

"*Marat/Sade's* Missing Epilogue"

Roger Gross

Script interpretation is often strongly influenced by what interpreters have read about a script and by what they have seen of it on the stage. If critical or theatrical impressions are very strong, it may not be possible to give the script a clear-eyed, unprejudiced reading. Critics and directors often influence us more powerfully than we or they know or intend.

Eventually, when scholars write about the impact of brilliant-but-misguided productions on the understanding of particular scripts, Peter Brook's productions of *Marat/Sade* will provide an ideal case study. Though Brook's productions (stage and film) made Peter Weiss famous in the English-speaking world and provoked many productions of the script, they also misrepresented the text extremely and the script has not recovered. The memory of Brook's brilliantly theatrical staging overwhelms interpretation. Directors mount versions of Brook's *Marat/Sade*, not Weiss'. Twenty three years after Brook's production, the image of the performance still dominates.

This case is an extreme one. It is certainly not unusual for a production to serve different goals and communicate different meanings than those intended by the author or implied by the script. With Shakespeare, it seems to happen more often than not. But in most of these cases no long-term harm is done because the original script is available and the memory of the production passes quickly. Even such extreme instances as Elia Kazan's revisions of *J.B.* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* did little harm because the authors' preferred texts were published as were their arguments in support of them. Weiss was not so fortunate, probably because he was not so assertive. Imagine the loss if we had only Nahum Tate's version of *King Lear* which cast off the "barbarism" of Shakespeare's script and gave it a happy ending. This is almost the position we English-speaking theatre people find

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ourselves in with *Marat/Sade*.

Brook found the Weiss script when he was in the midst of a year-long experiment with the Theatre of Cruelty. This concern seems to have overwhelmed his discretion. He ignored explicit and implicit intentions of the playwright. Brook must be applauded for selecting powerful translators and a brilliant composer. No doubt they served the text well, or at least that part of the text which Brook was willing to use.

Brook was interested in a full-scale "assault on the audience," a notion much in vogue at the time which now seems stunningly naive. This preoccupation seems to have blinded him to the crucial importance of much the text, particularly the epilogue. According to Weiss, Brook refused to use it, ending his productions with the chaos of the inmate riot and the audience assault, thus radically altering the general import and impact of the play.

Weiss wrote a script framed and punctuated by madness. Brook staged a play wallowing in it. Richard Gilman's review of the play is typical of the misunderstanding which sprang from a confusion of Brook's work with Weiss'. Gilman says that "change" is the issue presented by Weiss but:

the intellectual and moral sterility of Weiss' play defeat the possibility of change. We are left with images of violence which mount up finally to chaos, to nihilism; we are left really with violence for its own sake, and nothing for the mind to take away. . . . Flattering our sense of the fashionable, our desire to be at wicked and important happenings, but offering no light and no resurrection, *Marat/Sade* is to be seen but not believed.¹

This is a fair response to Brook's play but a gross misrepresentation of Weiss' script. Brook's distortion pervades the play but the omission of the epilogue is the overt alteration which subverted Weiss most effectively.

Once again, Brook was in his script-as-raw-material mood. He has so often produced works of genius when in this mood that he is surely not to be condemned for it. Unfortunately, his imposition on Weiss' script has been perpetuated in a way very damaging to Weiss and to students of the script. The only English translation of the script yet published is drawn from the Brook production.² Most of the English-speaking theatre does not know about the epilogue in the original script and wrongly assumes that the Brook productions and the published text represent Weiss' work with reasonable accuracy.

The epilogue is crucial as the final element in one of the most

delicately balanced scripts ever written. Even Weiss, for a moment, doubted this; he disavowed the epilogue in 1966. But by 1967 he again saw it as essential and he held that view until his death. If it is dropped, the impact and import of the play are quite different.

Brook's play (whatever his intention) was about the horror and danger and sensuality of madness. Its ending was despair. Most audience members could only experience shock and revulsion, perhaps titillation, at the grotesque spectacle. The core of the play, the three-sided debate between de Sade, Marat, and Corday/Coulmier was invisible or insignificant, lost in the Artaudian miasma. Excitement is something; it is achieved seldom enough. But in this case, excitement is far from enough. Shock and excitement are small reward compared to the potential of the original script.

