

Maria Shevtsova

The Craiova International Shakespeare Festival Celebrates Thirty Years

Emil Boroghină founded the Shakespeare Festival in Craiova in 1994 with the longer-term intention of making it an international festival of significant, indeed world, standing. This article, written in honour of Boroghină and dedicated to him, offers an overview of the Festival's programming and related details from its triennial period to its present biennial existence. It draws particular attention to Boroghină's selected outstanding directors ('great directors, great productions', in his words, and the title of one of his editions) without, however, losing sight of the Festival's varied theatre activities, especially in the celebratory year of 2024.

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THE THIRTIETH anniversary in 2024 of the biennial Craiova International Shakespeare Festival was a time of celebration and gratitude, but also of reflection on how much good can be done when there is a will and a way. The 'way', in this case, includes ideas about the benefits, for numerous different people, of regional cultural development. Craiova is three hours and more by road from the capital Bucharest, where cultural activities are concentrated, while Craiova, although overshadowed, is not entirely a backwater, with its Philharmonic Orchestra, opera house, and theatre history going back to 1850. The then-new building, no longer standing, began to welcome some of the noted companies, primarily Italian and German, travelling through Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thereafter, Craiova saw itself as a theatre city – a small city, but one interested in growing and enhancing its theatre heritage.

What could be named a cultural policy eventually took hold, particularly purposefully for socio-political and cultural renewal after the Romanian revolution and the execution of Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife in 1989; and this meant that the Shakespeare Festival,

which Emil Boroghină had founded in 1994, could be granted funds under the aegis of the local Ministry of Culture. 'International' was attached to the name of the Festival in 2006 in order to mark its future direction, and Boroghină's wish-list was in the wings, waiting for its time. The Ministry of Culture had agreed, in the same year, to honour Boroghină's resolve to change the Festival from a triennial event into a biennial one.

The adjustment to the Festival's title, and to its accelerated frequency, were more than matters of prestige and other symbolic capital, for they strengthened the Festival's claims on state finance, their sums fluctuating over the years, sometimes deeply disappointing hopes and expectations. Diminished subsidies, when they happened, entailed narrowing ambitions, which usually ended in Boroghină's being forced not to invite this or that world-esteemed company coveted for the Festival. The Théâtre du Soleil, for instance, in Ariane Mnouchkine's direction of *Macbeth* in her own translation (2014), was just such a casualty of monetary squeeze – unforgotten to this day and, for Boroghină, still one of his greatest regrets.

To its credit, the Ministry of Culture was amenable, here and there, to making amends for previous shortfall, as was to occur in 2024 for the jubilee edition. The latter, primarily as a consequence of ministerial munificence, was able to spread a packed programme across the entire city, involving, as never before, a broad spectrum of social groups, both as performers and spectators, whose active participation ensured the popular – that is, of-the-people – dimension desired for a ‘new look’ Festival at a turning point in its history.

The Beginnings: Emil Boroghină Invites Silviu Purcărete

The ‘way’ of the Festival was not, then, only monetary, administrative, or, of course, political: after all, ministries are organs of governments, and the horse-trading of politics is not for the faint-hearted. It also needed the sustained support of its theatre colleagues as a collective entity – a unified artistic voice concerned with artistic goals, actions, and achievements. This voice was the ensemble theatre of the National Theatre of Craiova (NTC), housed today in the building that was constructed for a permanent flagship company in 1973. Boroghină, an actor who had studied at the Theatre Institute in Bucharest, became this theatre’s director in 1988, holding his position until 2000. It was in the opening years of his tenure that he and his theatre colleagues had targeted the revitalization of the ensemble, as well as of the institution as a whole, coming up with the idea of a festival, which Boroghină’s vision, willpower, and energy were able to put into practice.

Boroghină’s perspective for the future incorporated his invitation in 1989 to the theatre director Silviu Purcărete to join the troupe. Purcărete, who had also studied in Bucharest, was an inspired choice. Clusters of remarkable, multi-award-winning productions ensued on an international scale from his continuous, intensive work with the NTC actors. Exultation over this totally original director drew attention to the excellent ‘ensemble’ (in the full sense of the word), which was admired in Romania but, until

Purcărete’s creative synergy with it, was unknown beyond the country’s frontiers.

Purcărete’s own spectacular rise to prominence was contingent on the strengths of this company – an indispensable entity for a theatre of quality (as for a Philharmonic Orchestra), particularly when it is an ensemble company; and ‘the company’ is too often unjustly ignored when directors are wowed and wooed. Of cardinal importance too, for artistic success is the backing, institutional and infrastructural, within a theatre’s walls, here spearheaded by Boroghină.

The first NTC–Purcărete cluster of productions featured D. R. Popescu’s *The Gnome in the Green Garden* (1989), continuing with *Ubu Rex with Scenes from Macbeth* (1991), which, satirically dark and intrinsically violent, and so inevitably alluding to Romania’s years of tyranny, netted two awards at the 1991 Edinburgh Festival, and then fulsome acclaim at the Theaterformen Festival in Braunschweig. The Braunschweig curator was anything but cautious, also showcasing in his selection Lev Dodin and the Maly Drama of St Petersburg as another instance of innovative, but also artistically exceptional, theatre coming out of the politically fraught ‘East’. History had witnessed the end of the Ceaușescu regime and, at the time of the Braunschweig Festival, was soon to witness a *coup d’état*, incumbent President Mikhail Gorbachev’s resignation, and the end of the Soviet Union on the last day of 1991. In such circumstances, the pervasive climate in Europe, but also across oceans, was propitious for daring art with political clout (even art with merely a political edge was enough), whether or not that art was acknowledged for being any such thing. These festivals by no means highlighted political meanings in their programming, leaving them to be subtextual – or ideologized, which was generally the approach of media dissemination – while the artistry of the chosen productions was foregrounded as discovery, as was, indeed, its due.

The third production in this cluster was *Titus Andronicus* (1992), another menacing, subtly terrifying spectacle, brilliantly rendered, which was premiered in Tokyo and won six awards in the Bucharest I. L. Caragiale National Festival, as well as four from

UNITER (the Romanian Association of Theatre Professionals). Resounding applause followed at festivals in Antwerp, Amsterdam, Melbourne, and Montréal, where it received the Quebec Theatre Critics Association Award for Best International Production in the 1992–93 season. Evidently the award was received over competitors Robert Wilson's *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* and Ariane Mnouchkine's *Les Atrides*.

