

# Touring Shakespeare: The Stratford Festival, Cultural Funding, and Cultural Diplomacy

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## Article abstract

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SARAH DOUGHERTY

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## *Résumé*

*Cet article examine trois tournées majeures effectuées par le Festival de Stratford entre 1967 et 1986. En 1967, le Festival avait entrepris sa première et unique tournée canadienne dans le cadre des célébrations du Centenaire. En 1973, il avait mis en scène sa production la plus directe de diplomatie culturelle en effectuant une tournée en Europe parrainée par le ministère des Affaires étrangères. Le Festival effectua également une importante tournée aux États-Unis durant l'hiver 1985-1986 avec le soutien des Affaires étrangères. Durant ces moments où la compagnie quittait Stratford pour se produire ailleurs, elle emportait avec elle non seulement Shakespeare, mais aussi ce qui était censé être la culture canadienne, et son programme n'avait pas seulement des motivations culturelles, mais*

*aussi commerciales. À partir des documents d'archives des tournées du Festival et des tentatives d'obtenir un financement de l'État, cet article cartographie le trajet du Festival et son éloignement des tournées nationales au profit des tournées internationales, ainsi que les calculs, que faisaient tant le théâtre que l'État, pour évaluer la rentabilité des tournées à l'extérieur du Canada et celles à l'intérieur du pays. En fin de compte, les tournées canadiennes s'avéraient onéreuses et ne paraissaient pas offrir le même retour sur investissement pour ce qui était du prestige national, de la diplomatie culturelle et de l'attrait touristique. J'avance que, tout en se prévalant de la culture canadienne, le Festival de Stratford s'efforçait de s'assurer le soutien de l'État dans le but de valoriser ses intérêts commerciaux ainsi que la ville de Stratford.*

In 1983 John Hirsch, Artistic Director of the Stratford Festival, wrote a letter of protest to Allan MacEachen, Canadian Minister of External Affairs. Hirsch admonished the Minister, asserting that External Affairs did not realize “the importance of showing Canada to the rest of the world not just as a place where beavers gambol and a small group of people celebrate the wonders of Open Space and Nature.” Hirsch chastised MacEachen for his perceived failure to understand the importance of culture in Canadian diplomacy after External Affairs denied the Stratford Festival a grant to tour a production of Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Mikado* to the United Kingdom in 1984. Hirsch made an argument for the significance of culture as a diplomatic tool to External Affairs, declaring “for thirty years in this country I have advocated the importance of Culture as by far the best ambassador.”<sup>1</sup> Whether or not we can credit Hirsch’s words about culture as an ambassador for changing the Minister’s mind, in the end, External Affairs did decide to give the Festival a grant for their United Kingdom tour in 1984 and again in 1985 for a tour of the United States. By emphasizing the importance of cultural diplomacy, the Stratford Festival attempted to secure state funding for their tours.

Cultural diplomacy, as Patricia Goff has noted, “sits on a spectrum of ideational approaches to diplomacy.”<sup>2</sup> It is on the soft power side of the hard power-soft power distinction, which, in the articulation of Joseph Nye,<sup>3</sup> means that it functions by attraction, and not coercion. A frequently cited definition from Milton Cummings defines cultural diplomacy as “the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding.”<sup>4</sup> As Tim Rivera notes, the key distinction between cultural relations and cultural diplomacy is that the latter

includes some extent of “government, national interest, and support of policy.”<sup>5</sup> As a report for the U.S. Department of State declared, cultural diplomacy is “the linchpin of public diplomacy; for it is in cultural activities that a nation’s idea of itself is best represented.”<sup>6</sup> In this article, I consider the extent to which the Stratford Festival tours can be characterized as successful acts of cultural diplomacy. The Stratford Festival’s tours presented an image of Canada — with funding, and thus implicit support — from the federal government. As state-sponsored tours, they are therefore a subject of political and historical interest.

Scholars have interrogated the Festival’s complex relationship to Canadian nationalism and the state. Theatre historian Ric Knowles has characterized the founding of the Stratford Festival as part of a nineteenth-century style of British-based nationalism, while the Festival’s later decades were part of a globalized movement of “intercultural tourism.”<sup>7</sup> Alan Filewod has noted the relationship of Governor-General Vincent Massey and the Festival, emphasizing that for Massey, “nation, drama, and race were inseparable, and all three were framed by the fundamental notion of tradition.”<sup>8</sup> Margaret Groome has examined the Festival’s “hegemonic discourse” and the ideology of “affirmative culture,” looking at Shakespeare as a “civilizing” instrument and discussing the conflation of culture and national theatre with Shakespeare.<sup>9</sup> There is also a robust literature on the theatre performed by the Festival, including work that analyses the Shakespearean theatre performed at Stratford through the lens of the nation.<sup>10</sup> In this article I trace how the Festival’s tours were funded to explore the relationship between the state and Stratford, and to interrogate the positionality of the Festival as a privileged site imbued with the mantle of purported national culture.

