HAMLET FROM THE BLOC: 1990 AND 2010

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ABSTRACT
The Romanian Bulandra Theatre's *Hamlet* visit to London, in 1990, was a much awaited event—by the critics, the diaspora and the wider British public. It finally talked to the world about the long history of communist repression, fear and dissidence and about the recent bloody overthrow of the infamous Ceaușescus only months after the fall of the Berlin Wall. As lead actor Ion Caramitru declared when talking about the production's run in mid-1980s Romania, "we were doing more than staging a production of *Hamlet*, we were preserving the conscience of our people" (*The Standard*, 9 August 1990). While perceived to have lost its immediacy at home, only while touring abroad could this production, which opened in 1985 (after three years of battling with the censors), perform its scripted task: "to hold the mirror up to [present] nature" (3.2.20)[1] anew. In London in 1990, this "new Prince from the Bloc" did not portray "a mangled introvert but a vigorous, passionately committed" Hamlet; more importantly, he was a dissident in post-Revolution Romania: been and gone vice-president, Ion Caramitru/Hamlet and this production in 1990 were warning about the "new dictatorship" in a "terrible vision of the future"—as Caramitru put it in his interview with Robert Twedwr Moss (*The Standard*, 9 August 1990). This production's vision, its lasting impact, its link with the London National Theatre and its former director Richard Eyre, all informed the production of *Hamlet* directed by Nicholas Hytner for the London NT in 2010. This article sets out to cross-examine what worked inside the Bloc in the mid-1980s but did no longer work on either side of the recently fallen Berlin Wall; equally, it examines the specific Eastern (European) tropes Hytner employed in 2010, in what appeared to be the first overtly political *Hamlet* for a decade in the UK. Finally, the paper aims to argue that by citing and sighting the Eastern Bloc as a trope, the 2010 UK production, too, by "indirection directions found," namely that *Hamlet*, "the play written about a surveillance state: a totalitarian monarchy with a high developed spy network"—as Hytner put it in an interview (*Hamlet* Programme)—was critical(ly) about present political regimes and agendas.

KEYWORDS: *Hamlet*, surveillance, Eastern Bloc, Ion Caramitru, Nicholas Hytner, Bulandra Theatre, the London National Theatre.

[1] All quotations from *Hamlet* are from the *Norton Shakespeare* edition of 2008 and will be referenced parenthetically in the text.

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Hamlet has been *the* Shakespeare play that has enabled Romania to ask "Who's there?" (1.1.1) at crucial moments in the country's history. For over two hundred years, Romanian productions, translations and critical appropriations of the seventeenth-century play have been Romania's way of thinking through its historical moments. *Hamlet*, the first Shakespeare play to be rendered into Romanian, was translated around 1810 by Ioan Barac, not directly from English (but from a German translation mediated through a Hungarian performance touring Transylvania at the end of the eighteenth century). Barac's effort, while remaining in manuscript, marked the beginning of the crucial political work this play would do: from that point onwards, *Hamlet*'s and Romania's stories have been intertwined. As I have argued extensively elsewhere, *Hamlet was there* and played a part in the 1848 Romanian Revolution, the development of indigenous playwriting, the establishment of the national theatres (in Iaşi, in Craiova and in Bucharest), through the two world wars, though the swift move from monarchy to military dictatorship then to socialism, and though the long dark years of communism. It was Hamlet/Ion Caramitru (cast in Alexandru Tocilescu's 1985 production at the Bulandra Theatre) riding a tank who announced at the 1989 Revolution: "We are free, Ceauşescu has fled…" ("The 1989 Romanian Revolution—Live Broadcast"), and *Hamlet* the play that paved the way during the country's transition to democracy.

After 1989, as much as before, Shakespeare has remained one of the most popular choices in Romanian repertories. Fourteen of his plays saw immediate and multiple revivals in the decade following the Romanian Revolution.[2] *Hamlet*—the first Shakespeare arrival in Romania, his most translated and most performed play—was not among them. No doubt one reason for this absence was that it took *Hamlet* longer than most plays to shed the political significance it had acquired before 1989. Immediately after 1989, the only production of *Hamlet* running, as it had been, uninterruptedly, since 1985 at the Bulandra Theatre, offered reflections on the communist past that held good for the interim, but Romanian audiences of the time were more interested in the "theatre in the streets and on television" and, as Seumas Milne pointed out in an interview with Caramitru, "Ceausescu's death has robbed theatre of its protest role. […] The dragon which was the focus of so many years of subterfuge has been slain and the theatres have lost their role as purveyors of forbidden political fruit. The censor has gone—and so has part of the audience" ("Exit the villain", 10 March 1990). Tocilescu's production with Ion Caramitru as Hamlet had out-lived its usefulness; and with no real job to do, leaving life to take its course at home, *Hamlet* went abroad.

