

Nicoleta CINPOEȘ
Sorin CAZACU

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**SHAKESTIVALLING IN CRAIOVA/
SHAKESTIVALIERI ÎN CRAIOVA
(1994-2024)**



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I. Cazacu, Sorin

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Shakestivalling in Craiova – 1994-2024

Prolegomena

Shakespeare's 430th birthday anniversary year was rich in celebrations of the writer and his works around the world. In the south-west corner of Romania, this year proved particularly fortuitous as it marked another birth, that of the Craiova International Shakespeare Festival, a festival that has been growing since in status, outreach, reputation and sheer size, both in theatrical and in civic terms. Looking back at its activity over the past thirty years, this book will chart the directions the Festival has been taking in its development and examine the impact it has achieved locally, nationally and internationally, all of which have been intrinsic to the transformation of Craiova from a city festival into a festival city, and the Craiova Shakespeare Festival into an unmissable event and, indeed, destination, as the inflight magazine on board of Wizzair informs its passengers when listing the top cultural attractions of 2024: : 'Don't be surprised if you happen to meet Hamlet in Cofetăria Minerva, Orsino in a club, Othello in the Botanical Garden or Julieta in Romanescu Park!'¹

In the process of morphing from a local(ised) event in 1994 to an eventified city boasting, in 2024, 300 Shakespeare events in dozens of locations, this Festival has occasioned the birth and growth of many projects and of many communities, from the European Shakespeare Festivals Network (ESFN) it co-founded in 2010 to the huge international spectatorship it has amassed over the three decades, from the one-off *Worldwide Hamlet* academic seminar in 2010 to what has now become the customary Shakespeare in Performance Series under the patronage of the European Shakespeare Research Association (ESRA), from the launch of the first two volumes of the third edition of William Shakespeare's *Complete Works*, to the creation of a library-size contribution to Shakespeare Studies in volumes generated from, launched at and translated for each edition of the Festival. It is on behalf of one such project and community in particular that we bring our gift to the Festival in this multi-anniversary year. On Shakespeare's 460th and the Festival's 30th birthdays, we celebrate fifteen years of partnership between the ESRA Shakespeare in Performance Series and the Department

of Anglo-American and Germanic Studies at the University of Craiova. Both as a *collaboration* and a *community*, it has grown year on year in numbers and in impact. It has always been a ‘marriage of true minds’ and a labour of true love, like those William Shakespeare writes of in ‘Sonnet 116’:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments; love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no, it is an ever-fixèd mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come.
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom:
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

In the beginning ...

Ubu Rex (With Scenes from Macbeth) swept its audiences off their feet, first in Craiova and then in Edinburgh and Braunschweig, with its high-energy, mesmerising and iconoclastic mash-up of Jarry and Shakespeare, who made perfect bedfellows in Silviu Purcărete's auteur-ial hands, in a spectacle of epic proportions. The production dissected meticulously the relationship between power and the masses it subordinated: swaddled in white onesies, like giant toddlers, Ma and Pa Ubu threw tantrum after tantrum and stepped over every single body in their way to climb to the top. With malice and egos inflating as fast as their fat costumes, they disposed of their minions with the same easiness they discarded one accessory or outfit after another, eventually saturating the white chromatics of their world with red.



Figure 1. Ma and Pa Ubu, directed by Silviu Purcărete, Craiova (1991)

© Craiova International Shakespeare Festival Archive

This production painted a picture that was too close for comfort not only for audiences in Craiova when it opened in 1990 but also when it toured to the Edinburgh Festival and Braunschweig's Theaterformen, in 1991. For

Romanian spectators, it ‘bore painful similarities with Romanian reality’ less than a year after the 1989 Revolution (Ichim: 1991). For international audiences, the ‘two plays about bloody tyrants ... shown to be absurd photographic negatives of each other’ in this production freshly out of the Eastern Bloc ‘gave a horrid frisson of topicality’ as it opened in Edinburgh just as ‘the August coup against Gorbachev’ made world news (Taylor: 1997). The production’s lingering final image, of ‘the Ceaușescu-like Ubus’, ‘[u]pright in their satin-lined coffins’, Taylor recalls, ‘fix[ed] the audience with a fatuous, knowing smirk, as if to say “Don’t worry, we’ll be back”’ (Taylor: 1997).

