ABSTRACT

THE RISE AND FALL OF VOIVODE PETER EARRING ACCORDING TO THE STORIES AND JOURNALS OF HIS COMPANION, FRANCO SIVORI
THE MAKING OF A ROMANIAN HISTORICAL PLAY

By Cristian Petru Panaitė

The critical side of this creative thesis has at its core the developmental process of my full length play “The Rise and Fall of Voivode Peter Earring According To The Stories and Journals of His Companion, Franco Sivori”. The play was written after extensive research done in the summer of 2006 in Romania and Hungary. The writing proved to be an exercise of will and skill, and I can only hope to provide the reader with an insightful image over the whole creative process. To that extent, I have divided the critical paper into three chapters (historical background, sources of inspiration and dramaturgical analysis/choices) each independent yet all interconnected to serve a better understanding of the body of work. Finally the Conclusion is meant to provide the reader with an insight over the future of this play.
THE RISE AND FALL OF PETER EARRING…
THE MAKING OF A ROMANIAN HISTORICAL PLAY

A Thesis

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CHAPTER 1

Great effort is required to arrest decay and restore vigor. One must exercise proper deliberation, plan carefully before making a move, and be alert in guarding against relapse following a renaissance.

Horace

It is not hard to think that a reader scrolling through the first pages of The Rise and Fall of Voivode Peter Earring According to the Journals and Stories of His Companion, Franco Sivori and getting acquainted with the historical time of action will associate it with the period of European Renaissance, even for the simple reason that the starting date of our plot is right in the midst of the Elizabethan age. And between 1579 (when Petru Cercel/Peter Earring, - the hero of our play- receives unconditional support from the French Gate, planning his journey to Istanbul and bid for the throne) and 1590 (when the Voivode’s life is cut short) Michel de Montaigne publishes his collection of Essays, Sir Francis Drake not only reaches what is now California but sails around the globe, Portugal loses its independence to Spain, and the Gregorian calendar is implemented. These are just a few of the emblematic events the curious reader might find while turning from the play to a chronology of the times.

The purpose of this thesis is not to comment on the importance of the Renaissance over the ages, and its nature and limited length will not allow us to paint a vivid description of this movement without falling into superficiality and mediocrity. However, several things must be noted before heading in the direction of the historical and dramaturgical resources that influenced my work. Scholars agree that the Renaissance can be defined as a movement and not as a historical period which can be plotted from point A to point B. It includes the progressive nations of Europe (starting with the states of Italy in the XIIIth century, moving to France and Germany, and ending up in Spain and England by the XVIIth century). It begins with the formation and the development of a new class, the bourgeoisie, and of secularism. It involves the

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1 Voivode- Slavic word denoting commander of a military force and later on, the position as a governor of a province.
2 Sources of this brief introduction include: Robert Ergang’s The Renaissance, Basil Oldham’s The Renaissance. Also we must differentiate between the western Renaissance and the Islamic one. The Renaissance of Islam is considered a movement that started as a reaction towards Westernization at the beginning of XIXth century. It included countries such as Syria and Egypt. (Thomson, 59). The Romanian National Renaissance includes the Revolution of 1848.
development of trade, guilds, the new arts of war, power and politics while placing the individual in the vortex of the earthly world. Among the many reasons[^3] of why the Renaissance occurred the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 to the Ottomans, is considered a key one.

But before considering the fall of one empire, it is important to recognize the rise of a religion and the close connections between Islam and Medieval Christianity and on how over centuries the two creeds have complemented each other. William Thomson in *The Renascence of Islam* concludes that there are two main differences between Christianity and Islam:

Islam did not belong to the so-called religion of salvation but it had its Messianic hopes. It was solidly anchored in a revelation of law like Judaism and therefore can be characterized as a religion of law. It should not be forgotten however that a revealed law was an essential part of the Christian faith (Thomson, 53).

The other main difference refers to the fact that Islam “entered history as a conquering religion in a rather decadent world and not as an insignificant Oriental sect in a pre-established order”. Thomson stresses that the development and establishment of Islam[^4] as a religion occurred in a world and age where, after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire[^5], society had arrived at a dead end. The Holy War (Jihad) was meant, however, not to destroy the darulharb[^6] but to subdue it. Long before the Crusades and long after the fall of Constantinople, Christians and Jews were allowed to practice their religion while respecting two terms: obedience and paying a poll tax. As the Ottomans occupied the Balkans, they offered protection and the choice of voluntary submission before the use of warfare (Inalcik,7). Perhaps such a protective choice came about from the great similarities the two faiths shared:

[^3]: Other reasons for the emergence of the Renaissance include: inventions, the growth of city states, the influence of Antiquity, and the reaction against the dark Middle Ages, ages which included absolute power of the Church, submissiveness to authority, unity of social and political organization while “Beauty was a snare, pleasure a sin”

[^4]: Muhammad “the most perfect creation by Allah or God, established Islam with its Five Pillars of Faith by 629 A.D.

[^5]: It is generally agreed that the final collapse of the Western Roman Empire occurred in 476 A.D.

[^6]: Lands outside Islam, and therefore populated by infidels
Both however were rooted in a Semitic religion\(^7\) of revelation. Both inherited and assimilated more or less Greek science and philosophy. Life in both was regulated by the social, economic and political practices and principles of the Greco-Roman world. And even their hostility was an heirloom of the religious and political divisions of the world” (Thomson, 52).

We can say that the battering of the Byzantine walls of Constantinople by Mehmed II for fifty three days, using the greatest firepower of those days, was a jump start for the Western culture. Over the centuries, the capital of the Byzantine or Eastern Roman Empire had been a haven for scholars, ancient texts, ideas and ideals which once sprung from the glory of the Greek and Roman Golden Ages. Therefore once the siege occurred, many of the enlightened elite fled to better and safer shores, such as the ones of Italy, carrying with them the seeds for what was to become, by 1637, “I think therefore I exist”.\(^8\) Also with the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, many of the old commerce routes to the East were closed, and before any trading pacts were put into practice, attempts of tracing new naval routes to the Orient have led to the discoveries made by Columbus and Vasco da Gama.

Scrolling through Western sources and scholarly research, one is quick to notice that the Renaissance is not recognized (or at most semi-recognized) as having reached the states and principalities east of Hungary, such as Walachia, Moldavia, Albania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Macedonia. This is not to say such a movement did not occur, but considering the imminent Ottoman threat, the change of rulers, the loss and gain of terrain in a region that was considered a buffer zone between Christianity and a militant Islam, reaching for humanism and artistry was at best difficult when placed between the hammer of Islam and anvil of Christianity.