[2] The Shakespeare plays in production after 1989 included: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, *Henry VI*, *Julius Caesar*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Timon of Athens*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Winter's Tale*.

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The Prince from the Bloc goes abroad

Touring the UK and Ireland (in 1990), France (in 1991) and Brazil (in 1992), the Bulandra production held the mirror up to the *degradation* of Romanian culture and life, a story previously unavailable or barely known outside its borders. Elsinore-the-prison full of spies, duplicity, suspicion and surveillance, translated as Romania's reality under Ceauşescu; it was shocking, contemporary, and relevant—in new ways—because of the recent events: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Romanian Revolution in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union. This *Hamlet*'s visit to London, in 1990, was a much awaited event—by the critics, the diaspora and the wider British public. It was the result of Thelma Holt and Richard Eyre's visit to Romania only two months after the 1989 Romanian Revolution, in a shopping-for-plays trip that brought to the UK three Romanian productions running at the time: *Hamlet* (directed by Alexandru Tocilescu for the Bulandra Theatre, Bucharest) *Vlad Dracula—The Impaler* (a play by Marin Sorescu, directed by Ion Caramitru for the Bulandra Theatre, Bucharest) and *Protocol* (a play by Paul Everac, directed by Alexandru Darie for the Comedy Theatre, Bucharest).

Both the forty-five years of communist past and the intense first year after the December Revolution competed for the headlines. In anticipation of the production's arrival, the *Guardian* published "Exit the villain": an extended interview with Caramitru (10 March 1990). "To be or not to be Vice-President of Romania" was the focus of a piece in *The Irish Times* (5 July 1990) and "Upstaging the revolution" that of *The Independent* (21 August 1990). Before the short touring season opened, reviews wrote at length on Ion Caramitru in the lead role being "The new prince from the bloc" (*Standard*, 9 August 1990) and a "Prince of the people" (*The Independent on Sunday*, 16 September 1990). Keeping up with the fast changing Romanian politics, *The Independent* entitled its piece: "A prince who has been vice president" (20 September 1990); by the time the production had its first night at the Lyttleton, London, Michael Billington's review entitled "Something rotten in the state" aptly captured the country's political turn for the worse and he concluded that "in the hands of Bucharest's Bulandra Theatre, *Hamlet* becomes a stunning portrait of a society at the end of its tether" (*Guardian*, 22 September 1990).

Despite gaining standing ovations and overall positive reviews, several theatrical aspects of the production didn't translate. The language of the play was one bone of contention. *Hamlet* without its English remained a sacrilege to a handful of critics. For Milton Shulman, only "pseuds [would] claim that it is possible to be elevated by Shakespeare spoken in gibberish. […] Deprived of its sublime verse and profound thoughts, *Hamlet* has to be judged either as noisy mime or as visual exercise" (Shulman, *The Evening Standard*, 21 September 1990). Watching the over four-hour *Hamlet* in Romanian "without any help from a simultaneous translation" might indeed have been "rather like a blind beginner fumbling through the play in Braille"—as Shulman put it. However, this was not because the actors were

