted vignettes to make the play’s jagged poetry more than simply an exercise in tone and rhythm. Tucker Green is a challenging and deeply promising playwright and even if her work isn’t yet the finished article, it deserves to be seen. (Allfree)

Ian Johns of *The Times* was wary of the production, as well as the production value the play had been given:

Perhaps attacking our sense of detachment from these distant problems, Tucker Green brings them closer to home by giving them a white, British urban voice. It’s a striking set-up but it’s not developed by the punchy, elliptical dialogue. Scenes are often initially puzzling, the writing more like brutal tone poems than conversation. Having actors as the AIDS couple’s egos expressing their real thoughts adds little and smacks of authorial contrivance. It’s all more alienating than engaging. Marianne Elliott’s production is equally stylised.

In the Royal Court’s main house, the designer Ultz has replaced the stalls with a blue, horseshoe-shaped arena, where the actors, all having to be white according to the published script, are turned into remote figures choreographed almost like dancers.

It’s a neat, chic style but feels at odds with the horror and desperation of the stories before us. [...] There are also moments when Tucker Green proves what a powerful, distinctive writer she can be. [...] It’s when Tucker Green’s verbal riffs start to individualise the speakers that the play begins to pack a real emotional punch. But, continuing the Royal Court’s current appetite for tackling big themes in oblique ways, the style and staging of *Stoning Mary* ultimately makes its concern easier, not harder, to ignore.

Alastair Macaulay of the *Financial Times* praised Marianne Elliott rather than Tucker Green: “Elliott persuades me that Green has serious talent; I want to see her stage Green’s next play”.

With all of these reviews having been reprinted on the Royal Court’s website of the production, it is no wonder that Charles Spencer’s review did not make it onto the site. Spencer calls *Stoning Mary* a “thin play unworthy of its punchy production”. As he continues, he connects the play to the rather scarce years in new writing at the Royal Court in the early 2000s, and makes a case in point over the production, which in his eyes, was just another of the Court’s many “one-act plays, rarely lasting more than 80 minutes that have largely failed to generate the sense of freshness and excitement that were once this theatre’s stock in trade” (Spencer, “Thin Play”). He continues by referring to a letter Rickson sent him in an effort to defend his theatre: “In his letter

Rickson said he hoped that I might ‘be shocked by the boldness and experiment of Debbie Tucker Green’s *Stoning Mary*.’ Oh dear. I’m afraid this main-stage production strikes me as yet another dud”.

The Royal Court’s move to put an 80-minute One Act on the main stage was indeed daring. Spencer is certainly right that there can be two sides to the story: that of championing a ‘young’ writer and that of hiding one’s being at a loss for stronger plays behind elaborate productions. It is in the second context that the huge cut in seats reads not as a strong belief in the success of tucker green’s play, but as a trick to be sold out easily. This version also sees the Court’s fear that full capacity could not be reached. Did the Royal Court put *Stoning Mary* in the Theatre Downstairs because it wanted to support a new and successfully emerging writer or because it did not have any better play at hand? After all, not everybody – as Ultz rightly felt – was convinced that *Stoning Mary* was a new hit play. Spencer continues:

Theatre reviewers are not immune to laziness, and by and large when I hear that a show has a running time of only an hour, as does *Stoning Mary*, I tend to perform a jig of joy in the foyer. Theatregoers who have paid top whack for an evening out (£27.50) might feel rather less enchanted.

There is nothing to prevent a short play from also being a profound play – one only has to remember Pinter’s *Old Times* or Sarah Kane’s *4.48 Psychosis* to realise that – but *Stoning Mary* is both short and glib.

[...] Green’s point, presumably, is that we would take such horrors more seriously, and do more to find a solution to them, if they were being experienced by whites in Britain rather than blacks in Africa.

But the play is stubbornly unmoving. This is partly because the characters are so unattractive. If Green had shown black Africans behaving so selfishly and cruelly in their distress, I suspect she would have been accused of racism. Western whites are always fair game, of course, but there is a failure of compassion here that I found deeply depressing. I am also tired of Green’s showy stylistic flourishes. The piece seems to be aiming for a kind of rap poetry, in which superficially vernacular dialogue actually makes artful use of single words, single lines, repetition and overlaps. The effect is of a writer drawing attention to her own virtuosity rather than her subject.

Marianne Elliott directs a slick, punchy production, on an epic reconfigured stage by Ultz that covers the whole of the stalls. The performances blaze with intensity. Once again, however, one has the dispiriting feeling that a small, flawed play has been pumped up to the max in a vain attempt to disguise just how thin it actually is. (“Thin Play”)

It cannot go unnoticed that Spencer, who was clearly “dispirited” with the Royal Court and maybe with Rickson’s attempts to defend it – which quoting from a personal letter in a review mildly hints at. He, however, appears to have had an opinion about one act, 80-minute plays even before he walked into the performance of *Stoning Mary*. His review tells that he was waiting for that “one big play” which simply did not show. Instead, tucker green’s play presented him with intimate scenes, in a ‘lingo’ that he could not connect with. Still, in spite of Spencer’s dismissiveness, the strong stylistic and psychological playfulness and the combination of narrative and language around the themes of displacement and relocation in *Stoning Mary* cannot be argued away. As such, Spencer

stands largely alone with his harsh critique of the text. Aleks Sierz commented in *The Stage*:

Debbie Tucker Green's thrilling new play is a passionately political work that confronts us with the terrors of faraway lands by the simple device of having white actors play the roles we usually associate with black people.

[...] this is a 60-minute howl of rage. Just as we have got used to thinking of war as a distant Third World experience, Tucker Green reminds us of its human costs.

Directed by Marianne Elliott on Ultz's bare set, with only a couple of chairs for props, the production rests heavily on a superb cast. As daring as Caryl Churchill, and as emotionally intelligent as Sarah Kane, this really is the finest new writing experience in London. ("Stoning Mary")

The majority of reviewers wrote about *Stoning Mary* in a good, yet not drastic – as with *Blasted* – or highly praising fashion. It did not take long for Tucker Green's play to be hailed as "one of the decade's most distinctive new voices" (Sierz, *Nation* 96) and her *Stoning Mary* to be called "a real masterpiece" (Sierz, "Debbie Tucker Green").

With *Stoning Mary* and her next plays *Random* (2008) and *Truth and Reconciliation* (2011), which have also been produced at the Royal Court, Tucker Green was beginning to be called a 'Royal Court writer' by the press and by the Royal Court itself (Lawson; Royal Court Theatre, "Young Writers Festival"). Yet, it must be asked, can a writer whose fifth play eventually went to the Court, and who had written seven plays before finally having one produced in Sloane Square, really be called a Royal Court writer? Or was Tucker Green's clearly belated welcome into the ranks of Royal Court playwrights Rickson's backdoor strategy in facing Spencer's and Rebellato's claims regarding the theatre's inability to discover interesting new works and writers?

With Debbie Tucker Green the answer to this question comes with some background information: Tucker Green had been associated with the Royal Court for a long time before *Stoning Mary* was programmed. Whybrow explains the beginnings of Tucker Green's career and his involvement in it:

Debbie Green (as she then was) submitted her first play *She Three* to the Alfred Fagon Award (AFA) in 1999. I helped set this up in 1996 as an award (initially) for 'playwrights of Caribbean descent' to offer specific encouragement: the award was defined by region rather than ethnicity. The first winner, in 1997, was Roy Williams. For me the AFA was also a strategy to discover playwrights who (I speculated) were not sending plays to the Royal Court. I was on the AFA selection panel and read Debbie Green's *She Three*; when I met the writer I realised it was Debbie Green, a stage manager at the Royal Court. She had not considered submitting the play to the Royal Court (I asked her), even though she was working there. But Debbie Green did submit the play to the recently announced Alfred Fagon Award, which seemed to vindicate the creation of the Award. (E-mail to the author)

During the 1999/2000 season, when the Royal Court practically could not produce any plays, due to *The Weir* occupying the Duke of York's and the Ambassadors already having been returned to the Ambassadors' own company, the Court decided to go back to the old tradition of doing readings of plays on the set of other productions – here of the Ambassador Group – formerly known as Sunday Nights without Décor.

