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Essay

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# “The rest is silence”: Censorship and conflicting Memory Politics in Ljubiša Georgievski’s *Hamlet*, 1989

Alexandra Portmann\*

This paper examines the production of *Hamlet* directed by Ljubiša Georgievski at the Macedonian National Theatre in Bitola in 1989 as an example of how the staging of classics in times of political upheaval can serve as a means for political theatre. In the context of the drastically changing political situation in Yugoslavia at the end of the 1980s, this production serves both as an expression of a memory politics in the process of changing towards a nationally-oriented historiography and as an example of how the staging of repetitive dramatic structures has the potential to criticise repertoire politics in established cultural institutions. Accordingly, this paper is also an argument against a reduction of classics to an expression of an escapist repertoire politics in the region of former Yugoslavia in the 1980s and early 1990s.

**Keywords:** Ljubiša Georgievski, *Hamlet*, Macedonia, key image, Mousetrap, dramatic agency, memory politics

## Introduction

As in many European countries, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is a stable part of the cultural repertoire in the region of former Yugoslavia, finding its expression in theatre, literature, film and visual arts. A closer look at the vivid staging tradition of Shakespeare’s tragedy reveals a variety of approaches towards the classical text, each engaging with the play in a different way. This paper poses the following general questions: how did Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* become a platform to negotiate the drastically changing political and cultural context during the 1980s and the 1990s in former Yugoslavia? And what are the advantages of staging classical texts as tools for political theatre?

This investigation goes hand in hand with a broader criticism of theatrical repertoires in the region during the late 1980s and the 1990s. The role of classics as a stable part of these repertoires was considered a form of escapism and avoidance of political topics in established, mostly state-funded institutions.<sup>1</sup> Although such tendencies are clearly recognisable in this period of time, this paper argues that classics such as *Hamlet*, with its well-known dramatic structures, figures and conflicts, have the potential to critically

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Marjanović, Petar. 2005. *Mala istorija srpskog pozorišta. XIII–XXI vek*. Novi Sad: Muzej Pozorišne Umetnosti, 395, or Jovićević, Aleksandra. 2002. Društvena stvarnost i beogradska pozorišta (1991–1995). *Teatron* (118), 42-49, 42.

investigate the constitution of theatrical repertoires themselves and therefore to serve as a useful tool to negotiate memory politics on stage. Since the 1980s, the changed culture of remembrance has been expressed in the form of a general critique of the depiction of historical events during the Second World War, the representation of the socialist revolution, and cultural policy in former Yugoslavia.<sup>2</sup> This paper will investigate how classics critically negotiate the representation of cultural policy with reference to Ljubiša Georgievski's production of *Hamlet* at the Macedonian National Theatre in Bitola from 1989.<sup>3</sup> Georgievski confronts Shakespeare's drama with his production of Vladimir Kostov's novel *Mara's Wedding* from 1975, alluding to the officially non-existent practice of censorship in former Yugoslavia. Georgievski's 1989 *Hamlet* will serve as a prime example of how dramatic structures and scenes (e.g. the *Mousetrap* scene) can be re-contextualised and function as dramaturgical means in political theatre. In this respect, the example runs counter to the argument of escapism and shows how the performance of classic texts in Macedonia at the end of the 1980s had political impact.

This paper will first introduce the concept of cultural memory and the concept of the theatrical *key image* as analytical tools for investigating Georgievski's *Hamlet*. Second, the paper focusses on how Georgievski's version of *The Murder of Gonzago* alludes to a changing memory politics. I argue that the play's intertheatrical<sup>4</sup> engagement with a past theatre event (the performance of *Mara's Wedding*) within the dramatic structure of *Hamlet* turns this production into a critique of cultural policy in the socialist state of Yugoslavia and therefore into an expression of a memory politics shifting towards a nationally-oriented historiography.