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speaking "gibberish" but rather because this *Hamlet* was a fantastic feast of Romanian double-speak: it was packed full of puns, *double entendres* and pre-1989 clichés it satirized. Secondly, the set confused non-Romanian spectators. Even Peter J. Smith's otherwise alert reading of production somewhat missed the point that "the glittering court of the balcony […] literally resting on a jumble sale" (Smith 71) was a realist display and crucial to the production's interpretation of the play: in this Elsinore, the rulers flaunted their wealth while the mob was kept behind closed doors. The "jumble sale" of art—paintings, sculptures, books, music—all stashed behind bars at the back of the stage and in the basement of this Elsinore (as designed by Ion Jitianu and Lia Manțoc) literalised the state of culture in Romania, whilst being another metaphor for the Romanian underground artistic movement. Similarly, most English critics failed to see the joke in the choice of lighting in this production of *Hamlet*: there were hardly any lights on stage not because the impoverished Romanian theatre (as some critics supposed) could not afford a proper lighting rig, but because this was a production about a nation literally kept in the dark. Finally, this version of the production, which saw extensive cuts when touring, compromised the initial purpose of the 1985 production: it didn't deliver the complete text (retranslated and updated for the production) and its extensive score because it didn't need to buy its foreign audiences the five hours and forty minutes of freedom which had been its gift to Romanian spectators before 1989. Ultimately, it didn't convey what the long silences and musical episodes in the complete version communicated more effectively than censored words in Romania.[3]

Retrospectively, it is easier to see both why the production was successful and vivid abroad (albeit mainly due to its political topicality), and why it was already dead in Romania. It was the ghost of the past a whole nation was trying to forget while busy enjoying a free present. Perhaps the strongest point of difference between this *Hamlet* at home and its touring version remains its ending. This production's Fortinbras draped in red, ordering his guards—none other than Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—to ensure that "The rest is silence" (5.2.300), an order the two swiftly executed by shooting Horatio dead, was to the UK critics *Hamlet*'s 'mirror' turned on the new regime's practices and a warning that history was set dangerously on fast re-play. Ironically, it was its foreign audiences that recognised the production's departure from *Hamlet*'s ending as a "ghastly *déjà vu*" of post-Revolution Romania in which the neo-communists were already consolidating their power (Montgomery Byles 26). After a final performance in 1992, this *Hamlet* retreated for re-evaluation, silently spectating as academic and critical interpretations of the play were updated, and as Romanian theatre went through successive stages of taking shocking liberties with the language and the body, as it experimented with Western theatrical innovations and entered a veritable technological orgy.

[3] For the production to meet the UK stage time of around three hours, several musical interludes were cut from the original length of the Bulandra 1985 production.

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"To England" (3.4.184)

The second part of my present enquiry fast-forwards to 2010. It starts in the same theatre venue, the Lyttleton: not with a Romanian production, but with the latest London National Theatre production of *Hamlet* directed by Nicholas Hytner. About ten minutes into the performance, the stiff brass band march which made the musical background to the coronation scene, I realised, was eerily familiar to me; a few bars in, I found myself involuntarily supplying the lyrics to it:

> E scris pe tricolor unire
> Pe roșul steag liberator,
> Prin lupta sub a lor umbrire
> Spre comunism urcăm in zbor.

My lyrics and the production's tune, it didn't take me long to work out, belonged to a song I had to learn by heart as a school child. It was the anthem of "The Romanian Democracy and Socialist Unity Front" (Frontul Democrației și Unității Socialiste), the song a whole nation had to listen to every evening at precisely 19:57, before the two-hour ration of TV broadcasting. The tune, I discovered years later, had a long national(ist) history: it was originally composed as a patriotic song militating for the unification of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859 (composed by Ciprian Porumbescu with lyrics by Andrei Bârseanu):

Pe-al nostru steag e scris unire,	On our flag union is written,
Unire-n cuget și simțiri	Union in thoughts and feelings
Și sub măreața lui umbrire	And under its great shadow
Vom înfrunta orice loviri	We'll face any blows.

It had been hijacked and rewritten during the communist 1970s, in the regime's double attempt to erase its previous right-wing connotations and to paste on it the Communist Party's own nationalist claims to these (national unification) roots: note the swift replacement of "Unification" written on the national flag with "the tricolour and the red flag" (that will lead to the communist future). The same tune and similar lyrics, I recently found out, currently serve as the Albanian national anthem.