So, in autumn 1999, in order to keep producing in some way, the Royal Court planned (1) a series of events and readings, including ‘Playwrights’ Playwrights’, and (2) some old-style ‘productions-without-decor’ which could be presented on the set of an A[mbassador] T[heater] G[roup] production at the ‘New Ambassadors’. I put Debbie Green’s *She Three* into the script meeting, and there was much enthusiasm for the play and the Royal Court ‘discovered’ another playwright.

Royal Court Artistic Director Ian Rickson then offered Debbie Green a production-without-decor of *She Three* (cuckoo-like, on another set), but she rejected the offer of a production-without-decor as (in her words) ‘half-arsed’. So, instead, we programmed a revival of Wallace Shawn’s *Our Late Night* (1975), directed by Caryl Churchill, which was a production-without-decor presented on the set of Mark Ravenhill’s *Some Explicit Polaroids* (Out of Joint TC production at New Ambassadors).

Tucker green, taking the Royal Court’s offer as ‘half-arsed’, sought to have her work produced elsewhere: with Paines Plough, the Soho, and the Hampstead. But even as tucker green turned to other companies, Whybrow still speaks of her works elsewhere as having been championed with his assistance:

In 1999, when we ‘discovered’ Debbie Green (as she still was), two of my assistants in the RCT literary office were Jeanie O’Hare and Ruth Little. A couple of years later they had been appointed to jobs at other theatres: Ruth Little as Literary Manager of Soho Theatre; and Jeanie O’Hare as Literary Manager of Hampstead Theatre. They each read Debbie Green’s *She Three* at the Royal Court and later both championed Debbie Green at their new theatres, which resulted in the following productions of her new plays (which may have been commissions):

- *Dirty Butterfly* (Hampstead Theatre, Feb 2003), and
- *Born Bad* (Soho Theatre, May 2003).

While this could merely speak to the London theatre scene, and particularly the new writing scene, being quite small, it still rings as though the Royal Court’s influence extended itself into other institutions. Whybrow continues:

One of the virtues of the British system of public subsidy of the arts is that there is an infrastructure of new writing theatres to extend the range of programming opportunities for new playwrights. The system is competitive and, in a way, collaborative. If one theatre decides not to produce a play then, if the play has any merit, there is a fair chance that another theatre may be ready and willing to produce the play. The play is then produced, and the theatres can review their failure to produce (or decision not to produce) the play; the playwrights and theatres all move forward. If the play is not produced, then the playwright may lack an incentive to write another play, or may get stuck or lose confidence, morale or direction. So, in my view, it is great that Debbie Tucker Green had further opportunities for commissions and productions.

Whybrow thus explains that, in this way, “‘Royal Court playwright’ Debbie Tucker Green was ‘discovered’ by the Royal Court but received her professional debut elsewhere”.

After the Royal Court had decided multiple times not to pick up tucker green’s work for production, they eventually “‘commissioned Debbie Tucker Green to write *Stoning Mary*, which was completed in 2004 and then programmed for April 2005” (Whybrow). According to Whybrow’s depiction of the workings within the new writing

community this means that tucker green had to work her way forward for a good five years, after having called the Royal Court's workshop offer "half-arsed", to be asked back by Whybrow and Rickson. By this time critics had lamented the absence of work like hers at the Royal Court (Rebellato in Aragay et al. 167) and had hailed her work as outstanding. In 2003, Lyn Gardner wrote about tucker green's debut *Dirty Butterfly*: "I cannot say that I enjoyed it very much, but I liked it a great deal. And now I cannot get it out of my head" ("Dirty"). Aleks Sierz wrote about tucker green:

She has certainly brought danger back to the British stage, at a time when many new plays feel a bit jaded in style and content. I guess she's attracted by agony because it seems both authentic and passionate, but her unique mix of poetry and emotion lifts her work above the banalities of dirty realism. (Sierz, "Debbie Tucker Green")

After having seen *Born Bad* at the Hampstead in 2003, Sierz wrote: "Love it or loathe it, Tucker Green's work is already making its mark" (Sierz, "If you hate the show"). Before the Royal Court asked her back, tucker green had also won an Olivier award.

Taken together with Rickson's letter to Spencer, assuring him that *Stoning Mary* would shock him, this adds a new layer to the Royal Court's championing of tucker green. One can argue that the Royal Court, trying to recreate the effect of the 1994/1995 season, commissioned a playwright, who by 2003 had become quite well-known for the Sarah Kane-like rawness in her work. Lyn Gardner wrote, when announcing *Stoning Mary*:

Critics have likened Tucker Green's work to that of the late Sarah Kane. You can see why: her plays are urgent, angry accounts of the way we live now. There is something raw and direct in their fractured poetry and internal monologues that seems to lay bare the characters' emotional lives with the kind of psychological complexity that you expect of a novel but rarely find on the stage. ("I was messing about")

To make the most of what Whybrow and Rickson anticipated, they programmed tucker green's Royal Court debut on the main stage. This does not, however, represent Whybrow's policy to have more young writers' work produced in the Theatre Downstairs, even if he makes it sound like it:

Many of the Royal Court's plays by new playwrights in this period were premiered in a small theatre and subsequently transferred to a big theatre. It is an artistic decision, but also a strategic one. New play theatres often find young playwrights write plays which are limited in subject or scale or gesture; or, for example, the play has a main character who is a teenager in a family, and the play fails to command the main stage. I think we shifted the thinking about programming by the nature of the play, rather than the status of the playwright. This is evident in the programming in that era. Harold Pinter *Ashes to Ashes* (1996), a two-hander, was produced in the Theatre Upstairs (physically, the Circle space at The Ambassadors); Caryl Churchill's *Far Away* (2000), with scores of supernumeraries, was programmed in the Theatre Upstairs (in Sloane Square); whereas Caryl Churchill's *A Number* (2000), a two-hander, was programmed in the Theatre Downstairs. On the other hand, several new playwrights had their plays programmed on the main stage: for example, Jez Butterworth's *Mojo* (1995), *The Night Heron* (2002), and *The Winterling* (2006), Conor McPherson's *Dublin Carol* (2000) and *Shining City* (2004), and Leo Butler *Redundant* (2001). Following that policy, Debbie Tucker Green's *Stoning*

Mary (2005) was a play by a young playwright, yet programmed on the main stage Theatre Downstairs. (E-mail to the author)

Whybrow suggest a ‘rule of thumb’ in choosing the best fitting space for each play:

My tentative suggestion about the artistic programming of new plays is that studio plays tend, thematically, to focus on intimacy or the lack of it; main stage plays tend to focus on power or its abuse. This is a schematic, and intuitive rather than analytical, no more than a ‘rule of thumb’.

To bring a play with such intimate scenes, as can be found in *Stoning Mary*, to the main-stage, accordingly, clearly goes against Whybrow’s rule. As can be seen above, Whybrow presents the Court, or more precisely himself, as a major factor in the development of tucker green’s work and career. In order to show how much the Royal Court promoted her, he highlights the play that was programmed on the main stage was by a ‘young’ and ‘new’ playwright.

It is true that Whybrow tends to use ‘young’ and ‘new’ interchangeably, but tucker green, who had, according to his own account, been ‘discovered’ by him six years earlier, was certainly neither new, nor young given that ‘young’ must be understood as a substitute for inexperienced, as tucker green’s age is unknown. It must therefore be argued that in spite of Whybrow arguing that they programmed the play of a newcomer on main stage, the Court commissioned a known playwright to write a play for a spot on the main stage. They expected the much needed “shock and boldness” the Court’s programme had been missing. This boldness, however, had already been attested to tucker green’s work by a wide range of critics. Rather than being a daring production of a ‘young’ and ‘new’ writer, when taking a closer look, the equation sounds more like a safe bet.

Whybrow never mentions any financial or political consideration regarding the programming of *Stoning Mary*, just as he never speaks about the actual quality of the script being the reason to send it to the main stage. Instead, Whybrow explains that the decision to move a play by a ‘young’ writer to the main stage was made on grounds that it was “serious-minded and angry” and that Marianne Elliott had envisioned the production in the Downstairs:

The Royal Court produced *Stoning Mary* on a re-configured main stage with reduced seating capacity. *Stoning Mary* is a serious-minded and angry play, and its subject and style seemed to command the main stage: we felt it demanded the scale and gesture of a main stage production. Marianne Elliott was a new associate director at the Royal Court, and, when we programmed the play, Marianne was keen to direct it and had a vision for a production.