In some ways, the Festival’s claim to the status of Canadian national culture stands in contrast to what José Igartua has described as the other Quiet Revolution, charting the shift in English Canada away from an ethnic-based British nationalism to a civic nationalism from 1945 to 1971.<sup>11</sup> In an era of Canadianization and emphasis on Canadian content, as described by Jeffrey Cormier,<sup>12</sup> the Festival’s tours demonstrate how the theatre’s continued reliance on British culture and heritage, with sponsorship from the Canadian state, was a contradiction to the emerging new cultural nationalisms of the period. The question of assessing national character in artistic production is complex, contingent, and subjective, and this article is not intended

to assert that the Stratford Festival epitomized a distinct and singular Canadian culture, identity or nationalism. Rather, it argues that the Festival's claims to such statuses facilitated its attempts to secure state support and funding.

In 1967, during the celebrations of Canada's Centennial, the Festival undertook its first and only cross-Canada tour and also performed in Montréal at Expo 67. After the national Centennial tour, the Festival mainly prioritized touring regionally and internationally. In 1973, the Festival staged its most direct production of cultural diplomacy with a Department of External Affairs sponsored tour of Europe. The Festival also performed a substantial tour of the United States in the winter of 1985/1986 with support from External Affairs. During these moments when the company left Stratford to perform elsewhere, the theatre brought with it a performance not only of Shakespeare but also of purported Canadian culture, and was motivated by not only a cultural agenda but also a commercial one.

Like Meaghan Elizabeth Beaton's study of the commemoration of the Centennial in Nova Scotia, my work looks beyond Expo 67 as the central focus of study of the 1967 anniversary. By centring her monograph outside of central Canada, and the location of Expo — Montréal — in particular, Beaton brought a new perspective to how Canadians experienced the Centennial.<sup>13</sup> My research here follows Beaton in expanding beyond Expo, looking at the Festival's Canadian tour and performances in Stratford as equally important to the Festival's contribution in Montréal. Nevertheless, the Stratford Festival was part of a hegemonic, state-sponsored performance of nationalism during the Centennial, and occupied a privileged place in Canada's cultural sphere, located in central Canada, albeit in small-town Canada.

The Festival's complex relationship to Canadian identity, and the tensions between art for art's sake<sup>14</sup> and financing culture, were at play in the tours. As John Urry reminds us in his seminal text *The Tourist Gaze*, "commerce and culture are indissolubly intertwined in the postmodern."<sup>15</sup> The interconnections between, and negotiations of, commerce and culture were essential to the Stratford Festival's tours of Canada and abroad. Drawing on archival records of the Festival's tours and attempts to gain state funding, this article charts the Festival's turn away from domestic national touring to international touring and the calculations, done by both the theatre and the state, of the value involved in prioritizing touring outside of Canada over touring the nation. Ultimately, touring Canada was expensive, and

was not seen as giving the same return on investment in terms of nationalist prestige, cultural diplomacy, and the attraction of tourists. I argue that through a claim to Canadian national culture, the Stratford Festival secured state support, with commercial interests for the Festival and town of Stratford at stake.

### The Centennial Tour

In the foreword to the Souvenir Programme for the 1967 season of the Stratford Festival, Governor-General Roland Michener asserted that “the Stratford Festival has already contributed immeasurably” to Canadian theatre, and in the Centennial year, expressed his confidence that the Festival would “continue to do so.”<sup>16</sup> 1967 was a landmark year for the Festival, as it marked both its own fifteen year anniversary, as well as the nation’s Centennial. The theatre began the year with its first ever cross-Canada tour from Victoria, B.C., to St. John’s, Newfoundland. The tour was sponsored by Festival Canada, which sponsored a number of Centennial tours of the arts,<sup>17</sup> as well as the Canada Council, and participating provincial governments.<sup>18</sup>

From February to March 1967, the Festival productions of *Twelfth Night* and Gogol’s *The Government Inspector* received generally positive reviews across the country. Reviewer Audrey Johnson of the *Victoria Daily Times* declared *Twelfth Night* “a feast for the eyes from beginning to end.”<sup>19</sup> Ron Evans reviewed *The Government Inspector* in Calgary, praising it as “a gutsy, belly-slapping, bottom-pinching, oath-slinging production.” Evans characterized it as “the very fare to show Canadians at large that Stratford is not the sanctimonious shrine to Shakespeare they might have imagined.”<sup>20</sup>

In the souvenir program for the tour, Michael Langham, the Festival’s Artistic Director, described the cross-Canada tour as an opportunity to attract new audiences to Stratford, writing that

we hope that this tour will not only bring us into contact with many old friends who have already visited us in Stratford, but also introduce many others who will be sufficiently attracted to make the long pilgrimage to see us At Home. Inevitably it is only in Stratford itself, in the very special theatre which has so much influenced the molding of our character and our attainment of international standing, that the full flavor of the Festival’s work and intentions can be discovered.<sup>21</sup>

The tour thus in some ways served as an advertisement to entice Canadians to travel to Stratford, assured that it was not just a “sanctimonious shrine,” and also implicitly supported the Festival’s goal of promoting itself as a national theatre.

How might we characterize the Festival’s Centennial celebrations in the broader context of Canadian culture and the arts in the late 1960s, particularly in light of Stratford’s association with British culture and heritage? The Festival had relied on a claim to the status of a national theatre of Canada since its founding in 1953. In its first fifteen years, the Festival was led by a British Artistic Director: first, Sir Tyrone Guthrie, who was instrumental to the founding of the Festival, and then his chosen successor, Michael Langham, who took over from 1955 to 1967.<sup>22</sup> The presence of British artistic leadership at the very top of the Festival might seem to somewhat undermine Stratford’s claim as an institution of Canadian cultural identity.

