
Good wine needs a bush: The British Council and Romania, 1937 to 1990

Dennis Deletant

Essay 1

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The British Committee for Relations with Other Countries – soon afterwards to be known as The British Council – came into being on 5 December 1934. Its main objective was to win friendship and respect for Britain abroad by cultural and educational activities. Its founding marked a major departure in British ideas and practice.

British opinion had long resisted the idea that the country's standing in the international community could be secured and improved by participating in the interchange of cultural experience, as an aspect of foreign policy. Sir Harold Nicolson commented in the Annual Report on the British Council's 21st anniversary:

In the 19th century ... Great Britain was regarded abroad as the champion of liberal institutions and the pioneer of technical progress and invention...

The excellence of our institutions, the honesty of our middle class, the contentment of our proletariat, the amicable tolerance of all our ways, persuaded us that we were universally liked, respected and admired.

He might have added that, during that epoch, its diplomacy was in the hands of people whose cultural preferences, if any, needed no state support. He then went on to mark the changes in British attitudes:

Our complacency was pierced by intimations that our best markets were being invaded by persistent and ingenious competition; even our self-assurance became clouded by the suspicion that foreigners did not invariably regard us either so charming or so intelligent as we seemed to ourselves; and once aeroplanes came to crowd the sky above our island we realised that we had ceased to be the most invulnerable of the Great Powers and had become one of the most vulnerable.

It was then that we first realised that our foreign competitors had been devoting effort, skill and large sums of money to rendering their languages, their type of civility, their scientific or technical resources and inventions, and the desirability of their exports, familiar to students and buyers overseas.²

These rumblings began to be heard – though not officially regarded – before 1914 but any change involved raising two issues which in practice were related – official subsidies for 'culture' and the persuasive role of cultural initiative in diplomacy. The War focused both issues. At home, public funds were spent on commissioning artists – including the *avant garde* – to depict the War. In 1915, Thomas Beecham was sent to conduct concerts in the Augusteo in Rome, as part of the attempt to get Italy to enter the War on the Allied side. Such initiatives were not followed up.

¹ I would like to express my thanks to Helen Meixner, Christopher Rennie, and Tamara Read at the British Council for facilitating access to most of the primary materials upon which this paper draws, and to Maurice Pearton for identifying certain documents in the Public Record Office and for his help in converting this lecture from a research paper.

² AJS White, *The British Council. The First 25 Years. 1934–1959*, London; The British Council, 1965, p. 1. Reginald Leeper, a senior Foreign Office figure, was Australian. He expressed himself in a similar vein in 1935:

As for taking positive steps to explain our aims and achievements, that we regard as undignified and unnecessary. Good wine, we optimistically feel, needs no bush.

*The average Englishman, even though he may not admit it openly, is at heart rather proud of this attitude. He persuades himself that it springs from some superior quality peculiar to Britain, from a spirit of detachment which the circumstances of our history have developed more maturely here than elsewhere. He would be incredulous or even mildly shocked were he told that this attitude was due, at least in part, to mental indolence and lack of imagination, and only if he were fully convinced that it was materially damaging his interests would he take steps to correct it. (Quoted from Frances Donaldson, *The British Council. The First Fifty Years*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1984, pp. 11–12.)*

The pressures of competition which had been experienced before 1914, when Britain was financially strong, were felt even more acutely after the War when its economic position in the world had weakened. The experience of propaganda during the war and the awareness that Britain had made very little effort to support British communities abroad led Lord Curzon to set up a committee in the Foreign Office in 1920 to examine the position of these communities but also to consider whether to encourage political or commercial propaganda in foreign countries, and whether British libraries should be established in certain capitals. The Committee came out firmly against political propaganda but did recommend that facilities for the reception and education of foreign students at British universities should be set up. They also proposed the foundation of British schools abroad, and the creation in a number of capitals of British centres containing institutes and libraries. Here were the twin embryos of what were to become the British Council's student activities and its cultural propaganda role. The Treasury opposed these plans on the grounds of cost and no further action was taken for 12 years.

Eventually the growing concern about the neglect of foreign students in the United Kingdom, combined with the criticism from HM representatives

abroad and from trade missions of the failure to win goodwill by spreading a knowledge of English and British culture, led to the setting up of a joint committee to look into the education and training of students from abroad in 1933 by the Board of Trade and the Board of Education. Its interim report argued that the student question was only part of the wider problem of the ignorance abroad of British achievements in education, culture, science, and technology. The committee recommended the urgent creation of a body to deal with these issues.

This had long been the conviction of Reginald Leeper, a senior figure in the News Department of the Foreign Office (he became its head in 1935), and it was largely due to his vision and pertinacity that the recommendations of the Joint Committee were translated into action. In a memorandum of June 1934 addressed to diplomatic missions, he wrote that 'cultural propaganda has been recognised of late years as an effective and necessary instrument of national policy' and described the principal features of the government's thinking. Efforts would be focused on:

1. Prizes and scholarships in order to develop interest in the study of English.
2. The establishment of English libraries.

3. The dispatch of British lecturers.
4. Visits to the UK of individual journalists and professional people who would be put in touch with their counterparts.
5. Films.
6. Support for institutions for teaching English and to anglophile societies.³

To put his ideas into practice Leeper suggested that an inter-departmental Cultural Relations Committee be established, with representatives from the Foreign Office and the Department of Overseas Trade, with the purpose of raising money from industry and from private persons. Leeper received support from the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office, Sir Robert Vansittart, and on 5 December 1934 a meeting was held which established the 'British Committee for Relations with Other Countries'. In January 1935, the Treasury, perhaps embarrassed by the Committee's intention to seek private funding, itself promised money to the Committee; at the same time it was decided that its title should be changed to the British Council for Relations with Other Countries, this being abbreviated soon afterwards to 'British Council'.

³ AJS White, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

Early in 1935 the British Council considered various small proposals for expenditure overseas from HM missions – £100 for the Finnish–British Society, £100 for the British Institute in Florence. It assumed tasks previously undertaken by the Foreign Office, such as the dispatch of books and periodicals to 14 countries, and set up advisory committees on music and literature. On 2 July 1935, the British Council was officially inaugurated by the Prince of Wales, who had agreed to become its patron. His speech recognised that the creation of the British Council was long overdue: ‘Of all the Great Powers, this country is the last in the field in setting up a proper organisation to spread a knowledge and appreciation of its language, literature, art, science and education.’⁴ During the following year the British Council did its best to make up for lost time. Bursaries were given to 55 student teachers of English from 13 European countries for one-term courses at British universities, new libraries were established and existing libraries extended in 36 countries, and Chairs and Readerships of English were created at universities in five European countries.