### Cultural Memory and Dramatic Agency

Approximately two decades ago, the concept of cultural memory began to enter theoretical discussions in theatre and performance studies, addressing the representation and negotiation of cultural memory in performance in different ways. While some approaches deal with the repetition and representation of history on stage,<sup>5</sup> other studies investigate the performer's body as an archive and therefore a 'storage' of cultural knowledge and memory.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to these approaches, this paper is interested in how cultural memory can be

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Sindbaek, Tea. 2012. *Usable History? Representations of Yugoslavia's Difficult Past from 1945 to 2002*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 13; Petrich, Wolfgang and Vedran Džihic. (ed.). 2010. *Conflict and Memory. Bridging Past and Future in (South East) Europe*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 20.

<sup>3</sup> The analysis of Georgievski's *Hamlet* from 1989 is based on the examination of a video recording, the investigation of reviews and articles in Macedonian newspapers, and an extended interview with Ljubiša Georgievski in Skopje, which I conducted in 2013.

<sup>4</sup> William West investigates the concept of intertheatricality as overlapping different styles and influences on early modern drama in West, William N. 2013. *Intertheatricality*, in *Early Modern Theatricality*, edited by Henry S. Turner. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 151-172.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Rokem, Freddie. 2000. *Performing History. Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press; Gluhović, Milija. 2013. *Performing European Memories. Trauma, Ethics, Politics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Roach, Joseph. 1996. *Cities of the Dead. Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York NY: Columbia University Press; and Taylor, Diana. 2003. *The Archive and the Repertoire. Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham, London: Duke University Press.

investigated within the context of dramatic theatre and, therefore, how performances of classical texts provide a useful platform to negotiate changing memory discourses.

During the 1980s, major cultural changes in Yugoslavia were connected to a drastically shifting memory politics, from socialist historical narratives towards a national or even nationalistic historiography.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to other republics, voices calling for Macedonia's independence only began to be heard towards the end of the 1980s. This can be attributed to the specific historical situation, namely the late founding of the multi-ethnic and -religious socialist Republic of Macedonia within the context of the establishment of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia after the Second World War. It was also a result of the consistently pro-Yugoslav policy of the Communist Party of Macedonia under Kiro Gilgorov.<sup>8</sup> By the end of the 1980s, Macedonia was one of the structurally weakest republics in Yugoslavia, and therefore the economic and political crisis was felt particularly strongly there. One expression of the crisis was a heightened tension between the Slavic-Macedonian and Albanian populations after the uprisings in Kosovo in 1981, which culminated in a new constitution that described Macedonia as the nation-state of the Macedonian people. This intensified the unrest among the Albanian population, which felt marginalised and discriminated against by the new constitution.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, Georgievski's *Hamlet* production takes place amidst a tense relationship between Macedonia as the Yugoslav Republic and Macedonia as an independent state. The director's affiliation to the national-conservative party VMRO-DPMNE seems at first glance to indicate the political direction of his production, but in fact it merely reflects only one facet of the ambivalently designed cultural-critical approach.

Against the background of the above-described political changes and a shifting culture of remembrance in multiethnic and -religious Yugoslavia towards the end of the 1980s, Michael Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memories seems particularly suitable for analysing this situation. In his eponymous study (2009), he identifies multidirectional memory as non-competitive memory, providing the possibility that different memory discourses exist side by side as equals without necessarily excluding each other. According to Rothberg:

*“memory's multidirectionality encourages us to think of the public sphere as a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions but actually come into being through their dialogical interactions with others; both the subjects and spaces of the public are open to continual reconstruction.”*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Todor Kuljić investigates this phenomenon in his monograph Kuljić, Todor. 2010. *Umkämpfte Vergangenheiten. Die Kultur der Erinnerung im postjugoslawischen Raum*. Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag.

<sup>8</sup> See Ramet, Sabrina P. 2011. *Die drei Jugoslawien. Eine Geschichte der Staatenbildung und ihrer Probleme*. Munich: Oldenbourg, 388.

<sup>9</sup> See Ramet, *Die drei Jugoslawien*, 433, as well as Clewing, Konrad and Oliver Jens Schmitt. (ed.). 2011. *Geschichte Südosteuropas. Vom frühen Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*. Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet Verlag, 750.

<sup>10</sup> Rothberg, Michael. 2009. *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 5.