Whybrow also dismisses a rumour that it was the co-producing artistic staff in Plymouth – to whose Drum Theatre *Stoning Mary* went after its run at the Court – that chose *Stoning Mary* out of two plays:

The Royal Court is a building-based theatre which is not geared up to tour productions, so it opens up conversations with regional theatres and sends them plays with a view to co-producing. The Royal Court had committed to producing *Stoning Mary*. As part of an

on-going conversation with Simon Stokes, AD of Theatre Royal Plymouth, we sent him plays which might interest him. That's how it works. This explains (and dispels) the rumour about the Drum Theatre (TR Plymouth's second stage): the Royal Court sent him some plays it was producing, and, of those plays, *Stoning Mary* was the play he wanted to co-produce; it is not accurate to say that TR Plymouth chose the play.

8.3 Conclusion

The case of *Stoning Mary* shows that the discovering and championing of new writers and the productions of new plays for a writers' theatre, like the Royal Court, go far beyond the eventual programming. New writing had become more and more prominent since the mid-1990s: not only to the Royal Court but throughout the whole British theatre landscape. Sierz writes: "new writing is a specialist activity that requires specialist theatres" (*Nation* 28). Had there not been such a strong and specialised new writing network, tucker green's career would have likely ended with her calling the Royal Court's suggestion of a reading for *She Three* 'half-arsed'.

The production of *Stoning Mary* thus illustrates the Royal Court's involvement in the career of yet another outstanding writer – it is not the story of the discovery and nurturing of a writer throughout her career though. Whybrow did not discover tucker green at the Royal Court, but through the AFA. Tucker green had chosen not to send her work to the Royal Court, and refused a workshop presentation there. As such, the analysis of tucker green's debut at the Royal Court is foremost illustrating the business side to the theatre: tucker green, having already gained a reputation as a writer, was programmed in the Downstairs space and given a striking performance. The letter by Ian Rickson to the critic Charles Spencer shows that the Royal Court aimed at creating yet another hit play that was expected to leave the audience "shocked by the boldness and experiment" (Spencer, "Thin play").

Tucker green was neither a newcomer, nor a young writer when the Court commissioned her. She had at no point in her career worked at the Royal Court in the capacity as a writer. Still, Whybrow argues that he has the right to call her a 'Royal Court writer' – because of the way he 'discovered' her. By doing so, he unrightfully ties tucker green both to the Royal Court's 1990s' new writing policy of discovering young writers and the 2000s' new new writing policy of nurturing these writers. In a similar way Whybrow's argument that with *Stoning Mary* a play by a young writer went on the main stage is misleading, as it suggests on the one hand that the impact of tucker green's work was in many ways unforeseeable, and on the other that he followed through with his policy of sending new plays by yet unknown writers to the mainstage. While it is obvious that a strong belief was put in tucker green by commissioning her, and in her play, by giving it such a striking production, it must still be acknowledged that the Royal Court was not buying 'a pig in a poke'.

Eventually, it is the importance of the new writing infrastructure in Britain that is illustrated in tucker green's career rather than a constant promotion of the writer by the Royal Court. Still, the Royal Court eventually made the best of it: it commissioned

tucker green to write *Stoning Mary*, launched it as a hit play, and produced her major works since. Had Whybrow chosen to claim tucker green as a ‘Royal Court writer’ on grounds of having promoted her work since *Stoning Mary*, the argument would have held strong. But Whybrow, quite noticeably, chose a different argument. He argued that he himself, quite in line with his and Rickson’s 2000s-policy of nurturing playwrights, directly and indirectly nurtured tucker green, when really she had to work her way to success on her own, or with the help of other companies, for five years.

It was these other institutions – like the Bush, the Hampstead, and Paines Plough – that kept tucker green from getting to the place where she would “lack an incentive to write another play, or may get stuck or lose confidence, morale or direction”. In Whybrow’s words this is how “the playwrights and theatres all move forward”. The new writing system in Britain and at the Royal Court must therefore be understood as a platform for talent, as much as – and probably foremost – a trade market for talent; and of the theatres specializing in new writing, the Royal Court is the oldest and the most experienced trader: they are the senior tradesperson – in a very fiscal sense.

After the rebuild, the Royal Court largely recalled its artistic reputation of the 1990s to link it to its history of being the world famous writers’ theatre. New writers, however, were the one thing that the theatre was short of. Rickson took to nurturing the relationships with established writers, but the Royal Court in the 2000s simply could not keep up with the artistic reputation of the 1990s. The analysis of the production of debbie tucker green’s *Stoning Mary* shows how the energies from ‘beyond the building’ actually caused the Court’s evolution. The Royal Court, as a writers’ theatre in the 2000s, could not be seen as the spearhead of a movement like in the 1990s. It was part of a greater network and did not lead. The career of ‘Royal Court writer’ tucker green shows how fundamentally times had changed. Whybrow may call tucker green a ‘Royal Court writer’ due to his influence on her work, yet it still seems more correct to simply call tucker green a British writer – for her career flourished within the British new writing system.

The Royal Court in the 2000s had become part of this infrastructure and knew well how to feed on the innovations and efforts of others. Other writers that were taken up, after already having built a career elsewhere, were, for example, Richard Bean and David Eldridge. Simon Stephens, Leo Butler, Laura Wade, and Michael Wynne came to the Court through the Young Writer’s Programme or competitions, and were tried out in those contexts before being launched as part of the Court’s season. Only very few playwrights, like Lucy Prebble, Polly Stenham, and Christopher Shinn, were taken on and produced by the Court without having had a recognizable career, or path with the Royal Court respectively, before. Still, even with them, Whybrow’s alleged policy of bringing actual young and new writers in the Downstairs space – not even after one or two productions – held true: Prebble’s play *Sugar Syndrome* (2003), as well as Shinn’s plays *Four* (1998), *Other People* (2000), and *Dying City* (2006), and Stenham’s debut

That Face (2007) – this last one in spite of moving on to the West End – all received productions in the Theatre Upstairs.

While other theatres had to do what the Court did in its early days – being the artistic spearhead – the Court, in the 2000s, stuck to well-known names or, in regard to younger voices, profited from the way in which the whole new writing culture moved itself forward, to then decide which writers and plays were worth producing.

9. Afterword. The 2010s

The 2010s kicked off with drastic cuts in arts funding, which initiated a restructuring of the landscape of subsidized arts institutions in England. The Arts Council presented a new policy. The majority of the Arts Council's regularly funded organisations, it was reported, were to be hit with an almost 9% real terms funding cut in 2011/12, with more severe cuts to follow in 2012/13 (Smith, "ACE").

In March 2011, the outcome of the national portfolio funding applications was announced: several companies and theatres in England had their funding cut off. In London, for instance, the Yellow Earth Theatre's £150,000 grant was axed completely forcing the theatre and the company to warn of closure (Smith, "Yellow Earth"). Even leading companies like Max Stafford-Clark's Out of Joint experienced a cut in grants of -27.9%, the Royal Opera House -15%, the Almeida Theatre -39%, the Royal National Theatre -14.9%. At the same time, however, organizations, whose artistic or organisational policies were considered future-oriented or trend-setting, received raises. As such, in London, for example, the Arcola Theatre, with its carbon neutral policy, received a raise of 82.1%, the Barbican, as a multi-arts venue, 108.7%, Crying Out Loud, with their focus on visual theatre, 158.2%, Punchdrunk, pushing the concept of immersive theatre, 141%, FUEL, with their diverse and artistically open development schemes, 203.5%, the Stratford Circus, as a performing arts centre, even received a raise of 554.8%. The English Stage Company, with a cut of -4.4% in their grant, pretty much remained on the same budget with merely a balancing of inflation. With this, they were also one of the new writing venues that had not been hit too hard. Whilst only the Royal Court and the Gate received a -4.4% cut, the Hampstead, Headlong, the Donmar, and the Roundhouse saw cuts of -11%. The Soho even received a cut of -17.6%. (Brown, "The arts").