The greatest impetus to the British Council’s work came with the appointment in September 1937 of Lord Lloyd as Chairman. Sir Harold Nicolson described him thus:

He was a man of quick intelligence, abounding energy, persuasive persistence, great personal charm, and dominating will. Restless and indeed impatient, he delighted in travel: he would fly from capital to capital, interviewing kings, dictators and ministers... He was impressed by the fact that in many Balkan and Asian lands there was what he called ‘a hunger for our help...’⁵

These attributes of Lord Lloyd were no better exemplified than in his dealings with Romania where the British Council was quick to seize an opportunity to support the British cultural presence. It did not, however, have to operate in a void. Two Anglo-Rumanian societies were already in existence. In 1923, Viorel Tilea, a fervent champion of the British and later Romanian minister to London (1939–40) set up an Anglo-Rumanian society in Cluj, and four years later a similar society was established in Bucharest.⁶ They provided a firm basis for partnership.

In October 1937, Sir Reginald Hoare, the British Minister to Romania, inaugurated a School for English with 150 pupils, organised by Dr D Mateescu, Honorary Secretary of the Anglo-Rumanian Society. John Amery, a young independent teacher of English who had come out for a year to Bucharest under the auspices of the British Council, was interviewed by

Mateescu and appointed Principal of the School. In a desire to consolidate the work of the School, and to put it on a firmer footing, Amery sent a memorandum to Hoare early in 1938 enlisting his support for the position of Principal to be made permanent and for the British Council to assist in this matter, and Hoare, in his turn, gave his backing to Amery in a letter to the British Council dated 12 May 1938. In his letter Hoare quoted extensively from the memorandum and in the process Amery gives some idea of the work of the School:

I accepted the post of Principal of the School of English because I considered it the most effective medium for raising the standard of English in Bucharest.

Thanks to Dr Mateescu I was able to initiate two English literature courses, an outline course from Chaucer to Wordsworth, and a modern course from Tennyson to the present day... Examinations have been introduced for second and third-year classes throughout the School. I began a dramatic society which was very promising... In fact, every effort has been made, within the time at our disposal and under existing conditions, to give the School not only an academic status but a corporate life of its own. The first aim has already been achieved because the way had been carefully prepared for many years by Dr Mateescu, the

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶ It was housed on Strada Boteanu 3. Tilea’s memoirs were edited and published by his daughter under the title *Envoy Extraordinary*, Ileana Tilea (ed), London: Haggerston Press, 1998.

second will be achieved if we have permanent premises and a permanent staff.

More time must be devoted to organising the School consolidating the work of the staff, and increasing the prestige of the School not only in Bucharest but in Romania. The classes require supervision, and teachers' meetings should be held at least once a fortnight to raise the standard of teaching and to discuss educational problems. At least two hours a week must be devoted to the enquiries of pupils about England and English matters. Dr Mateescu desires that the Principal should give all his time to raising the prestige of the School and making it a centre of culture in Romania.⁷

Hoare added some detail of his own about the School:

Its success was immediate and by the end of the year [1937] the School had 350 pupils and could have had many more had the accommodation been greater. This year [1938] more extensive but otherwise unsatisfactory premises were secured in conjunction with a French school and a thousand pupils are now being taught. It is understood that the number could easily be doubled... The premises at present occupied are about to be demolished, hence the low rent...

We are all agreed here that so long as there is a really eager desire to acquire a knowledge of English, by far the most effective propaganda, taking the long view, is to give all possible encouragement to would-be students; conversely there could be no more effective anti-British propaganda than the knowledge, which would undoubtedly be widespread, that the Anglo-Rumanian School had had to close down, or at any rate restrict its activities, through the lack of a few hundred pounds.

From figures supplied by Amery it appears that 65 per cent of the pupils at the School are either school children and students or persons requiring a commercial knowledge of English. It appears to me that the young and business people are exactly the persons whom we want to get into our net.

Hoare's letter reached the desk of Kenneth Johnstone, one of the two newly-created Deputy Secretary-Generals of the British Council, whose full-time services had recently been made available by the Foreign Office. Johnstone gave enthusiastic backing to Hoare's suggestion that Amery be offered full-time employment as Principal of the School; in a memorandum of 17 May to the British Council's Secretary-General Colonel Charles Bridge, Johnstone wrote:

It looks as if we had a magnificent opportunity here and I suggest that we ought to seize it with both hands... I suggest that we should telegraph to Sir R. Hoare a) authorising him to offer Amery £500 a year, of which £140 would continue to be paid by the Anglo-Rumanian Society; b) requesting an estimate for a school of 2,000 pupils, on the assumption that the British Council would be willing to provide a second teacher to work under Amery. This money would of course have to be found from the British Council's reserve fund: it would be impossible to cut down the relatively small amount we are spending in Romania.⁸

Johnstone's recommendation received Bridge's approval and he wrote to HL Farquhar at the British Legation in Bucharest, requesting an estimate of the expenditure involved in the proposed enlargement of the School of English. Farquhar's reply gives an indication of the differences between British and Romanian expectations which coloured the setting up of the new School: 'Although Mateescu is an official of the Ministry of Finance, I have had considerable difficulty in explaining to him what a budget is, and in a conversation which I had with him over three weeks ago he showed a curious reluctance to produce any detailed statement.'⁹ In the meantime, steps were taken to appoint two

⁷ Public Record Office (henceforth abbreviated to PRO) British Council, BW 53/1.

⁸ PRO BW 51/3.

⁹ PRO BW 53/1.

assistant teachers for the School, and after interviews conducted by Farquhar and Amery two men called Michael Sheldon and JH Vinden were selected and arrived on 23 September.

Lord Lloyd followed these developments closely and decided to add his personal imprimatur by making a private visit to Romania and renewing his friendship with King Carol, whom he had received as Governor of Bombay province during Carol's visit to India, as Crown Prince, in April 1920. The British Council was already sponsoring a number of lectures by eminent British visitors to the country as part of a drive to strengthen a British presence in South-Eastern Europe in the face of German rising influence.¹⁰ The British Council's support was given formal recognition when, on 12 October 1938, Lord Lloyd opened the British Institute in Bucharest, which was in fact the School of English in enlarged but decrepit premises on Strada Slătineanu 20. King Carol showed a keen interest in this move and received Lord Lloyd, an old friend from the 1920s. Following their meeting the King requested the Mayor of Bucharest to present a suitable plot of land to the British Council for a building for the Institute. But while the

future looked bright for the Institute, its validation by the British Council raised a question mark over the status of Professor John Burbank who had been appointed on a two-year contract by the British Council in April 1937 to occupy the newly-founded chair of English at Bucharest University. Colonel Bridge, the British Council's Secretary-General, followed Lord Lloyd out to the Romanian capital to investigate these and related issues.

In a long, plaintive letter to Lord Lloyd, sent from the Legation on 28 October 1938, Colonel Bridge confessed that the situation in Bucharest was 'so complicated as to make it almost impossible to settle and to sort out in three days'. On the question of Burbank, Bridge told the Professor that the British Council was willing to extend his contract for a further year and this Burbank accepted. With regard to the British Institute, Bridge reported that it had 2,300 students organised in 75 classes – by comparison, the British Institute in Rome had 1,000 students (author's note). The average size of the classes was 40, which he deemed far too large, and the premises too small. 'There are, of course', he added, 'a large number of Jews, I think 40 per cent, and this tends to keep the good

class Rumanians out. I am not sure what the solution of this problem is, but I think some limit must be set to the number of Jews admitted and I will discuss this with Mateescu.' Bridge shows a startling lack of sensitivity to the predicament of the Jews in Romania at this time, given the fact that they were the object of anti-Semitic legislation introduced by the Goga government earlier in the year, and that most of the Jews attended the Institute in order to improve their English in the hope of emigration.