Following this understanding of cultural memory politics as an ongoing public negotiation of simultaneously existing memory discourses, theatre, and especially dramatic theatre with its recurrent dramatic structures, provides the opportunity to critically investigate simultaneously existing discourses, as well as to expose and criticise existing power structures.

For the analysis of these recurrent dramatic structures, I propose the concept of the theatrical key image. This terminology is based on Aby Warburg's concept of survival (*Nachleben*), as well as William B. Worthen's concept of the dramatic agency. According to the art historian Warburg, every meaning of an artistic appearance (e.g. sculpture, image) is constituted by the layering of different forms of expression and the memory of past representations, which haunt the present form.<sup>11</sup> This anachronistic (meaning here ‘relieved of time’) potential of the image means that the implication of an artistic expression is not traceable to only one specific former, or even original ‘version’, but is constituted through overlapping, almost palimpsestic references, which become visible through repetitive forms.<sup>12</sup> In reference to Warburg’s survival, I would like to propose that a theatrical key image is a repetitive dramaturgical structure, which consists of visible and invisible implications of the play and which circulates through different times and cultural contexts. These key images are crucial scenes, which refer in their repetition either to the content of a scene, its function within the dramatic framework, or a particular character.

This understanding of key images is also related to William B. Worthen’s definition of dramatic agency as a certain framework for acting. According to Worthen, every performance of a dramatic text is not only influenced by our knowledge about the play, but also its various past stagings. Thus,

*“Dramatic writing provides a means for exploring acting, for interrogating bodies, for searching the desire to perform and to watch performance, to see, this ‘thing’ appear again tonight with the unerring recognition that its appearance will replace the writing we remember and instigate remembering anew.”*<sup>13</sup>

In this doubled perspective, the theatrical key image covers both the level of the dramatic text and the performance. On the level of the text it enables a perspective on various readings of a certain dramaturgical structure, while on the level of performance, the theatrical key image can refer to other past stagings, for example through the cast of the performance, certain aesthetical

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<sup>11</sup> Didi-Huberman, Georges. 2010. *Das Nachleben der Bilder*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

<sup>12</sup> This theoretical approach is presented in more detail in my monograph Portmann, Alexandra. 2016. *The Time is out of Joint. Shakespeares Hamlet in den Ländern des ehemaligen Jugoslawien*. Zürich: Chronos Verlag; and also in my chapter: Portmann, Alexandra. 2018. *Hamlet in Times of War – Two Hamlet Appropriations in Former Yugoslavia in the 1990s*, in *Local and Global Myths in Shakespearean Performance*, edited by Mancewicz, Aneta und Alexa Alice Joubin. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 173-87.

<sup>13</sup> Worthen, William B. 2010. *Drama. Between Poetry and Performance*. Oxford a. New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 82.

approaches, or even the site of a performance. It is the interplay of the dramatic text and its performance within the key image which reveals *Hamlet* as a platform for the negotiation of changing memory politics and which will be discussed with reference to the 1989 production at the Macedonian National Theatre in Bitola.

### **Context: Staging *Hamlet* in Yugoslavia**

Although this paper does not aim to provide a historical overview of the reception of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the region of former Yugoslavia, it is important to bear different approaches in mind in order to locate Georgievski's performance within a larger staging tradition. For the purpose of systematisation, the following approaches towards *Hamlet* can be suggested: firstly, there are conventional or 'classical' *Hamlet* performances, which are mainly based on a psychological reading of the dramatic text and often promote its historicisation. Even though this approach seems to be the most common one, there are, secondly, also metatheatrical adaptations of the play. Since the 1960s, very well-known adaptations such as Ivo Brešan's *Predstava Hamleta u Selu Mrduša Donja* (The Performance of Hamlet in the Village of Mrdusha Donja, 1965) were published and staged very successfully in Yugoslavia. This play was first directed by Božidar Violić at the Croatian Theatre &TD in 1971<sup>14</sup> and restaged in most republics of Yugoslavia during the 1970s and 1980s. Brešan uses Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a metaphor for theatre to parody the manner in which classical texts were appropriated in the first decade after the Second World War, creating a comical and at the same time socially engaged play about the cultural changes in socialist Yugoslavia. During the 1980s such adaptations of classic dramas were common tools for political theatre.<sup>15</sup> One example engaging with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is Slobodan Šnajder's *Gamlet* (1986), directed by Sulejman Kuposović at the National Theatre in Sarajevo in 1987. Šnajder takes a 1942 production of *Hamlet* at the National Theatre in Sarajevo as a starting point in order to reflect upon the political and cultural situation of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Second World War and the representation of the Second World War in socialist Yugoslavia.