And yet, the Festival’s reliance on Britain was not entirely incompatible with the kind of Canadian culture championed by the Royal Commission on the Development of the Arts, Letters, and Sciences, which was chaired by Governor-General Vincent Massey. The report of the Massey Commission warned that American mass culture was threatening Canadian sovereignty through film, radio, and print. In response, the report recommended strategic state-sponsored development of Canadian culture.<sup>23</sup> Founded in the wake of the Massey Commission, the Stratford Festival was part of a broader movement to develop Canadian culture, a high cultural project intended to foster ‘the best’ of Canadian culture. Massey himself was an important patron of the Festival, to the extent of saving the Festival from a premature death with a then-secret donation of \$10,000 in 1953.<sup>24</sup> As Anna Upchurch has shown, Vincent Massey’s view of the development of Canadian culture was influenced by his time on the board of British national arts organizations during Massey’s tenure as High Commissioner to London from 1935 to 1946.<sup>25</sup> This elite Anglo-Canadian nationalism was influenced by the social networks between Canada and Britain.

In some ways, the Festival represented an aberration, out of step with the new nationalist visions of Canada. As Igartua argues, the identity of an imagined English-Canadian community changed in the postwar period from an ethnically British to a civic nation based upon a shared language.<sup>26</sup> Igartua asserts that this discarding of the British definition of Canada occurred in the 1960s after a fairly short process



of evolution.<sup>27</sup> The Festival's continued association with Britishness and "Old World" high culture, as performed during the Centennial, contrasted this other Quiet Revolution. The Massey-Commission-era cultural nationalism that the Festival embodied was based on a sense of British heritage and Anglo-Canadian high culture. As Ryan Edwardson notes about the new nationalism of Canadian content in the 1960s and 1970s, "within this paradigm, a comic book such as *Captain Canuck* would ... be worth more to nationhood than any Shakespearean play offered by the Stratford Festival."<sup>28</sup>

The constructed and contested nature of the cultural categorization of the Festival as high culture and as Canadian complicates Stratford's relationship to Canadian nationalism. Shakespeare has been classified as not only high culture but also low culture, as Lawrence Levine makes clear in his study of Shakespeare in America in the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> While new nationalisms circa Expo emphasized Canadian content, the Stratford Festival had the support of important figures like Vincent Massey and Robertson Davies, who saw the Festival as an ideal project to contribute to their vision of postwar Canadian cultural development. The Festival's continuing British connection, and its ties to an élite Massey-Commission-era Anglo-Canadian nationalism, points to an exception in the kind of Canadian content performed during the Centennial and at Expo 67.

### Cultural Funding, Tourism, and Touring

The town of Stratford as well as the Festival relied heavily on tourism. In 1967, nearly 100,000 of the tickets sold at Stratford were to Americans.<sup>30</sup> In a survey conducted in 1966 jointly by the municipality, the Stratford Chamber of Commerce, the Festival itself, and the Ontario Department of Tourism and Information, 93.7 percent of visitors surveyed said they travelled to Stratford to attend the Festival. Eighty percent of respondents first heard of Stratford because of the Festival, and 85 percent of the visitors spent more than \$200 personally or with their travelling companions. These tourist dollars did not go just to the Festival itself, but to Stratford businesses, as respondents spent an average of 28 percent of their money on food and beverages during their stay. In total, tourist revenue for Stratford was reported at \$8 million.<sup>31</sup> Touring was one way that the Festival could generate good publicity and hopefully entice visitors to Stratford to spend their vacations and their dollars there.



In the *Globe and Mail's* coverage of opening night of the Festival in June of the Centennial year, 77-year-old Stratford taxi driver, William, voiced an important concern: "With so many people going to Expo, I just wonder if they'll have any money left to spend at Stratford."<sup>32</sup> A 1967 brief written by the Festival organizers to the Ontario Arts Council noted that "this coming Stratford season must be exciting in the extreme if for no other reason than simply to hold its own against the multiple attractions being staged throughout Canada." The Centennial would offer many attractions for tourists to visit, not the least of which would be Expo 67 in Montréal. While the Festival would perform at Expo in October, it faced competition from all the Centennial attractions for its cross-Canada tour and for its usual season in the spring and summer in Stratford. As part of its request for funding from the provincial agency, the Festival emphasized to the Council that "in the great celebration of 100 years of Confederation the 15<sup>th</sup> season of the Stratford Festival must not be routine."<sup>33</sup> Thus the Festival was cognisant both of the financial risks of the Centennial but also of the potential rewards in the form of increased cultural funding for an institution that had long relied on a claim to national status in the English-speaking community.

