



**PROCEEDINGS OF
THE INTER-BALKAN NETWORK
OF CULTURE, ART,
AND EDUCATION CONFERENCE**

Vol. 1 (2025)
Creation of an Inter-Balkan Network of Performing Arts

Edited by Andreas Markantonatos,
Mihaela Bețiu, and Despina Kosmopoulou

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16-17 March 2025, Thessaloniki

Editors: Andreas Markantonatos, Mihaela Bețiu,
and Despina Kosmopoulou

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Creation of an Inter-Balkan Network of Performing Arts

Editors: Andreas Markantonatos, Mihaela Bețiu, Despina Kosmopoulou

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Thessaloniki

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PAT/MA Programme in Performing Arts, Hellenic Open University**

Co-organisers:

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University of the Peloponnese

Association of “The Friends of the European Cultural Centre of Delphi”

SAPA – Summer Academy of Performing Arts, Hellenic Open University

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EDITORS' FOREWORD

The First Inter-Balkan Network of Culture, Art, and Education Conference on Performing Arts marks a significant moment in the cultural and academic life of our region. It represents not merely an event, but the inauguration of a sustained and structured dialogue among institutions, scholars, artists, and cultural administrators across the Balkan Peninsula. The performing arts have historically functioned as one of the most resilient and illuminating expressions of collective identity. In the Balkans, a region shaped by complex histories, layered traditions, and vibrant cultural intersections, theatre, music, and dance have consistently served as vehicles of communication, continuity, and renewal. This conference arises from the shared conviction that collaboration must replace fragmentation, and that structured networks must succeed isolated initiatives. The establishment of an Inter-Balkan Network of Culture, Art, and Education is not simply an administrative ambition – it is a cultural necessity. Through sustained cooperation, joint research, artistic exchange, and institutional partnership, we may cultivate a cultural ecosystem defined by dialogue, mutual respect, and creative synergy. The National Theatre of Northern Greece and the Hellenic Open University, as well as prestigious institutions and distinguished scholars from across our region, have undertaken this initiative with a clear sense of responsibility and vision. It is our sincere hope that this inaugural gathering will lay firm foundations for a long-term collaboration that will benefit both academic inquiry and artistic practice throughout the region. May this hefty publication stand as both documentation and declaration: documentation of a beginning, and declaration of a shared commitment to a common cultural future.

CONTENTS

Conference Papers

- 21 **Andreas Markantonatos** Establishing a Balkan Network of Performing Arts: Terms and Conditions
- 27 **Asterios Peltekis** Creation of an Inter-Balkan Performing Arts Network: A Pressing Need of Our Time
- 35 **Savas Patsalidis** Theatre and Community in Transition: Toward a Cohesive Balkan Artistic Vision
- 40 **Despina G. Kosmopoulou** Hecuba in the Balkans: Matei Vişniec's Hecuba. A Comparative Approach
- 57 **Varvara Georgopoulou** *Towards the Intellectual Balkans* (1926): The Timely Invitation of K. Bastias
- 67 **Ivan Dodovski** Theatre Life in North Macedonia: Mapping of the Institutions and Festivals
- 77 **Anna Tabaki** A Cross-study in Cultural, Aesthetics, and Artistic Exchanges in Southeastern Europe
- 84 **Nikolay Iordanov** Balkan Identity or Balkan Peculiarities
- 92 **Mihaela Beţiu** Cultural Heritage of the Balkans: Towards a Collaborative Approach to Acting Methods
- 102 **Sophie Shamanidi** Medea – The First Illegal Immigrant?
- 110 **Oana Cristea Grigorescu** Themes of The New Romanian Drama
- 123 **Ana Stojanoska** Modern Theatre as a Connection Between the Cultures of Two Countries – A Case Study: Directorial Works of Slobodan Unkovski in Greece
- 136 **Kamelia Nikolova** Contemporary Theatre and Digital Technologies. In focus: The Balkan Countries
- 144 **Oana Borş** Specificities and Crossroads in Balkan Dramaturgies
- 150 **Elpida Zampetaki** The Impact and Significance of Ancient Greek Tragedy and Ancient Greek Myths on Balkan Theatre in the 20th and 21st Centuries
- 159 **Octavian Szalad** The Greek Myth in Romanian Puppetry for Children
- 171 **Chrisa Psomiadou** Dance Without Borders: The Multicultural Nature of Movement
-

Opening Address

Asterios Peltekis

*Artistic Director of The National Theatre of Northern Greece
President and Founding member
of the Inter-Balkan Network of Culture, Art, and Education*

We are particularly proud to host the First Inter-Balkan Conference on Performing Arts, one of the major initiatives of the National Theatre of Northern Greece in the fields of culture and continuing education. This initiative extends beyond the Theatre's institutional mission and reaffirms its commitment to artistic excellence and social engagement. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Hellenic Open University and to the Postgraduate Programme in Performing Arts for our constructive collaboration. I also warmly thank the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of the Interior (Macedonia–Thrace Sector), the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports, and the Municipalities of Thessaloniki and Thermi for their longstanding support. Above all, I thank our distinguished participants from across the Balkan region. Your presence confirms the urgent need to expand academic dialogue and to explore new possibilities for the development of the performing arts in our wider region. By strengthening partnerships and cultivating new ones, the artistic and cultural potential of the Balkans can be mobilised to address both current and emerging challenges. Our shared objective is clear: the establishment of a sustainable Inter-Balkan Network of Performing Arts that will ensure meaningful cooperation and a dynamic international presence. I am confident that this conference will prove a great success and that our common vision will soon become a tangible reality.

Welcome Address

Professor Yianna Karibali-Tsiptsiou

*Emeritus Professor of Law, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
President of the Board of Directors,
National Theatre of Northern Greece*

Distinguished representatives of Government and Local Authorities, Rector of the Hellenic Open University,

Rector of the National University of Theatre and Film in Bucharest,
Distinguished speakers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the First Inter-Balkan Conference on Performing Arts, the inaugural event organised within the framework of the Memorandum of Cooperation between the National Theatre of Northern Greece and the Hellenic Open University. The Balkan region possesses a remarkable wealth of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Among its most significant expressions are the performing arts, which serve as living witnesses to the region's cultural evolution. Given the multicultural character of the Balkans, shaped by diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities, the importance of dialogue among scholars and performing arts practitioners becomes evident. Such dialogue, encompassing ancient, modern, and contemporary theatre, as well as musical theatre and dance, is both timely and necessary. This conference marks the beginning of that dialogue and aspires to lay the foundations for a comprehensive Inter-Balkan Network of Performing Arts that will strengthen regional cooperation and foster meaningful cultural exchange. I wish the conference every success as a decisive step towards a sustainable and promising future of collaboration.

Welcome Address

Professor Manolis Koutouzis
Rector of The Hellenic Open University

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor to welcome you to the First Inter-Balkan Conference on Performing Arts, which aims to establish an Inter-Balkan Network of Performing Arts. The Hellenic Open University is proud to co-organise this initiative. As an institution dedicated to openness and interdisciplinary learning, we are committed to fostering innovation and dialogue across diverse fields, including the performing arts. We are particularly pleased to have recently established the Postgraduate Programme in Performing Arts, reflecting our dedication to the academic advancement of the field. This conference provides a valuable platform for exchange among scholars and practitioners from across the Balkans. The dialogue initiated here is essential for strengthening mutual understanding and sustainable cooperation. I am confident that this gathering will inspire long-lasting partnerships and meaningful academic and artistic exchange.

Welcome Address

Nikos Koukis

*Historian, President of the Association of
“The Friends of the European Cultural Centre of Delphi”,
Former President of Hellenic Foundation for Culture;
President of the Advisory Board of the MA Programme in Performing Arts,
Hellenic Open University*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to express my great pleasure at the organization of the 1st Inter-Balkan Conference in the field of Performing Arts, entitled: “Creation of an Inter-Balkan Network of Performing Arts: Terms and Conditions.” My warmest congratulations are due, first and foremost, to the State Theatre of Northern Greece, its Board of Directors, its President, Ms. Karymbali, and its Artistic Director, Mr. Peltekis, as well as to the Hellenic Open University for this initiative. I am confident that this endeavor will lead to creative and fruitful collaboration with institutions throughout the Balkan Peninsula that serve the performing arts with distinction.

Together with the Artistic Director, Mr. Peltekis, and Professor Markantonatos, we worked systematically toward the implementation of this conceptual framework. As this effort is still in its initial stage, we shall proceed with goodwill and careful planning, working toward a convergence characterized by effectiveness and continuity. Both the commitment and the requisite experience are in place.

Professor Markantonatos and I worked closely together during our tenure on the Board of the Hellenic Foundation for Culture. As philologists, we set as a strategic objective the reinforcement of classical education, which has been severely challenged. Whether we succeeded, and to what extent, remains difficult to assess; what is certain, however, is that we did not confine ourselves to theoretical concerns, nor did we remain inactive. On the contrary, we organized a series of international conferences dedicated to ancient dramatic discourse, inviting distinguished personalities from Greece and abroad, in collaboration with reputable institutions. In this context, five conferences were held with the support of the National Theatre of Greece, the Greek National Tourism Organization, the Municipality of Salamis, the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, and the University of Bari. The results were substantial and original. Five substantial volumes of conference proceedings were published, edited by dedicated and enthusiastic collaborators, publications of which we are particularly proud. All of this was accomplished within four years.

The baton is now being taken up, in a related field, by the Hellenic Open University and the State Theatre of Northern Greece. The Friends of the European Cultural Centre of Delphi are joining forces in support of this Inter-Balkan collaboration. I am particularly gratified, as during my tenure as President of the Hellenic Foundation for Culture I was greatly impressed by the vitality of the book fairs in Tirana, Bucharest, Sofia, Banja Luka, and Belgrade. Thessaloniki, too, as the first host city of the 1st Inter-Balkan Conference, has consistently proven to be a cultural force, as well as a channel of communication with our Balkan colleagues.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I extend my congratulations to all participants who have warmly embraced this creative initiative, and I extend my sincere wishes for success!

Address

Vasileios Gakis

*Deputy Mayor of Culture, Tourism Development and Intermunicipal Cooperation,
Municipality of Thessaloniki*

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to Thessaloniki and to the First Inter-Balkan Conference on Performing Arts. Thessaloniki, a historic crossroads of cultures and ideas, provides an ideal setting for such an initiative. Its heritage, artistic vitality, and geographical position at the heart of the Balkans render it a natural hub for cultural exchange. Today, we gather to lay the foundations of a network that will strengthen collaboration among artists and performing arts organisations throughout the region. Our aim is to create a platform for dialogue, joint artistic ventures, and broader dissemination of creative work. The establishment of an Inter-Balkan Network of Performing Arts represents a significant step towards deepening cultural dialogue and artistic innovation. Through sustained cooperation, we can create new opportunities and contribute to a dynamic and forward-looking artistic landscape. I wish all participants every success and a productive stay in our city.

Address

Iason Fotilas

Deputy Minister of Culture

Distinguished guests, colleagues, and friends,

It is an honor to welcome you to the First Inter-Balkan Conference on Performing Arts, hosted by the National Theatre of Northern Greece in collaboration with the Hellenic Open University. Culture transcends borders, political divisions, and historical complexities. The Balkans constitute a region with a deeply interconnected history, where diverse traditions and artistic expressions have influenced one another for centuries. The performing arts, from ancient drama to contemporary performance, have long served as a shared language of communication and collective memory. Even during periods of political tension, artistic expression has functioned as a bridge fostering dialogue and understanding. This conference symbolises our shared commitment to dialogue, creative synergy, and long-term collaboration. Through such initiatives, we can cultivate a more integrated cultural landscape across the Balkan region. May this gathering reaffirm the unifying power of culture and inspire sustained cooperation.

Address

Professor Emerita Chrysothemis Stamatopoulou-Vasilakou

*Department of Theatre Studies, School of Philosophy
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens*

I welcome the opening of the 1st Inter-Balkan Conference for the creation of an inter-Balkan network of performing arts and I wish that the foundations of its desired objectives for the artistic osmosis of the peoples of the Balkan Peninsula in the field of theatre and, in general, in the field of performing arts to be successfully established. Theatre and, more broadly, the performing arts serve not only as a therapeutic means of individual as well as collective psychological support, uplifting the human spirit and fostering higher emotions, but also as a vehicle for self-awareness among peoples and mutual understanding.

Today, having resolved the issue of linguistic communication thanks to the means of modern technology, theatre contributes significantly to the understanding of cultural otherness by highlighting the common elements that connect peoples and revealing shared concerns and common quests. This helps

to smooth over old historical differences of rivalry and hostility among nations through the common codes of artistic creation.

We should never forget the four historical facts that connect the history of modern Greek theatre with the Balkan countries:

- a) The first appearance of modern Greek theatre in the Danubian Principalities on the eve of the War of Greek Independence.
- b) The fact that the first modern Greek drama from the 17th century until 1821 is made up of the clerical and secular satires of the Phanariots found during this period in Constantinople and Bucharest. Additionally, the fact that the political theatre of the War of Greek Independence emerges in the Danubian principalities and in Constantinople during the same period.
- c) The particularly fruitful period (after the passage of the Hatti-Humayun in 1856) from the mid-19th century and continuing into the 20th century, which is characterized by the remarkable mobility of Greek theatrical troupes that visited cities where there were Greek communities in the Balkan Peninsula and in Constantinople, and
- d) The presence of Greek theatre in the communities of Greek political refugees in Balkan countries after the end of the civil war in Greece (1948).

Based on these four historical facts, as a scholar of the history of modern Greek theatre, I would wish that the soon-to-be-established Inter-Balkan Network of Performing Arts, beyond facilitating communication and exchange among performing arts artists, will also give a boost to the research of theatre history, of Greece and the Balkan countries, assisting researchers by providing access to public and private archives and special collections, with the hope that new, unknown elements of their shared theatrical history will come to light.

With these thoughts in mind, I congratulate the organizers of this Conference, the National Theatre of Northern Greece (NTNG) and the Master's Program in Performing Arts of the Hellenic Open University (HOU) for this initiative, and I wish them wholeheartedly great success in the conference proceedings.

Address

Liviu Lucaci, Prof. PhD. Habil.

*Rector of I.L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film, Bucharest
Vice-President and Founding member
of the Inter-Balkan Network of Culture, Art, and Education*

My name is Liviu Lucaci, I am the Rector of the National University of Theatre and Film “I.L. Caragiale” in Bucharest and the vice-president of the Romanian National Council of Rectors. I would like to send their good wishes as well. I think that in our endeavor here, in building an Inter-Balkan Network of Performing Arts, the most important thing, more important than funding, is the idea. We will build, in time, different alliances and I believe that it is very important to be part of such alliances when you want to develop, to exchange your experiences and your way of thinking about performing arts. Also, it is important to know that in Romania, this year, we celebrate 191 years of institutional theatre education. This means almost 200 years of tradition regarding the school for performing arts.

In this part of the world and of Europe, we have something in common. I would begin to say that this common thing, the most important, is our mythology. Mythology should be the topic, in the future, for the next conference or for developing a Balkan festival. I think that the way we think about arts is different, is particular from the viewpoint of Europe and of the World. We must discover what are the roots and traditions that connect us and, then, link them with the technologies of the new age.

Address

Michail Marmarinos

*Distinguished Greek theatre director, actor, and educator
Director of the Athens-Epidaurus Festival*

Dear friends, dear participants,

My name is Michail Marmarinos. Unfortunately, unexpected obligations kept me away from you, obligations beyond my will. But, by this opportunity, I would love to cordially welcome you and my hope is that this gathering of the first inter-Balkan meeting for performing arts evolves into a vital tool for communication for the future of performing arts in the Balkans. Let's hope that this will be the starting point for a close and strong interchange in communication, establishing a strong foundation for deep artistic collaboration across the performing arts community.

Matei Vişniec

Poète, auteur dramatique, prosateur et journaliste roumano-français

Merci de me permettre de parler en français. C'est aussi une occasion de se rappeler que le français a été une langue de circulation internationale, peut-être la première langue d'une globalisation culturelle au dix-huitième et au dix-neuvième siècle. Et aujourd'hui, malgré le fait que nous aimons tellement l'anglais, je pense qu'il ne faut pas abandonner cette dimension francophone de la culture européenne. Le français a été une langue de savoir, une langue de l'art, de la culture, et la francophonie, j'en suis sûre, existe encore. Dans le nouveau contexte géopolitique, la France a un rôle énorme à jouer en Europe.

Mais j'aime toutes les langues. Je suis assez âgée, mais j'aimerais bien apprendre aussi le grec, d'autant plus que mes pièces sont traduites en grec et que j'ai rencontré ma traductrice, la metteuse en scène Ersi Vasilikioti. En France, en effet, c'est grâce à la langue française que nous nous sommes rencontrées, et elle a traduit mes pièces du français. Mais il existe une sorte d'internationale des gens du théâtre et des artistes. J'ai échangé en français avec énormément d'artistes, mais aussi en anglais. J'ai même vécu en Angleterre où j'ai travaillé pour la BBC, mais pendant trente-deux ans, j'ai vécu à Paris, où j'ai travaillé pour Radio France Internationale.

Mais parlons un peu du théâtre. Cette rencontre me paraît extrêmement importante, importante pour nous, les peuples des Balkans. Et sûrement, vous avez déjà dit cela, parce que nous regardons tous, ou presque tous, avec une fascination incroyable vers l'Ouest, vers l'Occident, vers le monde anglo-saxon, et nous oublions parfois d'apprendre à mieux nous connaître. Or, nous avons ce devoir: mieux nous connaître, mieux connaître nos cultures, mieux connaître l'histoire des Balkans, qui est complexe, et participer peut-être davantage à l'intégration européenne des pays des Balkans qui ne font pas encore partie de l'Union européenne.

Et puis, on parle souvent de l'art de vivre à la française, et moi, j'adore l'art de vivre des Balkans. Nous avons beaucoup de choses à enseigner au monde, parce que nous avons, dans les Balkans, je dirais, un art particulier. Nous avons le ressort de la spontanéité, le ressort de l'hospitalité, et aussi beaucoup de souffrances historiques difficiles à expliquer aux autres. Moi, j'étais professeure d'histoire et de philosophie en Roumanie avant de quitter la Roumanie totalitaire de Ceauşescu et de partir, en 1987, en France.

Mais les peuples des Balkans ont en commun une souffrance historique, au fond. Tous les peuples des Balkans ont été occupés pendant des siècles et ont été privés de liberté. Cette privation de liberté doit maintenant nous apporter un peu plus de sagesse. Et je pense que, parce que nous engageons en ce moment ce dialogue, nous pouvons accéder à un rôle que nous avons en Europe: expliquer

encore et encore ce que peut être la privation de liberté, la privation de démocratie, la privation d'avenir.

En ce qui me concerne, en ce moment de ma vie — j'ai soixante-neuf ans — je me pose une seule question essentielle: qu'est-ce que nous pouvons encore faire, nous, les artistes, contre la barbarie? Contre les nouvelles formes de barbarie, contre les nouvelles formes de lavage de cerveau, contre cette tendance de la technologie à se retourner contre la démocratie. Il y a énormément de problèmes qui s'accumulent, et nous, les artistes, avons un mot à dire, à notre manière.

En ce qui me concerne, pendant trente-deux ans, j'ai été à la fois journaliste et écrivaine. La journaliste que je suis encore, d'ailleurs, en ce moment, est assez pessimiste, parce que je me dis que, c'est évident, l'humanité n'arrive pas à apprendre des erreurs du passé. Mais la dramaturge, l'autrice, l'écrivaine en moi, elle, on a encore confiance en la littérature, en la possibilité qu'a l'homme de dépasser ses limites, de surmonter les crises, de trouver des solutions. Nous avons, nous, quelque chose de rare peut-être dans l'univers: de l'imagination. Nous savons manier la poésie, la parole, la sensibilité artistique. Pourquoi ne pas trouver aussi des réponses politiques aux crises, qui sont de plus en plus difficiles?

Plusieurs de mes pièces ont comme sujet les Balkans, les problèmes des Balkans, mais aussi les dilemmes historiques de certaines régions. Parce que les problèmes ont des solutions, mais les dilemmes, eux, n'en ont pas. D'ailleurs, c'est le théâtre grec antique qui a été le premier à mettre sur scène les débats autour des dilemmes. Je sais que l'une de mes pièces, *Pourquoi Hécube*, a été présentée ici, dans ce cadre. Et ce n'est pas la seule pièce que j'ai écrite inspirée par la mythologie grecque et par le théâtre grec.

En ce moment, je vous parle de Bucarest. Je suis venue en Roumanie pour voir l'une de mes pièces inspirée de *Lysistrata* d'Aristophane — quelle pièce incroyable sur la guerre, sur le rôle des femmes! J'ai réécrit, disons, d'une manière ludique, comme un hommage, l'histoire de *Lysistrata*, avec un accent sur les guerres d'aujourd'hui. Cette pièce s'appelle *Lysistrata, mon amour*, et je l'ai vue, il y a quelques jours, en Roumanie. Un grand merci encore à Ersi Vasilikioti, qui a monté plusieurs de mes pièces en Grèce, à Thessalonique.

J'ai eu ma pièce *Le mot « progrès » dans la bouche de ma mère sonnait terriblement faux*. C'est une pièce où je parle de la douleur de la guerre et aussi de ce mot « progrès ». Quel sens a encore ce mot? Cette pièce se joue en ce moment aussi au Théâtre National de Bucarest. J'ai créé une autre pièce sur les Balkans, sur les guerres fratricides, sur la guerre de Bosnie, où j'ai voulu que les femmes parlent de la guerre. C'est une pièce qu'ils appellent *La femme comme champ de bataille*.

J'ai toujours cru que, par le théâtre, la poésie, la parole, on avance dans la compréhension des choses. On peut devenir meilleur, bien sûr, mais l'art, c'est

aussi une forme de connaissance. Se connaître mieux, connaître l'autre, déchiffrer plus profondément l'histoire. Alors, je reste peut-être dans l'utopie de celle qui croit que nous avons encore un mot à dire. Tous ensemble, c'est sûr, nous allons avoir un peu plus de poids, comme c'est le cas aujourd'hui avec l'Union européenne, qui doit se réveiller d'un long sommeil et comprendre des choses essentielles. La liberté, il faut la défendre avec la parole, avec la culture, avec l'économie, mais aussi avec la force militaire.

Ce n'est pas pour rien que ma pièce sur *Lysistrata* est jouée en ce moment en Roumanie, parce qu'on a l'impression que, depuis deux mille cinq cents ans, quelque chose n'a pas changé. Je voudrais aussi vous dire que j'apprécie énormément les liens qui vont nous permettre de mieux nous connaître. J'ai écrit une pièce qui s'appelle justement *Occident Express*, où je ridiculise un peu cette obsession que nous avons de dévorer tout ce qui vient du monde anglo-saxon, tout ce qui vient de Netflix, tout ce qui vient de cette machine à rêves qu'est Hollywood.

Nous pouvons créer notre propre machine à rêves, parce que l'Europe, c'est vraiment la chose la plus intéressante qui soit arrivée à l'humanité depuis qu'elle essaie de trouver des solutions. Alors, moi, je peux me décliner en tant que Roumaine, je suis aussi Française, je suis aussi un esprit balkanique. Je suis aussi Européenne et citoyenne du monde. Restons des citoyens qui s'intéressent les uns aux autres.

Dr. Handan Salta

Theatre critic, literature researcher, and lecturer at the University of Istanbul

It is time for the theater community to share its common values with the public, fostering a regional culture of artistic solidarity, intellectual connection, and mutual safety. Human beings have been dealing with the same problems for centuries and could not reach a better state of mind yet. That's why we keep on going back to old resources to nurture our thought. In this era of disappointment at what we did to each other and all other living beings, we need to remember former perspectives which we can always learn from. Placed in the very centre of Western world, classical narratives await to be reread, re-evaluated so as to form a mutual field of understanding.

Brought up with similar stories, having borrowed traditions, words, food from each other, we, inhabitants and artists from Balkan countries, can create an atmosphere to breathe in with a glimpse of hope for today and for ourselves. Starting with themes concerning today's issues, plays, dance performances, storytelling sessions can be devised with the participation of actors, directors, playwrights from across the Balkan countries. The topics must be meaningful and impactful, designed to foster cross-cultural awareness and spark a collective awakening.

ESTABLISHING A BALKAN NETWORK OF PERFORMING ARTS: TERMS AND CONDITIONS

ANDREAS MARKANTONATOS

Vice-President and Founding member of the Inter-Balkan Network of Culture, Art, and Education
Director of the MA Programme in Performing Arts, Hellenic Open University
Professor, Department of Philology, University of the Peloponnese, Greece
Member of the Honorary Advisory Board of *Concept* academic journal

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Abstract: The establishment of a Balkan Network of Cooperation in the Performing Arts has the potential to be a transformative initiative, uniting artists across borders while strengthening cultural diplomacy, innovation, and international recognition. By fostering collaboration, securing sustainable funding, and embracing digital tools, the network could serve as a platform for artistic excellence and cross-cultural dialogue. With the collective commitment of artists, institutions, and policymakers, the Balkans could emerge as a thriving and unified force in the global performing arts scene, demonstrating that beyond political and historical divisions art remains a powerful medium of connection, shared heritage, and mutual understanding.

Keywords: Balkan Region (South-Eastern Europe), Interbalkan Network of Culture, Art and Education, objectives, organisational structure, long-term financial support, collaborative opportunities, policy advocacy and cultural diplomacy, long-term sustainability, strategic planning.

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The Balkan region, a historical crossroads of cultures and civilisations, boasts a rich and diverse performing arts heritage. Each nation within the region has developed its unique artistic traditions, yet the interconnectedness of cultural expressions across borders is undeniable. Despite this wealth of artistic potential, cooperation in the performing arts remains fragmented, often hindered by political divisions, logistical barriers, and insufficient institutional support. A formalised Balkan Network of Cooperation in the Performing Arts would serve as a catalyst for artistic mobility, cultural diplomacy, and innovation, enabling collaboration between artists, institutions, and policymakers while fostering a shared cultural identity. Such a network would not only strengthen artistic ties across the region but also provide Balkan artists with greater visibility on the international stage. This essay explores the necessary steps for establishing such a network, focusing on structural organisation, funding strategies, collaborative opportunities, policy advocacy, digital integration, and long-term sustainability.

A well-functioning network must first establish **clear objectives and scope** to ensure its effectiveness. The network should primarily aim to enhance artistic exchange by creating opportunities for cross-border performances, co-productions, and artist residencies. Through these initiatives, artists and institutions could integrate diverse Balkan traditions while pushing the boundaries of contemporary artistic expression. Additionally, the network should facilitate educational and training programmes, offering workshops, masterclasses, and mentorship opportunities for emerging artists. Beyond fostering creative

collaboration, the network must also advocate for stronger policy support from national governments and international cultural organisations, ensuring that performing arts in the Balkans receive adequate funding and recognition. A central goal should be to improve access to financial resources for independent artists, particularly those from underfunded sectors. The scope of the network should be inclusive, incorporating theatre, dance, opera, musical theatre, and contemporary performance practices, while respecting both traditional and avant-garde forms of expression.

To function effectively, the network must adopt **a robust organisational structure** that ensures transparency, efficiency, and equal representation across all participating countries. A central coordinating body should be established to oversee administration, fundraising, and strategic planning. This entity could be headquartered in a neutral Balkan city with strong artistic infrastructure, such as Belgrade, Sofia, or Thessaloniki. To ensure decentralised participation, regional hubs should be set up in major artistic centres such as Athens, Tirana, Sarajevo, Skopje, and Zagreb, each facilitating local engagement and supporting initiatives within their respective cultural communities. An advisory board composed of prominent artists, cultural policymakers, and academic experts should provide strategic guidance, helping the network remain relevant and adaptive to the changing artistic landscape. Furthermore, the network should operate on a membership system, welcoming theatres, festivals, conservatories, and independent arts organisations, as well as individual artists. To maintain democratic governance, an annual general assembly should be held, allowing members to propose initiatives, review progress, and collectively shape the direction of the network.

One of the greatest challenges in sustaining such a network lies in **securing long-term financial support**. A sustainable funding model must be developed, drawing from diverse sources. European Union cultural programmes, such as *Creative Europe* and *Erasmus+*, provide grants for cross-border artistic collaborations and would be a crucial source of initial funding. National governments could also play a role in co-financing projects that enhance regional artistic cooperation. In addition to public funding, the network should seek partnerships with private sponsors, cultural foundations, and philanthropic organisations invested in the development of performing arts. To diversify revenue streams, the network could establish a hybrid model incorporating crowdfunding initiatives and a membership fee system, where institutions contribute financially while offering subsidised access to independent artists. A co-production funding model could also be implemented, whereby multiple institutions across different Balkan countries pool resources to develop joint artistic productions.

A vital aspect of the network's success would be its ability to **foster meaningful collaborative opportunities** among artists and institutions. An annual Balkan Performing Arts Festival could serve as the flagship event, rotating among different host cities each year and showcasing co-productions, cross-border performances, and experimental artistic projects. In addition to large-scale festivals, the network should facilitate year-round artist residencies and exchange programmes, enabling performers, directors, and choreographers to work in different Balkan countries and engage with local artistic communities. Touring productions would also be instrumental in bringing Balkan performances to broader audiences, helping to cultivate regional artistic appreciation. Training and capacity-building initiatives should complement these efforts, offering specialised workshops, dramaturgical laboratories, and skill development programmes for emerging talents. Digital platforms could further enhance these collaborations by providing virtual masterclasses, live-streamed performances, and online forums for creative exchange, thus ensuring accessibility even for artists in more remote locations.

Beyond artistic collaborations, the network must also **engage in policy advocacy and cultural diplomacy**. Strengthening institutional support for performing arts in the Balkans requires engagement with policymakers at both national and international levels. One priority should be to secure easier visa and travel regulations for artists moving within the region, removing bureaucratic obstacles that hinder artistic mobility. Additionally, the network should promote arts education and advocate for increased public funding, ensuring that performing arts remain a cultural priority within national budgets. Establishing formal cultural agreements between governments would facilitate deeper cooperation between institutions and encourage long-term investment in regional artistic collaboration. By aligning with organisations such as UNESCO, the European Cultural Foundation, and regional arts councils, the network could leverage existing policy frameworks to advocate for the performing arts as a crucial sector in the Balkans' socio-economic and cultural development.

In an increasingly digital world, the network must **embrace technology and media to expand its reach and visibility**. A centralised digital platform should be created to promote events, facilitate networking, and provide access to funding opportunities. A strong social media presence would help build engagement, allowing artists and audiences to interact dynamically with the network's activities. Live-streamed performances, digital archives, and interactive discussions could further enhance the region's artistic accessibility, providing a means for Balkan artists to connect with global audiences. A dedicated online archive documenting Balkan performing arts history—featuring digitised plays, dance performances, and interviews—would serve as both an educational

resource and a tool for cultural preservation. By leveraging digital innovation, the network could transcend physical borders and establish itself as a vital hub for artistic exchange.

Ensuring the **long-term sustainability** of the network will require continuous adaptation and strategic planning. Regular evaluation mechanisms should be implemented, with annual reviews assessing the network's impact and refining its strategies based on feedback. Financial sustainability should remain a key priority, with diversified funding sources reducing dependence on a single revenue stream. Encouraging new leadership by engaging younger generations of artists and cultural managers will also be crucial in maintaining the network's dynamism. Ultimately, the network's success will depend on its ability to remain responsive to the evolving artistic landscape while upholding its core mission of fostering regional collaboration.

To sum up, the establishment of a Balkan Network of Cooperation in the Performing Arts has the potential to be a transformative initiative, uniting artists across borders while strengthening cultural diplomacy, innovation, and international recognition. By fostering collaboration, securing sustainable funding, and embracing digital tools, the network could serve as a platform for artistic excellence and cross-cultural dialogue. With the collective commitment of artists, institutions, and policymakers, the Balkans could emerge as a thriving and unified force in the global performing arts scene, demonstrating that beyond political and historical divisions art remains a powerful medium of connection, shared heritage, and mutual understanding.

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CREATION OF AN INTER-BALKAN PERFORMING ARTS NETWORK: A PRESSING NEED OF OUR TIME

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Abstract: Establishing a performing arts network in the Balkan region is as essential for regional development, social cohesion, and cultural exchange, leveraging the area's rich multicultural heritage to foster intercultural dialogue and support artists. While such a network could stimulate cultural tourism, it faces significant challenges including economic disparities, political tensions, differing national priorities, and the risk of art commercialization. The paper argues that, despite these complexities, a unified network is necessary to keep the Balkan cultural sector aligned with broader European developments.

Keywords: Balkan Region (South-Eastern Europe), cultural heritage, artistic exchange, cultural tourism, economic challenges (funding and resources), political tensions, cultural policy, European Union (synergy/integration).

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The establishment of a performing arts network in the Balkan region, which essentially covers most of South-Eastern Europe, is a prospect which seems to be turning into an urgent need for the maintenance of good neighborliness and constructive exchange of cultural and civil elements and, by extension, for the further development of the region, so that it does not fall behind the developments brought about by the systematic operation of the European Union (EU), at an economic, social and political level.

The Balkan region, with its rich cultural heritage and intense multiculturalism as a characteristic element of its historical journey, but also the simultaneous economic and political challenges it has always faced, which culminated in the last century and the beginning of the present century, is an extremely interesting region at all levels. With all the ferment and changes that have taken place, with the political - especially - and ideological changes in the systems of governance, as well as the changes that these events have brought about in everyday life and with a *modus vivendi* that has been shaped, through them, in the new 'reality' of the Balkan countries, it certainly does not go unnoticed in the history of the world community.

The establishment of a cultural network in this region, besides being a possibility seems to be essential and becomes necessary for the development in the field of culture for a comprehensive and unified Balkan cultural development. However, the creation of such an essential, as we have pointed out, network is clearly governed by a number of both positive and negative elements and implications.

Positive elements include cultural heritage and diversity in cultural and heritage elements. The wider Balkan region is characterized by a rich cultural heritage which includes music, dance, theatre, visual arts and all forms of art and techniques. The establishment of a performing arts network could enhance the promotion of this heritage, promote artistic exchange and even lead to the creation of a platform which could contribute drastically to the preservation and innovation in the field of art and performing arts.

Intercultural dialogue and cooperation. The aforementioned multiculturalism that runs through the history of the region, with populations belonging to different nationalities, religions and language groups could, through the creation of such a Network, act as a bridge for intercultural dialogue, promoting concepts and practices for a fuller understanding and preservation of peace in the region through humanist models and the benefits of similar practices and influences that arise through art.