Besides these modes of appropriation, *Hamlet* was also a popular basis for theatrical experiments. One prominent example is Slobodanka Aleksić's *Hamlet u podrumu* (Hamlet in the Cellar 1971), in which the director questioned the psychological paradigm of the classical approach by staging the play with five actors who constantly switched roles. These experimental methods challenge the disciplinary and institutional boundaries of dramatic theatre and therefore critically engage with established theatre practices. Georgievski's *Hamlet*, which is of interest in this paper, can be assigned to this last category. Not only does the director experiment with the play's

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<sup>14</sup> Milutinović, Zoran. 2004. The People are Hamlet's Friend. Meta-theatricality and Politics in Ivo Brešan's. *Predstava Hamleta u selu Mrduša Donja*. *Central Europe* 2(2), 161-77, 162.

<sup>15</sup> Duška Radosavljević investigates metatheatre as tools for political theatre in Yugoslavia during the 1980s, Radosavljević, Duška. 2009. The Alchemy of Power and Freedom - a Contextualisation of Slobodan Šnajder's *Hrvatski Faust* (the Croatian Faust). *Contemporary Theatre Review* 19(4), 428-47.

metatheatrical constitution throughout the performance, he also deconstructs the play as a dramatic text when experimenting with various textual collages and historical references to a wider staging tradition of *Hamlet* in Macedonia.

Regarding the specific context of Macedonia, the first translations of Shakespeare’s plays in the Macedonian language appeared after the Second World War and the first plays being staged were mostly comedies, e.g. *As You Like It* (1948, Macedonian National Theatre in Skopje) or *Twelfth Night* (1951, Macedonian National Theatre).<sup>16</sup> Ljubiša Georgievski was the first director to stage *Hamlet*, which took place at the National Theatre in Bitola in 1966. Since then, Georgievski engaged twice more with Shakespeare’s tragedy: in 1989 at the National Theatre in Bitola, and in 2014, when he adapted the Shakespearean drama for the newly opened National Theatre in Skopje. My thesis is that Georgievski uses the metatheatrical structure of the play in his 1989 production to highlight visible and invisible discourses about censorship in Macedonia. According to the official narrative about censorship in the socialist state of Yugoslavia, there had been no censorship since the early 1950s. While drama was strongly influenced politically and ideologically by the Communist Party in the first years after the Second World War, this situation changed radically after Josip Broz Tito’s political break with Stalin in 1948. Despite the fact that there was no official censorship authority, the government demanded a neutral attitude towards party politics from the theatre and arts workers. Accordingly, self-censorship by artists and cultural institutions cannot and must not be underestimated as a form of censorship.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, it can be said that Yugoslavia opening up politically from the 1950s led to a cultural liberalisation which saw the staging of aesthetically innovative and regime-critical plays from the mid-1960s at the latest.

The *Mousetrap* Scene in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is a crucial dramatic plot point. Not only does the protagonist stage a dumb show, which alludes to Claudius’ murder of Hamlet’s father, but the young prince also presents a performance of *The Murder of Gonzago*, in which he refers to his own plans to avenge his father’s death. This double function, Hamlet’s entrapment of Claudius, is like a mousetrap, and also the crucial figure of thought for Georgievski’s 1989 *Hamlet*. Thus, Georgievski engages with cultural knowledge about *Hamlet* and its dramatic structure in order to not only criticise the constitution of theatrical repertoires in socialist Macedonia, but to link the play to hidden practices of censorship and therefore the larger topic of a problematic cultural policy. Exactly this criticism within a theatrical performance is symptomatic of a changing memory politics in the whole region from the 1980s.

