

Dream Loops and Short-Circuited Nightmares: Post-Brechtian *Tempests* in Post-Communist Bulgaria

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". . . *It should, by now, be clear: / This could be paradise.*" Robin Kirkpatrick, "After Prospero"

Abstract

"Dream Loops and Short-Circuited Nightmares" explores the surge of interest in *The Tempest* among Bulgarian theater professionals and audiences after the fall of communism. The essay analyzes the interfaces between the Bulgarian post-communist cultural condition and three experimental performances of the play, discussed here as embodying the principles of Brechtian dialectical theater. In a notable divergence from postcolonial revisionist performances of the play, the Bulgarian directors choose to have Prospero remain on the island. Theirs is, however, a local Prospero, re-figured alternatively as the modern little man who desperately needs to make peace with the ghosts of his past, as the psychotic who has severed his ties to a reality outside of himself, as the Balkan and European colonizer/colonized incapable of connecting his past and his present in a narrative that would eschew annihilation. If postcolonial re-visions of *The Tempest* reconstruct its plot and dramatic conflict to focus on the cultural and political agency of the Other, the post-communist Bulgarian productions redefine the metropolis as the Other. Nobody gets elevated in these re-visions of *The Tempest* — not aesthetically, politically, or morally. Instead, they nurture poignant curiosity for fallen idols like Prospero, as well as for the Calibans, Ariels, and Mirandas these idols have traumatized — all of them little people exiled in their own minds.

Sketches from Distant Shakespeares

These are my memories of the three productions of *The Tempest* that I attended in Bulgaria in the summer of 2005. Two of them were performed at the yearly Varna Summer Theatre Festival; the third, which had won several awards at the same festival several years before, I saw in its ninth season at the National Theatre in Sofia.¹

Puppetry Theatre, Varna, 3 June

The island is a place of psychedelic beauty. It is bathed in the deep blue and purple light that can only be seen right after the sun dives below the sea-washed horizon of this city. The soft billows of the parachute fabric covering the diminutive stage are alive with the "spirits" trapped below the surface. The island is a live creature of surreal beauty, gently breathing. Natural or artificial? Real or imagined? Prospero is too frantically busy with his own scientific and artistic experiments to pay any attention to the puzzles of this beauty, or to the demands of his attention-starved young lioness of a daughter. Here is a Renaissance man spread thin and lacking in focus, confidence, and control. His first appearance on stage is preceded by a snowfall of paper that comes loose from the tattered book in his hands; his silly glasses do not hide his desperation; his "state" — a wobbly plastic platform reflecting the shades of the island — literally totters. Again and again, he attempts to arrange the chaotic events of his life in a forward direction, but his call, "Let's get going," only manages to negate what has come before as an unsuccessful stage in an experiment that must start anew — until he gets reconciled, in the end, to the restless spirit of the island. Or is this ending yet another self-deluding, surreal dream?

National Theatre "Ivan Vazov," Main Stage, Sofia, 11 June

The island is barren, but will soon grow "full of music." Dominating it under the oppressive, ruddy-colored sky is an almost life-sized sailing ship, "a rotten carcass of a boat" (*The Tempest*, 1.2.146).² Half a revolution of the stage later, the cell that Prospero has built into his leaky boat metamorphoses into the stranded vessel of the Neapolitan party. So this is how spectacle gets made. The morphing ship is half-wrecked or perhaps not quite finished, for as the spectators take their seats, stage hands still roam the set, clutching their tools. On stage, the actors practice their lines. The performance promises to be a work in progress, or else, a study in theater-making. Before long, I realize that the space of the island stretches across the cherub-adorned Rococo stage frame into the still brightly-lit auditorium, now filled with the unmistakable beat of Balkan folk music. Here is no enchanted island; the mechanics of the sea gale and the makings of Caliban's, Miranda's, and Ferdinand's passions are exposed for all to see. Rather, the audience is invited into a theater workshop where life stories are compulsively taken apart in a doomed attempt to short-circuit the cycle of history.

Adana State Theatre, Turkey, on the stage of Drama Theatre "Stoyan Buchvarov," Varna, 4 June

The island, bathed in stark white light, is confined to the proscenium dominated by a black-draped bench, reminiscent of an ancient altar. A see-through net divides it from the rest

of the stage. The border is visually emphasized by a series of clocks running the length of the proscenium arch, set to the time of, respectively, Chicago, New York, Rio de Janeiro, London, Paris, Istanbul, Moscow, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Sidney, and Honolulu. Mythic eternity meets the present here, ruptured by time-keeping technology in the imagery of this set. Blaring techno music stirs alive a Prospero, also clad in black and spread-eagled over a similarly costumed, and clearly distraught, Miranda. It soon becomes clear that this evil-eyed revenger is the island's most tightly confined prisoner. His island — a social space and also a mindset — is tightly squeezed between East and West, between interior and exterior, between the dream of revenge and the reality of terrorism born out of — what else — desperation. It is a three-dimensional chess-board, where Prospero simultaneously plays two ruthless games against the Neapolitans and Caliban, summoning to his aid one unreliably obedient Ariel after another. Narratives of revenge, violence, and trauma clash with one another, are continually modified, and cancel each other out. Yet remorse is a quality foreign to all those stranded on the island. Accordingly, the Shakespearean promise of freedom and "auspicious gales" (*The Tempest*, 5.1.315) on the way to Prospero's reclaimed dukedom is dashed to pieces in the outcome of this re-vision of the play, to be replaced by claustrophobic, deadly confinement.

Anti-Nostalgia

The summer of 2005 was the first season in Bulgarian theater history to see multiple productions of Shakespeare's *Tempest*. This is all the more noteworthy because before Alexander Morfov began staging his re-visions of the play — first in 1991 for Theatre Sofia, then in 1996 for the National Theatre — *The Tempest* had been performed only once, in the 1950s (Sokolova 2005, 60). There is a clear parallel between this surge of interest in re-visioning the play in the aftermath of communism and its postcolonial appropriations in Africa and the Caribbean in the 1960s and 1970s, notably Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête* (first performed in 1969). Yet, as we shall see, the politics of post-communist and post-colonial Shakespearean appropriations are markedly different.

The three Bulgarian productions under discussion had disparate ambitions and targeted different audiences. The first, Petar Pashov's visually beguiling, yet resolutely anti-illusionistic, tale of post-communism, complete with clown masks and live cartoon drawing, first drew the families of Varna to its popular Puppetry Theatre in October 2004, before it was selected for the 2005 Varna Summer Theatre Festival. There it played to a full house of theater sophisticates, professionals, and cultural tourists. The second, Alexander Morfov's bleak postmodern reconstitution of the play liberally mixed farce, comic improvisation, and metatheatricity to earn an impressive nine-year run at the National Theatre, drawing young audiences as well as the usual middle-aged and older

theatergoers. Like the other two productions, it was selected for the Varna Summer festival in 1997 as among the best for the season in which it opened. Later, it was warmly received by audiences in St. Petersburg and Skopje, winning major prizes in both Russia and Macedonia. The third *Tempest*, Javor Gardev's daring intercultural production, which opened in November 2004 at the Adana State Theatre in Turkey, wrenched the political overtones of the play to sound its full tragic potential. As part of the 2005 Varna Summer festival, it played to a wonderfully responsive audience of theater professionals and aficionados, mixed in with largely working-class Turkish-Bulgarians drawn to the theater by the prospect of hearing Shakespeare in the language spoken in their homes. It went on to tour France.