The next cluster concerned Greek tragedy, embracing *Phaedra* (1993), *The Danaïdes* (1995), and *The Oresteia* (1998), the latter two billed as 'After Aeschylus' to indicate their non-canonical character. Regarding the composition of these three productions, only noted here is the fact that, for the two choruses of *The Danaïdes*, the NTC troupe was joined by other actors and non-actors from Romania, totalling a little over a hundred performers, besides seven core roles. Premiered in Craiova, the production then played in various Romanian cities, among them the theatrically lively Sibiu, before performing at the Avignon Festival in the white quarry made famous by Peter Brook's 1985 *The Mahabharata*.

Extensive international exposure followed, thanks to the co-production of this epic work by the National Theatre of Craiova, the Avignon Festival, the Art Centre of La Villette in Paris, the Holland Festival, and the Wiener Festwochen. Needless to say, impressive consortia of this kind contributed to Purcărete's standing, with some spin-off to the NTC ensemble and management. In 1996, the French Ministry of Culture appointed Purcărete artistic director of the National Dramatic Centre of Limoges. Settled in France, he travelled back to Craiova to stage *The Oresteia*.

Purcărete subsequently returned to the NTC, essentially to direct Shakespeare for ensemble repertory productions, but also for presentation in the anticipated Shakespeare Festivals of Craiova that would follow their premieres: thus *Twelfth Night* (2004), programmed in the 2006 Shakespeare Festival (its fifth edition, by the Festival's count, keeping in mind that the Festival was every three years from 1994 until 2006); *Measure for Measure* in 2008, in the chilling spirit of *Ubu Rex with Scenes from Macbeth* (as detailed in NTQ

126, May 2016); and a visually sensuous, largely poetic *The Tempest* in 2012, whose underlying sadness, as if for the end of a beautiful dream, tempered the production's comically grotesque features.

Guest Directors with the NTC Ensemble

It could well be that Purcărete's returns as a 'guest' director triggered a desire on Boroghină's part (and perhaps also on that of the theatre management) to encourage pedagogical input for the ensemble actors from outside. These provided opportunities to learn from different aesthetic and directorial idioms and be challenged by particular acting approaches and skills that they may have observed as spectators during Shakespeare Festivals but did not know as practitioners. Over the years I have seen many of the Craiova actors in the audience, as eager as any non-professional spectators to see the work of – in Boroghină's words – 'the great directors'.

Whatever the impulse may have been, the practice of employing directors who had been invited to the Craiova Festival, although still small, has certainly been significant. Robert Wilson's idiosyncratic perception was embodied in his production of Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* in 2008 (shown in its Spanish version) and, although not Shakespeare, it introduced Wilson to Craiovan audiences while satisfying Boroghină's craving to bring Wilson into his world. Awareness of Wilson's unorthodox scenic language paved the way for his *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, which arrived in 2012 with its original, magnificent Berliner Ensemble cast (2009; see NTQ 112, November 2012). Audiences were by and large NTC and Festival ones, with variations on the quantity of young spectators, all of whom, having already had a taster (or only bites of hearsay about the 'unlike-any-other' Wilson), were at once dazzled and moved.

Thunderous applause, unanimous critics, and further discussions after the event confirmed Boroghină's decision to have Wilson come in 2014 and direct Romanian-born Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* at the NTC. It is difficult, of course, to assess a visiting director's impact, not so much on actors' sensations

as on their actual practice in the short term, let alone in the longer term; and impacts, like influences, tend to blend into each other in an individual actor's work and its contribution to a company's working style, especially when an ensemble's cohesion is at issue. However, if behaviours speak accurately and eyes can see clearly, it is worth reporting that, in 2024, I witnessed relaxed, warm relations between Wilson and NTC actors, ten years after their *Rhinoceros* experience together. The company was not present in its entirety, so the 'evidence', such as it was, was far from complete. Furthermore, the meeting took place after the Festival performance of the Wilson-directed and Bulgarian-made *The Tempest* (2021), and many Bulgarian actors were present, their camaraderie adding to the all-embracing atmosphere in the room (Figures 1 and 2).

Before Wilson, the Greek director Yiannis Paraskevopoulos had directed the NTC actors in *The Winter's Tale*, presented in the 2006 fifth edition. After Wilson, the non-Romanian guest

director from the Festival group was Declan Donnellan. (To be noted is that visiting Romanian directors at the NTC had set a 'guest' precedent in earlier years, as indicated below.) Donnellan's *Cheek by Jowl As You Like It* – groundbreaking in all sorts of ways, but foremost in terms of race and gender casting – was an outright success everywhere it went, which was repeated in Craiova during Boroghină's very first Shakespeare Festival in 1994.

Donnellan could be called an inaugural director of the Festival, although, as multiple reasons would have it, he and his scenographer partner Nick Ormerod did not return until 2006. When they did reappear, it was with their Russian group, the Moscow Chekhov International Festival. The production was *Twelfth Night*, a loving, compassionate rendition in which, at play's end, and startlingly contrary to usual practice, Malvolio is not reduced to ridicule, but reveals a poignant vulnerability, a touching humanity unsuspected in his stereotyped silly-comical image.



Figure 1. *The Tempest*. Directed by Robert Wilson. Photograph by Florin Chirea. Courtesy of Florin Chirea and the National Theatre of Craiova.



Figure 2. *The Tempest*. Directed by Robert Wilson. Photograph by Florin Chirea. Courtesy of Florin Chirea and the National Theatre of Craiova.

Cheek by Jowl returned to Craiova with *Troilus and Cressida* in 2008. Then, in 2018, came Donnellan and Ormerod's *Measure for Measure*, which was co-produced by, and premiered in, the Pushkin Theatre in Moscow (2013, where I first saw it). A number of actors who had not played in *Twelfth Night* were culled from the Pushkin Theatre's ensemble to play *Measure for Measure* with the Chekhov Festival group for its European tours. These tours in the UK involved the Barbican in London (also a co-producer) in 2015, and went to Edinburgh in 2016. In 2017, the production travelled to Sydney and, in 2018, to Boston and New York, several months after Craiova.