A century before the fall of Constantinople, in mid of the XIVth century the Ottomans began a conquest campaign over the Balkans while their own state was “stretching from Ankara to the Dardanelles” (Inalcik, 14). The confirmation of the Ottomans as a force in the East, and one to be feared by the Hungarians (who were trying to gain control of the Danube region as well) occurred after the crusade of Nicopolis in 1396\(^9\), when Bayezid managed to occupy the

\(^7\) An example would be the recognition of Jesus Christ (Jesus Isa) as one of the highest ranked prophets in Islam, along with Moses (Musa), Ibrahim (Abraham), and Noah (Nuh).
\(^8\) Renes Descartes in the Discourse of Method: “Cogito Ergo Sum”
\(^9\) 1397 marks the defeat of the Walachian Prince, Mircea the Elder at Arges, and the subordination of Walachia to a vassal state of the Turkish Gate
Kingdom of Bulgaria, while defeating an alliance led by French crusaders and formed of Byzantium, Venice and Hungary. At the end of the XIVth century the Empire stretched from the Euphrates to the Danube, though Bayezid was to find his defeat and subsequent death at the Battle of Ankara, awhile fighting Tamerlane’s Mongols. After the fall of Constantinople Selim I continued the expansion, adding Syria, Palestine and Egypt while Suleyman the Magnificent conquered Buda, Belgrade, Rhodos, Tripoli, Tunis, Algiers and Kurdistan. This is actually considered the peak of the Ottoman expansion. In 1541 Transylvania becomes a vassal principality to The Turkish Gate and John Sigismund the first governor prince. After conquering Cyprus in 1570, an allied fleet under the command of Don of Austria defeated the Turks at Lepanto in 1571. Afterwards a new alliance, which included the Vatican, Spain and Venice, was meant to reclaim Istanbul.

In The Ottoman Empire, Dr. Halil Inalcik concludes that the increase in the number of Christian alliances, the war with the Habsburgs (ending with leaving Hungary in the hands of the Habsburg Empire), the threat coming from Iran (which was ready to sign treaties of alliance with Western Europe), the increase of Spain’s power in Europe under Philip II (though the Armada was defeated in 1588 as the Sultan was consolidating his political position with England and the Dutch) and the extermination of the Calvinists in France (who were supporting the Turks), as well as the increase of piracy in the Mediterranean led to “confusion and unrest which afflicted the Ottoman Empire” at the turn of the XVIIth century. A period of stagnation and slow decline followed while the Empire was sinking under one of its own marvels: bureaucracy. The Russo-Turkish wars, Napoleon’s campaigns in Egypt, the Greek War of Independence, the protectorate of Russia over Walachia and Moldova, the semi-independence of Serbia and the whole struggle for national identity are just a few of the causes that made the Ottoman Empire the “sick man of Europe” by the XIXth century.

This brief description of key events and dates is simply meant to remind us in what context part of the Renaissance took place and what followed. It also wishes to emphasize that history could and should be analyzed through the lens of the East as well. That is to say we should be keeping an eye towards both sunrise and sunset, and the West should not disregard the East on account of the formers greatness.

Since humanism reached the furthest corners of Western Europe from a dying Constantinople, it is safe to say that it had reached as close as five hundred miles away, across
the Danube. But how and in what manner did that happen? Surviving physical proofs of the
Romanian Renaissance stand in the numerous Orthodox painted monasteries of Moldova and
Walachia and in the great Germanic architectural influences in Transylvania\(^\text{10}\). While most of
them were also designed and consolidated to serve as fortresses against the Tatar or Turkish
invasions, others reflect a unique blend of oriental and occidental architectonic techniques,
especially late XVIth century Italian architecture. The exterior paintings of the monasteries in
Bucovina (Northern Moldavia) attest to the development of a unique style, one which
nevertheless can be traced back to the Byzantine Paleologues Era.

Turkish scholarly sources emphasized the importance of Walachia as a state which was
difficult to transpose into a vassal, yet remained all along a buttress of Christianity. Walachia is
named in various Chronicles a strong ally of Venice and Vienna, of Poland and later on of
France. In politics, the small principalities could gain terrain and favors only if they were to play
along their one disadvantage and trump card – and that is serving as a buffer zone between
Europe and the Ottoman threat. History has long proved the double sided politics governing
those lands, perhaps the most notable event in modern history being Romania changing sides\(^\text{11}\) in
World War Two. Five hundred years before that, things were quite similar, and foreign travelers,
including Franco Sivori himself, are not shy in characterizing the Walachians especially as two
faced/bigots, people with hidden interests whom you cannot and should not trust without solid
proof of honesty and friendship. A more detailed description of the Walachians by Sivori:

Walachians have an ever changing temper, embracing luck and leaving things in the
hands of fate, rather than trying to change them with their own hands. They have frail
hearts and therefore are of little use in war, in comparison with the Moldavians who are
quite brave, and are of the same blood. The nobility is full of envy. Walachians don’t
engage in any commerce, leaving it to the Greeks, the Turks, the Jews. Their clothing is
nice and imposing, reminding one of the Polish, Hungarian or Turkish style. At times it is
even more noble. Walachians love to have great feasts and have music playing, though
what’s being played sounds barbaric. Food is quite good and the princes take care in
having Italian or French cooks. Walachians pay attention to random details, are very
superstitious, and they don’t take care of their conscience, since they live after their own
common sense and not religion. And as uncultured people who had no one to teach them

\(^{10}\) Transylvania was occupied gradually by the Kingdom of Hungary during the XIIth
century. A colonization process began and lasted till XIII century, with Hungarians bringing
the Teuton Chivelry. Descendants of Saxons – sasi and secui – populated Transylvania
starting with the XIIth century. A large number of fortified churches, fortresses and citadels
(Medias, for example) have been designated UNESCO world heritage sites

\(^{11}\) On 23\(^{rd}\) of August 1944, Romania turns arms against its ally, Germany.
how to live by the Holy Book, they don’t find a sin in a lot of serious unorthodox matters though they are most careful when it comes to fasting and respecting Christmas and Easter. Their language is partly Latin, partly Italian, partly Greek and partly Slavic, all together being barbaric. (Sivori 180-183)\textsuperscript{12}

While researching several other accounts, the description of the Walachians by Sivori seems to be most compelling considering his long term direct experience at Peter Earring’s court. So if a Renaissance did occur in the Romanian Principalities then it sprang out of the will of people (of the nature mentioned above), or rulers who had had the chance of traveling across Europe.