Clearly, the site and appearance of Prospero's island, the ghosts of its past, the yearnings of its love-starved people, and the question of their uncertain future consumed the thinking and imagination of Bulgarian theater-makers and their diverse audiences — in that country and in other states of the "New" and "Old" Europe. *The Tempest* interfaced with the socio-cultural condition of Bulgaria, variously described as a Balkan or a post-communist state, a transitional economy, a new democracy. But how? What were the theatrical means through which this seventeenth-century text, a pillar of the Anglo-American educational, literary, and cultural canon, was transformed into a compelling signifier in such geographically, temporally, and culturally remote performance sites? Furthermore, what were the new intertexts developed as Shakespeare's playtext was inscribed within the Bulgarian post-communist cultural condition? And finally, how can we describe the politics of these performance-generated intertexts?

A useful theoretical paradigm for addressing these questions would be Brecht's notion that formal experiment in the theater amounts to treating social hierarchies and relationships as capable of change, as if all social "actions were performed as experiments" (Brecht 1964, 195). Brecht's best known use of formal stage experiment to inculcate in audience members the intellectual habits of critical, revolutionary thinking is his extensively conceptualized epic theater, the parable theater that harnesses the material means and mentality of the "scientific age," whose signature mechanism is the *Vefremdungseffekt* (translated into English as "alienation" or "estrangement" effect and into French as "distanciation"). As Brecht himself pointed out, however, the epic theater's practices were historically circumscribed in their capability to induce critical thinking and enjoyment. In the last year of his life, he began developing the concept of dialectical theater. This concept is well suited for an analytical tool of *Tempest* productions in today's multi-networked "flat world," which doubles as an apartheid planet of high-tech "secure" borders. Staging old plays as dialectical theater, Brecht suggests, entails developing the "historical sense . . . into a real sensual delight," a delight "in comparisons, in distance, in dissimilarity." Still relying on the epic theater's penchant for

narrative, dialectical theater "unreels" stories "in a contradictory manner," where "individual scenes retain their own meaning; they yield (and stimulate) a wealth of ideas; and their sum, the story, unfolds authentically without any cheap, all-pervading idealization (one word leading to another) or directing of subordinate, purely functional component parts to an ending in which everything is resolved" (Brecht 1964, 279). On the one hand, the aestheticized juxtaposition of fleeting antithetical images, gestures, and scenes of dialectical theater, "tossed like so many balls," is a source of powerful cognitive pleasure (283). Walter Benjamin, the first major theorist of Brecht's theater, describes what he calls Brechtian "dialectic at a standstill" as "the damming of the stream of real life, the moment when its flow comes to a standstill, makes itself felt as a reflux: this reflux is astonishment" (Benjamin 1983, 13). On the other hand, a Benjaminian reading of Brecht's theater underscores the intrinsic negativity of its "dialectic at a standstill." Dialectical theater dramatizes the tension between identity and its conceptualization through the non-identical, between stasis and dynamics, but this tension yields no totalizing resolution at some higher Hegelian level of ideation. Rather, it provokes the desire for sublation of contradictions even as it traumatically fails this desire.³ In line with this Brechtian-Benjaminian theoretical framework, the three productions of *The Tempest* under discussion flaunt a formal experimentation that re-draws Shakespeare's play in startlingly unfamiliar ways. In an era when the concept of greatness has become deeply problematic, the Bulgarian directors, in a manner that Brecht describes with provocative admiration as vandalist, have ditched all hints of reverence for Shakespeare as the high embodiment of Western Civilization. In "Conversation about Classics," Brecht argues against the fear "of being accused of vandalism" and goes on to explain that the "vandalistic efforts" of his company provide the much needed raw material for a purposeful repertoire (Brecht 2003, 79). Such Brechtian choice has become an established trend in post-communist dramatizations of the European canon by a new generation of Bulgarian directors.

The Brechtian dialectical approach to staging Shakespeare came into being with the first Shakespeare production of the post-communist era, the Youth Theatre's absurdist *Romeo and Juliet* (1990) directed by Stefan Moskov. Coincidentally, *Romeo and Juliet* was the very first Shakespeare play to be performed, in 1868, by a newly established amateur theater in the Danubian city of Svishtov, as Bulgarian nationhood began to coalesce in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire. Moskov's production matched the bold cuts, fragmentation, rewriting, and rearrangement of the play text with rapidly switching rhythms of movement and line delivery. To this, he added visual dismemberment and reassembling of the dummy-props used by the actors as pantomimic and provisional extensions of their characters. The director's inventiveness took center stage as

characters were played not only by actors using prostheses to dis-articulate and re-articulate their bodies, but also — in the case of Lady Capulet — by a statue whose lines were pulled out from various drawers (Shurbanov and Sokolova 2001, 44, 250-51). In an interview given several years prior to his staging of *The Tempest*, Gardev declared, "Directing happens most regularly in spite of the text. It lives in a constant state of interpretative war with the text" ("Dramaturgy of the 1990s" [1997], 6). Structure, characterization, metatheatrical distance from the play's narratives, the very identity of the play — all are up for grabs in this new generation of directors' interpretive warfare with the classical text. Theater critic Violeta Decheva, columnist and reviewer for the prestigious weekly *Kultura*, notes their determination to blow up the dogma that Shakespeare should not be touched before one turns fifty or sixty (Decheva 2005).

As incarnations of dialectical theater, these productions, often announced in publicity posters to be "after William Shakespeare," do not simply switch scenes, cut speeches, rearrange entrances and exits, or use a locale markedly different from the setting in the play text (Sokolova 2005, 63). Nor do the directors content themselves with disillusioned *da capo* revisions of Shakespeare's endings, made famous by Jan Kott's influential 1964 book, *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary* and Roman Polanski's film *Macbeth*. Their dialectic has a distinctive structural manifestation. The play text and the swiftly flowing action are fragmented into startlingly dissimilar and visually compelling scenes; comic skits parody the "sacred" text; surprising collages with excerpts from other Shakespeare plays question the very identity of the play; the familiar lyricism of Valery Petrov's canonical Bulgarian translation is subverted by alternating it with the bawdy language of the street. Furthermore, characterization in all three *Tempest* productions is carried out in an antithetical, dialectical fashion, the characters and their relationships a conglomerate of sometimes contradictory, sometimes complementary traits. Two of these productions double up representation and performance, story and story-telling against each other, forcing the audience to consider the mechanisms of theatrical illusion and dramatic construction by either laying them bare (Morfov) or overindulging in them (Pashov).

What of the new intertexts that the dialectics of creative "vandalism" yields? Given the reputation of *The Tempest* as a play of forgiveness and redemption, it is tempting to speculate that its productions in Bulgaria's post-communist era, with the country having ostensibly regained democratic "normalcy" and poised itself for a "return to Europe" by joining the European Union, would be likely to develop what Susan Bennett would label as a "nostalgic" vision of the play.⁴ "Nostalgia," Bennett explains, is the representation "of a past which forms a continuous trajectory into the present and through into the future" — in other words, a false dialectic of the past and the

present in which the critical tension of conceptualizing difference has been eliminated (Bennett 1996, 4). Profoundly conservative, "collective nostalgia can promote a feeling of community which works to downplay or (even if only temporarily) disregard divisive positionalities (class, race, gender, and so on); when nostalgia is produced and experienced collectively, then it can promote a false and likely dangerous sense of 'we'" (5). The immediate, personal connection that theater establishes between its humanly embodied stage narratives and live audiences, makes it an especially effective tool for inculcating collective nostalgia.