Several other details in Hytner's production took me back to Eastern Bloc Romania and its practices. Among them, Laertes's application to leave the country being signed off but Hamlet's being rejected: while the Danish Prince (Rory Kinnear in this production) torn the rejected application form in anger, albeit after Claudius made his exit, he got to keep his passport. As many Romanians would remember, this wouldn't have been an option in the olden days because the only means of escaping the regime, one's passport, would have been retained by the Securitate Office. Also uncannily familiar was the persecution of the actors (after the interrupted *Mousetrap*), punished for their daring critique of the regime—a similar

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interpretation of this scene had been proposed by director Tompa Gabor, both in his 1987 production for the Hungarian Theatre, Cluj and later, in his 1997 production of the play for the National Theatre, Craiova.[4]

But I was not alone in making these links between the London National Theatre's 2010 Elsinore and Eastern Bloc Romania. In the short film about the production's stage design, when commenting on the overall take on the play in the 2010 production, Richard Eyre stated: "I was visiting Romania in the worst years of Ceauşescu's [regime], when it was the worst policed state among many in Eastern Europe, that seems to me the perfect analogy for Elsinore" ("Creating Elsinore in *Hamlet*," 1:16).[5] The production programme, too, made numerous references to the Eastern Bloc and its close relation to *Hamlet*, rendering the Eastern experience as intrinsic to the understanding of the play anywhere today. Peter Holland began his programme feature thus:

> Stalin did not like *Hamlet*. When the Moscow Art Theatre was in rehearsal for a production with a new translation by Boris Pasternak, a hint from the Kremlin was enough for the production to be cancelled immediately by the nervous director. Plays about assassinating the ruler were not recommended under a dictatorship—and, in any case, Stalin probably disapproved of a revenger who takes such a long time to carry out his plan.
>
> (Holland, *Hamlet* Programme 22)

Later in his piece, Holland read the Elizabethan context of the play through Stalin's Russia: "no less totalitarian than Stalin's Russia, Elizabethan England was, like Claudius's Denmark, dependent on the mechanisms of control and supervision" of the State (*Hamlet* Programme 24). In the same programme, Russell Jackson's survey of *Hamlet*s and the "pressures" of *their* respective "times" remembered Russian director Grigori Kosintzev's 1964 film and Romanian director Alexandru Tocilescu's 1985 stage production, citing the latter visually (with a photograph of Ion Caramitru and the Gravediggers) spliced between two of the most famous English Danish Princes: David Garrick's (1773) and Lawrence Olivier's (in the 1948 film) (*Hamlet* Programme 26–31).

Such analogies and references were not only possible but also productive in a 2010 *Hamlet* in Britain which, like Polonius, "by indirections" found "directions out" (2.1.65): in order to examine its present, it used the Eastern *Hamlet* tropes. While they worked in an English production in 2010, such tropes have lost both their appeal and currency in Romanian productions of *Hamlet*. Post-1989, the play has undertaken a long and painful process of cleansing of political hints, games, and

[4] For more on this interpretive choice, see "The Lesson in democracy," in Nicoleta Cinpoeş, *Shakespeare's Hamlet in Romania* (200–211).

[5] Richard Eyre visited Bucharest in the 1980s with the aim of directing *Hamlet* at the Bulandra Theatre, Bucharest—a project he could not pursue when he was offered the BBC contract. The production was eventually directed by Alexandru Tocilescu and opened after four years of tough negotiation with the censors.

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double codes in Romania—more than any other Shakespeare play, given its extreme popularity. So what was "Hamlet from the Eastern Bloc" doing in a UK production in 2010? I would like to suggest that this trope was employed not (or not mainly) to flash back to pre-1989 Europe as "a recognisable" world, in an act of remembrance, and even less to Elizabethan England which, as director Nicholas Hytner put it, was:

> [a] surveillance state: a totalitarian monarchy with a highly developed spy network. That was the system under which those who first watched the play lived. Elizabeth I exerted control through an internal security system that must have impinged on the lives of everyone who was present at its first performance.
>
> (*Hamlet* Programme 33)

Hytner's response to the question "So how modern a government is it?" posited that "even if we can't replicate the sense its original audience must have had of watching its own world on the stage, we can try to create a world which at least feels recognisable: where everything is observed, everything is suspect, no social gesture is trustworthy" (*Hamlet* Programme 33).

But there were other things which I felt were "recognisable": as a spectator, I read the production as replete with and critical about more present politics. It offered a bricolage in which East and West tropes clashed: Claudius "was a dead ringer for Putin," as the reviewer for *theartdesk* put it, but his Royal office looked very much like the Oval Office, his "entourage, with pristine suits, guns hidden and sometimes not so hidden"; the place swarmed with high tech spies and CCTV cameras monitored everybody's every move—making this Elsinore look and feel like the world of Bond, James Bond; the faceless "security men talking into their lower arms" made this Elsinore, as Woodall comments, overtly "Putinesque"—complete with "intimidating laws of surveillance and constant threats of physical abuse, and worse" ("theartdesk").