In addition to making an argument for funding based on nationalism, the brief emphasized the potential the Festival could have in attracting tourists, noting "you will agree that the excitement generated by a successful Stratford season will go a long way to entice people this year into Ontario en route to EXPO and thus extend their sojourn in Canada. We expect at least 125,000 admissions from United States patrons and this represents several millions of dollars added to Ontario's tourist coffers in a year when tourist targets are high and competition keen."<sup>34</sup> The Festival had long-standing appeal for American tourists, and served as a logical enough stop for people coming up to Montréal through border crossings at Windsor or Niagara Falls. The Council seems to have been convinced by the Festival's lines of arguments, more than doubling its 1966 grant of \$40,000 to \$85,000 for the Centennial season.<sup>35</sup>

The increase in grant money was essential to the Festival's budget, since making the season "exciting in the extreme" was an expensive endeavour.<sup>36</sup> The revenue from the 1967 season was about \$1.5 million, the highest in the Festival's fifteen-year history, but expenses for the cross-Canada tour, the particularly lavish season, and the appearance at Expo totalled about \$2.4 million,<sup>37</sup> which left

the Festival operating at a loss even with support from the Centennial Commission of \$109,000, the Canada Council contribution of \$275,000, and an Ontario Arts Council grant of \$85,000, as well as donations totalling \$220,000.<sup>38</sup> While the Stratford Festival had been the recipient of consistent and generous state support, as well as corporate and philanthropic donations, it had always financed most of its expenses from box-office sales. Moreover, as a 1968 brief to the Ontario Arts Council noted, while the 1967 season was well received, “the fact that the percentage was not record-breaking was due to the very heavy competitive demands on the nation’s entertainment and travel dollar in the year of Expo.”<sup>39</sup> Despite there clearly being an awareness at the planning stage, it remained difficult for the Stratford Festival to attract audiences precisely because it had to compete for tourists with other events surrounding the Centennial.

The Stratford Festival’s first cross-Canada tour came 15 years into its history. Such an extensive tour has not occurred since. The lack of Canadian touring is perhaps surprising for a theatre which has claimed status as a national theatre — at times called the Stratford National Theatre of Canada. The Stratford Festival’s artistic goals, and the connection of these goals to a national cultural agenda, conflicted with the commercial realities of running a theatre company. Touring Canada is expensive. The vast distances between major centres mean high transportation costs, and Canadian cities generally have smaller theatres to accommodate smaller populations than other touring possibilities, such as the United States.

The issue of the lack of Canadian touring by the Stratford Festival was raised during the Centennial tour. Wells of the *Summerside Journal-Pioneer* wrote: “Stratford’s appearance here, as part of Festival Canada, may well spoil Prince Edward Island audiences. We can only hope that, with all the money being spent on theatre during Centennial Year by the Federal Government, a lasting effect will be achieved, and that in a few years we won’t be looking back and saying, ‘wasn’t that a great year for the theatre? We’ll never see another like it.’”<sup>40</sup> Wells proved prescient: the Stratford Festival has yet to return to Prince Edward Island. Funding the tours, as Wells suggested, was arguably the key determinant in the Festival’s touring schedule. The Canadian government prioritized cultural spending during the Centennial, finding funds for a cross-Canada tour, but this was the exception to the usual state of cultural funding politics in which Stratford operated.

In the years following the Centennial, the issue of the lack of Canadian touring for major cultural companies arose again. In a 1973 column in the *Calgary Herald*, Jamie Portman noted that “considering that the Canadian taxpayer provides hefty sums of money for the care and nurture of such illustrious performing arts organizations as the National Ballet, the Stratford Shakespearean Festival and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, it would be nice if those of us who inhabit the hinterlands were able to see their productions a bit more often.”<sup>41</sup> Portman identified the regional tensions present in cultural funding politics that were exemplified in the touring of the major companies. Most of the major Canadian cultural institutions were based in Ontario or Québec, with some notable exceptions such as the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, and thus the opportunity to see these artistic companies was concentrated in central Canada. As such, federal cultural funding was disproportionately distributed to these few provinces. Nevertheless, without more extensive state funding, central Canadian companies like the Stratford Festival were unlikely to venture out to the “hinterlands” due to the prohibitive cost of touring.

The Canada Council’s 1971 Annual Report discussed the issue of the cost of touring Canada. In a time of budget restraint, companies “had to cut down their touring in Canada, which is always a costly affair because of the vast distances and relatively small population centres.” While the Report emphasized that it “placed very high value on more extensive Canadian tours and will encourage them more systematically as soon as means allow,” it also applauded the recent touring of a number of companies to American cities, noting “touring the United States is much less costly.”<sup>42</sup> The *Calgary Herald*’s Jamie Portman characterized the situation of “stressing the importance of international tours while at the same time seeming to downgrade the domestic aspect” as “a curious blind spot” of both the cultural organizations themselves as well as (and perhaps even more incomprehensibly) funding agencies like the Canada Council.<sup>43</sup> For Stratford, the international prestige of touring beyond Canada was undoubtedly greater. It was more economically viable to try to attract Canadians to come to Stratford rather than tour the productions to the rest of Canada. While tours like the Centennial tour could serve as a sort of advertisement to entice Canadians to travel to Stratford, more conventional advertising like newspaper advertisements and brochures were perhaps nearly as effective but much less expensive, especially without any additional funding to offset the cost of Canadian touring.

The Canada Council did establish a new federally supported national touring office in 1973 to facilitate tours by Canadian performing arts companies within Canada and abroad.<sup>44</sup> The Stratford Festival reportedly hoped to tour Canada in 1975 with the participation of the Council's booking office, but this did not come to pass.<sup>45</sup> The Festival never undertook an extensive tour of Canada with its full company again following the Centennial, with the exception of its engagement with the Festival's smaller Young Company to parts of western Canada, Ottawa, and Montréal in 1976.<sup>46</sup> Despite the nationalist prestige with which the Centennial tour imbued the Festival, the benefits of touring Canada apparently did not outweigh the costs. Instead, the Festival turned its touring efforts beyond Canada and towards cultural diplomacy.