In London alone, 32 new organizations were funded. *The Stage's* Alistair Smith, in his blog, commented on the cuts:

Yes, there are a small number of individual decisions that might raise an eyebrow or two, but in the context of the spending review and a desire to inject fresh blood into the arts ecology, they appear to have made a pretty good fist of things and the sector seems to have recognised this fact.

Crucially, they have been able to manage expectations. [...] That is not to pretend that things won't be hard, they will be and the average cut of 11% is still a severe one. But let's be honest, we were all expecting a bloodbath. There have been cuts – some very severe and regretful cuts – but it is not on the scale that we had been led to believe. In fact, if we are being brutally honest there are probably a few organisations left in the portfolio that have dodged a bullet. There have also been a few more welcome introductions and uplifts than I think were expected. New funding deals for organisations such as HighTide and the first ever core support for new musical theatre writing (through Perfect Pitch and Mercury Musical Developments) should be celebrated, while uplifts in support for companies like Punchdrunk, Pilot, Arcola, the Watermill, LIFT and the Maltings should also be applauded.

It is also good to see that smaller organisations haven't suffered disproportionately. Seven out of eight of the national organisations took bigger than average cuts of 15% and £34.7 million will be spent on new organisations from 2012/13 to 2014/15. That strikes me as

a pretty healthy rate of turnover. Extra money has also been brought into the pot from the Lottery to help support two specific areas of work – touring, which receives an extra £18 million a year, and work for children and young people, which will receive £10.5 million a year. Again, both sensible developments. (“Yellow Earth”)

It is not surprising to see that the Royal Court came out of the cuts with a mere -4.4%. Whilst during the 1980s it had been battling its closure, there were no severe battles to fight in 2011: it was a firmly standing institution.

Still, on 2 February 2011, Dominic Cooke, alongside Simon Stephens, was quoted by *The Stage* labelling the cuts as “totally senseless”. Stephens said they could “‘irreparably damage’ the UK theatre scene” and “will hurt the ‘vitality of our theatre’ and affect venues’ ability to commission new work”, concluding that “in simple terms, theatres over the next few years may well be able to commission fewer plays. They will be able to produce fewer still. They will lean into plays with smaller casts and more accessible forms”. Cooke, it was quoted, “told *The Stage* the Royal Court had already lost £450,000 [in 2011] because of the funding reductions. He added that he hoped the venue would ‘try to absorb the cuts and find ways of sidelining them’. But he warned it could only operate in this way for a year” (Hemley).

A meeting on 25 March 2011 saw many directors and artists gather at the Old Vic Theatre to express their concern about the upcoming cuts and the government’s losing interest in the arts and focussing more on the economy – much like in the 1980s¹⁷⁶. David Lan, at the time Artistic Director of the Young Vic, said:

Many of us are concerned that, more and more, culture in this country is coming to be valued principally for its potential contribution to the economy. This is, certainly, one of its values. But we are afraid that an essential value of art, a means by which people and societies achieve their full human potential, is in danger of being treated as a side effect. [...] We understand that, in the short term, cuts to public investment in the arts are inevitable. The meeting we are calling is not intended to contest that. We are however concerned that if we do not collectively make a forceful and articulate case for public investment in the arts, those in control of future spending rounds may assume that we believe 2011 to 2013 levels of funding to be adequate. We feel it is urgent to raise these ideas with colleagues working across the arts and, together, to communicate our feelings about the future to government. (“ACE cancels”)

176 The event was hosted by the Young Vic’s Artistic Director David Lan as well as the Royal Shakespeare Company’s Artistic Director Michael Boyd. Present were Richard Eyre, director of Free World Shreela Ghosh, the Chief Executive of the Royal Opera House Tony Hall, the Artistic Director of the Southbank Centre Jude Kelly, the Artistic Director Akram Khan, the director of Artsadmin Judith Knight, the General Director of the Opera North Richard Mantle, the director of the National Portrait Gallery Sandy Nairne, the General Director of the Sage Gateshead Anthony Sargent, the Chief Executive of the Royal Academy of Arts Charles Saumarez Smith, the Artistic Director of the Graeae Theatre Company Jenny Sealey, the Chief Executive and Artistic Director of Sadler’s Wells Alistair Spalding, the director of Farnham Maltings Gavin Stride, the Chief Executive of The Place Kenneth Tharp, and the Managing Director of the Philharmonia Orchestra David Whelton. (“ACE cancels”)

During the meeting a letter to the Prime Minister was formulated mirroring the concerns expressed by Lan above. It was signed by 26 directors and chief executives in the arts, including the host and directors of the Liverpool Everyman Playhouse, the Akram Khan Company, Youth Music, the Roundhouse, Siobhan Davies Dance, Studios and Relay, the Broadway, Barking, the Battersea Arts Centre, Clean Break and Mark Rubinstein (“What Next Arts”). Whilst back in the day, many had fought alongside Stafford-Clark, no Royal Court representative signed the letter.

When Cooke’s leaving his post as Artistic Director of the Royal Court in 2013 became public on 19 December 2011, the *Guardian* recalled him as having “presided over the Royal Court’s most dazzling period for years”, claiming that under his directorship “the Royal Court [...] has re-established an unrivalled reputation as the home of provocative new drama” (Needham). *The Stage*’s Marc Shenton commented on 22 December 2011, choosing similar words for Cooke as he chose for Rickson some six years before: “Half of my choices of the best plays I saw this year [...] were premiered at [the Royal Court]. [Cooke] will be a seriously tough act to follow” (“Ian Rickson”).

Under Cooke’s lead, Royal Court productions were seen in Sloane Square, on tour with the ‘theatre local’ project, in the West End with the productions of *Rock ‘n’ Roll*, *That Face*, *Under the Blue Sky* (2008), *Enron*, *Jerusalem*, Bruce Norris’ *Clybourne Park* (2010), with the three-plays season in 2012 at the Duke of York’s with Laura Wade’s *Posh* (2008), April de Angelis’ *Jumpy* (2011), and Nick Payne’s *Constellation* (2012)¹⁷⁷, and on Broadway with *Rock ‘n’ Roll*, *Enron*, *Jerusalem*, and *Clybourne Park*. The *Guardian* commented on the Court’s 2012 West End season:

The season, which will overlap with the London Olympics, marks the continuation of the Royal Court’s relationship with the Duke of York’s Theatre and its owners Ambassador Theatre Group, who will co-produce. In 1996, the Court relocated its operations to the West End venue for three years while its Sloane Square home was being refurbished. Since then, the Duke of York’s has hosted a number of Royal Court transfers, including Tom Stoppard’s *Rock ‘n’ Roll* and Polly Stenham’s *That Face* as well as a revival of David Eldridge’s *Under the Blue Sky* in 2008, starring Catherine Tate.

Posh and *Jumpy* will be the sixth and seventh Royal Court productions to transfer to the West End under Cooke – one for each year of his tenure as Artistic Director, which will end next year. The theatre will also present an off-Broadway production of Mike Bartlett’s *Cock* later this year.

Howard Panter, joint CEO and creative director of Ambassador Theatre Group, said: ‘With Dominic Cooke at the artistic helm the Royal Court has been responsible for some of the best theatre that has ever been produced in the UK, and under his inspired leadership the Court has enjoyed a golden period.’

177 The ‘Royal Court at the Duke of York’s’, with three productions transferring to the West End for three months each, was also accompanied by readings of famous plays directed by playwrights: *The Starry Messenger* (2009) by Kenneth Lonergan directed by Nick Payne, Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* directed by Polly Stenham, *Abide With Me* (1976) by Barrie Keefe directed by Roy Williams, and *Across Oka* (1988) by Robert Holman directed by David Eldridge (Royal Court Theatre, “Playwright’s Playwrights”).