On the staff, Bridge commented: 'Amery has ten teachers, who are all English bar two, and these two Rumanians are probably the best. Two of the English teachers are unsatisfactory, and Amery is anxiously awaiting the arrival of the two teachers we are sending out.' Finally, Bridge discussed the relationship between the Anglo-Romanian Society and the Institute, about which he had had an inconclusive talk with Mateescu. Bridge confessed: 'I found it almost impossible to get him to understand that although the British School here is called the British Institute, it is in fact not an institute in our interpretation of the term. I told him that if and when the Institute and Society moved to the new building, the

¹⁰ Among those who lectured were Robert Bruce Lockhart (4 March), Harold Nicolson (18 and 19 April with lectures entitled *Are the English Hypocrites* and *The British Empire Today*), and Sir Ronald Storrs (24 October on TE Lawrence). From Lockhart's talks in Romania and elsewhere in South-Eastern Europe came *Guns or Butter*, London: Putnam, 1938, an optimistic assessment of the Balkan nations tempered by fears of German aggression.

Society will become absorbed in and subordinate to the Institute, but whether he understood or not I am not clear.¹¹

Although the British Council had taken major strides to secure the teaching of English in Romania by the autumn of 1938, it is useful to put its achievement into perspective. The British Council was providing the salaries of four teachers in Bucharest – Amery, Burbank, Seldon and Vinden – and of two teachers in the provinces: Mr FY Thompson at Cernăuți University and Mr AC Crawley at Iași.¹² By contrast, the French authorities were funding 15 university posts in French in Romania and the Italian government was funding ten university posts.

One of the two new teachers awaited by Amery and referred to by Bridge in his letter to Lord Lloyd was Reginald (Reggie) Smith, husband of Olivia Manning who presented an unflattering portrait of her husband as Guy Pringle in her *Balkan Trilogy*. Kenneth Johnstone announced his appointment in an internal memorandum to the British Council on 1 December 1938,

advising the accounts section that Smith's salary was to be £325 per annum. Smith advised an official of the British Council that he would be taking the following authors to Bucharest:

1. Standard poets – Chaucer to Browning, with some critical works of the period.
2. Modern writers:
 - a. Poets: Auden, Spender, Eliot, Graves, Yeats, MacNeice, Plomer, Greene, Van der Post.
 - b. Criticism: Eliot, Richards, Lewis.
 - c. DH Lawrence and Lawrence's.
 - d. Wyndham Lewis, and a few modern novelists (unpolitical).
3. Translations and foreign texts: Flaubert, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Tolstoy.
4. Some standard grammar books, works on language and some psycho-analytic works.
5. *Certain volumes which you may object to* (Smith's emphasis)

Although they are all fiction: Andre Malraux, Proletarian Literature in the

USA, and modern history (scientific, literary, historical scholarship.¹³)

Smith's warning about the 'possible objection' to certain volumes proved prophetic, although the source of the criticism was not the British Council but the Bishop of Southwark whose complaints – unascribed – were passed on by a Mr Boyd Tollinton of the British Council to John Amery:

One or two criticisms in regard to the British Council's work in Bucharest have recently been voiced to us. We were told that some of the teachers at the Institute are unpunctual at their classes and fraternise too closely with their pupils. Will you let me know whether there is any truth in these remarks and take steps to avoid further criticism?

*Criticism has also been raised as to certain recent lectures given under the British Council's auspices in which undue prominence was given to James Joyce's *Ulysses* and the works of D.H. Lawrence. It is said that this might give offence to the more serious sections of Rumanian life.¹⁴*

¹¹ PRO BW53/1.

¹² Burbank was joined by an assistant, also sponsored by the British Council, in March 1939. His name was Ivor Porter and he has recounted his experiences of the time in *Operation Autonomous. With SOE in Wartime Romania*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1989. Miss EJ Cumming was appointed as a teacher at the Institute by Amery in November 1939.

¹³ PRO BW 53/1. Manning's view of Romania is the subject of a revealing analysis by Ernest Latham, *Watching from the Window: Olivia Manning in Romania 1939–1940*, *Journal of the American Romanian Academy*

of Arts and Sciences, no.20, 1995, pp. 92–112. It was while he was on summer leave in London in 1939 that Smith met Olivia Manning, who was working at the time at the Medici Society, and they married shortly afterwards. The newly-wed couple arrived in Bucharest on 3 September 1939, the day Britain declared war on Germany, and stayed there until early October 1940, shortly after the Romanian government ordered all British civilians out of the country on 30 September 1940. On the accuracy of Manning's portrayal of Romanian society and her fellow Britons in Bucharest at this time the reader might find the introduction this author wrote for the Romanian translation of *The Balkan Trilogy* (*Trilogia Balcanică*, București, Univers, 3 vols. 1996–97) useful.

Lord Lloyd reviewed the position of the building for the British Institute at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the British Council held on 19 December 1938. He reported that the Mayor of Bucharest, acting on King Carol's instructions, had agreed to present land to the British Council for the Institute building or, if no suitable land was available, the equivalent in cash. He anticipated that, to compete with the Italians, who had an impressive building in the centre of Bucharest, and to house all the activities of the British Council in one building, an expenditure of £25,000 would be involved. Lord Lloyd justified this by emphasising the importance of the British Council's work in Romania and the success attending its activities there.¹⁵

The Treasury refused funds for the construction of the Institute until reminded that King Carol had personally donated the site. The Treasury rapidly sanctioned the expenditure.¹⁶ The land offered by the King was known as 'proprietatea Cesianu', situated on the corner of Calea Victoriei and Strada Sevastopol, and right in the centre of Bucharest. It had always been

understood on both sides that the Anglo-Rumanian Society would share the new premises with the Institute and it was the Society, in the person of the architect Prince Cantacuzino, that the British Legation contacted. The initial estimates supplied by the Prince were considered too high by the British Council and discussions dragged on for over a year.¹⁷ It was only in March 1940 that the Treasury sanctioned expenditure of £25,000 for the building in anticipation of fresh plans from the Prince, but political events were swiftly making these redundant. King Carol's abdication in September 1940, and the appointment of the pro-German Ion Antonescu as virtual dictator, led to a rapid deterioration in relations between Britain and Romania and at the end of the month the Romanians ordered most of the British who had not already left to go. On 27 October, Hoare telegraphed to the Foreign Office from Bucharest that the Institute was to be closed in view of the withdrawal of the teachers. In the following year, the activities of the Anglo-Rumanian Society were finally suspended¹⁸ (footnote on following page).

King Michael's *coup* of 23 August 1944 against Antonescu and the entry of Soviet troops into Bucharest completely changed the political complexion of Romania. The Soviet occupation transformed the Communist Party of Romania into a major political force, and it was on the back of Soviet power that Gheorghiu-Dej and his colleagues were installed in government. Under Dej's rule Romania shared with all the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe a total reliance upon terror as an instrument of political power. The regime, in its search for actual or potential opponents of totalitarian conformity, struck terror into the whole of Romanian society. These opponents were deemed to be those who had had, or were in, contact with the West, in whatever form.