Beyond these "forms," 2010 "pressures" were visible in this production of *Hamlet*. War, a topic shunned by every *Hamlet* production in the UK since 1999, was top of the agenda. The threat of war was the reason for the surveillance and spying from the very beginning. The sound of jets flying over was heard from second one of this production. Reynaldo's mission to spy on Laertes was not a bumbling fool's whim, but a meaningful political mission of a regime that kept tabs on everyone: in this production Polonius had Ophelia's book bugged and, in turn, his notes were checked by the ubiquitous faceless men guarding Claudius's regime. When he finally returned to Elsinore, Laertes marched in with his army of men in full combat gear, and in this production his army posed a real threat to Claudius's regime. There was little doubt as to what was going to happen to the tragedians once they had offended the King, and in a sense one couldn't quite ignore that it was Hamlet's request that rendered them disposable. Even less was left to one's imagination regarding the interrogation methods that would be readily employed to extract from Hamlet information about Polonius's dead body.

Some of these interpretive shifts were readily accepted, others were viewed as a step too far—sometimes by the same reviewer. The intimation that Ophelia was

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murdered at Claudius's order—her visible distress and the two men who forcefully removed her from the stage—proved too much of a directorial departure from the playtext for many reviewers. Conversely, it gave new force to Gertrude's lament and the Queen's rage was finely coded when she was brought in, at gun point by two of the regime's guards, to deliver the news "Your sister's drowned, Laertes" (4.7.135). While Michael Billington thought that "Kinnear's fine Hamlet gain[ed] enormously from Elsinore itself having such a hugely living presence. […] Both for Kinnear's performance and the revelatory detail of the production, this [wa]s an evening to admire and cherish" (*Guardian,* 8 October 2010). Woodfall, on the other hand, saw it as a "modern, militaristic and unfussy" staging but also "relentlessly secular, actually over-politicised version," concluding that this was a production both "good" and "disappointing," "inspiring and unconvincing at once" ("theartdesk").

"This is a much more political approach than we normally see in Britain where there is no really repressive state to rebel against and Hamlet's problem is therefore more personal and psychological," wrote Malcolm Rutherford about Alexandru Tocilescu's visiting Romanian production back in 1990 (*Financial Times*, 22 September 1990). As I have suggested in this article, the same sum-up applies to Nicholas Hytner's *Hamlet* at the London National Theatre in 2010, despite the fact that very few reviews acknowledged this even covertly. While admitting that Kinnear's was a *Hamlet* "that would define our age," this is how far David Lister's reading of the production goes: "[Rory Kinnear's] Hamlet is an adult, the ordinary adult stripped of all nobility in a self-destructive battle to make sense of life in a surveillance state that denies him trust, friends and love. *If it is a Hamlet for our age, then things are bleak indeed.* It is certainly a chilling production that demands to be seen" (*Independent*, 8 October 2010).[6]

According to Michael Coveney, the *Observer* reviewer of Tocilescu's *Hamlet* in London 1990, "like most good Eastern European productions, it restores to the play what most British versions cannot: a sense of political in-fighting and of succession" (*Observer*, September 1990). What I have ventured in this article is that it was the Eastern Bloc tropes employed in the 2010 London National production that gave this production 'licence' to politicise the play.

"Who's there?" (1.1.1)

In place of conclusion, I would like to travel back to Romania and to a *Hamlet* contemporary with Nicholas Hytner's for the London National: the latest Romanian *Hamlet* to date, László Bocsárdi's production for The Metropolis Theatre, Bucharest. The director's first encounter with the play,[7] this *Hamlet* was the first

[6] My italics.