Cooke added: ‘As the world focuses its attention on London for the Olympics, it’s a great moment for the Royal Court to mark its groundbreaking contribution to British culture, and the leading role British playwrights take in theatre across the world, with a season in the West End.’ (Trueman, “Royal Court hits”)

Panter’s statement of a ‘golden period’ echoes and highlights Cooke’s reign in an old Royal Court tradition of labelling ‘golden ages’. It is further noteworthy that Cooke’s idea to celebrate British culture was to have a season of Royal Court productions in the West End. The fact that Cooke’s reign saw seven transfers by March 2012 – it was nine after adding Bartlett’s *Cock* and Payne’s *Constellations* – seemed to make for a grand achievement of the Royal Court’s Artistic Director. And indeed, transfers like these were financially feasible, more so when plays moved on to New York: the plays enjoyed a longer run and ticket prices were higher. It is, however, with the history of the Royal Court in mind, outstanding that nobody was complaining about such a strong, ongoing alliance – as was the case in 2012 – between the Royal Court and the formerly loathed West End. No question: the Royal Court was not in any way the uncompromising David any longer; it rather celebrated British culture in being the commercial Goliath. The theatre had become a strong presence in the West End and on Broadway.

Under Cooke, the Court had fully moved away from its radically countercultural mandate. But Cooke’s commercially favourable policy not only affected the Royal Court’s artistic output and the West End leg of the Royal Court’s work. Even the ‘theatre local’ project that brought plays like Debbie Tucker Green’s *Random* (2008) into the neighbourhoods, where it could have been set, and as such could have counted as a non-commercial, broadly communal event, only had the effect that the bohemian bourgeoisie, in order to see a Royal Court play – in an almost voyeuristic manner, travelled to a shop in an Elephant and Castle mall instead of staying more central.

In May 2012, Dan Reballato asked in his blog if the Royal Court in its attempt to cater to the middle class had drifted towards presenting boulevard comedy. Reballato writes:

Dominic Cooke’s avowed intention, when he took over as Artistic Director in 2006, was to bring middle class life onto its stages to be examined and scrutinized. And he’s certainly made good on that promise: *The City, The Pain and the Itch, That Face, Tusk Tusk, Haunted Child, Jumpy, The Heretic, Tribes, Clybourne Park*, and, now, *Love Love Love* all, in their various ways, consider middle class life.

And that’s a good thing. Many of these plays have subjected middle class life to unflinching scrutiny in a way that was very uncomfortable for its audience. Middle class values certainly need to be examined, critiqued, parodied, taken apart, put back together, violated, captured and questioned.

[...]

But sometimes I think the scrutiny can be blunted, by a knowing complicity of audience and stage, and by the corseted neatness of play and production.

[...]

Are we seeing a resurgence of a theatre of reassurance and comfort at the very time when the values of our society should be held up to scrutiny and question? A timid theatre, whose soft contours will smother all dissent? I’d like to see radicals occupy the boulevards again. (“Théâtre”)

Rebellato's critique was quickly picked up, and Matt Trueman asked on his *Guardian* blog on 11 May: "Has the Royal Court lost its edge?" Trueman continues:

The location of this famous home of the theatrical kitchen sink has left it with a conundrum, since, perched on the east side of Sloane Square, its neighbours are the (nowadays) wealthy burghers of Chelsea. Is the theatre's role to stage plays attacking or supporting its audience? Should it sock it to 'em, or cosy up to 'em?

Trueman reads that "Rebellato argues that the stock Royal Court audience has grown accustomed to – indeed, come to actively enjoy – being the centre of attention. It's pandering to the audience that it ought to confront". Max Stafford-Clark, in 2012, commented on the Royal Court:

Well, it is more successful in the sense that it gets an audience. Dominic Cooke, who is the leading director, has successfully programmed plays that have much more middle-class concerns. And he has been more successful than any director in the Royal Court's history in getting an audience there. It's always full... so, I love everything about the Royal Court now, except the plays they put on. Which I find rather banal, but who knows, maybe that'll be looked on as a golden age in a few years time. (Personal interview)

The Court today is very different from the Court of the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and even early 1990s. Nobody questions the institution and its establishment, and nobody debates its value and its creative output – at least not on a quantitative and economic level. The Royal Court has become a 'living' theatre in the sense that it is providing for itself through many subsidization mechanisms – like a creature that naturally feeds on governmental funds, as much as it has learnt to grow its own food on an expanding patch of land called private sponsoring. Royal Court plays are produced all over the world, the theatre produces plays from all over the world (sponsored through its International Programmes) and many new writing theatres – not only in Britain – have followed the Court's lead.

In 2013, Cooke handed over the artistic directorship to Vicky Featherstone (Royal Court Theatre, "Royal Court Theatre announces"). Lyn Gardner, in a response to Reballato and Trueman, announced that "Vicky Featherstone can help the Royal Court keep its edge":

News that Vicky Featherstone has been appointed to succeed Dominic Cooke as the Artistic Director of the Royal Court is being greeted with cheers in the theatre world. Featherstone, who has been running the UK's first non-building-based national theatre, the National Theatre of Scotland (NTS), since it began, and who before that was Artistic Director of the new writing company Paines Plough, is unafraid to be a strong leader. But she is also a personable figure who is widely liked and admired.

So she should be. Her tenure at the National Theatre of Scotland has been a great success, creating a model for a "theatre without walls" whose education and participatory work and productions for schools and family audiences have been as important as its flagship projects, including the worldwide hit *Black Watch*, or the verbatim play about the press, *Enquirer*, which is currently running in Glasgow.

If a little of that rubs off on the Royal Court it will be no bad thing. [...] Featherstone's tenure at the Royal Court may signal a change of culture in a theatre world where most directors are male and most of the plays staged are still written by men.

Featherstone's forte has always been new writing, and her devotion to playwrights is well documented. She has a good eye for potential: many playwrights including Abi Morgan, David Greig and Gary Owen owe early successes to her, and she's been unafraid to collaborate and push at the boundaries of what theatre can and might be. [...]

This all bodes well for the Court, an institution that sometimes looks as if it is struggling to redefine its place in a theatre culture that has dramatically shifted over the last decade to embrace many forms of theatre taking place in many different kinds of spaces. [...] Featherstone should turn out to be exactly what the Royal Court needs to keep its radical edge. (Gardner)

Featherstone herself was careful not to give her work a direction, before she had even taken up the post:

The notion of producing classics really bores me [...]. What challenges me, ego-wise, is being the first person to uncover a play. I feel thrilled about being able to create an environment where writers can take risks and surprise themselves, but I'm unwilling to say much more than that lest I be defined by it. George Devine [...] said that this theatre must respond to constantly changing contexts and that's how I see it, too. But some things change quite fast, and if you're any more specific than that about what you're going to do, you start to get over-defined by it, as poor Dominic did. (Cooke, "Vicky Featherstone")

Yet, during the handover period, in which Featherstone and Cooke shared an office from January to April 2013, Featherstone made a decision that would set her on track for the direction that she was to go in. Cooke's last season ended in April 2013 and Featherstone's first would begin in September: "she made her first decision: over the course of the summer, she would hand the keys of the theatre over to more than 140 writers for 'Open Court', a season of plays, workshops and rehearsed readings" (Cooke, "Vicky Featherstone"). 'Open Court' not only broke with the Court's tradition to present plays – in 4-week runs in the Theatre Upstairs and 6-week runs in the Theatre Downstairs – but also offered many different theatrical formats – always putting the writer at the centre of attention. It was thus crucial to this programming that it did not come from Featherstone and her creative team – Associate Directors Carry Cracknell and Jonathan Tiffany, Literary Manager Chris Campbell, and executive director Lucy Davies – but from the writers.