The cards of Anglophiles were marked, in Dej's eyes, for two reasons: first, because Dej, who had not enjoyed a formal education, was envious of those who had (including his own colleagues); and second, since Britain was a major power, and had been a significant influence in the cultural and commercial lives of many Romanians,

¹⁴ PRO BW 53/6. 22 May 1940; E Latham, op. cit., p. 96. A seasoned observer of Romanian society at the time might well have argued that the 'more serious sections of Rumanian life' would have given ample material to Joyce and Lawrence!

¹⁵ PRO BW 53/1.

¹⁶ See correspondence between Sir John Simon and Lord Halifax, March 1940, PRO FO 371/24995; I have taken this reference from Maurice Pearton, 'British Policy Towards Romania 1939–1941', *Occasional*

Papers in Romanian Studies, no.2, Rebecca Haynes (ed). London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London (1998) p. 73, note 33.

¹⁷ PRO BW 53/4.



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¹⁸ Amery went to Sarajevo to work with the Yugoslav-British Society there, while Smith and Manning were evacuated to Athens where Reggie worked as a British Council lecturer until the spring of 1941 when once again a German advance forced them to leave, this time for Cairo. The British Council lecturers in Cernăuți, Iași, and Timișoara, also left. According to a statement of proposed British Council expenditure in Romania for the year 1940–41, the British Council teacher in Cernăuți was a Mr Balister, in Timișoara a Mr Kingdon, and in Iași a Mr Ennals. The British Council was also contributing to the rent of Anglo-Rumanian Society premises in Cernăuți, Cluj, Constanța, Galați, and Iași, as well as making small payments to locally-engaged teachers in Cluj and Constanța. Ennals was an enterprising figure and sent the British Legation a memorandum in July 1940 giving an eye-witness account of the treatment meted out to some of the peasants and Jews from Bukovina by the Romanian authorities as they returned to the province after its cession to the Soviet Union. *I entered Bukovina on July 3rd [1940] with a group of Bukovinian peasants, workers and Jews who were returning from other parts of Roumania, particularly from Bucharest. Many of the Jews amongst them had been attacked on the train and several had severe head injuries. The Roumanian authorities would do nothing towards giving*

them medical treatment. I managed to obtain some bandages, cotton wool and antiseptics and did what I could. We waited three hours in a waiting room at Dornești and eleven hours at the local gendarmerie. During this time the people were not allowed to go out and look for anything to eat. Everyone's name was entered on a list and then we were told that we were to walk with our baggage to Adancata on the other side of the frontier. It is a distance of about 30 kilometres. We were forced to walk along the railway and as we did not start till seven in the evening, most of the distance was covered in the dark. We were accompanied by Roumanian soldiers with fixed bayonets who did not allow us to stop until we had walked for four hours at a very swift pace. Many of the travellers were not fit to walk, being old and ill. They were all carrying with them all their possessions. At one point all the Jews were separated from the remainder of the party and they were forced to hand over money at the point of a bayonet. Soon after this, the Roumanian soldiers began firing and using their bayonets and as it was very dark there was a complete panic, almost everybody dropped their luggage and ran desperately in the direction of the Russian frontier. Many of them arrived in the early hours of the morning when they were picked up by Russian army lorries. Others did not arrive, of them we could find out nothing. (PRO, FO 371/24856/192).

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contact with the country and its culture marked them out as targets of the Communist regime. Anything British was regarded by the Communists with suspicion, and anything that was both cultural and British attracted the special attention of the Romanian secret police, the *Securitate*.

Despite the Communist mistrust of the British, the Foreign Office was quick to show interest in a renewal of British Council activities in Romania and the position of the Anglo-Rumanian Society after the signature of the Allied Armistice Agreement with Romania in Moscow on 12 September 1944. The British had suggested that as part of the Armistice an Allied Control Commission be set up to oversee the implementation of the terms but the Soviet determination to have the main say in this matter was carried through in their Armistice draft of 31 August which stated that the terms would be implemented 'under the control of the Soviet High Command, hereinafter called Allied (Soviet) High Command, acting on behalf of the Allied powers.' As if to stress the point, Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, in conversation with the American ambassador to Moscow, Averell Harriman, implied that the Western Allies could only have political contact with the Romanian government through the Russians. The same was to be true of cultural contacts. Since the Soviet Union had

the monopoly of its interpretation, the Armistice Agreement became the mechanism for the takeover of Romania.¹⁹ The British and Americans, who both sent military missions to Romania, were reduced to the role of spectators.

On 14 November 1944, HJ Seymour of the Foreign Office wrote to Ian Le Rougetel, British Political Representative to the Allied Control Commission in Bucharest, for his views on the Anglo-Rumanian Society and the prospects of a resumption of British Council work. Le Rougetel, who only received the letter on 26 January 1945, sent a detailed reply on 28 February which highlights the constraints imposed by Soviet control:

So far as the Society is concerned, no public meetings have been held as yet and it has been felt that the best way in which the Society's aims could at present be achieved is by the loan of its books to an English Library under the control of this Mission...

Under the Armistice Convention the dissemination of all propaganda material is subject to the direction of the 'Allied (Soviet) High Command'.

We have therefore felt that, rather than to raise the whole question of British propaganda in this country, our first step should be to announce the foundation of the Library and to

invite both Rumanians and Russians to take advantage of its facilities... We hope in this way to be able at the same time to fill a crying need among the Rumanians and allay any suspicions that the Russians might entertain regarding our propaganda activities. We are confident that the Library, when it is opened next month, will attract a large membership and when it has been open for a few weeks, we shall be able to judge better of the advisability of extending its activities and perhaps of resuming the meetings of the Anglo-Rumanian Society.

The only other activity which we are launching out on at present is films.

We have received several news reels with Rumanian commentaries and these have been most successfully shown, with the addition of Russian subtitles, in Bucharest and the provincial towns...

Our whole approach to the question of British propaganda in this country must, of course, be radically different now that Romania is within the Russian sphere of operations. The Rumanians are in an embarrassingly Anglophile mood at present and we are at pains to discourage them from assuming that we are here as their protectors and invariably insist that the future of this country depends

¹⁹ Maurice Pearton and Dennis Deletant, 'The Soviet Takeover in Romania, 1944–1948', in Dennis Deletant and Maurice Pearton, *Romania Observed*, Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1998, p. 145.

on straightforward and practical co-operation with Russia.

It is therefore obvious that our publicity work here cannot be aimed exclusively at the furtherance of Anglo-Rumanian cultural relations.²⁰

With the imposition of Communist rule in 1945 Romania was forced to turn its back on the West and face eastwards. In cultural terms, this meant that the Romanians' debt to the West could no longer be acknowledged nor their links maintained while, conversely, the Romanians' associations with Russia in the past were fraudulently amplified to provide a justification for the new ideological imprint to be given by the Soviet Union.