This was a promise kept, because back they were, in ways 1991 could only partially envisage. Romania’s return to (neo-)communism and Craiova’s National Theatre’s return to Edinburgh bringing another ‘not ... pretty’ (Taylor: 1997) Shakespeare Purcărete-style in 1992, make the backdrop to my pursuit here. Its main story is about the outcomes and long-term impact Craiova’s National festivaling experience abroad had. Edinburgh and the success of Purcărete’s Shakespeare productions with Craiova National Theatre brought home the managing director Emil Boroghină’s dream of creating a festival, entirely dedicated to Shakespeare, as he has said on numerous occasions (Cinpoș: 2003). Fuelled by Boroghină’s ‘vision and boundless courage’ (Maria Shevtsova 2012: 352) as actor, director and, at the time, manager of the Craiova National, this dream began to gain substance slowly but surely with the inauguration of the Craiova Shakespeare Festival in 1994.

My retrospective is cued by Marjana Johansson’s argument that festival and city stand in a ‘mutually co-constitutive’ relation (Johansson 2020: 69). While acknowledging this interdependence, my approach also examines how the Craiova International Shakespeare Festival was established in relation to other Shakespeare festivals discussed in the volume *Shakespeare on European Festival Stages* (Bloomsbury: 2022) and explores its changing dynamics. The festival model in Craiova stands in clear opposition to those in festival cities such as Edinburgh and Avignon. It also contrasts with the model found at Shakespeare festivals such as Gdańsk or Verona, both of which trade on a spatial connection (whether real or fictional)

with Shakespeare. While Gdańsk boasts a Shakespeare footprint with its 2014 inaugurated Shakespeare Theatre built on the site of the early modern fencing school which doubled as a theatre venue for travelling players during the early modern period, Verona's connection is the site where Shakespeare sets the story of the famous 'star-crossed lovers' of *Romeo and Juliet*.² Furthermore, Craiova does not have either a tradition of festivaling or a site-specific (touristic) incentive or a multi-cultural community or a Shakespeare footprint/connection that would naturally lend the city – what Temple Hauptfleisch (2007) terms – 'festivalising' qualities.

Charting the festival's emergence and key stages of development, naturally explores the shifts in terms of aims, organisation, programme, participation, audiences, that have turned the festival from a celebration of Shakespeare's work taking place in an industrial and university city of a former Eastern Bloc country into a large scale international event, a founder of and key player in the European Shakespeare Festivals Network (ESFN) in 2010, and a destination on the Shakespeare tourism circuit. My unpacking of the Craiova festival sees it as a 'vehicle for performance-based cultural expression, regeneration, and social inclusion' (Johansson 2020: 55) that has reconfigured, beneficially and at times somewhat disruptively, its urban home, the Romanian theatrical landscape *and* international Shakespeare production.

New Europe, old structures and the festival syndrome

For half of the old continent, the reconstruction of new Europe, literal and cultural, began in the aftermath of World War II and theatre festivals played a key role in this rebuilding programme. Three such festivals were particularly prominent: the Festival d'Avignon and 'the Edinburgh International Festival', both of which opened in 1947, and 'the Festivals of Athens and Epidaurus (officially founded in 1954)', according to Erika Fischer-Lichte (2020: 90).³ For the other half of Europe, which fell, as history lots were drawn, into the Soviet gulag, it took another forty-five years to join *that* new Europe. The fall of the Berlin Wall – the physical and symbolic border that marked this split – in November 1989, and the subsequent collapse of one communist regime after another in the Eastern Bloc, re-opened Europe

and re-established cross-national contacts severed for almost half a century. For Romania, a country ghettoed within its national borders and subjected to strict surveillance, the overthrow of Ceaușescu's rule in December of the same year opened the door to the West – and the rest of the world. As the euphoria of movement across national borders matched that of unprecedented freedoms within its borders, the country embarked on its journey of recovery and self-discovery.