One of the founders of the Renaissance in Walachia is Neagoe Basarab (1512-1521), a Walachian prince who also “suffered” from the qualities mentioned above. Though he was named by the Turkish Gate as a ruler, the Prince was also trying to get along with Hungary, naming himself a vassal of King Lajos (Ludovic) and reassuring the latter that Walachia will stand against any Turkish threat. At the same time the prince was taking great care in cultivating the relations with Turkish tradesmen and artists. And yet this double sided relation and the close encounters with the Papacy and Venice, seemed to have provoked positive cultural changes in the lands north of the Danube. The country flourished as Neagoe ruled and built following the Byzantine tradition. On the frontal wall of the Monastery in Snagov (close to Bucharest), the Prince is depicted wearing purple royal clothing with an imprint of the Byzantine Double Headed Eagle.

During his reign several impressive churches were built (including the one in Targoviste, where the Orthodox Patriarchal Chair was instituted, and the majestic Arges Court Cathedral\textsuperscript{13}), crafts and trade flourished, the Voivode made donations to other Orthodox monasteries around the Balkans (including Mount Athos and Mount Sinai):

\textsuperscript{12} Personal translation of excerpts from Sivori’s journal, when he just arrived in Walachia and is appointed Peter Earring’s counselor.

\textsuperscript{13} Sivori in his journal praises the beauty of this church. It is the one he remembers from the high number of “most beautiful monasteries”. Arges is a church of a glorious design and covered in marble, and can be compared with the monasteries of Italy (Sivori 182)
All that are in Europe, Thrace, Elada, Achaia, Illiria, Cambania, Helispont, Macedonia, Sirmia, Lugdania, Dalmatia and everywhere from east to west and north to south”

Neagoe also completed one of the first philosophical and ethical works to be found in Walachia: “The teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son Theodosie”. The work is comprised of essays depicting the politics and diplomacies of those times.

As Prof. Stefan Stefanescu puts it in his work Walachia from Basarab I to Michael the Brave:

Neagoe Basarab improved all the domains of the state/principality, and manifested a great receptiveness for the Western European renaissance. In his time the border line between Oltenia and Transylvania was set, an action which would announce the modern times.”

A milestone in Romanian history is the first letter in Romanian, dated 1521 (also the year of Neagoe’s death), and entitled: Neacsu’s Letter from Campulung. Until that date Slavic was the official administrative language. Neacsu’s letter is universally considered proof of the birth of the Romanian written language, (a language of Latin descent, as the content of the letter reveals the majority of the words to have the Latin quality of seven other romance languages) at a time when Western Europe was suffering a rebirth. The letter addressed to Hans Benkner, governor of Brasov (Transylvania) warns the Hungarians of the Turkish threat, as Suleyman the Magnificent was heading out of Sofia starting his campaign against Hungary in June 1521. Neacsu himself was a tradesman who facilitated the passing of goods from Transylvania across the Danube.

Just like in any other country, the chronicles became the one literary way of keeping track of history. However many of them were written while being inspired by and using foreign sources, such as the ones from Poland. The Chronicle of interest to this period is the one written by Grigore Ureche (1590-1647) The Chronicles of the land of Moldavia covering the period from 1359 to 1594. His work would be continued by Miron Costin covering the period 1594-

14 Personal translation of passage from Biography of Patriarch Niphon, collected by A.D. Xenopol
15 The work is not to be considered quite objective in interpretation due to the time of its publishing: 1970, under Ceausescu’s regime.
16 The Chronicle since with the will of God, Moldova was made written during Stephan the Great reign is considered a medieval writing, scribed in Cyrillic around 1502.
1661. It is important to notice that Ureche’s writing is led from a humanist perspective. The main issues he is touching upon are the Latinity of the Romanian people and the idea that Walachians, Moldavians and Transylvanians alike can trace their roots to Rome. The work includes the rule of a number of Voivodes, the fighting for the throne, the treason plots, traditions, heroic actions and exemplary ways of living. Stephan the Great (1357-1504, Moldova) is portrayed as a hero of Christianity, one who served God and his people, an example to be followed. At the opposite end are rulers who opposed or broke the divine and mortal law.

All in all for the Romanian Principalities¹⁷ these writings are to be read as birth¹⁸, not rebirth.

Time, ink, paper and enlightened minds¹⁹ made Basarab I, Neagoe Basarab, Mircea the Elder, Vlad the Impaler, Stefan the Great, or Michael the Brave, to be some of the Voivodes depicted in “garments” of national pride and virtues. While some were to be portrayed soon after on theater stages, others were to be remembered from generation to generation through folk tales.

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¹⁷ In Transylvania, one of the greatest figures of Renaissance is Nicolaus Olahus (1493-1568). His fame derives out of the fact he continued using the name of Nicolaus the Vlach though he chose an ecclesiastic career that brought him to crown Maximilian, King of Hungary, and bury Ferdinand I, as well. His writings evoke his counter Reformation ideas. The establishment of new schools and the reformation of Catholic clergy are top priorities. Historian Victor Newmann in “The Lights of Renaissance in Central-Eastern Europe” says about Nicolaus Olahus: “The universal idea of Erasmus in regards with the destiny of Europe, is also embraced by the enlightened spirits coming from the opposite pole of the continent: through Nicolaus Olahus, Europe communicates from one end to the other through epistles and letters, while his thinking crosses the continent through Brussels, Louvain, Besancon, Madrid, Milano, Vatican, Bratislava, Tarnavia, Vienna, Buda. We are in 1527-1538 and Olahus conquers the spirituality of the occidental world with his most extravagant gestures of HOMO EUROPAEUS” (Newmann 122)

¹⁸ Dacia – the Carpathian - Danubian- Pontic space - was conquered and became Roman province under Emperor Traian after the war in 105-106 A.D. The process of symbiosis began with the implementation of administration and army. Between 271-275 A.D. Emperor Aurelian retrieved both, south west of the Danube, but the plant of Latinity continued to grow through the already established veterans of war, etc. Christianity is believed to have been embraced by V century. By VII century the process of symbiosis was completed however the migration of Huns, Goths (Visigoths and Ostrogoths) Tatars, Slavs slowed down the socio-political consolidation process. Byzantine, Hungarian and Slavic sources recognize the existence of Romanian pre-statal formations establishments by the Xth century. The names given to the inhabitants: vlahs, blahs, volohi – are considered proof of the Latinity and the distinct ethnic and cultural background, these people have in comparison with the ones south of the Danube (ex. Kingdom of Bulgaria). The formation of the Romanian principalities occurred under Basarab I and Bogdan I in Walachia and Moldova around 1360.