A nostalgic production of *The Tempest* for Bulgarian audiences around the turn of the millennium, then, would smooth over the gaps and tensions in the play's narrative to endorse Prospero's dream of returning to a Milan cleansed of betrayals and political machinations. It would indulge in the play's promise of freedom regained by Ariel and even (implicitly) by Caliban. It would resort to seamless characterization, celebrating the restoration of Prospero's benevolent idealism and the age-wise love of Milan's future young rulers. Naturalizing the artifice of its signifiers, such a production would showcase its representational value as an elaborate allegory of the redemption of the abhorred communist past of secret informers, abrogation of individual freedoms, and stilted perspective for the young. Its politics would be unabashedly reconciliatory. The past would be forgiven, if not forgotten; the downtrodden, having realized that revolutionary violence would earn them nothing, would have been benevolently granted freedom in their own land; the ensnared spirits would be set free; and the young promised a future of love, wisdom, and justice. Such a staging of the play would certainly provide emotional gratification to audiences by fitting recent Bulgarian history into the master narrative of a continually revitalized Western History periodically cleansed of the sins of the past.

Let me be clear: Euro-nostalgia is *not* among the intertexts merging Shakespeare's play text and the cultural narratives of the post-communist experience in these dialectical theater productions. Although the question of national/regional identity construction through the intercession of the Other (embodied by the *arrivistes* from Naples and by Caliban) is central to all three *Tempests*, even the most lyrical one, Pashov's, eschews the departure from the island to Milan that Prospero promises at the end of the play. In effect, the Bulgarian directors have rejected the opportunity offered by Shakespeare's resolution to connect the evolutionary narrative of European Historical Progress and that of the Freeing of the Island. The island remains Prospero's in all three productions, or rather, Prospero remains on the island. For audiences who identify culturally as survivors of three imperial occupations (Byzantine, Ottoman, and Soviet), this could be an anxiety-provoking resolution. Yet what the Bulgarian directors offer is hardly a neocolonial solution, for theirs is a local Prospero, who has realized that Milan is either unattainable or undesirable, and has gone

native. By no means an automatically optimistic outcome, this new direction of the narrative confronts audiences with important and uncomfortable questions about the makings of Bulgarian and European cultural identities, about cultural entitlement, isolationism, and responsibility.

What, then, is the politics of these stagings — interactive, scandalous, irreverent, and on occasion bitterly sarcastic of their source text? When they juxtapose and disarticulate the myths of classical romance and of victimized national memory, what new identity narratives do they offer to their audiences located geographically on the fringe of Europe and posed historically to join the European political structures? Clearly, the three directors veer away from a belief in historical progress. None of them sets himself the goal, driving many post-colonial revisions of *The Tempest*, of charting the cultural and political agency of the Other. Nor do the productions engage in some sort of political anarchy, in spite of the transgressive way in which they deregulate the orderly boundaries between past and present, Europe and its Balkan fringe. Instead, these post-communist Bulgarian productions of the play redefine the metropolis as the Other. Some of them critically explore and others explode the mythic geography of a European core of civilized order and its antithetical periphery, populated by irrational and violent Balkan types; all question coherent narratives connecting past and present, political desire and political action. The effect, I believe, is not only to deconstruct the dichotomy between metropolis/other, but also to present their audiences in the de-segregating Balkans and the globalizing West with the imperative need to reinvent the long-lost polis, that site of face-to-face interactions of humbled, yet perceptive, persevering, and imaginative equals.⁵ In a historical era in which politics has become a derogatory concept, such a goal is perhaps best described as cognitively ethical.

Pashov's Post-Communist Papers: Puck, the Vitruvian Man, and the Walled-In Bride

Pashov's *Tempest* is marked by its fragmented structure and characterization, as well as by a parodically flaunted indulgence in the art of theater illusionism typical of a Brechtian approach to radicalizing the classics. Its opening, already a structural transgression of the play's entity, is an unacknowledged quote from Puck's final speech. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* this speech shifts the scene of the aristocratic wedding to a here-and-now of mysteriously glowing trees, "screech owls," and "graves all gaping wide" to release their "sprites," shortly before Puck comes out of character to call for the audience's applause (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1.382-88). Delivered here by Prospero who, in a Brechtian instructive gesture, proceeds to summarize the plot of *The Tempest*, the opening establishes the Duke of Milan as quite the scatter-brained storyteller (was he about to spin the story of the woods or the island?) with a penchant for trickery and dark mystery.

The production's fragmented story-telling is underscored by a variety of visual quotations from realms ranging from Renaissance art to children's television shows. Prospero's near-fatal absent-mindedness as the conspirators Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo advance onto his cell to "burn . . . his books" (*The Tempest*, 3.2.90), kill him, and take over the island is not due, as the play text indicates, to the masque he is busy composing for Miranda and Ferdinand. Instead, he is preoccupied by engineering flying machines and makes an appearance with one of them strapped to his back, in an unmistakable visual quote of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man. Earlier, when telling the story of his exile from Milan, he keeps Miranda's attention by illustrating it with effortlessly sketched cartoons. Projected for the benefit of the off-stage audience as well, this multimedia art is an amusing reference to a children's television show hosted by Hristo Kolev, the actor playing Prospero. Similarly, the puppet-like rendition of Miranda and Ferdinand falling in love would ring familiar to spectators who have already seen Morfov's long-running *Tempest* at the National Theatre in Sofia. However, if the National Theatre's marionette-like characters were brought to life by having their limbs manipulated by the errant spirits of the island, in the production of the Varna Puppet Theatre the actors' bodies seem to lurch towards each other spontaneously, hands landing on breasts and buttocks of their own accord, as if driven by natural electro-magnetic forces (fig. 1).

The diverse visual and media quotations woven into Pashov's adaptation are coupled with a sense that the play's narratives have fallen into place by random chance. We get the first indication of such contingency when Prospero drops his book of magic, sending its pages flying over the diminutive stage. This, in itself, is another visual quote from both Morfov's National Theatre production and from Peter Greenaway's film *Prospero's Books*. The scattered pages, imprinted with memories of influential adaptations of the play, are the constitutive elements of this performance. Actor Hristo Kolev (Prospero) comments on the improvisational nature of the rehearsal process which involved playing with a parachute and two rolls of paper: "All the paper in the show actually represents Prospero's book, which seems to blanket the island at the onset of the tempest" (Kolev 2005, 4).

Characterization is as fragmented and improvisational as the narrative structuring of the performance, with characters literally taking shape from the mixed-up pages of Prospero's book. The Neapolitans' ruffs, cloaks, and rather limp swords, Ferdinand's harmonica-style royal mantle and the stuffing of his empty codpiece, Miranda's wild, stubborn hair, and even Prospero's crown are made of paper. Except for Prospero, all the characters wear either reversible cardboard half-masks or partial body armor strategically accentuating body parts, such as Miranda's pointed breast plates, Ferdinand's codpiece, or the protruding stomachs and sagging testicles of the Neapolitans

(fig. 2). The overall impression of these pasted-on costumes is humorously Frankensteinian, as if the human bodies were some kind of grotesque found art. In this story created by the chance arrangement of book pages, the characters are also arbitrarily constructed and mutable, twisted into whimsical shapes through playful improvisation.

At the core of the play's social and narrative experiment is Kolev's Prospero, a character whose wide-ranging artistic talents do not add up to psychological or artistic coherence. No potent magus, he desperately strains his almost frenzied imagination to make do with the limited resources at his disposal, constantly racing against time, and in control of neither himself nor the rest of the island's inhabitants. A rushed insecurity marks his commentary on the development of the revenge plot. His assertion to Miranda that "a most auspicious star" (*The Tempest*, 1.2.180-87) guides his actions is followed first by a panicky observation that he has already "lost the moment," and then by the not entirely convincing statement, "I am in control." This Prospero is at a loss even when handling Miranda's adolescent rebellion in 1.2, when she pointedly accuses her father of depriving her of her history.