### **Aggravations: *Hamlet* staging *Mara’s Wedding***

Georgievski notably uses the *key image* of the *Mousetrap* to broach the issue of changing memory politics, interweaving different dramatic structures into the

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<sup>16</sup> See Koviloska-Poposka, Ivanka. 1988. Šekspir u Makedoniji u dvadesetom stoleću. *Književna smotra* 21, 69-72, 88-92, 91.

<sup>17</sup> Aleksandar Novaković investigates various forms of censorship in former Yugoslavia in his study about the forbidden performance *Kako su cvetale tikve*, directed by Boro Drašković in 1969, see Novaković, Aleksandar. 2004. *Kako je Tito razbijao Tikve. Istorija zabrane pozorišne predstave: kad su cvetale tikve* D.Mihailović. Belgrade: Narodna Knjiga.

plot of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. After deleting the players' scene (2.2.), he also substitutes the *Mousetrap* scene (3.2.) with parts of his performance of *Mara's Wedding* from 1975. *Mara's Wedding*, which was also staged at the National Theatre of Bitola, was one of the most politically controversial, even scandalous, theatre events in Macedonia during the 1970s. Georgievski's dramatisation of Vladimir Kostov's eponymous novel was forbidden by law after its first few performances and underwent several professional examinations by writers and dramatists until it could be put back in the repertoire in 1976. After being accused of having a questionable attitude towards socialist politics and morals, Georgievski objected and entered a caveat against the juridical prohibition. After a rigorous vetting process by a professional committee, the performance was rehabilitated and very successfully staged in Yugoslavia, without changing the performance or the dramatisation. Georgievski claimed in an interview, which I conducted in July 2013, that ten of his performances were forbidden in socialist Yugoslavia. What is important to underline is that only *Mara's Wedding* was officially banned from the stage. In contrast to this form of censorship, the other prohibitions of his performance did not enter public discourse. Since there was no official censorship in the federative Republic of Macedonia, the case of *Mara's Wedding* not only made visible certain irregularities between official political narratives and the actual practice of secret censorship, but also attracted wider public attention. This intertheatrical reference to Georgievski's former performance is a crucial dramaturgical change, which not only situates this particular *Hamlet* performance in a longer history of Macedonian theatre, especially the history of the National Theatre of Bitola, but also provides insight into the political potential of well-known dramaturgical structures, such as the metatheatrical players' scene and the play within the play.

But what actually happens in Georgievski's version of the *Mousetrap* scene? In the middle of the stage, there is a smaller stage around which the court of Helsingoer is seated. Horatio, who is dressed like a Pierrot clown, first announces the play within the play. Then the players arrive on stage, accompanied by improvised and badly played flute music. A barely dressed woman lies on an ottoman on the second smaller stage. Next to her, an older man sits in a rocking chair, wearing a white suit. After a short interactive scene between the woman (the character of Blagorodna in Kostov's novel) and the arriving players, an older man in a white coat (the character of Čopela Ladganov) starts a monologue about lies, which is immediately interrupted by Claudius. After the court leaves, Horatio reads out the justification for why that performance had to be forbidden. This *Mousetrap* scene, similarly to Shakespeare's version, is divided into three parts, expressing the intertheatrical reference system in multiple ways: first, Georgievski stages the original cast of *Mara's Wedding*, with the exception of one deceased actor. Second, the cast is dressed in the original costumes of *Mara's Wedding*, and they have elements from the original scenography on the stage upon the stage (e.g. the ottoman). Third, the actors playfully allude to Georgievski's dramatisation in terms of the character constellation (e.g. the characters Blagorodna and Copela Ladzganov are clearly recognisable) and cite original text passages from *Mara's Wedding*, such as the monologue about lies. Fourth, Horatio cites the original juridical prohibition, and therefore an actual historical document, on stage. These multiple layers are interwoven into the

dramatic framework of the *Mousetrap* scene, indicating the specific content of *Mara's Wedding*, in which Kostov deliberates the question of lying, masking and unmasking in contemporary societies. In this respect, the theatrical re-enactment of the performance and its social, political and judicial surroundings link this *Mousetrap* scene directly to the situation in 1975. The costumes and the cast are not the only references to the past performance of Georgievski's adaptation. By restaging it at the National Theatre in Bitola, the performance is potentially presented to the same audience as *Mara's Wedding* fourteen years before. The question remains: since then, what has changed, and what are the implications of confronting the 1975 performance of *Mara's Wedding* with *Hamlet* in 1989?