### Cultural Diplomacy Beyond the Iron Curtain

In 1973, the rebranded "Stratford National Theatre of Canada" toured Denmark and the Netherlands, and ventured beyond the Iron Curtain, to Poland and the USSR. The Department of External Affairs helped organize and finance the tour,<sup>47</sup> which represented a moment for the Festival to potentially act as an agent of cultural diplomacy for the state. In a message to Artistic Director Jean Gascon, the Minister of External Affairs, Mitchell Sharp, praised "this most important European tour."<sup>48</sup> Writing in the *Toronto Star*, Urjo Kareeda declared that the opening night of the Festival's *King Lear* in Moscow represented a summit of "cultural ambassadorship" and "prestige."<sup>49</sup> The tour was part of a cultural exchange agreement between the USSR and Canada. The Soviet Union sent the Bolshoi Ballet and the Moscow Circus to Canada in 1972. In return, Canada sent the Stratford Festival and the National Arts Centre Orchestra.<sup>50</sup> The company toured for seven weeks during the Festival's off-season, from 24 January to 5 March. Before the European tour, the Festival first warmed up at a stop closer to home, Montréal's Place des Arts, in a ten-day engagement from 11 January.<sup>51</sup> Then, the company journeyed to Copenhagen, Utrecht, The Hague, Warsaw, Krakow, Moscow, and Leningrad (St. Petersburg).<sup>52</sup>

The Soviet stops on the tour were particularly notable as moments of potential cultural diplomacy beyond the Iron Curtain.<sup>53</sup> The opening night of *King Lear* at the Moscow Art Theatre sold out the day tickets were made available, with an exclusive audience including Canadian ambassador Robert Ford, and the poet Yevgeny

Yevtushenko. The performance received an enthusiastic reception, described by Urjo Kareda of the *Toronto Star* as a “typical Russian ovation – rhythmic applause, cheers, flowers.” However, Kareda found the performance itself wanting, describing it as “wild and exaggerated,” and he felt that the Russian audience throughout the play was “restless and inattentive.”<sup>54</sup> Herbert Whittaker’s front-page review in the *Globe and Mail* was more complimentary, describing a “nine and a half minutes” ovation for the company and declaring that *Lear* had “been improved since its original showing.”<sup>55</sup>

Despite the tour’s sponsorship by External Affairs, there were some rumblings in the Canadian press about whether the Stratford Festival was performing Canadian content on the European tour, a fact which calls into question the tour as a venture of cultural diplomacy. *Toronto Star* theatre critic Urjo Kareda reported that “the Stratford troupe, calling itself the Stratford National Theatre of Canada, came under puzzled criticism throughout Europe for performing nothing even vaguely national.”<sup>56</sup> Kareda also questioned why Stratford’s tour did not include any English-speaking cities, asking “is this in any way indicative of Stratford’s self-image?”<sup>57</sup> Jacqui Good echoed Kareda’s sentiments in the *Fredericton Gleaner*, writing that “when Canada’s Stratford Festival Theatre was in Poland earlier this year performing two Shakespearean plays, members were often asked why, as Canada’s national theatre, they were not presenting any Canadian plays. The answer: embarrassed silence.”<sup>58</sup> These critiques foreshadowed the coming storm of the Festival’s controversial hiring of British artistic directors in 1975 and 1980, in an era when Canadianization of institutions was being pushed for by cultural nationalists.<sup>59</sup>

While the Canadian press agonized over whether the Stratford Festival was truly representing Canada on the world’s stage, some of the European audience saw a particularly Canadian style at the theatre. Roman Szylodwski of the Polish Community party newspaper *Trybuna Ludu* described the Festival’s *Taming of the Shrew* in Warsaw as a “very interesting performance as an example of Canadian Shakespeare influenced by French culture. It has more charm, is more colourful, lighter and with perhaps more humour than the usual British production of Shakespeare.” Szylodwski identified a Canadian-style of Shakespeare, which notably included a French influence from Stratford’s first Canadian Artistic Director, Jean Gascon. The Polish academic critic, Professor Tadeusz Sinko, also described a uniqueness to the *Shrew* production, echoing Szylodwski and saying, “the acting is very different

from the British style, modern but in a very different way.”<sup>60</sup> While the Festival had 15 years of British artistic leadership, by 1973 after four years under Canadian Artistic Director Jean Gascon,<sup>61</sup> the Festival was judged by some of its foreign audience to perform in a style distinct from Britain, and perhaps distinctly Canadian.

Criticism of the Festival’s perceived lack of Canadian content had been anticipated by the Canadian Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Robert Arthur Douglas Ford, who warned External Affairs that despite [the] fact that Stratford Theatre is synonymous with Shakespeare and have made their reputation on it, we must remember that the [Department of External Affairs] is subsidizing their trip abroad to the tune of \$150,000, in order to project [an] image of [Canada]. [The] fact that Actors performing *Taming of the Shrew* are [Canadians] can be easily lost on European Audiences; and this is especially the case with Shakespeare which is linked to English theatre.<sup>62</sup>

Ford pointed out a central tension in the Festival’s representation of Canada abroad and its relationship to Canadian nationalism: that its performance of Shakespeare was not perceived as Canadian. However, External Affairs’ decision to send the Festival abroad as a cultural ambassador despite these critiques indicates the fluidity of Shakespeare as a cultural icon.