More protean than Prospero's character, and just as contradictory, are the island's spirits, Ariel and various unnamed ones. On the one hand, they are trapped underground, presumably by Prospero's magic. On the other, their motions beneath the surface of parachute silk literally shape the island, and they act much more independently than in most productions of the play. It is they, for example, who quench Miranda's rebellion, enfolding her in their invisible embrace and rocking her to sleep, to the visible relief of the befuddled Prospero.

The dialectical nature of the production is further underscored by the tension between fragmented story-telling and the flaunted artifice of the representation, accomplished largely through the lighting and set designs. The island, a precariously balanced round platform with two rectangular aluminum reflectors for a sky, and a continuously shifting landscape of parachute silk, is resolutely unnaturalistic (fig. 3). The deep blues and reds of the lighting refract in the dents of the aluminum sky, creating an effect at once fantastical and music hall-like. The audience witnesses an artistic experiment in creating beauty, and the intimate space of the puppet theater renders it both exciting and disconcerting, especially when the island starts tottering under the weight of the newly landed Neapolitans, or when Ariel, trapped under the parachute surface, pushes desperately against it.

The experience of a grand, but barely controllable, experiment under way in this small place of beauty is of course painfully familiar to the play's spectators, young and old. Parents and grandparents would have remembered only too well the failed social experiment of communism, which among other things redrew the navigable outlines of the scenic Varna Bay. Both young and

adult audiences would have witnessed the recent frantic construction of imposing, bold-colored hotels and homes carried out in ecologically vulnerable locations. Most of the adults would be too familiar with the mad rush to seize the mirage of business opportunity as the country transitioned from the government-run communist economy to a free-market economy; some perhaps lost a good part of their meager investments as the infamous Varna financial pyramids collapsed in the late 1990s. Those driving in from the nearby resorts would have gotten tangled in the maze of traffic-locked roads that within the last few years displaced the ancient woods flanking the coast. Almost all would know something about failed expectations for retribution against the old corrupt communist bosses, turned businessmen with millionaire investment portfolios. What the phantasmagoric set and lighting design suggest is that as breathtaking and exciting as the promises of these social ventures may have been, none of them was natural or inevitable.

The intertexts emerging from the dialectical tensions of articulating *The Tempest* within a post-communist historical context are memorable and provocative. Prospero here comes across as a man of the island, rather than as an exile yearning to restore justice and order to the metropolis. There is an unmistakable similarity between the endlessly shifting outlook of the island and the workings of the Duke's restless mind. It is difficult to imagine anyone else but him surviving this constant shape-shifting day in, day out; hence, the appropriate excision of Gonzalo's famous "Had I a plantation" speech (*The Tempest*, 2.1, 147-56, 159-68). But the clearest statement that Prospero belongs to this place is made in the play's final scene, when the so-far invisible Ariel emerges from underneath the island's silky surface to embrace him gently. This is no parting embrace, but rather, a reunification tableau (fig. 4). But what is this couple? Surely not Penelope welcoming home the wandering Odysseus, for these two, invisible to each other yet cognizant of each other's struggles to know and to live, have inhabited the same space for twelve hard years.

A foundational myth about civilization-building that is preserved in folk songs and tales throughout the Balkans may help identify the reunited partners and explain their separation. In the myth, as narrated in the Bulgarian folk song "Struna Nevyasta" ("Struna the Bride"), three brothers are building a city, only to find their day's work mysteriously destroyed every night. They decide that the only way for the city to endure is to entomb alive in its wall the first of their wives to arrive the following morning. The two older brothers warn their wives to stay home, but the youngest brother, though deeply in love with his wife, who has just given birth to their first child, plays fair. Struna rises before dawn to complete the household chores before bringing "the morning bread" to her husband at the construction site. When she arrives there, her fate is sealed. As she is entombed into the citadel's wall, she asks for one last favor, that her right breast is left exposed so she can continue feeding her baby ("Struna Nevyasta" 1996, 528-31). Lyubomira

Parpulova-Gribble reports 180 Bulgarian variants of this ballad. The myth, in variations involving the building of a bridge, a monastery, a tower, is familiar throughout the Balkans, as well as in Hungary (Parpulova-Gribble 1996, 170).

In a study of a Serbian variation of this nostalgic myth of foundational feminine sacrifice, philosopher Branka Arsi# interprets the walled-in bride as a

"new symbolic field" . . . built on the grave of the "symbolic," insofar as the whole city is the crypt of the buried female body, of a buried kingdom and [alien] race. This myth is therefore the myth of the foundation of another type of "race," not only the race that would be the effect of homosocial bonds . . . but the psychotically "pure" race of brothers who are literally brothers, who are building the city as the city of eternal life that would make it possible for the race to exist eternally as a pure race, as the race that never changes. (Arsi# 2002, 264)

In Pashov's production, when Emilia Petkova's Ariel breaks through the membrane of Prospero's magical island, having served for twelve years as the living cornerstone for Prospero's civilization, the audience witnesses the implosion of the "pure race" Balkan myth. Earlier, Prospero's characterization had satirized the Western myth of the multi-talented Renaissance Man of towering ambition wielding magical control over his life-story and of his world. The production, then, juxtaposes and finds wanting both the myth of the civilizing and conquering Western Humanism and the Balkan myth of a polity built on pure eternal brotherhood. Furthermore, since the "hero" in both of these identity-constitutive mythic narratives is Prospero, the outcome of the production compels audiences to deconstruct the very dichotomy of the metropolitan West and its Balkan fringe. The difficult cognitive task of imagining the post-communist self outside of alluring, precarious, and ultimately destructive mythologies remains facing the spectators.

Morfov's Post-Modern Anatomies of Meaning Construction

While Pashov's creative "vandalism" invites audiences to engage in juggling arbitrary narrative elements and playful myth deconstruction, Morfov presents them with a more methodically transgressive dialectics, albeit one that similarly builds on the fragmentary narration, alienating and disjointed characterization, and enhanced metatheatricality of Brechtian dialectical theater. *The Tempest*, to this director, is like a beautiful corpse that he approaches with the curiosity, precision, and performative panache of a demonstrator in a Renaissance anatomy theater. Judging from the lengthy run of the play, this director's obsession with the (dead) play text has proved contagious to spectators. Yet by interspersing his demonstration with humorous commentary,

Morfov's Brechtian estrangement from the body/world of the play distances the audience, too, from emotional engagement with almost all of the characters.

Morfov's formal experimentation with narrative begins by questioning the very notion of what constitutes a performance and when it starts. For the play opens with what appears to be a rehearsal, and not a terribly coordinated rehearsal at that. The action starts in a fully lit house with Vrangova's Miranda, coffee mug in hand, practicing the scene of her encounter with Ferdinand with an imaginary acting partner. Adding body movement and delicate music to bring out the yearning in her voice, she presses a seashell against her ear and pretends to pluck the strings of an invisible harp. Enter an absorbed Lukanov (Prospero) in no-nonsense, loose overalls, who carelessly interrupts the creation of Miranda's falling-in-love scene to utter his speech about Antonio's betrayal and his own miraculous survival. Although Vrangova is on stage, Lukanov addresses this tale to an imaginary Miranda. He finishes the account of the arrival on the island against the musical background of a Balkan folk tune and sweeps right into the celebration of the highest accomplishment of Prospero's magic arts: "Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves" (*The Tempest*, 5.1.33). At this point, the audience witnesses an exploratory rehearsal transformed into an alternate reality created out of words. The transformation is marked by the darkening of the auditorium and the change to a full palate of stage lighting, but not before the production has established itself as "rough" and provisional magic.