¹⁹ One of the most predominant Romanian Enlightenment figures and Ruler of Moldavia; Dimitrie Cantemir 1673—1723.
and ballads. Peter Earring, who enjoyed a very short rule, was not to be remembered because of any serious national resistance or uprising. He is remembered mostly by his name, a name “Cercel-Earring” which could very well symbolize the lightness of his being. A name that would carry the imagination of any Walachian man, onto distant foreign rich and bright lands. A taste of the Western extravagance was brought to Walachia by Peter, and there isn’t one Romanian chronicle which blames him for doing so. However, by 1848 it is not luxury and gold Romania was lacking. All what Romania was lacking, was, well - Romania.

The centuries of struggle against the Turkish yoke and the Western oblivion had finally their due. The revolutionary figures of the XIXth century, desiring and in search of national rebirth and identity, found themselves urging the whole nation to look back for examples of high morality and virtues. The main goals of the Romanian revolutionary movement of 1848 were the independence and unification of Walachia and Moldova and the autonomy of Transylvania. It would take another decade for the first two to get unified, a war of independence (1877-1878) and a First World War for all three to get united in Great Romania on the 1st of December 1918. But back to the period of 1848, a period influenced by a Western ideology, a period when revolutionaries such as Nicolae Balcescu would return home from Paris bringing with them the word of liberte, egalite, fraternite. And in the tumultuous times when the Principalities were to find themselves again as a buffer zone this time between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, theatrical entertainment was popular and a fight for the founding of a National Theater was undertaken. Mihail Kogalniceanu talks in 1840 in his periodical, Dacia Literara (Literary Dacia) about the lack of quality and taste in Romanian theater. Kogalniceanu makes it clear that unfortunately there is still no patriotic will to reform the drama which finds itself saturated with bad plays, bad actors and inconsistencies in production such as The Adventures of Scapin where:

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20 For example, The Ballad of Manole which presents the trials of the architect who was ordered to build the Arges Monastery, during the reign of Neagoe, or as history remembers him: The Black Voivode

21 The National Theater in Bucharest was founded in 1852. In 1861 Hamlet is staged for the very first time. In 1895, Ibsen’s Rosmersholm, in 1915 Gorki’s The Night Asylum, in 1919, Shaw’s Candida, and two years later Strinberg’s Miss Julia

22 Kogalniceanu (1817-1891) was a revolutionary figure in Moldova, publicist, historian, and cultural leader. His activity is associated with the founding of modern Romania.
We saw a hussar from the times of Napoleon, an elegant muscadin from the times of Moliere, and a fashionable lady from our days. (Kogalniceanu, 41)\(^{23}\)

Later on, in 1846 another prominent literary figure, Alecu Russo, talks about the need of the Romanian people to see plays inspired by their traditions, the national customs and thinking and not by foreign works translated in a language which “neither the actor nor the public” understand. The main responsibility of the dramaturge is to bring on the national stage nationalism: “drama and comedy dressed in the way and character of our land” (Russo, 42).

Perhaps the most notable affirmation comes from C. A. Rosetti who launches the idea of a national enslavement that made the spirit perish. He refers to all the blood spilled during the Ottoman supremacy.

If our Romanian theater arrived at a complete stage of decadence it is because it reflected our national state of slavery. How could our ancestors write plays full of morality and national feeling? History and our national legends are treasures the next generation must make full use of. (Rosetti, 44)

Rosetti states plainly and humorously how it was impossible for any Walachian or Moldovian to do what Aeschylus did after battles, that is, writing plays. The days were tumultuous, the wars were plenty, the country was most fragile. Rosetti’s thoughts are extreme in a historical period which does not ask for less. Rosetti enunciates the idea of spiritual unity through theater, of being proud of our past history and making good use of it, when it comes to inspiring our future. There is yet one difference between Russo and Rosetti. Rosetti also encourages for working towards producing great translations of the European classics which would provide examples for future Romanian playwrights: the works of Schiller and Shakespeare as well as those of French authors who wrote about “morality, love for family, for country, for liberty”. Mihai Eminescu\(^{24}\) completes the list adding Spanish dramaturges, a Norwegian author (Bjornston Bjornson), and Frideric Gibel (for country side stories). Victor Hugo is given as an example for the ones who wish to write about the integrity and the greatness of a nation: a nation fighting for independence with intelligence and fury. Eminescu also

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\(^{23}\) Personal translation from Romanian edition.

\(^{24}\) Mihai Eminescu. 1850-1889. Considered to be the greatest Romanian poet of all times.
encourages the creation of original works which “can be vulgar but not corrupted: honest, righteous and good – this is how we wish the character of our dramatic work to be” (Eminescu, 64). What all the humanists of the XIXth century agree about is that the Romanian Dramaturgical Repertory should first and foremost be useful to the society on the long term and not just for pure entertainment.

Before the first Romanian historical play there was a first Romanian historical tale published in the first issue of Kogalniceanu’s *Literary Dacia* in 1840: *Alexandru Lapusneanu* by Costache Negruzzi. The story traces the rise and fall of the Moldavian ruler (1564-1568) with the same name and has as inspiration material taken from *The Chronicle of Grigore Ureche*. Lapusneanu focuses on maintaining and increasing his authority as a ruler, serving his country while losing the support of the boyars after killing at a feast forty seven of them: a common action of those times, Peter Earring for example, continued the tradition. His cold blooded temper and actions bring the rest of the court against him and he falls pray to the same kind of treason and internal fighting for dominion. His wife, Lady Ruxandra, is portrayed as a weak being, ending up serving the boyar intrigues, poisoning her husband. And so we arrive at the first Romanian romantic drama with a historical backdrop, the XVIth century “Razvan and Vidra” written in 1867 by Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu. The playwright adds an 1848 vision towards the past, by that meaning the ideals of the revolutionary year are embodied by the main character, Razvan, a slave who passes through five stages (also acts) ending up being crowned Prince of Moldavia. The titles of these stages: *A slave for gold, The revenge, Motoc’s Niece, Another step, The Falling into grace*, assist the reader into following the main character’s rise and fall. Razvan is also constructed in the popular view as a legendary fighter towards justice and freedom, his personal suffering melting into the pot of national social ideals. What is most worthy of observing is the playwright’s choice of adding to the slave past, a Gypsy identity. Indeed Razvan is a freed Gypsy slave, one who knows how to read, who also fights against the prejudices of the day, prejudices which reflect also in our contemporary times. Razvan ascends to the position

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25 Bogdan P. Hasedu (1838-1907) was a historian, philologist, founder of several periodicals, head of the State Archives in Bucharest. He is known to have had a command of 26 languages. His dramatic work also includes *Domnita Ruxandra Lady Ruxandra*.