Weiss wrote about sanity and the difficulty of coming by it when social madness threatens. He achieved something never before (and perhaps not since) accomplished: he brought together the seemingly-contradictory techniques of Brechtian and Artaudian drama and showed that the contradiction was an illusion, that they are powerfully complementary. Each of the techniques presents a threat: the Artaudian Scylla is mindless excitement for its own sake; the Brechtian Charybdis is excessive disengagement and reduced impact. Weiss showed that it is possible to have the best of both worlds, that the two techniques, when properly integrated and balanced, interact in a most valuable synergy. The mix is more powerful than either can be alone. The puzzle is that Brook's introduction to the published text shows he understood its delicate balance. For whatever reason, he did not capture it in production.

Weiss was most concerned with the Brechtian debate and, though he personally took the Marxist/Marat side, the script presents a debate fairly balanced between de Sade and Marat with only the liberals, Corday and Coulmier, flatly condemned. Weiss found a way to heighten the impact of the debate by imbedding it in a mad microcosm. His intended effect depends on keeping priorities clear at each moment, on understanding the specific function of each new outbreak of violence. This balance was lost (cast off, anyway) in the Brook productions and is unlikely to be recaptured by a production using the Brook text as it stands.

In Europe, however, seen in many brilliant productions in the repertoires of the major theatres, *Marat/Sade* was revealed to be a quite different and much more powerful script. In the four European productions I saw, including Weiss' favorite productions, those directed by Swinarski in East Berlin and in Warsaw, the fineness of Weiss' craftsmanship and the cleverness of his strategy are clear. The Artaudian fireworks which interested Brook so exclusively are not

abandoned; they are used, calculatedly, in the service of the more fundamental ideas of the play.

Before my first staging of *Marat/Sade*, I met and spoke at length with Peter Weiss in Stockholm. I expressed my misgivings about the Brook approach and asked Weiss what he most wanted for the play. He asked for two things: first, restore the missing epilogue; second, pull the inmates back (in two senses: 1. move them upstage letting them disappear when central issues of the debate are at hand, 2. make them less dramatically central). He provided a manuscript of the epilogue as it had evolved and it is given here in my translation which was approved by Peter Weiss before his untimely death.³

"THE EPILOGUE TO PETER WEISS' *MARAT/SADE*"

(THE RIOT OF THE INMATES BEGINS, AS IN THE PUBLISHED ENGLISH TEXT. AT THE HEIGHT OF THE RIOT, WHEN THE HORROR TO COME HAS BEEN FULLY ESTABLISHED, ALL FREEZE IN TABLEAU. PAUSE. SILENCE. SLOWLY, ONE BY ONE, THE HERALD, DE SADE, MARAT, CORDAY, AND ROUX DISENGAGE THEMSELVES FROM THE TABLEAU AND MOVE DOWN CENTER. THE TABLEAU REMAINS IN PLACE BEHIND.)

HERALD: Before you rise and head for the door
 We'd like to speak for a moment more
 Of just what it was we meant to say
 With the antics and music and talk of our play.
 With this aim in mind we again call to life
 The man in whom Charlotte just buried her knife.
 And Charlotte as well, and our priest Jacques Roux.
 For soon after Marat, they lost their heads too.
 The only one living is Monsieur de Sade
 Safely in Charenton, by the Grace of God.

Tell us good Marquis, is it really so sad,
 The death of this Marat? Was he truly as bad
 As they say? Or was he just the scapegoat for those
 Who would have what he won, but escape all
 the blows?

DE SADE: Marat was my friend and I respected him.
It was precisely this love which provoked my protest
About his frantic rush to change and improve
the world
With axes and knives.
I myself once spoke for violence.
But studying Marat I came to understand
That my concept of force was utterly unlike his.
Indeed, his view of life and mine negated each other.
On one point, however, we agreed completely.
The world, as it is, is bad.
But I could not see as far as my friend;
Could not find the path to a better life.
Now I find I have no time for such futilities.
I only know and care about my own experience.