The first steps in the new cultural direction were taken under the cover of the Paris Peace Treaty of February 1947. One of its provisions required Romania to undertake to outlaw all Fascist organisations on Romanian territory and 'all other bodies engaged in anti-Soviet propaganda.' The anathemas were comprehensive. The Romanian authorities argued that 'the struggle against those who sought to prevent the democratisation of the country could not be pursued without banning all publications which propagated Fascist ideas and without a general effort to *purge all publications in general*. The Ministry of the Interior issued a circular to all libraries and bookshops in spring 1948 forbidding them to provide or sell all school textbooks published before 1947,

all books relating to Russia, France, Britain, the British Empire, and the United States before 1944, all books favourable to a regime or government other than the Soviet one, and all books showing western cultural influence in Romania's past.²¹

In May, the Ministry of Information published a list of 8,000 titles which were to be withdrawn from circulation. Many Romanians must have been amazed to find the names of Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle, the Soviets' wartime allies, included amongst the outlawed authors.²² As well as the purge of politically incorrect titles, the activities of journalists, writers, artists and musicians were brought under the Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop)

²⁰ PRO BW 53/9. Broad agreement with these views and actions was expressed by WR Wickham when he wrote in reply to Le Rougetel on behalf of the British Council on 16 April. (*ibid.*) Further information about the newly-created English Library, which was housed on Strada Biserica Amzei 7, was given by Ivor Porter, serving as major in the Press Office of the British Military Mission, to the British Council in a letter dated 2 May. Porter had left Romania on 12 February 1941 with the last remaining British diplomats and the journalists Clare Hollingworth and David Walker. He had returned on 22 December 1943 as a member of a three-man Special Operations Executive team that was parachuted into the country in order to make contact with Marshal Antonescu and Iuliu Maniu about Allied feelers to get the Romanians to accept Armistice terms. The team was captured by the Romanians shortly after their drop but was treated well. Its leader, Alfred Gardyne de Chastelain, was given access to both Antonescu and Maniu, and was permitted to transmit messages back to SOE under supervision. For further information see Ivor Porter, *Operation Autonomous. With SOE in Wartime Romania*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1989. Porter's letter was sent to FY Thompson, the former British Council lecturer in Cernăuți who was now working in the British Council's headquarters. His efforts to satisfy the Romanian thirst for English literature are chronicled thus: 'In view, however, of the great demand for English

literature of all kinds with which we were confronted, we decided to put the books of the 'Anglo-Romanian Society' into circulation. The Mission took these books on loan from the 'Anglo-Rumanian Society' and named them the 'English Library'. A small committee, consisting of Professor Oprescu, Mr Chrissoveloni and myself has been formed. Miss Pantazi is librarian and has two assistant librarians, Miss Donici and Mr Catargi. The library is in two sections, a lending library and a reference library and there are reading rooms for students. We have another room for British newspapers and periodicals. The library, which is housed on Strada Biserica Amzei 7, is in no way, of course, a society or club. The library of the Bucharest Faculty of English Language and Literature was burnt out during the bombing last year and their work was almost immobilised. We have, therefore, lent them some 770 books from the English Library, consisting chiefly of the Eckersley courses and anthologies of verse, essays and plays. We intend to let the University of Iași have some 100 books of the same kind. We have given about 80 books to the Russian Mission for Russians who are learning English (PRO. BW 53/9).

²¹ Marcel Fontaine, *La République Populaire Roumaine contre la culture française*, Paris: Fundația Regală Universitară Carol 1, 1962, p. 31.

²² Publicațiile interzise, București, 1948, p. 15.

section of the Central Committee of the Party. Nothing could be published or performed without approval.

Education was similarly treated. In August 1948, the Law for Educational Reform closed down all foreign schools, including those run by religious orders. A purge was conducted of the teaching profession and of university students. Eminent professors were removed from the faculties of history and philosophy and their places taken by Stalinist indoctrinators, the most notorious of whom in the history field was the Agitprop activist Mihai Roller. The Ministry of Education banned the use of certain didactic materials and authorised textbooks incorporating Marxist-Leninist precepts. Marxism-Leninism, in Stalin's interpretation, was made obligatory from the secondary school upwards; the teaching of religion was totally banned.

The Russian language was introduced as a compulsory subject in the fourth year of schooling, displacing French as the principal foreign language in primary and secondary education. The teaching of French was withdrawn from primary schools and it became an optional language – alongside English and German – in the secondary system,

with pupils given the choice of only one of these languages for which the number of teaching hours was reduced. In summer 1948, all foreign language textbooks were withdrawn from schools and new ones, authorised by the Ministry of Education, were introduced in the following year. In its official bulletin the Ministry instructed teachers on the methods to be used to teach the language:

In secondary schools, French, English or German are also taught alongside Russian. But the method of instruction differs radically from the previous one.

Taking the experience of Soviet teachers as the example, the Ministry of Education recommends the most complete assimilation possible of the foreign language. Emphasis is placed in particular on the language of everyday speech, spoken by the working class and scientists of the respective country. In the teaching of French, English and German, the aim is to familiarise pupils with current political, social, and economic notions. At the same time, this study must be closely linked with the achievements of the workers in the Soviet Union and in the people's democracies, as well as to the struggle of the workers in France, Britain, and Germany for a better life.²³

It was against this distinctly unpromising background that the Foreign Office and the British Council had sought to revive British Council activities in Romania. In the summer of 1947 Mr Tom Morray was appointed the British Council's representative and he arrived in Bucharest in October. Some local staff were engaged, but it proved impossible to acquire premises. The British Minister approached the newly-installed Foreign Minister Ana Pauker and asked whether the Romanian government would agree to the opening of a British Council centre. Her reply, Morray reported, was 'evasive and non-committal'.²⁴ After several reminders sent by the Minister asking whether the government had considered the request, permission was refused in December.

Some of the British Council's tasks were taken up by the Information Office of the British Legation, for whom Morray had only the kindest of words:

I cannot speak too highly of the work being done on British Council lines by the Information Office here, particularly by the local staff. The library is well run, and considering all the circumstances, well used.²⁵

²³ M Fontaine, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

²⁴ T Morray to HP Croom-Johnson, The British Council, 22 December 1947 (PRO BW 53/7). Morray continued in pessimistic vein: *I cannot help feeling that we have 'missed the boat' in what might have been an extremely important post i.e. the Chair of English in the University of Bucharest. As far as I can ascertain a little*

hope still remains that a suitable person will be accepted, but this cannot last indefinitely. I have explained elsewhere the change in the nature of this appointment following the purge of Professor [Dragoş] Protopopescu, formerly holder of the Chair of English Language and Literature.