Moreover, the strengthening of social cohesion is another positive extension that could benefit from the establishment of the Network under discussion and exploration. Art can be, and has been proven to be, in most cases, a powerful tool for strengthening social cohesion and addressing social problems such as unemployment or social exclusion. In the context of the operation of a Performing Arts Network, for example, programs could be created and operated which would also address vulnerable groups, using art as a means of expression and strengthening social cohesion, with the integration of these groups through the various programs and activities leading to the normalization of any differences with other social groups.

It also becomes an incubator for creating opportunities for artists. Many talented artists in the region face difficulties in accessing international markets or some kind of funding both locally and internationally. Such a network could provide the framework for claiming resources in terms of money and logistical infrastructure through synergy in claiming ERDF-type cross-border support programs such as interreg or Creative Europe, training, support and opportunities for partnerships, helping artists to develop and gain exposure.

Strengthening the promotion of the Balkan languages through the production and realization of works from the repertoire (past and present) of each Balkan country with simultaneous translation projects, with the aim of bringing the Balkan people closer to each other.

The creation of a Network of this kind could attract “cultural travelers”, enhancing the local culture, the local economy and the general image of the area benefiting from participation in the Network. The Balkan Peninsula is already of tourist interest due to its natural beauty and history and the establishment of

a Performing Arts Network with the possible actions and festivals that could be created and operated in the context of cooperation and exchanges, both between the participating institutions and autonomous artistic entities, could potentially be an additional attractive element for cultural tourism in the region.

Clearly, in such an undertaking there can't help but be potential difficulties in various areas, starting with the financial sector and any financial challenges arising from its possible creation. Several of the Balkan countries are facing economic difficulties which inevitably lead to a cultural policy which is pursued with limited resources for all cultural and heritage activities. The establishment and more importantly the maintenance of such a network requires significant and continuous periodic funding, which is probably not available in some of the potential member countries of such a network. The decisive intervention and internal funding of such a project is necessary even in the case of other sources of funds such as any funding programs, possible sponsorships and donations as well as possible own income.

The scope of possible political conditions and the possible contradictions or socio-political reality of each potential member country is also considered crucial. This region has a complex political history, with tensions and conflicts in the distant and more recent past. Political differences between countries could create potential obstacles to both cooperation and other processes and thus to the final implementation of such a project.

Another potential sticking point is the literary and cultural disparity between the neighboring countries. The Balkan countries have different levels of cultural development in terms of artistic activity, cultural policy and cultural infrastructure background in all areas. Some countries are superior in several of the above-mentioned areas, with better infrastructure, more opportunities and more positive attitude in relation to the cultural agenda and political treatment of the whole cultural field, while others with different political treatment in this area may not be able to contribute equally to the creation of such a network, creating inequalities among potential neighbors.

In all of the above, different cultural priorities play an important role. There is no certainty that all countries will give the same priority to an action concerning the performing arts and the creation of a multi-layered network for the development and exchange of cultural and cultural elements related to this field. Some are likely to focus on other areas, such as economic development or education, seeking upgrading in different areas depending on the priorities and imperatives of the political situation and the given historical context, reducing the chances of committing resources and energy to such an undertaking.

To the possible negative effects of the mentioned project could be added the risk of a negligent commercialization of Art and specifically of the actions produced in the context of the operation of such a network. It is always possible in such cases that there is a risk of art being commercialized, with the emphasis of the participants being placed more on financial profitability than on artistic value. If such a possibility were to develop into a real and existing condition, it would be capable of undermining the authenticity and quality of the works and the intentions of the participants on an individual collective and national level.

Despite any positive or negative effects, the establishment of a performing arts network in the Balkans has the potential to be an important tool for promoting cultural heritage, strengthening the economy and promoting social cohesion. However, the economic, political and cultural challenges of the region require careful planning and creative ongoing cooperation between the representatives and political forces of all the countries. If there is adequate support and commitment from all sides, the realization of such a network could be achieved and could serve as an important pillar of cultural development in South-Eastern Europe, i.e. our neighbor, the Balkans.

Its realization requires a strategic approach that takes into account the cultural, economic and political contemporary reality of the wider region. Thessaloniki, as one of the largest and culturally important cities in the region, could potentially be the ideal focus for such an action. Some suggested ways of implementation and the reasons why Thessaloniki could be the ideal choice as a location or focal point for such an action are examined below.

The reasons why Thessaloniki could be the ideal reference center for this action are several and important. To summarize, we could focus on the most essential ones.

The first is the historical, political and cultural importance of the city for the wider Balkan Peninsula region. Its deep historical and cultural heritage which established it as one of the most important cities of the Byzantine Empire and an important center of Hellenism, playing a catalytic role in the cultural life of the region. In addition, the city of Thessaloniki has a strong tradition in the performing arts, especially with the State Theatre of Northern Greece and its pluralistic production, the other private theatres, the Concert Hall and the Concert Hall, the dance companies and the tradition of dance which culminated with Daniel Lomel's Aenao Dance Theatre and later with the takeover of the city's dance theatre by Konstantinos Rigos, who is now the artistic director of the Experimental Stage of the Greek Lyric Stage, the State Orchestra and the Thessaloniki State Conservatory, musical groups and artistic groups from the performing arts field.

The second important reason is also its privileged geographical location. Thessaloniki is located in the center of the Balkans, with easy access to and from all the surrounding countries. This central location makes it an ideal meeting and exchange point for artists and cultural institutions in the context of a cultural network.

Another reason that makes it an ideal choice is the timeless multicultural element and social context for which it stands out and stands out. The city has a multicultural identity, with influences from Hellenism, Ottoman culture, Jewish culture and other cultures and cultural entities that have shaped its particular palimpsest of character. This diversity makes it an ideal space for intercultural dialogue and artistic expression in all areas of the performing arts field.

It also has a sufficient number of existing cultural infrastructures which belong mainly to the above-mentioned cultural institutions but also a plethora of other infrastructures such as the large open and closed theatres of the Municipality of Thessaloniki and the neighboring municipalities which form the urban complex of the city, existing structures which were inherited from the period of the Olympic Games, potentially exploitable cultural archaeological sites, museums, etc.

The city also has an important academic and artistic community, being home to major universities and important art schools, offering a dynamic academic and artistic framework that could substantially support the work of a cultural network of this kind.

Finally, there is the not inconsiderable symbolic importance of the city's leading position in a central role in the operation of the network, which makes it an ideal choice. As a city that has been a bridge between East and West, it adds an essential symbolic note to an initiative that aims and concerns the strengthening of cultural unity and cooperation between the countries of the region, leading once again to the creation of a cultural and civilizational bridge that will contribute to harmonious coexistence, good neighborliness, peace and development in various sectors of the wider troubled region.

The ways in which this action could be implemented are many and varied, but all of them require synergy and comprehensive communication as well as substantial consultation of the potential members of the proposed network.

Its practical implementation could, for example, be achieved through the creation of a funded cooperative body. This body could be created in a cooperative approach such as the one we propose, with the participation of state and non-state actors, cultural organizations and educational institutions as well as the assistance of political forces and institutions from the interested countries of the Balkan region.

The financial participation as well as the support at the logistical and infrastructure level could be shared among all the member countries and operate by the rotation method according to the capabilities that each country has during its period of operation within the cooperative. Such cooperation could be supported and sustainable only within an institutionally supported framework, with the support of the existing political and social forces through a series of cultural practices and initiatives with the prospect of its expansion and enrichment with new actions and practices which would strengthen its role in the overall creation of cultural development and synergies with the ultimate goal of the harmonious joint development and evolution of a homogeneous cultural and cultural identity of the participants without, however, losing the uniqueness and particularities of each existing culture.

One of the safest and most likely sustainable future practices for the establishment of the mentioned network that our conference is concerned with is the continuous funding from European and International Programs to strengthen synergies between different countries in the field of culture. Such a source of funding could come from existing European programs, such as Creative Europe, the more specialized for the Balkan region, Interreg or from international organizations that support cultural development. Also, private sponsors, possible donations from institutions and individuals, actions to collect resources through grab funding as well as non-profit organizations that are active in the field of culture and international social cohesion could contribute.

An important action for the better functioning and sustainability of such an undertaking could be the creation of cultural centers and spaces with continuous operation, in various cities of the Balkans, with Thessaloniki functioning as a central hub. These centers could host performances, exhibitions, workshops and educational programs throughout the year with the aim of collecting financial resources from tickets, maintaining and maintaining continuous action and contact as well as continuous exchanges on a smaller scale, with the aim of ultimately holding an annual or biennial festival where the overall activity of the network's operation will culminate and its members will meet in a creative process of presenting all artistic actions, the holding of conferences and workshops for a more holistic and theoretical approach will be implemented and finally the purpose and objectives related to its establishment will be completed. The organization of such a festival on a permanent basis within the framework of the network based in Thessaloniki and the rotation of its holding in a different member country of the network each time could strengthen the institution to attract artists and spectators from across the region and abroad, making the network's actions an

important international event and an important act for achieving a substantial globalization of culture.

It could also prove helpful, for the sustainability and smooth functioning of the network, to create a digital platform that would enhance communication and collaboration between artists and organizations or the various participating bodies. This platform could include digital exhibitions, online workshops, presentation and advertising of the network's actions and events, as well as a database for its overall forest, artists and their work, highlighting the artistic forces of each country that could potentially become future partners of the Network and other important functions.

In conclusion, the creation of a trans-Balkan performing arts network based in Thessaloniki could be an initiative that will strengthen the cultural identity of the region, promote intercultural dialogue and create new opportunities for artists, institutions and communities. With the right support and cooperation, this action could be a significant cultural driving force for Southeastern Europe and more specifically our “neighborhood”, the Balkans.

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THEATRE AND COMMUNITY IN TRANSITION: TOWARD A COHESIVE BALKAN ARTISTIC VISION

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Abstract: In an epoch marked by extraordinary diversity and complexity, which demand the forging of alliances, partnerships, collaborations, and cooperative endeavors, it is incumbent upon us to identify and implement practical mechanisms to connect, convene, co-create, and engage, transcending the confines of isolated national identities. The author argues for establishing a robust, collaborative theatrical network across the Balkan region to act as a “bastion of resistance”, moving beyond national isolation and prioritizing interregional creative exchange rooted in the region’s diverse cultural identities, led by participatory models rather than hierarchical management. The author also suggests forming a mixed committee of theatrical professionals to draft a program and organize a pilot festival to demonstrate the value of regional collaboration.

Keywords: Balkan Region (South-Eastern Europe), cultural heritage, Interbalkan Network of Culture, Art, and Education, connection, creative engagement, interregional creative partnerships, untapped historical, social, and cultural resources, international visibility.

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We live in an era characterized by rapid and unprecedented transformation. While change has always been an inherent feature of human history, the velocity and scale of contemporary developments are unparalleled. This reality necessitates that we adapt with equal urgency, actively engaging with the evolving landscape rather than remaining passive observers.

In this context, the concept of “CONNECT” assumes paramount importance. Our current epoch is marked by extraordinary diversity and complexity, which demand the forging of alliances, partnerships, collaborations, and cooperative endeavors. It is incumbent upon us to identify and implement practical mechanisms to connect, convene, co-create, and engage, transcending the confines of isolated national identities.

It is imperative that we critically examine the role of theatre as a bastion of resistance against the pervasive forces of neoliberal economic paradigms and the impersonal logic of technocratic governance. This calls for a systematic reflection on theatre’s function within its immediate community and its relationship with the broader constellation of communities in the region.

A foundational inquiry must be posed:

- What constitutes a Balkan community?
- What values define it?
- Who are its constituents?

- Is homogeneity a necessary condition for community? If not, how should heterogeneity be understood?
- Within a heterogeneous community, can a genuine sense of belonging be cultivated?
- Are moral and ethical bonds indispensable to the community's existence?

These are not merely theoretical questions but pressing concerns with direct relevance to our region's sociocultural fabric. Although complex and challenging, they conceal invaluable resources that, if harnessed, could inspire theatres across the Balkans to create distinctive and meaningful works. Such works would revolve around shared themes and foster an atmosphere of open, constructive dialogue.

I underscore this point because, despite geographical proximity, there exists a surprising paucity of mutual understanding among our communities. There is a tendency to seek inspiration predominantly from Western European theatrical traditions, often overlooking the rich, historically and ethnographically intricate theatrical realities within our own region. For instance, the vibrant and politically charged theatre of Belgrade, or the innovative experimental works emerging in Athens, Sofia or Bucharest, to name just a few, are fertile grounds for creative exchange.

Our region is characterized by commonalities that far surpass our differences. Nonetheless, these differences themselves serve as fertile soil for reflection, critical examination, and artistic innovation. Theatre that seeks only uniformity risks stagnation. Indeed, diversity enriches creative expression.

In this age marked by the formation of alliances and collaborations across multiple sectors, we have yet to fully cultivate a robust and productive network of interregional theatrical partnerships. All too often, we remain unaware of one another's ongoing projects, achievements, and challenges.

Hence, a critical challenge confronts us: to redefine and revitalize our relationship with the broader Balkan neighborhood. We must establish a common platform for reflection, discussion, exchange, co-creation, and gathering, a platform that, through its artistic and intellectual endeavors, genuinely addresses and includes all communities.

The road ahead will undoubtedly be arduous. Thus, a concerted creative collaboration is required to persuade governmental leadership, relevant ministries, and principal funding bodies of the necessity and value of this initiative. Success will depend upon our ability to demonstrate, through carefully designed programs, clearly articulated objectives, rigorous academic research, and exemplary artistic

output, that collaboration among regional theatres and their communities is not optional, but essential.

It is imperative to recognize that European theatre is not solely the province of northern countries. Our region boasts remarkable artistic talent and harbors untapped historical, social, and cultural resources. For example, the rich folk traditions of Bulgaria and North Macedonia, the multicultural influences evident in Romanian and Serbian theatre, and the contemporary performance art emerging from most Balkan cities all represent assets that could be mobilized through this initiative to yield significant social and artistic contributions, while also enhancing international visibility.

To transform this vision into reality, immediate coordination is essential. The valuable deliberations of this meeting must result in sustained, concrete actions. The era of centralized, top-down leadership has passed. The multicultural and multifaceted nature of contemporary society demands more adaptable, inclusive, and participatory artistic leadership.

We must embrace the concept of “the many who shape” rather than the singular leader. We must progress:

- From power dynamics to empowered participation.
- From individual vision to shared vision.
- From discussion to dialogue.
- From mere information sharing to collective knowledge creation.
- From unilateral decision-making to thoughtful contemplation.
- From rigid goal-setting to adherence to core values and collective vision.
- From a hierarchical model of change to one that acknowledges change can emerge from any level.
- From exclusive binary thinking to inclusive, pluralistic approaches.

Finally, I wish to stress the distinction between management and leadership. While management, entailing planning, resource allocation, and organization, is necessary, at this juncture, I propose the formation of a mixed committee comprising theorists, practitioners, leaders, and managers from the theatrical sector. This committee would be tasked with developing a preliminary program draft, outlining objectives and methodologies, and potentially organizing an inaugural festival as a pilot project.

In conclusion, I hope that the discussions in this first meeting will bear fruitful results and set the foundation for sustained collaboration. I eagerly anticipate the opportunity to join you in person and continue this vital endeavor.

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HECUBA IN THE BALKANS. MATEI VIȘNIEC'S HECUBA. A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract: The dramaturgy of recent decades has presented a multitude of works that engage in dialogue with ancient Greek tragedies, offering new interpretive perspectives, and highlighting their hidden meanings. Intertextuality functions as a key indicator of the reception of ancient tragedy by contemporary playwrights, who transcribe and transform the ancient myth into new theatrical texts, adapted to modern aesthetic and new ideological approaches. The paper focuses on Euripides' tragedy *Hecuba* and on the impact that this heroine continues to have to this day, as she has exerted significant influence on a wide range of writers since antiquity. We examine the archetype of Hecuba, the authors and works that have been influenced by this specific archetype. We also investigate the influence of Euripides' *Hecuba* on the work of the Franco-Romanian playwright Matei Vişniec, *Why Hecuba?*, and we search for the similarities and differences between the ancient tragedy and the contemporary work.

Keywords: Greek theatre, Euripides, Romanian theatre, Matei Vişniec, comparative study.

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Introduction

The study of ancient Greek tragedies, which mark the beginning of world theatre and the point at which myth acquired its tragic dimension, may create the impression that the birth of tragedy simultaneously signified its peak or perfection. This occurs because these works address fundamental issues of life and human existence in a manner that appears holistic. However, this view does not fully correspond to reality. Each historical period is characterized by its own particular conditions and priorities, a fact that leads to the continuous evolution and adaptation of art to the demands of the era in which it is created. The reason for the transformation of art lies in the fact that whatever remains unchanged risks being lost, while the adaptation of an artistic work entails inevitable changes both in its form and in its function, so that it may be integrated into a new environment (Patsalidis, 2013, pp. 143–166). This also applies to ancient Greek tragedy, which is reshaped according to the time and place in which it is revived. These changes are reflected both in the manner of its stage presentation and in its dramaturgical treatment, through adaptations and rewritings.

According to Jauss, reception theory examines the meaning of a work from two perspectives. On the one hand, the text itself shapes its meaning based on the horizon of expectations of each recipient, which is defined spatially and temporally. On the other hand, meaning changes as it is reinterpreted by later readers, among whom contemporary writers are also included, resulting in the

latter drawing elements from earlier works and adapting them to the historical, social, and political context of their own era (Jauss, 1995, pp. 93–107). Through this process, intertextuality functions as a key indicator of the reception of ancient tragedy by contemporary playwrights, who transcribe and transform the ancient myth into new theatrical texts, incorporating modern aesthetic and ideological approaches. More specifically, the dramaturgy of recent decades has presented a multitude of works that engage in dialogue with ancient Greek tragedies, offering new interpretive perspectives, broadening the ways in which they are received, and highlighting their hidden meanings.

The present study will focus on Euripides' tragedy *Hecuba* and on the impact that this particular heroine continues to have to this day, as she has exerted significant influence on a wide range of writers since antiquity. Initially, we will examine the archetype of Hecuba and then seek out the authors and works that have been influenced by this specific archetype. In particular, we will investigate the influence of Euripides' *Hecuba* on the work of the Franco-Romanian playwright Matei Vişniec, *Why Hecuba?*, and we will focus on the similarities and differences between the ancient tragedy and the contemporary work.

The archetype of Hecuba from antiquity to the 20th century

Intertextuality functions as a mechanism for interpreting new elements that appear and are incorporated into a new work, which is based primarily on data from a preceding one (Kraias, 2023, pp. 19–21). Philosophers, semioticians, and linguists have included intertext within the “theory of borrowings and interactions,” treating it as a textual whole. In this way, the intertextual perspective of a text should be studied through the fundamental areas of writing, revealing the inner, archetypal myth that bridges the past with the present and space with time (Kosmopoulou, 2020, pp. 101–103).

As a term, intertext can define the transformation of one system of signifiers into another and denotes the dialogical relationship between texts, which are either incorporated or transformed while simultaneously preserving the ideology and character of the original text (Kristeva, 1969, p. 85). The new text is situated in a beyond that confirms the diachronic nature of the original, as it brings back to the foreground material that is recorded as original and archetypal (Kosmopoulou, 2020, pp. 101–103). The primordial type, which is shaped through a specific sequence—event → example → symbolization of the event → archetype—acquires a distinctive position in space and time, as it is transformed into a symbol and established at the highest level of creation (Kosmopoulou, 2017, pp. 12–13).

degradation to the harsh reality of a slave. Her figure symbolizes the fragility of human fate and the renegotiation of the concept of power and loss (Knox, 1979, p. 297). All of the above constitute the deeper reasons why the figure of the shattered queen who is transmuted into an “avenger” survived in dramaturgy and literature from late antiquity onward (Mastronarde, 2010, pp. 118–120).

Adaptation aims to respond to the expectations of a new audience and cannot be a mere transcription or translation of the source text; rather, it must constitute a deepening by the new author, who engages in a complex and continuous dialogue with the conceptual world and the values espoused by the original text, as well as with the particularities of the audience they face and seek to satisfy (Γραμματάς [Grammatas], 2004, pp. 18–21). Characteristically, Seneca, in his play *Troades*, created his own Hecuba, in which the presence of the motif of revenge becomes even more intense, as the heroine becomes almost demonic, giving a darker hue to the archetype of the shattered mother (Mastronarde, 2010, pp. 118–120; Henry, 1988, pp. 44–52; Easterling & Knox, 2005, pp. 450–451). During the same period, Ovid also makes references to Hecuba in his *Metamorphoses* (Henry, 1988, p. 44), where Hecuba appears as the grieving mother (*mater dolorosa*) (Fanham, 2004–2005, p. 114).

In the sixteenth century, interest in the Trojan War was rekindled among many writers, who sought there a connection between the origins of the Tudors and the Trojans (Westney, 1984, p. 436). In the poetry collection *Mirror of the Magistrates*, the story of Hecuba is retold, where she is likewise presented in the role of the shattered mother, and her role functions as a “mirror” of the Tudor legacy, reflecting elements inherent in every human being (Westney, 1984, pp. 442–444). The story of Hecuba’s vengeful “madness” was already known before Shakespeare’s time and is mentioned by Peele in his poem *The Tale of Troy* and in Marlowe’s play *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (Westney, 1984, p. 447).

Shakespeare refers to both qualities attributed to Hecuba: that of the grieving mother in his poem *The Rape of Lucrece* (Westney, 1984, pp. 449–451; Cap-Bun, 2016, p. 113; Pollard, 2012, p. 1075; Πιπινιά [Pipinia], 2002, p. 6), and that of the vengeful mother in his dramatic work *Cymbeline*. It is also very likely that he makes another reference in *Titus Andronicus*, when he refers to the “shattered” queen and later in the same play explicitly mentions her name (Westney, 1984, p. 456; Pollard, 2012, pp. 1074–1075). Undoubtedly, Shakespeare’s most significant reference to Hecuba occurs in *Hamlet*, where Hamlet asks the actor to recount the story of Hecuba and the anger she expresses toward Pyrrhus, who killed Priam—a tale that impresses Hamlet deeply (Pollard, 2012, p. 1084; Cap-Bun, 2016, pp. 114–115; Πιπινιά [Pipinia], 2002, p. 6). His humanist education, however, leads him to question the legitimacy of revenge, and it also shows that Shakespeare is

familiar with the work of Euripides, as he uses the device of the ghost in a similar way (Cap-Bun, 2016, pp. 114–115). Hamlet realizes the contrast between his own mother and the ideal mother for him—Hecuba—and decides to punish his own mother. In this way, Shakespeare projects the archetypal myth of Hecuba, which for him reflects elements of the real world (Cap-Bun, 2016, pp. 115–116).

In contemporary literature and dramaturgy, such a powerful archetype could not possibly fade into oblivion. Thus, in 1965 Hecuba inspired Sartre to write a play in which he develops the theme of the destructive nature of war through the eyes of Hecuba and the women of Troy and projects his nihilistic vision (Ντραγκλίτσα [Draglitsa], 2024, pp. 1–15; Goldhill, 2007, pp. 134–137; Πιπινιά [Pipinia], 2002, p. 7). Beyond being a literary archetype, Hecuba is also a powerful symbol of female endurance and social injustice, something that becomes evident in contemporary theatrical revivals of the work, which emphasize its feminist and political dimensions by approaching this character as a female figure who resists oppression and violence. In many cases, contemporary adaptations treat Hecuba as a refugee and a victim of war, making her particularly relevant to today's sociopolitical reality (Goldhill, 2007, pp. 134–137).

In the twenty-first century, Hecuba continues to inspire and impress playwrights, who often incorporate contemporary reality into the archetypal myth. Characteristically, the Portuguese Tiago Rodrigues created the play *Hecuba, not Hecuba*, which integrates contemporary issues into tragedy, producing a timeless effect (Κούκα [Kouka], 2024; Αντωνόπουλος [Antonopoulos], 2024). The Greek writer Vangelis Hatzigiannidis offered a different perspective on Hecuba with his work *Εγώ, η δούλα* [I, the Slave], in which he deconstructs the heroine and her vengeful frenzy through the monologue of a woman from the chorus, bearing characteristics similar to those of Hecuba after her enslavement by the Achaeans (Δούλος [Doulos], 2024).

Euripides' *Hecuba*

The period in which Euripides lived and wrote was characterized by the teachings of the Sophists, with the result that many of their ideas are reflected in his work (Romilly, 1997, p. 133; Νίτσε [Nietzsche], 2008, p. 132). Moreover, it should not be forgotten that Euripides experienced the humiliation of Athens following its defeat in the Peloponnesian War, a fact that also had a significant influence on his choice of themes, the treatment of the subjects in his tragedies, and the way his characters, including Hecuba, confront one another (Ευριπίδης [Euripides], 1994a, p. 15; Romilly, 1997, p. 133; Storey & Allan, 2024, p. 547). As a result, *Hecuba*, like *The Trojan Women*, represents a work expressing aversion to war and

diverges from plays centered on intrigue, such as *Helen* or *Ion* (Easterling & Knox, 2005, p. 423; Knox, 1979, p. 323). Views on Euripides are often controversial: some consider him an innovator and modernizer, while others see him as atheist and misogynistic (Μαρκαντωνάτος [Markantonatos], 2020, p. 1), since, in order to achieve the desired ideological or artistic effect, he altered the myths of his tragedies (Ευριπίδης [Euripides], 1994a, p. 16; Νίτσε [Nietzsche], 2008, pp. 122–123).

It cannot, of course, be disputed that Euripides was a harbinger of a new era, yet at the same time he was considered reactionary and uncompromising (Easterling & Knox, 2005, p. 424; Μαρκαντωνάτος [Markantonatos], 2020, p. 1; Νίτσε [Nietzsche], 2008, pp. 121–122). While his works are characterized by complexity, there underlies, among countless contrasts, an anxious tension that runs through the interpretation of his entire oeuvre from antiquity to the present (Μαρκαντωνάτος [Markantonatos], 2020, p. 1; Νίτσε [Nietzsche], 2008, pp. 121–122). The heroes of his works, moreover, obey new psychological principles, approaching the audience or the reader by displaying their emotions as ordinary human beings. The psychology of Euripides' characters indicates the realism he pursues, as he presents vulnerable people with human weaknesses¹, driven by their passions or self-interest, subject to impulses and frailties (Romilly, 1997, p. 146; Pucci, 2020, p. 528).

Although Euripides was often accused of misogyny, even by his contemporaries (Powel, 1990, pp. 32–33; Lesky, 1983, p. 524), it is nevertheless evident that in works where his heroines are characterized by ruthlessness, such as *Clytemnestra* or *Hecuba*, he depicts them with sympathy for the gender-based discriminations and injustices they suffer (Powel, 1990, pp. 32–33; Lesky, 1983, p. 524). *Hecuba* represents a work from Euripides' mature period and is one of his most tragic plays, performed between 430–420 BCE (Lesky, 2003, p. 103; Oates & O'Neil Jr., 1938, p. 805; Hall, 2010, p. 255), and deals with Hecuba's transformation from the "grieving mother" to the cold and frenzied murderer (Oates & O'Neil Jr., 1938, p. 806). The capture of the women of Troy, including Hecuba, leads them to Greece, and during their journey they stop in Thrace, where Priam had entrusted his son Polydorus to King Polymestor. The prologue of the tragedy is delivered by the ghost of Polydorus, whom Polymestor has killed in order to seize his wealth (Storey & Allan, 2024, p. 546; Lesky, 2003, p. 103; Gregory, 1992, p. 266). When Polydorus' ghost vanishes, Hecuba breaks into lamentation, revealing her identity as the "grieving mother," entering the

¹ For more, see the book by Markantonatos & Tsangalis, *Αρχαία ελληνική τραγωδία. Θεωρία και Πράξη* (Athens: Gutenberg, 2008).

stage supported by the Chorus of Trojan Women (Diamantakou, 2010, p. 58; Abrahamson, 1952, pp. 121–122).

Many scholars consider *Hecuba* a compilation of two distinct thematic units: one focused on Polyxena's sacrifice at Achilles' tomb, and the other on Hecuba's transformation from "grieving mother" into the "ruthless avenger" of Polydorus' death (Segal, 1990, p. 109; Lesky, 2003, pp. 102, 113–114; Lesky, 1983, p. 524; Meridor, 1978, p. 28; Conacher, 1961, p. 1; Hall, 2010, p. 255; Oates & O'Neil Jr., 1938, p. 805; Kirkwood, 1947, p. 61). Although the word "avenger" is not often used in tragedy, in fifth-century BCE Athenian society murder as a crime required punishment, and it was the duty of the victim's family to ensure it (Meridor, 1978, p. 29). Although both the Thracians (Polymestor) and the Trojans (Hecuba and Polydorus) were considered "barbarians," Euripides portrays Polymestor as brutal and the victim as civilized, enabling the audience to identify with the latter (Segal, 1990, p. 110). This is why, although *Hecuba* engages in three contests of speech (Storey & Allan, 2024, p. 547; Tzanetou, 2020, pp. 166–175)², she succeeds only in the third against Polymestor, justifying the double murder of her enemy's sons and the blinding of Polymestor himself, thereby avenging her own son's death (Storey & Allan, 2024, p. 547).

Particular attention is drawn to the contrast between the proud Polyxena, who accepts her fate without fear, complaint, or pleading, and Hecuba, who begs to be sacrificed in her daughter's place (Lesky, 2003, p. 106). Polyxena's courage is tempered only by the fact that she did not fulfill her goal of establishing a family, highlighting the importance of marriage for women of that era (Euripides, 1967)³, and she accepts her death with dignity, facing a future as a slave (Kitto, 2010, p. 291; Alexopoulou, 2000, p. 144; Daitz, 1971, p. 220). After Polyxena's death and the discovery of the dead Polydorus, Hecuba transforms into a brutal and monstrous avenger (Mossé, 1993, p. 56; Lesky, 1983, p. 525; Alexopoulou, 2000, p. 11), becoming a "maenad" (Lesky, 2003, p. 109; Hall, 2010, p. 256) and seeking to appropriate the masculine attribute of vengeance, surpassing the limits of her gender. She could also be described, like Clytemnestra before her, as an "androbulous woman" (ἀνδροβούλος γυνή), since vengeance was considered a purely male matter at the time the tragedy was performed, as women were legally and morally "minor" (Mossé, 1993, p. 56).

2 The first concerns the rescue of Polyxena, in which he loses, and the second is with Agamemnon, which ends in a draw.

3 Euripides, *Hecuba*, lines 345–346: «Εἰ δέ μὴ βουλῆσομαι, κακὴ φανοῦμαι καὶ φιλόψυχος γυνή» ["But if I do not wish, I shall seem wicked and faint-hearted as a woman"]; line 413: «ἄχρηστος ἀνυμέναιος ὃν μ' ἐχρήσθη τυχεῖν» ["A bride without a bridegroom, of whom I was fated to be married"].

Hecuba alone exacts vengeance with particular cruelty on Polymestor and his sons, exploiting the Thracian king's greed (Lesky, 2003, p. 111; Kitto, 2010, p. 295; Kirkwood, 1947, p. 67). After her act, Polymestor crawls off the stage (Lesky, 2003, pp. 111–112; Kitto, 2010, p. 295; Hall, 2010, p. 257) and “foretells” or “curses” Hecuba: “You will become a dog with eyes like flames,” illustrating the contemporary notion that individuals are “monstrified” by their passions—in this case, Hecuba's vengeful frenzy—which strips her of her status as a “grieving mother” (Lesky, 2003, pp. 113–114; Kitto, 2010, p. 295; Tzanetou, 2020, p. 177). Although Agamemnon sides with Hecuba and believes Polymestor was justly punished (Lesky, 2003, p. 112; Kitto, 2010, p. 295), Euripides emphasizes that war dehumanizes and transforms everyone into monsters⁴, whether perpetrators or victims (Kitto, 2010, p. 295). After being vindicated by Agamemnon, who embodies justice, Polymestor admits that he was defeated by an inferior being—that is, a woman—underscoring the contemporary view that women were considered inferior, legally equated with slaves (Just, 1989, p. 14; Mossé, 1991, pp. 47, 56; Alexopoulou, 2000, p. 144).

***Why Hecuba?* by Matei Vişniec**

Matei Vişniec is a contemporary author and playwright, born in Romania in 1956. From an early age, he regarded literature as a space devoted to freedom and drew inspiration from writers such as Kafka, Dostoevsky, and Poe. He loved grotesque theatre, the theatre of the absurd, Dadaism, and Surrealism, while rejecting Socialist Realism. He studied philosophy in Bucharest and was part of the generation of the 1980s that significantly influenced Romanian literature. Since 1987, he has lived in France, where his works have been translated, written, and staged, and they have also appeared in twenty other countries. After the fall of communism in Romania, he became one of the country's most popular playwrights (visniec.com, 2010; Ştefănescu, 2003).

Vişniec's work originates from the “Generation of the Monday Stage” (Vişniec, 1996, pp. 23–75; Sorescu, 1987, pp. 12–45; Popescu, 1981, pp. 55–90)⁵. His deep belief in cultural resistance, and perhaps in cultural activism, shaped him into an observant dramatist of his era. The messages he presents on stage,

⁴ For more details on the values presented in Euripides' *Hecuba*, see Adkins' article 'Basic Greek Values in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Hercules Furens*'.

⁵ The “Monday Stage Generation” (*Génération du Théâtre du Lundi*) refers to a group of playwrights who emerged in Romania between 1970 and 1980. The name derives from the fact that their works were presented in alternative theatre spaces, often on Mondays, as state theatres were closed. Its main characteristics include a reaction against censored realism, a political and philosophical dimension, and experimental and existential themes.

once received by audiences, continue to evolve and invite spectators to engage, reflect, and question. Influences from Dadaism and Ionesco are evident throughout Vişniec's oeuvre, as are those of other avant-garde authors of his period (Călinescu, 1983, pp. 413–421; Roth, 2014, pp. 101–111; Ranchieru, 2022; Vişniec, 1996, pp. 23–75). The political and military events of the twentieth century deeply marked Vişniec's work, just as the Peloponnesian War had left its mark on Euripides.

Vişniec created the Theatre of Decomposition, a theatrical approach examining the human condition, political structures, and social frameworks in a period of decay and disintegration. This theatre explores the deconstruction of traditional theatrical forms and the representation of chaos, the loss of meaning, decline, and uncertainty. Its main characteristics include the deconstruction of traditional theatre form, dark and existential themes, allegories and parables, and the absence of catharsis found in classical Greek tragedy. Representative works of the Theatre of Decomposition include *The Woman's Body as a Battlefield* (1991), *The Word "Progress" Sounded Very Out of Tune in My Mother's Mouth* (1994), and *Why Hecuba?* (2014) (Vişniec, 1996, pp. 71–75; Losseroy, 2023, p. 4; Komporalý & O'Konor, 2023, pp. 74–78). The Theatre of Decomposition shares similarities with the theatre of the absurd, particularly in its use of surrealism and non-realistic dialogue to enhance the sense of uncertainty, chaos, and general deconstruction. Theoretically, the Theatre of Decomposition, as expressed in Vişniec's works—especially *Why Hecuba?*—reflects the human crisis of the present day and the difficulty of finding meaning and stability in the world (Vişniec, 1996, pp. 61–67).

