

TRANSNATIONAL ENCOUNTERS: BRECHT, BROOK AND THE ROMANIAN THEATRE (1958-1964)

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Abstract: Theatre in communist Romania is seldom analyzed from a transnational perspective. The usual narrative favours the classic East-West divide, while following national or institutional emplotments. In contrast, the present article deals with the impact of the Berliner Ensemble and the Royal Shakespeare Company on theatre practice in Romania during late fifties and early sixties. It focuses on a series of transnational encounters beyond the Iron Curtain. It connects the highly influential activity of these European companies with momentous changes within the domestic creative context.

Keywords: *theatre, socialist realism, cultural exchange*

Theatre in communist Romania is usually studied from a national and institutional perspective. Even after 1956, when the Romanian artistic community went through a change of gears, the topic is analyzed mainly by going back to the domestic pre-war traditions ferment for this transformation. The transnational trans-systemic perspective has not been the focus of scholars dealing with the history of theatre in communist Romania. Nevertheless, personalities such as Bertolt Brecht or Peter Brook had a significant impact on the local theatre artists. Although at the official level the tenets of socialist realism continued to be followed, at the practical level, the system allowed for attentively selected external influences. The cultural exchange program with the West starts in earnest with the National Theatre tour in France as a participant to the International Theatre Festival organized in Paris in 1956. The process will continue in later years with the constant involvement with the Theatre of Nations Festival organized by the International Theatre Institute. The presence at this international festival and the access to specialized journals such as *World Theatre* also under ITI auspices functioned as a means for a stylistic recalibration of the Romanian theatre after Stalin's death. These two international arenas were not only a means for the states behind the Iron Curtain to see the cultural productions of the west but also a means for the West to see the theatre that was developing for ten years beyond the Iron Curtain. They are in fact the site for a conversation between the East and the West.

This paper aims to map the first encounters and the circulation of some of the most influential agents in terms of their impact on theatre practice in Romania, in the late fifties and early sixties. I will focus on the *Berliner Ensemble* and the *Royal Shakespeare Company*. Even though politically speaking Brecht's troupe was a theatre of the East, its aesthetic DNA was very far removed from socialist realism. It could be argued that the *Berliner Ensemble* acted as an aesthetic binding agent between East and West, a first common denominator for a discussion on theatre in a politically divided Europe. The impact the *Ensemble* had on British theatre practice percolates as a catalyst for the latter's turn to the theatrical avant-garde¹ and

¹ Lennart Nyberg, *The Shakespeare Ideal, Shakespeare Production and the Modern Theatre in Britain*, (Stockholm: Uppsala, 1988), p.104.

even as an undeniable influence on the *Royal Shakespeare Company* work.² Founded in 1961 this company was already touring Eastern Europe by 1964. It brought back to the region the seeds of a willingly forgotten avant-garde, Brecht included. It also encompassed the ideas of luminaries from the East such as Jan Kott. It was one of the agents who placed the theatre in Romania on new stylistic tracks albeit in a context of permanent negotiation within the shifting boundaries of the newly found socialist humanism.

A Romanian newsreel from 1959³ shows a brightly lit stage, people carrying placards and yelling at the top of their lungs and an uneasy audience witnessing it all. It is the Berliner Ensemble playing in Bucharest. There is an almost palpable discomfort and one understands where this originates by simply looking at the very few visual documents available from the period. The return to theatricality was in full swing at least at a discursive level by 1957. Nevertheless, when it came to what audiences could see at the theatre⁴ it still boiled down to practices shaped by socialist realist aesthetic: naturalist sets, psychological approach to acting and long performance hours.