²⁵ *ibid.*

His remarks seem poignant, in view of the fate 18 months later of the local staff, all of whom were arrested by the Romanian authorities on charges of 'espionage for the British'. A Council minute on Morray's report, in an undecipherable hand, dated 19 January 1948, advised that 'Mr Morray should stay on as long as he is tolerated, doing what useful work he can in patience, and if it becomes necessary under pressure from the Rumanian government to withdraw him then we should come out altogether, as in Russia.'²⁶ In less than a month the decision was taken, on 10 February, to withdraw Morray after discussions in London with HM Minister to Romania. He had already recommended that plans to post a second (less senior) British Council officer should be abandoned, as a visa would almost certainly be refused. Morray left Bucharest on 23 February. After that date there was no Council representative in Bucharest, and it was agreed that Council material should be left in the care of Mr John Bennett, First Secretary for Information at the Legation, for his use as suitable opportunities occurred.

In March, Pauker said in an interview that 'the possibility of a British Council Centre being set up was not definitely excluded for all time'. Asked whether permission could be given to appoint a British lecturer at the University of

Bucharest, she stated that the Romanian government wanted technical professors or lecturers on agriculture, medicine and engineering, 'not experts in philosophy'.²⁷ Her reply was a blunt reminder of the Communist government's priorities. During the summer the Romanian government refused the British Council's offer of a visit by a British expert on malariology, and its proposal to pay the expenses of a member of the Cantacuzino Institute to visit Britain to study typhoid phages was rejected. Commenting on these decisions, Bennett wrote: 'This refusal ... has finally closed the door on any sort of cultural or scientific exchanges or visits between Great Britain and Roumania'.²⁸

It was through the Information Office at the British Legation that Bennett sought to represent the British Council's interests but the opportunity it afforded Romanians to contact British diplomats with news of the progress of the communisation of Romanian life threatened the regime's ability to prevent details of its repressive policies from leaking out to the West. In July 1949, all of the local staff, whose work Morray had so warmly praised, were arrested on charges of 'espionage' and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Among them was Maria Golescu, sentenced to 20 years in jail for passing two letters to a member of the British Legation

from Ștefan Nenițescu, the former secretary to the pre-war Romanian Foreign Minister Nicolae Titulescu, and Annie Samuelli. The regime's determination to deny its citizens contact with western institutions was highlighted by its decision to take direct action against pupils and students who sought to supplement their meagre ration of culture by frequenting the libraries of the French Institutes in Bucharest, Iași, Cluj, Timișoara and Craiova, the library of the Italian Institute, the library of the British Information Office, and that of the American Information Office. The arrest in March 1950 of Romanians who visited these institutes showed that cultures long valued by the Romanians were no longer valued by the new regime.

At a meeting of the secretariat of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party on 1 March 1950, chaired by the Party Secretary Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the decision was taken to close the western cultural institutes in Romania on the grounds they were 'information offices' that spread propaganda through books and films since they were visited by many Romanians, in particular by teachers, students and pupils. In order for the measure to have the desired effect, the Communist leadership resolved that after the respective foreign governments had been

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁷ PRO CF/RU/680/1. *British Council Activities in Roumania*, 21 February 1957.

informed by the Romanian Foreign Minister, Ana Pauker, the Minister of the Interior, Teohari Georgescu, should order the arrest of all those who attended these institutes and send them to labour camps.²⁹ This is precisely the fate of the men and women most of them under the age of 25 – who were arrested as they left these institutes on the evening of 2 March.³⁰

With the door remaining firmly shut in the face of the British, the Chancery section of the Legation finally suggested to the Cultural Relations Department of the Foreign Office on 21 May 1952 that the books in the British Information Office library be sent to London. The Foreign Office agreed but decided that the books should be transferred from Bucharest to a new British Council library in Zagreb.

The British took the view that since the Communists had spurned the British Council's attempts to maintain cultural relations with Romania, any initiative to restore the British Council's position had to come from the Romanian side. No such move was made for several years. In September 1956, the Romanian Minister to London, Corchinschi asked the Minister of State at the Foreign Office whether the

²⁹ The relevant minute of the meeting reads: 'The meeting began at 6 pm. In the chair, comrade Gheorghiu-Dej. Those present: A Pauker, V Luca, T Georgescu, L Rădăceanu, I Chişinevski and Al Moghioroş.

Agenda: 1. The closing of the American, British and Italian information offices.

Comrade Ana Pauker: We must close the information offices because they use them for propaganda, they show films, they have a library, and school children frequent them.

Comrade Chişinevski: Only we must see how we go about it, because we took a decision earlier to close the French Institute and yet it still continues to operate.

Comrade Gheorghiu: I therefore support the proposal, comrade Ana should summon them and enforce the closure. After that, an announcement should be made in the press and the Ministry of the Interior should then take measures against those who visit the institutes and send them to work camps. The same steps should be taken against the French and Italian institutes etc. So let it be clear, all those who go to these institutes should be arrested.' (Ioan Scurtu, '1950: cine merge la Institutul francez să fie arestat, iar Zaharia Stancu să fie exclus din partid,' *Magazin Istoric*, vol.XXXII, no.1 (January 1998), p. 43).

³⁰ The faith that the local employees of the British Information Office placed in their masters and the risks that they ran daily by ignoring threats from the *Securitate* and reporting for work were not repaid after their arrest. The papers available in the Public Record Office show that the Foreign Office's stance over the imprisonment of local employees of the legation on charges of espionage was less than robust, and there is little evidence to indicate that the fate of the employees was a priority in pursuing British interests in Romania. Suggestive of the official British attitude was a note from Henry Hohler, the head of the Northern

Department to William Sullivan, Head of Mission in Bucharest, in March 1954, that he should not press the Romanian authorities for greater freedom of contact with Romanians on the grounds that Britain was keen to develop commercial relations with Romania. In a conversation with the Rumanian chargé in London on 8 March, Hohler told the latter that he 'did not in any way dispute the right of the Romanian authorities to arrest these persons [local employees]', but 'wished to point out that it was very difficult for our Legation to function effectively' if it could not use local employees. (PRO FO 111640, NR 1151/6; minute by Hohler, 8 March 1954. I am grateful to Mark Percival for this reference.)

It was only in 1959, to judge from Foreign Office papers, that a serious effort was made to obtain the release of the jailed employees of the British legation. This appears to have been largely the initiative of Robert Scott Foxe, who arrived as Head of Mission in May, as Mark Percival has discovered in research for his London University PhD thesis on British-Romanian relations from 1945 to 1965, defended in 1997. Here is what Percival has to say on the matter:

Their [the employees'] situation was not helped by the considerable uncertainty in London as to their whereabouts and status. A despatch from the Bucharest legation chancery in October 1960 reported that officials had 'recently looked at old papers with a view to establishing the facts behind the oral tradition we have inherited according to which certain locally-employed members of the British Council and Information Office staff were imprisoned.' The legation's records did not make clear when the arrests and trials had taken place, and London was asked for clarification. However, it was only after three months, during which former legation officials were consulted, that a list of names could be established, and even this did not claim to be comprehensive. The absence of a definitive list weakened Britain's position considerably.