Intertextuality can be understood as a way to revitalize literary and dramaturgical productivity, providing internal impetus and meaning to the artist's and playwright's creative exploration. Barthes, for example, describes writing as a process of practical reproduction and creation, in which a "battle" occurs, alongside total suppression and the dominance of the sense of death (Barthes, 1987, p. 22). In Vişniec's *Why Hecuba?*, the intertextual connection to Euripides' *Hecuba* is clear, yet the same thematic material is approached from a distinctly different perspective. Vişniec reconstructs the tragic figure of Hecuba, drawing inspiration and elements from Greek mythology, Euripides' eponymous tragedy, and *The Trojan Women*. Through the narrative of the fallen queen, he explores themes such as war, the enduring human spirit, and loss (Chiţan, 2015).

In this dramatic endeavor, Vişniec delves into Hecuba's profound grief, transforming her from a noble and kind-hearted queen into a symbol of resilience, sorrow, and pain. For the playwright, violence is cyclical, and the cost of war is not only personal but resonates universally, while simultaneously highlighting the international impact of ancient Greek tragedies on contemporary audiences. Vişniec's portrayal of Hecuba goes beyond a mere homage to ancient tradition; it

creates a modern lens through which her story is told, emphasizing the relevance of classical themes—such as the destructive nature of war—for understanding human experience across time (Petcu, 2023, pp. 58–60).

The play was written in 2013 for Tokyo's KAZE Theatre at the suggestion of director Yoshimari Asano and directed by Sayaka Ehara. Vişniec's postmodern text removes Hecuba from Greek mythology and the tradition of Greco-Roman theatre, making her the personification of the "eternal" violence of war and the incomprehensible violence that has become a global scourge. His reinterpretation of the myth questions aspects of contemporary sociopolitical reality. Hecuba is the last queen of Troy, held captive and traumatized by the loss of her family and homeland. Yet her personal fate becomes exemplary of human suffering and tragedy amid the widespread violence of the modern world. Timeless themes, such as war and the condition of women, are staged using postmodern methods. The structural conventions and rhetoric of ancient theatre, as well as the values and beliefs of Euripides' contemporaries, are no longer the same today. Vişniec's work relies on metatheatricality, metaphor, and a distinct metaphysical framework, creating a symbolic and imaginative world rich in correspondences, resonances, and contrasts (Gancevici, 2023, p. 17).

Vişniec expressed his admiration for Hecuba as a symbol of pain and defiance of fate, emphasizing her significance in the contemporary era as a representative of maternal suffering and the refusal to accept destiny (Chiţan, 2015). This dramatic work, and particularly the figure of Hecuba, has been associated with performances of the Japanese dance-theatre form Butoh, which emerged in Japan after the nuclear catastrophes of the Second World War. Butoh dancers identify with the victims and use ash on their naked bodies to express death and despair, in a manner similar to Hecuba's appearance in the opening scenes of the play (Patureau, 2015, p. 21). Moreover, the playwright himself stated that ancient Greek tragedy symbolizes the "war of the human species against itself," and that history is filled with wars upon wars waged in the name of causes, whether justified or not (Dumitrache, 2014, p. 24). Although Vişniec's text draws upon ancient Greek themes and employs classical characters and techniques, it ultimately serves as a medium through which he speaks for all the victims of wars over the past two millennia (Patureau, 2015, p. 21).

Similarities and Differences between Euripides' Hecuba and Matei Vişniec's Hecuba

The score of Euripides' *Hecuba* constitutes the skeleton upon which the theatre of diffuse contours and resonant lines—echoing the present and articulated through Vişniec's *Hecuba*—is constructed. The playwright himself notes that his text

incorporates events on a European scale, of which we are both witnesses and participants, with the result that the “theatre of the world” comes to “swallow” the theatre on stage. Violence triumphs over democracy and erupts at the gates of Europe, with the war in Ukraine as a characteristic example, as well as the continent’s broader entrapment in surrounding zones of violence (cf. Iran, Syria, Palestine, etc.), developments that affect everyone. The final lesson of Hecuba, for both Euripides and Vişniec, is that the mistakes of the past should not be repeated by future generations (Chiţan, 2022). Reality usually falls short of human expectations, a fact made evident in both tragedies, as the sense of powerlessness before fate permeates both versions of Hecuba and, as we already know, proves catastrophic (Petcu, 2023, p. 67).

The sorrowful queen functions as a symbol of suffering, encapsulating the voices of all mothers who have lost their children because of war. In Vişniec’s play, the gods are present, but they possess a theatrical profile: they respond with indifference, sarcasm, or silence—much as in Euripides’ Hecuba, where they are entirely absent. In Vişniec’s work, the gods render Hecuba mute, and she continues to “cry out” silently, without a voice (Vişniec, 2014a, p. 212), recalling Munch’s *The Scream*. The silence on stage is equivalent to the silence of the spectators and, by extension, of an entire sociopolitical framework; it symbolizes the absence of meaning, reason, and humanity (Vişniec, 2014a, p. 264; Petcu, 2023, pp. 67–68). Both versions of Hecuba focus on the fate of the former queen of Troy, though from different perspectives and interpretive approaches.

In Euripides’ version, Hecuba, in the Greek camp in Thrace shortly before the fleet’s departure, endures two devastating shocks: the sacrifice of her daughter Polyxena and the discovery of the body of her murdered son Polydorus, killed by Polymestor. These two tragedies dehumanize her and lead her to exact horrific revenge upon her child’s murderer by killing his sons and blinding him (Euripides, 1994a, pp. 1–136). Vişniec’s Hecuba, by contrast, functions as a symbol of postwar societies rather than as a tragic figure in the classical sense. The playwright reinterprets the archetypal myth by emphasizing its political dimension and human devastation. For Vişniec, Hecuba becomes the detonator for commentary on the timelessness of violence and oppression, while he underscores that revenge does not bring redemption and injustice is not rectified (Vişniec, 2014b, pp. 3–60).

Euripides’ Hecuba becomes an “avenger” and takes revenge on Polymestor (Euripides, 1994b, lines 1023–1046), whereas in Vişniec’s version her transformation is not merely an act of vengeance but an existential quest for justice—particularly in a world in which justice itself does not exist (Vişniec, 2014b, pp. 6–7). In ancient tragedy, revenge functions as a restoration of moral order; in modern dramaturgy, however, it leads to a vicious cycle of violence.

In Višniec's work, Hecuba appears as a figure who doubts and questions even her own anger. This reflects the postmodern skepticism expressed by the playwright toward acts of retaliation (Chițan, 2022). For Euripides, revenge is presented as morally justified on the one hand (Euripides, 1994b, lines 1255–1256), yet the dehumanization Hecuba undergoes after her revenge—combined with Polymestor's curse that she will become a “bitch”—suggests that the poet leaves open the question of whether the violence she commits places her in the same position as her oppressors (Euripides, 1994b, lines 1041–1055 and 1271–1274). By contrast, in Višniec's Hecuba, revenge is meaningless and offers no redemption. Whereas in ancient tragedy revenge may be associated with honor, in contemporary dramaturgy it fails to deliver justice and simultaneously reflects a destabilized and disillusioned world in which moral values are called into question.

Both the ancient and the modern versions of Hecuba address the fate of women who lose everything in war. For Euripides, personal loss is of particular importance, while Višniec focuses on women themselves as social and political victims in every era. Female figures in ancient Greek tragedy often serve as bearers of collective memory of war, as is the case with the compatriots of Euripides' Hecuba, whereas contemporary theatrical discourse transforms them into symbols of ongoing oppression (Rabinowitz, 1993, pp. 103–124). It becomes evident that Višniec's Hecuba is not merely a bereaved mother but also an allegory of the female voice, which is often weak or even invisible—especially in societies indifferent to the pursuit of justice. Euripides' Hecuba is directly linked to the fall of Troy and the collapse of an entire political entity. In Višniec's perspective, Hecuba's story serves to comment on postwar society and the loss of humanity, which becomes particularly evident in human conflicts. Moreover, the representation of suffering in the contemporary play exceeds the limits of the ancient myth and adopts a more generalized scope in order to depict modern sociopolitical crises (Rehm, 2002, pp. 175–186).

Conclusions

Hecuba embodies fundamental aspects of human existence—such as maternal love, revenge, loss, and the collapse of power—through the influence she exerts on theatre, philosophy, and literature. She is continually reshaped and adapted, demonstrating both the timelessness of her archetype and her power as a literary, dramaturgical, and mythical symbol. Euripides' Hecuba and Višniec's Hecuba constitute two versions of the same archetypal myth, reflecting the differing perceptions of antiquity and the modern era regarding principles such as justice, revenge, and human fate. Euripides' tragic heroine takes fate into her own hands,

whereas Vişniec's Hecuba becomes an eternal symbol of oppression and of the failure of revenge to restore justice.

The study of the two dramatic texts leads to the identification of specific symbols employed by both authors—perhaps in different ways, yet present in both cases. Euripides' Hecuba, as noted above, embodies the perpetual pain of the lost homeland and maternal love transformed into despair, symbolizing the tragic fate of all the defeated in war. Vişniec's Hecuba transcends the boundaries of motherhood and personifies all victims of all wars, across all eras and regions of the world. The playwright employs Hecuba to highlight human suffering as well as the futility of revenge. Both dramatists likewise use darkness and blindness as symbols of truth and ignorance. Euripides' Polymestor is blinded in order for justice to be served, just as Hecuba lives in the darkness of mourning. For Vişniec, darkness does not concern Polymestor alone but is omnipresent, signifying the collective blindness of society to the atrocities of war, such that even when truth is revealed, redemption does not follow; instead, despair intensifies.

Another shared symbol between the two works is the dog, which signifies human dehumanization and resilience and is applied to Hecuba in both cases. At the end of Euripides' tragedy, Polymestor likens Hecuba to a "bitch" to indicate the complete loss of her human identity and her transformation into a savage being driven by the instinct for revenge. In contrast, in Vişniec's work the dog carries central symbolic weight and is the only faithful being to Hecuba, even after she has lost her human condition. This symbolism may be interpreted either as a metaphor for human resilience under extreme conditions such as war or as a representation of human bestialization. Finally, the ocean functions in both works as a symbol of uncertainty or inevitable fate. In Euripides, it serves as the bearer of tragedy, since it delivers Polydorus' corpse, which triggers the unfolding events by revealing the truth to Hecuba. In Vişniec's work, the ocean represents the final destination for all—a vast abyss in which the victims of war and their memories disappear.

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**TOWARDS THE INTELLECTUAL
BALKANS
(1926):
THE TIMELY INVITATION OF
K. BASTIAS**

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Abstract: The study examines Greece's relations with the Balkan people during the interwar period, as they developed through the Press, with a focus on theatre. Specifically, it concerns the visits of the journalist and intellectual K. Bastias in Bulgaria and Romania with the aim of developing relations in the intellectual and cultural field. He believed this approach to be a necessary condition for the normalization of national differences and the peaceful coexistence of the people. He was received with enthusiasm and his contacts with politicians and intellectuals were successful.

Keywords: Balkan Region (South-Eastern Europe), cultural heritage, Interwar period, Balkan friendship, relations, art, theatre, cooperation, interwar cultural press, K. Bastias, Balkan peoples in the interwar Greek press.

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1. Introduction

Riga Ferrai's vision for the unification of the Balkan peoples seems increasingly to be moving away from the plans of the official state, but remains alive in the hearts of the people. In particular, after the Balkan wars and the Asia Minor disaster, the relations of the Balkan peoples are going through a new phase of tension due to the strengthening of both: national demands and social claims. In decisive situations, Art always functions as an effective weapon of peace and cooperation.

In particular, the performing arts, having the privilege of direct communication, has been proved that contribute the most to a substantial cooperation and friendship between people. Men of letters and artists, well aware of the dynamic and direct function of art, take the lead in these attempts at reconciliation and creative cooperation.

K. Bastias in Bulgaria

In this context, is interpreted the interest of the Greek intellectual world in the interwar period for the culture of the neighboring nations and especially for the theatre.

What impression could have caused a Greek journalist's visit to interwar Sofia when he announced his target to study the intellectual and artistic movement of the Balkans?

Everyone, from the president of the Council of Ministers to the last probationary reporter of the little monster Bulgarian newspaper, heard with genuine joy but also with astonishment when the Greek journalist said:

One of the great disadvantages of the Balkan peoples is that they do not know each other. They know almost nothing about the modern Greek intellectual movement in Sofia and it is terrible to think that about Greece and its life, as well as about the life of the other Balkan states, an Arvanite salesman knows much more things than the intellectuals. (Bastias, 20.7. 1926).

K. Bastias, one of the most important personalities of the interwar period, (Georgopoulou 2022, 164-219) being present in this period in the progressive political party of Alexandros Papanastasi, knew that the development of relations between the Balkan peoples would strengthen their power, soften their political and national differences and forge strong bonds of friendship and cooperation. He believed that the role of intellectuals in this direction is very important, especially in an era of national confrontations and political rearrangements. As a correspondent for the newspaper *Eleftheros Typos* published by the democratic activist journalist Andreas Cavafakis. In the 1920s Bastias visited Bulgaria and Romania. His impressions were published in seventeen articles in *Eleftheros Typos* under the title „The Intellectual Balkan: First Bulgaria». We typically mention some titles of the articles: „Toward the intellectual Balkan... Greek the first influence on the Bulgarian Renaissance” (Bastias, 24.7.1926), „Bulgarian dramatic production taken from the legends” (Bastias 28.7.1926). After discussing the unique psyche of the Bulgarian people, Bastias focuses his interest on the work of the most important Bulgarian playwright, Petko Todorov, directly inspired by the mythology of his country and the movement of symbolism. In his meetings with political figures, he learns about the political and social situation of the country and is impressed by the sharpness of the political confrontations. In these circumstances, he understands the difficulty of intellectuals to devote themselves to their work, coming into direct contact with reality (Bastias, 21.7.1926, 22.7.1926).

He comes in contact with politicians, poets, artists to whom he presents modern Greek literature, theatre, and art. In his correspondence in Greece, he presents specific information about the sources of the Bulgarian theatre, its main representatives, the relationship between past and present.” At the University of Sofia, he meets the professor of comparative literature, Ivan Shismanov, who explains to him that the first literary texts of Bulgaria and the entire Balkans have their roots in Greek folk songs. The professor refers in detail to the common elements of the Balkan peoples, with emphasis on the *song of the Dead Brother* (Bastias, 24.7.1926). He is impressed by the various literary movements that influenced Bulgarian literature, with the Russian and French schools dominating, (Bastias, 25.7.1926). Modern writers seek to balance domestic tradition with foreign influences and create a national literature (Bastias, 26.7.1926).

At the National Theatre in Sofia, he attends performances of Shakespeare's plays and talks with the director of the theatre Professor Arnaudov about the theatre in Bulgaria. The state has exclusively taken over the operation of the theatre, while musical theatre prevails over drama. An effort is being made to create a Bulgarian dramatic production (Bastias, 27.7.1926, 28.7.1926).

At the same time, in articles he sends to the *Eleftheros Typos* (Free Press), he presents Bulgarian Literature from the 19th century to the 1920s, the dramatic production taken from the legends, the artistic movement, a brief review of the history of the Bulgarian Press, (1.8.1926). He studies the textbooks and rages because cultivate hatred for the other Balkan peoples (Bastias, 31.7.1926). Επισκέπτεται το Πανεπιστήμιο και συνομιλεί περί παιδείας και πολιτικής με the economics professor Danailov to whom he says: "We separate nationalism from chauvinism and ask for the cooperation of the Balkans and the cultivation of peace and civilization. This is today's Greek ideal and our intellectuals are gathered around this ideal" (Bastias, 7.8.1926).

Bastias in Romania

Then Bastias visits Bucharest following the same tactic: he meets with the political leadership and then with circles of spirit and art exchanging information about the intellectual and artistic Movement of Romania and Greece. His impressions of the trip to Romania were published in the *Eleftheros Typos* in August and September, 1926. In Romania, Bastias highlights the atmosphere of grandeur, national pride and optimism that prevails in Bucharest. In contrast to the depressing Sofia, a regenerative aura that blows in all sectors of society, politics, culture and religion with the aim of promoting national identity (Bastias, 13.8.1926, 14.8.1926). He notes the strong contrast between national tradition and cosmopolitanism and the creative coexistence of the two currents (Bastias, 14.8.1926). He notes with satisfaction the cooperation between politicians and intellectuals, exemplified by the country's greatest lyric poet, Goga, who is also Minister of the Interior (Bastias, 17.8.1926).

We typically mention some of the article titles:

«How Romanian theatre turned towards Romanian life« Caraziale, the relentless Romanian Juvenalis»,» (Bastias, 2.9.1926), „Where should the modern dramatist look for his subject, Folk legends and modern life» (Bastias 3.9.1926). The article includes an interview with Victor Efthimiou, Romanian, playwright and former director of the National Theatre. The interesting discussion focused on issues of aesthetics and the need to place tradition and folk legends at the center of the literary and theatrical movement. Several of his works, such as Thebes and Prometheus, are inspired by Greek mythology.

With the knowledge but also the faith and enthusiasm that distinguishes him, Bastias wins impressions. The *Rampa* newspaper of Bucharest presents in front page an extended interview with the impressive title: „Great theatrical renaissance in Greece”... An hour with K. Bastia. Playwright and journalist” (Bastias, 3.7.1926). On the same day, the Bucharest daily newspaper *Dimineața* presents another interview with K. Bastias with the title: “Theatrical and literary movement in Greece. Discussion with Mr. Costi Bastias” (Bastias, 3.7.1926). In this text impresses the detailed reference to authors, dramatic production, aesthetic trends, theatrical act, the older and younger generation of actors, the relationship between tradition and European avant-garde.

K. Bastias believes that as descendants of Byzantium, the Balkan peoples are capable of creating a Balkan cultural consciousness based mainly on folk culture. With this perspective he meets professor and writer Nicolae Iorga, an important figure of the Romanian interwar period. They completely agree on the utilization of the national and popular tradition and on the creative transfiguration of foreign influences (Bastias, 15.8.1926). With great interest, Bastias was informed by the general manager of the National Theatre about the state support of the competent Ministry (Bastias, 24.8.1926) and envisioned the establishment of a Greek National Theatre, for which discussions had already begun. It was founded in 1930 and operated in 1932, (Georgopoulou 2009, 247-287).

In addition to the five national theatres, the state also supports private theatre enterprises, while actors enjoy special privileges. A well-organized theatre regime operates with a diverse repertoire of Romanian and foreign – mainly classical – plays (Bastias, 26.8.1926).

In the field of theatre, the lack of domestic tradition and the influence of French theatre became noticeable. National dramaturgy was inaugurated in the 19th century by Caratziale, and the purely Romanian themes of his plays are a phenomenon for a country that lacked theatrical tradition.

The interest for the Balkans continues

This creative tour of K. Bastia in the Balkans was extensively commented by politics and intellectual circles. We keep the positive response of the left-wing intellectual Dem. Glinou:

Mr. Bastias went to Bulgaria and Romania, saw politicians, professors, poets, scholars. The intention is commendable. We need to get to know the peoples we live with in the Balkans. We have a duty to prepare the Balkan Federation. Those who reflect on these countries,

instead of being preachers of national hatred, must become apostles of understanding, appreciation and love. (Glinos, 1926)

K. Bastias will continue the approach to the Balkan peoples through the magazine he will found a year later, in 1927, *Greek Letters*. The research of the spiritual life of the Balkan peoples is set as one of the main targets of the journal. In 1929, the magazine informs its readers that the issue of translation makes it difficult to achieve this goal because the magazine aims for direct translation from the Bulgarian or Serbian language.

The magazine specially praises the translation work of T. Vafiadis direct from the Bulgarian language. Vafiadis translated an article referring to Bulgarian drama. The article highlights the inadequacy of existing drama production and emphasizes the need to create a national drama (Vafiadis, trans 10.8.1929, 392-393). A little later the magazine mentions the operation of a new theatre in Sofia, which revives the hopes for the modernization of theatrical life (Argis, trans. 5.10.1929, 587). An extensive article from the same magazine, with photographs of actors, writers and theatres, refers to the creation and development of the Bulgarian theatre, and in particular of the state stage (Argis, trans. 15. 6. 1929, 159-162). The interest of K. Bastia for the Balkan cultural approach, manifested in practice in 1938, when as general director of the Royal Theatre visited Sofia, where he was received with enthusiasm. After discussions with the director of the Royal Theatre of Sofia, Vassilev, was decided the theatrical cooperation of the two countries and the exchange of playwrights [Αργής (μετ.), 15. 6.1929, 159-162].

This tour by K. Bastias constitutes a valuable source for all aspects of the life of the Balkan peoples, and is the most complete recording to date of the material and spiritual culture of the neighboring peoples, based on on-site research.

In addition to this detailed and systematic article by K. Bastias, in the interwar Press we often find responses from Greek journalists from the Balkan capitals who refer to the theatrical life of the peoples and emphasize the need for acquaintance and cooperation (Georgopoulou, 2009). An article in the magazine, *Musical Chronicles*, is dedicated to the Bulgarian National Theatre. It refers to its foundation in 1907, its operation, its division into dramatic and melodramatic departments, the cast, the repertoire and the technical facilities. The latter include „a marvel of the latest system, a rotating stage”. The article also mentions the parallel operation of a drama school. It is emphasized that the theatre is an autonomous organization with a separate budget and is at the same time subsidized by the state. The operation of the melodramatic department is presented as a model for the establishment of a similar one in Greece (Nikolaidis 1930, 148-150).

Serbian theatre was less represented in the interwar press. In 1924, theatrical critic, A. Thrilos, while in Belgrade as a delegate at a women's rights conference, conveyed his impressions of the country's lifestyle, social conditions, and the women's movement. The critic, referring to theatrical life, speaks of the existence of a single theatre, which houses both the lyric and dramatic theatres and operates with state subsidies. Most of the actors are Russian and, in general, theatrical life is characterized by the influence of the Russian avant-garde (Thrilos, 15.11.1924).

In comparison, the presence of the Turkish theatre in the interwar Press is more intense than that of the other Balkan peoples and the intellectuals' interest in the theatrical life of the neighboring country is continuous. After the Kemalist revolution we also have collaborations of Greek and Turkish actors both in Istanbul and in Athens. In this field, it is worth mentioning the Greek-Turkish performance of Shakespeare's *Othello* in 1931, initially in Istanbul and then in Athens. The participants were Per. Gavriilidis as Othello, K. Mousouris as Iago and the Turkish actress Bedia Khanum as Desdemona (Papazoglou 1931, 25-26). The same year the performance will be repeated in Athens at the „Olympia” theatre. Participated Othello by Per. Gavriilidis, Iagos by M. Myrat and Desdemona by Benda Khanum. The Press praises the event. The magazine *Musical Chronicles* particularly emphasize the appearance of the Turkish actress of the Municipal Theatre of Constantinople in Athens: „a kind of our Miranda” (Sideris 1931, 270). In 1933, cultural event from both a political and cultural point of view was the filming of the novel *The Bad Road*, by G. Xenopoulos with the Kotopoulis - Kyvelis troupe in Turkey at the Ipekci brothers' studio. The script was written by G. Xenopoulos but modified by the director of the National Theatre of Turkey, Ertugrul-Buhsin-Bey. This is the first film of Greek speaking cinema, and the actors' magazine, *Hellenic Theatre*, dedicates a series of articles to its filming with detailed descriptions of the studio and the scenery (Agathos, 2016, 99-127).

Balkan performances in interwar Athens

However, the absence of the Balkan theatre is noticeable in the field of theatrical performance. We have to reach the end of the second interwar decade to see two plays of the Romanian theatre on the Athenian stage.

In 1936, the Alikis' troupe presented Herz's *Bogracesco* in a translation by Nellis Marcellou. The intellectual world positively welcomed the troupe's initiative to present a Balkan work and hopes that the performance will become a starting point for mutual cultural exchanges. The play, a comedy about marital infidelity, was deemed completely insignificant, and clearly inferior to similar

European theatrical genres (Kukoulas, 10.9.1936). In 1940 the Kotopouli's troupe directed by the young pioneering director K. Koon presented the work of the Romanian Tudor Musatescum, *Titanic Waltz*, a satire of modern plutocratic society, translated by M. Kounelakis. Before the show, Kounelakis introduced the author to the public (Kounelakis, 13.1.1940, 1. The performance was seen as an important step in getting to know the Balkan peoples (Rotas 27.1.1940, 1) and as a means capable of leading to creative comparisons and interactions (Thrilos, B. 473.) However, its quality was questioned and it was not considered representative of Romanian dramatic production (Stogiannis, 25.1.1940; Chourmouziou, 26.1.1940; Mamakis: 25.1.1940).

Conclusions – Discussion

During the interwar period, our relations with the Balkan peoples improved significantly. Particularly in the field of theatre, common origins emerged and interest in the theatrical life of neighboring peoples manifested itself in various ways.

Today, through the Balkan network of performing arts, we turn once more to the „Intelligent Balkan”, searching for the deep roots of our cultures in the vivid representation of life, achievement and constant demand of art.

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THEATRE LIFE IN NORTH MACEDONIA: MAPPING OF THE INSTITUTIONS AND FESTIVALS

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Abstract: This paper presents an overview of current theatre life in North Macedonia, mapping the key institutions and festivals and discussing the capacities of both state and independent theatres. Divided into five sections, the first section includes a brief historical introduction to the theatrical tradition in the country. The second offers information about the key capacities, repertoire focus, and funding models of 16 professional theatres. The third mentions the funding possibilities for private theatre companies; and, the fourth outlines 28 festivals funded by the state; whilst the final section provides brief summative conclusions on the theatre's current state of affairs in North Macedonia indicating trends, challenges, and the possibilities for a policy upgrade.

Keywords: Balkan Region (South-Eastern Europe), theatre in North Macedonia, institutional mapping, state theatres, festivals, funding.

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Introduction

Theatrical tradition on the territory of North Macedonia dates back to ancient times. A testimony to this is provided by the archaeological sites of ancient amphitheatres in Ohrid, Stobi (near Veles), and Heraclea Lyncestis (near Bitola). These magnificent venues, fully restored today, are believed to have hosted tragedies, comedies, mime, pantomime, gladiatorial contests, and wild animal fights. From the Middle Ages onward, theatrical traditions evolved through folklore and ritual performances, including pagan carnival calendar festivities (for instance, *Babari* masquerades) and comedic performances (*soytari*, or jester plays) which persistently co-existed with other forms of Christian rituals (for example, biblical scenes, including Nativity plays). During the Ottoman period, puppet theatre, *karagioz* (theatre of shadows), and monodramatic *medah* (storytelling) were prevalent as forms of public performance. By the 19th century, several cities witnessed amateur school performances of European dramatic works (Dodovski, 2024).

In the first half of the 20th century, institutional theatre in the Serbian and Bulgarian languages was introduced intermittently as the territory of the country fell under the rule of the two neighbouring states. Though performances in the Macedonian language were inadmissible during this time due to oppressive regimes, "a few folklore melodramas (so called *bitovi dram*) performed in a local dialect in the 1930s" later on became a sort of 'classics' (Dodovski, 2011, p. 95). Fully institutionalised theatre in the Macedonian language was possible only after the Second World War when the Socialist Republic of Macedonia was declared as a separate state which joined Yugoslavia as one of its six constitutive federal

republics. Also, the multi-ethnic character of Macedonian society has been affirmed by establishing theatres which offered repertoires in other languages, such as Albanian, Turkish and Roma.

Indeed, the post-war period witnessed an incredible intensification of theatre life owing to state investment in infrastructure, the professionalisation of ensembles, and the creation of a wide network of theatre institutions. As socialist ideological constraints gradually loosened, many productions became critical of the societal taboos of the period. This resulted in both new aesthetic levels and increasing political relevance of Macedonian theatre in the 1970s and 1980s. Further recognition in European contexts was achieved in the 1990s, though the period after the dissolution of Yugoslavia brought challenges to cultural exchange and international exposure.

This paper gives a brief overview of theatre life in North Macedonia, focusing on the current situation. It provides a mapping of the key institutions and festivals, indicating their main capacities, repertoire focus, funding models, and potential for international cooperation.

State theatres

The theatrical landscape of North Macedonia is dominated by 16 professional theatres established by the state. Seven of them are in the capital, and the rest in different towns across the country (See Figure 1). They get guaranteed annual subsidies for their employees' salaries and repertoire productions from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Some of these institutions also benefit from irregular (and usually negligible) financial support by the local municipal authorities and corporate sponsors.



Figure 1: Map of state theatres in North Macedonia

Ten state theatres offer repertoire in the Macedonian language, while three others produce performances in both Albanian and Macedonian. Also, two theatres in Skopje produce performances solely in the Albanian language, while one - also based in Skopje - gives performances in the Turkish language. Two of the 16 professional theatres are exclusively dedicated to productions for children and youth, though the other ensembles also tend to produce for the said audiences (usually one or two performances per year).

Out of the 16 state theatres, 11 have the status of national institutions as separate legal entities, while the remaining 6 theatres operate within larger state institutions called “centres of culture”:

- **The Macedonian National Theatre in Skopje**, or MNT, is the largest theatre institution in the country. Founded on 31 January 1945, over the years it grew into a major national establishment encompassing Drama, Opera and Ballet, operating at two separate venues. This model was abandoned in 2004, when each of these units became a separate institution (MNT, 2025a). Since 2013 the theatre operates in a new building on the left bank of River Vardar (Brif, 2013). The new object was built to resemble an earlier one erected on the same location in 1927 and demolished after the earthquake of 1963. With a total area of 7,200 square metres, two halls of 724 and 213 seats respectively, modern equipment and modular stage technology, MNT is nowadays the leading theatre in the country (MNT, 2025b).
- **The National Theatre in Bitola**, or NTB, is the oldest institutional theatre in the country, which gave its first performance on 14 November 1944, just ten days after the liberation of this city from the fascists (Dodovski, 2024). Today it operates in a building built in 1980 with 418 seats in the main hall (NTB, 2025).
- **The Dramski Theatre in Skopje** has its beginnings as a puppet stage of the MNT initiated in 1946. Over the years it evolved as a separate entity, changing its name several times, until it was finally named as Dramski Theatre in 1960. Five years later it moved to a new object with two stages (with 374 and 100 seats respectively), eventually becoming prominent for its avant-garde repertoire (DTS, 2025).
- **The Theatre in Kumanovo** was established in 1948, then closed and reopened twice after longer intermissions. Nowadays it operates as part of the Trajko Prokopiev Centre of Culture in Kumanovo. It gives performances in both the Macedonian and Albanian languages.
- **The Jordan Hadzi Konstantinov - Dzinot Theatre in Veles**, named after one of the 19th century pioneers of Macedonian drama and

theatre, was established in 1949. Since 2014, it works in a new theatre building which has two stages (with 370 and 110 seats respectively) (Dnevnik, 2014).

- **The Anton Panov Theatre in Strumica** was established in 1949. Since 2004, it operates as part of the Centre of Culture in Strumica.
- **The Albanian Theatre in Skopje**, formerly part of the Theatre of Nationalities established in 1950, is one of the major cultural institutions of the Albanian community in the country. It operates in a recently renovated building with a main hall of 350 seats and state-of-the-art technical equipment. Its repertoire is exclusively in the Albanian language.
- **The Turkish Theatre in Skopje**, formerly part of the Theatre of Nationalities established in 1950, offers stage productions exclusively in the Turkish language; currently awaiting its transfer to a brand new site.
- **The Vojdan Chernodrinski Theatre in Prilep** began its work in 1950 in a separate building, which has been closed in 2025 due to safety reasons; it continues to operate as part of the Centre of Culture in Prilep.
- **The Theatre in Shtip**, established in 1951, operates as part of the Aco Shopov Centre of Culture in Shtip.
- **The Theatre for Children and Youth in Skopje**, established in 1990, is an institution specialised in varied repertoire for children and youth (TDM, 2025).
- **The Tetovo Theatre**, established in 2007, gives performances in Albanian and Macedonian at the Centre of Culture in Tetovo.
- **The Teatar Komediija (Comedy Theatre) in Skopje** was established in November 2011. For three years it gave performances at the Dramski Theatre in Skopje, before moving to its current site, formerly known as “Teatar Centar”, which was used by MNT until 2014 (Teatar Komediija, 2025).
- **The Ohrid Theatre**, established in 2011, operates as part of the Centre of Culture in Ohrid.
- **The Gostivar Theatre, which** was established in 2018 with the idea of producing plays in Albanian, Macedonian and Turkish; currently performing at the Centre of Culture in Gostivar.
- **The Albanian Theatre for Children and Youth** is one of the most recently established institutions, offering children and youth repertoire in the Albanian language.

On average, state theatres produce between 5 and 10 new plays each year, though some of them often get funding from the Ministry of Culture for only 2 or 3 performances. In recent years there has been a general decline in the number of spectators, which is not only a consequence of the 2020 pandemic, but of a plethora of other factors, including reduced state funding for new productions, inconsistent repertoire planning, and meagre marketing capacities. Over the past three years, a state theatre sold – on average – between 10,000 and 40,000 tickets annually, which in some cases is 30-50% less compared to figures in the 1990s or earlier decades. This is, of course, an average estimate, and there are stark differences in the figures when comparing, for instance, the MNT and Dramski Theatre in Skopje to other theatres in smaller towns.

The repertoire in state theatres is a mix of classical and modern works, sometimes incorporating contemporary social themes. None of the aforementioned institutions is specialised in experimental contemporary productions. The only institutions which have a specialised repertoire focus or defined mission are the Teatar Komediija and the two theatres for children and youth. There has been a recent call to revive the emphasis on new contemporary plays by local authors, though there is no consistent policy on this.

Last, but not least, funding for regional and international cooperation is rather limited, and very few performances get invited to festivals abroad, and usually these are only in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. This does not come as a surprise, given the links that existed in the past and the attempts to re-establish them again. On a similar note, the number of foreign theatre directors or other theatre artists working in North Macedonia in recent years is much lower compared to any other period over the past four decades. The same is true for guest performances by foreign companies, though local audiences do get to see some foreign productions as part of the few international festivals that take place in the country.

Private theatre companies

Alongside state theatres, there is a small number of private theatre companies that apply annually for funding both from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and from the municipalities. They do not have their own playhouses (except for one small private theatre in Bitola), and they have to negotiate with state theatres or centres of culture to use their premises. Sometimes this evolves into co-productions.