This "rough" opening already contains the motif of the short-circuiting of communication among the characters, which will rupture the play's narrative fabric, again and again. Here and on multiple other occasions, characters direct their words to unresponsive or, worse, disdainful interlocutors. Thus when Ferdinand, who during his close imprisonment by Prospero in Caliban's cage has kept busy by writing, attempts to read his poetry to the Neapolitans strolling below him, he is derisively shouted down. And although these rowdy newcomers to the island pause to attend to Caliban's plan to overthrow and kill Prospero, the heart-rending coda of his speech, "Am I human, or a monster?" — delivered pointedly in the direction of Prospero's cell — yields no response (fig. 5). Fittingly, Morfov's *Tempest* ends as it began, with story-telling frustrated by unresponsiveness. "We are such stuff as dreams are made on," ruminates a wistful Prospero to Miranda and Caliban, only to be interrupted by Caliban's parodically inappropriate, "Master, when should I eat?" Caliban's words, of course, are his own urgent call for human connection, but the two fail to communicate. As Miranda feebly resigns herself to what she perceives as yet another bout of her father's philosophizing — "I'm listening" — Prospero cuts himself short, "No, it's still early." At this point, Miranda and Caliban go back to tending to the voices in the seashells pressed against their ears, and the stage rotates to reveal the Neapolitans descending from the other side of the ship

that doubles as Prospero's cell. The play ends with its characters holding on to shreds of narratives that are deeply meaningful to them, but completely useless as a means of relating to others.

In addition to deconstructing the unity and structure of the play, Morfov questions the notion of character cohesiveness and integrity. A step in this direction is the casting of Reni Vrangova as both Ariel and Miranda. Which of the two does the island's magical power rest with? Prospero's identity? His future? While the disorienting effect of the doubling undermines emotional affiliation with either character, it opens up important questions for the audience about power and identity, the family and the state.

In the case of the Neapolitan party, including Ferdinand, the Brechtian emotional distance from the characters is acquired by means of farcical representation. The costumes in which they appear — kilted lawyers' wigs, high-heeled boots worn on bare feet, long cream-colored overcoats through which their underwear peeks — are a ridiculous sight rendered laughable by Gonzalo's exclamation, "Methinks our garments are now as fresh as when we put them on first in Afric" (*The Tempest*, 2.1.68-69). Ferdinand's costume is an even crazier assembly of disparate symbols of high culture: a lawyer's wig, a poet's shirt, and a ballerina's tutu. Stephano, as Sokolova notes, cuts a farcical figure of yet another arbitrary sort, "a 1930s black-face music-hall clown" (Sokolova 2005, 62). Just as farcical is the scene of first contact with the island's spirits, who appear in exotic head-dress and grass skirts, dancing to a wild beat and threatening the aristocrats with their spears. When Gonzalo is volunteered by his terrified companions to pacify the stereotypically savage crowd, he frantically goes through his inventory of languages: "English? Deutsch? Swahili?" Before long, the Neapolitans don grass skirts and feathery head-dress on top of their Euro-garments. This accumulation of farcical signifiers, mixing low and high cultural registers, along with cultural symbols from different continents should sate the audience's appetite for spectacle and entertainment, fulfilling the etymological promise of the term *farcire*: to fill, to stuff full, to fatten. It also flattens the characters, precluding possibilities for non-reflective empathy with their plight and remorse.

But the principal figure for incohesive characterization is Caliban. Neither a tragic character nor a heroic rebel, Krustyu Lafazanov's Caliban lacks shape. Theater critic Chavdar Dobrev sees him as "a little man of the twentieth century, whose body and soul have incorporated the horrors of being " (Dobrev 2000, 15). Here is a man whose tortured existence has literally forced him to forget how to stand on his own two feet. As Trinculo and Stephano lower the cage, in which Prospero has left his servant to agonize with his fear of heights, and take off Caliban's chains, he has to relearn how to walk. Tellingly, the ecstatic call of Shakespeare's character — "Freedom, hey-day! hey-day, freedom! Freedom, hey-day, freedom!" (*The Tempest*, 2.2.190-91) — gets rendered here as

the pathetic curse of the helpless, "A plague on the tyrant!" Perhaps because Lafazanov's Caliban is such a deflated rebel, Sokolova views him as the allegedly semi-civilized Bulgarian bossed around by the equally pathetic aristocrats who have descended on the island from the "white" European metropolis. His interactions with Trinculo and Stephano especially, she claims, evoke dealings with "the endless string of dignitaries from the World Bank and other international institutions who briefly visit to tell the natives how to run their lives and then go away." Yet as shapeless as Caliban's survival strategies are, they are also comically subversive, as both critics agree (Sokolova 2005, 62). The conspicuous boredom with which he meets Prospero's chastisement, as well as his cunningly passive resistance, are anti-authoritarian strategies familiar to Bulgarian audiences from a long line of characters in popular folklore and literary fiction.⁶

Foolish in his actions but by no means a dimwit, this Caliban turns out to love the written word. In fact, the only book on the island of the magus who supposedly prizes his "volumes" above his dukedom belongs to Caliban (*The Tempest*, 1.2.168). This is where he records all kinds of sounds that strike his fancy — including his own curses — and where he puts together his life story, his moving reading of which would earn him Trinculo's and Stephano's attention. Shakespearean scholar Evgenia Pancheva sees Caliban's obsession with writing as "his own recipe for survival in a brave new world" (Pancheva 1994, 257). The question remains for the audience, however, as to who would attend to the pithy tragic tales of this pathetically shapeless character.

Along with unraveling the Shakespearean dialogue into the misdirected lines of replicable, parodically flattened, or comically incohesive characters, Morfov's methodical theater dialectics involves anatomizing theater illusionism. The island magic in his production is an acoustic phenomenon, but the creation of sound is no supernatural, nor even a mysterious, matter. As Prospero conjures up the tempest in the opening scene, at the culmination of the description of his "so potent art" he urges Miranda to "Listen! Listen!" and dissolves Shakespeare's language into Latin incantations. The magical aura of the ensuing storm, however, is immediately dispersed when it is exposed as a sound show by the "spirits," who crumple paper, beat drums, and churn wind machines on the proscenium and in the orchestra pit. Soon afterwards, the sprinklers in the flies activate, sending down water in sheets in a gleeful demonstration of the company's technical equipment.

The production ends on the same metatheatrical note. As Sokolova points out in her critique of Moskov's "reconstitution" of the play, the director eschews Prospero's anticipation of his return to Milan and his final monologue, replacing them with a section from the revels speech in the wedding masque scene:

These our actors,
 As I foretold you, were all spirits and
 Are melted into air, into thin air:
 . . .
 . . . We are such stuff
 As dreams are made on, and our little life
 Is rounded with a sleep. (*The Tempest*, 4.1.147-58)

At this point, the auditorium lights are turned on, the actors return to their original positions in the opening scene, and "the backdrop of painted clouds gently folds aside to lay bare the recesses of the theater with their magic-making ropes and pulleys" (Sokolova 2005, 63). The disassembly of the set recalls the ending of Giorgio Strehler's influential production of *The Tempest* (staged first at the Piccolo Theatre in Milan in 1978), which, however, also involved the reconstruction of the set as the audience started applauding (Bevington 2007, 217). Unlike Strehler, once Morfov pulls his spectators out of the Shakespearean fantasy to point out the theatrical engineering of such "dreams," he has no interest in restoring the "dream" of theatrical grandeur.