What western travelers reported seeing on the Moscow stage immediately after 1956 was also a familiar site for the Romanian case. Brecht's theatre was problematic because it proposed a very different reading of Marxism when it came to the role theatre should fulfill in a socialist society. His debate with Lukacs on the meaning and relevance of realism within the boundaries of this new culture is paradigmatic⁵. Unlike the socialist realist theatre with its absorbing illusionist effect, Brecht's was a theatre where the spectator never forgot where s/he was. John Willet⁶ makes the connection between Brecht's notes on the production of *The Life of Galileo Galilei* (incidentally the production with which the Berliner Ensemble came to Bucharest) and Vakhtangov's journal. Brecht writes: "the public must never lose conviction they are in the theatre". The soviet director puts Meyerhold and Stanislavski on separate pars making the connection with Brecht more than obvious: "Meyerhold calls *good theatre* when the spectator does not forget for a moment that he is in the theatre. Stanislavski, on the contrary, wants the spectator to forget that he is in the theatre."⁷

The connection between these views can be traced back to the cultural exchanges happening between Germany and Russia in the early 1920s. Alexander Tairov goes to Berlin with *The Man who was Thursday* in August 1925 inspiring Piscator while Eisenstein produces excitement with his *Potemkin* the same year. In his turn Brecht strongly impressed Tretiakoff in 1931 when the latter saw *Man ist Man* with Hellen Weigel and Peter Lore, similar in effect according to the soviet writer with Meyerhold's "The Magnificent Cuckold" produced in 1922. In 1934 Tretiakoff translated and published three of Brecht's plays and Tairov staged his *Tree Penny Opera* in 1930 at the Kamerny Theatre. In 1935 Brecht finally travels to

² Colin Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company, Creativity and the Institution*, (London: Routledge, 2004) p.9 and 12.

³ *VIAȚA LUI GALILEO GALILEI* "România, 1959, reportaj. Producător: Actualitatea în imagini nr. 23 / 1959, 10th session of the project „The Avant-Garde Revisited, The European Avant-Garde in the Romanian National Film Archive” 18-20 Decembrie 2014. Curator, Igor Mocanu.

⁴ Ciulei's 1958 *Saint John* was harshly criticized and our first *Hamlet* production only opened in 1958 removed from the capital at the Craiova National Theatre.

⁵ Ronald Taylor, Trans. Ed., Frederick Jameson afterword, *Aesthetics and Politics, Debates between Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertold Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno* (London: Verso Books, Whitstable, 1980), p.60-86.

⁶ John Willett, *The theatre of Bertolt Brecht : a study from eight aspects*, (London: Methuen, 1959)

⁷ Ibid. 111-112.

Moscow. He sees there the spectacularly theatrical Mei Lang-Fang and gets acquainted with Viktor Shklovskij's formalist theories.

These influences show Brecht's aesthetic pedigree as a continuous digestion of ideas. They influence Brecht's artistic evolution in stages pushing his poetry, his theory and his theatre practice from the didactic to the epic theatre, from the *Verfremdung* effect to the yet to be proclaimed dialectical theatre. Even though Romanian audience were never privy to Brecht's raw and exciting performances in the 20s and early 30s what they were seeing in 1959 was nevertheless a reminder of that form to which Brecht always kept true albeit in a stylistic decantation shaped by the social and historical circumstances characteristic of a totalitarian state such as Eastern Germany. David Caute⁸ argues that Brecht's decision to move to the East was an opportunist move. Nevertheless, even if his theatre lost the virulence of youth and his *Short Organum for the Theatre* finished in 1948 shows compromises between empathy and detachment he still was an uncomfortable presence in the context of socialist realist practices. The official theatre in Eastern Europe was one of positive heroes, plots with clear conclusions, exuding a healthy optimism and geared on obtaining the ultimate illusion on stage.

Brecht adds to this stylistic trajectory, his disregard for the conventions of the plot catharsis, or empathy, the idea of estrangement. Brecht proposes his *Verfremdung* effect after this trip in to Moscow in 1935. The similarities with Soviet formalism are striking. The *Verfremdung* effect is in essence Shklovskij's extremely influential concept at the time, "Priem Ostrannenija" or the "device of making it strange." In Brecht's theatre, it "refers to the making strange of familiar objects and ideas, thereby enabling the audience to see them in a new light, from a different perspective."⁹ The idea translates into practice by stripping down the performance to a strict chain of events. When this accumulation was not clearly defined intervention in the text was warranted. Brecht's willingness to work and rework a material in performance until the best possible "model" was achieved is another characteristic of his late theatre practice. After 1948 Brecht could change a play numerous times even in the course of a single run.¹⁰ The actor he preferred was young and amateurish and the casting was never done according to physical characteristics. The light he used in his theatre was bright and merciless. The stage design was always expressive of Brecht's preference for materials "that bore the evidence of long contact with the labour of human hands."¹¹ From objects to costumes everything had to show signs of work while the actors had to be intimately acquainted with the activities they were showing on stage as if they would have performed them for a very long time. The act of work itself had to be done properly.