Also, there are around 25 local cultural institutions, established by the state and funded by the municipalities, including the city of Skopje, that manage public spaces which allow for cultural productions of a different kind, including from time

to time professional or amateur theatre plays, as well as productions by private theatre companies. For 2025, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has decided to fund around 50 stage productions (many of them semi-professional) proposed by private companies or local institutions (Ministerstvo za kultura i turizam, 2025).

Festivals

Theatre life in North Macedonia is enriched by a number of festivals that serve as essential platforms for showcasing both national and international stage productions. The number of festivals has increased in recent years, though the overall state funding has, paradoxically, dwindled. Namely, there are about 28 theatre festivals (see Figure 2, festivals marked in blue), which is almost twice the number of state theatres. Some of these are rather local festivals in smaller towns, though most of the festivals tend to have an international dimension, mainly inviting guest performances from the former Yugoslav countries or Albania and Bulgaria.



Figure 2: Map of festival in North Macedonia

Some festivals are unique by limiting their profile by type, genre, or even author. For instance, there is a monodrama festival in Bitola, a duo-drama festival in Negotino, and a chamber theatre festival in Strumica. Also, Stobi Fest in Veles is dedicated to ancient drama, and there is a Shakespeare festival in Bitola. There is a festival of humour and satire in Vinica, and three festivals of comedy – in Kumanovo, Skopje and Veles. There is a festival of Albanian theatre in Debar, and of Roma theatre in Skopje. There are two theatre festivals for children – in Bitola and Prilep, as well as an amateur drama festival in Kochani. Each year the Faculty of Dramatic Art in Skopje organises the Skomrahi Festival, which gathers students from the theatre academies in Balkan and other European countries.

The Ohrid Summer Festival is one of the country's most prestigious and oldest cultural events, celebrated annually in the UNESCO World Heritage city of Ohrid. Though primarily known for its classical music and opera performances, the festival also includes a theatre programme.

The most important theatre festival in the country is the **Vojdan Chernodrinski Festival in Prilep**, named after the forefather of Macedonian drama Vojdan Chernodrinski, who was an author, actor, manager, and theatre producer at the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century (MTF, 2025). Each year the festival showcases a selection of the best productions of the state theatres, as well as an off-programme of private productions.

Apart from those mentioned above, there are two other important international theatre festivals in Skopje. The **MOT, or Young Open Theatre**, established in 1976, has become the leading platform for avant-garde, contemporary, and experimental theatre (<https://www.mot.mk/>). Also, the **Skupi Fest**, established in 2007, offers a varied programme of aesthetically innovative, and often politically challenging plays (Skupi Festival, 2019).

This is the list of festivals funded by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2025 (Ministerstvo za kultura i turizam, 2025):

- The Ohrid Summer Festival, established in 1960;
- The Macedonian Theatre Festival Vojdan Chernodrinski in Prilep, established 1965;
- The MOT, Mlad otvoren teatar (Young Open Theatre) in Skopje, established in 1976;
- The Chamber Theatre Festival Risto Shishkov in Strumica, established in 1992;
- The Stobi Festival of Ancient Drama in Veles, established in 2001;
- The Skupi Theatre Festival in Skopje, established in 2007;
- The Shakespeare Festival in Bitola;
- The Skopje Summer Festival;
- The Albanian Theatre Festival in Debar;
- The Days of Comedy in Kumanovo;
- The Naked Moon Comedy Festival in Skopje;
- The Branko Gjorchev Duodrama Festival in Negotino;
- The Monodrama Festival in Bitola;
- The Othello Festival in Gostival;
- The The Actor of Europe Festival in Resen;
- The Ketu Festival in Struga;
- The Balkan Festival in Kumanovo;

- The Humour and Satire Festival in Vinica;
- The Skomrahi Festival in Skopje;
- The Uskana Festival in Kichevo;
- The Petre Popular Play and Comedy Festival in Veles;
- The Amateur Drama Festival in Kochani;
- The St Joakim Osogovski Theatre Festival in Kriva Palanka;
- The Hidden Faces Roma Theatre Festival in Skopje;
- The Siljan the Stork Theatre Festival for Children in Prilep;
- The Bitolino Theatre Festival for Children in Bitola;
- The Panfiz Pantomime and Physical Theatre Festival in Skopje;
- The Faces without Masks Festival in Skopje.

Conclusion

This paper offered an overview of current theatre life in North Macedonia, mapping the key institutions and festivals and assessing their key capacities. The analysis indicates that theatre life in the country is mainly shaped by 16 professional theatres which get state funding to offer a mixed repertoire (10 of them in the Macedonian language, two in Albanian, one in Turkish, and three in both Albanian and Macedonian). Their main challenges seem to be the deficiency of strategic repertoire thinking, diminishing audiences, and limited international exchange. On the other hand, the few independent private companies lack funding and capacities to offer serious alternatives to the inherited model of state theatre institutions.

Similarly, festivals in North Macedonia seem to be abundant, about 28 of them receiving a varying level of state funding. However, this seeming surge of festival programmes might mask the trend of diminishing international exchange and exposure. As a consequence of underfunding in recent years, many of the festivals lack consistent focus, a coproduction scheme, and an international dimension, to say the least.

Considering the above-mentioned indicators, the network of professional theatres in North Macedonia seems unsustainable in the longer run. An apparent budgetary imbalance in salary, maintenance and programming costs of the state institutions tends to result in repertoire inertia and declining audiences. On the other hand, the absence of transparent and goal-driven policy on funding independent productions does not allow for positive outcomes that would alleviate the shortcomings of state-funded institutional theatre. Finally, a broader policy reconsideration is needed to allow for sustained national, regional, and international cooperation.

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A CROSS-STUDY IN CULTURAL, AESTHETICS AND ARTISTIC EXCHANGES IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

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Abstract: This text advocates for a comparative approach to the intellectual and cultural history of Southeastern Europe, emphasizing the role of cultural transfers and translations in shaping the region's national identities. The author highlights several key themes: a. intellectual genealogies – the need to construct Balkan intellectual histories by distinguishing between nationalist literary products and pre-modern traditions often “reclaimed” for nation-building; b. mechanisms of influence – the significance of the transition from manuscript to printed book and the vital role of translation in introducing Western aesthetic movements like the Renaissance, Baroque, and Enlightenment; c. aesthetic evolution – a chronological mapping of the region's cultural reception, noting the late arrival of the Renaissance, the compatible coexistence of Enlightenment and pre-Romanticism, and the eventual dominance of French Neoclassicism in the early 19th century; d. regional commonality – the emergence of shared cultural traits following the creation of new states, specifically a penchant for social satire and the “nationalization” of translated works (e.g., Hellenization or Romanianization). Ultimately, the author calls for more intensive, comparative research into these shared aesthetic movements to better synthesize the complex cultural history of the Balkans.

Keywords: Balkan cultural history, comparative research, national intellectual genealogies, translated texts, aesthetic evolution, regional commonality, Balkan polymorphism, homogeneous problematic, national specificities, cultural transfers.

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The constant concern for comparison, I would like to insist, has established a long tradition aimed at studies of cultural transfers which reciprocally influence intellectual and social life, the evolution of thought, institutions, historiographical attitudes, literature and drama, the collective imagination in general. It is not possible in this brief speech to discuss, that is common cultural traditions in Southeastern Europe. On this level what might form the focus of attention of the intellectual history of Southeastern Europe would be *the construction* of the intellectual genealogies of the Balkan national societies that have emerged during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. *Distinctions* I should now turn to a second issue in this framework of reconsiderations.

In rethinking the intellectual past of Southeastern Europe some fundamental distinctions should be borne in mind: levelling of problems and especially levelling of evidence is a safe recipe not only for bad scholarship but for dishonest scholarship as well. The fundamental distinction that ought to be borne in mind in this connection is that between two varieties of source material.

We must distinguish between:

- (a) the literary and dramatic products of nationalism which even in the pre-nation state periods do belong to national intellectual genealogies, and
- (b) pre-modern literary, in the case of Southeastern Europe under Ottoman rule. In this case considerable force would have to be exercised to integrate the literary and dramatic products of these traditions into national intellectual genealogies.

It was precisely this kind of ahistorical treatment that has been attempted on a large scale as part of nation-building projects in all Balkan “national” societies. For a comparative reconsideration of aesthetic, literary and dramatic currents we have a long and very fertile line of translated texts: I am referring to both edited texts and manuscripts that have reciprocally fertilized our cultures, belonging to many spheres of knowledge. The coexistence of manuscript and printed matter is always a case to remember, because both were able to satisfy the needs of a determined circuit of scholars, almost equally. On the other hand, speaking of the 18th and 19th centuries, familiarity with new genres, texts and ideas, alignment with the renewed faces of Western culture, was developed through the parallel process: manuscript / printed book.

The impact of certain aesthetic dispositions, such as the Baroque, pre-Romanticism, neo-classicism or more precisely of certain genres, such as the sentimental novel, the picaresque, etc., occurs almost exclusively through translations. As for the great Western movements, if we go back a little, we note that modern Hellenism did not directly receive the breath of the Italian Renaissance (and of the Baroque in aesthetics) until relatively late, in the middle of the 17th century. The phenomenon found its roots in a cultural area peripheral to the central body of “Greece”, notably Venetian Crete; from there, it subsequently radiated to some centres of Italian influence, notably in the Ionian Islands. It is a production with a preponderance in literature and drama. Furthermore, it is in this same cultural space that we encounter the presence of the spirit of the Counter-Reformation, expressed above all by Jesuit theatre (such is the example of the play *Zeno* written towards the end of the 17th century in Zakynthos (or Cephalonia) by an islander, Cretan or Heptanesian (imitation of a tragedy written in latin by the English Jesuit Joseph Simons, bearing the same title, *Zeno*, published in 1648).

However, I wonder whether such a prolific movement, which found many artistic expressions, should not be studied in comparison with similar cultural manifestations that developed in other regions of South-Eastern Europe, either under the direct patronage of the Renaissance (such as Dalmatia) or under other tutelages. Do we have before our eyes a map with the target sites, having

assimilated the concept of the Renaissance? The same goes for the expressions of the Baroque and Rococo. Nowadays, new discoveries bring to light narrative or dramatic texts, the latter highlighted by the assiduous research of Professor Walter Puchner concerning either translations or original compositions of religious themes, which testify to a clear and widespread interest in a fairly wide area, extending from Cyprus to the islands of the Archipelagos and the Principalities. In the nursery that was the Romanian Principalities of the second half of the 18th century, one can therefore find at several levels of cultural or more precisely poetic expression, and on many occasions, the presence of pre-Romantic aesthetic notions, as diffuse predispositions, in concert with the moral and didactic ideal stemming from the spirit of the Enlightenment. These two notions prove to be compatible. Towards the end of the century, the Romantic impulse will reinforce the liberalism of the Enlightenment. The surge of sensitivity, of sentimentality, cultivated by the Phanariots, lying halfway between “oriental languor” and the literary fashions of the West, was not, in my opinion, a completely isolated case.

The last decades of the 18th century provide us with similar examples, proving the impact of these notions. Nevertheless, at the turn of the century, we notice the predominance of French heroic neoclassicism. The tone was certainly set by Adamance Coray and his followers, who introduced the current of French ideology. I mean here the influence exerted by the group of *Idéologues* into modern Greek intellectual life. Thus, the first decades of the 19th century will be more neoclassicist than romantic. However, apart from a few flagrant romantic exceptions, osmoses exist, more or less visible or even underlying, if only at the level of the temperaments that are formed. These osmoses also contribute to the formation of the particularity of the neo-Hellenic Enlightenment in the wider area of Southeastern Europe.

Going through the 19th century very quickly, since it is, along with the 20th century, I would like to point out some similarities deriving above all from the common vision, following the creation of the new States, intended to establish the national character. This preponderant vision left its traces both on the cultivated literary and dramatic genres, where one can discern a great penchant for social criticism and satire, and on the translation movement, where one finds a common penchant in the Balkan cultures for **adaptation** to national utility (in particular we speak of Hellenization, Vulgarisation, Romanianization, etc).

In conclusion, let me say how much the comparative approach to thin particular phenomena that we have briefly discussed can offer a valuable tool, how much it remains indispensable to any effort to synthesize. We need solid concepts, formed after intense reflection, derived from a deep knowledge of the similarities and underlying diversities in each specific culture, while establishing parallels.

Nevertheless, we need one or more Meetings on the great aesthetic movements and their reception in South-Eastern Europe, starting with the Renaissance and the Baroque, and then extending to the Age of Enlightenment, Romanticism, Naturalism, and finally to the modernist movements up to the present day. In 1875, a Bulgarian adaptation of Molière's *The Miser* by Marco Balabanov circulated in Constantinople, borrowing many of Constantine Oeconomos' solutions. For example, he adopted Oeconomos' enlightened vision as it results from the added scene evoking Exintavelonis' obscurantist [Harpagon] contempt for education and schools (Act II, Scene IV), which places him among the opponents of the Enlightenment. Balabanov's links with Greek culture are also attested by other sources. The result not so much of a direct influence as, rather, of a common and convergent atmosphere, P. R. Slaveykov's one-act comedy *Malakof* (1864) uses a widespread motif: the excesses of fashion and the ridiculousness of its servile imitation. The play is set in a Bulgarian province and the only visible similarity with M. Chourmouzis' comedy remains the reference to the wide skirt that was all the rage at the time. Is this a common point or a simple coincidence? Both authors were in Constantinople at the time each wrote his play.

The didactic aims of D. Misitzi's work remain predominant. His only preserved portrait testifies to a sober personality and an austere appearance. However, he left us graceful comedies that were very popular at the end of the 19th century. Born in Vathy, on the island of Samos, around 1826, he completed his early studies on his native island, which at the time was experiencing a cultural flourishing in the fields of literature, theatre and education. While still young (perhaps around 1855-1858), he left Samos for Constantinople, probably feeling the desire to continue his studies. He taught for over 45 years in various educational institutions in Constantinople and was very actively involved in the cultural activities, predominantly literary and dramatic (readings or stagings, by amateur troupes, of plays often of circumstance), which took place in the *Sylogues*. From 1860, each district of the city boasted of having its Association (*Σύλλογος*) working for the dissemination of education among the Greeks. Moreover, according to some testimonies, Misitzi was among the pioneers who introduced Greek theatre in this city in the years 1858-1860. His educational contribution was widely recognized; this is also due to the fact that around 1878 he was invited to Philippoupolis (Plovdiv) to reorganize the educational system in the Greek primary schools of the city. I believe we can assume that during his stay in Bulgaria he contributed to the organization of theatrical performances in the schools. His one-act comedy, *Ὁ Δούξ τῆς Βλακείας* [The Duke of Stupidity], which was composed in the style of an improvisational comedy, even making a vague allusion at its beginning to the *commedia dell'arte*, in order to be performed

by students in a school setting, was perhaps written on the spot. Against the backdrop of Carnival, the students of a Greek school, located in a suburb of Constantinople, will invent a prank, based on the motif of misunderstanding (*quiproquo*), to fool the supervisor Michalis, a xenomaniac and illiterate. Don Carlos (Spanish nobleman, historical figure) arrives in Constantinople and, after various comic incidents, awards him a decoration. His ridicule is such that at the end of the play, after discovering the truth, Michalis seems ready to cure himself of his illusions. Despite the improvisational process, the rhythm of the comedy is fast and unrelenting. Misitzis exploits some of his favorite techniques: disguise and his ability to imitate the sound of foreign languages, creating comic effects. Knowing the mixed ethnic character of these schools, which did not necessarily address young people of Greek origin, we can assume that among its students there were also Bulgarians.

The comedy, according to the custom of the time, was printed in Philippoupolis in 1881. Among the subscribers were a good number of Bulgarians and, if we rely on the subscribers' catalogues, Misitzis must have been known in a much wider geographical area. Among the subscribers (*αυθρομητέες*) were a good number of Bulgarians and, if we rely on the subscribers' catalogues, Misitzis must have been known in a much wider geographical area. Although this incident does not fall within the heart of the osmoses that endowed Bulgarian culture with its first stage achievements, which occurred towards the beginning of the second half of the 19th century and primarily in the schools established by foreign communities, the latter serving as nurseries for the impact of dramatic art, it still remains eloquent.

During the 19th century, during the formation of the nation states, the Balkan polymorphism is expressed in a more decisive way, while in the field of letters we can identify some converging trajectories. If in the whole of literary production, in this case dramatic, we witness the elaboration of the concept of national identity, a process that presupposed above all the ideological interpretation of national history, in the field of comedy two elements form par excellence the components of a homogeneous problematic that encompasses both the original production and that derived from translations: the adaptation to local customs (*“είς τὰ καθ’ἡμᾶς”*) and the orientation towards social and political criticism, with the criticism of customs as its epicentre.

The social problems seem almost identical: great mobility of social classes, creation of a state mechanism, of a completely new hierarchy composed of civil servants, emergence of a large number of contradictions due to the rapid metamorphosis of a society which saw itself obliged to adopt a “European” way of life. In the examples discussed in this paper, we are faced with the crystallization

of common behaviours; from the time of the “universalism” of the Enlightenment represented by Piccolos, to the time of the emergence of national specificities outlined in Greek and Bulgarian comedies, many convergences are due to the similarities of the Balkan infrastructures; cultural transfers are visible and evident as much as the handling of certain themes and motifs relevant to social realities.

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BALKAN IDENTITY OR BALKAN PECULIARITIES

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Abstract: The debate on whether there is a common Balkan cultural identity has a long history. But today we could ask: Is there really a common space “Balkans”? Or is it more about Balkan peculiarities of these cultures. The text focuses on the issue how theatre cultures from the Balkan region experience their identities. Loaded with the ideas of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, theatre entered into the projects and the practices of the Balkan states, into the national and social identifications. The strong attachment of theatrical art with national identity affirmed theatre as an important public practice and at the same time closed it very strongly in the national narratives. But there has been also an understanding that European cultural models of development should be followed. The direct consequence for theatrical life in the Balkan countries of this excessive cultural tension is the constant wandering between the “modern” and the “postmodern” on the one hand, and the “native” and the “idiosyncratic” on the other. The text affirms that this the artists and intellectuals from the Balkan countries should realize the enormous opportunities for cooperation in the region. But it is the awareness that the Balkans or South-Eastern Europe is an integral part of the European cultural mosaic that can be the basis for closer cooperation.

Keywords: Balkan Region (South-Eastern Europe), cultural heritage, multiculturalism, Balkan identity, theatre history and present, festivals, cultural dialogue.

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The debate on whether there is a Balkan cultural identity has a long history. The very name “Balkans” is the product of a confusion: as we know, the term was introduced into use at the very beginning of the 19th century by the German geographer Johann August Zeune, who mistakenly decided that the Balkan mountain-range extended from the Black Sea to the Adriatic. Although this geographical fallacy was later dispelled, the political necessity to find a term to summarise the breakaway parts of the disintegrating Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, which usually had an unclear international status when they emerged, imposed the term ‘Balkans’. So from its inception, the term suggests the question of whether the geographical error also hides a political error, summarizing incompatible realities. The notion *Balkan identity* “crystallized in a specific discourse” especially after the Balkan wars and the First World War (Todorova, 2004, p. 5). But today we could ask: Is there really a common space “Balkans”? – the question interests me mostly in a socio-cultural sense. Or the term “Balkans” is only the fruit of a geographical and historical generalization that refers to the outskirts of South-Eastern Europe? In fact, today in the discourse of the European Union, *Southeast Europe* is the dominant concept for our region, broader than the old geographical notions of “Balkans”, of which today mostly

the phrase “Western Balkans” has remained in linguistic use. Is it then possible to talk about the Balkans as a common cultural space?

We could see a number of examples of the history of how the founding ideas and practices of European Enlightenment came to the Balkans in a very similar way. And theatrical history is a great example of this. A specific characteristic of Bulgarian theatre is the fact that it played an important role in the process which Bulgarians adopt as their Renaissance in the 19-th century. It is the period of two-three decades before the national liberation at the end of the 70's of the 19-th century. The most popular plays on the Bulgarian stages at that time were taken from the European tradition through the mediation of neighboring Balkan cultures through translations and adaptations, mostly from Serbian and Greek texts following European dramaturgical samples themselves (Iordanov, 2002). The theatre at that historical moment was the image, the mechanism, the institution of representation that a newborn historical actor needed a stage – the newborn Bulgarian nation. The attractiveness of the European type of civilization for a significant number of subjects of the Ottoman Empire, such as the Bulgarians at that time, was the real reason for turning to the European theatre as a cultural practice to be imitated (“imitation” is the exact word for the very beginning of theatrical interest in the Bulgarian communities, as well as in the Armenian, Turkish and Greek communities in the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire, although the later cultural processes acquired their own logic and independent development in each of these national cultures). This fact determined to a great extent the role that theatre played not only in Bulgarian, but for all Balkan cultures, throughout the next 20-th century: loaded with the ideas of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, theatre entered into the projects and the practices of the states, into the ideologies, into the national and social identifications.

The strong attachment of theatrical art with national identity has played a double role – it affirmed theatre as an important public practice and at the same time closed it very strongly in the national narratives. But there has been also an understanding that European cultural models of development should be followed. Good examples are the buildings of the national theatres in Bulgaria and Greece. The building of Bulgarian national theatre was founded as early as the first decade of the 20-th century. It was an ambitious and expensive project, competing the big European theatre buildings. Austrian architectural studio Fellner & Helmer was commissioned for this purpose and that's why the National theatre in Sofia looks like the National Theatre in Zagreb and Rijeka in Croatia and very similar to the Prague state opera and many other public theatres in Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Ukraine, etc. which were designed by this Austrian architectural studio. The building of the

National Theatre of Greece was created in a similar way and almost at the same time – it was designed by a German-born architect Ernst Ziller and opened in 1900 as a Royal Theatre in Athens. Earlier in the second half of 19-th century were built the houses of the national theatres in Serbia and in Romania. The first building of Romanian national theatre inaugurated in the middle of the 19-th century was designed by the Viennese architect A. Hefft. The process of building of the National theatre of Serbia ended towards the end of the 19th century and its architecture resembled La Scala in Milan, Italy. These theatres are also part of the European common cultural heritage.

We must note the division between Balkan cultures, which division came from the different orientation of the Balkan states in the blocks of warring countries during the two world wars of the 20-th century. This division was expressed not only in the interrupted cultural contacts for a long time between them, but also in the cultural dialogue with Europe, divided into military unions, which took place on different vectors of influences.

We cannot miss of course also the political legacy after the Second World War when the Balkan countries were split into three geopolitical spheres – Romania and Bulgaria fell into the Soviet zone, Greece and Turkey were part of the so-called Western world and the countries from the Western Balkans were members of the Non-Aligned Movement. This sharp division for nearly half a century has strongly negatively affected the cultural ties between Balkan countries. The most obvious evidence of this is the state of roads and communications, which continues to be demanding even today – moving from one Balkan country to another is often exhausting, speedways are lacking, air flights are not direct, etc.

We can summarize that 19-th and 20-th centuries, i. e. the time of the birth of nation states, has left to the whole Balkan region the same sociocultural heritage: a mixture of traditionalism and modernity, of a sharp clash between individualistic and collectivist attitudes, but also of compatibility between urban and rural cultures, between industrial and agrarian myths. At the same time, the socio-cultural heterogeneity of the region called “Balkans” is evident – there are multiple cultural layers, different national and religious affiliations intersect, and alongside them there are a number of sub-cultural zones with hybrid identities. Perhaps it is in this incredible variety of ethnic and religious determinations, in the hybridity between them, in the mythical and legendary narratives that travel through these lands, in the superstitions and heresies that have been passed down, in the common historical memories, fears and hopes, that some Balkan specificity lies. But we must explicitly make the caveat that we are dealing with multiple identity when we inquire to detect voices and intonations from pre-modern times in these lands we inhabit today. We should, however, be aware that even if we

could find the “soul of Balkans”, these will be only remnants, scarce crumbs of the culture of a pre-modern way of life that has been subjected to shocking and radical changes for many of the last decades. In fact, it is precisely because modernity at the Balkans came with the pathos of nationalism that the national, rather than the urban, regional or common human context, has been meaning-making in the twentieth century for the official cultures of the Balkan countries. This “nationalism” should not be understood as simplistic; its nature is significantly more complex than the political meaning of this concept. It is the result of a very characteristic state of the Balkan’s societies – the never-ending process of modernization, which has often been interrupted by outbreaks of pre-modern attitudes and authoritarian political regimes. The overvaluation of the category “national” in culture, without a clear perspective to the bigger world, has actually created problems for a full-grown cultural dialogue at the Balkan level in the past. And as competitors for the conquest of territories or for particular population groups in the region, cultural cooperation between the Balkan states over the past century has been highly contradictory – without continuity, sometimes deliberate, often superficial.

We should also highlight another recognizable feature of the Balkan national cultures – this is their orientation towards the cultural models of the major European nations. Direct cultural influences have been (and still are) taking place along this, let’s call it “Eurocentric axis”, not so much between the Balkan countries themselves. Although this is a view that can be called in some sense ‘colonial’, because it suggests that cultural influences are thought of primarily as transfers only from the centre (the leading European countries) to the periphery of Europe (the small Balkan countries), it is consistent with the historical logic – the official culture in the Balkan countries, the one that the state is committed to develop, is thought simultaneously through the prism of national legitimation and social modernisation, understood as approximation to the European standards seen in the large metropolises. This desire to fit into the cultural patterns we usually call “European” or “universal” often leads to ebbs and flows of unnecessary self-flagellation or overconfidence – here is a common cultural reflex we could call “Balkan”.

The direct consequence for theatrical life in the Balkan countries of this excessive cultural tension is the constant wandering between the “modern” and the “postmodern” on the one hand, and the “native” and the “idiosyncratic” on the other. And even today a bystander could easily notice that our national theatre cultures are more open to the West European and Central European dramaturgies and stage practices instead to mutual collaborations between each other. A few days ago, knowing that I was going to participate in this conference, I made a simple comparison between the current repertoires of the national theatre stages

in Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Greece and North Macedonia. I have seen that at the moment two or more of these stages are playing the same authors such as Euripides, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Chekhov, Turgenev, Brecht, Camus. Some titles are literally repeated – for example, from Ibsen *A doll's house* (at the national stages in Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria), *An Enemy of the People* (in Athens and Skopje), *Hedda Gabler* (in Bucharest; it is about to premiere also in Sofia); from Chekhov *The Seagull* (at the national theatres in North Macedonia and in Romania), *Three sisters* (in Bucharest and in Athens). It is not necessary to make further comparisons, because if we take the repertoires not only of the national stages, but also of the other city theatres, we will see how many other titles are repeated. In fact, we see the usual repetitive repertoire formula: national authors plus European classics and contemporary European and American authors. This example clearly shows us that the cultural bridges between our countries pass through the understanding of the common European heritage and present. For example, historical studies of Bulgarian theatre show also the enormous and crucial importance of European dramaturgy for its development (Nikolova, 2004).

Such conclusion does not mean that this mediated dialogue between our neighbouring cultures only through the bigger European cultures should continue. Just the opposite – we need to know each other better and to realize the enormous opportunities for cooperation in our region. But it is the awareness that the Balkans or South-Eastern Europe is an integral part of the European cultural mosaic that can be the basis for closer cooperation. And the geographical proximity, the advantages of neighbourhood, the understanding of cultural stereotypes, the shared common past and common European horizons – these are what above all binds us and will continue to bind us in the future.

Of course, there are also economic reasons for seeking cultural cooperation. The lack of a large, i.e. self-sufficient cultural market in most of the Balkan countries suggests that we must rely on a more active dialogue between cultural operators and artistic platforms.

On a very pragmatic level, the festivals are the fastest ways for theatrical collaboration (Nikolova, 2003). They are platforms for creating and distributing performances, for launching projects, and for professional debates. In Bulgaria, in the field of performing arts, there are several festivals that program international productions. In the area of dance these are *One Dance Festival* in Plovdiv and *Atistatic Festival* in Sofia; in puppetry the most recognizable festivals are *Puppet fair* in Sofia, *Golden dolphin* in Varna and *Pierrot* in Stara Zagora; the drama festivals programing international performances, predominantly from Balkan countries, are *Stage at a crossroads* in Plovdiv and *Balkan theatre festival* in Blagoevgrad. Personally

I represent “Via Fest” Foundation – the organizer of two parallel festival forums: the International Theatre Festival *Varna Summer* (the biggest theatre festival in Bulgaria) and the platform *World Theatre in Sofia*. This year – by coincidence – for the June editions of the both events we have invited foreign performances only from Southeast Europe. This is not necessarily our profile; we are not specifically looking for this programming direction. But we, as festival organizers, realize how important is to know what is happening in our region with a perspective to our future festival editions. As a good example of cooperation, I can also point to our joint work with other Bulgarian theatres that are open to programming international works. Our platform *World Theatre in Sofia* collaborates with the National Theatre, with Theatre workshop *SFUMATO*, with the Regional Centre for Performing Arts *Toplocentrala*. And the beginning of this collaboration came from the idea of the Varna Summer International Theatre Festival to expand the audience for the programmed international productions by presenting them in Sofia. Now the platform *World Theatre in Sofia* has its own profile and autonomy. I believe that now is the time for similar cooperation with other cities not only in Bulgaria but also with programming centres and festivals from the geographically close countries. We had some exchanges of theatre productions with the International Theatre Festival in Sibiu, Romania. We could think about creating Balkan festival routes for international tours – as long as, of course, two or three festival forums coincide in time. In fact, such gatherings (like this one in Thessaloniki) can serve to create a network for cooperation. It is important to know each other and to build trust with each other.

I think that in addition to exchanging information about interesting and high-quality performances, we can, through the partnerships we have built with specialized theatre editions and other cultural entities, we can contribute to the mutual promotion of our theatre cultures, individual artists and art critics, as well as to dialogue in the field of history and theory of performing arts.

Last but not least – just as the cooperation at the institutional level, as well as the cooperation through existing festivals and theatre publications, so important too are individual contacts and participation in joint projects by artists, art critics, and cultural managers. It is the artistic and intellectual energy of individuals that can change the situation so that the Balkans can emerge from the negative connotation that the term “Balkan” has had in the past and still continues to cast its shadow over our region.

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CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE BALKANS: TOWARDS A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO ACTING METHODS

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Abstract: Closely linked to the strong trend towards internationalisation in all fields of science and human creativity, *transnational theatre projects* bringing together artists from several Balkan countries and beyond will be favoured in the coming years. Certainly, the “theatre of the future” will be a theatre that transcends national borders, creates a dialogue between local theatrical traditions and international methods. The dialogue between the arts will not remain solely in the realm of interpretive technique, but will also address pressing, often shared, social and political issues faced by youth and society in the region. The dialogue between theatre schools in the region is also taking place in the constantly changing and evolving field of acting methods. In this context, the Romanian school of theatre will present its specific characteristics, determined by the legacy of the Stanislavskian method, the additions of Viola Spolin’s improvisation method, the principles of an acting method based on authenticity and unity in diversity, specific to visionary Professor Ion Cojar, and the psychoanalytic approach of the great professor Adriana Marina Popovici. The paper also discusses how students of the current generation perceive and approach topics such as cruelty, exile, crime, in the acting workshops dedicated to the study of Ancient Greek Drama.

Keywords: Balkan Region, transnational projects, collaborative approach, acting methods, Ancient Greek Theatre, Medeea, Clitemnestra, UNATC’s acting method, acting principles, Ion Cojar/Iany Kozsar, Adriana Marina Popovici, establishing a common specialized vocabulary.

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While national narratives often remain distinct, contemporary theatrical projects increasingly emphasize **intercultural dialogue** and reconciliation as a way to unify the region’s diverse performance traditions. The Balkan region is characterized by a “treasure trove” of shared folk traditions, music, dance, and oral histories, which can serve as the foundation for a common artistic methodology.

Cultural institutions and universities in the Balkan region are providing a robust framework for developing an Inter-Balkan Network of Performing Arts, which the founding members will name The Inter-Balkan Network of Culture, Art and Education, for an integrated perspective.

In this context, closely linked to the strong trend towards internationalisation in all fields of science and human creativity, *transnational theatre projects* bringing together artists from several Balkan countries and beyond will be favoured. Certainly, the “theatre of the future” will be a theatre that transcends national borders, creates a dialogue between local theatrical traditions and international methods, and seeks to convey the indigenous artistic heritage incorporating oral tradition (utilizing fairy tales, myths, and legends that span

the region), incorporating unique regional musical elements (such as polyphonic singing) and complex rhythms, along with traditional dances. The dialogue between the arts will not remain solely in the realm of interpretive technique, but will also address pressing, often shared, social and political issues faced by youth and society in the region.

The dialogue between theatre schools in the region will also take place in the constantly changing and evolving field of **acting methods**. From this point of view, theatre schools share common characteristics, such as the synthesis between tradition and modernity, between international methods that have become widely accepted (Stanislavski, Method Acting) and local or national ones, between the theatrical theories of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century (Artaud, Brecht, Grotowski, Brook, Eugenio Barba, and others).

The Stanislavskian method and its various interpretations remain the dominant pedagogical framework in regional acting schools. This includes a focus on the “art of acting” through disciplined technical work, such as the use of neutral black rehearsal costumes to focus on internal psychological and physical development. Also, most theatres and alternative spaces in the region focus on training actors through vocal and physical exercises, exploring the relationship between thought, emotion, body, rhythm, and text.

The challenges of a common approach in the transnational culture, art and educational projects include overcoming conflicting discourses about cultural heritage and finding a balance between “Eastern”, “Western,” and local influences, creating a hybrid, flexible style that combines emotion with physical rigor.

The Romanian Acting School – Pedagogical Foundations

In this context, the Romanian school of theatre will present its specific characteristics, determined by the legacy of the Stanislavskian method, the additions of Viola Spolin’s improvisation method, the principles of an acting method based on authenticity and unity in diversity, specific to visionary Professor Ion Cojar, and the psychoanalytic approach of the great professor Adriana Marina Popovici.

Ion Cojar (1931-2009) was an actor, director with an extremely vast culture and refined artistic taste, author of over 100 memorable performances throughout a career spanning almost six decades, director of the Teatrul Mic theatre in Bucharest between 1969 and 1972, and then general director of the I.L. Caragiale National Theatre in Bucharest between 1997 and 2001. Ion Cojar was also a reformer of the Romanian theatre school, teaching continuously at the Department of Acting within the Theatre Faculty of I.L. Caragiale UNATC

in Bucharest, where he trained generations of young actors and theatre teachers and influenced the continuous development and modernization of the theatre education system. He was called “the creator, mentor, and senior of the Romanian theatre school.” (<https://www.tnb.ro/ro/tnb-i-ia-adio-de-la-ion-cojar>) Ion Cojar, whose birth name was Iany Koszar, came from a family of Serbian origin from Recaş (Timiș county, Romania).