In this production of enhanced theatricality, certain scenes qualify as outright celebration of what Alexander Shurbanov, in his study of Shakespearean production on the Bulgarian stage in the 1990s, has aptly called "theater's liberation from literature" (Shurbanov 1997, 11). During Miranda and Ferdinand's first encounter, for example, the characters are completely deprived of their dialogue (fig. 6). Instead, their lines are parodically uttered by the spirits, as they open and close the mouths of the young lovers and propel Miranda's and Ferdinand's bodies — marionette-like — into sexually explicit positions. Later, Stephano and Trinculo bring the dramatic action to a complete halt to indulge in the comic skit of a peeing competition. "I'll throw it to third row," hollers Stephano, and Trinculo one-ups him, "I'll throw it to the gallery circle!" The arresting of the momentum of the dramatic narrative by performative comedy readily triggers audience laughter, while subverting the spectators' emotional identification with the play's romantic and redemptive narratives.

In spite of the surges of creativity and humor in Morfov's production, his take on Prospero's very Balkan island and its people is far from optimistic. The ending of his *Tempest* does away with the catharsis of forgiveness, renders pointless all consideration of the political future, and circles back to the beginning. Tired and dejected, Prospero, remains on the island with Miranda and Caliban. As the stage revolves, it reveals the Neapolitan aristocrats drowsily descending from the other side of his boat. Nothing has been resolved; rather, vital energy has been spent in dreams

of a resolution. Prospero has not even begun to notice the parallels between his "rough magic" and Sycorax's, nor has he acknowledged the wretched Caliban, "this thing of darkness," as his creation. Caliban has never promised to "seek for grace" (*The Tempest*, 5.1.295). Miranda has been deprived of the Game of Chess and the chance to declare her support for Ferdinand's "wrangling" for kingdoms — the one opportunity the play text offers to distinguish her as a political agent. The past has failed to connect to the future, and the characters have failed to take responsibility for duplicating in their own actions the betrayals and violence they have suffered.

What Morfov confronts his audience with, in the case of Prospero, Miranda, and Caliban, are, in Arsi#'s terms, spectralized subjects. Uniformly, they have failed to recognize the Other calling out to them and to constitute their subjectivity in response to the interpellation of that Other. Instead, they have produced little others, figments of what they experience as exterior reality, but actually products of their own dream-like existence. Arsi# explains the outcome of this psychotic subjectivation thus: "The subject spectralizes itself (as well as others) and becomes its own apparitional other (its own shadow), thus subjecting itself to itself, recognizing itself by itself" (Arsi# 2002, 258). The Neapolitans, who do not even attempt to articulate a call to the Other, can be diagnosed with the same neurosis.

Unlike Pashov's playful deconstructive juxtaposition of the myths of Western civilization and its Balkan fringe, which invites a creative intervention on the part of the audience, in Morfov's bleak postmodernist aesthetic the various strands of the mythic narratives are unraveled, mercilessly parodied, and finally reconstituted as self-consuming vicious circles. His island, a place of frustrated desires (communicative, political, sexual) inhabited by spectralized neurotic subjects, is stuck in a narrative loop between past and present, completely severed from the future. What, a spectator might ask, would it take for Prospero to learn how to listen to the Other, for Miranda to break out of the Ariel-like mode of mimicry and subjection, and for Caliban to command the attention and respect he deserves?

Post-Political Terror in Gardev's *Tempest*

Foregoing the restorative playfulness or humor as well as the metatheatrical estrangement of Pashov's and Morfov's productions, Gardev's *Tempest* wields its dialectics by splicing the play's action across three distinct stage loci. It ratchets up the tension between Prospero's penchant for sadism and his vulnerability, a tension informing the Duke's relationships with Ariel, Caliban, and the island. Spectators fond of the multi-faceted emotional world of the Renaissance romance would have to wrestle with the manifest contradiction between their generic expectations and the stark darkness of this production. The most radical of the three adaptations of Shakespeare analyzed

here, in Gardev's *Tempest* the generic hybridity of the romance has been hammered into a full-blown revenge tragedy in which, as one reviewer noted, "the corpses on the stage must be more than those at the end of *Hamlet*" (Yaneva 2005).

Nikola Toromanov's set has rendered Prospero's island as a clearly compartmentalized space with stark geometric outlines. Where does one find such an island? As signifiers of an altered mental state multiply — Prospero's glazed eyes, the hypnotic spinning of the fifteen ceiling fans in the main cabin of the Neapolitans' ship, the slight delay in responding to dialogue clues, the inwardly addressed lines in Prospero's first exchange with Miranda — it becomes clear that most of the action of Gardev's *Tempest* unfolds within Prospero's dream. The set's linear divisions — the sunken cell area in the proscenium, the main stage space of the brightly lit main cabin of the aristocrats' ship, the continually reconfigured narrow space behind the sliding backdrop — allow the audience to distinguish among dialectically contrasted narratives. In the foreground is Prospero, who has turned a blind eye to the exterior world, tossed in the unforgiving rhythms of his dreams; the middle ground relates the content of these revenge dreams, sometimes susceptible to the dreamer's control, more often not; the backstage unveils startling tableaux of the dreamer's deepest fantasies and fears. The effect is a visualization of Prospero's tortured psyche without losing sight of his body, always located in the performance space closest to the audience.

The narratives taking shape in the different loci may be geometrically parallel, but they are often at odds with each other. The unfolding of the storm scene in the middle ground of the dream, for example, captures not only Prospero's vengeful desires, but also something of his political/ethical ambition to cleanse the world of sinfulness and depravity. The storm is unleashed upon the ship at the very moment when Sebastian and Antonio lead a drunken orgy for the benefit of a passive, but not terribly reticent, Ferdinand. The aristocrats are so carried away that they remain oblivious to the frantic commands of the ship's officers and the sickening sound of the tearing of the metal hull. One would expect the dreamer to be fully satisfied by his retribution. Instead, we see Prospero's body writhe in pain in his barren cell. Dreams, it seems, can be hard to control.

Gardev's restructuring of Shakespearean story-telling plays havoc not only with expectations raised by the visual symmetry of the play's loci, but also with genre conventions. In an interview, Gardev characterizes his resolution of the vicious conflicts taking place in Prospero's cell and in his subconscious as a "virus" that "has attacked the happy-ending convention of the fairy tale" (Gardev 2005b, 1). His Prospero gives up his supernatural and political powers not because he has been moved to remorse by Ariel, nor because he has accomplished his political goals and secured his daughter's queenship of Milan. He gives them up because he has realized that his mind, obsessed with revenge, is on the verge of self-destruction. But this does not stop destruction

from taking place. In the penultimate scene, a frozen tableau of a wedding feast is displayed in the discovery space, in a conventional wedding- portrait fashion. But the action continues beyond the sentimentally framed happily-ever-after ending. As an explosive-wired Trinculo parodically blesses the bride and groom, Stephano arrives, removes the unresponsive Ferdinand, and installs himself next to Miranda (fig. 7). He then lays out her body on the table — a visual quotation of the earlier harpy scene — and climbs on top of her. This time Prospero will not be able to prevent the rape: Caliban has entered the proscenium clutching the detonators for the explosives stuffed in his suicide-bomber vest. The lights go out with a deafening blast. If the audience harbored any illusions that what they just witnessed was nothing worse than Prospero's terrifying nightmare, the final scene dispels them. Prospero does indeed awake with a jolt on the proscenium bench, only to comment that "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on," climb into a body bag, and pull closed the zipper. In the discovery space, more body bags are carried on a conveyor belt on top of what was the table for Miranda's wedding feast.