Featherstone asked the theatre's staff members to nominate writers. Eighty were nominated and she sat down with them to discuss what the Court was actually for and how a wide audience could be attracted (Hoggart). One of the most outstanding ideas came from Caryl Churchill: a fixed company – four directors and 14 actors, including Anna Calder-Marshall, Siobhan Redmond, Paul Bhattacharjee and Jonjo O'Neill (Hoggart) – playing on weekly repertory, presenting new interpretations of old regional plays. Another was a Soap Opera, written by Royal Court Playwrights and performed in nightly 5-minute instalments at the Bussey Building in Peckham. Besides various performances and audio installations, one also had the opportunity to sit down with a

playwright and hear their newest play, or to see 24-hour productions of plays (Cavendish, “National Theatre of Sloane Square”). The festival clearly took a stand in showing that Featherstone’s intention was to put the writer first – in which ever format their work asked for. Dominic Cavendish wrote:

[C]learly there will be immense change coming [...]. [S]he’s intent on creating theatre for the crowd-sourcing, quick-fire, social media age – events are happening so thick and fast these days, and reactions to them are so swift, that the commissioning and producing process has to start speeding up. And if one had a criticism of the Court in the recent past it was that – for all the renewed populism of Cooke’s tenure – it still felt a bit cliquy, inward-looking and forbidding. With this announcement today, the doors are being flung open as never before. Let’s see what happens. (Cavendish, “National Theatre of Sloane Square“)

And indeed Featherstone’s focus on new writers turned out to be distinctly different from those of her predecessors. This became more and more clear in the programming of the following seasons.

With a very strong focus on new writers, Featherstone’s first four seasons at the Royal Court opened the theatre for a more daring and brave policy. The eyes of the Royal Court were no longer set firmly on the West End but on the risky business of producing as many new plays as possible, which included many plays by female writers, such as Lucy Kirkwood, Penelope Skinner, EV Crowe, Abi Morgan, Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti, and new female voices like Katherine Soper, Alice Birch, Anna Jordan, Vivienne Franzmann, Charlene James, Stef Smith, Cordelia Lynn, Molly Davies, Rachel DeLahay, and Diana Nneka Atuona. More young writers were Al Smith, Gary Owen, Nathaniel Martello-White, Chris Thorpe, Mongiwekhaya, Rory Mullarkey. Also longstanding writers like Simon Stephens, Jez Butterworth, debbie tucker green, Jim Cartwright, Caryl Churchill, Antony Neilson, Alistair McDowall, Martin McDonagh, Enda Walsh, Michael Wynne, Nick Gill, Duncan Macmillan, and Tim Price were part of the programme. As well as well-known British writers and theatre makers like Dennis Kelly, Jack Thorne, Tim Crouch, Katie Mitchell – all four made their debut at the Court under Featherstone – and international names like Guillermo Calderon, Susan-Lori Parks, Constanza Markas/ Dorky Park, Lola Arias, Jennifer Haley, Dalia Taha, and Abhishek Majumdar.

While Featherstone and her team nourished their ties with known Royal Court writers, even making Simon Stephens an Associate Playwright, they also took on plays that had simply been sent to the literary department by the writers. Cordelia Lynn’s *Lela & Co* (2015), Nicola Wilson’s *Plaques and Tangles* (2015), and *You For Me For You* (2015) by the American playwright Mia Chung were all Royal Court debuts that had arrived in an envelope on Campbell’s desk. Campbell had seen Lynn’s first play, worked with Wilson and had had a meeting with Chung when she was visiting London, but eventually the plays had reached the Court on the initiative of the writer, not through an agent. Literary Manager Chris Campbell comments: “Three different processes, but all founded on the principle that if you send us an envelope, we will open it.” (Trueman, “It arrives in an envelope”).

Instead of looking to transfers for financial stability, Featherstone opted for a different strategy:

As well as three homegrown commissions, the Royal Court is beginning its new commitment to significant co-productions with several wonderful partners outside London, as well as Clean Break. This means that for the writers and audiences the work will have as wide a reach as possible. (Trueman, “New Royal Court season”)

Not only did Featherstone opt for co-production, she also looked outside of London to find these. While this had been done before – see the co-production of *Stoning Mary* with the Drum Theatre in Plymouth – Featherstone significantly extended the co-production network. As such, the Royal Court entered co-productions with the National Theatre of Scotland for Jack Thorne’s *Let the Right One In* (2013), the Schaubühne Berlin for *Ophelia’s Zimmer* (2015), Johannesburg’s Market Theatre and the Fugard Theatre in Cape Town for Mongiwekhaya *I See You* (2015), the Abbey Theatre in Dublin for David Ireland’s *Cyprus Avenue* (2015), the Sherman Theatre in Cardiff for Gary Owen’s *Killology* (2016), the Young Vic, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Sheffield Theatres, and the Yard Theatre for Charlene James’ *Cuttin’ It* (2016), and production companies like Marla Rubin Productions and Bill Kenwright for *Let the Right One In*, Mighty Mouth in association with Cusack Projects for Beckett’s short plays *Not I/Footfalls/Rockaby* (2015), Paines Plough for the Royal Court commission of an anonymous woman’s *Manwatching* (2016), HighTide and HOUSE for Al Smith’s *Harrowgate* (2016), Complicite for Simon McBurney’s production of *The Kid Stays in the Picture* (2017), and Sonia Friedmann Productions and Neal Street Productions for Jez Butterworth’s *The Ferryman* (2017) (Royal Court Theatre). The Court also entered a scheme with the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester to produce the winning plays of the biannual Bruntwood Prize competition: Anna Jordan’s *YEN* (2013) and Katherine Sopers’ *Wish List* (2015) (Royal Court Theatre).

Featherstone’s first season had contained *The Ritual Slaughter of George Mastromas* by Dennis Kelly, *Let the Right One In* by Jack Thorne, Beckett’s *Not I, Footfalls* and *Rockaby*, *The Mistress Contract* by Abi Morgan, *Routes* by Rachel De-Lahay, *The Djinnns of Eidgah* by Abhishek Majumdar. Featherstone commented:

Introducing major writers, examining different aspects of radicalisation, developing a family audience, collaborative projects, and touring - this first season goes some way to begin exploring these strands, which will develop more strongly as we go. It’s inspiring to be leading the Royal Court into the next stage of this journey. (“Dennis Kelly and Abi Morgan”)

Introducing new writers to the Royal Court and opening up a wide array of topics, Featherstone’s 2013/ 14 season clearly was more of an exploration, rather than following a theme. The same was true for the early 2014 season, which started in April 2014 with Stephen’s *Birdland*, then saw Crouch’s *Adler & Gibb*, and new plays by John Donnelly, Vivienne Franzmann, and Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti in the Theatre Upstairs.

Dominic Cavendish commented in June 2014, just a week before the new season announcement, in the review of Crouch's *Adler & Gibb*:

Carnage in Syria, returning chaos in Iraq, turmoil in Ukraine. And what has Vicky Featherstone programmed downstairs at the Royal Court? A laborious, coolly cerebral piece by arch theatrical conceptualist Tim Crouch about (broadly speaking, it's not easily reducible) the representation of "reality" in art.

I was an early cheerleader for Featherstone's regime but I'm starting to have my doubts. Where are the plays that matter? Where's the connection with the here and now? (Cavendish, "Adler & Gibb")

While Featherstone's looking out for her writers could be greatly applauded, it was not only the non-political subject matters of plays, but also the quality in general that the work at the Court was seemingly lacking:

Last year, for the first time this century, the theatre failed to muster a single nomination at either the Olivier or the Evening Standard awards. Since Featherstone started, every main stage play, with the exception of the imported *Let the Right One In*, has had its detractors. One, *The Mistress Contract*, got a proper critical drubbing. Walk-outs became a regular occurrence.

By contrast, Dominic Cooke's first year in charge yielded Polly Stenham's *That Face*, Mike Bartlett's *My Child* and *The Pain and the Itch* by Bruce Norris – all debuts of one kind or another and all critical, commercial hits. The Royal Court is often deemed the pinnacle of British new writing. With that in mind, you can understand the unease around Sloane Square. (Trueman, "Holding Court")

Thinking back to the Royal Court's legacy, particularly around the 'right to fail', Trueman's critique is noteworthy. Walkouts and bad reviews, for him, were proscribed, while he missed commercial hits. The 'right to fail' – after Cooke's commercial policy, was not what was understood as the Court's strong suit or unique feature any longer.