As with the new Europe project after the WWII, theatre and festivals in Romania took up a healing role. What proved a more daunting part was rebuilding a culture imprisoned and 'debilitated by [forty-five] years of deprivation [and] corruption' (Richard Eyre: 1990) and fear, a period in which theatre and festivals, alongside every institution and cultural activity, had been gradually requisitioned by the regime and tasked with singing its communist tune. With theatres nationalised and culture centralised under full State control since 1961 (when the wholesale nationalisation was completed at immeasurable cost to life), cultural production was employed to systematically rewrite history and everyday reality by regurgitating Party propaganda. A new level of national-scale indoctrination began after the Ceaușescu's presidential tour of China, North Korea, Mongolia and North Vietnam. The ensuing Mini-Cultural Revolution of Maoist inspiration (enshrined, by decree, in the July 1971 *Theses of the Communist Party*) redefined culture's sole mission as the construction of the new man in the socialist humanist vein, dispelling any remaining illusion, as advertised to the West, that this regime represented communism with a human face. The approach was good old socialist realism revamped in a national(istic) style. It enabled the Ceaușescu's cult of personality and in the process commandeered all public means – print, press, theatre, television, radio – and community participation. Festivities and festivals became enforced regime praising exercises, customised for every age group, reaching megalomaniac proportions in the annual *Cântarea României* (*Songs of Praise to Romania*) and a regular calendar of similar celebrations.

With the venues, budgets, repertoires and discourse redeployed to glorifying the Party and its leaders, theatre retreated to underground spaces and sharpened its dissident tongue. The louder and more ostentatious the

socialist realist performance outside, the subtler and more dissident the theatre inside. In a reality which was rewritten, contemporary voices gagged or exiled, and spectators turned into ‘mute audiences’, Shakespeare’s plays provided a lifeline and a language for survival, one even the censors could not ban for being anti-regime. This was the heritage theatre in Romania had to reckon with post-1989.

While theatre makers and audiences were equally ‘eager to release [theatre] from censorship, double-speak and intricate means of resistance’ (Nicoleta Cinpoș 2010: 191), their enthusiasm was curbed. All forty-two theatres were owned by a bankrupt state and ‘thrice bound – to a building, a company [in residence] and a[n annual] repertory’ (2010: 191). Insufficient subsidies, cavernous buildings expensive to maintain, artists treated as civil servants and audiences hard to tempt back when other forms of entertainment and commercial pap were easily available – these were the common denominators for theatres in the slowly expanding capitalist marketplace in Romania.

With the economics staked against culture, it was up to ‘each theatre’s husbandry of its respective artistic and managerial potential’ (Cinpoș 191–2) to navigate the new context. The Romanian Theatre Association (UNITER), founded in 1990, emerged precisely from theatre’s need of a compass at the national level.⁴ The borders and theatre doors opened to directors returning from exile certainly encouraged mobility and collaboration, but effecting these entailed opening up from within. This complex process ranged from opening the repertory to previously banned authors and titles, to revising the contractual terms to short-term collaboration and exchange, and rethinking subsidisation so that local and private sponsors could become invested in cultural production.