Professor Cojar’s method is based on two conditions on which the “quality of the stage act” and the “quality of the actor’s performance” reside:

1) The specific logical mechanism – Ion Cojar believes that actors have always been guided by a different type of logic than the classic binary one: actors believe and can even be two things at once, themselves and someone else:

So, the initial point which contains everything and which all stem from, the founding principle of the actor’s art is this mentality which works based on the polyvalent logical scheme which accepts and explains logically, coherently, the multiple polyvalent nature of the authentic actor. They are the artist and their work, at the same time. They are the artist and the character, citizen X and character Y. Throughout the authentic stage act, the actor is both their own (civilian) self, as well as Hamlet or Richard, the concepts of whom, their way of thinking, they have adopted. (Cojar, 2025, p. 37)

This leads to a statement that Cojar considers to be the essence, the whole truth about the phenomenon of the actor’s specific creation and which, having been demonstrated and verified in practice in our acting school over time, has acquired axiomatic value:

THE ACTOR’S ART IS A WAY OF THINKING.

THE ACTOR’S ART IS FIRST AND FOREMOST A SPECIFIC LOGICAL MECHANISM.

It is only secondarily that the actor’s art is a way of “doing”. (Cojar, 2025, p. 37)

In terms of the multifaceted nature of the **actor-human being**, he is two things at once: Himself and the Other, Identity and Otherness. Otherness in the sense of a possible variant of one’s own being, a variant that differs from identity and which, in certain objective circumstances, substitutes identity (that is, it actualizes itself). The actualization of potencies is also one of Ion Cojar’s

basic ideas and constitutes the unmistakable specificity of the art of acting. The emergence, “realization,” “actualization” of this “potential,” “virtuality,” “possibilities,” this “prozonier,” “archetype” should be the meaning and ultimate goal of a good school of dramatic art.

II) The potential for vulnerability is, as can be seen from the above, another essential condition for achieving acting performance, which is ultimately the goal of actor’s training. This is the “ineffable potential” that Viola Spolin spoke of; the truth, naturalness, unpredictability of behavior, events, and changes that make up what Cojar calls “the actor’s subject”, depend on the activation of this potential by the actor-human being. The potential for vulnerability intervenes on its own in the creative process:

Actors journey in creating a character

start from themselves, from their own identity, and they even strive to maintain it in order to be able to “feel” with their senses, in order to judge with a sober mind and in order to be able to feel with their whole “potential of vulnerability” all that could happen to them throughout the itinerary that the author proposed.

Through this simple procedure, implicitly using themselves, the genius of true actors knows how to discover and develop their own subject. This seems to be the paradox of depth of the actor’s art.

The way to the other (to any “character”) goes through myself. *Only by being myself can I be any potential others that lie within me.* (Cojar, 2025, p. 77)

Thus, Professor Cojar puts forward another fundamental principle when he says that „All characters are within ourselves.” According to this „thesis,” the path, the „ascent” from myself to the character, has three crucial moments:

- 1) Myself in given situations
- 2) The discovery, purpose, and role of myself in the theatrical convention
- 3) Assuming the concept, the logical mechanism of the character, substitution, myself, the role, the character.

One of the particularities of talent is mobility, the ease of „de-specializing” in order to „re-specialize” in another type of concept, another way of thinking and, therefore, another way of „being.” These abilities, which are based on the wealth of inherited genetic information (including the multitude of „alterities”

that exist within him) and acquired information (through the acquisition of a „good theory” and a „good method”), constitute the actor’s true creative potential.

The actor’s approach on crime and cruelty themes of the Ancient Greek Theatre in the acting class

The other perspective we wish to address in this paper is prompted by our participation in *The First Inter-Balkan Conference of Performing Arts from Thessaloniki* (16-17 March 2025) with pedagogical staff and a group of students that prepared and presented scenes from the Ancient Greek Theatre. At our university, the study of Greek tragedy is approached simultaneously with the study of Shakespearean drama—both topics are studied in what we call the “Tragedy Module” in the third year of study in Acting.

Approaching themes such as murder and cruelty in the academic acting courses meets paradoxical challenges today. On the one hand, students are quite comfortable with the idea of cruelty from cinema and video games, but when it comes to assuming themselves a character who initiates and even completes acts of cruelty, there is a major reluctance. Emotional blockages appear, traumas come to the surface, obstacles arise even regarding the ability to support a conflict, although the conflict is deeply impregnated in the idea of becoming, a constant characteristic of life, movement, transformation. In addition, the conflict is the very warp from which any theatrical story is woven.

The theatrical themes stir up the being and put it face to face with itself. They provoke the soul and the spirit and put it in front of the great existential questions. Especially the “great dramaturgy” and the great theatre creators, manage to put the actor in front of the major questions of life, determine him to plunge into his own past, to analyze his own experience, to use his own factual and emotional memory so that, in the end, the great dramaturgy itself becomes the main textbook in the study of the human experience transmitted through the art of the actor. For, as Professor Ion Cojar says, they cannot fathom the “complexly organized unit” and thus they hinder the free and unpredictable manifestation of dynamic and contradictory human nature as it appears from “the unique possible rational realistic perspective” – which is “ACTOR = HUMAN. This logical couple is irreducible, no matter from what perspective or assumption, and therefore, form of artistic diversity, we would approach the actor’s art” (Cojar, 2025, chapter XI, p. 98).

So, for representing conflict, cruelty, for bringing the echos of the crime onstage and in order to help our students gain courage and the faith to approach

the main themes of the Ancient drama, we are using a set of theatrical techniques that effectively intervene. I will present them in the order in which we apply them in I.L. Caragiale UNATC's acting classes:

1. First and above all, we put the principle of **authenticity**. In order to become someone else and to test another human experience, the actor must be himself. He must have the courage to analyze himself, to make mental processes real himself, with all their bodily and emotional consequences. The actor is his own instrument and his own work at the same time. And authenticity is the first professional act he must assume.

Unlike the views which consider the interpretation of the line, of the word, tone, gesture, attitude and movement as the main matter of the actor's creation, the great schools of dramatic art of the twentieth century, starting with Stanislavsky's system, or Lee Strasberg's Method, just like the explorations of Tairov, Meyerhold, Michael Chekhov, Kedrov, Gorceakov, Knebel, Michel St. Denis, Charles Dullin, Luis Jovet, Michael Redgrave, Grotowski and many other theatre practitioners and pedagogues, placed at the foundation of the actor's work the principle of authenticity and the method.

The main problem in acting is not what the actors do or how they do it, but what happens to them in essence throughout the stage act. The true acting is the result of real natural organic processes. As professor Cojar describes it:

Between "something happening" and "nothing essential happening" lies the difference between truth and fake, between the authenticity and the artificiality of the stage act. The actor that acts like an actor all the time experiences nothing important from a human point of view. They do not create, they do not discover anything that had been unknown and unpredictable up to the moment of creation, they pre-do and pretend based on something which is already known. Their stage action therefore has no gnoseological, formative value. (Cojar, 2025, Cap VII *A necessary redefinition*, p. 37)

2. The second level needed for any student is the conscious assumption of another concept – another way of thinking. The **Concept** is the main foundation of the character. Because it represents his own, unique way of thinking. Starting from being himself, the actor adds new mental grids, new life motto-s, a new set of values, a main guiding principle that leads him through life. I quote from Liviu Lucaci's manual *The Becoming of the Actor*:
The concept is a sentence. Sometimes a paragraph, if it is too difficult to be put into words. The concept expresses a creed. "Everything in life is achieved through work", "Live in the moment", "The whole world is

indebted to me” or “Life is a struggle” are possible concepts.” The concept “is a conviction, a kind of rule that guides the character. As each person has a set of principles and prejudices that they are led by in life, so is the character guided by a number of concepts. For example, Richard III has, among others, the concept that the world owes him for his misfortune of being born with an infirmity (Lucaci, 2025, p. 39).

3. The third level of triggering a new stage existence is making **cultural analogies**. The actor’s preparation for stage involves continuous research and is very important that he builds up his own expertise in matters of life, psychology, philosophy, human relations. Life experience plays an important part here, but also the cultural perspective about the problems of life (Adriana Marina Popovici’s method).

For example, by studying characters such as Medea and Clitemnestra, at some point, it was very helpful for the students’ ability to take over the parts, with the cruel situation involved, to hear the story of Hadoula Fragogiannou from Alexandros Papadiamantis novel “The Murderres”, one I heard about from my Greek colleague, researcher and editor – Despina Kosmopoulou. Just as Medea, Hadoula is a “farmaka” and does her own justice and telling her story to the students brought Medea’s problems to our century.

Also, researching the story of Medea is essential for the actor’s training for understanding the theme of betrayal, injustice, cruel separation, deportation, exile and approaching Medea at any level of study is further on very helpful for understanding themes from Shakespeare – for example Isabella from *Mesure for Mesure* – and Ibsen’s Nora. The confrontation between Helmer Torvald and Nora is the modern approach for a lot more direct and powerful confrontation – the one between Medea and Iasonos/Jason.

4. The forth level that an actor must pursue is activating his **substitutive imagination**. By answering to Stanislavski’s question: What if I was myself in the position of Isabela? Of Medea? Of Hadoula Fragogiannou? Is giving a key of understanding. The key is the empathy that is triggered when you put yourself in the situation given by dramaturgy. Then the organic existence of the character’s life appears, the flow of the character’s existence is released, the character is no longer a semiotic system from a book, but has his own life experience, powerful and with real physical and emotional consequences.

In the practical part of our presentation, we illustrated our approaches by exemplifying the scene Clitemnestra-Aegistius-The Chorus from Aeschylus' play *Agamemnon* (Lines 1331-1576).

Conclusion

The region's intangible cultural heritage serves as a unifying «soul» for contemporary practice. By tapping into the region's shared folk heritage and oral stories, by sharing the music, dance, acting techniques that each university and academy proposes, young artists can transform these collective “treasures” into a shared modern methodology.

The regional cooperation and the collaborative approach to the acting methods used in the Balkan Theatre Schools and Universities should be less about creating a single “Balkan school” and more about fostering a shared “playing culture”—a set of theatrical traditions and conventions through which the region can communicate its shared values.

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MEDEA – THE FIRST ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT?

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Abstract: This essay explores the unique cultural perception of Medea in Georgian literature, theatre, and public discourse. Contrary to her perception in much of Western tradition, Medea is portrayed in Georgia as a misunderstood, even heroic figure. The text traces this interpretation from Akaki Tsereteli's 19th-century play to contemporary theatrical works, emphasizing the ethnic and national identification Georgians feel with Medea. It highlights the shift in her portrayal in modern theatre, particularly in the plays of Misha Charkviani and Paata Tsikolia, which address her as a victim of violence and societal decay. The analysis culminates in Lasha Bugadze's *Anti-Medea*, where Medea becomes a symbol of the modern immigrant woman, reflecting the challenges of assimilation, xenophobia, and systemic injustice in liberal democracies. Drawing parallels between Euripides' ancient narrative and contemporary politics – including immigration policies in Europe and the U.S. – the essay interrogates the durability of liberal values and the persistent “othering” of foreigners. Ultimately, it uses Medea as a lens to critique nationalism, expose societal hypocrisies, and explore the intersection of myth, identity, and modern statehood. And all of these is reflecting in Lasha Bugadzes play.

Keywords: multiculturalism, Medea, Georgia, Lasha Bugadze, migration, xenophobia, foreignness.

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Medea is one of the most cherished characters in Georgia. You may ask why. How can a character who betrayed her homeland, murdered her own brother, and then committed an unthinkable act killing her own children out of revenge against her husband be considered “beloved”? The thing is, Georgians don't believe this version of the story, and they do everything they can to justify Medea's actions (especially since ancient sources provide them with this opportunity). (Shamanidi, 2017, pp. 16-58). It may sound cliché, but one of the main arguments for defending Medea is this: a Georgian woman would never kill her own children. This might seem like a humorous remark, but it is actually reinforced by Georgian classical literature.

Medea was first introduced into Georgian literature by one of the most prominent 19th-century poets, Akaki Tsereteli. In his play *Medea*, he goes to great lengths to portray her as a model of virtue, while Jason is depicted as a deceitful scoundrel who uses her for his own selfish goals.¹

¹ “Akaki Tsereteli wrote a play called *Media* (Me + Dia meaning I + a female, woman), which was originally intended to be a trilogy: *Media in Colchis*, *Media in Hellas*, and *Media Back in The Homeland*. However, the initial idea failed to be implemented and the poet published only its first part called *Media in 1875*. He referred to Apollonius' *Argonautica* as the source for his play; however, the title he gave to the plot describing the events in Colchis was the same as that of the Euripidean play. This leads to the thought that

This text essentially became canonical in Georgian literature, and from Akaki Tsereteli onward, every poet, writer, and playwright who has written about Medea has sought to justify her actions.²

There is even an opera on the theme of Medea, *The Colchian Maiden*. Although the ending is slightly different, Medea informs Jason that she has killed their children because she did not want them to fall into enemy hands. She then takes her own life, followed by Jason's suicide.³

A deep analysis of these texts would take us too far, and many articles have already been written on the subject. It is also worth mentioning that, until 2015, Euripides' *Medea* had been staged in Georgia only once and even then, with great difficulty because the leading actress of the time refused to play the role of a woman who had killed her own children (Nadareishvili, 2005).

A certain shift in the perception of Medea began only in 21st-century theatre — young playwrights and directors freed themselves from the “Georgian Medea complex” and started speaking openly about her actions.

In 2015, Misha Charkviani staged Euripides' *Medea* without deviating from the original text. However, he added two moments beyond the text to provide a deeper explanation for Medea's decision to kill her children: after her dialogue with Creon, he rapes her, and throughout the play, a constantly running television

the poet evidently wished to depict already in this poem the events taking place in Colchis. On the other hand, he intended to create a certain exposition for a better presentation of Medea and in order to prepare the reader for the changes (in the mythic plot as well as in Medea's image) forthcoming in the remaining part of the trilogy. We may reckon that the second play was supposed to allude to Euripides' *Medea*, while the third play would probably be fostered by the poet's own imagination. Evidently, Medea's return to her homeland aimed at her complete rehabilitation and at neutralizing the motivation of her leaving Colchis". (Shamanidi, 2007).

2 A huge number of books has been written by Georgian scholars about Medea in Modern Georgian literature, visual arts, theatre and generally in culture. The international conferences held in Georgia underlines the interest toward Medea in this country: *The Argonautica and the World Culture*, 2007; *Medea in the World Artistic Culture*, Tbilisi, 2018; *Perceptions of Caucasus in Myths and Literature from Antiquity till Contemporaneity*, Tbilisi, 2023.

3 In 2010, renowned Georgian composer and conductor Vakhtang Machavariani staged a concert performance, an opera composed by Aleksii Machavariani, at the Tbilisi Music Centre. Vakhtang, who also authored the libretto, structured the opera in two acts: the first set in Colchis, the second in Corinth, ten years later. The concert program included a rich and intellectually ambitious essay by the director himself. In it, Machavariani draws not only on ancient sources - Euripides, Pindar, Aristotle, Seneca - but also on post-classical literature, ranging from the Middle Ages to contemporary authors such as Franz Grillparzer, Christa Wolf, Dario Fo, and Ludmila Ulitskaya. His research makes clear his interpretive aim: to offer a sympathetic reading of Medea. Interestingly, despite aligning himself with the Georgian tradition of exonerating Medea, where she does not kill her children, Machavariani departs from this in his libretto. In the final duet, Medea tells Jason that she has, in fact, killed their children, claiming they would otherwise have fallen into enemy hands. The opera concludes with both Medea and Jason taking their own lives. This ending seems driven by two imperatives. On the one hand, it adheres to operatic convention, tragic love stories often culminate in the double death of the protagonists. On the other, it provides a sense of psychological or moral resolution: a woman who kills her children must, by this logic, also destroy herself; and a man whose children have been murdered by their mother cannot bear the weight of such loss.

screen shows a sensationalist TV channel broadcasting Jason enjoying himself with Glauce.⁴

In 2020, playwright and director Paata Tsikolia presented perhaps the most chilling portrayal of Medea in Georgian theatre with his play *Medea s01e06*. Here, Medea is depicted as a depraved, unrestrained woman living in a degenerate society. However, and this might be my interpretation, the play seems to offer an explanation for her actions - she herself is a victim of violence at the hands of her relatives and society, and as a result, she later becomes a perpetrator.⁵

Even though the most defining and intriguing element of Euripides' *Medea* is precisely the act of infanticide, I believe that for contemporary writers, a different aspect of her story has become more compelling. This aspect is Medea's foreignness - her status as a barbarian - which was already emphasized in Euripides' version and was a factor that worsened her fate even in antiquity.

One fascinating example of this perspective is Andreas Flourakis' *Medea Burka* (Φλουράκης, 2023). In Georgian literature, a particularly interesting interpretation of this theme is found in Lasha Bugadze's *Anti-Medea* (Bugadze, 2020).

As I mentioned earlier, Medea is extremely popular in Georgia because Georgians identify with her on an ethnic level. However, there is another reason why Georgians are particularly sensitive to the story of Medea: since the 1990s, virtually every Georgian family has had at least one emigrant. Emigration is not an unfamiliar phenomenon for Greeks either, but Georgian emigration stands out in that it is primarily women who leave the country, and the majority of them are undocumented. In Georgia, there exists what is known as the "Skype generation" - children who grew up seeing their mothers only through Skype, reaching adulthood without ever physically being with them. There are countless such children in Georgia. As a result, cases of illegal Georgian women being pursued and deported from Europe are common, just as Medea was chased out by the Corinthians.⁶ It turns out that Medea did not only "frighten" Europeans 25 centuries ago. Even now, in the 21st century, the collective Medea - the barbarian, the foreigner, the unassimilated refugee, the "dangerous" immigrant - is still perceived as a threat in Europe.

4 The play was staged in Vaso Abashidze State Professional New Theatre.

5 The play was first staged in 2020 in the city of Poti, as part of a regional theatre festival. In 2022, it was revived at the Royal District Theatre in Tbilisi, directed by Paata Tsikolia.

6 In 2007, a statue of Medea was erected in the central square of Batumi, a major city in western Georgia. Sculpted by David Khmaladze, the monument immediately sparked a public controversy. Many locals expressed outrage, arguing that a mother who murdered her children had no place in the symbolic heart of the city. Others rushed to defend Medea, claiming she never killed her children at all. The debate gained such traction that even the President of Georgia stepped in, offering a rather unexpected interpretation: the statue, he claimed, commemorated the first deported from Europe woman. That, it seems, was the moment the controversy deflated. After all, nearly every Georgian family had at least one deported woman in their families.

This very aspect is central to Lasha Bugadze's play *Anti-Medea*. Here, Medea is portrayed as a victim, but not so much of her husband's betrayal as of the intolerance of a developed, democratic society.

Bugadze's Medea has been living in Europe for 17 years; she is married to a European and has children with him. However, she has only been "visible", legally recognized as a person for the last three years. Following the election of an ultranationalist government (which Medea herself had supported)⁷, a referendum is held, determining that only those who have legally resided in the country for at least 30 years may remain. Otherwise, one is deemed an "anti-citizen." And so, Medea faces a dilemma - should she leave and abandon the children she bore in Europe, who are, therefore, European? Or should she take them with her into an uncertain future? The active Medea refuses to surrender. From the "temporary detention zone," she is live-streaming 24/7. She has thousands of followers on social media, showering her with likes and words of encouragement. A kind of virtual chorus, cheering her on in cyberspace, yet ultimately remaining just that: virtual, nonexistent, a simulacrum of support that will vanish when she truly needs real, tangible solidarity.

As we noted earlier, even in Euripides' version, Medea's suffering is amplified by the fact that she is a foreigner, a woman from an alien culture, an outsider to the "civilized" Western world.

Bugadze's play makes it clear that the problem Medea faced 25 centuries ago remains just as relevant today. His Medea is just as foreign and unwelcome in the Western world as Euripides' Medea was in her time.

Can we say, then, that Europe, despite seemingly opening its doors to the East, even signing agreements allowing visa-free travel, was still not truly ready to accept and recognize as equals those who are even slightly different (even in something as trivial as clothing)? How firm, well-founded, and real are the liberal values that Europe claims to uphold, values that supposedly rest on equality? How much do these declared values align with reality? And how does contemporary theatre reflect on this contradiction?

⁷ For one of my studies, I conducted a small survey among our former compatriots living in Greece. Most of my interviewees were Georgian citizens who had moved to Greece in the 1990s, primarily Pontic Greeks. My question was straightforward: *In your opinion, how fair is Greece's immigration policy?* Despite being immigrants themselves and having personally experienced the hardships of living abroad, the vast majority responded that they did not support Greece's decision to accept refugees, asylum seekers, or migrants from Eastern countries or Africa. They were particularly irritated by the fact that the state provided financial assistance to these newcomers and offered them opportunities to start small businesses, privileges that the so-called "old immigrants" no longer enjoyed. Many of them even referred to the new arrivals in derogatory terms. Some openly supported the far-right *Golden Dawn* party, which actively campaigned against migrants. A similar trend is likely observable among Georgian immigrants in the United States, many of whom voted for Trump, though this is a topic for further research. The study is not published yet.

So, how does this society perceive Medea?

Bugadze's Medea fully integrates into her new environment. She becomes an active, typical, indistinguishable citizen of the host country. She is even politically engaged, working as a political campaigner. She tries to change her identity, to adopt a new, European self. But does this effort ensure her acceptance? It turns out, no. No matter what she does, no matter how hard she tries, she remains foreign, different. In the end, the "native" European (as Bugadze puts it) will always find a reason to exclude, to expel, to put her in her place: "*Only a native citizen can truly be recognized.*"

The country she fled from years ago has now been conquered. If she returns, she faces either enslavement or death. But for European bureaucracy, this is merely a formality:

"The state will be forced to take action"; "You will be forcibly removed from the territory"; "The state is not responsible for your further movement"; "The law is the law. There are rules we must all obey. We have lived this way for centuries."

As in Euripides' *Medea*, the most painful part of Bugadze's play is Medea's separation from her children. The court rules against her - she must leave Europe. Now, she must decide whether to leave her children behind or take them with her into an uncertain future.

Many women have faced this exact dilemma. Consider the policy enacted in the U.S. during President Trump's administration, where newly arrived undocumented immigrants from Mexico were forcibly separated from their children.⁸ Another policy, the repatriation law for American-born children of undocumented immigrants, also resulted in the breakup of families.⁹

So, what are we dealing with here? Is modern society repeating Creon's mistake? Has Euripides' Creon reemerged in the role of the modern state? What is Creon-state afraid of, and what is it fighting against? Is Creon-state merely a reflection of society's collective attitude? If we examine recent political trends in Europe and the U.S., we see that far-right, ultranationalist, and populist politicians are gaining popularity. Le Pen's party in France, Trump's MAGA movement in the U.S., AfD in Germany. On the surface, it seemed like the narrative was changing. Greece banned the neo-fascist Golden Dawn party, and Trump's immigration policies were ruled unconstitutional by American courts.

Yet, just recently, a new political figure, Éric Zemmour, has entered the race for the French presidency, once again attempting to win votes with the same nationalist rhetoric.

8 https://www.justice.gov/opa/pressrelease/file/1049751/download?fbclid=IwAR2z9Mi7L2a90Ga85LWtZkQXr0Z2_P7C0ib7dwQxV2mSvXJjVHn8hnOmAG0

9 <https://globalnews.ca/news/7079833/u-s-supreme-court-donald-trump-dreamers/?fbclid=IwAR2xAsV4fThOr5WDOH6nLMXHQI3JuIYTcdL7pu2Xnk-dqhYn4LpFkehnTYc>

Bugadze's Creon Says: *"Shall I list my fears? Tell you what I'm ashamed of? The referendum answered all of them! I don't like it that in the street, where I was raised, an old pharmacy was closed and some foreigners opened a kebab place. And a tea-house nearby with green walls... In my neighbourhood all my old friends moved out, and why's that? Because they stopped recognizing the old streets, squares and the whole area because that foreign culture – oh, sorry, lack of culture destroyed it all! Indeed, destroyed it! I don't like aggressive foreigners in my country, but have nothing against honest and hard-working newcomers. But either they change their ways, try to be like us, or else they can go back to where they belong and open their tea-houses with green walls."*¹⁰

Éric Zemmour, in his campaign video, essentially repeats the same message: "Dear fellow citizens, you have not gone anywhere, but you no longer feel at home. The France of the people your parents told you about no longer exists. We must preserve our way of life, our traditions, our conversations, and so on and so forth, while at the same time the newcomers must assimilate into our culture and become French in France - rather than strangers in an unfamiliar land." (paraphrase)¹¹

More recently the speaker of white house, quoting president Trump said that all the emigrants are criminals because they entered the US borders illegally.¹²

The irrational fear that Europeans have toward the "foreigner" is nothing new. This phobia was already present in Euripides' time regarding Medea. So, where is the boundary between liberal thinking, liberal values, openness, and ultranationalism? What kind of policy should be adopted so that, on the one hand, government decisions do not sow fear in society, and on the other, fundamental principles and values are not betrayed? Has irrational fear overshadowed the reality of the threat? Has liberalism been defeated in Europe? It is clear that it was defeated in America, and we have all felt the consequences of that.

Obviously, engaging in such a complex and controversial discussion within a single lecture or presentation is impossible. But one thing is certain - the Georgian playwright is asking precisely this question in his play: What has happened to liberal society? And once again, to address this issue, he turns to Euripides' Medea.

10 English translation belongs to Maya Kiasashvili, though it is not published.

11 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JK50WjoMVZw>

12 <https://www.axios.com/2025/01/28/trump-immigrants-criminals-white-house-briefing>

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THEMES OF THE NEW ROMANIAN DRAMA

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Abstract: The paper *Themes of the New Romanian Drama* proposes a survey of a vivid and very actual landscape of the Romanian dramaturgy staged in Romanian theatres, through most relevant voices of the new contemporary Romanian playwright. The selection of playwrights and plays addresses social themes with political implications, captures the transformations of the post-communist Eastern world and its patterns of thought, and portrays the styles of the new Romanian dramaturgy, which meets the interest in reflecting the transformation of today's world on stages outside Romania. Alexandra Felseghi, Mihaela Michailov, Alina Nelega, Elise Wilk, Radu Apostol, Gabriel Sandu, Cosmin Stănilă, Csaba Szekely belong to different generations and reflect the multicultural character of the new Romanian dramaturgy, inspired by the recent history of this part of Europe. I present Romanian playwrights as well as ethnic Hungarians and Germans, currently performing on Romanian stages. The issues and themes of the selected plays relate to the essence of the regional social and political picture.

Keywords: Balkan Region (South-Eastern Europe), New Romanian Drama, multicultural identity, Romanian theatre after 1989, recent history, national minorities, documented realities, regional identity, intergenerational conflicts, interethnic relations.

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A Map of New Romanian Playwrights

After 1989, in Romania, the interest of the theatrical environment was mainly directed towards reconnecting with the Western European cultural space, and less towards communication and mutual knowledge of regional dramaturgies, of our neighbours. A notable exception in Romania is the Timisoara Teszt Euroregional Theatre Festival, organized since 2008 by the Csiki Gergely Hungarian Theatre in Timisoara, in the programme of which we have had the opportunity to see performances of new texts from the countries of the former Yugoslavia or Greece. In opposite sense, the new Romanian dramaturgy is not very well known and performed in Balkan countries, and it is rather an exception than an assumed program.

My paper aims to offer some landmarks through the selection of seven playwrights, representative for the identity of the Romanian theatrical space after 1989. I selected seven texts from their works, for the questioning the themes of the present and of the relationship with recent history, which depicts the diversity of the subjects addressed by the new playwrights. I will refer to the texts selected and published last year in North Macedonia by Perun Artis Publishing House from Bitola, "New Romanian Drama", in the volume that I conceived and realized with Saso Ognenovski, through a project funded by the Romanian Cultural Institute. The last Eurodram selection nominee one of these plays, translated by Ermis Lafazanovski, "No longer hold the line busy" by Alexandra Felseghi. among the top three Macedonian drama translations of 2024.



Book cover for *New Romanian Drama*, Perun Artis Publishing House Bitola, (2024).

I propose a journey on Romania's map, with stops in some defining moments for the Romanian dramaturgic creation from the last two decades. In three and a half decades of freedom, after 1989, Romanian dramaturgy has redefined itself in relation to the themes it deals with and has cultivated the diversification of dramatic structures. The new stage texts have imposed itself through the voice of two generations concerned with reflecting the social and ethical transformations Romanian society has gone through, by interrogating the legacy of recent history and relations with national minorities seen from the individual perspective. Two generations, which have consecutively asserted themselves in the decencies of transition and of Romania's European integration, share a common interest in the exploration of documented realities through fiction, in the reflection of regional identity, but also in combating intolerant mentalities towards different minorities. In concentric circles, from the individual to the group, community and society, the texts debate through the small history, felt individually, the relationship with the big history that we have to clarify and manage as a society emerging from decades of communism. The topic of these plays relates to local and regional socio-political realities, through the most powerful voices of the new dramaturgy. The plays present a vivid and very topical landscape of drama performed on Romanian stages. I present Romanian playwrights, but also Hungarian and German ethnic authors, most of them recognised on the international theatre scene. They are: Alina Nelega, Mihaela Michailov, Elise Wilk, Alexandra Felseghi, Csaba Szekely, Radu Apostol, Cosmin Stănilă and Gabriel Sandu.

In Romania there are two MA (master's degree) programs in dramatic writing within universities and theatre faculties, one in Bucharest, led by Mihaela Michailov, and another in Târgu-Mureș, founded and directed until 2024 by Alina Nelega. A glance at the list of the authors selected reveals that most of

them trained as journalists, followed by a master's degree in dramatic writing and/or international creative residencies. The experience of journalism can be seen in the choice of topics and the skill of developing the dramatic structure at Elisei Wilk, Csaba Székely, Gabriel Sandu. Also, the first years of Alina Nelega's career as a radio journalist left a mark in her style, as did Mihaela Michailov, who systematically wrote theatre reviews. Alexandra Felseghi, Radu Apostol and Cosmin Stănilă came from the stage either as directors (the first two) or as actors, and their plays attract by the force of the dialog and impose the performative quality of the word. Another general observation concerns the contribution of the playwriting residencies at the Royal Court Theatre in London dedicated to new playwrights, which Alina Nelega and Mihaela Michailov have gone through, the creative internships at the Lark Theatre New York, which Mihaela Michailov, Elise Wilk and Csaba Székely have benefited from, and the Fabulamundi. Playwriting Europe program, which propelled Elise Wilk, Mihaela Michailov, Csaba Székely and Gabriel Sandu into the international theatrical scene.

Braşov. Elise Wilk (born in 1981 in Braşov, lives in Târgu Mureş) is probably the best example of national and international success of an author launched at a very early age, with texts about and for teenagers, an age group neglected in the 2000s by the repertoires of Romanian theatres. Although she is of German ethnicity, Elise Wilk writes in Romanian. Her plays deal with taboo subjects in society, such as intergenerational conflicts, managing homosexual impulses or suicide in teenagers. The success that propelled her nationally and internationally in her debut years is *The Green Cat* (2012), the first text of the "trilogy of adolescence" that also includes the plays *Paper Planes* and *Crocodile*. The characters are teenagers, and the world is seen and judged through their sensitivity and age understanding.



Photos from *Green Cat* by Elise Wilk, director Bobi Pricop, produced by Teatrul pentru Copii și Tineret Luceafărul Iași, (2012).

With maturity, the range of subjects expands naturally, but also stimulated by the commissioning of the writing of new plays, coming from state or independent theatres: *Disappearances* (2018) and *Nothing Happened* (2021) by Yorick Theatre, Targu-Mures, *Feminin* (2019) by Youth Theatre Piatra-Neamt, *About* (2021) by Regina Maria Theatre Oradea. With this last play, *About*, she returns to adolescents and address the issue of depression. Two notable successes are *Explosive* (2015) and *Disappearances* (2019), the most frequently performed in national and European theatres. Her plays are also translated into Bulgarian, Greek, Hungarian, and Macedonian. Elise Wilk is one of the Romanian authors promoted in the international program Fabulamundi. Playwriting Europe, and in the academic year 2024-2025 she took over from Alina Nelega the management of the Master's program in Dramatic Writing at the University of Arts in Târgu Mureș.

Constanța. Cosmin Stănilă (born in 1994 in Constanța, lives in Cluj) is actor at the National Theatre Cluj since 2017, hired immediately after graduating from the Faculty of Theatre and Television of the Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj. His first stage text produced by the independent theatre Reactor de Creație și Experiment Cluj, *All the Things Alois Took from me* (2020) imposes a confident voice with an exceptional sense of dialogue, attacking a sensitive theme of today's society, that of filial love and altruism related to the parents' suffering. The play is a two-character story that develops on the principle of reversal role between mother and son, as the mother, a famous actress (Hungarian speaking), ages and Alzheimer's progresses.



All the Things Alois Took from me (2020),
director Andrei Măjeri, produced by
Creator de Creație și Experiment Cluj, photo credit Bogdan Botaș.



*How Mr. Gherase fell in love with Clara Smith (2023),
director Doru Vatavului,
produced by National Theatre Cluj
photo Nicu Cbereiu.*

In just four years since his debut, two other remarkable texts confirm him as a playwright: *How Mr. Gherase fell in love with Clara Smith* produced by National Theatre in Cluj (2023), where the author plays the title role, and *The Choice of Mr. Macabeș* at the National Theatre in Chisinau (2023). The collaborations as stage playwright for *Blind Spot* after *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone* at the Serbian National Theatre in Novi Sad (2021, directed by Andrei Măjerei) and the adaptation of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, at the Bulandra Theatre in Bucharest (2023, directed by Diana Mititelu) confirm his qualities as a dramatist. The most recent adaptation he-s working on it is *Phaedra*, for the same director, Andrei Măjerei.

Ploiești-Bucharest. Playwright Mihaela Michailov (born 1977 in Ploiești, lives in Bucharest), and director Radu Apostol (born 1977 in Bucharest, lives in Bucharest) are founding members of the independent space in Bucharest Centrul Educațional Replika/Replika Educational Centre. Since its foundation, in 2015, they support educational art platforms, cultural intervention programs and are promoters of social theatre in Romania through performances on educational themes. Mihaela Michailov's dramatic texts debate socio-political issues such as labour migration, power relations in the education system (*Bad Kids*, *Religion Teacher*), the condition of children growing up in the absence of their parents (*Offline Family*), the marginalization of vulnerable groups in post-socialism (*Under Earth*, *Crisis. Survival Kit*), the history of LGBTQ+ communities before and

after 1989. Her plays have been translated into Bulgarian, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, French, Spanish, Portuguese. Radu Apostol is theatre director and directing professor at UNATC Bucharest (Theatre University). He is the co-founder of the program “dramAcum” at UNATC to encourage new dramaturgy. He directs community and educational theatre and contemporary Romanian plays, most of them produced by Replika in the last nine years.