26 As the play begins we witness the amazement of one Romanian old beggar when he is handed money by Razvan, and not by a Boyar. We also find out Razvan’s mother was Moldavian and his father a Gypsy. The Old Beggar Tanase: “A cultured Gypsy?”
of a prince with the help of his new wife, Vidra who is considered to be a Romanian embodiment of Lady Macbeth. With a great thirst for power, Vidra leads Razvan into bloody deeds for grabbing the throne. In the final act, she is haunted by nightmares of revenge, while Razvan is proclaimed king but finds his tragic end in a short while. What is most interesting about the play is the time frame. B.P. Hasdeu portrays Razvan as being a fictive prince around 1590, right around the time of Petru Schiopul (Peter the Crippled, Prince of Moldova three times: 1574-77, 1578-79, 1582-1591) considered to be a ruler of the same Renaissance quality as Peter Earring.

In 1880, the poet Vasile Alexandri writes *Despot Voivode*, a historical dramatization of the rise and fall of the Moldavian ruler between 1561 and 1563.

At the turn of the century in 1902, yet another historical play makes its debut, *Vlaicu Voivode* by Alexandru Davila, based on the life of a XIVth century Walachian Prince. As the author emphasizes, the action happens “around 1370 at the Royal Court of Arges”, where Vlaicu is opposing his stepmother’s (Lady Dara) ruling policy. Just like Vidra and perhaps my Lady in Black, Lady Dara tries to diminish Vlaicu’s authority as a ruler, tries to keep the throne for herself, to impose Catholicism over an Orthodox people, and have the country kneel in front of a Hungarian king. However Vlaicu manages to maintain the control, gaining the trust of his court, pledging alliances with the voivodes south of the Danube, banishing the Hungarian Ambassador and reinstituting the autonomy of his people.

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27 In Act I of *Razvan and Vidra*, one of the town people says: “Peter is crippled but he is not ugly” while another one agrees the Voivode is quite handsome. Historically, Petru Schiopul is known for contracting commerce routes through Moldova with the English and is the first from whom we have full documents in Romanian language. He continued the work of chronicle writing, employing monks to the task. He had an affinity for Catholicism though in 1583 he built Galata Monastery in Iasi. Patriarch Ieremia II of Constantinople in a letter dated 1588 describes Petru Schiopul as: an eloquent man, severe in action, knowledgeable, knows Turkish and Greek, and had an affinity for acquiring new skills, loved letters, cultured people, astronomy and music.

28 Historically he is known to have entered Alexandru Lapusneanu’s court, presenting himself as a relative of Lady Ruxandra while attempting and succeeding in dethroning Lapusneanu in 1561. He is trying to reform the state by bringing foreign counselors and reducing the power of the boyars. Such actions which would cost him his life.

29 Vlaicu or Vladislav Voivode ruled Walachia between 1364-1377. He is attributed with introducing the first Romanian silver coin in 1365.

30 Alexandru Davila (1862-1929). Romanian dramatist and diplomat. The National Theater in Bucharest was under his jurisdiction in 1905.
The one Romanian historical trilogy of the XIXth century was written by Barbu
Stefanescu Delavrancea\(^{31}\) between 1909-1910. The collection includes *Apus de Soare – Sunset* that presents Moldova in the last year of Stefan the Great’s rule. It continues with *Viforul The Blizzard* where the main character is Stefan’s grandson and his rule from 1524 to 1527 and concludes with *Luceafarul- Lucifer* and the reign of Petru Rares\(^{32}\), illegitimate son of Stefan the Great.

It must be acknowledged that what Dr. Halil Inalcik calls the classic period (1300-1600) of the Ottoman Empire, is the one historical period which receives the most fictive/artistic treatments in the Romanian history. It is not the Western Renaissance that makes the ruling of these Voivodes interesting to study, but more the proximity and the tangency of this movement with such lands. It is not winning or losing against the Turks that offers us a good dramatic subject, it is the means by which such victories and losses were acquired, many due to the underground and silent support coming from the West. The conditional or unconditional support, the great importance and seriousness –at least at the surface - with which these small principalities and small princes (such as Peter Earring) were manipulated by the West makes this period quite worthy of being explored.

What these plays have in common are the ideas of liberty and freedom of 1848 projected back onto the Romanian Principalities some five hundred years before, the everlasting fight for power, the battles against the Turks, and the relationship with the great powers of the West. The result was “an impossible country for ruling”, one that passed through the XVIIth century Fanariot Greek regime and became a Kingdom in the XIXth century under the rule of a Hohenzollern: Carol I. And what he and his son, Ferdinand I have achieved – the formation of Great Romania in 1918 which included Transylvania and Basarabia (Republic of Moldova today) - fell apart after the end of the Second World war.

\(^{31}\) Barbu Stefanescu Delavrancea (1858-1918). Literary figure, academician and politician becomes also mayor of Bucharest in 1899.

\(^{32}\) He ruled Moldavia twice: 1527-1538, 1541-1546. Continued his father’s cultural work, raising and restoring religious establishments. Tries to regain several fortresses owned by the Turks and tries to invade Transylvania. Fails in both just as he fails in the planning of a new crusade against the Ottomans.
Soon after the communism regime was installed, and later on Marin Sorescu33, a poet, playwright and novelist wrote two historical dramas in 1970, including The Third Stake, an outlook over Vlad the Impaler’s rule with “between the lines” parallels to the communist era. Sorescu was also pointing out that this national renaissance through drama became most rotten and embalmed in communist spirit, when the glorious deeds of Romanian voivodes were depicted in movies and pumped up due to the Socialist policy and manifestos. Therefore most of the movies from 1963 on including The Dacians and The Column (about the conquest of Dacia by the Romans), Mircea, Stephan the Great, Michael the Brave, and Tudor, apart from portraying history are also machinery of propaganda. The trajectory of such propaganda follows the titles being great names in history, and the great names are to be preserved, honored and raised higher and higher through the great golden years of communism by Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu. This is perhaps why nowadays historical plays have suffered a loss of terrain, of trust and interest. The Romanian of 2006 does not have as a reference a published complete up to date non-politically altered history. Certainly the Chronicles of the XVth and XVIth century are to be studied and the lessons of the great figures of 1848 are to be remembered, but other than that there is no real modern scale of comparison and objectivity. There is no way of looking back into the past without not being blinded or at least bothered by the hundreds of historical treatments written during the communism regime.