While Featherstone's first two seasons had not come with a theme, the late 2014 season did. Featherstone commented: "We never planned that we would create a season with a theme. [...] So there really isn't a theme, but we are responding to what the playwrights are asking us to think about. And the playwrights are asking us to think about revolution" (Bosanquet). Featherstone's season planning, just a week after Cavendish's remark, feels like a lucky response. The season contained Mullarkey's *The World on the Door*, Price's *The Internet is Serious Business*, Macmillian's *2071*, Davies' *God Bless the Child*, Atuona's *Liberian Girl*, Thorne's *Hope*, Harris' *Hold Your Breath*, and Walsh's adaptation of Dahl's *The Twits*. Featherstone felt: "All of these plays are about revolutions - big and small acts of resistance. They are provocative, diverse and timely. They are great stories, inventively told and demanding that we consider a better future" (Bosanquet).

It almost felt like going back to the roots, when, in September 2014, Featherstone commented on her first year: "Some of it has worked and some of it has failed, whatever that means, but that's absolutely how it should be" (Trueman, "Holding Court"). And just like at the beginning of her reign at the Royal Court, she refused to pin down her vision: "We should always be surprising and slightly indefinable".

Before Featherstone took over, the Royal Court under Cooke was very successful, with many plays being transferred, awards being won, and sold out houses. Matt Trueman, however, remarks: “[B]ut writers had become frustrated by constrictive development processes. New writing felt somewhat staid and homogeneous” (“Holding Court”). To break this, Featherstone allowed for the writers to take over during ‘Open Court’. It is also the place where she rooted her idea of a writers’ theatre:

You can only be good at the Royal Court if that’s the case. If you’re trying to put your little claws into everything and shape every single thing, it’s no longer the writers’ theatre. [...] I always want them to be writing plays with the Royal Court, but also to see the Royal Court as a place for experimentation in other ways. [...] The theatre should bend to fit the writers, not vice versa. (Featherstone in Trueman, “Holding Court”)

Featherstone created a theatre that invited the writer into the building – much like Devine had envisioned it.

Finally, with the 2014 and 2015 seasons Featherstone’s openness and braveness slowly began to pay off. In February 2015 the *Guardian* wrote: “For the first time in more than a century, the British theatre scene is now dominated by new work including original plays, musicals, operas and pantomimes, which make up almost two-thirds of all productions” (Kennedy). And when the Royal Court’s 60th season was announced in October 2015 it was hailed “exciting” (Marshall). In March 2016 Billington wrote:

At a time when other theatres, such as the Young Vic, the Almeida and even Rufus Norris’s National, seem very much director-driven, I would say the Court still puts the dramatist at the centre of the theatrical event. It also strikes me as defiantly internationalist in tone and open to experiments with form, as proved by work as various as Stephen Emmott’s *Ten Billion*, a dramatised lecture on population explosion, or Caryl Churchill’s *Escaped Alone*, with its riveting mixture of the domestic and the apocalyptic. [...] it remains for me London’s most indispensable theatre because of its tenacious and single-minded belief that, whatever the interpretative skills of the director, designer, actor or sound engineer, in the beginning, and irreplaceably, is the dramatist’s word.

Featherstone not only stirred the Royal Court according to the writer’s needs when it came to the programme. She extended the Royal Court’s Schools and Youth Programme, by introducing a youth board, youth theatre, the young people’s script panel, and in 2016 the ‘Open Court’ festival was brought back as ‘Young Court’, under the leadership of young artists. Featherstone further worked to extend the Royal Court’s reach beyond Sloane Square, even further than Theatre Local had done. As such, she continued ‘Royal Court: Pimlico and Tottenham’, which she had initiated in 2015, a programme of three-year residencies in SW1V and N17, and ‘Big Idea’ a forum for talks, debates and workshops. In July 2016, *What’s on Stage* commented that “there’s no denying that Featherstone has made her own mark. And while she’s not scored a raft of out-and-out hits at the venue, her programming is brave and very exciting” (Bowie-Sell). While Dominic Cavendish had complained about the scarcity of awards in the first seasons, 2016 brought the Court eight awards, including the Olivier for Best Design and Best New Play (*Hangmen* by Martin McDonagh), Manchester Theatre Awards for Best Actress in a Visiting Production, Best Actor in a Visiting Production and Best Visiting

Production (*Constellations* by Nick Payne), Critics' Circle Awards for Best New Play, Best Design (both *Hangmen*) and Best Newcomer (David Moorst, *Violence and Son* by Gary Owen), and the South Bank Theatre Award (*Hangmen*) (Woodward). Without Featherstone stating it, it seems the Royal Court in the 2010s is the writers' theatre many before her had wished for: with stable public funding, a co-production network that makes it independent of the West End, and programming that allows for new forms and as many new, as well as well-known, voices as possible.

10. Looking Back. 60 Years at the Royal Court

Conceptually, in its beginning, the English Stage Company at the Royal Court was half the offspring of Saint-Denis' French artistry at the Old Vic, and half a metropolitan platform for Ronald Duncan's poetic drama. An elitist endeavour, sponsored by middle aged, middle and upper class men, most of them with an Oxford education, it was – in an almost ironic turn of events – soon communicated as a rallying point for a young, angry, socialist, working class audience. The position the theatre really took lay somewhere in the middle: in the area of catering to an insecure post-war middle class. The Angry Young image – once it had caught foot – was perpetually communicated. Much to the liking of the catered to insecure post-war middle class – which could now see itself as 'young' and 'angry', and the Arts Council, which was proven correct in seeing the potential of a national theatre in this now socially relevant stage.

As the English Stage Company in the following years made use of every aspect there was to Osborne's work, the role of its Artistic Director, George Devine, must not be underestimated. He had pushed the English Stage Company into the direction it had established with Osborne. He pushed for the 'kitchen-sink' and killed off Duncan's poetic drama. It is not preposterous to say that Devine's taste in plays influences British theatre to the day. The importance of Devine's leadership for the Royal Court at the time, however, was not always valued. It only showed once he was gone and William Gaskill took over the Royal Court Theatre.

Gaskill may have been an ingenious director, but he was not a very good Artistic Director. Had the 1960s not asked for strong political standpoints and bravery, which Gaskill delivered, the Royal Court would have simply gone down silently. Only the battle against the Lord Chamberlain gave Gaskill backing, in an artistic and cultural-political way; and Gaskill fought. The stakes were high: over *Early Morning*, Gaskill risked losing the Royal Court its license. The unclear scenario around the Lord Chamberlain's alleged verbal assurance, saying that he allowed a Sunday Night without Décor performance, looks like Gaskill only scarcely escaped one of the censor's traps.

After that battle was fought, Gaskill, this time with the help – or more precisely, refused help – of Anderson and Page, returned to running down the Royal Court. All three men were too elitist and self-focussed to see the important new trends in theatre. When they handed over the Royal Court to Lewenstein in 1972, the fringe movement had already taken over. It would take until the early 1980s for the Court to artistically catch up with the rest of the theatre world. That the Court – at least financially – survived the 1970s, can therefore only be attributed to Oscar Lewenstein's and mostly Stuart Burge's keen sense of theatre management that even managed to level out Anderson's unstoppable meddling, and the consequent debacle of the Wright-Kidd directorate.

Max Stafford-Clark, coming from the democratically run Out of Joint company, was the input the Royal Court needed to ease the Arts Council's opinion that it had become redundant. Stafford-Clark was the fringe that the Arts Council loved. While a free and democratic leader in the fringe world, he became an autocrat at the Royal Court.

Matthew Evans fought him on this, and the two men's internal quarrels not only made their work, but also the structures at the Court complicated. The board was once again antagonizing its Artistic Director – and the *Perdition* affair added insult to Stafford-Clark's already injured position. Coincidentally, this happened at a time when working in the theatre was made as undesirable as possible by the Thatcher administration anyway. Still, no matter how strong the English Stage Company Council's wish to let go of Stafford-Clark was, his artistic value was too high. And indeed, it needed a leader as charismatic, strong and ambitious as Stephen Daldry – and again a bit of meddling by Lindsay Anderson – to replace Stafford-Clark.