Shakespeare is tied to Britishness, but has also assumed the status of a transnational cultural formation. As Dominic Shellard and Siobhan Keenan argue, Shakespeare has been identified with “‘culture, quality, Britishness, tradition’” and “‘wisdom.’”<sup>63</sup> And yet, Shakespeare is performed throughout the world, and his work is not inherently or solely British. Dennis Kennedy observes, from the time Shakespeare emerged as “the idealized English dramatist there have been other Shakespeares, Shakespeares not dependent upon English and often at odds with it.”<sup>64</sup> As Sofía Muñoz-Valdivieso notes, the works of playwright William Shakespeare have long been perceived as “particular and universal, core British heritage and inevitable global commodity.”<sup>65</sup> The Stratford Festival’s tours demonstrate how Shakespeare is performed variously as “core British heritage,” and separate from, and at times at odds with, this specific national heritage. Moreover, Shakespeare is imbued with what Pierre Bourdieu has called cultural capital.<sup>66</sup> As Paul Prescott remarks, cultural programming of Shakespeare operates under the assumption that the Bard’s “work – and the festivals that produce

them — are powerful catalysts for international exchange and understanding and therefore help to produce a more peaceful and civilized world.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, Shakespeare, while not Canadian in origin, could be subsumed into Canadian nationalism with a sense of British heritage and as a universal global commodity, steeped in cultural capital and ready for international exchange and understanding.

Total expenditure for the European tour was \$404,389.98, while total revenue was \$171,209.80, leaving a deficit of \$233,180.18 for the theatre, which was mostly covered by the \$200,000 grant from External Affairs.<sup>68</sup> For the Festival, the remaining deficit of approximately \$30,000 was justified with the idea that touring would bring publicity and thus higher ticket sales. The Festival’s comptroller, Bruce Swerdfager, judged that the deficit which would result from the tour would be “not much money at all compared to the benefit both to Canada and the festival.”<sup>69</sup> Indeed, there was marked economic benefit to the Festival from the tour. As of 31 March, just a few weeks after the company returned to Canada, advance ticket orders were up 18 per cent from the 1972 season, which had held the previous record high for advance orders. William Wylie, the Festival’s General Manager, acknowledged that the tour may have caused the increased sales: “the tour was well publicized at home in Canada and word of the enthusiastic reception by overseas audiences may well have sparked the interest of people who aren’t regular theatre-goers.”<sup>70</sup> The increase in sales was despite the higher ticket prices than the previous year, which apparently did not put ticket-buyers off.<sup>71</sup>

As to whether the tour was a successful venture of cultural diplomacy, worth the cost of the state’s investment, it is difficult to assess. As a 2005 report for the United States Department of State explains, “no metric or language exists by which to gauge the success of a cultural initiative.”<sup>72</sup> The Festival was satisfied with the economic results of the tour, and also made an argument that it was a successful moment of cultural diplomacy, worth the \$200,000 grant from External Affairs. William Hutt, star of *Lear* and Associate Director of the Festival, reflected that the tour “accomplished all that the Stratford National Theatre could wish for.”<sup>73</sup> Bruce Swerdfager expressed his belief that “We as Canadians will reap the rewards... because it is a great accomplishment when our artists can take theatre to Europe where it was born hundreds of years ago.”<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, the reception of the Festival’s tour by European audiences (beyond the critics) and therefore the success of the performances as state-sponsored cul-



tural diplomacy is difficult to determine with certainty. Festival actress Elizabeth Shepherd described the 1973 tour as “just one step in helping to bridge the gap between our countries,” and noted that it was unlike the 1972 Canada-Russia Summit Series.<sup>75</sup> Theatre, as Shepherd noted, was a less competitive form of Cold War interaction. Perhaps also thinking of the Summit Series, John Hayes, the Festival’s director of production, declared after the opening of the tour in Copenhagen that “this should show Europe what we can do in cultural fields. It’s not only hockey that we excel at.”<sup>76</sup>

The decision to send “Canadian” Shakespeare abroad represented a significant investment in the Stratford Festival, one which External Affairs in Ottawa and Canada’s representatives in Europe ultimately felt was justified. Mitchell Sharp, the Minister of External Affairs, declared that the tour helped create “a picture of Canada as a country which has reached a significant level of cultural maturity.”<sup>77</sup> The Canadian Embassy in Copenhagen asserted in their report of that tour stop to External Affairs that “We feel that the success of Stratford in Copenhagen clearly shows that visits and tours abroad by Canadian groups of this calibre provide not only excellent publicity for Canada, but also go a long way toward building the image of Canada as a country which has a good deal more to offer than snow and scenery.”<sup>78</sup>

This idea of the Stratford Festival demonstrating that Canada had a national culture, and was not just a wintry, outdoorsy, industrial nation was a common refrain throughout the Festival’s history. The tour provided the state with an opportunity to tell a different narrative of Canada as a nation of culture through Shakespearean performance, though whether this message was received and believed by a European audience is another matter. Whether the tour actually helped, in the eyes of Shepherd, to “bridge” the perceived “gap” between the two cultures is not possible to assess, but the Festival’s tour facilitated cultural contact, if not understanding, between Canada and the Eastern Bloc, which made it a notable event in Stratford’s history as well as the history of Canadian cultural diplomacy.