HERALD: What can Marat answer to this
Now that the bathing is over with?
Marat, if God granted you one life more,
Would you spend it just as you did before?

MARAT: I don't believe in second chances.
So all this talk is wasted breath.
Once only God sets us down in the midst of life.
He makes us masters of our actions.
We choose--and live or die with the consequences.
What I saw was an astonishing world.
Life ruled by money.
But those who had it were few
And those without were numberless.
The ugliness and evil of it were obvious to all.
But they feared to name it, to face the truth.
The only answer was to topple the whole system,
And with it the few;
To throw all the proceeds in a common pot.
But the few began to whine and cry,
And the jackals, attracted by their screams,
Came running to see if they could snatch something
For their own empty pockets.
They'd never seen any money before,
And they wanted, just once,
To see what caviar and cream cake tasted like.
I saw the only way to break this greed was force--
Only through complete and universal renunciation

Could sanity be restored to society.
 I gave my life to this task.
 I chose to do so.

CORDAY: I too saw the evils that Marat speaks of.
 We both learned our lessons from the great Rousseau.
 But though we spoke the same words,
 We never meant the same things.
 We wanted Freedom, Peace.
 But for Marat the path lay over mountains of bodies,
 Through a storm of terror.
 I saw in Marat, not the birth of Equality and Unity,
 But the death of all France.
 So I made it my task to destroy him.
 And, like Marat, I would make the same choice again.

ROUX: (RUSHES IN TO INTERRUPT)
 Let me warn you of this one here.
 Time and time again we pay the price for her scruples.
 She holds us back with her half-ideals.
 She travels with us like brothers,
 But only half the way.
 Then she lays the club between our legs.
 She's worse than our enemies because she disguises
 herself.
 With the others, we know where we stand.
 But with this one--even she doesn't know what
 she means.

(THE TABLEAU FIGURES GRADUALLY EMERGE, REGROUP-
 ING IN A LOOSE FORMATION UPSTAGE. EPILOGUE SPEAKERS
 REMAIN IN PLACE. ALL FACE AUDIENCE. ALL BEGIN TO SING
 REPRISÉ, VERY SLOWLY, VERY QUIETLY, SLOWLY APPROACH-
 ING THE AUDIENCE AS THEY BUILD IN VOLUME AND SPEED
 TO A FULLPOWER FINISH:

"But though most have a little and few have a lot
 You can see how much nearer our goal we have got . . ."

AND SO ON TO THE FINISH OF THE CHORUS. HOLD. SLOW
 FADE TO BLACK.)⁴

The effect is potent; the cake can be eaten and had too. The riot, both in motion and in tableau, powerfully communicates the horrors to come if the questions of the debate are not wisely answered. The epilogue gives the audience the information and provocation necessary if they are to go beyond mere excitement, fear, and repugnance and to begin the effort to understand both the play and the real-life issues with which it deals. It is desirable to re-instate the epilogue, not merely because the author wished it so but because it makes something much finer, clearer, and more powerful of the play. Weiss' *Marat/Sade* is significantly more mature than Brook's and, though less sensational, no less exciting. Brook's play was of the sixties. Weiss' script is for all time.

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Notes

1. Richard Gilman, *Common and Uncommon Masks, Writings on the Theatre 1961-1970* (NY: Vintage Books, 1972) 169.

2. Peter Weiss, *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*, English version by Geoffrey Skelton, Verse Adaptation by Adrian Mitchell, Introduction by Peter Brook (NY: Atheneum, 1965).

3. Two versions of the epilogue, very similar to the one Weiss gave me, are published in German in a very interesting book, *Materielen zu Peter Weiss' Marat/Sade* (Frankfort am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967). The stage directions are mine, based on conversation with Weiss and approved by him.

4. You are encouraged to use this Epilogue in staging or teaching *Marat/Sade*. It may be used, royalty-free, in any production licensed to perform the published script, if appropriate program credit and notice to the translator are given.

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