[7] Bocsárdi directed the play again, in 2013, and proposed a completely different take on the play: this was a co-production between the Tamási Áron Hungarian Theatre, Sfântu Gheorghe (Romania) and The Fortress Theatre, Gyula (Hungary) on the fiftieth anniversary of the latter. The large scale production which emphasised the different acting style of the

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independent theatre production of the play in Romania since the nationalisation of the theatres in 1948. *Hamlet* as a head-on struggle between the past and the present was at the heart of this production, which posed directly some of the questions that have been preoccupying me for the past fifteen years: how can Hamlet and audiences deal with the past and the present? What is *Hamlet*'s role in post-dramatic theatre? What story is left to be told? Who's there to tell the story? Is there anyone who'd listen? Several elements of this small scale production—the casting choice and the set in particular—were crucial in articulating these questions. Some spectators would have seen this Hamlet (Marius Stănescu) cast as Hamlet in the grand scale operatic production of Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* only a few seasons before (at the Odeon Theatre, Bucharest, in 2006). Fewer might have seen this production's Claudius as Hamlet in Vlad Mugur's production (at the Cluj National Theatre, in 2001). While the former choice was an overt interrogation regarding what part Hamlet can still play, the latter was a comment perhaps as much on the old-new political regime as on what actors have to do in the open market competition. In the intimate space of the Metropolis Theatre, this production's set (designed by József Bartha) was an old eight-panel cupboard whose revolving doors exposed various skeletons: a domestic looking Ghost, Hamlet and Ophelia's love story, the "rat" behind the arras. The back of the cupboard doors doubled as the "mirror held to nature"—for actors and audience alike. Most intriguing, however, was the fact that the set itself was fitted on a revolving stage: though a mechanical facility used only on a couple of occasions, this revolving stage decided the fate of the Prince and that of this production. The long wooden handle (to the right of the eight-panel cupboard), which allowed for the rotation of the set, was physically disputed by Hamlet and the Ghost: the young Prince pushed it clockwise; the Ghost of the dead king, his father, insisted on pushing it anti-clockwise. The latter won the fight and Hamlet dutifully (albeit reluctantly) proceeded to his task to remember the past.

But for László Bocsárdi, *Hamlet* was a story of refusniks *par excellence*: the Ghost of late King Hamlet lingered insistently (in more than his two scripted scenes) and refused to let go of his "rights" to be "remembered" and "revenged," even when knowing that such demands jeopardised the lives of his own son and of his country. Nagged by this selfish "old mole" Ghost, this production's Hamlet was a son reluctant to believe in ghosts, fathers, history or theatre as traditions and values capable of either redeeming the past or altering the present. In this sense he was much like the refusnik Hamlet in Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* (which Stănescu performed under Dragoş Galgoţiu's direction in 2006).

László Bocsárdi's production articulated the struggle *Hamlet* as a play continues to face in Romania—and elsewhere: the dead weight of the politicised

Hungarian speaking company, had its opening night in Sfântu Gheorghe on 8 December 2013. In 2014, József Bartha received the UNITER award for Best Scenographer 2013 for this production, while Bocsárdi took Best Director 2013 for it. Since, the production toured internationally: it was invited to the International Shakespeare Festival, Gdansk, Poland (2014).

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text in translation and in previous stage versions; tensions between the past and the present, and between the East and the West, all counter-productive dichotomies. In this sense, the production's most striking statement was its finale: yes, it cut the arrival of Fortinbras and it gave Hamlet the last words, but it was Horatio's actions in this scene that were crucial. He completely ignored Hamlet's request: "Absent thee from felicity a while / […] / To tell my story" (5.2.289, 291). Telling Hamlet's story would have surrendered the play to the *posthistoire* routine it fought to escape and would have *per force* edited out the other *Hamlet* stories this production—like every production—of the play contained. This Horatio chose not to do so by drinking the leftover poison and leaving his friend and the play to die at the end of the evening. His was a conscious act of erasing Hamlet's "rights of memory" in so far as it deprived the Prince of his chosen story-teller. Besides cancelling Hamlet's story, Horatio's act aimed to free future Hamlets from the pressure of history, and to free *Hamlet*, the play, which has been politicised with a vengeance in Romania for too long, of its *posthistoire* condition. Remembering was no longer the play's sole task in Bocsárdi's production. His Hamlet died not as an action-slacker, victim of a political conspiracy, but simply as a victim of an indifferent society. When ending with Hamlet left prey to the realisation "Horatio, I die? | The rest *is* silence," the production refused to tie Hamlet the part and *Hamlet* the play to the past—as stories, histories, theatrics. Instead, it "gave" its audiences "pause" before posing, from beyond the grave and with renewed urgency, the question "Who's there?" (1.1.1), thus turning the page to *Hamlet*'s *newhistoire*—one yet to be written in Romania and elsewhere in Europe.

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