By starting small, with a collaboration, a workshop or a seminar, then building up to an anniversary event or a one-off festival, theatres could both channel the general enthusiasm, test the waters of the new reality and begin to find a new theatrical language. Some of these initiatives focused on previously marginalised areas (such as Romanian Theatre on the Radio, in 1990), or responded to new interests (such as the International Theatre Festival of American Drama, in Brașov, 1993). They opened up to new

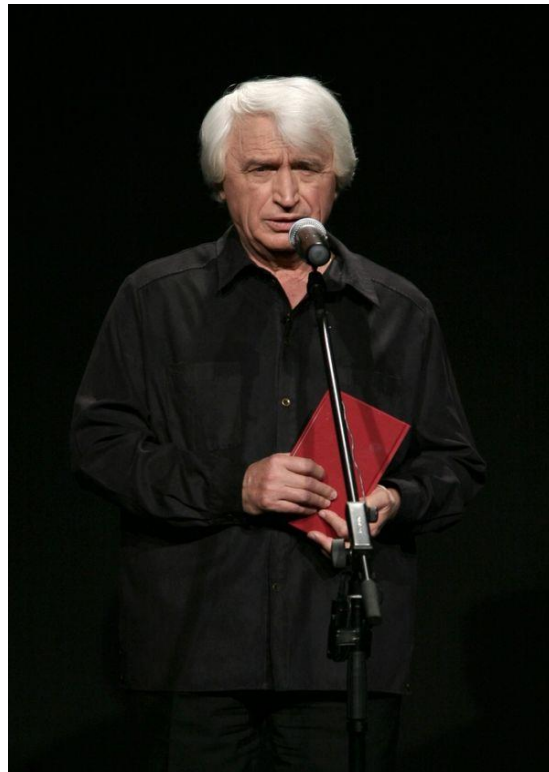
practitioners and practices (for example, the ‘Open Door Week’ which presented to the wider public the graduation projects of the Bucharest Academy of Theatre and Film students). Others engaged with pressing topics, such as the ‘Theatre and National Identity’, organised by Concepts UK, and ‘Power and the Theatre’, organised by UNITER, as a direct response to Decree 442 (1994) that ‘put theatres’ patrimony, budgets and sponsorship’ and the appointment of managing directors ‘directly under the control of the Ministry of Culture’ (Cinpoș 2010: 197). This was the context which the National Theatre in Craiova was negotiating as it prepared to organise a ‘Shakespeare Festival’ in 1994.

Becoming a ‘cultural event’

According to Temple Hauptfleisch, ‘festivals are not only where the work is; it is where the artistic output of the actor, director, choreographer, etc. is *eventified*’ (Hauptfleisch 2007: 39). Having started as an ‘everyday *life event*’ on the stage of the Craiova National Theatre, the first Shakespeare adaptation this theatre staged in new Romania: *Ubu Rex with Scenes from Macbeth* was eventified, in quick succession, at festivals in Romania, where it scooped the National Theatre Festival’s award for best production and the UNITER’s best director of the season, and across the world, in Edinburgh, Braunschweig, Parma, Tokyo, and Jerusalem. Its success and the company it kept in the international arena gave the theatre’s managing director Emil Boroghină the courage of his old conviction that ‘as actors test their mettle by doing Shakespeare, so do theatres’ (Festival Programme 1994: 6) and a form for his dream of making Craiova an eventifying *locus* for Shakespeare’s work.

The repeat success with *Titus Andronicus* directed by Silviu Purcărete in 1992 and Boroghină’s galvanizing personality at the helm of Craiova National Theatre led to extending this dream beyond the commitment to stage a Shakespeare play every two years. By 1994, Boroghină established the Shakespeare Theatre Foundation, a registered charity whose mission, unpolitical by (its own) definition, was ‘to organise the Shakespeare Festival’ and ‘to stimulate the study of Shakespeare’s work in Romania and beyond’ (The Statutes of The Shakespeare Theatre Foundation: 1994, Article 1). Running within the Craiova National, the Foundation pledged to organise

conferences and symposia, facilitate the publication of theatre criticism through a programme of translating world Shakespeare critical studies into Romanian and supporting the publication of work generated by its own events in order to bridge the gap in Shakespeare criticism available to Romanian readers. Its ambitious cultural goals also included, from the start, creating a Shakespeare library and a museum archive, alongside incentivizing creatives, both indigenous and international, to work on Shakespeare premieres at the Craiova National, and sharing global Shakespeare knowledge by bringing together theatre historians, literary and theatre critics, theatre practitioners, teachers and students. Additionally, it aimed to organise research visits to the UK and European centres with traditions in Shakespeare studies, and to fundraise for ‘bursaries to widen the horizon of research on Shakespeare performed’ (Statutes Article 2: 1–8).