Essay continues on page 26

Nevertheless, Scott Foxe continued to focus on the question of the legation employees in his meetings with high-ranking Romanians. In May 1961, at a meeting with Manea Mănescu, the newly-appointed Foreign Minister, he reiterated the point that the continued imprisonment of the legation employees was an obstacle to improved relations. In June, Scott Foxe raised the matter again with Gheorghiu-Dej at his last meeting with the Romanian leader before returning to London. Dej was in a good mood and promised that the legation employees would be released and would be able to go to Britain if they wanted. As the British Head of Mission recognized, it was most unusual for the regime to make such a significant concession so quickly. However, by the end of 1961 only two legation employees, Annie Samuelli and Costica Mugur, had been released out of a total of seven on the British list. (p. 322)

James Dalton Murray, when presenting his credentials as British Minister on 11 October 1961, wrote that he had a conversation with Gheorghiu-Dej about Romanians who had helped the UK and had been sentenced on that account. He admitted that, as they were Romanian citizens, Britain had no legal standing, but considered it had a moral duty insofar as helping the British had entered into the indictment. The four men were Constantin Agarici, Alexandru Vasescu, Modest Grigoru and Constantin Raşcanu. Murray added that the first two had been openly attached to the British Mission and the last had, in fact, worked for British security. Dej gave assurances that imprisoned ex-employees of the Legation had been released and encouraged Murray to take up the cases of the four with the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This he did, but progress over the cases was exceedingly slow. It was only on 1 September 1964 that Murray was in a position to tell the Foreign Office that all four were free. This indeed was the case with the first three but the file ran out with Raşcanu's fate still unsettled (PRO FO 371 166161, FO 371/17765, 'Political Prisoners' and FO 371/177616).

It may well be that the release of the four men was secured as a result of pressure from the British Legation but in the case of other employees, ransoms were paid by family and friends.

The procedure for paying a ransom was the following. Henry Jakober, a British businessman, acted as the conduit for payment to Romanian intelligence of monies given by private individuals in the West for exit visas for their relatives in prison in Romania. The ransom demanded varied according to the status of the prisoner but was between \$4,000 and \$6,000. Jakober was approached at his address at 55 Park Lane in London and given the name of the person to be ransomed. He then gave the name a reference number which was quoted in all correspondence and took the details to Bucharest. There a ransom fee was fixed by the Romanian intelligence directorate acting on Dej's orders and communicated to Jakober who, on his return to Britain gave instructions to those paying the ransom to deposit the sum into Jakober's account at the Credit Suisse Bank in Lucerne, Switzerland. The monies were only paid over to the Romanian authorities after the ransomed person had arrived in the West. Thus a ransom of \$4,200 was paid in August 1962 by Professor Eric Tappe of London University's School of Slavonic and East European Studies and relatives for the release from prison of Maria Golescu, the librarian of the British Information Office in Bucharest who had been arrested in July 1949. The British government did not contribute to the ransom but it did agree to pay Miss Golescu a small pension based on her ten years of service at the Legation. Maria Golescu died in Eastbourne, Sussex in 1987 at the age of 90.

British Council would be able to help him should he wish to arrange for a British theatre to visit Romania without expense, or for a Romanian visit of the kind on similar terms. The Minister referred the question to the British Council and Kenneth Johnstone replied. He widened the issue to include the position of the British Council with regard to Romania and argued that the British Council should not contemplate renewing its work in satellite countries unless in the first place their governments approached it with a request and, subsequently, unless they agreed to the terms upon which it was prepared to operate. So far, Johnstone pointed out, Romania and Hungary were the only two countries whose governments had shown interest. If it were thought desirable for the British Council to work in either or both, and the money were provided, then the British Council would do its best, although for financial and manpower reasons alone, it could only be on a modest scale.³¹

Paul Grey at the Foreign Office explained to Corchinschi that money was lacking for the kind of venture proposed and elaborated on the procedures adopted by the British Council when they were asked to undertake cultural relations with a country. The pattern was that they asked permission to open an office

and some kind of institute in which British publications would be available to the public and where cultural contacts could be arranged, and lectures given on occasions. Grey emphasised this because he suspected that this was not what the Romanian government wanted at all. The Romanian Minister appeared to accept all this. However, no request to the British Council to reopen relations was forthcoming.³²

Regardless of this, Corchinschi returned to the subject at a meeting with Grey in February 1957. Sir Paul Sinker, Director-General of the British Council, was present at Grey's request. In Sinker's report on the meeting, he stated that the Romanian Minister had made 'the usual requests about major cultural manifestations, exchanges of delegations, etc.' Sinker had responded by saying that if the necessary funds could be found, the British Council would prefer to spend them on opening an office, library, and possibly an Institute in Romania. Sinker continued: 'This met a brick wall and the conversation became a rather barren conflict between dancing girls and delegations on the one hand, and British Council office, library and English classes on the other.' Both Grey and Sinker were impressed by the fact that Corchinschi 'adopted a completely Molotov-like attitude the moment we

mentioned a British Council office.' Sinker concluded: 'There is no reason that I can see why we should let the Romanians have what they want on their own terms.'³³

The feelers put out by the Romanian Minister in London were symptomatic of a diplomatic drive by the Romanian regime to end its isolation from the West. In 1957, the first in a succession of Franco-Romanian cultural agreements was signed. It established a number of studentships to be held reciprocally in both countries and allowed for an exchange of lecturers in the French and Romanian languages. But it was only in 1961 that Britain and Romania exchanged *Notes Verbales* proposing a programme of cultural contacts in 1961–62 to be implemented in Romania by the British Legation. A similar exchange took place in the following year, and in 1963 an Anglo-Romanian Programme of Cultural Exchanges was agreed. In 1964, the Foreign Office asked the British Council to fill the post of Cultural Attaché and in September Mr David Williams took up the post. The political significance of this *rapprochement* was underlined by a visit by the Royal Shakespeare Company that same year whose production of *King Lear* left an indelible impression upon spectators denied access for more than two decades to English drama performed

³¹ PRO BW 53/11. Letter of K Johnstone to GM Warr, FO Cultural Relations Department, 26 September 1956.

³² PRO BW 53/11. Letter of GM Warr to K Johnstone, 24 October 1956.

³³ PRO BW 53/11. Memo from Director-General on British Council: Rumania, 22 February 1957.

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This met a brick wall and the conversation became a rather barren conflict between dancing girls and delegations on the one hand, and British Council office, library and English classes on the other.

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in the original. Lear's struggle against madness is also the power of good in conflict with the forces of evil, and the storm which took place in the minds of the audience of the day as it experienced the catharsis of the tragedy must have been momentous.

The *rapprochement* was based on Gheorghiu-Dej's wish to reduce his dependency upon the Soviet Union and to steer a more autonomous course in economic and foreign policy. The rift with Moscow was produced gradually and was formalised by a public declaration of autonomy entitled *Statement on the Stand of the Rumanian Workers' Party Concerning the Problems of the World Communist and Working Class Movement* which was published in Scînteia on 23 April 1964. Gheorghiu-Dej distanced himself further from his overlord by reversing the trend of Russianisation in Romanian culture and education. The Russian Institute in Bucharest was closed, and to many of the city's streets which had been given Russian names were restored their original Romanian ones. In secondary education Russian lost its compulsory status. These measures led to a relaxation of Romanian cultural policies and ushered in a period of somewhat closer contact with the West. A further sign of this new orientation in Romania's policy was the signing of trade and cultural agreements with Britain and the United States.