### “Two Distinct Objectives”: Touring the United States

In 1985, the Stratford Festival received a grant from the Department of External Affairs to support a tour across the United States, playing *King Lear* and *Twelfth Night* in Los Angeles, Seattle, Chicago, Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, and Washington, D.C. in the winter of

1985/1986. The Department of External Affairs supported the tour to help promote Canadian relations with the United States. As Tim Rivera's distinction between cultural relations and cultural diplomacy emphasizes, the role of government, national interest, and policy objectives indicate an effort is more than just relations, but a concerted diplomatic effort.<sup>79</sup> Touring the United States also presented the Canadian state with an opportunity for cultural diplomacy, showing the southern neighbour that Canada is more than "a place where beavers gambol," in the words of John Hirsch. This cultural diplomacy value was important for the Festival to secure state funding, using its long-standing connection to Canadian nationalism. The Festival's tour was supported by External Affairs with Canadian national interests and policy objectives in mind. Backstage, the Festival and the state negotiated over the funding of the tour, but also worked out the meanings and significance of the Festival's performances abroad.

While the tour was meant to present an expression of Canadian cultural identity, there was also an economic motivation behind the performances. As the Canada Council noted in 1971, "touring the United States is much less costly" than touring in Canada.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, touring the United States was beneficial for the Festival to generate publicity and attract American tourists to Stratford, since visitors from the United States made up as much as a third of the theatre's audience. The Festival received a series of grants that made up the rest: \$50,000 from External Affairs,<sup>81</sup> \$250,000 from the Department of Communications as a contingency fund, as well as matching grants from the Department of Communications and the provincial Ministry of Citizenship and Culture for USD \$42,171.<sup>82</sup>

In a July 1985 message, External Affairs explained "two distinct objectives" as their motivation for sponsoring the Festival's tour. The first was economically motivated: "to tour parts of [the] U.S. within relatively close proximity of Stratford with [the] objective to promote both future sale of tickets to [the] Festival in US urban centres and thus encourage tourism to [Canada] and Southern Ontario." The second was more narratively driven: "to promote greater awareness of [Canada's] creative excellence around the US and thus appreciation of [Canada] as [a] culturally vital and sophisticated country."<sup>83</sup> Thus, External Affairs supported the touring both with the goal of generating tourism and with a view towards the narrative-making of cultural diplomacy as important components of the Festival's American Tour.

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For the first of External Affairs' two objectives, developing an American ticket-buying audience who would travel to Stratford in subsequent years was clearly important. The route of the tour, however, proved a divisive subject within the changing leadership of the Festival. The Festival's incoming Artistic Director John Neville, due to begin his tenure after the tour's conclusion in 1986, was not satisfied with the route. Neville called into question the objective of the tour as a means to attract new audiences since he believed the destinations for the winter tour would prove too far from Stratford for those theatregoers to travel to Canada. An External Affairs memorandum written after a visit to Stratford in May 1985 noted that Neville was "positively vituperative about the upcoming tour this winter." Neville had "future plans to more actively cultivate Shakespeare enthusiasts in nearby cross border areas." In contrast, the tour, "which will journey to such far off places as Seattle, California, and Fort Lauderdale" would, in this thinking, not prove to be "likely origins for Shakespeare-lovers who will fill the empty seats at Stratford, Ontario, next season."<sup>84</sup>

In regards to the second of External Affairs' objectives, promoting awareness of Canadian cultural excellence and a view of the country as sophisticated, this was clearly compatible with the Festival's goal of gaining good publicity and good reviews in the United States. The benefit to Canada's image as culturally sophisticated and excellent would come from the Festival representing itself well on American stages, so in some ways the success of this cultural diplomacy goal depended on the success of Stratford's performances. Moreover, it is clear that the Festival was aware of the value of its performances to the state, and used this objective to argue for state funding. Gerry Eldred used cultural diplomacy as a line of argument to press for more funding from External Affairs, writing that the tour "is going to be important not only for the Festival but for Canada's image in the major cities in the United States, and we all should gain from the project."<sup>85</sup>

In the effort to promote Canada's image and influence, Palm Beach, Florida, was a particularly noteworthy tour stop. As Peter Sever, the tour organizer, wrote to Gar Parry, the Director of External Affairs's United States Programs Division, the Palm Beach community was "one of the wealthiest communities anywhere," and was full of important, rich, theatregoers: "already the wives of the Forbes 400 are killing one another for tickets." Sever noted that "Stratford will be the first major event of the Palm Beach social season which, as you probably know, is where a lot of the USA's business and politics get

done.” Sever emphasized the value of the Festival’s tour as an event of cultural diplomacy among such movers and shakers, writing: “Canada could do worse than be officially represented there.”<sup>86</sup>

The stop in Washington, D.C. was also a particularly useful venue for diplomacy. A request from an officer in D.C. to External Affairs in Ottawa underlined “the interest of Ambassador [Allan] Gotlieb in taking advantage of the presence of the Stratford [Festival] to promote Canada in the U.S. Capital.”<sup>87</sup> The final report to External Affairs on the D.C. tour stop assessed the results of External Affairs’ hospitality funding to the Embassy for a reception following the premiere performance: “Senators, congressmen, administrators of the arts, representatives of the State Department... of the National Endowment for the Arts, of the Kennedy Center, actors and actresses, etc. all seemed to appreciate our hospitality till early morning hours enjoying a good supper.” Overall, the report argued that the funding given by External Affairs to the Stratford tour was money well-spent: “this visit did help us to enhance the cultural profile of Canada... the artistic value of Stratford is potent enough to create a Canadian cultural impact in the U.S.”<sup>88</sup>