Daldry was not the accomplished director Stafford-Clark was, but he was a magnificent administrator. It is safe to say that the Court after Daldry – and not only the theatre's building – was not the same again. Daldry was the reason the Court was included in the 1994 Arts Council decision to hold the Royal Court in high regard. He was the one to install a private sponsorship network that backs the theatre until today. His artistic team, with Macdonald, Rickson, and Whybrow further laid the groundwork for a renaissance of new writing. The combination of the Lottery grant, the Arts Council positive position, and Daldry's widely communicated reintroduction of Devine's policy, made this one – in spite of all the outstanding work in the 1960, 1970 or 1980s – a true comeback for the Royal Court. In this, Daldry installed the narrative that finally grounded the Royal Court as a firmly standing institution in the world of subsidized theatre.

Ian Rickson was lucky to build on this momentum and expanded on it. Dominic Cooke did the same. Yet, after the 1990s it was hard to find new writers that stood out. In this, Cooke was more successful than Rickson. Cooke further pushed more and more into the West End, extending the Royal Court's role in the London theatre scene. In spite of Daldry's – and in the following Rickson's and Cooke's – assertions about returning to Devine's policy, it was, however, Vicky Featherstone who re-installed a true writers' theatre in Sloane Square. Rickson and Cooke had done their best to strive for success, financial success, largely meaning sold out houses and a good number of transfers. They had built on a group of well-known writers and had produced quite a remarkable number of commercial hits.

Featherstone's policy differed strongly from that of her predecessors, in that she simply put the writer first, and then created a structure to sponsor them according to each play's particular needs. As such, co-operations with other subsidized stages, rather than West End transfers, were installed. Many of these co-producing stages were stages the writers had previously been associated with. In this, Featherstone built her network along the writers. Her strategy is the exact opposite of the 1990s and 2000s system, which was built according to 'Downstairs or Upstairs' and West End availabilities, and only allowed for plays and writers to fit within this production scope. Featherstone put the Royal Court in an international and national network of co-operation schemes. With the effect that the theatre is no longer caught between its role as the subsidized David and the commercial Goliath. How much Featherstone broke up the system found its

clearest manifestation in the 'Open Court'. Rather than opting for a series of readings, as her predecessors did, when programming was not yet possible or delayed, Featherstone turned to the writers. The amount of new dramatic voices at the Court, particularly female voices, is outstanding. Under Featherstone, it seems, the Royal Court finally is a true writers' theatre.

Look Back in Anger, *Early Morning*, *Cloud Nine*, *Perdition*, *Blasted*, and *Stoning Mary* all played pivotal roles in prominent, and even existential battles that the Court fought. While Osborne's debut gave the English Stage Company the mandate of the early years, Bond's and Allen's plays caused battles that played out on the levels of censorship or the debatable territory of 'what should not and must not be said on a stage'. Churchill's co-operation with Stafford-Clark blew a new wind into the Royal Court, and allowed it not to miss out completely on the fringe movement of the 1970s. Kane's debut is similar to *Early Morning* and *Perdition* in the way that it caused a public uproar. However, it was also a strong anchor in re-grounding the Royal Court artistically in a new trend. Tucker Green's first play at the Royal Court is representative for the changed new writing culture in Britain, and the Royal Court's role in it, in the 2000s. As such, all plays represent an important movement in the Royal Court's artistic development. They did, however, also help the Court on a much more practical level: in securing funding.

Only from the late mid-1990s on was the Royal Court in a position that can be described as firm in regard to its standing with the public funding bodies. In 1956, it was the success of *Look Back in Anger* that not only backed the Court's formulated policy in its Arts Council application of 'bringing the new into theatre', Osborne's works – through transfers and film rights – were also one of the major sources of income for the company. While Bond's works certainly did not help with securing financial stability, they nevertheless put the Royal Court, which had lost its notoriety with the ebbing down of the hype around the Angry Young, back on the map. More than that: the fight with the Lord Chamberlain put the Royal Court on the frontlines, and gave it a fixed role in British theatre history.

When after the abolition of stage censorship the fringe movement developed and in the 1970s flourished, the Royal Court lost its monopoly on new writing. The Arts Council felt the theatre had lost its purpose. It was seen as redundant. A merger with the spirit of the fringe seemed like a way out. Stafford-Clark's co-operation with Caryl Churchill was an integral part in building a new, confident reputation for the Royal Court. In the 1980s, it was therefore not the artistic output of the theatre, but the high running costs of the building that made life hard, particularly in regard to the major cuts in funding as introduced by the Thatcher administration. Here Churchill's plays helped the Court financially to a large part by transfers into the West End and to Broadway. The *Perdition* affair clearly did not further a positive overturn in the sector of private sponsorship, which the Royal Court was forced to pursue after the cuts. It did, however, show the extent to which financial considerations had to influence artistic choices after

Thatcher. A libel action or a stop to sponsorship money and transfer opportunities was financially inconceivable. Artistic independence was no longer given.

Stephen Daldry was a master of fundraising and an outstanding theatre administrator. It has to be attributed to Daldry that the Royal Court was set on a course of undebatable public funding and in a network of far-reaching private sponsorship. The rebuild of the theatre and the artistic renaissance around writers like Kane, grounded the Court in this development. The 2000s were thus a time that, finally, saw financial safety. Even the 2010/11 cuts only shook the theatre mildly – in comparison to other institutions. With the institutionalization of the Court, however, also came a self-conscious attitude. Labelling tucker green as a ‘Royal Court writer’ speaks of this. So does the way in which Whybrow takes the British new writing network for granted in so far that he attributes many of the developments of tucker green’s career to the Royal Court.

The Court had grown into a national organization. It was funded accordingly. Even its extensive presence in the West End was applauded. The same development was petitioned against by the theatre’s staff and criticized by the Arts Council in the 1970s and 1980s. After the move into the West End for the rebuild, the attitude towards the commercial Goliath had clearly changed. Turning her back on this, Featherstone moved to co-operations with other subsidized companies. This, as well as her focus on the writer, particularly the new, unknown writer, seems like a manifestation of policy that many Artistic Directors before her had promised – mostly by referring either to Devine or a golden age – but never actually fulfilled.

The Court has indeed “never actually been what it used to be” – not even in what it actually used to be. It is the first – and most prominent – writers’ theatre in Britain, and maybe in the entire world. Budgets and funding strategies, however, were responsible for an environment that – soon after the establishment of the company – began to ask for writers to fit into the given structures, rather than shaping structures around the writers.

The Royal Court Theatre is a subsidized stage. As such, West End transfers and a commercialization of its mandate always were a strategy to prevail. Therefore, over the years, these strategies became commonplace, and at times fundamentally necessary to keep the Court running. Surely, it must be acknowledged that transfers into the West End or to Broadway were not necessarily a bad development in a writer’s career. Ideologies and individual conceptions of one’s art, as seen in the 1970s, could, however, strongly speak against being part of that mainstream. In the same way, the Royal Court’s commercialization was frowned upon for large parts of its history, because of the theatre’s legacy of being the ‘oppositional’ and ‘radical’ stage.

The narrative of the Royal Court that emerged in the 1990s took a clever turn around this conundrum. The Royal Court was praised for its legacy of having produced historical markers, rather than for constantly turning its back on, or not even knowing, its mandate – like in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Also, the new renaissance of the 1990s clearly proved that a national institution had the ability to create radical art. That this art

was produced by a new generation of angry writers does not erase the fact that these young writers were also pieces in the jigsaw puzzle that was the Court's funding campaign to match the Lottery grant. Daldry had resuscitated the 'golden' Royal Court – only to rebuild it. At that point in time, when the Royal Court's legacy finally counted for something in the eyes of the funding bodies, the old Royal Court disappeared.

The major 1950s and 1990s narratives of the Angry Young and its renaissance respectively, as well as the minor narratives in between – fighting the censor and the establishment, being the establishment, welcoming the fringe, hating the fringe, needing the proscenium stage, wanting to get rid of the proscenium stage for the sake of an arts centre, solely serving the playwright, being elitist and exclusive and mainly about certain director's tastes, dissecting the middle class, striving to be oppositional at all costs – have muddled all that can be assumed and said about the Royal Court. The conundrum of the Royal Court's history can therefore only be broken when taking a detailed look at the production side of the theatre. What comes to light behind grant writing rhetorics, strategies to please the Arts Council, and sponsor-attracting PR, is a subsidized theatre, successfully doing all in its power to prevail, in spite of producing new works – because of its love for new works.

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