Katia Pascariu în *All the quiet in the World*, direction Radu Apostol, Centrul de Teatru Educational Repika, Bucharest. (2019)

All the quiet in the World (2019) is a monodrama written at four hands by Mihaela Michailov and Radu Apostol, who also directed the show, exceptionally performed by the famous actress Katia Pascariu (leading role in Radu Jude’s film *Babardeală cu bucluc sau porno balamuc/Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn*, winner of Golden Bear 2021). The story tells the daily struggle in the life of a single mother with two teenage sons, the eldest of whom (16 years old) suffers from severe Down syndrome. All the Quiet in the World is a poem about the sacrifice of love of a mother who knows she is fighting alone in a war where both she and her son are defeated from the start.

Târgu-Mureș. Csaba Székely (born in 1981 in Târgu Mureș, lives in Târgu Mureș) is a writer, playwright and translator, the most performed Hungarian-language playwright on Romanian stages, staged by Romanian and Hungarian directors alike. He is famous far beyond Romania’s borders for the sharp humour of his comedies and for his courage to tackle sensitive topics criticizing nationalism and the clichés of Hungarian-Romanian coexistence in Transylvania. After his spectacular debut in 2009 with the BBC European Radio Play of the Year Award for *Do you Like Banana, Comrades*, the *Mines Trilogy* established him definitively in

Romanian theatre. These three plays, *Mine Flowers*, *Mine Blind* and *Mine Water* portray the rural community in the Hungarian villages of the region” Secuime”, confronted with the high incidence of suicide, alcoholism, cultural self-isolation, nationalism and lack of existential horizons. Written in Hungarian, these plays have also been successfully performed in Hungary and Slovakia. Themes such as the Hungarian-Romanian coexistence and the change of perspective in the reading of episodes from the common history of Transylvania irrigate his dramatic texts.

The text *:P (four political plays about enemies)* (2016) presents in four parables independent comic scenes, which have in common the projection of collective hatred onto an invented enemy. In other texts like *MaRO*, *10* or *I regret nothing* the indirect aim of comedy is to ridicule and dissolve tensions. Csaba Székely’s texts convey the conviction that laughter, if it does not heal, at least helps us to become more lucid.



:P (four political plays about enemies), director Aba Sebestyén,
„Liviu Rebreanu” Company, National Theatre
Târgu-Mureş. (2016)

Bucharest. Gabriel Sandu (born in 1988 in Bucharest, lives in Bucharest) is a multidisciplinary theatre and film artist, writer and director. He established himself as a playwright in 2017 with *My Father, the Priest*, one of the first Romanian plays that confronts the confession of homosexuality with the patriarchal family. The Master of Dramatic Writing, graduated in 2017 at the University of Arts Târgu-Mureș, paves his path in theatre as a natural continuation of the years spent as a young film actor and then investigative journalist, through which he discovered and explored his interest in documented fiction. His plays are generally inspired by news from the written press, fictionally developed, imagining the destiny of some socially conditioned characters. The author belongs to the Y generation, formed in the decade of transition, brought up with new technologies. Gabriel Sandu proposes in his creations a reading of the world outside the accepted social canon.



Enmity, director Gabriel Sandu, Teatrelli, Bucharest. (2022)

The play *Enmity* deals with the recent past: the transmission and renegotiation of ethical values from one generation to the next. The fate of children of a simple family is marked by their relationship with a party activist, who in her old age sells her memories to those interested in listening. In the dramatic structure, the songs delivered with a burst of comic irony convey the realities of everyday humiliation and deprivation during the decades of communism, and the light music refers to local landmarks of mass culture. Moreover, the light tone, black comedy touches and twists make visible the gap in values and perception of history between the two generations - the grandparents who built and lived communism and the grandchildren who judge it. Three other remarkable plays written and directed by Gabriel Sandu in the last three years debate the condition of the artist who fails in *10 things I missed at the Mamaia Festival* (2023, Constanta

State Theatre, co-directed with Elena Morar), all kinds of addictions in *Adrenaline* (2024, Excelsior Theatre Bucharest) and the decay of the revue theatre and its actors in *Death at the Revue Theatre* (2024, "Stela Popescu" Theatre Bucharest), all documented fictions.

Cluj-Napoca. Alexandra Felseghi (born in 1987 in Cluj-Napoca, lives in Cluj-Napoca) is BA in theatre directing, MA in performing arts and film, and is currently a lecturer at the Faculty of Theatre and Film of the Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca where she teaches dramatic writing. She started writing for the stage out of the desire to tackle in her performances topics that were absent at that time in our contemporary dramaturgy, inspired by current events. Moreover, she teams up with the director Adina Lazăr and the texts are the result of the playwright's process of integration on stage. Her plays are all written for performances and fictionally develop real cases that she takes from the local reality, circumscribed to the observation and diagnosis of traumas in society. In 2024 she published a volume with four plays with a manifest feminist tone, centred on the destiny of strong female characters, on the issues of alienated family and the violence of the social environment.: *Cut Green, No longer hold the line occupied, We don't Talk About It* and *Home*.



No longer hold the line occupied (2021), director Adina Lazăr,
National Theatre Clu-Napoca, photo Nicu Cherciu

No longer hold the line occupied is the most committed text, with form and structure of ancient tragedy. The conflict, the characters, the ancient chorus and the versified form of its sentences, as opposed to the epic character of the dialogs, descend from this model. The plot is documented by "The Caracal Case", the tragedy of the disappearance of the teenage girl kidnapped and killed by human flesh traffickers. But the play goes far beyond the particular case and tackles the problem of physical violence and emotional abuse of women in couples, a real

social phenomenon in Romanian society, which is spreading with the implicit consent and support of the authorities.

Târgu-Mureș. Alina Nelega (born in 1960 in Târgu Mureș, lives in Târgu Mureș) is a playwright with an unmistakable voice, national and international multi-award-winner, staged in Romania and abroad. She has marked milestones in writing for the stage in Romania in the last three decades. At the beginning of the 2000s, she imposed in Romanian dramaturgy subjects inspired by the reading of recent history from a subjective-human perspective and from the alienating everyday life, about the transformations in the post-decembrist Romanian society (after 1989), she tackled the sensitive issue of interethnic relations in Transylvania, racism and systemic discrimination, in a sharp tone, without ethical or ideologically compromises. Over the past three decades, she has dedicated her creativity and energy stimulating and supporting new dramaturgy, a credo that is reflected in all the roles she has tenaciously taken on. Whether we are talking about the concept and organization of the first festival of new drama “Dramafest” at the end of the 90s, the repertoire strategy oriented towards new plays during the period when she directed the „Liviu Rebreanu” Romanian Company of the National Theatre of Târgu Mureș (2012-2017), the master’s degree in dramatic writing that she founded and directed at the University of Arts (2009-2024) in Târgu Mureș or the mentorship of the Drama5 residencies at the Reactor de Creație și Experiment Cluj (in the period 2014-2023) we recognize a carefully developed and implemented strategy.

In today’s Romanian dramaturgy two of her plays are fundamental: *Hess* (2003) and *Amalia Breath Deep* (2005) - for the last she received the 2007 Heidelberg Theatrestueckemarkt European Author Award - mark two important milestones. Other performed and awarded dramatic texts from Alina Nelega’s dramatic creation are *Taxi Vinyl* (2008), *Genovese Effect* (2012), *In Traffic* (2014),



Amalia Breath Deep, director Tudor Lucanu, *Amalia Breath Deep*, director Gavril Cadariu, National Theatre Cluj (2014)



Ariel Theatre Târgu-Mureş (2005)

The Play *Hess* came to the stage under the title *Decalogue after Hess at Ariel theatre Târgu Mureş (2004)* and imagines the last supper before the suicide of the character as a monodrama, in which Hess submits to an examination of conscience structured according to the commandments of the Christian Decalogue. The crimes justified by perverting the moral law place the character in the field of tensions of tragic essence, between guilty confession and overturned ethics. In psychoanalytic terms, the conscience justifies its guilt by recourse to the great paradigms of modern philosophy: the death of God, the superman, the chosen nation. The play has been translated and performed in Polish, Hungarian, Czech and English and provides a virtuoso score for a mature actor.



Nicu Mihoc in *Decalogue after Hess*, director Gavril Cadariu, Teatrul de Artă Bucharest (2024)

Conclusion

Two categories are defined from the plays presented here: one concerns the struggles of the individual and the family. I include here *Green Cat* by Elise Wilk, *All the Quiet in the World* by Mihaela Michailov and Radu Apostol, *All the things that*

Alois took from me by Cosmin Stănilă. A second category concerns recent history and social criticism: *P(four political plays about enemies)* by Csaba Székely, *Enmity* by Gabriel Sandu, *No longer hold the line occupied* by Alexandra Felseghi and the *Decalogue after Hess* by Alina Nelega. These playwrights cover defining points on the map of the new Romanian dramaturgy, with themes relevant to the countries of this geographical space, which share a close destiny in the social transformations after 1989.

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MODERN THEATRE AS A CONNECTION BETWEEN THE CULTURES OF TWO COUNTRIES – A CASE STUDY: THE DIRECTORIAL WORKS OF SLOBODAN UNKOVSKI IN GREECE

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Abstract: Macedonian director Slobodan Unkovski, Professor Emeritus at Skopje's Faculty of Dramatic Arts, has directed extensively across Greece, including major productions of *The Fourth Sister*, *King Lear*, and *Orestes*. His international career spans the USA, Russia, and Europe, focusing on both classical and contemporary world premieres. This research uses Unkovski's career as a case study for building cultural networks between Balkan nations. By analyzing these established theatrical links, I aim to show how modern theatre serves as a vital platform for opening communication and inspiring future cross-border collaboration.

Keywords: Balkan Region (South-Eastern Europe), intercultural theatre, theatre directing, bilateral relations, modern theatre, collaboration.

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Introduction

Theatre, as an art form, teaches us that dialogue is fundamental, necessary, and essential in the process of communication. I believe that dialogue between different cultures and countries can contribute to better relations and establish a network that will serve as an inspiration for many future collaborations.

The term "*Balkan Theatre Sphere*" was introduced into contemporary theatre studies in our region by Lecturer Jelena Luzhina, Ph.D. Her definition of the concept is based on the thesis of "an undeniably millennia-long, continuous, and exceptionally dynamic pulsation of the phenomenon shared (in one way or another) by all theatrical traditions that have developed on Balkan soil, regardless of the national attributes that define or determine each separately. The undeniable exactness of the phenomenon, which the Macedonian school of theatre studies refers to as the *Balkan Theatre Sphere*, is easily recognizable not only through all phases of the development of individual national theatre histories but also through the evolution of all theatrical conventions (stage speech, stage movement—kinesthetics, acting elements, costume design, scenography, dramaturgy/dramatology, directing, stage and theatre architecture, reception of the theatrical act, etc.)." (Luzhina, 2007: 9-10)

Taking this standpoint into account, the relationships between Balkan theatre cultures from the perspective of mutual exchange and communication can be explored. However, considering the Balkan gene of constant conflict, both within itself and with others, this theatre sphere must be continuously re-established and reactivated. Therefore, the idea of openly discussing bilateral

and multilateral theatre connections is more than welcome. Having researched theatre for almost half a century, I have always been inspired by theatre stories that speak of dialogue between two or more cultures.

***Relationship To Be Established and Activated:
Modern Theatre as a Connection Between The Cultures of Two Countries***

This theatre study explores the correlation between the two countries, using as a starting point the directorial work of Slobodan Unkovski, an eminent Macedonian director and professor in Greece. Unkovski has directed three productions in Greece: *The Fourth Sister* by Janusz Głowacki (2003) and *King Lear* (2005) by Shakespeare at the National Theatre of Greece in Athens, and *Oresteia* (2008) by Euripides, a co-production between the National Theatre of Northern Greece in Thessaloniki and the Athens Epidaurus Festival. Slobodan Unkovski is Professor Emeritus at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts—Skopje. He was a Visiting Professor at Brooklyn College, the City University of New York, and Harvard University in the USA. He mentored a two-month-long workshop with young Greek directors and actors in the National Theatre in Athens. His work includes classical repertory, as well as more than thirty contemporary plays, many of which world premieres. Besides in theatres in ex-Yugoslavia, he also directed in the USA (four performances), Russia, Italy, Sweden, Germany, Greece, and other countries. His performances were shown at many festivals in Europe, and he is the recipient of many awards.

According to professor Unkovski's testimony in the book *Разговори со УНКОВСКИ (Conversations with Unkovski)* by Zoja Buzalkovska (2018), his collaboration with the Greek theatres stemmed from his mutual respect with the actor and theatre director Nikos Kourkoulos. This initial connection laid the foundation for further cooperation. While such collaborations may begin with personal relationships, they must ultimately be solidly embedded in the cultural policies of both countries to facilitate ongoing exchange and collaboration. No matter how strong or positive personal relationships may be, long-term collaboration must be based on professional exchange and institutional cooperation.

In the book *Разговори со УНКОВСКИ*, Buzalkovska raises the question of the beginnings of Unkovski's collaboration with the Greek theatres:

- If I am not mistaken, your collaboration with the Greek theatres began when you were Minister of Culture of Macedonia?
- No, it didn't; it happened afterwards, in the year 2000. (Buzalkovska, 2018: 316)

This initial standpoint helps us identify the key elements necessary for developing a potential cultural collaboration between the two nations. Given our immediate geographical proximity, it is crucial to initiate and expand a theatre network. Theatre, as an art form, teaches us that only through dialogue and exchange can we contribute to a richer cultural landscape and a better societal system.

After many years, Nikos Kourkoulos, a great Greek actor—often compared to Alain Delon in cinema—became the director of the National Theatre in Athens and wanted to commemorate the anniversary of his acting career. (Unkovski, 2018: 317)

The personal story of Kourkoulos and Unkovski serves as an inspiration for all future bilateral collaborations, which, unfortunately, are yet to be fully realized. Therefore, the aim of this study is to define, establish, and develop a potential strategy for collaboration on both bilateral and multilateral levels. More specifically, it seeks to confirm and solidify the Balkan Theatre Sphere as a unique opportunity to map theatre events across the Balkan region.

Developing the Network – Beginning of Collaboration

In a theatrical context, the two countries have few developed connections in the field of theatre. While there is interest in ancient drama, contemporary Greek playwrights are rarely staged in Macedonian theatres. In Greece, only three Macedonian playwrights have had their works performed. **Slobodan Unkovski** has directed three productions in Greece, and I believe that these productions should serve as the starting point for establishing and developing a **bilateral relationship**.

In Разговори со УНКОВСКИ, penned and edited by the director and professor **Zoja Buzalkovska** (2018), this collaboration is highlighted multiple times, and Unkovski frequently affirms the positive experience of working on the three productions and collaborating with Greek actors. For him, the collaboration had been essential because it had allowed him to **implement and further develop his directing method** and work with actors.

There are many excellent actors in Greece who lack endurance, tradition, and experience working with directors. They have been directed before, but not in the deep way that I might approach it. So now, they come to me, and up to today, everyone who has acted in my productions in

Greece still keeps in touch with me by email, SMS, or other means available, requiring me to return, all purely out of sincerity, yet nothing depends on me. However, there are those who are not ready for that process, those who have had bad experiences with directors. They fear that I will interfere with something they have complete control over, and that's where the problem arises. (Unkovski, 2018: 49)

Further in the book, he adds:

In Greece, for example, I worked with a group of actors who have primarily performed on television. They wanted a specific task to complete, and that was the end of it. But for me, that's just the first step of a process that needs to develop further. (Unkovski, 2018: 309)

With his unique **working method**, Unkovski not only initiated a **collaborative network** between the two countries but also contributed to the **secondary education** of the Greek actors. Through each production, he creates a **theatrical process** that remains in a nation's **theatrical memory**. His work with the Greek actors fosters collaboration on multiple levels:

- **Primary level** – Directing theatre productions;
- **Secondary level** – Educating actors and directors;
- **Tertiary level** – Creating a theatrical model that the audience can recognize and evaluate.

Therefore, it is crucial to start with these three productions and analyze how they **lay the foundation** for further collaboration between the countries, as well as the **expansion of a theatrical network on a Balkan level**.

Case Study:

Case No. 1 – The Fourth Sister by Janusz Głowacki (2003)

“The Fourth Sister” was a great success. (Buzalkovska)

Yes, it was very successful with the audience and won the award for Best Performance in Athens that year. Two actresses received awards for best roles; Angelina (Atlagić) won for costume design, Meta (Hočevar) for set design, and I won for directing—it was a great success, and this was very important for Nikos. (Unkovski, 2018: 322)

In 2003, three years after the world premiere of what is now considered a significant play by the Polish playwright **Janusz Głowacki**, **Slobodan Unkovski** staged *The Fourth Sister* at the **National Theatre of Greece in Athens**. He brought along his longtime collaborators **Meta Hočevar** for the set design and **Angelina Atlagić** for the costumes, both having worked with him on numerous productions.

The cast of the production included:

- Vlasis Zotis – John Freeman
- Thanos Samaras – Kolya
- Ana Makraki – Babushka
- Christos Parlas – General
- Marilita Lampropoulo – Tanya
- Maria Nafliotu – Vera
- Amalia Moutiousi – Katya
- Aristotel Aposkitis – Misha
- Christos Papas – Ivan Pavlovich
- Toni Dimitrou – Yuri Alexievich
- Tansi Efimiadis – Kostya
- Genadis Patsis – Stjopa

Prior to this production, Unkovski had already directed *The Fourth Sister* in Slovenia. The Greek staging was initiated by **Gaga Rosić**, the dramaturge of the production. Originally, **Nikos Kourkoulos** had invited Unkovski to direct *Richard III* by Shakespeare, but due to Kourkoulos' illness and other objective reasons, Unkovski decided to stage *The Fourth Sister* instead at the **National Theatre in Athens**.

Unlike **Chekhov's** *Three Sisters*, who yearn for the distant and idealized Moscow while standing at the crossroads between illusion and harsh reality, **Głowacki transposes the story to a modern context**, set in a transitional society where a family now dreams of achieving the **American Dream**. While Chekhov takes an **idealistic** approach, Głowacki presents a **harsh and painful reality**, which Unkovski masterfully translates into a **long-running production** in Athens.

The staging, designed by **Meta Hočevar**, features a **modernist, minimalist, and somewhat futuristic space**, stripped of excessive details. **Unkovski shifts the focus to the actors' performances**, emphasizing the raw emotions of the characters.

Among the numerous articles about the production, a **notable interview** stands out—an interview between **Unkovski and Vasilis Angelikopoulos**, published in the newspaper *Kathimerini*. When asked about his experience working with Greek actors, Unkovski replied

My experience began with student directors and actors at the National Theatre's Experimental Workshop, where I taught last year. I'm now working with a group of very good actors. There is no problem on a communication level. I do feel, however, that a director in Greece might find the following to be problem: Actors probably behave as people executing orders, rather than people who join in creatively, by suggesting things. For me, actors have always been on the same level as the directors, co-creators, working on an exchange basis. My kind of actor is the creative actor, one who is willing to take risks. That is the only way to go further. I think that at this level television has destroyed something vital. I watch various television series here and see things which surprise me. On a television set, the actor simply executes what he is asked to do. And then he transfers this to the theatre. My approach is very different. That is why, I sense, that the actors at the National feel a gust of fresh air – that is my take anyway. You have served as culture minister. What is it like to have that kind of power? I think that a director's power suits me better. I accepted to take over the Ministry of Culture because I had criticized it severely. And so in 1996, Prime Minister (Branko) Crvenkovski said to me, «Here, you who are always criticizing, why don't you take over and show me what you can come up with?» Everybody was against it: my family, my friends, my actors, everyone. Yet my feeling was that I could do my bit for this new democracy – and that's I how fell right into the trap. In retrospect, since the birth of the new state, out of the five new cultural laws, four are mine. Therefore, I accomplished something. For me personally, it was really important to see the other side of the coin as far as running the country is concerned. The minute my term ended I went running back to the theatre. During my tenure as culture minister, I understood how important theatre was for me. Yes, that period was very instructive. (<https://www.ekathimerini.com/culture/18183/three-sisters-become-four-in-a-new-play/>)

The quotation shows us that Director Unkovski approaches the production not only as a director but also as an educator and a creative force behind the collaboration. The performance was well-received by both the actors and the

audience. In the context of the National Theatre in Athens' repertoire at the time, the play stands out for several reasons: the way Unkovski worked with the actors, the treatment of the stage, and the fresh dramatic material that made the performance highly sought after by the audience. *The Fourth Sister*, as reported by the Greek media, can be seen as the beginning of Unkovski's collaboration with Greek theatres, and it positions the National Theatre in Athens as one of the key points on Unkovski's "odyssey" through European and world theatres.

At the time of the staging of the play, the political relations between Macedonia and Greece were poor. Therefore, the production can be viewed as a diplomatic act—a creative and positive resolution to a long-standing political issue. While we may want to isolate the performance solely within the theatrical context, *The Fourth Sister* is, in a way, a commentary on bilateral relations and mutual cooperation.

Case Study N. 2: *King Lear* – Shakespeare (2005)

King Lear is one of Shakespeare's most well-known tragedies. The way the aging monarch deals with his heirs, as well as the mirrored family tragedy through Gloucester's family, has always intrigued theatre directors globally. Directors often choose to stage *King Lear* when they have the right actor to portray Lear in his most paradigmatic form. The case of *King Lear* in Athens differs significantly, both in terms of the approach and the interpretation that Unkovski presents on stage at the National Theatre in Athens. The decision to work on *King Lear* in Athens was a logical continuation after the failure to stage *Richard III* with Nikos Kurkoulos, and in the time when Unkovski was invited back to Athens in 2005—after the political climate between Macedonia and Greece worsened following the United States' recognition of Macedonia under its constitutional name.

The play featured a stellar cast including Dimitris Katalifos as King Lear and Maria Kechagioglou as Goneril. The production was also supported by an accomplished creative team comprised by the costume designer Angelina Atlagic, the set designer Meta Hochevar, the dramaturge Goga Rosić, the composer Vasilis Dimitriou, and the lighting designer Antonis Panayotopoulos. The play remained in the repertoire of the theatre until April of the following year.

Unkovski's decision to direct *King Lear* in Athens could be seen as a political act, but above all, it represents the victory of art over daily political circumstances. The play is described as a "precisely woven net," where actors must be rooted in their roles. Unkovski emphasized that an actor must know where they live, i.e., their "address," in order to truly embody their character. When an actor knows where they live in the story, they can anchor themselves in their role.

One of the key aspects of this production is Unkovski's approach to the actors, specifically how he creates a template for the production where the actors' performances are central. In *King Lear*, there are approximately forty roles, and Unkovski notes that the majority of the actors left the production believing it to be a superior way of working. However, the main challenge, he stated, was understanding the play itself. The lead actor, Dimitris Katalifos, had a traditional and conservative approach, which Unkovski describes as quite different from his personal, more modern one. The relationship between the two was intense, with Unkovski describing it as a real challenge to work with Katalifos' well-established acting style. This dynamic between the director and the actor is an example of Unkovski's methodology—what he calls his “Medusa Strategy.”

Unkovski compares his method to the structure of a jellyfish, where all actors are placed into the same structure, expecting them to function as one collective at the end of the process. This approach underscores the importance of dialogue and mutual understanding in creating a unified performance.

This analysis of Unkovski's work demonstrates how his collaboration with the Greek theatres is not only a mere reflection of his directorial prowess but also a model for cultural diplomacy in action, highlighting the potential for artistic work to transcend political and social boundaries.

Case Study N. 3: “Orestes” – Euripides (2008)

In the circular stage of the now iconic ancient, almost mythical theatre at Epidaurus, a production unfolds about one of the most tragic heroes of ancient times—Orestes, the son who killed his mother after she had murdered his father. The tragedy is intertwined with prophecy and the consequences of King Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia, the sister of Orestes and Electra. The play was directed by Slobodan Unkovski, a director who greatly values the freedom of drama, or rather, considers drama to be a space for our freedom:

Nothing is final. Nothing binds us. I have never thought that there is only one truth. No one has a monopoly on the truth—on what is written in the drama. THE DRAMA MUST REMAIN A SPACE FOR OUR FREEDOM. (Unkovski, 2018: 18)

When I asked Professor Unkovski what exactly this meant, he replied that his task was to defend the drama in front of the actors and all the creative contributors to the theatrical performance. Epidaurus and the production are significant and highly important parts of his theatrical story.

I think two events dramatically influenced my creativity. One of them was this, and the other was my premiere of *Orestes* in Epidaurus, where I seemed to collide with the goddess of theatre, with the place where theatre was born. When I came to that place, it felt as though my career had come to an end. It didn't end; I'm working and will continue working, but it felt like I had bitten my own tail. Like I had reached the end. Like I had returned my talent." (Unkovski, 2018: 196)

Why is this production so important, not only for his theatreography but also for the dialogue between the two cultures? The production involved the following team:

- Translation: Giorgos Heimonas
- Directing: Slobodan Unkovski
- Dramaturgy: Goga Rosić
- Set Design: Meta Hochevar
- Costume Design: Angelina Atlagic
- Choreography: Dimitris Sotirou
- Composer: Nikos Voudouris
- Lighting: Antonis Panayotopoulos;

as well as the 28 actors, including prominent performances by:

- Lazaros Georgakopoulos (as Orestes)
- Lidia Fotopoulou
- Yannis Krannas
- Natalia Dragomir, and others.

The play had 27 performances and has been seen by 23,832 spectators since its premiere on August 1, 2008.

Unkovski himself states

Well, I love *Orestes* as an entire event, although I think that as a performance I didn't manage to piece it together fully because I faced a dramatic issue: two composers I counted on for the production canceled on me. That's how it happened. (...) And the music and choral singing in ancient drama are incredibly dramatic and important, and we lacked that. For me, this is a borderline significant production. (Unkovski, 2018: 256)

This production of *Orestes* stands out as both a personal artistic milestone for Unkovski and a cross-cultural bridge between Macedonia and Greece. It represents not only his directorial challenges and triumphs yet also highlights the

tension between artistic freedom and the constraints of external factors, such as the loss of key collaborators. It serves as a poignant reminder of the complexities of staging ancient drama in a modern context, especially in a historic and symbolic place like Epidaurus.

In focusing on an alleged 'moral', scholars have tended to discount the role of the exodus in the emotional melodramatic structure of 'Orestes'. But in fact the exodus fittingly concludes this exceedingly agitated and innovative play, providing an appropriate climax to Orestes' growing frustration and outrage, while building to a similar crisis the sense of a world that has gone disastrously and irrevocably awry. Betrayed on all sides, his expectations repeatedly frustrated by a world where the old rules no longer seem to apply, Orestes threatens the destruction of his ancestral palace and, with it, the entire mythical tradition associated with the house of Atreus. This most unorthodox of plays finds a fitting finale in the sheer bravoura of the scene, whose intensity presents a suitable emotional climax. To a large degree the anger and frustration of Euripides' protagonist his bitter alienation from a society corrupted by self-interest and political factionalism must have spoken directly to the poet's contemporaries. Apollo, it is true, appears at the end to set things right, but the audience departs from 'Orestes' with the sense, not of a final reconciliation, but of a resentful and angry grievance against a world in chaos. John R. Porter <https://www.ntng.gr/default.aspx?lang=en-GB&page=2&production=6219>

Conclusion

According to the previously stated, it can be concluded that the theatre is an excellent starting point, a place from where the idea of a bilateral cooperation between the two countries can be created and developed. As we belong to the same Balkan theatrical sphere, our cultures and theatrical practices can find a common ground to develop further. Of course, this mutual collaboration should be guided by the ministries of culture of both countries in question, as well as by the institutional theatrical institutions in both countries. This way, we will succeed in what Professor Unkovski began with his three productions in Greece—creating a creative and constructive collaboration.

Richard Schechner, in his well-known book *Performance Theory*, positions intercultural theatre as a theatre of exchange in several places. Schechner has consistently written and spoken about intercultural theatre over the years. It is

understandable that theatre, as an art form that unites multiple creators in the artistic act, will best understand and implement interculturalism. In a deeply fulfilling way, theatre is but a fertile ground for the development of the idea of intercultural exchange. Therefore, just as interculturalism involves travel, knowledge, tradition, and exchange, theatre responds to these ideas appropriately, with its specific functions.

To be more illustrative, we will consult Schechner and his theory on Intercultural Training:

Why training? I think of the five functions, which are not always separate. They overlap. In North America, actors are prepared to interpret dramatic texts. This is a need of Euro-American culture. (...) Another function of training is for the performer to become someone who conveys 'the text of the performance.' (...) The third function of training— not so well-known in Euro-American culture but very familiar in India, Japan, and other places—is the preservation of secret knowledge. The performance methods are precious and belong to certain families or groups. (...) The fourth function is—helping performers to acquire self-expression. This is an extension of individualism. (...) The fifth function of training is the formation of theatre groups. (Schechner, 1996: 147)

In the complex approach to theatrical exchange, we must start with what we bring from our own culture, then the culture we encounter, and the connection we establish between the two. The productions directed by Unkovski in Greece, among other functions, served to demonstrate that cultural collaboration is possible and should continue. This cooperation should not be driven by political decisions but rather by institutional or artistic productions that highlight the fundamental desire for exchange and collaboration. The Balkan theatrical sphere helps us understand each culture within the region and facilitates collaboration, making it a fundamental aspect of both future research and theatrical practice.

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CONTEMPORARY THEATRE AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES. IN FOCUS: THE BALKAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract: One of the most significant trends in the contemporary theatre and, especially in the Balkan countries today is the intense relationship between theatre art and digital technologies. The focus is on the problematization of two fundamental beliefs related to contemporary performing arts. Above all, the large scale broadcast in the last years via satellite transmissions, streaming and various online performance formats (featuring both emblematic and established theatre classics as well as brand new productions on the European stages) undermine the conviction that the renewal of theatre through the digital technologies will happen unconditionally. The experiencing of a number of online theatre productions clearly allows for a differentiation between the true innovative multimedia performances and the traditional ones employing technologies only as means to reach their audiences. The current situation also casts new light on the second basic axiom and provokes a re-examination of its definite, until recently, conviction that theatre as an art form which offers physical togetherness and shared experience will always be of absolute necessity in an increasingly technologized world that creates distance between people. The relationship between theatre and digital technologies, as well as these key questions, related to it, are examined especially in the light of the issue of creating of an Inter-Balkan Network – from the perspective of the new opportunities it provides for activating and expanding theatre cooperation and exchange between the countries of the Balkan region.

Keywords: Balkan Region (South-Eastern Europe), cultural heritage, multiculturalism, contemporary theatre, digital technologies, satellite transmissions, theatre streaming, Bulgarian contemporary theatre, theatre in Balkan countries.

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The relationship between theatre and digital technologies has gradually intensified over the last two decades. Live broadcasts of theatre productions in cinemas across different cities around the world taking place simultaneously with the actual performances on stage, the streaming of performances online, the expansion and transformation of theatre language by incorporating elements and strategies from the cinematic expression and digital filming techniques have already become an integral part of the contemporary theatre landscape.

Although this connection has already been subject to extensive debate and analysis, a comprehensive and detailed study is yet to emerge. In this text I would like to examine it especially in the light of the topic of present conference *Creating of an Inter-Balkan Network* – from the perspective of the new opportunities it provides for activating and expanding theatre cooperation and exchange between the countries of the Balkan region.

I would like to begin with the well-established and most popular form of interaction between theatre and digital technologies that has evolved over the past two decades – the *live broadcasting of theatre productions* in different parts of the world to large audiences of thousands of spectators, together with their actual performances onstage. The beginnings of this practice can be traced back to the famous 1956 broadcast of John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* on UK television to “more than 5,000 viewers” (Rabey, D.J., 2003, p. 33) nationwide while the show was being performed live at the Royal Court Theatre in London. Since the turn of the 21st century, with the advancement of digital technology, satellite broadcasting of performances has been developed with the aim of reaching the widest possible audience. The new initiative was led by major opera houses such as the Metropolitan Opera, The Royal Opera House, La Scala, and the Paris National Opera. Theatre joined the global distribution of its production in 2009, when the National Theatre in London created its National Theatre Live (NT Live) programme, aimed to showcase the best of its repertoire live, via satellite, to various cinemas and arts centres in the UK and around the world. The project was launched with a performance of Racine’s *Phaedra*, starring Helen Mirren. Later, the programme was expanded to incorporate notable productions by other theatres and companies, and it was duly renamed “NT Live. The best of British theatre on a cinema screen near you”. Today, its broadcasts can be seen in more than 700 cinemas in different parts of the planet. Bulgaria became part of NT Live’s global audience in 2011 when two of the most significant festivals in the country – World Theatre in Sofia and the Varna Summer International Theatre Festival – launched their own special initiative to broadcast performances from the NT Live, and later included screenings of some of its productions in almost every edition of their festival programme. Today, this method of wider distribution of creative output is becoming increasingly popular with other major theatre companies as well. Perhaps the most emblematic example of the last few years is the production of *Tartuffe, or the Hypocrite* by the Comédie Française.

Without question, the production *Le Tartuffe ou L’hypocrite* (*Tartuffe, or The Hypocrite*) is one of the biggest theatrical events of 2022 on a European and global scale. The show was especially planned by the Comédie-Française to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Molière (1622–1673). Its premiere on the first French stage (often named “the home of Molière” during past centuries) fell on 15 January, the birthday of the dramatist, and was accompanied by live screenings in cinemas all over the country. In the months to follow, the show was performed in many cities and at numerous festivals. among which also at the Varna Summer International Theatre Festival (June 1-10, 2022) in Bulgaria. (Nikolova, 2022)

Although making a detailed analysis of this new type of hybrid performance is beyond the scope of this paper, it is necessary to highlight two of its important characteristics. Above all, it is not just a well-filmed performance that is also screened, but a production created in a new hybrid aesthetic (Dixon, 2007, 73; Newman, 2010). The fact that the theatrical performance is intended both for showing in the theatre auditorium and for satellite broadcasting “live” on a cinema screen is a real test of the professionalism of the entire production team and especially of the actor. Above all, he or she must master both the performance in front of the camera and on stage, and at the same time skilfully combine and unify these two techniques. The director, the set designer, and the composer face similar challenges. So, it is particularly important to distinguish between the contemporary multimedia hybrid performance, which incorporates the digital technologies as an inseparable part of its theatrical aesthetics, and the performances created in other aesthetics which make use of filming and online broadcasts as a mere technical means of reaching the audience in other specific circumstances (such as the pandemic recently experienced worldwide).