The doubled experience of remembering the past event and watching its scenes and monologues within the framework of Shakespeare's drama not only offers a specific reading of *Hamlet* in the sense of Denmark being a repressive state, but also a comment on Claudius's role as a censorer. Understanding the *Mousetrap* as a theatrical key image provides a certain agency: the repetitive dramaturgical structure is filled with a new content which not only actualises and connects this *Hamlet* to the cultural context of Macedonia, but also provides a broader perspective on memory discourses in 1989. The combination of the performance of *Mara's Wedding* with the function of the *Mousetrap* scene within Shakespeare's *Hamlet* shows the multiple layers of cultural memory referring to a staging tradition of *Hamlet* as well as to the history of the National Theatre in Bitola. Bearing in mind that Georgievski claims that ten of his performances were forbidden during socialist Yugoslavia, this re-staging not only negotiates the cultural policy in Macedonia and the hidden practice of self-censorship, but turns Georgievski's personal experience into a collective one, which is relevant to other dramatists too. Thus, *Mara's Wedding* provides the possibility to point towards irregularities in official narratives of the Yugoslav state and is therefore symptomatic of a larger criticism of socialist narratives in favour of nationally-oriented representations of history. In this particular case, the director represents himself as an artist opposing the Communist Party, and therefore identifies with the political powers promoting national independence such as the VMRO-DPMNE party.

In contrast to the dominant representation of Horatio as a confident scholar, in Georgievski's performance Horatio is characterised as a clown-like figure. Not only does the Pierrot costume ensure such an interpretation, he also takes on a much more important role than in Shakespeare's drama. He frames the whole performance and comments on Hamlet and other characters' various actions. In the beginning of the play, Horatio sits, fishing, on a bare stage in front of the grave. He starts to talk about Hamlet's story and announces, “something is rotten in the state of Denmark”. In contrast to the *Mousetrap* scene, in which Horatio makes fun of censorship, Georgievski reverses Horatio's function in the end of the play. In this scene, Horatio starts to call Fortinbras, who arrives in a black Mercedes. Horatio enters the car and is immediately thrown out of it. He is naked and bleeds out of his mouth, holding his tongue in his hands. The play ends with Horatio's attempt to quote Hamlet's words, “the rest is silence”. This emphasised function of Horatio as narrator and, ultimately, silenced becomes clearly visible during the *Mousetrap*, where he announces the play at the beginning and reads the juridical prohibition at the end of the scene. Since

Georgievski starts and ends his performance with Horatio, the *Mousetrap* scene mirrors the whole performance of *Hamlet*.

Bearing in mind the above-analysed reference to artistic restrictions and the discourse about official censorship in former Yugoslavia, the conceptualisation of Horatio could be read as a comment on these discourses. By mirroring his function in the mousetrap scene, this specific reading is reversed at the end of the scene's performance. Horatio reads out Claudius' prohibition and makes fun of it, something he would not be capable of doing at the end of the performance. The multi-layered structure of the mousetrap scene is doubled with the representation of Horatio in this performance. The different layers of the clearly repetitive dramaturgical structure of the *Mousetrap* scene can be interpreted as a key moment in *Hamlet*, which has the agency to not only refer to the memory of censoring *Mara's Wedding* and to the history of the National Theatre in Bitola, but also to refer to the staging tradition of Shakespeare's play by re-contextualising the *Mousetrap* scene within a specific political and cultural environment. This particular reading is suggested by various reviews and documentations of Georgievski's *Hamlet* in 1989. Not only did the critics highlight the fact that *Mara's Wedding* was re-enacted, but they also related it to the role of censorship in Yugoslavia in general and in Macedonia in particular. Thus, it was not the performance as such that caught the interest of the critics, but the fact that censorship was openly negotiated on stage. This aspect of the performance led to a more widespread negotiation of these topics, which was accompanied by different roundtables where Macedonian dramatists and theatre makers discussed practices of censorship in the socialist state of Yugoslavia. Some of these roundtables were reported in newspapers, which made them accessible to a wider audience beyond the theatre.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps even more so than the performance, the public discourse about the representation of official narratives regarding cultural policy in socialist Macedonia turned this performance into a prime example of how classics and their recurrent dramatic structures can be used for political theatre.