Dialectical tensions between expectations and artistic decisions permeate the characterization in this production. Its revisionist mode gets established as soon as the spectator meets the hypnotizing eyes of Sava# Özdemir's Prospero in the opening scene. No learned, noble magus, he appears more as a merciless conqueror, brooding over memories of violence wrought and the anticipation of further violence. His control over others is not a matter of knowledge gleaned from arcane books, nor is it accomplished by magic staff and cloak. Power is inalienable to this Prospero and is channeled mainly through his heavy stare. His is the Eastern magic of the evil eye, an effect accomplished through the use of white contacts that render Özdemir's stunning eyes a deathly pale green. It is created early in the production when the partially dimmed auditorium and Özdemir's position on the proscenium place him in the same visual space as the spectators. "It is as if he sees through the characters, calls them into existence," explains director Gardev (Gardev 2005a).

The Shakespearean Duke's propensity for inflicting mental and physical anguish is portrayed as distinctly sadistic, bringing out both the pleasures with which Prospero lures his opponents and the pains he concocts for them. The banquet scene is one such demonstration of his sadistic sensuality. Unfolding in the "discovery" space behind the backdrop, the locale for Prospero's most deeply seated fears and desires, it features three scantily clad women who, striking seductive poses on top of a table spanning almost the entire width of the stage, offer themselves and the apples in their mouths to the Neapolitans (fig. 8). As the shipwrecked party begins to indulge greedily, the "harpies" utter their curses so calmly and quietly that they elicit no signs of remorse or fear from Alonso and company. It is only after Alonso displays the unmistakable symptoms of food poisoning that all hell breaks out. The harpies, Antonio, and Sebastian start hurling apples and

oranges at each other, while in the proscenium cell space Prospero, whose subconscious has created the scene, spastically beats his bench to the blare of techno-music.

The sadism of Prospero's subconscious corrupts even the scene of Miranda and Ferdinand falling in love. Like the banquet scene, it is staged in the space of the tyrant's deep subconscious, the loss of Miranda to another man ranking among his gravest fears. Here Ferdinand is almost crushed like an insect under the weight of a huge refrigerator, which he has been sentenced to drag across the back of the stage — a task at once more strenuous and absurd than the moving of logs in Shakespeare's play text (fig. 9). It is from underneath this burden that he professes his love for Miranda. She herself remains tied up throughout the scene within the middle-plane of the dream space. Thoroughly subjected to Prospero's control, the two dejected lovers are relegated to disparate loci and cannot even touch. Their helplessness is eagerly watched by Prospero, the creator of this torture chamber, who is joined by Ariel in the proscenium cell space.

But the power of the island's tyrant is dialectically conjoined to powerlessness. For Özdemir's Prospero is even more tightly confined than Shakespeare's exiled duke. Unlike the rest of the characters, his movements are entirely constricted to his cell, the recessed proscenium furnished with a single black-draped bench, emphatically separated from the main stage — the site of pleasure cruises and chance encounters.

Ironically, it is Ariel, the tool for enacting Prospero's sadistic dreams, who functions as the clearest indicator of how tenuous the tyrant's power is. Ariel's appearance and body language in his first scene, probably the one comical instance in this dark production, strikes a parodic contrast to the deferential greeting in the play text:

All hail, great master! grave sir, hail! I come
 To answer thy best pleasure; be't to fly,
 To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride
 On the curl'd clouds, to thy strong bidding task
 Ariel and all his quality. (*The Tempest*, 1.2.189-93)

The words are uttered not by a "dainty spirit," but by a fleshy, aging sea captain in a pristine white uniform who struts confidently on stage, plunks himself down next to Prospero, and proceeds to take off his gleaming white shoes and wring the water from his soaked socks. His sheer bulk suggests imperviousness to commands and manipulation, supernatural or not (fig. 10). When we realize that Ariel is also the captain of the wrecked Neapolitan boat, the distinction between Prospero's revenge dreams and a terrorist plot becomes tenuous (fig. 11). At the same time, one wonders whether the painful effect of the orgiastic storm scene was not deliberately inflicted upon

the ascetic Prospero by this epicurean Ariel. If so, how has he managed to infiltrate the tyrant's unconscious?

Clearly dissatisfied by his lack of control over Captain Ariel, Prospero summons a second incarnation of the "spirit," a stern young man with inscrutable Eastern eyes whose black costume fits better the asceticism of his master as well as the sinister world of his dreams. He, too, proves evasive and difficult to control and never appears overly impressed by Prospero. So the master resorts to a third Ariel, a melancholy schoolgirl in a black satin dress, who acts smitten by him. Her submissiveness and emotional dependence make her the ideal servant, but on the other hand, she clearly lacks the force and energy of the previous two Ariels (fig. 12). Besides, Prospero's constant need to refashion the image of the faithful spirit underscores the waning of his powers.

But the tyrant's greatest vulnerability is the calculated resoluteness of his one autonomous subject, Caliban. Like Ariel, Caliban freely crosses between dream space and island space. Unlike Ariel, whose material shape Prospero somehow manages to control, he is impervious to the Duke's powers. A killing machine in army fatigues, one eye covered with a black patch, Caliban's first action is to climb on top of the sleeping Miranda. The rape is prevented because Prospero wakes up in the nick of time, but his and Caliban's icy determination in the ensuing exchange of curses suggests that this was not the first confrontation between these evenly matched foes, nor is it likely to be the last. The two know all about infiltrating enemy territory and breaching the boundaries of the Other. Just as Prospero takes control over the Neapolitans' ship by implanting Ariel as its captain, Caliban will invade Prospero's unconscious mind. Both are set to destroy. The revenge each takes issues from their dejected isolation, though it is also tinted with painful curiosity about the world of pleasure and indulgence from which both have been exiled.

Gardev's radical re-vision of *The Tempest* weaves provocative intertextual connections between the play's exploration of the concept of the Other and a contemporary cultural context permeated with fear of Otherness. The production's contemporary references are many and conspicuous. The army fatigues, suicide vests, army boots, and techno music unambiguously locate this apocalyptic rendition of *The Tempest* in the volatile present. As the row of twelve clocks marking the boundary between Prospero's cell and the space of his dreams reminds us, the time allotted for the understanding and forgiveness that would be necessary to break the cycle of revenge is ticking out, albeit at a languid Eastern pace.

Prospero's island is not fleshed out in terms as unambiguously local as in Pashov's and Morfov's visions. It is, nonetheless, a place that audiences in both Turkey and Bulgaria — and indeed, in many countries familiar with home-grown terrorism — can clearly recognize. "The performance deals with our tempests and our hysteria, and the impossibility to be sufficiently compassionate

to the other," explains Gardev (Gardev 2005b, 1). Its world, colored in Toromanov's scenic and costume design almost exclusively in black and white (Caliban's green and brown fatigues are the one exception), embodies the *jouissance* of the Balkans — abandon, leisure, casual encounters — as well as the dialectical obverse of this *jouissance* — brooding, victimization, vengefulness. It is a world painfully familiar with suicide missions and, in Gardev's words, with "the difficulty of distinguishing between a martyr and a terrorist" (Gardev 2005a).