The 2020 Covid Festival (called the 'home edition' and counted as the Festival's twelfth) showed past productions online, among them Cheek by Jowl's 2016 *The Winter's Tale* (not to be confused with Donnellan's 1997 version in Russian of this play with the Maly Drama Theatre of St Petersburg). In short, director Donnellan's historical role in the founding

Festival of 1994 and his pride of place in the hearts of Craiovens – actors, theatre staff, young directors, and spectators (many students among them) – made him a 'natural' for in-house work with the NTC. This collaboration produced *Oedipus Rex* in 2022 and *Hamlet* in 2024, the latter programmed to play in that year's Festival.

Organizational changes occurred between 2018 and 2024. Boroghină acquired the titles of Founding Director of the Festival and President of the Shakespeare Foundation, which, in the interim years, became honorary positions. Vlad Drăgulescu, like Boroghină an actor, and now the director of the NTC, took the post of Director of the Festival, along with Ilarian Stefanescu, who had been a member of the Festival's board. For 2024, Drăgulescu modified the Festival's signature 'great directors, great productions' programming, which was Boroghină's forte, by notably adding a wide range of student performances, a good number taking place at Craiova University, as well as an even

wider range of park and street performances, some designed to be site-specific.

Student and popular performances, open-air and indoors, had contributed before 2022, but they now did so quite conspicuously. University of Craiova productions were spotlighted more efficiently, although shows targeting a broader demographic were not, in 2022, as densely numerous or as highly visible in Craiova's squares and reclaimed spaces, whether outdoor or in, as was to be the case two years later in 2024. Drăgulescu, then, markedly accentuated the Festival's of-the-people dimension of preceding years, further accentuating its presence by creating in one of Craiova's vast, remarkable parks – this one on the edge of the city – a huge space termed 'Shakespeare's Village'. Multiple open-air performances were shown, many, but certainly not all, crafted by young performers in scenic voices and images recognized as their own by their peers. The 'Village' was also a place for friends to hear their various bands playing, or just to hang out, food and drink being readily available in the stalls set up temporarily for the Festival. Families came too, often with small children, but not exclusively for the plentiful daytime performances.

Productions before the 2024 Festival

An overview of programming in the history of the Festival needs to be selective and brief so as not to end up as a tedious list of data. My account here begins by focusing on key Romanian directors programmed for the Festival before it became biennial. The 1994 first edition showed Purcărete's *Ubu Rex with Scenes from Macbeth* and *Titus Andronicus*, alongside, for instance, Mihai Măniuțiu's highly esteemed *Romeo and Juliet* from the Bucharest National Theatre, a theatre powerhouse, and Alexandru Darie's *The Winter's Tale* from one of Bucharest's leading theatres, the renownedly experimental Bulandra Theatre. The 1997 edition foregrounded Gábor Tompa, soon to be a major director in Cluj, who would concurrently be tied up with teaching in the United States. He staged *Hamlet* with the NTC actors, featuring the renowned actor Adrian Pinteau

the titular role. Măniuțiu staged *Timon of Athens*, also with the NTC ensemble, in 2000.

The pattern changed slightly in 2003, in that Vlad Mugur and László Bocsárdi did not work with the NTC ensemble, but brought their home-grown productions: *Hamlet* from Cluj, and *Romeo and Juliet* from Sfântu Gheorghe, respectively. The latter is a small Hungarian-and-Romanian-speaking town in Transylvania, accustomed to performances in both languages (but not simultaneously), as was the case of the Bocsárdi productions that I saw in Sfântu Gheorghe during the marvellous, regrettably short-lived triennial Theatre Festival, Reflex. Of Bocsárdi's making, Reflex lasted from 2009 to 2018, disappearing thereafter for lack of finance. That such a small, rather remote town, but with a superlatively discerning audience developed over five or so decades of excellent theatre, could command visits by theatre of such calibre as the Deutsches Theater director Michael Thalheimer's *Oresteia* (Berlin) and OKT Oskaras Koršunovas's *Hamlet* (Vilnius) is quite a feat! That, for his part, Boroghină's sense and judgement did not waver in assembling the Romanian directors and companies cited in these paragraphs (none of which could be described as run-of-the-mill) is also a significant achievement. Then there is his feat of bringing internationally sought-after directors to Craiova, frequently several of them gathered together in one edition.

Non-Romanian productions were few in the four Craiova Festivals running from 1994 to 2003, but notable were *A Midsummer Night's Dream* from Hungary in 1994, directed by the Romanian Beatrice Bleonț (Rancea), a rare woman in the undeniably male-dominated world of directors; Krzysztof Nazar's *Richard III* from Poland (2000); and another *Richard III* in 2003, from the director Rimas Tuminas, born and based in Lithuania, but largely Russian-trained. Artistic director from 2007 to 2022 of Moscow's Vakhtangov Theatre, Tuminas's beautifully balanced, tonally nuanced productions with actors who were masters of their art restored the Vakhtangov's etiolated glory, inspiring love without reservation in both audiences and colleagues across the theatre profession.

My second list concerns 2006 and the Festivals that follow, all of which realized the expanded internationalism envisaged for them; and 'international' did not simply mean intra-European participants, since it also aspired to a wider genuinely intercultural presence (not merely exoticism) by seeking outstanding theatre from Asia. The 2006 edition began with five works, two of which stood out (the salient third, Donnellan's *Russian Twelfth Night*, was mentioned above). They were Koršunovas's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with his OKT company, and director Yoshihiro Kurita's *The Winter's Tale*, with his Ryutopia Company (then based in Tokyo). Kurita's *Hamlet* – 'Noh-theatre' Shakespeare – was subsequently scheduled for performance in 2010, but was shown, instead, on video because the volcanic eruption in Iceland had seriously disrupted international travel (mine included, which meant, to my chagrin, that I missed it).

The Japanese presence introduced by Kurita continued with Yukio Ninagawa's *Richard II*, which opened the 2016 Festival (commemorating the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death) and received the longest ovations that I have ever heard in Craiova. Boroghina, a long-standing admirer of Ninagawa, was blown away with the rest of us by the ingenuity of Ninagawa's reminder, via a chorus of elderly actors in wheelchairs, that life was as fragile, contingent, as the play's eponymous protagonist had spiritually, painfully, found it to be (NTQ 127, August 2016).