Bearing in mind that memory politics and the official historiography were negotiated in theatre, literature and the arts in the whole of Yugoslavia during the 1980s, Georgievski's performance contributes to these discourses in a subversive manner. By negotiating the practice of censorship, which officially did not exist in Yugoslavia, Georgievski refers to processes of writing history and therefore offers a comment on discourses about the representation of history. This form of criticism is also an expression of a general political climate that is increasingly moving towards national independence. Contextualising this topic within *Hamlet*, the *Mousetrap* scene itself becomes a platform for questioning the social and political function of theatre in general. After the performances at the Macedonian National Theatre in Bitola, the performance was successfully performed at the Ohrid summer festival (*Ohridsko leto*) in 1990.

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<sup>18</sup> See Karanfilov, Vančo. Можеме ли сите заедно напред? *Ekran* 987(12), 24-25.

### **Political potential: Re-enacting the past**

Georgievski's version of *The Mousetrap* clearly exemplifies the potential of *Hamlet* and its *key images* to negotiate changing memory politics. Not only does he use the agency of the dramatic structure of the *Mousetrap* scene to allude to his adaptation of *Mara's Wedding*, but he strongly engages with the dramatic function of and the cultural knowledge about this scene. Its function of revealing the truth about past events (or the past in general) is expanded to revealing the political restrictions imposed on cultural activities while officially denying censorship in former Yugoslavia. By re-enacting this past theatrical event, Georgievski restages the discourse about the juridical prohibition of *Mara's Wedding*, mirroring it with the silenced narrator Horatio in the end of the performance. The clear and plausible reference to a staging tradition of *Hamlet* – with Georgievski being the first director of the play in Macedonia, which took place at the National Theatre of Bitola – as well as the localisation of this performance within a larger history of this theatre and the events surrounding the censorship of *Mara's Wedding*, constitute this play's political potential: for the first time, there is a discourse about the invisible conditions for theatrical production in Macedonia. When “something is rotten”, the public questioning of official narratives and historiography usually marks an expression of major shifts in memory politics. With this performance, Georgievski creates a self-image of an artist experiencing hidden practices of censorship. By confronting the production of *Mara's Wedding* with his 1989-*Hamlet*, he not only thematises a general political climate, but takes it as a chance to position himself as a dissident to the Communist Party and therefore in line with the political powers promoting national independence, which became possible only towards the end of the 1980s.

Besides this political contextualisation, Georgievski's *Hamlet* clearly exemplifies how conflicting representations of history and cultural memory can be negotiated within the framework of dramatic theatre. Highlighting theatrical key images as useful tools in political theatre, this paper offers a possibility to rethink the relation between dramatic theatre and the negotiation of memory politics. This paper has argued that, instead of reducing classics to being part of a standard, or even escapist, repertoire during the late 1980s and early 1990s, their reappearing recurrent dramaturgical structures, such as the *Mousetrap* scene, have the potential to negotiate cultural politics in a subversive manner and, therefore, must be considered alongside broader theoretical discourses about the shifting understanding of the political in performance and the arts in general.<sup>19</sup> Thus, instead of merely being means for escapism, classics can provide a fruitful platform for negotiating political topics on stage.

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<sup>19</sup> This discussion on shifts in political theatre in the age of postmodernism is prominently discussed by Rancière, Jacques. 2013. *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible*. London: Bloomsbury; and in reference to postdramatic theatre by Lehmann, Hans-Thies. 2011. *Wie politisch ist Postdramatisches Theater?*, in *Politisches Theater machen. Neue Artikulationsformen des Politischen in den darstellenden Künsten*, edited by Deck, Jan and Angelika Sieburg. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 29-40.

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“The rest is silence”:  
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