In Eastern Europe his dedication to form was always a subject for dispute. Formalism was an anathema during Stalinism. After 1948, Brecht was the only formalist left alive and allowed to practice his formalism. When Romanians saw *Mother* and *Galileo* in 1959 they were caught off guard. Brecht's reception had been carefully framed in a direction that can be said obscured entirely his theatre theories and concentrated on extolling his poetry. But this approach was in its turn replicating the model at the centre. For a communist state such as Romania, the example of the bigger brother was still followed after 1956 in all matters of

⁸ David Caute, *The Dancer Defects, The Struggle for Cultural Diplomacy During the Cold War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).p 271-305.

⁹ James Roose-Evans, *Experimental Theatre, From Stanislavsky to Peter Brook*, (London: Routledge, 1990), p.68.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.152

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.158

culture, even if Romanian leaders were not so keen on de-Stalinization. Brecht went to Moscow in 1955 and discovered with satisfaction that theatre was welcoming again distancing effects. The same year, Lukacs lauds Brecht for the *Senora Carrar's Rifles*, a play wrote by Brecht to prove his point on Aristotelian empathy drama and therefore highly uncharacteristic. The other of Lukacs preferences *Terror and Misery of the Third Rich*, a series of sketches that portray the Nazi individual, the looming war and the concentration camps is easy to understand considering how the entire Eastern Europe modelled its humanist ethos in opposition to Nazi views of a chosen society.

In 1957, after Brecht's death, the *Berliner Ensemble* went to Moscow. Earlier though, in 1956, the journal *Teatr* featured an article by I. Fradkin where all formalist influences were excised and where it was argued that Brecht's work showed "a variation of socialist realism existing outside de URSS."¹² In 1957 among the articles discussing the acting, the use of masks, the naturalism and expressionism melange there was also Boris Zahava's *Znamia* article. The soviet director seemed to be against all aspects of the Ensemble production: from text to acting and design. In the aftermath of the event soviet critics concluded that some traits of Brecht will live on (i.e. the poetry) while others will fade into the past (i.e. his theatre theory). In the first issue of the 1958 Romanian journal *Teatrul*, Zahava's musings on the Berliner Ensemble's performance published in 1957 in *Znamia* are paraphrased in an article entitled "Between Gorki and Brecht."¹³ The opening statement introduces the reader to the debate ensued in the country of socialist realism by the presence of the Berliner Ensemble. As a consequence artists such as Zahava have contributed significantly to deciphering the particularities of the Brechtien theatre. According to this paraphrasing, since Brecht's approach is unconventional and aims to eliminate traditional means of representation, his drama is much closer to Gorki than one might think. Like Gorki, Brecht is continuously tearing down dramatic conventions. One such example is *Egor Buliciov*:

"In this piece, says Zahava, Gorki is reluctant to arouse the spectator's interest for any detail that is not contingent with the philosophical collision of the play or with life aspects reflected in it. The writer does not intend to amaze the spectator through an unforeseen evolution of the dramatic conflict, neither does he try to make him breathlessly pursue who will win or lose that intricate game played by the characters."¹⁴

Discursive framing was the usual approach to introducing a problematic artist to the socialist realist canon. Brecht was first and foremost commended for his poetry, which was said to exude his undying love for the working people. At the same time however, specialized journals such as *Teatrul* introduced lists of specific plays and their appropriate socialist realist interpretation.¹⁵ In 1956, Petru Comarnescu, one of the most intelligent theatre critics in Romania at that time, very sensitive to the idea that theatre did not simply meant the illustration of dramatic works but was an autonomous art form, presents for the *Teatrul* readers the discussion that ensued in the pages of the journal *World Theatre*¹⁶ in 1955. The latter had focused on Brecht's approach to acting. Comarnescu presents the Verfremdung effect

¹² Willet, p. 208

¹³ V.D, "Intre Gorki si Brecht, TurneulFormatiei Berliner Ensamble in URSS", *Teatrul*, 1958, nr. 1, p.84-85.