The link continued with Masahiro Yasuda and the Yamanote Jijosha's *The Tempest* in 2018; Saburo Teshigawara's *Ophelia*, presented by the KARAS Theatre Company in 2022; and Yamato Kochi's breathtaking 'Noh-plus' *Richard II* in 2024, with his G. Garage Shakespeare-dô Company. Kochi directed but also performed Richard in a production in which (to cite the programme note) 'the mind of Richard II is kept moving like ripples . . . until it becomes unimportant like a pebble. This fits together perfectly with the culture of *wabi-sabi*, which the Japanese nurtured for a long time' (Figures 3 and 4). Again from the programme note comes this vital statement: 'Currently, [Kochi] is well known

in Japan as one of the most important actors in his generation doing Shakespeare.' Whether, as a director, Kochi reaches the artistic standards set by Ninagawa, who certainly 'did' Shakespeare (allegedly thirty-one of Shakespeare's plays *in toto* and eight versions of *Hamlet*), is yet to be seen, but he is young, energetic, and nothing less than focused. Traumatically for Ninagawa's company, but also for his devotees across the world, Ninagawa, who had hoped to direct every Shakespeare play at least once, died shortly after Craiova's *Richard II*, his hope unfulfilled.

While Japan took its prominent position in Craiova, Korea found its own place, first with Lee Yun-Taek's *Hamlet*, performed during the 2010 *Hamlet*-centred feast in which the uninvited Icelandic eruption had interfered. Second was Yang Jung-Ung's textually modified and culturally adapted *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the Yohangza Theatre Company in 2012. The director dubbed it 'Korean' Shakespeare: 'dumplings', for instance – understood to be culturally specific to Korea – were cooked on the stage, while village-like characters humorously sang a ditty in homage to them. The media willingly accepted Yang Jung-Ung's label since it simplified matters regarding what was 'in Shakespeare' and what alien ('People don't eat *dumplings* in Shakespeare!'). (My discussion in NTQ 108, November 2011, is of the performance, one year earlier, at the annual Gyula Shakespeare Festival in Hungary.)

The third production to come from Korea was *Romeo and Juliet* in 2018, directed by Oh Tae-Seok with his company of young actors, the Mokhwa Repertory Company (which I first saw at the Barbican in London in 2006). Oh Tae-Seok virtually has the status of National Playwright in Korea, and some of his plays address the deeply troublesome issue of the division of the country into North and South. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* admirably lent itself to the task of exploring this subject, which, to his mind, had been emotionally sublimated in society at large. Oh Tae-Seok's carefully chosen aspects of traditional Korean performance styles, Korean legends, and Korean shamanism suggest, by their explicit references to a culture



Figure 3. *Richard II*. Directed by Yamato Kochi. Photograph by Florin Chirea. Courtesy of Florin Chirea and the National Theatre of Craiova.

shared by both North and South, his desire to see restored the unity lost to dissent and war.

Work from China came in 2010 in the form of the Theatre Academy of Shanghai with *Hamlet*, directed by Richard Schechner. In 2014, the National Theatre of China brought *Richard III*, directed by Wang Xiaoying, which, in 2012, had performed at the six-week long ‘Globe to Globe’ World Shakespeare Festival, created by Shakespeare’s Globe theatre in London as part of the Cultural Olympiad of the Olympic Games hosted by London.

European productions shown from 2006 until 2022 carry star names as bright as those shining from Asia. Be it noted that those already cited above do not reappear in the following section; that European ‘great director’ productions are grouped at the end of my synopsis of 2024; and, further, that I include, in the company of Europeans, a co-directed work by Robert Lepage (company Ex Machina) and choreographer Guillaume Côté (company Côté Danse) from

Quebec, Canada. (The reason for this is simply one of convenience, so as not to artificially isolate this latter work.)

Turning, then, to this European bracket, two iconic figures of their countries make a grand entrance in 2008: Eimuntas Nekrošius (Lithuania), and Lev Dodin (Russia), each with his own troupe – respectively Meno Fortas, and (honoured with this extended title in 1998) the Maly Drama of St Petersburg–Theatre of Europe. Each director came with his very own exception to the main trends of his repertoire: thus *Macbeth* (1999) in Nekrošius’s collected works, and *King Lear* (2006) in Dodin’s. Nekrošius was to return in the Festival’s year of *Hamlet* (2010), with his knock-out production of the play (premiered 1997), in which the passage of time towards Hamlet’s death was measured by the melting of a huge block of ice. Hamlet’s out-of-joint youth was conveyed by the very fact that a Lithuanian rock superstar, known for singing social critique and who was not a member of Meno Fortas, played the role.



Figure 4. *Richard II*. Directed by Yamato Kochi. Photograph by Florin Chirea. Courtesy of Florin Chirea and the National Theatre of Craiova.

Dodin's *King Lear*, which (unusually for Dodin) looked more like a psychoanalytical interpretation than anything else, did not have a successful Shakespeare follow-up until his *Hamlet* of 2016. *Hamlet* never made it to Craiova during the next few years for organizational reasons, and then Covid stymied prospects for travel altogether. It was not a pop hero who now played Hamlet but a cinema superstar taught by Dodin, although he was, and still is, integral to the Maly. A mixture, to varying degrees, of Shakespeare, Holinshed, and the much earlier Saxo Grammaticus, this *Hamlet* won Moscow's Golden Mask prize for best production in 2017 (see NTQ 131, August 2017).

But back to *Hamlet* in 2010. Thomas Ostermeier's *Hamlet*, performed by the Berlin Schaubühne, had an enormous reception in Craiova, as did Koršunovas's *Hamlet*. Wilson's *Hamlet – A Monologue* (on video), Piotr Konrad's solo *Hamlet* from Poland, and the *Hamlet* directed by Monika Pesikiewisz, from Wrocław's

Polish Theatre, completed the foreign lineup, not forgetting the Nekrošius, Kurita, and Lee Yun-Taek *Hamlets* of 2010 mentioned above. The Wooster Group's *Hamlet*, although sponsored by the Craiova Festival, was, for logistical reasons, finally shown only in Bucharest. It should be noted, however, that the only Romanian *Hamlet* on offer in 2010 was that of Bucharest director Alina Rece, performed with the NTC.