Indeed, as the “re-productive” dynamic of technology improves and the possibilities for new stenographic, sound, graphic, and lighting designs expand, we will see the conditions for an increasingly broader theatrical/performance poetics taking shape, with its own challenges, its own communicative as well as aesthetic, writing, and acting possibilities and peculiarities, as well as its own notions of presence, absence, ontology, participation, plot, live, etc. (Patsalidis, 2024, p. 5)

The edition of “virtuality” to the overall receptive strategy of theatrical production is aimed both at creating a new theatrical language and at attracting new audiences, as Nikolay Yordanov accurately notes in his article on changes in publicity today and Oleg Tonkoshkura in his study on theatre in the age of digital technologies.

Today, none other than the media structures publicity – their defining role as a cultural code is beginning to equal that of spoken language; the media shape perceptions, attitudes, tastes, preferences. New audiences are naturally created around new media, which represent a kind of electronic interest clubs. (Jordanov, 2011, p. 16)

The use of “virtuality” by directors and stage designers is reasoned by two factors: the quest for new theatrical forms and the need to attract

a “new” audience to the theatre, the audience that should no longer be preoccupied with “How does it happen?”, but with “That is the idea?” Conveying creative thought to the audience through the synthesis of traditional theatrical forms and new technologies is an important objective for modern theatre. (Tonkoshkura, 2022, p. 32)

The second characteristic of the performances designed for satellite broadcasting to a global audience is that they effectively replace the costly tours of large productions by leading theatre companies and production centres, while at the same time providing them with significant additional income. In addition to the undeniable advantages of this practice, such as making high-quality theatre accessible to the widest possible audience both financially and in terms of physical convenience, amongst its major outcomes is the concentration of some of the best and most popular actors and directors, as well as large technical and financial resources in several leading theatre centres. This forces local theatre practitioners to engage in intense competition against the broadcast productions. It is expressed both in terms of aesthetic quality and in the fact that many important topics and problems relevant on a local level, as well as dramatic texts, authors and artists, struggle to find a niche for expression and recognition.

On that note, I would like to present my first proposal for expanding the cooperation in the theatre field between the Balkan countries. One of the possible directions in which it would be particularly effective and timely would be the *creation of co-productions*, produced by several theatres and festivals from the countries of the region and created by an international team, which, in addition to being presented in one of the partner theatres, would also be periodically broadcast live via satellite in cinemas in the other participating countries, as well as elsewhere in Europe and the world, especially in cities with larger diasporas of one or more of the Balkan communities.

My second proposal concerns mainly the *theatrical exchange facilitated by the festivals* and especially through the planned Annual Festival within the framework of the *Inter-Balkan Network of Performing Arts*, which is being discussed. It concerns the so-called “reruns” of performances recorded by using satellite technology. These “reruns” in fact simulate the experience of a live digital broadcast of a performance in real time in the form of a recording of the entire event – not only what takes place on stage, but also the audience’s reactions, pre-show talks with members of the artistic team, interviews that take place during the interval, etc. Notable co-productions and other performances from the Balkan countries recorded in this manner could be selected and included in the programmes of theatre festivals and other international forums both in the region and beyond.

Of course, other formats of broadcasting performances could be added to these, such as screenings on online platforms with access limited by scheduled date and time, real-time streaming, etc.

This practice is already being used in some Balkan countries. For the last four years, the *Varna Summer International Theatre Festival* in Bulgaria has included a special section in its program *Via Fest Digital Portal*. It is a virtual space for presenting outstanding productions in contemporary performing arts (theatre, dance, performance, etc.). The project was launched in 2021, provoked by the pandemic of Covid-19. Periodically, it presents a selection of performances by leading artists and companies. In its recent editions, the festival has presented screenings of significant performances from Slovenia, North Macedonia, and Romania on its website with free access for 72 hours.

It is naturally expected that, following the current stimulation and re-consideration of the theatre's relationship with the digital technologies, dramatically enforced by the recently experienced pandemic, a striking sea change is imminent. One of the most fundamental and distinct changes which is becoming clearly noticeable is the new attitude towards the archiving of theatre artefacts, as well as the writing and using of theatre history. During the months of the worst stages of the pandemic crisis when physical theatre-going and festivals were suspended indefinitely, theatre, with the help of the digital technologies offered its most dedicated spectators a compensation which, at the end of the day, proved very worthwhile. This compensation consisted of the broadcasting of live performances and recordings of a number of emblematic European stage productions and many other performances, some more accomplished than others, by various companies and performers created over the years. Included in the wide array of choices available to the viewers across the world were benchmark productions such as Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and her Children* (1954/57), Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata* (1985) and Robert Wilson's *Hamletmachine* (1986), other iconic works by the greatest theatre directors produced in the recent decades as well as cutting-edge productions of leading contemporary theatre groups and artists. This unexpected boom of high-quality theatre, made available for us to watch, would have not been possible in our normal pre-pandemic theatre life. It quickly and firmly brought to the fore an important issue which until then neither theatre makers nor audiences had paid much attention to – the need of a high-quality professional video recording of theatre performances even if to be used only for the purpose of archiving and preservation for posterity.

The intense process or re-evaluation of the world's digital theatre archive, prompted by the unforeseen circumstances, clearly demonstrated that the formal recordings of performances, made solely for archival purposes, most often with

a single camera, do not differ much from other traditional archiving methods, such as photography and sketches and contribute almost nothing to improving the reconstruction of the performances by current and future viewers and researchers. This has led theatre companies to reconsider their attitude towards the process of documenting their output in recent years and generated the rapid emergence of increasingly high-quality video recordings of theatrical performances, corresponding to the high capabilities of modern technologies, in which the video version often even outshines the original (this is a newly emerged problem which will inevitably generate further discussions, but will not be addressed presently). Undoubtedly, “a new era is dawning for those making theatre history and those writing about it” (Nikolova, 2021), insofar as the artefacts themselves, in the shape of their most accurate digital copies, will now stand alongside their reconstructions and critical evaluations.

It is precisely the creation of a contemporary archive of adequately filmed recordings of productions currently being performed by theatre companies in the Balkan countries that would be particularly timely and useful both for the emergence of the currently almost absent research area of comparative theatre studies in the Balkan region, as well as to improve our awareness of each other and for facilitating a faster and more effective theatrical exchange.

Conclusion

To conclude, the gradually intense relationship between theatre and digital technologies over the last two decades has not only irreversibly changed theatre language, communication with audiences and the forms of artefacts’ distribution, but also created new, previously unsuspected opportunities for activating and expanding theatre cooperation and exchange both in a global context and, specifically, between the countries of the Balkan region. The live broadcasting of theatre productions in different parts of the world to large audience, together with their actual performances onstage is particularly productive practice from the point of view of opening up theatre cultures in the area to each other and of creating an Inter-Balkan network of performing arts. The creation of such kind of co-productions, produced by several theatres and festivals from the countries of the region and created by an international team, which, in addition to being presented in one of the partner stages, would also be periodically broadcast live via satellite in cinemas in the other participating countries, would be one of the most relevant and effective ways of cooperation and exchange in the sphere of theatre. A good opportunity to introduce local audiences to the theatre art of their neighbors also is the inclusion in the programmes of theatre festivals and other international forums of so-called “reruns” of performances recorded by

using satellite technology, which in fact simulate the experience of a live digital broadcast of a show in real time in the form of a recording of the entire event, as well as other different types of broadcasting of theatre artefacts. It would be extremely timely and useful to create a digital theatre archive of well-filmed and documented performances from all Balkan countries, which would stimulate both the writing of the current theatre history of the region and comparative theatre research, and would be a useful source of information for festival selections, for creative partnership between artists and companies, and for the organizing of tours and other forms of theatre exchange.

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SPECIFICITIES AND CROSSROADS IN BALKAN DRAMATURGIES

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Abstract: Understanding dramaturgy means understanding the historical period. Understanding a historical period means understanding man's destiny – an inhabitant of this space, caught in the clamp of time.

In Romania, facing a new reality, starting with the 90s, the dramaturgy forces itself to leave the metaphor, to give up allegory and see mankind in context. It sheds light on the repetitive destiny of this area and its trauma, on its lost stories or, on the contrary, on the stories that could be recovered, like exclusion and integration from the European space. At the same time, contemporary Romanian dramaturgy talks about the wish to be inside, when you are placed on the edge, at the outskirts, it talks about the future, about hope, about the meaning of being an inhabitant of this corner of Europe.

Keywords: Balkan Region (South-Eastern Europe), multiculturalism, Balkan dramaturgies, Romanian drama, International Festival of New Dramaturgy – Dramafest, dramAcum.

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The paper provides an overview of Romanian drama over the past three decades, framed within the Balkan context. This region of Europe, positioned at the crossroads of East and West, possesses shared and recognizable identity markers. Political scientist Tom Gallagher notes, "Here, perhaps more than elsewhere on the continent, geography is history, and history continues to influence politics." When discussing the Balkans, one invariably touches upon the region's distinct characteristics, represented by the "homo balkanicus," who, despite existing differences, remains a bearer of unified behavioral stereotypes in the eyes of the West. Contributing to this perception are shared historical experiences, cultural intermingling, fluid borders among ethnic groups, and the prevalent influence of Orthodoxy. However, the true essence of what constitutes Balkan identity lies in its nature as a product of intersection. Bulgarian anthropologist Bogdan Bogdanov observes that "contemporary Balkan civilization can be seen as a form of dialogue between various lifestyles and, consequently, between differing attitudes towards life."

The Balkan region has seen theatre and, more specifically, drama evolve into a means of understanding its history, politics, and the fate of its inhabitants. Much of this area shared a similar experience in the latter half of the 20th century, dominated by communist ideology, with Greece being the sole exception, having faced its own dictatorship in the 1970s. Consequently, the year 1989, which marked the „liberation” of Eastern Europe from the constraints of a failing ideology, also revealed a theatre and a dramatic tradition that had long been stifled in terms of freedom of expression. In Bulgaria, as in Romania prior to

1989, theatre served as a space where audiences could interpret truths they dared not voice among themselves. To facilitate this, playwrights employed allegory to communicate indirectly with their viewers. Aware of theatre's potential to mobilize, the Albanian dictatorship before 1989 persecuted playwrights, many of whom faced imprisonment, resulting in a dramatic landscape in Albania that teetered on the brink of survival following the collapse of the communist regime.

In the former Yugoslavia, where a more relaxed form of socialism was practiced, the reality of the cultural landscape was markedly different. Theatre and dramaturgy were viewed as a "fortress of the avant-garde," with the theatrical movement aligning closely with European and international trends; notably, the Living Theatre was invited to the BITEF festival in Belgrade. This environment allowed for free expression and experimentation in dramaturgy. However, the situation became volatile, particularly following the interethnic wars after 1990, which devastated and fragmented the region. Greek dramaturgy also faced tense moments during the dictatorship, with prominent playwrights articulating their responses to the ideological and economic oppression experienced in the 1970s. Consequently, within this broader context, marked by the historical turning point of 1989, Balkan theatre and dramaturgy evolved in diverse ways, reflecting local nuances. This included an aggressive manifestation of "in yer-face theatre," quickly embraced by the young "angry" voices of the former Yugoslavia, such as Biljana Srbljanović and Dejan Dukovski. Additionally, parable theatre emerged, exemplified by figures like Bulgarian Hristo Boicev and Croatian Igor Štikš, alongside attempts at reconciling with the past, as seen in the works of Albanian Štefan Çapaliku, or anthropological explorations by the Sfumato Theatre Laboratory in Sofia. There was also a foray into the absurd, as demonstrated by Hristo Boicev, and the introduction of postmodernism in Eastern literature through Macedonian playwright Goran Stefanovski, alongside Greek playwrights revisiting ancient myths.

In Romania, facing this new reality in the realm of drama, we encounter a significant fracture. During nearly 50 years of communism, drama was transformed into a tool of propaganda, supporting the imposition of a new ideology. To survive, an aesthetic of allusion emerged, and escapism became a means of artistic survival. Consequently, as the country transitioned to a completely new reality, some playwrights of undeniable value, such as D.R. Popescu and Dumitru Solomon, became unrepresentative. The stylistic mechanisms they developed as a refuge for expression proved inadequate for the new contexts, and the themes they once explored no longer resonate with audiences.

A new wave of dramaturgy and playwrights was essential, and they emerged promptly. This was the generation of the youth from the 1990s, who

grew up during communism and understood the depths of helplessness, fear, and the implications of colluding with a dictatorial regime. This generation sought to express themselves freely, and they did so with conviction. The first decade of this new paradigm in Romanian society saw three distinct developmental directions. One was a dramaturgy of exposure, serving as a just act for a generation in search of truth, unyielding in confronting guilt, whether it lay with a brother, parent, or friend. Notable representatives of this movement include Alina Nelega and Radu Macrinici. Simultaneously, after nearly fifty years of enforced realism, there was a need for openness to alternative aesthetics, experimentation, and modern narrative structures, with figures like Saviana Stănescu and Vlad Zografi leading the charge. Lastly, the new dramaturgy reflected the tumultuous present of those years, characterized by a rawness that mirrored the transitional society, with prominent voices such as Ștefan Caraman, Horia Gârbea, Radu F. Alexandru, and Petre Barbu.

At the end of this decade, it can be observed that dramaturgy has embarked on a steady path of exploration and experimentation. In 1997, the Dramafest Foundation, established by the leader of this generation of playwrights, Alina Nelega, became the first organization dedicated to investing in the development of Romanian dramaturgy. It organizes playwriting competitions, promotes and supports emerging playwrights, collaborates with the Royal Court Theatre for workshops, and publishes bilingual anthologies of contemporary Romanian plays. Additionally, for two years, it organizes the International Festival of New Dramaturgy – Dramafest.

The 2000s marked a significant expansion in the realm of Romanian theatre, introducing fresh perspectives and innovative approaches. In 2001, the “Ion Creangă” Theatre showcased a production by the young director Radu Apostol titled *Acasă*, based on *Domoj* by Ludmila Razumovskaia. While it may have seemed unremarkable at first glance, the production was groundbreaking as it featured street children—an acute societal issue at the time—rather than professional actors. Apostol adapted the script to reflect the children’s life stories, signaling a shift towards new theatrical forms and a diversification of styles. This moment underscored the potential of theatre to serve a social purpose and act as a catalyst for community change. The affirmation of this new direction was further solidified by the emergence of the most coherent and innovative theatrical movement of the 2000s, *dramAcum*. Initiated by a group of young directors, then students, alongside their professor Radu Apostol, including Andreea Vălean, Gianina Cărbunariu, Alexandru Berceanu, and Ana Mărgineanu, under the guidance of Nicolae Manda, their manifesto focused on two core ideas: fostering a collaborative relationship between directors and playwrights throughout

the production process, and establishing a partnership between directors and translators to explore contemporary theatrical trends. Their rallying cry was simple yet powerful: the determination to persevere, encapsulated in the slogan, “Have an idea? We’ll make it happen!”, as noted in an article in *Dilema veche* magazine.

Over time, the group expanded to include playwrights Peca Ștefan, Mihaela Michailov and Maria Manolescu. The artists in this group began to become more connected to the European or American artistic reality. It can be said that the artists of *dramAcum* have invigorated Romanian theatrical life, creating observational theatre that scrutinizes the present in a search for truth, moving away from traditional confrontations in their works.

Many of their texts fall under the category of documentary theatre. Their dramaturgy is straightforward and incisive, lacking the extreme provocations characteristic of the “in-yer-face theatre” movement that emerged in England during the 1990s. However, it shares a similar impact. This new wave not only introduces a fresh cohort of playwrights but also brings forth innovative stylistic approaches.

Under the influence of these emerging generations, Romanian dramaturgy has diversified both stylistically and thematically. Consequently, the manifestations include a consolidation of docudrama and engaged theatre, particularly in its political form (notable figures include David Schwartz and Mihaela Michailov), activism across various domains (social: Catinca Drăgănescu, Alexandra Badea, Alexandra Felseghi, Gabi Sandu; LGBT+: Bogdan Georgescu; ethnic: Alina Șerban, Mihaela Drăgan), and educational theatre (Elise Wilk, Mihaela Michailov). Additionally, traditional structures of classical dramaturgy are not abandoned, as seen in the fictional narratives adhering to Aristotelian frameworks (Csaba Székely, Mimi Brănescu, Alex Popa, Leta Popescu).

The well-deserved success enjoyed by young playwrights Elise Wilk and Székely Csaba, both domestically and internationally, underscores the notion that the diverse forms of theatrical writing that have emerged in the past two decades in our country do not preclude the presence of literary texts by authors., as Miruna Runcan remarks. (2022, p. 610)

During this period, a distinctive figure in Romanian drama is playwright Matei Vișniec. Having emigrated to France in 1987, Vișniec operates within two cultures and is currently the most recognized Romanian author, with his works translated and performed across all continents. His plays explore a wide range of themes, from existential metaphors to pressing contemporary issues such as the war in the former Yugoslav region, the significant migration trends of recent years and their consequences, as well as the loss and redefinition of identities. „His works

are constructs of fear, reflecting the torment of a spirit grappling with the infinite secrets of an unfathomable ontological scenario, which the French existentialists referred to as anguish”, notes the critic and theorist Mircea Ghițulescu in his volume on *The History of Romanian Literature. Dramaturgy*. (2022, p. 510)

In this overarching context that unites us through history, shared experiences, and similar identity markers, the Balkan theatre lacks interconnectivity. There is a significant gap in our knowledge about one another, with few translations or productions of works from neighboring countries. While we often look towards Europe or the wider world, we fail to capitalize on the strong connections that bind us. Perhaps it is time for us to deepen our understanding of each other, even if it is through reading or staging each other’s plays.

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THE IMPACT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF ANCIENT GREEK TRAGEDY AND ANCIENT GREEK MYTHS ON BALKAN THEATRE IN THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES

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Abstract: The inter-Balkan theatrical interaction between Greece and the Balkans, using ancient Greek myths and tragedies as a vehicle, can be traced back to the distant Renaissance. However, with the exception of a few translations of ancient Greek tragedies and comedies that were made until the 19th century, greater interest in ancient Greek drama has been observed after 1900. The influence of ancient Greek theatre had a different dynamic in each area of our Balkan neighborhood. Nevertheless, particularly after 1950, there has been a significant increase in the number of translations into the languages of our neighboring countries. Prominent Greek directors who toured major cities in the Balkans also played an important role in promoting ancient Greek drama. At the same time, within the framework of socialist systems, the staging of ancient Greek plays helped convey camouflaged political views that conflicted with the system. Through a significant historical journey that ancient Greek drama underwent in the Balkans in the 20th and 21st centuries, it ultimately managed to establish its position on stage, while also serving as a source of inspiration for the creation of new original “Balkan tragedies” that more vividly expressed the political and social situation in the wounded post-civil war, former socialist Balkan states.

Keywords: Balkan Region (South-Eastern Europe), cultural heritage, multiculturalism, Ancient Greek drama, inter-Balkan theatrical communication, Balkan tragedies.

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The ancient Greek tragedy and mythology have played a decisive role in the cultural life of the Balkans since the distant Renaissance. A characteristic example is the first Slavic tragedy, *Hekuba* composed by the great writer from Ragusa, Marin Držić, in 1558. Ancient Greek culture is encountered in our Balkan neighborhood in every era in different ways, with different perceptions and different meanings. This demonstrates its magical and timeless ability to express the social and political values and concerns of each society in its specific time and space.

Through a historical review of the development of ancient Greek drama in the Balkans, it is observed that in the 19th century, there were few translations of ancient Greek theatrical plays into Balkan languages, most of which date from the last fifteen years. Nevertheless, it is only in the first half of the 20th century that ancient Greek tragedy begins to timidly establish its presence in the broader region of the Balkans. It is worth mentioning that its influence should not be considered homogeneous, as its dynamics vary in each corner of our Balkan neighborhood. Generally speaking, a common point is the fact that translations of ancient Greek tragedies that took place in the first half of the 20th century were quite limited, resulting in these works not being frequently performed in theatres.

Despite its weak influence, ancient Greek culture was not entirely absent. In Slovenia, until World War II, only two ancient Greek plays were performed on stage, *Antigone*¹ and *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles (Inkret, 2017, p.101). In Croatia, translations of *Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex* appeared as early as 1904², and Zagreb's theatre scene featured *Electra* (1908)³, *Alcestis* (1909)⁴, and *Agamemnon* (1910)⁵, (DiZbi.HAZU, 2025). It was only in 1913 that the tragedies of Sophocles and some of Aeschylus were published in a translation by Koloman Rac in Zagreb. In Serbia, *Antigone* was first performed in Belgrade in 1925 and thirty years later, it was presented for the second time at the Yugoslav Drama Theatre (Jugoslovensko dramsko pozorište)⁶ (M.B., 2012). In Montenegro *Antigone* was staged at the Zetski dom in Cetinje in 1946.⁷ In Bosnia, *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles had its first premiere in 1922 at the National Theatre in Sarajevo (Narodno pozorište Sarajevo).⁸ In Bulgarian language *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles and *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus were translated in 1911 and *Medea* by Euripides in 1914.⁹ *Oedipus Rex* was performed on stage in Stara Zagora in 1916¹⁰ and *Medea* in Sofia in

1 *Antigone* was first performed in 1911 at the Slovenian National Theatre in Ljubljana (Slovensko Narodno Gledališče Drama Ljubljana) in the Slovenian language, translated by Cvetko Golar and directed by Hinko Nučič. Sigledal, *Antigona*. Available at: <https://repertoar.sigledal.org/predstava/4898> (Accessed: 25 February 2025)

2 *Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex* were translated by August Harambašić and directed by Bach and Fijan. DiZbi.HAZU (2025). *Kralj Edip: tragedija u jednom činu*. Available at: <https://dizbi.hazu.hr/?pr=i&id=26092> (Accessed: 9 February 2025).

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1929.¹¹ Romania saw the translation of *Hecuba* (1900), *Antigone*, *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus* (1910)¹², *Alcestis* (1921)¹³, and *Oedipus Rex* (1925).¹⁴ In contrast, Albania and North Macedonia had no translations of ancient Greek drama in the first half of the 20th century, with the first translations appearing later. Thus, in North Macedonia, *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone* were translated in 1967.¹⁵ In Albania, Aristophanes *Wealth* was translated in 1954, and Euripides' *Medea* in 1956.¹⁶

A comparative perspective reveals that several ancient Greek tragedies and comedies were not translated into all Balkan languages during this period, and performances remained scarce. The greatest influence of ancient Greek theatre is found in Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia, while very little to no influence is observed in the areas of Albania and North Macedonia.

Moving into the second half of the 20th century, translations of ancient Greek works gradually increased. However, Serbian theatre expert Jovan Ćirilov noted that in the 50s, tragic poets were still rarely staged in Yugoslav theatre (Nikčević, 2014). A major turning point came with Greek theatre companies touring the Balkans, presenting ancient Greek plays under renowned directors such as Alexis Minotis, Dimitris Rondiris, and Karolos Koun. Alexis Minotis presented performances of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Euripides' *Hecuba* in Belgrade and Zagreb in 1955, and in Bucharest and Sofia in 1965 (Ψηφιοποιημένο αρχείο ΑΣΚΙ, 2024; Ψηφιοποιημένο αρχείο Εθνικού Θεάτρου, 2008-2011). Through the newspapers of the time, the curiosity of the neighbors about how ancient Greek tragedies are presented on stage by Greek directors becomes evident. The Romanian press of the time highlights the fact that Euripides remains unknown

11 *Medea* was presented on the stage of the National Theatre in Sofia, directed by Nikolay Massalitinov (Николай Масалитинов). Народен театър Иван Вазов (2024), *Медя*. Available at: <https://digitalnabiblioteka.nationaltheatre.bg/obekt/6256-medeq> (Accessed: 22 February 2025).

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compared to Aeschylus and Sophocles for the Romanian audience in the 60s (Ψηφιοποιημένο αρχείο ΑΣΚΙ, 2024, p.2). Rondiris, with the Piraiko Theatre, brought *The Persians* and *Electra* to Belgrade in 1959, *Electra* and *Oresteia* to Zagreb in 1962, and *Electra* and *Medea* to Sofia and Bucharest (Ψηφιοποιημένες συλλογές ΕΛΙΑ, 2017; Αρχείο Δημήτρη Ροντήρη, 2025). The major Balkan cities of Belgrade, Zagreb, Bucharest, and Sofia served as stops for the Greek theatre troupes, while the press of the time recorded the enthusiastic reactions of the audience and the packed theatres. These performances were particularly significant because they took place at a time when ancient Greek drama had not yet secured a place in the repertoire of Balkan theatres and, secondly, they served as a means of communication and acquaintance among the Balkan countries. It is worth mentioning that shortly afterward, in 1974, Karolos Koun participated in the Bitez theatre festival in Belgrade with Aristophanes' *Birds* through the Art Theatre (Pretraživa digitalna biblioteka, 2014-2025), while four years later, Minotis presented *Prometheus Bound* at the summer festival in Dubrovnik (Ψηφιοποιημένες συλλογές ΕΛΙΑ, 2017).

In the following decades of the 20th century, translations of ancient Greek theatrical works gradually increased. In fact, the staging of ancient Greek classic plays was particularly significant in countries where strict censorship was enforced, such as Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania, as well as throughout the former Yugoslavia, where the boundaries between freedom and unfreedom in art were fluid and negotiable, often through indirect methods of halting a theatrical performance (Jovičević, 2008, p.241). Specifically, ancient Greek tragedies or the new “Balkan tragedies” written by Balkan authors based on ancient Greek myths allowed artists to convey their camouflaged views that clashed with the socialist system, through veiled references to the contemporary socio-political reality. A notable example is the writing of the “new” *Antigone* by the Slovenian Dominik Smole in 1959. A hallmark of the work was the complete absence of Antigone herself. The audience learns about her actions and thoughts through the words of the other characters. Antigone, through the burial of Polyneices, embarks on a journey of self-awareness and identity search. Smole's poetic drama was linked to the current political situation of the time. The absence of Antigone was equated with the absence of the intellectual Jože Pučnik, who was imprisoned for his political ideas at the time the play was performed (Inkret, p. 106). Similarly, *Antigone* was associated with the executions of thousands of members of the national Slovenian guard by the Yugoslav army after World War II (Inkret, p.107).

The collapse of socialist regimes, the Yugoslav civil war, and the establishment of newly formed nation-states inaugurated a new era for the ancient Greek drama in the Balkans. The staging of ancient Greek tragedies has

now become a staple choice in the repertoire of National Theatres, while an increasing number of Balkan directors are experimenting with ancient Greek myths. Moreover, from the early 1990s to the present new “Balkan tragedies” have been written. The list of the new Balkan works based on ancient Greek tragedies, Homeric epics, and ancient Greek myths is impressively extensive. Notably mentioned are: *Odysseus* by the author from North Macedonia Goran Stefanovski, *Medea* by Montenegrin playwright Ljubomir Đurković, *Arhetip Medeja* by Croatian Ivana Sajko, *Medeja* by Croatian Josip Vela, *Antigone* by Slovenian Dušan Jovanović, *Hrvatska Antigona* (The Antigone of Croatia) by Croatian Miroslav Međimorec, *Antigona - 2000 godina posle* (Antigone - 2,000 years later) by Croatian Željka Udovičić, *Ojdisip v Korintu* (Oedipus in Corinth) by Slovenian Ivo Svetina, *Moja domovina - Sedam snova* (My homeland - Seven dreams) by Serbian Nikita Miliwojević, *Balkan Bordello* by Kosovar Jeton Neziraj, *De ce Hecuba?* by Romanian Matei Vişniec, *Medeae dem* by Bulgarian Диана Добрева (Diana Dobрева), *Medeea, mama mea* (Medea, My Mother) by Bulgarian Иван Добчев (Ivan Dobcev).

One characteristic found in several of the new Balkan tragedies is the tendency to demystify ancient Greek heroes and their mythical stories. The heroes are placed in the present day, and influenced by the generally decayed socio-political system in which they operate, they have lost their heroic dimensions. A prime example is the *Odysseus* by the Macedonian author Goran Stefanovski. In this work, the renowned Greek hero is portrayed as a war criminal, old, depressed, suffering from arthritis and stomach ache. The beautiful Helen appears as a prostitute, Nestor as a drug dealer, Athena as a lovesick virgin with Odysseus, Penelope as an alcoholic, and Telemachus, disillusioned by the image he has created of his father, tries to erase the tattoo of his name from his body. Moreover, the “Yugoslav Odysseus,” upon returning to Ithaca, is discontented to discover that his homeland has changed its name, flags, monuments, songs, and gods (Stefanovski, 2019). The ancient Greek myth is used symbolically by Goran Stefanovski to express his nostalgia for his lost homeland, Yugoslavia, which has now been replaced by a new, morally and ethically decayed society that the main hero no longer recognizes as part of his identity.

Similarly, the Kosovar writer Jeton Neziraj in his work *Balkan Bordello* adopts the basic elements of the plot of Aeschylus’s “Oresteia” to deconstruct the post-Yugoslav, post-war society. His goal is to provide sharp criticism of individuals and institutions. In the “Balkan Oresteia,” Agamemnon and his soldiers return victorious, not from the Trojan War, but from the Yugoslav civil war. The luxury of the kingdom in Argos has been replaced by a kitsch motel run by Clytemnestra, who suffers from migraines. Her lover, Aegisthus, is portrayed as an unpublished poet who deserted but believes that with his pen, he managed

to save the nation, which must recognize the value of the intellectuals who served it. The provocative, homosexual relationship between Orestes and Pylades serves as commentary on the conservative treatment of the LGBTQ+ community in today's Balkans. Pylades is presented as a choreographer from Berlin who travels to civilize the war-torn Balkans through European cultural programs (Neziraj, 2014-2017).

In the new Balkan tragedies, the concept of "heroism" seems to be questioned and reinterpreted through a postmodern narrative. The new Balkan tragedies or the original ones through an innovative directorial perspective express the conflicting ideological trends, the collective trauma of war, the mechanisms of communist and capitalist power, the search for a new national, multicultural, European, consumer identity and other related socio-political issues. Through innovative directorial approaches, these adaptations and original works often use multilingual performances, cultural hybridity, striking visual imagery, symbolism, and physical theatre to communicate their political messages.

Conclusion

From the Renaissance to the present day, the influence of ancient Greek culture on the wider Balkan region has become evident. However, this influence was weak until the first half of the 20th century, when the first translations of ancient Greek drama appeared in all Balkan countries except Albania and North Macedonia. The number of translations recorded up to 1950 indicates that ancient Greek culture did not exert the same influence across every corner of the Balkan Peninsula. Thus, in Slovenia, only two translations of ancient Greek tragedies are noted until 1950, whereas the number of translations in Croatia, Bulgaria, and Romania was significantly higher. A small influence is also observed in the regions of Serbia, Bosnia, and Montenegro. Notably, in the first half of the 20th century, the first performances of ancient Greek drama were conducted in several cases on Balkan stages, thus inaugurating a closer relationship between the Balkans and ancient Greek theatre. In the second half of the 20th century, ancient Greek drama gradually increased its influence through new translations, while several times ancient tragedies and comedies were deliberately used by artists aiming to subtly convey political messages that conflicted with the socialist system. During the same period, new Balkan tragedies inspired by the works of tragic poets began to be written. However, decisive in establishing ancient Greek drama in the Balkans were the political and social events that took place towards the end of the 20th century. The fall of communist regimes, the relentless civil war in Yugoslavia, the search for new national identities, the end of censorship, and the adoption of

new economic and political models made staging ancient Greek plays imperative. Today, ancient Greek tragedy marks its most glorious period of influence across all of the Balkans, adapted in ways that express new social concerns. Throughout this historical journey, many times the glorious ancient Greek heroes have been demythologized to become carriers of a modern, post-war, fallen society.

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THE GREEK MYTH IN ROMANIAN PUPPETRY FOR CHILDREN

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Abstract: The historical influence of Greek-language theatre on the development of the Romanian stage is undeniable, especially considering that one of the first performances in Romanian, staged in the first half of the 19th century by Romanian intellectuals, were translations of Greek tragedies. In the case of puppet theatre, however, the influence is more subtle, emerging not directly from the classical Greek stage, but from a shared ancestor: the Turkish shadow theatre of Karagöz. From this origin, the form evolved differently in each culture, adapting to their specific local contexts. The influence of Greek culture on Romanian puppet theatre lies not so much in form, but in subject matter. This paper explores the role Greek myths have played in the development of Romanian performing arts, particularly their influence on Romanian puppet theatre. It focuses on a small number of productions from the communist period that draw on ancient Greek mythology, especially those featuring two central mythological figures: Prometheus and Herakles.

Keywords: Balkan Region (South-Eastern Europe), cultural heritage, Romanian Puppet Theatre, Greek myth, Prometheus, Herakles, Alexandru Mitru, Valentin Silvestru, Țândărică Puppet Theatre.

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Introduction

The connections between modern Greek-language theatre and the early development of the National Romanian Theatre movement in the first decades of the nineteenth century are crucial to the subsequent evolution of Romanian theatre. A notable example is the Red Well Theatre in Bucharest, founded by Greek Princess Ralu Caragea. It was here that a young Costache Aristia, who would later become a professor to Romania's first playwrights and actors, performed in Greek. This theatre played a pivotal role in shaping the future of Romanian drama.

While the influence of Greek-language drama on Romanian theatre is undeniable, in the case of puppet theatre, the Balkan influences stem from another significant cultural force of the period: the Ottoman shadow theatre tradition of Karagöz. Although Romanian puppetry does not directly follow the Turkish or later Greek forms, the Romanian tradition, based on the technique of European hand puppetry, retains essential character details, as noted by Professor John McCormick in his seminal work *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe*. Speaking about the character of Vasilache, the national hero of the Romanian popular puppet theatre tradition, rooted in the 19th-century movement of national awakening following the French Revolution, which also saw the emergence of the fourth generation of European puppet heroes, Professor McCormick states that "he may

be no more than a Rumanianised version of Karagoz.” (McCormich & Pratasik, 2004, p. 115) This observation on language and puppetry techniques, tracing a path from popular tradition to modern Romanian puppetry, relates to the fact that the influence of Greek culture on Romanian puppet theatre lay not in form, but in subject matter, as will be seen.

This paper focuses on the role Greek myths played in the development of Romanian performing arts, particularly in its influence on the Romanian puppet theatre. In this context, the differences between drama and puppet theatre are once again significant. While ancient tragedies have been a foundational element in the repertoire of Romanian theatre from the outset, one example being the 1819 staging of *Hecuba* at Gheorghe Lazăr High School in Bucharest, where Romanian intellectual Ion Heliade Rădulescu, played the title role, the inclusion of these subjects on the puppet theatre stage only became evident in the 1960s and 1970s, after the early decades of Romania’s modern puppet theatre movement.