¹⁴ Ibidem., p.84 (my translation)

¹⁵ Alfred MargulSperber, "Bertolt Brecht siTeatrul", *Teatrul*, 1956, nr. 5, p. 15-18.

¹⁶ PetruComarnescu, "O controversaasupraarteiactoricesti", *Teatrul*, nr.9, 1956, p. 95-98.

and in order to make sure that his reader understands it, he provides French and English translations. He then proceeds to a detailed description of each point of view.

According to Comarnescu, the most important difference that can be discerned between Brecht and Stanislavski is the way they understand the responsibilities of the actor. Brecht's actor is a "rezoneur", a man of science who comments, argues and reasons while showing this entire intellectual process to the audience. Nevertheless, he concludes that Brecht's intellectual/reasoning centred approach is not very different from that of Stanislavski who also asked from his actors to judge the situation proposed in the play, to find the overarching theme and to show the character in all its complexity. However, when it came to avoiding the illusion of reality on stage, Brecht showed his weak points. According to Comarnescu, if Stanislavski's approach can be applied to Pirandello, Gogol and Caragiale, Brecht's can only fit Pirandello, Ibsen, Hauptman, and Strindberg. For Goethe, Tolstoy, Chekhov or Shakespeare who present us with very rich/complex characters there is in no need for additional explanatory arguments or any kind intellectualist excesses [*excess de intelectualizare*]. The surplus of reasoning, which materialized in Brecht's approach to acting, was feared that it might lead to a dehumanisation of the character.

As late as, 1960 Brechtien productions in Romania were taken apart by the critics for employing distancing effects.¹⁷ These views show the stress laid on framing Brecht's so as to bring him closer to an idea of realism that could suit the domestic cultural milieu without utterly disrupting it. This is a tug and pull contest, where the establishment is allowing an extension of realism but only by making certain concessions. Maybe one of the most important article in this direction is Alfred Langfelder's.¹⁸ The author tackles among other things the issue of adapting Brecht's theatre for the Romanian stage. Echoing the soviet critics Langfelder states that

"Brecht will not have to be always played in the "epic" fashion. It would be extremely helpful if one of Brecht's masterpieces, *Galileo* or maybe *Mother Courage*, would be attempted in two different theatres and in two fundamentally different approaches: on one side in the Brechtien style, on the basis of the promptbook painstakingly put together by the Berliner Ensemble; on the other, in the style, let's call it the traditional, of the Stanislavskian theatre or thereabouts."¹⁹

The discursive framing is indicative of the system of censorship put in place in the communist states. This was a culture that thrived on and put its trust in the written text. Text could be easily controlled from the selection of plays or poems to translation, editing, printing and even in performance. The latter process implied viewing the performance before the premiere in order to detect possible ideological derailments. Socialist realism dealt in absolutes, it imposed transparency and totality at all costs, and its application generated recipes that could be reproduced in their turn. One could argue that what was bothersome most of all in Brecht's writing was the lack of clear cut conclusions and statements. Also, Brecht's approach to stagecraft was too close to comfort to the bygone avant-garde directors that were utterly vilified before 1953. As David Cauter points out, Brecht choosing the right side of Germany was a blow given to the west. Brecht chose the East so the East won. It was difficult in this

¹⁷Mircea Alexandrescu, "Mutter Courage de Bertold Brecht (teatrul de Stat din Orasul Stalin)", *Teatrul*, nr. 4, 1960, p.72-74.

¹⁸Alfred Langfelder, "Ce e neobisnuit in dramaturgia lui Bertold Brecht, *Teatrul*", nr.10, 1957, p.8-14.

¹⁹*Ibid.* p. 14 (my translation)

circumstance to show Brecht a merciless critique such as Beckett was receiving for example. The latter's writing was considered morbid and irresponsible. He was criticized for violating the audience, for putting them in appalling situations and for eliciting in them a sense of shame.