Productions already noted above for 2012 require the addition of Koršunovas's *Romeo and Juliet* (see NTQ 112, November 2012). The 2014 highlights were: Koršunovas's *Miranda* (derived from *The Tempest*), which had been performed three years earlier at the Gyula Shakespeare Festival (discussed at length in NTQ 108, November 2011); and Yury Butusov's *Measure for Measure* from the Vakhtangov Theatre – a completely original and nimbly performed work in which, in a shock ending, the Duke proves to be no less of a predator than Angelo. Butusov's daring

revelation of the misogyny behind masculine power had sent spectators reeling in the Globe to Globe season in London in 2012. (My account of Butusov's *Measure for Measure* can be found in NTQ 116, November 2013, and is only of the 2013 Gyula performance.) The 2014 Festival also showed Silviu Purcărete's *As You Like It*, with the Budapest National Theatre, and Armen Khandikyan's *Julius Caesar*, with the Yerevan Dramatic Theatre from Armenia.

The European highlights of 2016 were Romeo Castellucci's 'installation' (as it is described in the programme) of his *Julius Caesar*; Thomas Ostermeier's Schaubühne *Richard III*; and Luc Perceval's *Macbeth*, with Russian ensemble actors from Baltic House, a major theatre in St Petersburg. Baltic House has consistently showcased the works of Nekrošius and, furthermore, has repeatedly welcomed him to mount new productions on its stage. Perceval's *Macbeth*, which I saw at Baltic House as well as Gyula in 2014, took a completely different slant on Shakespeare's play. It concentrated on the love-and-sex relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, and how Duncan's murder speedily unravelled their psyche – their very being. At the same time, Perceval safeguarded the production's delicate balance between existential disintegration and Macbeth's 'manly' killing in war (see NTQ 120, November 2014, reviewing the Gyula performance). Philip Parr, famous from Parrabola for promoting community-based and community-made theatre, and who is director of the York International Shakespeare Festival, came with *Romeo and Juliet*.

The Festival of 2018, while hosting Oh Tae-Seok, Masahiro Yasuda, and Donnellan's Russian *Measure for Measure*, made a point of stretching its 'great directors' portfolio. Newcomers were the more recently internationally acclaimed Krzysztof Warlikowski ('recently' by comparison with, say, Donnellan), who presented *The African Tales by Shakespeare*, and Irina Brook (as yet inadequately acknowledged internationally) with her *The Tempest*. Then there were South African Fred Abrahamse's *Macbeth* (Abrahamse returning to Craiova) and Ex Machina Robert Lepage's signature work, *Needles and Opium*. It was not

Shakespeare, but – such was the general attitude – 'What the heck, it was Lepage!' The British Kelly Hunter and Flute Theatre (pretty regular invitees to Craiova) contributed *Twelfth Night*.

The 2022 thirteenth edition gave Lepage's autobiographical *887*; Kelly Hunter's *Pericles*; and *The Tiger Lillies Perform Hamlet*, invented in 2011 by Martyn Jacques, founder of the Tiger Lillies band in London, and by Danish theatre and film director Martin Tulinus. Tulinus, who died tragically young, left his light and free imagination with Jacques's bitter-sweet music, sung and played by Jacques and two other white-faced, clown-faced musicians alongside several dramatic, as well as circus-adept, actors. This engaging one-off work has travelled across land and sea to unanimous acclaim.

Much was expected of Koršunovas's *Othello* in 2022, which, unhappily, turned out to be a laboured collage of études. Koršunovas is superb at crafting productions out of études, as was particularly evident in his simply arranged but mesmerizing *The Seagull* of 2014, which I saw in Vilnius performed by his seasoned actors. But he appears to have been reluctant to cut and shape the work of the young actors of *Othello* – possibly still Koršunovas's student actors. Or perhaps his express intention was to give the actors a free rein, on the stage, rather than in the studio, and before a discerning audience, to improvise on the études that they had already developed. Whatever the case may have been, the actors were carried away by their inventive stream of physical actions, many accompanied by self-conscious patter meant to be funny, forgetting that too much might be overdone. The Hungarian Theatre of Cluj came with Purcărete's *Macbeth*, which was shaped by his clear, bold strokes for Ionesco's satirical tones.

The Fourteenth Edition (2024)

The material brought together in the foregoing pages indicates the richness and deftness of Boroghină's curatorship over the many years of the Festival's life. By the same token, it sheds light on how and why the Craiova International Shakespeare Festival has grown into

a prominent world festival, as well as becoming a very significant point of reference for studies of Shakespeare. Such studies offer insight into how and why knowing Shakespeare, to whatever degree or kind of 'knowing', matters in, and for, our battered societies. To start with, because the plays are of inexhaustible richness, thus facilitating the staged works' dialogue with contemporary societies in their own cultures, times, and places, and evoke what spectators recognize feelingly to be their own: all this – and it is a great deal – through collective imaginative play.

This concluding section starts from my description earlier of the 2024 Festival as a 'turning point' – consequent, too, on the Festival's changing leadership. Modifications to the Festival have become more visible through the sheer quantity and variety of shows taking place over its habitual ten-day duration. Drăgulescu, in his closing-night speech, observed that, in those 10 days, more than 380 performances were held in 170 places, with more than 500 people working on them.

Heterogeneous multiplicity, while running the risk of providing too much for any one human being to handle – most certainly in my case – has the advantage of forming a substantial context by which the Festival's various elements can be situated. Given my focus here on Boroghina's vision (directors, and especially outstanding world directors), these multiple events serve as contextual factors. In other words, their primary purpose is to contextualize both Boroghina's predilections and my task to honour his achievements; and this means that my text speaks contextually, not intrinsically, about the events in the Festival programme as a whole. Contextualization of this kind allows some broad brushstrokes to suggest the plenitude at hand, after which my central focus returns to close this article.