Choosing to write a historical play happened by acknowledging first the lack of interest in our own history, by knowing that often my colleagues in arms have belittled our people and our roots as well. I also wrote The Rise and Fall of Peter Earring keeping in mind that what interests theater companies abroad is definitely not the period when Romanian Principalities were seen as a buffer zone between Christianity and Islam. Where is the focus of interest then? Reading Romanian contemporary plays (that have been commissioned, produced and praised across the seas), it seems the excitement/interest lies in Romania as a present buffer zones between real Western civilization and poverty or at most an almost civilized place, as a buffer zone between the orchard from where the fruits of human traffic are picked, and the great

33 In Sorescu’s own words in the preface to the play: "For the dramatist, history is like a bone to a dog."
Western market where they are displayed and bought, a buffer zone between high morality and high corruption, a buffer zone between real victims and self victimization.

Perhaps what we need to do nowadays is not grin at our history any longer. Nobody asks us to be patriots but nobody subdues us to be ashamed either. Perhaps a return to our history as it has been passed on to us – altered, propagandist, non-objective- would be useful in redefining our bearings in the post communism theater. Sixteen years past from the revolution and many more shall pass before another. But meanwhile we should be listening with no shame to the voices of XIX century. Sure they talked about the age of princes, of treason, guts and blood, sure they took national pride to an extreme but as we said before those were extreme days. And in the end, though their language and attitude might provoke a giggle in our contemporary voices, it’s also healthy to remember theirs (including the ones that gave birth to plays) produced a revolution, two unifications and a war of independence, while keeping a keen eye into the past.

CHAPTER 2

“History consists of a series of accumulated imaginative inventions.”
Voltaire

True or not, this statement is a safe starting point for the playwright to unveil his sources of inspiration. Here stand the means of defending myself and replying to any objections, like many of my characters do: “Do you doubt…Voltaire?”. One thing is certain, from secondary school I was taught that historical evidence is of two kinds: physical and narrative; in other words, what has been built, was left behind and survived time, and what has been experienced, written and forgotten only so it can be rediscover and passed on by the means of ink and paper.

In the course of play development I have experienced directly the physical evidence and had drawn facts, figures and characters from two chronicles and a few modern historical treaties.

First, the main character – Petru Demetrius a.k.a. Petru Cercel (Peter Earring), was a ruler of Walachia from 1583-1585. According to Nicolae Iorga, the most prominent historian of modern Romania, Petru Cercel is the 35th Walachian ruler from the foundation of the Eastern Orthodox Metropolitan seat by Nicolae Alexandru Basarab in 1359 and 36th from the foundation of the Walachian State by Basarab the First. In his work, The History of Romanians in Faces and
Icons, Iorga attempts to describe chronologically each Romanian ruler’s life and death, mentioning Peter Earring as:

son of Patrascu the Good, enlightened prince in the likes of the Western fashion, who built the Royal Church in Targoviste, where he also wished to be buried. He was dethroned and, fighting for the throne, ended up drowned in Bosphorus in March 1590. Afterwards his dead body was taken out of the sea, his skin filled with straws and sent to his enemy, Mihnea. (Iorga,35)

Since these mentionings are of a high scholarly nature, I could not stop from whispering Voltaire’s words. It is not for the shock value I chose Iorga’s interpretation of Peter Earring’s tragic end but for a strong theatrical effect which would rap up the plot of the play and pin point the theme, if any. Also, a contemporary scholastic source with whom I will end this chapter, gives us an extra view of the tragic situation of princes:

the princes who do not direct – with the most faithful and greatest devotion – all their efforts towards our imperial duties - will be punished according to their crimes either by dethronement or by other methods (Panaite,358).

Iorga’s historical time-line was also of great help when it came to the “gapped” development of action. By that I mean the episodic plot development in the likes of historical plays such as Luther by John Osborne. In a way my exercise of skill as a playwright was completed by an exercise of skill as a novice historian. If from Iorga I grabbed all that is related to complete names of rulers, dates, deaths, exile and burial places, another prolific historian (he is credited with having written the first complete history of Romania in mid 1800s), Alexandru D. Xenopol, offered me a more detailed account of Peter’s times.

These include Peter’s problematic financial background, the treachery happening at the Walachian court due to the ever changing boyars, Peter executing three of his boyars after being crowned, Mihnea’s and his mother’s (Ecaterina) pressure to the Turkish Gate, and an account on why the Western European powers (Catherine de Medici, Henric III, Stephan Bathory, Pope Gregory XIII) wanted Peter in Walachia. Looking at the bibliography, his information is mostly drawn from French and Italian correspondence happening around 1585, the year of Peter’s dethronement, his escape to Transylvania, his imprisonment and, later on, trips of pledge to the west. Closing his chapter entitled Walachia from Mircea the Shepherd to Mihai the Brave, 1545-1593, Xenopol takes the liberty in expressing his thoughts on Peter’s fall from grace and
the collapse of Henric’s dream (the one of having a strong ally and vassal state at the Danube in the likes of a united Transylvania, Moldova and Walachia).

First on why everything failed in Walachia:

Henric’s dream was crushed by a fatal power which ruled above these grounds of Europe: the most horrible corruption which could have ever devoured the human being”. (Xenopol, 35).

And about Peter in the context of the same political struggle, and in regards with villainous planning being done by Mihnea, against him:

he himself was too much of a poet, too much of a fantasist, too proud and too trustworthy in the luck that has been trusted upon him” (Xenopol, 34).

At the time I completed the first draft, regarding Henric’s relationship with Peter and the time frame of action, I took the liberty of having Henric alive at the time of Peter Earring’s death. That is to say, historically, Henric III was murdered in August of 1589 while Peter was executed by the Turkish Gate in Spring of 1590. The draft attached to this thesis was formatted to include the correct historical data.