With the downgrading of Russian as a compulsory language in the secondary school more time could be allotted to French and English in the curriculum. By the time of Gheorghiu-Dej's death in March 1965, French had a rival as the principal foreign language of study in Romania. The popularity of English among children and their parents was reflected in the competition for places to study English at Romanian universities, which by the end of the 1960s was more severe than that for French. To meet this demand, the British Council increased its provision of English language lecturers; a second position was created at Cluj University, alongside the British Council lectureship set up in 1964 and assigned by the Romanian Ministry of Education to Bucharest. In the 1970s, further posts were established and the British Council attached lecturers, with the agreement of the Ministry of Education, to departments of English at Iași University, at the Polytechnic in Bacău, and at the English language secondary school in Cluj. Presentations of books were made to these institutions on a regular basis by the Cultural Attaché as well as subscriptions to periodicals and academic journals.

At the social, as opposed to official, level the relations of Romanians with foreign embassies, their staff, and foreign visitors were more delicate.

They were regulated by legal provisions on the Romanian side. Romanians – depending on their status – were allowed to meet foreigners either by previous sanction and/or with subsequent monitoring. Broadly speaking the permissible contacts had to be justified in terms of a 'pay-off'; what the Romanian *Securitate* could make out of cultivating a particular relationship to the benefit of professional cooperation. This paved the way for all kinds of permutations – a Romanian could attempt to justify a contact to the authorities as conducive, for example, to the continuing supply of books, periodicals or other material.

The principal channel open to a Cultural Attaché for initiating and maintaining relationships was entertainment, but here again Romanian guests had to obtain permission to attend social gatherings with foreigners – although not all of them did so – and since the invitation cards were scrutinised by the authorities, there had to be a clear reason for the invitation noted on it. Entertainment, therefore, tended to revolve around incoming British visitors. A second means of keeping in touch with Romanians was frequent attendance at the theatre, film premieres, concerts and the vernissages of exhibitions. A small number of Romanians did not follow the rules; retired people, those with

minor posts, or those who simply did not care about the reaction of the authorities. The Cultural Attachés found them refreshing company.³⁴

Within a decade, Nicolae Ceaușescu had turned his back on Western culture. English and French were the major victims. His regime launched itself upon a cultural offensive that trumpeted what Gabriel Liiceanu called 'Eastern and native' values while rejecting European ones. Ceilings were placed on the numbers of students admitted to university to study West European languages and by the early 1980s universities were only permitted to offer 25 places per year for new entrants to study English. Through its increasing xenophobia the regime shot itself in the foot, since its scientific and technological programmes, by which it set such store, suffered as much as the cultural sector by being cut off from Western ideas.

In spite of the prevailing ideology in Romania the British Council, through its representatives in Bucharest, succeeded in maintaining a momentum in the movement of visitors under the cultural exchange programme until 1988.³⁵ As in pre-war days, it was the British library which provided the most persuasive evidence of cultural activity. It attracted increasing numbers of users each year. The Cultural Attaché, Kevin McGuinness,

and his assistant Christine Melia, worked on cheerfully and very effectively in really harsh times out of a miserable-looking terrapin hut – which also housed the Library – in the Embassy yard. On average 115 Romanians visited the library each day in 1987, despite the cramped conditions. McGuinness created a cave of delights with the film sessions every night and built up a highly popular library despite the fact that Romanians visiting the library were subject to stringent security checks by the Romanian police at the gate and made to feel extremely awkward. McGuinness's successor, Alec Pattison – he took over in 1987 and stayed until 1991 – jotted down a few recollections for me:

It was a difficult, restrictive time. My first three years were occupied in getting as many specialists as possible from Britain to Romania, and sending key people from Romania to Britain when they were able to travel. The number grew steadily. I think we were particularly successful in English language training, literature, theatre and construction engineering. We were also happy to help with the publishing of Romanian literature in Britain – through Brenda Walker – and British authors in Romania (Alan Brownjohn). All university and polytechnic departments of English benefited from attendance

at UK summer schools. As regards the theatre, Ion Caramitru, Eugenia Maci, and Dinu Cernescu visited Britain and Deborah Warner came to Romania.

*It was a dark, threatening period. When entertaining one never knew if you'd have ten or 60 guests, depending on the mood of the authorities and the vigilance of the securitate. There were many brave contacts, whose homes we visited late at night, leaving the car some distance away, sitting in semi-darkness with the telephone covered and whispering away in a smoke-filled atmosphere faced with three or four bottles of țuică. One really excellent contact in that period was Codruța Cruceanu from the Galeria Națională. As we moved towards the end of 1989 we got permission for a visit by Cheek by Jowl Theatre. That really stirred up the scene – free flowing, irreverent and innovative performances of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. There were a few glum faces among the Party officials that night. I gather that the National Theatre director and his staff had great difficulty trying to defend their decision to support the visit and heads were meant to roll!*

After the revolution the British Council helped to bring in 400,000 books, contributed by academic libraries and organisations across Britain, following the launch of an

³⁴ These insights are based on the notes of a Cultural Attaché with whom I worked closely in the 1970s.

³⁵ These were Kevin McGuinness, Cultural Attaché (1984–87), his assistant Christine Melia, and Alec Pattison, Cultural Attaché (1987–91).

appeal by Richard Crampton, Richard Clogg, Stevan Pavlowitch and Dennis Deletant, donated £30,000 of computers to the university library in Bucharest, and a complete set of the Oxford English Dictionary, presented by Lord Jenkins in May 1990. Exchanges followed thick and fast – the English National Theatre and Ian McKellan came with Richard III and Ion Caramitru took his Hamlet to London.

The big plus at the end of my stay was to find this present building for the British Council. One of my last parties was for Sir David Orr, the Chairman of the British Council. It was a large, noisy, happy gathering, seemingly endless. There were artists, dancers, scientists, doctors, actors, ELT lecturers, writers, the president of the Romanian rugby federation, puppeteers, critics – a vast range of good friends.

I was helped immeasurably by my secretary Aura Vlad, and by Gabriela Massaci, the librarian, both having to endure inordinate pressures from the political officials and the securitate. Even my office cat was highly intelligent – he sat on my in-tray in the morning, preventing any work being done, and moved to my out-tray in the afternoon when the sun shone in. I produced as a consequence of this astute move very little.³⁶

With the overthrow of Ceaușescu in December 1989, Romania turned westwards once again and Western culture was restored to the position of honour that it had enjoyed before the Second World War. Notable in this fresh orientation was the cultivation of relations with France, towards which Romanian intellectuals, fired by the bond of a shared Romance linguistic heritage, had turned since the beginning of the nineteenth century for inspiration.

I said earlier that the British Council's main objective on its foundation in 1934 was to win friendship and respect for Britain abroad by cultural and educational activities. Successive British Council representatives laboured to do this in Romania after the reopening of cultural relations in 1964, often against impossible odds, and can point with pride to their achievements. Since 1990, the British Council's activities here have increased ten-fold.

³⁶ Letter from Alec Pattison to Dennis Deletant, 21 January 2000.