Shakespeare in squares abounded. Usually thirty minutes long, repeated frequently across the Festival, and mostly by Romanian Independent Performers (as billed), these items were identified by such piquant titles as *Shakespeare's Mystic Revelations*, *Shakespeare's Witenesses*, *Miss Shakespeare*, and *Shakespeare Dealer*. Then – still theatre-in-the-square, but on a

stage – was the example of the Swedish sixty-minute piece headed 'Absolute Shakespeare'. An open-street performance (as distinct from one in a square) was the Spanish *Maclownbeth*, running at seventy-five minutes. Other outdoor events saw the stilt-work *Special Conquests* from France and the Stow Pipe Band from Scotland. Park performances, on average about an hour long, were mostly Spanish and French; the Spanish label was 'Micro-Shakespeare'. Still on the short side, but indoors, were offerings at the University's Student House, among them *CyberWill* from Poland (forty-five minutes), *romeo@julia.com* from Romania (fifty minutes) and a puppet *Othello* (sixty minutes) from Georgia.

Then there was 'Short Shakespeare' in Shakespeare Village – Philip Parr's *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, and *Macbeth*, each separately at sixty minutes, and all repeated at a different time. Then, to my surprise, since I had not seen them for so long, the legendary Footsbarn Theatre appeared at the Shakespeare Village with a regular-length *Twelfth Night* (for one night only, which seemed like bad economics). The company had performed *Twelfth Night* at the York International Shakespeare Festival in April. Footsbarn was founded in 1971 in a farm in Cornwall and settled – as much as a travelling company can settle – on a farm in France sometime after the company left Britain in the early 1980s to tour the world. Closer to regular (at two and a quarter hours), and also at Shakespeare Village, were Flabbergast Theatre's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* from the UK, directed by Henry Maynard.

Longer 'shorts', generally coming in at ninety minutes, were scheduled in a sizeable business conference hall, transformed into an amphitheatre, belonging to Craiova's Ramada Hotel. They were, principally: Parrabbola-produced and Parr-directed *FEAST: A Play in One Cooking*, a woman-centred (if 'feminist-lite?') adaptation by Olivia Negrean from several Shakespeare plays; and *Caliban and the Witch*, written by Mihaela Drăgan, who borrowed her title from that of a book, while her contents were clearly affiliated to *The Tempest*. Drăgan's text assimilates extracts from speeches by Angela Davis, Malcolm X, and

Frantz Fanon (and perhaps other revolutionaries, too). She is Romani but, I was informed, Izabela Tiberiade translated her play into Romani for the Romani-identified theatre company Giuvlipen, which co-produced *Caliban and the Witch* with the NTC.

The play's and the production's anti-colonialist thrust does not stray from post-colonial readings of Shakespeare's play, nor from critiques of the white-supremacist destruction of indigenous peoples, patriarchy, misogyny, or all of them put together, seen to be integral to its structure. Spectators observe the tyrant Prospero brutalize Caliban and subjugate Ariel, all played by women. Clues build up, indicating that Miranda's mother was an indigenous Romani, whereas Prospero persecutes the indigenous people of the island; and, it transpires, Miranda's mother is not Prospero's fabricated ugly wicked witch but an attractive decent human being. In short, Miranda topples Prospero's power. However, the ambiguous dialogue of the production's ending seems to suggest that she is a chip off the old block, which in turn seems to suggest that tyranny might well repeat itself. Which, if this is the production's shift, would not get the perennially discriminated-against Romani people anywhere.

FEAST, meanwhile, also with an all-woman cast, was played in Olivia Negrean's adaptation, with quotations from Shakespeare that identify its protagonists: Isabella, Emilia, Imogen, Ophelia, Lady Macbeth, and Lady Anne. Isabella, in their conversation about the difficulties for women of having a voice at all, wonders why men (the Duke and Angelo) never took her wish to go into a convent seriously. The women chat quietly, amiably (once or twice slightly tartly), as they cook a meal together to break bread; allusion to the Bible comes to mind, given the gently ritual atmosphere of the event (Figure 5). Each woman has a theme drawn from Shakespeare, so, in a second example, Emilia frets over how she might have saved Desdemona from Othello's murderous rage: 'Desdemona died because I did not know better.' The overarching theme of the whole might be phrased: 'If we could have written our own stories, they would have been different.' A Romanian-

German *Shakespeare*, directed by Bogdan Georgescu and performed by NTC actors in the Ramada, was three hours long (and clashed with my schedule).

Generally, the longer, bigger productions that could not be programmed on the National Theatre's main stage performed either in reasonably sized theatres elsewhere in town or in the spacious, well-appointed Student House. Such was the case for the Ivano-Frankivskiyi Theatre from Ukraine, directed by Rostyslav Derzhipilskiyi. Their production was an emotionally gripping *Romeo and Juliet* played in two spaces, the first in the capacious student hall, dominated by the warring families, and the second on the student stage, where actors and spectators were immersed in Romeo and Juliet's love and death. Neither the director nor the actors seemed to feel the need to stress their production's relevance to the present war in Ukraine, but relevant it certainly was.

A *Romeo and Juliet* played earlier in the Festival at the Colibri Theatre was from the Republic of Moldova (director Luminița Țăcu), as was *King Lear* by another Moldovan company (director Mihai Țărnă). A third Moldovan production from a third company was *Macbeth* (Shakespeare and Ionesco, director Țărnă), performed at the Student House. There may have been an underlying political motive behind this invitation to three companies from one country (such tripling is generally very rare in festivals), and it may have been tied up with ongoing debates, particularly acutely felt in recent years in Romania, on the issue of Moldova's reunification with Romania.

'Great Directors' (2024)

Boroghină's 'great directors' for this jubilee year were given the main stage of the National Theatre, as was customary, although there have always been exceptions for chamber productions – the case this year with Yamato Kochi's *Richard II*. I would have thought this also to be the case with Marie-Hélène Estienne and Peter Brook's jointly translated, researched, and directed *Tempest Project*, dated 2021 (the year before Brook passed away), yet it appeared on the main stage (Figure 6).



Figure 5. *FEAST: A Play in One Cooking*. Directed by Philip Parr. Photograph by Florin Chirea. Courtesy of Florin Chirea and the National Theatre of Craiova.



Figure 6. *Tempest Project*. Directed by Marie-Hélène Estienne and Peter Brook. Photograph by Florin Chirea. Courtesy of Florin Chirea and the National Theatre of Craiova.