Any ruler must have a place from where to rule. Peter chose the old Royal Court of Targoviste, a place of reigning, desired by some of the freshly named Wallachian princes, but not well seen by the Ottoman Gate due to its defendable geographical position. Targoviste (situated some fifty miles north west of Bucharest, in the sub-Carpathian region, with a direct route to Transylvania and the more enlightened cities of Brasov, Alba, Sibiu, Medias and Sighisoara) functioned on and off as the Province’s capital from 1396 until trading places permanently in favor of Bucharest in 1659. A voivode’s choice of making Targoviste his royal residence, was interpreted by The Gate as a sign of moral rebellion. This explains the swift switch of rulers at times, or the choice of others to ruling from Bucharest (still considered a small settlement in mid XVI century). Bucharest could be easily reached and controlled. The town had a Royal Palace from the times of Vlad the Impaler. Little of the palace survived to our times but a church built in 1559 by Mircea Ciobanul (Mircea the Shepherd) is still in place. Why is this detail to be noted? Because Mircea’s wife, Lady Chiajna, served as the source for my Lady in Black character. Again, Iorga comes in handy. Along with him for a better understanding of Lady Chiajna’s character over the literary ages of Romania, I have come across Alexandru Odobescu’s short
story bearing her name. Portrayed as a bloody persona, trying to impose on the throne of Walachia her youngest son (Peter the Young, died at 23) by any means, she bought favors at the Gate, married one of her daughters with Sultan Murad, but fell shortly out of grace due to other villainous attempts, being finally exiled to Alep, Siria. Physical evidence of her existence consists of the village wearing her name and her grave in Galata, Istanbul.

But back to Targoviste. The Gate kept a weary eye over the city while imposing certain regulations: the town was to be kept without any fortifications/buttresses. This might be one of the reason why not much of Peter Earring’s royal court has survived to our days. However it is widely accepted by historians that during Peter’s reign the city received a crucial makeover, one with a scent of western Renaissance based on his journeys and observations. Peter completed and renovated the work of his predecessors, while also adding according to his own aesthetics. Direct proof of his skill as a ruler comes from the recordings of a foreign traveler in Walachia, by name Franco Sivori, son of a Genovese merchant, Benedetto Sivori:

As the month of February arrived, his Highness decided to change his residence and retire to a town called Targoviste... The town is enriched with all sort of things, satiated with good water, with wells and fountains and a lovely river flowing by the prince's palace. His palace, built by his ancestors has large proportions and an accurate architecture; it was immediately enlarged by his Highness who added beautiful and grand chambers. He had a fountain made on the esplanade, with great toil and expense, which brought the water from a spring well from at least four miles far from the city, passing it underground through thick fir cradles. The prince ordered at the same time to have a beautiful church raised next to the palace, thus his Highness could pass over a covered bridge and enter the church from his chambers without anybody seeing him.... He ordered the making of unspeakably large and beautiful cages to keep wild beasts and italian gardens which were placed next to this palace. And he made everything with such expedition that everything seemed like a wonder. In less than six months everything was completed as more than one thousand people worked ceaselessly.35 (Sivori, 174)

And here we arrive to the root of my main source. Published starting with 1970 the collection (under the name: Foreign Travelers About the Romanian Principalities) numbering ten impressive volumes gathers the narrative products of ambassadors, merchants, soldiers, escorts, etc. Either crossing from Poland and following the commerce route to Constantinople or arriving from Paris, Rome or Genoa, the scribbling of these foreigners offers a refreshing lens over life in Walachia, Moldavia and Transylvania from 15th to 19th century. In this collection I came across

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35 Personal translation from Foreign Travelers in Romanian Principalities
the Memoir of Franco Sivori, one which spans from 1581-1589 (from Peter’s journey to meet the Sultan and bid for the throne till the time the two of them part ways in Venice, before Peter’s second try at regaining his position as a prince). The Editors believe that due to its format and style the Memoir is made out of several different writings, each serving a time and a purpose such as presenting the lord in a most favorable light if and when he needed help.

In some seventy pages we have our Italian traveler describing the arrival and the crowning in Bucharest, the political climate (including Walachia’s relationship with France, Poland, Transylvania and of course The Gate). There are also chapters dedicated to his refusal of being named as the Right Hand in the Royal Council, his trip to Transylvania at Sigismund Bathory’s court, and later on to Poland. Sivori offers very detailed information from Peter’s physical appearance to the way he acted and spoke in private. He emphasizes Peter’s qualities as a humanist, an architect. Also he pays attention to the international flavor and recognition Peter’s court has received, as more and more foreigners would make a detour just to pay visits to the Prince or be amazed by the outburst of renaissance in those “barbarous lands”. Sivori speaks of the peasantry approving of Peter’s choices as a ruler; however he also mentions the difficult way of living under the Ottoman pressure, especially at the time the tribute must have been paid. He doesn’t forget to mention the religion, the traditions, the nature of Peter’s people. Of particular interest stand the chapters dedicated to Khadim Pasha’s (Governor of Rumelia) treacherous plan and the wrong doing suffered by Peter after his escape to Transylvania (including getting robbed, being imprisoned in Medias, trying to escape, failing to do so). According to the editors this report was written in order to soften the hearts of the Western European rulers, and Sivori might have written it with the help of Peter, who around 1588 found himself in Rome trying to gain trust and financial support once more. The one question which arises at the end of reading the memoir is how honest have been the translators with Sivori’s work. It is interesting that the translators ask themselves how honest and objective has Sivori been when writing his memoirs. However what we have in front of us is a translation done at the peak of communism in Romania, a translation that at least had as a purpose to shed even more patriotism and pride in the socialist scholars. Through its entirety there are passages (even chapters) that cast a critical or even negative light over the Romanian society, culture, politics, ways of ruling. The editors took their toll in trying to soften the original text while using explanatory notes which most of the time start with :”the author in this case didn’t mean to…” . Leaving this aside, we can conclude
that the worst the translators/editors did was to add more flavor to Peter’s portrayal and a better victimization of the Romanians in front of the Turks. Their communist choices served well enough for my American made play. It would be difficult to catalog all the events noted in Sivori’s journal, which I have used, however I can sum up my choices, inventions and interpretations as a playwright, and should start by emphasizing that the first act is a very close interpretation of Sivori’s journal. As for the second act, I would like to take more creative credit.