In the West, Brecht's influence went in tandem with the drama of the absurd but also with the method, Stanislavsky's American variation. Although, Michael Redgrave stated on the occasion of the debate on approaches to acting in the *World Theatre*,²⁰ that Brecht and Stanislavki wanted to predigest the play for the public, it can be argued that both brought a new type of realism to the British stage.²¹ Brecht's approach to production surprised British critics in 1956. One noted upon seeing Angela Hurwicz, who played Grusche and Kattrin that she was "a lumpy girl with a face as round as an apple" who would have been at best cast in a British production "as a fat comic maid".²² Nyberg argues that Brecht had a strong influence on the shift British theatre went through in the sixties. Ironically the Brechtian perspective mixed with Stanislavski's theories gave the British theatre a realist impetus. On a grander scale it infused it with an imaginative realism, while on a more specific level it brought about a new trend when it came to representing Shakespearean characters who consequently became more and more human.

Maybe Peter Brook is the best representative for a proof of this statement. Brook acknowledged Brecht as "the most influential and the most radical man of our time" since "no one seriously concerned with theatre can bypass Brecht."²³ While he appreciated the usefulness of his theatre approach he did not necessarily agreed with it in its entirety.

"I found out that I did not really agree with his view of the difference between illusion and non illusion. In his production of *Mother Courage* by the Berliner Ensemble, I found that however much he tried to break any belief in the reality of what happened on the stage, the more he did, the more I entered whole heartedly into the illusion".²⁴

But in *The Empty Space* he discusses the alienation effect and illustrates its sophistication with an instance of his *King Lear* production:

"Often when an actor is carried away by his part, he can get more and more exaggerated, more and more cheaply emotional, and yet sweep the audience along with him. Here the alienation device will keep us awake when part of us wishes to surrender wholly to the tug of the heartstrings. But it is hard to interfere with the spectator's stock reactions. At the end of the first act of *Lear* when Gloucester is blinded we brought the house lights up before the last savage action was completed – so as to make the audience take stock of the scene before being engulfed in automatic applause."²⁵

²⁰Comarnescu, O controversa..., 1956, p. 98

²¹ Lennart Nyberg, *The Shakespeare Ideal, Shakespeare Production and the Modern Theatre in Britain*, (Stockholm: Uppsala, 1988).

²²Ibid. p. 59.

²³ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1968) p. 71.

²⁴ Peter Brook, *The Shifting Point, 1946-1987*, (New York : Harper & Row,1987) p 42.

²⁵Brook, *The Empty...* p. 73.-74.

This production is of special relevance for the Romanian case since it was performed in Bucharest in 1964 where it played to a house packed to the brim, while in the streets there were riotous students trying to get in. Aside the fact that audiences in Eastern Europe would jump at the opportunity of seeing any outsider, Brook was far from being a stranger in Eastern Europe. His wunderkind status and his previous travels behind the Iron Curtain were known. In 1955 he went to Moscow with his *Hamlet* producing there quite the stir. Although he later thought of this *Hamlet* as a trial of youth, the production had a long lasting effect on theatre artists in Moscow and not only. Part of the Khrushchevite program of opening to the west the communist republics sent their specialists to Moscow to see the West's cultural production. One of these travellers, Vlad Mugur, the director who first staged *Hamlet* in Rumania after 1948, was deeply impressed with this production. In 1957 Peter Brook's *Titus Andronicus* went to the Theatre of Nations and after touring Venice and Belgrade, where Marshal Tito came to congratulate the cast, Zagreb, Vienna and Warsaw followed suit. In Warsaw, Brook's *Titus* made a lasting impression on Jan Kott who would later remember this production as the one of the most important theatrical experiences of his life. Even though the text was cut, the way in which Brook chose to develop the action had a strong impression on Kott. "The production was composed not of scenes but of shots and sequences[...] intervals of time were marked by blackouts ; scenes faded, one into the other, film-like: dramatic encounters and soliloquies stood apart from crowd scenes like big close-ups. Attention would be concentrated on a given character which seemed to grow and move nearer to the audience; as if a film camera were tracking from Titus to Lavinia, from Tamora to Arron."²⁶