Did the tour succeed in its two objectives: bettering Canada’s cultural image in the U.S. and attracting American tourists to Canada? Was the tour a successful act of cultural diplomacy? As Milton Cummings notes, “a certain degree of faith is involved in cultural diplomacy.”<sup>89</sup> The reports about the tour made by and to External Affairs, such as the aforementioned one about the Washington, D. C. stop, were generally positive. R.D. Sirrs, the Consul-General for the southeastern United States, praised the Stratford players who “made a most striking and lasting impression on the opening night audience” in Fort Lauderdale, and emphasized that the tour “also, of course, adds a very positive dimension to an already buoyant Canada-USA relationship.”<sup>90</sup> The Canadian diplomats and civil servants who used the tour as an opportunity for cultural diplomacy were satisfied with the results. As the Festival’s new executive director Gary Thomas told the *Globe and Mail* in April 1986, the tour “generated a lot of publicity, and there has been an increase in U.S. sales for our current season.”<sup>91</sup> From the Stratford Festival’s perspective, the tour served its purpose to publicize the Festival and attract American tourists to Stratford.

In contrast to the 1973 European tour, which aimed to improve relations across the Iron Curtain, the 1985/86 tour is an example of a different kind of cultural diplomacy. It was aimed at a nation with

whom Canada already had close relations, rather than a nation on the other side of a geopolitical conflict. Nevertheless, the American tour was clearly a moment of cultural diplomacy, not cultural relations; it was sponsored by the state to support both the national interest of improving Canada's image abroad, and the policy objective of attracting American tourism and therefore spending to Canada. As Patricia Goff has noted, "cultural diplomacy's position at the intersection of government and the cultural world is both a source of strength and challenge." There can be conflict between the artist and the government, who, as Goff reminds us, "have different agendas and goals," and artists whose beliefs stand in contrast to the politics of a government may not be embraced by that government.<sup>92</sup> The Stratford Festival, with its Shakespearean plays steeped in a sense of Anglo-Canadian colonial heritage, benefitted from elite cultural and political connections. The Festival's privileged place in the postwar Canadian cultural sphere was not called into question by the Canadian federal government and was in fact reified through state funding. The Canadian state, represented in these tours through External Affairs and the Canadian diplomats stationed in Europe and the United States, and the Stratford Festival itself, as well as individuals within these institutions, all had various objectives for the tour — some similar and some distinct.

Cultural diplomacy, at its heart, is a narrative-making activity. Patricia Goff's definition, for example, emphasizes story: stories about a state, which "can offset negative, stereotypical or overly simplistic impressions," or "fill a void where no stories of any kind exist."<sup>93</sup> The Stratford Festival's tours offered a chance for the Canadian state to tell a story about Canada, as well as for the Stratford Festival to tell a story about itself, through theatrical performance on stages across Canada and the world. In this regard, the tours were successful moments of cultural diplomacy, with the participation of both the state and the Stratford Festival, which had long sought the status of a national theatre of a Canada, particularly in its tours abroad.

On tour in Los Angeles, Seattle, Chicago, Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, and Washington, D.C., the Stratford Festival performed not only *King Lear* and *Twelfth Night*, but also cultural diplomacy. The tour represented a moment of story-telling for the Festival and for the Canadian state, which sponsored the performances. The Department of External Affairs' two distinct objectives in this story-telling were similar to though not necessarily synonymous with the Stratford

Festival's own motivation for the tour. Both objectives were clearly motivated by economics, attracting tourists to Stratford, and potentially to Canada more broadly, and both saw the tour as a valuable asset to projecting an image of Canadian culture abroad, though the Stratford Festival was more concerned about this story-telling from the stance of its own publicity and ability to attract state funding. While both External Affairs and the Stratford Festival judged the tour a success, the meaning and reception of both cultural diplomacy and live performance is a more complex and contingent story. At the very least, John Hirsch can be vindicated by the fact that the tour did present Canada to some American audiences as a place where not just beavers, but also Shakespeare, gambols.

## Conclusion

The tours offer a window into how the Stratford Festival attempted to secure state support through claims to a national cultural status. The theatre performed as an institution of purported Canadian identity on tour, attracting cultural funding and acting as an agent of cultural diplomacy. While some observers questioned the Festival's lack of perceived Canadian content, the state funding the theatre received demonstrates the importance of Stratford's claim to the status of national culture. The tours were motivated by the desire to attract both publicity and tourists to the Festival. The 1967 Centennial activities allowed the Festival to fly the flag and tour the country as it never had before and never has since, because the outpouring of nationalism allowed for an outpouring of funding as well. The Festival's sole cross-Canada tour shows that domestic touring was too expensive to be a regular venture, and also suggests that international recognition was more valuable than domestic praise. The 1973 tour to Western and Eastern Europe was steeped in a context of Cold War cultural diplomacy, and generated significant publicity for the festival as the purported national theatre of Canada. Finally, the 1985-1986 tour of the United States, sponsored by the Department of External Affairs, makes clear the funding value of the cultural diplomacy impetus for the tours, and how claims of national significance could generate tourism for the Festival. The tours demonstrate how the negotiation of culture and commerce, and the symbiosis of these seemingly divergent forces, have been essential to the Stratford Festival's success.

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