Hapless circumstances prevented me from attending the only night of this work carrying the name of Peter Brook, whose work has played such an important part in my life since first seeing *Timon of Athens* in Paris in 1974. Productions by Wilson, Donnellan, and Lepage were on the main stage, as expected, and in this order.

Wilson's *The Tempest* begins with a phenomenal sea storm constructed by the play of light and sound, which are not synchronized, but in counterpoint, and in counterpoint again for juxtaposition against the visual imagery so as not to make the scene illustrative but *expressive* of the event. These are foremost Wilson traits in relation to which he offsets movement. Movement is stylized, which the eye discerns when bodily images suddenly appear in sharp, shaped flashes signifying lightning; and these movements flash out and, suddenly, seem to be stilled for a split second. Juxtaposition like this and, similarly, of the moving body and the still body, is also a Wilson trait, and here it implies (rather than 'tells') the attempts the scene's indistinct humans make, twisting in angular fashion, to steady their bodies in the violence of a ship rolled and tossed by a ferocious tempest.

Shakespeare's narrative component is embedded in the composition whose blasting sounds stimulate spectators to conjure up images of thunder and roaring ocean: thus they 'see the sound', and this is one of Wilson's fundamental synaesthetic principles. The scene suggests colossal cosmic upheaval and the devastation of the planet, and its immense sonic build-up explodes into the sound of a gigantic, speeding, all-consuming wave. The scene ends abruptly, almost simultaneously with a swift blackout, followed, almost immediately, by low light. Its overt theatricality, prodigiously powered sonically, is a metonym for Shakespeare's words, while, nevertheless, relaying their story: here is a 'tempest', a 'shipwreck', 'people stranded somewhere', which, as in Shakespeare, turns out to be an island.

Wilson strips back the story, offering what could be called the gist of its essential parts: Prospero seeks revenge; Miranda and Ferdinand fall in love; and the foolish Stefano and Trinculo drink as they plot a political coup – if



Figure 7. *The Tempest*. Directed by Robert Wilson. Photograph by Florin Chirea. Courtesy of Florin Chirea and the National Theatre of Craiova.

braggart natter can be called 'plotting' in anything but a vaudeville-type ironic sense; Ariel, demure, plays the role of Prospero's fairy-angel helper (another ironic touch); Caliban appears, learns to drink alcohol, and is otherwise subordinated to Stefano and Trinculo's antics, but his role in Wilson's arrangement is really no more significant than that of the usurping Duke Antonio, Prospero's brother and father to Ferdinand, or of Alonso, King of Naples and Prospero's former friend. The latter two are shown in an incidental, run-by-magic banquet scene, attractive for its visual panache. Wilson's is a 'short' version of *The Tempest* (it is temporally short too, taking only ninety minutes) that, truncated in terms of storyline and, especially noticeably, of dialogue, can be argued to be as valid in its excision as any other 'short' Shakespeare on the 2024 programme.



Figure 8. *Hamlet*. Directed by Declan Donnellan. Photograph by Florin Chirea. Courtesy of Florin Chirea and the National Theatre of Craiova.

However, more than narrative is at issue in this not immediately blazoned approach to narrative typical of Wilson's theatre. The production elides to its close and to Shakespeare's Prospero, alone with his daughter Miranda. Wilson condenses Prospero's lines, but their subject is clearly Prospero's bygone suffering and inner turmoil, and this, *his* internal tempest, is transcended as forgiveness, reconciliation and renewal begin in an atmosphere of peace (Figure 7). Prospero's spiritual voyage is the core of the production. The impression of his last scene with Miranda is that of a legacy offered by Prospero not only to Miranda but also to all listening and watching. Prospero could have prompted the phrase from T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, 'In my end is my beginning', which envelops Eliot's deeply spiritual itinerary and, elusively, Wilson's spiritual insight into Shakespeare's play.

Donnellan's *Hamlet* moved away from the proscenium arch to the stage itself, arranged, for the actors' purposes, along a rather narrow

space of the stage floor – a corridor, of kinds – flanked by rows of seats in amphitheatre gradation for the spectators on either side (Figure 8). The actors held their personal space within their commonly shared space – shared in the sense that they moved around in it, changing places for changing scenes, thereby organically drawing attention to the speech and actions of this or that grouping of actors.

The production's spatial organization also meant that not only could the actors see their own roles clearly, but they also saw the roles of their colleagues more clearly because of the spatial gaps between them; and, at the same time, they were able to use the space, whether small or larger, as a propeller for their interaction. This could not have been shown more openly, nor more shockingly, than when Actor Hamlet, in a peroration against his mother's alleged sexual appetite, drags a badgered Ophelia, as if by her hair, from one end of the 'corridor' to just beyond its middle, effectively to fight with his mother, in which

Ophelia becomes, metaphorically speaking, his fisticuffs. A cruelly misogynistic Hamlet here springs into view.

Space, in Donnellan's hands, is malleable, Shakespearean, in its capacity to be anywhere at any time of day or night because it is free of the accoutrements of stage design. The corridor cannot hold the furniture and other insignia that would define Gertrude's status. Accordingly, designer Nick Ormerod identifies her by costume: she is cast as a standard pearls-and-cardigans (and English) middle-class woman, dressed in the mask of anodyne – not colours, but flat colouring (Figure 9). What noticeably distinguishes her from her instantly socially recognizable way of dressing is her feisty character; and she is open and intelligent enough to heed – or at least to nod agreement to heed – her brutal son's request, bordering on a command, not to dally that



Figure 9. *Hamlet*. Directed by Declan Donnellan. Photograph by Florin Chirea. Courtesy of Florin Chirea and the National Theatre of Craiova.



Figure 10. *Hamlet*. Directed by Declan Donnellan. Photograph by Florin Chirea. Courtesy of Florin Chirea and the National Theatre of Craiova.

same night with Claudius, since Claudius was not what he appeared to be.