The modern period of Romanian puppetry formally began with the establishment of the Țândărică Puppet Theatre in Bucharest in 1945 and its institutionalization in 1949. During the early years of the Communist regime in Romania, this context of growth was replicated, and by the late 1950s, between 19-22 state-owned puppet theatres had emerged across the country. One of the primary goals of these institutions was to create a Romanian dramaturgy for the puppet stage, with Margareta Niculescu, the director of the Țândărică Puppet Theatre, playing a central role in this effort. Through her persistent dedication, well-known Romanian authors like surrealist writer Gelu Naum or Nina Cassian, were introduced to the puppet theatre scene.

Among them was Alexandru Mitru, a renowned children’s book author from the interwar and communist periods, whose works retold world myths for children and youth. The influence of Al. Mitru on the Romanian collective consciousness, even after the fall of the communist regime, cannot be overstated. His books on the *Legends of Olympus* provided many generations of Romanians with a deep connection to the essential myths of the Greek world, embedding them in the nation’s cultural fabric.

Methodology for rediscovering the undocumented

When discussing The Greek Myth in Romanian Puppetry for Children, the research reveals that the body of work is quite limited. Leading the way are two plays written by Alexandru Mitru: *The Labours of Herakles* (Țândărică, 1959; Constanța, 1960) and *Prometheus* (1973, Galați), as well as Valentin Silvestru’s

Hercules in Search of the Golden Apples (Iași, 1973; Bacău, 1975). The only other production from this period is *The Amazing Adventures of Odysseus* by Sanda Diaconescu (1975, Botoșani). It was not until the new millennium that Greek myths reappeared on the Romanian puppet theatre stage with *Prometheus* by Aurelian Bălăiță (2009), a reimagining of Alexandru Mitru's version, and *The Iliad* by Gavril Pinte (Constanța, 2007).

One important aspect of this overview of puppet theatre performances based on Greek mythology is that, from a research methodology perspective, it includes only those stagings that were documented and reflected upon by local and national theatre critics of the time, in both well-known and lesser-known publications and mentioned in Romanian puppet theatre monographies and histories. Due to the general lack of popular attention paid to puppetry by cultural and theatre journalists, a regrettable situation that has persisted, or even worsened, since the regime change in Romania, there is an undeniable possibility that the overview presented in this paper is not conclusive. Another major challenge in this research is the absence of a national theatre archive, along with the degradation, or even destruction, of state-owned puppet theatre archives over time, which significantly limits the available sources.

One last relevant methodological aspect is that this paper does not take into consideration productions that resulted from the educational process within university puppetry arts training programs, such as the 2009 production of *Ulysse* at the National University of Theatre and Film "I.L. Caragiale," directed by professor and puppeteer Ioan Brancu, and others.

Ancient myths on the Romanian puppet stage

Although the number of productions based on subjects from the Greek myths is limited, analyzing them provides a crucial summary of the defining aesthetic trends in this period of puppet theatre. As with drama theatre, the return to the original subjects of European theatre offers an opportunity to review, reinvent and reconsider the role of the puppet theatre in a contemporary context. Several key characteristics emerge from this analysis, which will be discussed here. The topics will follow the selected mythical characters and the reasons behind their choice, taking into consideration the specific conditions of the period, the attributes of these characters, the puppetry techniques used, innovations introduced to the puppetry scene at the time, and the broader context of each production. In this short overview we will also look at the critical reception of the pieces. We will specifically focus on the productions from the period 1959-1979 that have as source the myths of Prometheus and Herakles.

The Saviour and The Hero – From classical tragedy to the puppet stage

Regarding the protagonists, at first glance, a common characteristic emerges across most of the plays staged in the modern period: the central roles given to two particular heroes, Herakles and Prometheus. Notably, even in plays where Herakles is the main character, such as those following the classical structure of the „Labours of Herakles”, Prometheus also plays a significant role.

This choice of characters carries important meanings that reflect both the history of European puppet theatre and the social context of the period. Both Herakles and Prometheus are figures whose origins in European theatre can be traced back to the ancient tragedies that have survived the passage of time, such as *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus, *Trachiniae* by Sophocles, and *Herakles* and *Alceste* by Euripides. One observable reason for choosing them is the fact that they share a significant characteristic that makes them suitable for theatre, and particularly puppet theatre the detail that they are not entirely divine beings, they are halfbreeds. Hercules is a demigod, half human and half god, while Prometheus is half Titan on his father's side. By this characteristic they resemble the dualstatus of the puppet, animate and inanimate at the same time, a halfbreed between human and object.

In classical tragedy, both characters become tragic heroes through their suffering, a suffering that renders them human-like. In the context of children's puppet theatre, their suitability as heroic figures also derives from their specific traits: Hercules for his incredible feats of strength, and Prometheus for his moral and civilizational values. These traits were particularly relevant for the ideological goals of the Romanian state puppet theatres, which aimed to present role models for the young communist audience they served.

One such interpretation, as noted by Romanian theatre critic Alexandru Popovici in his review of the Țândărică production, connects to the rhetoric imposed by the communist state. Following the ideas of Karl Marx, Prometheus is portrayed as “the most noble and saintly martyr of the humankind calendar,” (Popovici, 1959, p. 83) making him an ideal hero for educating the communist youth. This interpretation also served as a means to bypass the censorship of the period, opening the door to a broader, humanistic moral education.

From this perspective, Prometheus is seen by Alexandru Mitru as a civilizing and moral hero who chooses to save humankind – maybe even from the communist monster, even though we do not know of an explicit reactionary intent –, positioning him as a proper model for youth. In contrast, the choice of Herakles as a central character is based on the dynamic nature of his story. As an adventurous hero who overcomes various trials, Hercules embodies the

determination to overcome every obstacle, while Prometheus represents the rational essence and mindfulness that children should cultivate in their lives.

In the case of Herakles, his significance for puppet theatre more broadly is also linked to a resemblance noted by Romanian puppet theatre director and professor Cristian Pepino between his character in *Alcestis* by Euripedes and the popular puppet heroes of the European stage. According to professor Pepino, when discussing the ancestral origins of Vasilache, the Romanian counterpart to figures such as Pulcinella or Guignol, he observes:

“The only resemblance with something is the episode from the life of Herakles shown in *Alcestis* by Euripides, where the hero, intoxicated by alcohol, physically forces Death to bring Alcestis back to life. Other elements that bring Herakles closer to Vasilache are the club and the butchery of his family.” (Pepino, 2014, pp. 135-136)

In professor Pepino’s view, the character of Herakles evolved during antiquity into a comic figure known as „Herculianus”, in the Roman Empire, and this figure, through various influences from outside sources and historical developments, eventually transformed into the prototype of the puppet heroes we recognize today.

The focus on powerful heroes like Herakles and Prometheus also highlights the period’s emphasis on creating new heroes for the Romanian puppet theatre, and more broadly, European puppetry. This movement aligns with what I define as the 5th generation of puppet heroes – a generation characterized by heroes drawn from classical or modern literature used as subject matter for the puppet theatre.

Techniques, particularities and innovations

When analyzing the characteristics of these performances, as they can be reconstructed from period articles, we propose to view them based on four key aspects: puppeteering techniques, visual aesthetics, voice acting, and the text.

1. Puppeteering Techniques – When looking at the different Romanian stagings of the stories of Prometheus and Herakles, we can observe the use of various puppeteering techniques specific to the period: string marionettes, rod puppets, shadow figures, and masks. The only traditional technique missing, in order to complete this complex map, is hand puppetry. The 1973 Galați production of *Prometheus* is a pantomime using rod puppets. *The Labours of Hercules*, directed by Ștefan Lenkisch at the Țândărică Puppet Theatre, is a marionette show, the most

developed puppetry form at Țândărică at that time, featuring a human performer wearing a mask as the narrator. In the Constanța staging of the same play, director Claudiu Cristescu chose to tell the story using transparent figures and light. The most innovative of these productions is the Iași staging of *Hercules in Search of the Golden Apples*, where the characters are portrayed by “human-puppets”: actors wearing various masks and moving like puppets, alongside a chorus made up of silhouettes. These various puppeteering techniques speak to the complexity of the Romanian phenomenon and also mark the first steps toward the beginning phases object theatre in Romania.



Herakles and Cerberus in *The Labours of Hercules*, Țândărică Puppet Theatre, 1959
Puppets designed by Ella Conovici
© Revista Teatrul, No. 9, year IV, September 1959

2. The Visual Universes – The essential value of these productions resides in their visual universes, shaped by renowned Romanian puppet theatre scenographers and puppet-makers such as Ella Conovici and Ștefan Hablinski (Țândărică), Lucia Cristescu (Constanța), Valentin Prisăcan (Bacău), and Cik Damadian (Iași). For *The Labours of Hercules*, Ștefan Hablinski created abstract graphic backgrounds using a variety of techniques. These backgrounds, composed as collages combining photographs, paintings, and objects in somber tones, were paired with Ella Conovici’s detailed marionettes. In the Constanța staging of the same text, Lucia Cristescu designed a dual universe: original puppets made of transparent silhouettes represented the gods, while the fantastic creatures, such as the Hydra of Lerna, Cerberus, and the Nemean Lion, were rendered as detailed, plastic constructions. Although contemporary reviews do not explicitly

describe the staging as shadow theatre, based on the puppet descriptions and lack of photographic documentation, it can be interpreted as such. This method evokes the early roots of Romanian puppet theatre, linked to the shadow tradition of Karagöz. Cîk Damadian's scenography in Iași stood out for its simplicity in mask and costume design. The set consisted of movable and modular panels that depicted various locations and terrains, enhanced by a carefully designed lighting scheme. This emphasis on visual storytelling aligns with the widely accepted definition of puppetry in Romanian theatre as a "moving visual art," as described by Professor Cristian Pepino.

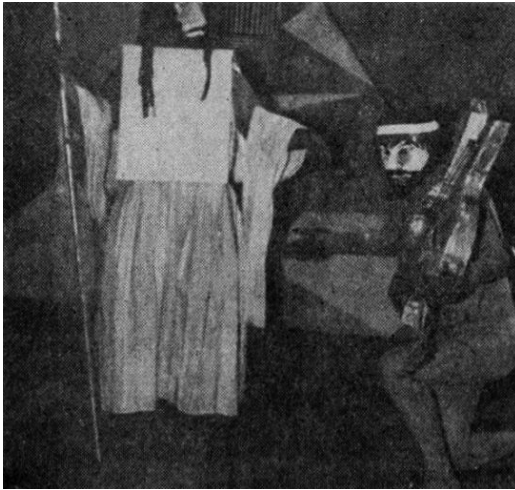
3. Voice Acting – When analyzing the common aesthetic elements of these productions, one notable aspect is the use of pre-recorded voice acting. Due to the lack of a professional university training program for puppeteers at the time, many state-owned puppet theatres relied on prerecorded voices for the characters, allowing puppeteers to concentrate exclusively on manipulation. In the context of staging Greek myths, this approach created an opportunity for traditional drama actors, often experienced in performing ancient tragedies, to provide the voices of puppet characters, thereby adding gravitas and theatrical depth to the performances. This practice was common in many of the puppet shows produced during the communist period discussed here. A prominent example is the involvement of Teofil Vilcu, one of the leading actors of the Iași National Theatre, who lent his voice to the character of Hercules in the Iași staging of Valentin Silvestru's play at the Children and Youth Theatre. The use of prerecorded voices, however, was received with mixed reactions. In the case of the Constanța production of *The Labours of Hercules*, critic Boris Buzilă remarked: "It is a shame that the sound of the tape recording reproduced a mediocre interpretation, interrupted by explosive interjections that were very bothersome." (Buzilă, 1960, p. 2)



Unknown characters (supposition: Zeus and Athena),
Prometheus, Galați Puppet Theatre, 1973
Puppets designed by Mircea Nicolau
© Revista Teatrul, No. 11, year XVIII, November 1973

4. The Text – In terms of dramaturgy, two authors are central to this analysis: Alexandru Mitru and Valentin Silvestru. In Mitru’s case, he adopts two distinct dramatic forms, the classical, somewhat narrative style typical of the puppet theatre of the period (*The Labours of Herakles*), and pantomime (*Prometheus*). In the pantomime, by abandoning spoken dialogue as the primary storytelling device, the production shifts the focus toward the visual aspect and rational interpretation. This approach brings it closer to the improvisational style and action-based dramaturgy of traditional popular puppet theatre. By contrast, in *The Labours of Herakles*, critics such as Valentin Silvestru and Alexandru Popovici noted that the text at times becomes overly verbose, which detracts from the overall impact of the performance. As Silvestru wrote, “The play is constructed disharmoniously; in the show, there is too much talk.” (Silvestru, 1960, p. 4) In this way, Alexandru Mitru’s two puppet dramas seem to oscillate between two extremes: the complete absence of spoken language and excessive verbosity. This aspect may help explain why, in 1973, Valentin Silvestru chose to write his own version of the Herakles myth for the puppet stage. Silvestru’s adaptation aimed to more closely align with ancient tragedies, introducing a chorus into the

puppet performance. His version adopts a comical, even parodic tone, while still preserving the seriousness and educational function of the myth. As Silvestru himself stated, “I did nothing more than choose and rewrite, in blank verse so beloved by those people of long ago, for the audience of today.” (Popovici, 1973, p. 4) It is important to note that, due to the absence of the original script, interpretations of Silvestru’s text may have been influenced by his political position within the communist party at the time.



Unknown characters,
Hercules in Search of the Golden Apples, Iași
Theatre for Children and Youth, 1973
Puppets designed by Cik Damadian
© Revista Teatrul, No. 5, year XVIII, May 1973

Another important aspect of these productions must be noted. They reflect a significant trend of the period: the relationship between tradition and modernity, between the techniques and elements of traditional puppet theatre and the themes and methods of the contemporary stage. This dynamic can be observed in the evolving relationship between the puppet and the puppeteer. In the Țândărică production, the interaction between the human narrator and the marionettes echoes the structure of Romania’s popular puppet theatre, where a commentator figure, known as the *Sprech*, would reinterpret or mediate the words of the puppet protagonist, Vasilache. This relationship develops further in *Hercules in Search of the Golden Apples*, where the human figure becomes puppet-like, signaling a shift or resetting of this dynamic. This creative fusion of human and puppet elements illustrates a distinctive approach to blending traditional puppetry

with modern theatrical practices. It also reflects the institutionalization of puppet theatre and its recognition as an independent art form within the Romanian cultural landscape.

Conclusion

The few productions mentioned here, beginning with the stagings of Alexandru Mitru's *The Labours of Hercules* and briefly related with other works, provide a succinct contextualization of the period. They highlight the shift from conventional production methods to the significant relationship between tradition and modernity, as well as the evolution of puppet heroes. These productions encompass the broad diversity of techniques that defined 20th-century Romanian puppetry, from marionettes to masks and shadows, and from text-based performances to pantomime.

The more contemporary iteration, such as *Prometheus* by Aurelian Bălăiță (after Alexandru Mitru), retains its experimental nature. It serves as an academic exploration of the possibilities within shadow puppetry, as the author notes, promoting innovative approaches to puppet theatre. By drawing from classical subjects like Greek myths, it showcases how puppet theatre can evolve while honoring its roots and exploring new creative dimensions.

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DANCE WITHOUT BORDERS: THE MULTICULTURAL NATURE OF MOVEMENT

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Abstract: Dance, as a universal and non-verbal means of expression, transcends geopolitical borders, linguistic barriers, and cultural divides, functioning as a powerful tool of intercultural communication. In the Balkan area, a historically complex and culturally heterogeneous region, due to migrations and political upheavals, the movement functions as a dynamic archive of social, political and religious life. Traditional dance forms transmit collective values and memory, while contemporary choreographic practices draw on diverse cultural references to negotiate identity in transnational contexts. In the Balkan dances, circular formations and ritual movement structures embody the coexistence and conflict between ethnic communities. These are expressed through these common motifs. Ritual dances capture the spiritual dimension of movement, positioning dance as both an artistic expression and a religious embodiment. Such dances are the Anastenaria and the Sufi's whirling and Dervish Dance as will be mentioned below. In contemporary creations, Balkan –and not only– choreographers incorporate traditional elements into their choreographies, fueling a continuous intercultural dialogue in the area. Through this process, hybrid forms of expression are cultivated, bridging the past with the present and the local with the global. This study examines the role of Balkan dance and beyond, as a means of communication, negotiation, identity and cultural mediation, highlighting its importance both in preserving cultural heritage and promoting social transformation.

Keywords: Balkan Region (South-Eastern Europe), multiculturalism, intercultural dance, Balkan traditions, identity, ritual performance, globalisation, embodiment memory.

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Dance, as one of humanity's most ancient expressive forms, extends beyond aesthetics to encompass social, political, and spiritual dimensions. From its roots in ritual to its presence in contemporary performance, it operates as a living repository of collective memory and cultural identity (Kaeppeler, 2000; Adsheed, 1988). In the context of the Balkan Peninsula—a region marked by a long history of civilizational convergence, religious intersections, migrations, and political complexities—dance holds particular cultural weight (Kavouras, 2010; Giersdorf, 2009).

This research investigates how both traditional and contemporary Balkan dance reflect and shape multicultural realities, serving as a medium through which issues of ethnicity, identity, and global transformation are explored. The study is guided by the following core questions:

1. In what ways does dance operate as a medium of intercultural dialogue?
2. How does it contribute to the preservation and reinvention of ethnic and religious identities?
3. How is the notion of “ethnicity” reinterpreted in relation to globalisation, migration, and cultural commodification? (Kealiinohomoku, 1970; Buckland, 1999)

This study uses an interdisciplinary approach, bringing together ideas from anthropology, sociology, and performance theory, to explore dance as more than just physical movement. It views dance as something deeply rooted in culture and politics (Layson, 1983; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The research compares different types of ritual dances, such as the Anastenaria fire-walking tradition (Kousiopoulou, 2024) and Sufi whirling ceremonies (Paridis, 2013; Gkasiamis, 2019), alongside contemporary choreographies by artists like Akram Khan and Gregory Maqoma (Akram Khan Company, 2005; Dance Umbrella, 2018). By doing so, it shows how dance acts as a powerful way of telling stories that transcend borders and symbolism. The study suggests that dance is not a static tradition, but an ever-evolving form of expression that connects the past with the potential futures of culture (Giersdorf, 2009; Kringelbach & Skinner, 2019).

Looking at dance through this interdisciplinary lens means examining its deeper cultural, social, and political meanings. Kealiinohomoku (1970) was one of the first to suggest that all forms of dance are shaped by the cultures they come from, making them inherently “ethnic.” She argued that dance is a form of movement tied to a specific cultural context, challenging the idea that art can be universally neutral. Instead, she proposed that dance is a way of expressing identity and belonging.

Radcliffe-Brown (1922) also highlighted the role of dance in rituals, noting that it plays a key part in building social bonds and creating shared experiences. Giersdorf (2009) takes this further by exploring how dance functions as a tool for negotiating identity, especially in spaces where people move between cultures—like in diasporic communities. For Giersdorf, dance becomes a language through which people express gender, national identity, and cultural affiliation.

These theoretical perspectives provide valuable insight into the evolving role of dance in the Balkans. In this region, dance functions not only as a mechanism for preserving tradition, but also as a medium for adapting to sociopolitical change, migration, and cultural fusion. Frameworks developed by scholars like Adshead (1988) and Layson (1983), which focus on structural, stylistic, and regional aspects of performance, offer useful tools for analyzing the dynamic character of Balkan dance. These models facilitate a nuanced understanding of how both traditional and contemporary choreographies convey continuity while simultaneously embracing innovation.

Within this conceptual landscape, the present study locates Balkan dance as more than a performative art form—it is viewed as a generative site of cultural meaning, memory, and transformation. Here, dance serves as a medium through which societies narrate their histories, contest their realities, and envision alternative futures.

This study employs an interdisciplinary and interpretive methodological framework, integrating perspectives from performance studies, ethnography, and dance anthropology. The analysis draws on a range of qualitative materials, including scholarly texts, ethnographic research, choreographic case studies, and audiovisual documentation. Central to this approach is the emphasis on embodied experience as a form of cultural storytelling (Buckland, 1999; Kavouras, 2010; Kealiinohomoku, 1970).

Ethnographic methods, such as those developed by Kringelbach and Skinner (2019), offer valuable insight into the ways dance connects with tourism, identity, and movement across borders. These approaches emphasize the importance of bodily experience—how people physically engage with dance—as key to understanding its broader cultural and social meanings. At the same time, this research draws on Giersdorf’s (2009) critique of institutionalized dance systems, exploring how educational and professional structures shape who gets to participate in dance, how they are trained, and what kinds of identities are formed in the process—both in classrooms and on stage.

The works of choreographers Akram Khan and Gregory Maqoma are examined not only as artistic performances, but also as cultural narratives shaped by larger political and social forces. Their dances tackle issues such as migration, exile, and the complexities of national identity in a globalized world (Giersdorf, 2009; Kringelbach & Skinner, 2019). This approach allows us to read dance in multiple ways: as a living archive, a ritual, and a form of communication—while connecting critical theory with creative expression (Dance Umbrella, 2018; AX1 Entertainment, 2008).

Historically, dance has played a central role in preserving culture. It serves as a living archive that carries the values, memories, and stories of a community. In the Balkans, traditional dances are more than just entertainment—they preserve collective knowledge and reflect worldviews passed down through generations (Kousiopolou, 2024; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Circle dances like the *horó* and *syrtos* are prime examples. Often performed at weddings, festivals, and seasonal rituals, these dances help strengthen community bonds and express regional, ethnic, or religious identities. Their repeated steps and patterns create a feeling of continuity and stability—especially in times of upheaval, such as war, displacement, or political transformation.

Dance also acts as a living language through which communities respond to social and political change. As societies shift and evolve, so too do their dance traditions—absorbing new influences, adapting to diasporic realities, and reflecting cultural exchanges. In the Balkans, choreographic forms often blend elements from Eastern, Slavic, and Mediterranean aesthetics, illustrating just

how adaptable and open to reinterpretation dance can be (Kavouras, 2010; Kringelbach & Skinner, 2019).

In this process, the body itself becomes a vessel of memory. Balkan dance practices hold and express a deep sense of historical consciousness. The dancer is not just performing inherited steps but actively interpreting and reshaping them—bringing together the past and the present in each movement. This dual role, as both archive and interpreter, shows that dance is not just a static cultural product, but a powerful, evolving force that helps shape identity across generations (Kavouras, 2010; Adshead, 1988).

In many parts of the Balkans, dance also holds spiritual and ritual meaning that goes beyond performance. A striking example is the *Anastenaria*, a fire-walking ritual practiced in Northern Greece and Bulgaria. Celebrated during the feast days of Saints Constantine and Helen, the ritual features trance-like dancing, music, and the use of sacred icons, culminating in participants walking barefoot across burning embers. Those who take part often describe it as an act of divine possession or ecstatic union with the sacred (Kousiopoulou, 2024).



Canva. Live coals for the fire walking ritual. The ritual starts with burning wood and is a Tamil Hindu ceremony in Mauritius. Created using Canva Pro 2025
<https://www.canva.com/>

Anthropological studies have traced the roots of the *Anastenaria* back to ancient Dionysian rituals, revealing the longevity of certain ritual patterns across time. Within this framework, dance becomes a shared vehicle for transcending pain and fear—both physical and emotional—creating an intense spiritual experience and reinforcing social bonds. Its survival in modern times highlights the lasting power of embodied religious practice and the communal need for meaning-making through movement (Kountourelli, 2024).

A similar example can be seen in the whirling rituals of the Mevlevi dervishes in Turkey, where dance is elevated to a sacred act. The *sema* ceremony, characterized by continuous spinning and ritualized gestures, symbolizes the soul's journey toward unity with the divine. Every detail—from the flowing garments to the accompanying music—carries theological weight. Though grounded in Sufi Islamic tradition, the *sema* has left its mark on the wider aesthetic and spiritual landscapes of the Balkans, weaving itself into the region's diverse cultural fabric (Giannopoulos, 2024).



Kemmos, G. (2019). The ecstatic dance of the Dervishes with Greek and Christian expressions. [Photos].News.gr.<https://www.news.gr/kosmos/article/1696013/o-ekstatikos-choros-ton-dervisidon-me-tis-ellinikes-ke-christianikes-ekfansis.html>

These examples highlight the unique ability of dance to blur the lines between sacred and secular, personal and communal. Through embodied acts of devotion, movement becomes more than physical expression—it becomes a bridge between the material and the spiritual. In this context, dance is not simply a staged art form, but a living ritual that shapes collective memory, affirms identity, and reinforces social bonds (Radcliffe-Brown, 1922; Kavouras, 2010).

In contemporary performance, many choreographers from the Balkans or with diasporic backgrounds draw on traditional motifs while also responding to global issues like migration, cultural hybridity, and identity transformation. By blending folkloric vocabulary with modern and postmodern techniques, they create hybrid choreographic languages that challenge the divide between the “traditional” and the “contemporary” (Kavouras, 2010; Giersdorf, 2009; Kringelbach & Skinner, 2019).

Akram Khan, the British-Bangladeshi choreographer, is a powerful example of this kind of intercultural synthesis. His landmark work *Zero Degrees* merges classical Indian kathak with contemporary movement, crafting a vocabulary that explores tensions between life and death, chaos and order, tradition and reinvention. While deeply personal, Khan's stories are told through shared cultural

symbols, avoiding simplistic or commodified notions of “national” dance. In his choreography, movement becomes a form of philosophical exploration—a way to question identity, transformation, and belonging. The concept of “zero degrees” doesn’t signal neutrality, but rather a space of encounter, ambiguity, and creative potential. Though his work is not geographically Balkan, Khan’s engagement with diasporic identity, colonial history, and embodied memory mirrors strategies found in contemporary Balkan dance practices. His collaborations with artists from diverse backgrounds further emphasize dance’s potential as a medium for intercultural dialogue (Akram Khan Company, n.d.).

His partnership with Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui takes this dialogue even further. Minimalist set design by Antony Gormley and live music by Nitin Sawhney deepen the piece’s emotional and cultural resonance. The blending of kathak with contemporary movement creates a compelling exchange between classical heritage and contemporary expression, East and West, memory and imagination. The performance speaks to the choreographers’ shared experience as British Muslims navigating layered cultural identities, using the body as a site of resistance, spirituality, and transformation (Gormley, 2005).



Gormley, A. (n.d.). [*Zero Degrees*]. [online images]
Source of images: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/dance/zero-degrees>

Exit/Exist, choreographed by Gregory Maqoma, offers a powerful reflection on postcolonial identity through a refined interplay of movement, sound, and visual design. Rooted in the cultural and historical context of South Africa, the work weaves personal ancestry with collective memory, crafting a choreographic language that resonates across temporal and emotional registers. Rather than presenting Xhosa traditions as static folklore, Maqoma reimagines them as living heritage—recontextualized and critically engaged within a contemporary framework. This deliberate approach resists the tendency to exoticize ethnic culture, instead animating cultural symbols as vital, evolving elements of expression.

Maqoma's choreography moves with emotional depth, oscillating between mourning and celebration, tradition and modernity. His movement vocabulary does not simply cite cultural motifs—it embodies them as living archives of resistance, memory, and identity. Through this, *Exit/Exist* pushes back against reductive images of African dance, asserting a complex, nuanced counter-narrative grounded in agency and continuity. The integration of live music, voice, and a symbolically charged minimalist set transforms the performance into something ritualistic—an act of remembrance that evokes loss, resilience, and ethical memory within the broader postcolonial condition (Market Theatre, 2023).

At the core of *Exit/Exist* is the body as a vessel of historical consciousness and political defiance. The piece honors Maqoma's ancestor, Jongumsobomvu Maqoma—a prominent leader in the Xhosa resistance against colonial rule—by transforming personal lineage into shared storytelling. In this way, the work becomes a kind of embodied historiography, where private memory and public history converge in a powerful act of performative remembrance (Toyota Stellenbosch Woordfees, 2024).



Gregory Maqoma performing in *Exit/Exist*
at the 2024 Toyota Stellenbosch Woordfees

Akram Khan and Gregory Maqoma both demonstrate how traditional forms, when reimagined through contemporary lenses, can generate fresh layers of meaning within cultural narratives. Their choreographic works confront issues such as globalization, displacement, and cultural hybridity, offering movement-based responses to themes of survival, resistance, and identity (Kringelbach & Skinner, 2019; Giersdorf, 2009). In their hands, dance becomes a multilingual, multicultural language—one that crosses borders without erasing the specificity of cultural identity. The body, in both cases, serves as a powerful medium for

resistance, memory, and storytelling. Importantly, their engagement with tradition does not rely on nostalgia; instead, it signals a critical and creative dialogue with the past.

Across the Balkans and beyond, contemporary choreographers are using dance to question dominant narratives, assert alternative identities, and foster intercultural understanding (Kringelbach & Skinner, 2019; Giersdorf, 2009). Their work affirms that tradition is not a fixed relic, but a living, generative force—constantly reshaped by evolving social and artistic realities. Through choreographic experimentation, these artists challenge established notions of belonging and memory, and reimagine what it means to move across cultures—physically, symbolically, and historically (Kealiinohomoku, 1970; Kavouras, 2010).

The globalization of culture presents both opportunities and challenges for the evolution of traditional and contemporary dance practices. On one hand, increased mobility, digital connectivity, and international collaboration have allowed Balkan dance forms to circulate more widely across the globe (Kringelbach & Skinner, 2019). On the other hand, this broader visibility exposes these forms to the risks of cultural commodification—where deeply embodied and experiential traditions are often simplified or stylized to fit commercial frameworks (Buckland, 1999; Giersdorf, 2009).

Within the global cultural economy, ethnic and folkloric dance can be repackaged as spectacle, staged to satisfy expectations of exoticism or “authenticity” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This raises pressing questions: Who controls the representation of tradition? What changes when cultural expressions are shaped for tourists or commercial audiences? And what is lost—or potentially gained—when ritual becomes performance? (Giersdorf, 2009; Kringelbach & Skinner, 2019).

Kavouras (2010) argues that the management of cultural difference tends to follow two divergent paths: either assimilation into market-driven systems or a more reflective, critical engagement within artistic practice. The latter path can be seen in works that deliberately resist commodification—challenging dominant expectations and reimagining national identity through a contemporary lens. These artists are not merely preserving tradition; they interrogate it, using movement to question personal and collective histories, and to confront the power structures that shape them.

Paradoxically, globalization can also rekindle interest in local identities. In the face of cultural homogenization, communities often return to traditional practices—not as acts of nostalgia, but as affirmations of difference and continuity. This “return to roots” is not inherently conservative; rather, it can be a political

gesture that reasserts cultural distinctiveness within an interconnected world (Kavouras, 2010; Kealiinohomoku, 1970; Buckland, 1999).

Within this complex interplay, dance emerges as a space of negotiation—between local and global, sacred and commercial, archive and innovation. It becomes a powerful lens for examining how cultural practices assert visibility, claim ownership, and adapt to ongoing transformation in the 21st century (Kavouras, 2010; Giersdorf, 2009; Buckland, 1999).

Conclusion

The exploration of Balkan dance as a cultural practice has revealed a rich interplay between tradition and transformation, rootedness and global exchange, spirituality and aesthetic expression. In this context, dance is far more than performance—it is a site where memory, identity, and resistance are embodied and enacted (Giersdorf, 2009; Kealiinohomoku, 1970; Kavouras, 2010).

Whether as ritual, living archive, or creative expression, movement articulates what words often cannot. It tells shared stories, communicates belief systems, and navigates changing cultural terrains. Contemporary choreographers extend these expressive possibilities, using the body not only as an artistic medium but as a vehicle for cross-cultural dialogue and political insight (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Kringelbach & Skinner, 2019; Giersdorf, 2009).

This study argues that dance is not merely recreational or decorative—it is a deeply symbolic and political act. Through movement, identities are performed, contested, and continuously reimaged within ever-shifting social and geopolitical contexts. By examining ritual forms such as the Anastenaria and the Sufi whirling ceremonies, alongside the innovative work of choreographers like Akram Khan and Gregory Maqoma, the research illustrates how dance can simultaneously preserve cultural memory and generate new ways of being and belonging.

In this framework, ethnicity emerges not as a fixed category but as a fluid construct shaped by historical power dynamics and the forces of globalization. As dance moves across borders and stages, it is continually redefined—at times commodified, at others reclaimed and reinterpreted. This liminality invites ongoing critical reflection. Rather than positioning tradition and innovation in opposition, the study emphasizes their interdependence—each fueling and reshaping the other within dance practice.

The resilience of embodied traditions suggests that cultural transmission is never passive. Instead, it is an active, often contested process of reinterpretation. The choreographic examples discussed demonstrate how artists use movement to challenge cultural homogenization, confront postcolonial histories, and

reimagine belonging within diasporic or transnational spaces. These approaches, while rooted in the Balkan experience, speak to broader global currents where displacement and hybridity shape cultural expression.

Future research might build on this foundation through ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews with choreographers and participants, or audience reception studies. Collaboration with scholars in fields such as musicology, theology, or migration studies could also deepen the understanding of dance as both personal testimony and collective performance.

Ultimately, this study affirms that identity is not static or singular. It is relational, fluid, and performative — shaped by the movements we inherit, embody, and transform. In this sense, dance is not simply a reflection of who we are, but a powerful way of becoming — of negotiating our place within the world as individuals, as communities, and as cultures.

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The Inter-Balkan Network of Culture, Art, and Education marks a decisive step towards the creation of a structured and sustainable network of cultural collaboration across the Balkan region. Bringing together scholars, artists, institutional leaders, and public representatives, this inaugural gathering affirms the performing arts as a shared cultural language, one that transcends historical divisions and fosters dialogue, creativity, and mutual understanding. The present volume collects the official addresses and the academic papers delivered at the conference and, more important, documents the foundational vision of the Inter-Balkan Network of Culture, Art, and Education. It reflects a collective commitment to cooperation, academic exchange, and artistic partnership among institutions dedicated to theatre, music, dance, and performance. Rooted in the cultural vitality of Thessaloniki and shaped by the collaboration between the National Theatre of Northern Greece and the Hellenic Open University, as well as the essential participation of numerous prestigious institutions from across Eastern Europe, this initiative aspires to establish enduring structures of dialogue and joint action. In a region defined by layered histories and diverse identities, the performing arts continue to serve as a space of encounter, continuity, and renewal. This impressive publication stands as both a record of a beginning and a declaration of a shared cultural future.



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