In 1958, Brook's achievements are presented for the first time to a wider Romanian public in an article especially written by the British critic Ossia Trilling for the journal *Teatrul*.²⁷ Trilling introduces Brook by criticizing his lack of knowledge and *savoir-faire* when it comes to working with actors. He disagrees with Brook's casting choices for *Romeo and Juliet* and with the design approach for *Salome*. He praises the *Measure for Measure* 1950 production while mentioning that it was influenced by Gordon Craig's ideas of delivering on stage a single vision. He recounts in detail the production of *The Tempest* and its wonderfully imaginative set. Trilling does not forget to mention Brook owed a lot in this respect to Orson Wells. However, what is of most interest for the Romanian theatre community is the description for *Titus Andronicus*. He minutely describes Brook's approach and sound design for this production:

"Always a master of lighting in the theatre, Brook devised this time a new technique for sound effects, recording on tape and "cutting" after, following the classic film technique, a series of sounds some of which were not produced by musical instruments. In places, the sounds were reproduced at a slower or accelerated and many a times interrupted in the middle. No longer resorting to the naturalistic music by Sibelius or to the cacophony of some modern composer, Brook decided to obtain by its own original means all the charming (or revolting) sounds he needed."²⁸

Following this description it is quite hard not to see the inspiration behind the 1959/1960 production of *Hamlet* at the Cluj National Theatre. Articles featuring this production made a point to talk about the sound décor. The leitmotif here was the sound of

²⁶ Quoted in JC Trewin, *Peter Brook, A biography*, (London: Macdonald & Co., 1971) p.101

²⁷ Ossia Trilling, "Furtuna de Shakespeare la Stradford-Upon-Avon", *Teatrul*, nr 1, 1958, p.35-36.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.36.

steps. They were used to highlight or describe a certain character or a certain dramatic moment all throughout the play.²⁹ The lack of curtains and the bare floor boards also show the British influence. The connection is singular and it points to the fact that, when it came to production practices, Romanian theatre practitioners were taking their inspiration from clearly indicated sources. These were delivered in small dosages feeding a hunger that any artist was bound to feel in the stylistic desert characterizing Romanian cultural life in those days. These pre-approved sources also indicate the examples that could be followed.

Interestingly enough in his “East European Travel Journal” published in 1958 in the *World Theatre*, Ossia Trilling laments the fact that the East European theatre was not at all aware of great Shakespearean directors such as William Poel and Barry Jackson.³⁰ Trilling is not correct in assuming this. They were, but through the lens of soviet Shakespeare scholars such as Morozov who as early as 1948 condemned the British mania of staging Shakespeare in modern dress.³¹ Brook was then among the first British directors to be acknowledged and promoted in the East soon after Stalin’s death. Nevertheless, he only reaches Romania with his production of *King Lear* in 1964. The production won the grand prize in 1963 at the Theatre of Nations, an honour bestowed only once before to the *Berliner Ensemble* in 1959. Brook’s visit was also discursively prepared. In 1963 a fragment describing Brook’s approach to costume design is featured in *Teatrul* in translation from Margueritte Duras’ article for the magazine „Arts”³² This aspect is again visited in more detail in the interview with Peter Brook by Dana Crivat, the Romanian correspondent to the Theatre of Nations festival.³³ What transpires in this interview most vividly is the collision between two very different worlds. One almost feels that the two simply do not understand each other. Reiterating the socialist realist reconfigured Shakespeare, Dana Crivat wonders about the validity of Brook’s approach to the tragedy. As she points out in her question usually all of Shakespeare’s tragedies end with a ray of sunshine, with a character that takes the stand giving us the sense that life follows its course in a healthy world. In *Lear* however, both the good and the bad die leaving us with a pessimist conclusion. Brook is categorical in his answer saying that in fact there is no conclusion and that he finds simplistic a division of characters in bad and good. According to him, Cordelia is unyielding and brutal simply because she is Lear’s daughter:

“I do not quite understand, why raise this sentimental issue? Cordelia is unyielding. What can I do? This is the situation. What we know about her? One thing, but essential: she is King Lear’s daughter. It may seem an arbitrary assumption somewhat, but I think that the easiest route to reach Lear is to blend together Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. According to me, your question starts from the false premises that the first two are monsters, while Cordelia is an angel. That the king was deceived taking the monsters’ side. It is a rather simplistic point of view. In all of Lear’s daughters we find something from their father’s force and desire for absolute.”³⁴

The fact that such an interview could be published in the pages of *Teatrul* speaks volumes about the relaxation taking place in Romania. More than that, it signals again what

²⁹Nicoleta Cinpoies, *Shakespeare’s Hamlet in Romania, 1778-2008, A study of translation, performance, and Cultural adaptation* (Lewinston, New York :The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010) p. 122,123.

³⁰Ossia Trilling, “An East European Travel Journal”, *World Theatre*, nr. 7, 1958, p. 191.

³¹M.Morozov, “Pângărireai Shakespeare”, *Contemporanul*, nr.73,1948, p8

³²Peter Brook, “Despre regale Lear”, *Teatrul*, nr. 6, 1963, p.90.

³³Dana Crivat, “Interviu cu Peter Brook”, *Teatrul*, nr. 12, 1963, p.98-100.

³⁴Ibid. p.99 (my translation)

were the accepted guidelines. It could be argued that the *King Lear* production made present and meaningful for the Romanian audience Brecht's distancing effects but also Jan Kott's views with regard to the Shakespearean drama. For example, the later were known in Romania in 1964. Petru Comarnescu mentions Jan Kott's *Shakespeare our Contemporary* in the French translation in connection with his study of the interwar Romanian avant-garde director Ion Sava, published in 1966. However, seeing a theatre inspired by these game changing ideas was an entirely different matter.

Maybe one of the most interesting accounts of the impact Brook and Brecht had on theatre practitioners in Romania is Liviu Ciulei's article on "the realism of 1964".³⁵ This is an article that Ciulei first wrote for the *World Theatre* journal reprinted in translation in *Teatrul* in 1965. In it, Ciulei comments on the "dynamic, complex, contradictory" and all encompassing nature of this new realism by making references to the direct or indirect influences on his art. Meyerhold and Brecht are described as "the great revelation of an age", while Brook's *King Lear* stands out as "a perfect and profoundly realist performance." Ciulei lists his own performances inspired by these influences in support of a practice that extended the boundaries of realism beyond its Stalinist days. This is in fact a piece of rewriting history since productions that were criticized in 1958 or 1961 are now examples of a continuous search for a "stage realism/realism scenic" and, in effect, proof of synchronicity with similar preoccupations in the west. The jaded tone of the article is palpable, but beyond the chagrin of the artist, this is an instance where "the encounters" are not just merely inferred but clearly stated.

The years 1958 and 1964 reveal a high density of encounters, discursive or otherwise. The impact was often mediated and obscured via text in the attempt to soften the blow of the actual event. In 1959, the Berliner Ensemble visit is not announced before hand as it was the case with the Royal Shakespeare Company Visit in 1964. The information appears in *Teatrul* at the end of the calendar year as part of a statistics of events: "26-31 May, The German Democratic Republic, Berliner Ensemble Collective presents in the capital: *Mother* an adaptation after Maxim Gorki by Brecht and *The life of Galileo Galilei* by Bertold Brecht." It was difficult to tame Brecht's theatre. The impact of the actual production could hardly be controlled. The same goes for Brook, who admired the hunger with which Eastern audiences came to see his theatre. But maybe more than that, while being encased in layered discursive practices, what audiences were really searching was the actual event.

This short account shows a transnational circuit of theatre practices and conceptualizations that defy, to a certain extent, the classical separation behind the Iron Curtain. In fact, it reveals how pre-1945 influences from the East take hold in the West, only to later return via a sinuous route during post-Stalinization. This new synthesis then becomes the foundation for a certain synchronization of East and West in the theatre – a development that alters without disrupting the creative and critical environment in socialist Romania.

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³⁵Liviu Ciulei, "Pasionantul Drum spre Realism." *Teatrul*, nr 1, 1965, p.19-22.