To its audiences in Bulgaria, the eruptions of unmitigated violence in the play's plot would bring to mind the bombings of passenger trains and hotels by underground resistance groups of Bulgarian-Turks in the 1980s. These acts of violence were also acts of revenge, triggered by the infamous campaign for ethnic unification waged by Bulgaria's then Communist government. During this campaign the Bulgarian Turks were forced to change their ethnic names to Bulgarian — a state order that did not spare the tombstones of the dead and that was backed by the full power of the police and the army. To the production's first audiences in Adana, in Southwest Turkey, the detonations on stage would have recalled the bombings of tourist sites by Kurdish militants fighting for their human rights. All of these spectators would know something about the desperate desire to scorch one's place into the consciousness of those in power. In Gardev's vision of *The Tempest*, the same desire drives Prospero to blow a hole in the hull of the Neapolitans' ship to drown the casual merry-making of the aristocrats who have completely forgotten this lonely exile, or Caliban to blow up his master's cell to destroy a world that has deprived him of love. If it is difficult to absolve from moral responsibility any of the entangled protagonists of these revenge tragedies, it is as imperative to conceive of political action that would break the cycle of hatred and violence.

Unlike Prospero's surrender to a somnolent, spectralized subjectivity in Morfov's rendition of *The Tempest*, in Gardev's production the exiled Duke is confronted by a clearly constituted Other. When Caliban names Prospero "tyrant" and "usurper" and ensures that his deadly threat to Prospero's world would be heard, he brings Prospero's subjectivity into existence. In the end, Prospero yields to Caliban's subjectivity construction — and destruction — because he has recognized himself in the Other. In a Brechtian dialectic fashion, he perceives himself as both a colonial ruler (over the belligerent Caliban and the Ariels relentlessly morphing out of his control) and a colonial subject (exiled to the edge of civilization by Antonio). When Caliban, his finger on the detonator, presents Prospero with the very plot of revenge and destruction that the exiled Duke dreamed of unleashing upon the passengers on the royal ship, he has no way to stop the cycle of violence but to annul his own existence. Hence Gardev's substitution of the body bag into which Prospero crams his own body for the hope of Shakespeare's Duke "to see the nuptial / Of these our dear beloved solemnized; / And thence retire me to my Milan" (*The Tempest*, 5.1.308-10).

Self-representations "as both colonial rulers *and* as colonial subjects," cultural theorist Dušan Bjeli# maintains, are commonly held by Balkan people. He goes on to illustrate his claim: "Serbian nationalism, for example, both celebrates its medieval empire and remembers Ottoman slavery, a dual sensitivity which then gets translated into calling Bosnian Muslims 'Turks' — that is, colonizers — even while claiming Kosovo as an important part of the Serbian Empire" (Bjeli# 2002, 6). The "translation" of Shakespeare's Prospero in Gardev's production then, renders the Duke of Milan — the learned politician from the cradle of the European Renaissance — as a Balkan subject. For this writing subject, constituted as Balkan and localized as American, such "translation" rests on the assumption of equivalence between "Balkan" cultural disorder and Western cultural disorder. Both amount to confining the self within vindictive dreams of the glorious restoration of absolute power, often in the aftermath of an exile from such meeting places as the main cabins of ships of international importance. Such dreams are deadly.

From the Post-Colonial to the Post-Political?

"We can best salvage the Shakespearean text when we savage it, when we plunder it for its gaps and blind spots," writes Susan Bennett in endorsing such post-colonial revisions of *The Tempest* as Lewis Baumander's Toronto production of the play (1987 and 1989), Derek Jarman's film (1979), and Philip Osment's production of *This Island's Mine* for London's Gay Sweatshop (1988) (Bennett 1996, 169). From the intellectual leaders of the independence movements in the Caribbean and Africa in the 1960-1970s, to British artists active in the gay and lesbian rights movement of the 1980s, Shakespeare's last play has been aggressively refashioned to confront the oppression of the subaltern in various colonial and post-colonial settings. Its recent adaptations for the Bulgarian stage continue the revisionist tradition, but with a difference. On the one hand, the Bulgarian *Tempests* confront the colonizing of Balkan cultural identities, their mooring in age-old myths of oppression and destruction, and the frustrated efforts to set them free of doomed narratives of history and power. But their focus is not Caliban, as in post-colonial revisions of the play, nor Ariel, as in the recent environmentally-conscious British productions of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal Opera House.⁷ Embedded within the Bulgarian post-communist cultural context, *The Tempest* remains Prospero's play, though it is by no means a nostalgic celebration of the enlightened and compassionate ruler. The Bulgarian Prosperos have been re-figured in various anti-nostalgic terms: as the modern little man who desperately needs to make peace with the ghosts of his past; as the neurotic who has severed his ties to a reality that is not a replica of himself; as the Balkan and European colonizer/colonized incapable of connecting his past and his present in a narrative that eschews annihilation.

The narratives of these Prosperos and their counterparts — the Mirandas, Ariels, and Calibans of recent Bulgarian performances — engage their audiences through the Brechtian-Benjaminian principle of negative dialectics. Discussing negative dialectics, Theodore Adorno writes: "The name of dialectics says no more . . . than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy. Contradiction . . . indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived" (Adorno 1973, 5). The dialectical tensions in the productions discussed here, tensions between inherited concepts of identity and the contradictions exceeding them, render strange and even untenable the traditional makings of Western cultural identity. In these post-communist productions, the old myths of the grandeur and moral uprightness of Western civilization are dismantled and their heroes knocked down from the pedestal of veneration. Unlike Brecht, most Bulgarian theater professionals would hasten to declare that theirs is no political theater, for it offers neither political nor moral alternatives to the fallen idols and their value systems. It is worth questioning, however, whether the cognitive and ethical questions raised in these experimental, intellectually engaging productions do not constitute the kind of dialectical contradiction that provides a much needed corrective to the concept of the political.

Notes

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2. All references to Shakespeare's plays will be to *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt et al. (see Shakespeare 1997a and 1997b).
3. For an insightful study of Benjamin's reading of the dialectics of Brecht's theater and its underpinnings by Theodore Adorno's concept of negative dialectics, see Carney 2005, 45-50.
4. Bulgaria joined the European Union in January 2007.
5. The need to reinvent the polis and foster democratic habits of inter-subjective relationships as a condition for historically responsible political action is described in Lawrence Weschler's essay, "Aristotle in Belgrade," on the arduous cultural identity shifts in Serbia after the demise of the Milosevic regime. See Weschler 2004, 75-76.

6. The best known among those would be Hitar Petar (Cunning Peter) and Andreshko. The sly peasant Hitar Petar features in countless folk tales, in which he outwits the rich, pretentious, and powerful. Andreshko, the humble horse-cart driver and titular character in one of Elin Pelin's best known short stories, outwits a greedy tax collector, leaving him mired in a bog overnight.
7. Although the RSC's *Tempest*, directed by Rubert Goold and produced for the 2006-2007 *Complete Works* Festival, featured Patrick Stewart as a formidable Prospero, theater critics focused their attention on the pallid, otherworldly Ariel, played by Julian Bleach. During its Spring 2007 London season, Goold's play performed concurrently with the first revival at the Royal Opera House of Thomas Adès's opera, *The Tempest*, directed by Thomas Cairns, a performance also dominated, both visually and acoustically, by Cyndia Sieden's haunting Ariel.

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Rehearsal photographs from *The Tempest* (dir. Petar Pashov) courtesy of the Varna Puppetry Theatre.

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Photographs from the French tour of the Adana State Theatre's production of *The Tempest* (dir. Javor Gardev) courtesy of the production's composer, Kalin Nikolov.

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