**Figure 2. Emil Boroghină, manager of the "Marin Sorescu" National Theatre, Craiova and founder of the Craiova International Shakespeare Festival
© Craiova International Shakespeare Festival Archive**

The first Craiova Shakespeare Festival took place in the autumn of 1994. Its modest offerings – six productions, two book launches and several workshops over five days – were transformational; their impact, long-lasting. The festival opened with Cheek by Jowl’s *As You Like It* and continued with four Romanian productions from Bucharest theatres (‘Ion Creangă’ Theatre’s *Tempest*, ‘Bulandra’ Theatre’s *Winter’s Tale*, the Odeon’s *Richard III*, the National’s *Romeo and Juliet*). The sixth production was the home-grown *Titus Andronicus*. Both Cheek by Jowl’s production and John Elsom’s book: *Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary?* incentivised the exploration of contemporary Shakespeare making. The stripped-down aesthetics of the former (especially on the first night, when the company performed without their set and costumes which were stuck at some border crossing on the way from the UK to Romania) invited attention on acting and words, both of which had been buried in the metaphoric realism that kept censors at bay for decades in Romania. The latter challenged Romanian stage practice head on to investigate Shakespeare’s role in the ‘now’.



**Figure 3. Adrian Lester in *As You Like It*, Cheek by Jowl, Craiova (1994)
© Craiova International Shakespeare Festival Archive**

The two organisers, Craiova's National and the Shakespeare Theatre Foundation, secured an impressive patronage, which ranged from the Romanian Ministry of Culture, the British Council, the Romanian-British Cultural Programme NOROC, to regional (Dolj District Council, Dolj District Prefecture) and local (Craiova Guildhall) sponsors. Its consumers were not so much the local theatre-goers, but the wider artistic community in Romania and invited international guests. This was an event that celebrated diversity as much as it showcased it, 'a significant *Cultural Event*, framed and made meaningful by the presence of an audience and reviewers' tasked with 'respond[ing] to the celebrated event' (Hauptfleisch: 39). Planned as such, the Craiova Shakespeare Festival 'became a means of retaining the event in the cultural memory of the particular society in which it [wa]s taking place' (Hauptfleisch: 39).

The following two editions (in 1997 and 2000) continued to build on the festival's mission and commitment to make a cultural difference, in spite of financial challenges and bureaucracy, aggravated further by the political swing from one extreme to the other.⁵ It took hard graft and sheer determination to defy the odds, and the critics' pessimism: the festival delivered on the statutory promises of the Shakespeare Foundation, albeit every three (rather than two) years, and asserted its potential as cultural player nationally, regionally (in 1997) and internationally (2000).

The 1997 edition embodied success by collaboration and exchange in the programme it offered, the in-house production the Craiova National staged and the wider financial support the Festival accrued. Between 23 and 30 April 1997, Craiova hosted seven visiting stage productions alongside its own *Hamlet*; the line-up included: *Troilus and Cressida* (dir. Dejan Mijač, Dramatic Theatre, Yugoslavia), *Oh, Romeo...*, *Oh, Juliet* (dir. Antal Pál, Hungarian section of Ariel Theatre, Târgu-Mureş), *Much Ado About Nothing* (dir. Alexandru Dabija, Youth Theatre, Piatra-Neamţ), *Twelfth Night* (dir. Victor Iona Frunză, Hungarian State Theatre, Cluj), *Measure for Measure* (dir. Theodor Cristian Popescu, Târgu-Mureş National Theatre), *Hamlet* (dir. Janez Pipan, National Theatre, Slovenia), *Hamlet* (dir. Sandu Vasilache, Chişinău National Theatre, Moldova). The programme also included screening one television production of *As You Like It*, one big screen