Hamlet shrugs off his accidental killing of Polonius with a touch of humour – a version of the harsher humour that he bestows on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who are confidently and cleanly played as relatively good-natured young fellows not too concerned about their job of killing their friend. Somewhere on the edge between comradeship, thoughtlessness, and amorality, the two actors in these roles might well be our contemporary boys in the street, with the added bonus that they wear funky T-shirts. Hamlet falls into play with them, chameleon-like, to suit each occasion, including when they come upon him in drag, the latter mildly parodied by red high heels *à la* Louboutin shoes and red lipstick, thickly applied (Figure 10). On my second viewing, Actor Hamlet smeared lipstick on Guildenstern, as well.



Figure 11. *Hamlet*. Directed by Declan Donnellan. Photograph by Florin Chirea. Courtesy of Florin Chirea and the National Theatre of Craiova.

In the meantime, a woman in the role of Polonius brilliantly portrays him as the perfect civil servant – never out of line, always subservient – and she generates considerable unobtrusive humour by the sheer horror that such exist. Actor Hamlet, as he goads Polonius, shows once again, how unlovable he really is in his all-round behaviour with all the *dramatis personae* (Figure 11). Hero Hamlet, beset by existential, spiritual, and ethical questions, dies in this personification, while the historically maligned Claudius emerges as more likeable than usually imagined. Here he is: gentle and attentive, he truly loves Gertrude, seems not to have been too besotted with power, and genuinely prays for his sins. Horatio, Shakespeare’s observer of events, is non-existent, having changed identity with spectators: each spectator – Donnellan’s altogether maverick epiphany – is Horatio,

watching, a being without agency, who sees disaster and observes it, but is unable to *act*. Horatio’s erasure is quite a coup, but Donnellan’s greatest coup is his whole last scene, riveting in its silence; all of it, from the preparations for the duel, and wine poured into goblets, until the very end, when Shakespeare’s ‘the rest is silence’ is simply unspoken; all of it is silenced – unspeakable in its senseless charades, which only lead to senseless bloodshed.

Lepage and Guillaume Coté’s *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* saw Lepage ‘dramaturgically adjust’ (in his words, in a brief personal conversation) his partner’s choreography, presumably in order to highlight key events and turns of emotional direction which, in the flow of dance, can be absorbed all too quickly to stand out adequately for attention. It seems, too, that he may have chosen to show bland surtitles like ‘Enter Ophelia’, or such now



Figure 12. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Directed by Robert Lepage and choreography by Guillaume Coté. Photograph by Florin Chirea. Courtesy of Florin Chirea and the National Theatre of Craiova.



Figure 13. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Directed by Robert Lepage and choreography by Guillaume Coté. Photograph by Florin Chirea. Courtesy of Florin Chirea and the National Theatre of Craiova.

hackneyed phrases for scenes as ‘Alas Poor Yorick’, with a humorous smile, but also with reference to silent-film techniques in order to strengthen the ‘hybridity’ of the work. A plush red curtain hanging from one side that, now and then, passes across the stage, recalls early movie-house practices as well as those of old-style theatre-like theatres for cinema. Ophelia, when drowning, is drawn up by wires, meant to be invisible, into the vortex of billowing fabric supposed to look like silk – a device no longer fashionable in circuses or operas but still effective when you see it.

The dance combines virtuosic classical ballet – the work’s main dance form – (Figure 12) – and a variety of contemporary dance idioms, ranging from free-form dance (Laban) and non-expressive dance of ‘pure’ form (Cunningham) to street dance (hints of hip-hop, among others). Danced with great precision, sharpness of contour, and narrative sense and energy on the first of two nights, the mixture worked (but less so on the following night, when the

dancers, having given their all on opening night, were quite clearly tired). Dramaturgically speaking, Hamlet’s kissing Gertrude on the lips and looking at her as he does not look at Ophelia, re-introduces old chestnuts about how Hamlet loves his mother. A small, lithe, and exceptionally quick woman dances a faithfully loving Horatio (whom Donnellan had deleted altogether) and lovingly holds Hamlet close to her heart as he dies. The poisoned foils of the dance leading up to the denouement display a wide ribbon attached in an arc to each foil, one white and the other red, in an allusion to Lepage’s use, years earlier, of intercultural elements originating in China and Japan (Figure 13).

Within the Festival’s Orbit

The 2024 Festival multiplied the book launches, talking sessions, and small-scale academic symposia that had flanked the theatre events of preceding years. The symposia were

organized, when they first started, by members of the Romanian section of the International Association of Theatre Critics (IATC/AICT), with the support and participation of international colleagues belonging to this association; then, separately, by Shakespeare scholars gathered around Stanley Wells at Stratford-upon-Avon; then by the European Shakespeare Research Association. The European Shakespeare Festivals Network (ESFN), a fundamentally important support system for all the festivals under its banner, took form early in the story of these festivals, when there were fewer of them (five) than now (thirteen); and, although the Network rotates hosting, it has often gathered its founders and/or representatives for meetings in Craiova to share their perspectives.

My obituaries of founder and director József Gedeon of the Gyula Shakespeare Festival in Hungary, and founder and director Jerzy Limon of the Gdansk Shakespeare Festival in Poland – both co-founders with Emil Boroghină of the ESFN (along with Rainer Wiertz of Neuss and Philip Parr, at that time of Bath, now York) – are in NTQ 130 (May 2017) and NTQ 147 (May 2021), respectively. While short, they nevertheless suggest something of the varied tempers and tones in which the Craiova Festival was placed and found its own distinctive place, as the other Shakespeare festivals were to find theirs. All of them put together profile their individual perceptions and aspirations while, at the

same time, they etch out their common interests and purposes. Shakespeare, in the process, finds his rightful place in our comprehensive world, while moving in a Renaissance-like borderlessness of knowledge, art, culture, and shared human potential as well as realization.

The International Shakespeare Award took root in 2008, when Declan Donnellan was its first recipient. In 2024, it was awarded to Emil Boroghină in recognition of his tireless service to Shakespeare's work. Also in 2024, the Art Gallery of Craiova hosted a magnificent exhibition of photographs, posters, and video performances of Purcărete's work, celebrating its fifty years of existence. The exhibition was held in the Gallery's newly constructed modern wing, named after the superb sculptor Constantin Brancusi, and inaugurated in 2022. Brancusi was born in the Oltenia region, where Craiova is situated, and where Emil Boroghină was also born to find and accomplish his great task.

Editor's Note

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