First of all, most of the names in the play are true to Sivori’s journal or the additional sources. I took the liberty of not naming the boyars and inventing the character of Boyar Bogdan given the notion there should have been at least one honest figure at the court. I have omitted to use the real names of The Pope and The Sultan from that period, partly because “true supreme power does not need a name” and partly because during Peter’s ruling Pope Gregory XIII died right at the time of Peter’s dethronement, being replaced by Sixtus V. As for the Sultan, Murad III (ruled 1574-1595) the chronicles call him a great womanizer, one who bought hundreds of women to his harem (over 1000), but one who also paid the price by leading under the influence of his mother and first wife. And talking about the Sultan, we arrive at Mihnea the Muslim or the Turkified (Mihnea Turcitul) and his mother Ecaterina Salvaresso. As his name mentions, Mihnea converted to Islam after his second dethronement, becoming Mehmed Bey, District Governor of Nikopolis (in present Bulgaria). His son Radu, bid for the throne in 1601, the same year Mihnea dies in Constantinople and, as Iorga mentions:

> the renegade’s body must be resting under one of those tilted tombstones, embellished with a turban – as it was the custom of the day (Iorga, 34).

Mihnea is quite unique among Walachian rulers. Proof is the way history baptized him. While many other voivodes were fighting or opposing the Turkish yolk, while figures like Michael the Brave fought on multiple fronts and even managed to unify the three principalities (even if for only a short period of time 1600-1601), Mihnea’s weakness speaks by itself. Sense my choice in portraying him as fearful, frail, caught between the idea of what a prince should be and what he is. As for his mother, again my choice was to treat her as history did: she pressured the Turkish Porte to offer the throne back to her son. Ecaterina Salvaresso, wife of Alexander II, is mentioned as having a Venetian heritage. Ecaterina is not shy when it comes to describing Walachia. In a letter dated 1578, when she was herself a queen, as Mihnea was still a minor, Ecaterina tells her sister, Maria Fabrizio:
and the people here are barbarian, they aren’t like in Constantinople or Pera where Greeks and French are all mixed together. And yet on another hand, this country is not ours truly: today we are, tomorrow we are not – as it stands in God’s will and we find ourselves in the Turk’s hands

Her letters served also as a great resource when it came to developing the subplot of their exile and the action of trying to grab the throne once more. And so it seems relevant to have Mihnea’s nervous collapse in Act I, Scene 3 when he hears about the exchange of letters, going on. Again Ecaterina to her sister:

and I am with my son, Mihnea Voivode. And we are well, thank God and I beg you not to worry, because this is how the earthly ways are around here: when they dethrone someone, they (the Turks) don’t let him stay in Constantinople. I am sorry I can’t send you any money like before, since our throne has been taken away, and taken not for some sort of simple reason. (Jan 14, 1584)

Two years later in 1586, another letter tells us about the return to the throne: “God had mercy and returned to us our Earthly Throne” and a year into Mihnea’s second ruling while Peter was looking for support around Europe, Ecaterina offers a most detailed portrayal of the status quo. I have translated the passage below, as I found useful for the reader to place reality before my fictive take, or at least reality as given by the chronicles:

because that unlawful (Peter) came and mixed things and made in such a way that they (the Turks) have given him the throne. And when he came in the country, he robbed and stole that nothing was left. And since they saw him pulling the country apart, they called him to the Gate, just as they called us, but instead of going there, he took all what he had and ran away. And when we returned, we found the place in great debt since he was owing the Turks, the Jews, the French and the Genovese. And all of them went to the Sultan and cried to have their gold back. And the Sultan made it so that Mihnea Voivode should take the tribute plus all Peter’s debts. So now where and how can we escape from such a burden? (April 22nd 1587)

Another woman whom I offered the one romantic portrayal is Griselda, Sigismund Bathory’s sister. Sivori briefly mentions her in the journal, as he is being sent by Peter to ask for

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36 Translation of the author from Romanian sources. Some of the correspondence of those days was compiled for a very first time by historian, Nicolae Iorga

37 Translation of the author from Nicolae Iorga’s: Contributions To The History of Walachia For The Second Half of XVIIth Century. Anthology can be found in the Romanian Academy Archives: Series II, Batch XVIII, Historical Centuries, Bucharest, 1896
her hand. A note of the text mentions her as marrying Jan Zamoyski\textsuperscript{38} in 1585, right after Peter’s dethronment. My choice of romanticizing her identity is purely technical. My goal was to offer an alternative to Lady in Black and Ecaterina. Yet this alternative might as well reflect the way the latter characters have lived their life by their husbands. In the end Griselda becomes part of the big circle. She was loved, she will be a mother and she becomes a widow looking for means of surviving and revenge. While her tumultuous existence is about to start, Lady in Black and Ecaterina have finally found peace.

As for her brother Sigismund and his uncle Stephan Bathory King of Poland, the length and nature of this thesis do not allow us to treat in all worthiness their personas and way of ruling. I can say that my choices of portrayal (especially of the political context they find themselves in) have tried to stay true to Sivori’s journal and the very basics of history; that is: Sigismund growing out from being under the control of the regents, and constantly being caught between supporting the fight against the Turks in the south and the political desires coming from Vienna or Krakow. The idea of portraying him as always trying to learn and being reminded by Sivori that he is the prince did not come only from the age factor. During his life Sigismund did abdicate twice in favor of The Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II (in 1597, 1602) and once in favor of his cousin Andrew Bathory. As for Stephan Bathory, it is important to mention he was born and raised in Transylvania, was elected prince of Transylvania on May 25\textsuperscript{th} 1571 and was raised on the Polish Throne after the period of interregnum when Henri de Valois ruled under the name of Henry III Walezy.

Now that we talked about the main characters, it is time to talk about the main sources of interpreting politics. For a better understanding of the time period in a humanist European context, I have consulted Machiavelli’s, \textit{El Principe} (The Prince), written around 1513 but published five years after his death in 1532. Why Machiavelli? Why \textit{The Prince} for a play which deals with Eastern European history? I should say due to the epochal importance of his writing, but my paper would better be served if I remember that this book in itself is meant to be a gift addressed “to the Magnificent Lorenzo de Medici the Younger” though at the very beginning it was supposed to be dedicated to Giuliano de Medici, brother of Pope Leo X. But since Giuliano

\textsuperscript{38}important advisor to the King Stephan Bathory and Sigismund II Augustus. At the time Peter was looking for support in the west, Jan was Great Hetman of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Starost of Krakow.
fell out of Vatican’s graces, Machiavelli redirected his interest onto the next person who could help him. It is a writing with which Machiavelli was hoping to gain an academic position, at least, while in his earlier years he found himself in the high circles of politics as a governor. And it is in this introductory letter, when I started to see the connection between him and any other lord (let’s say Peter Earring) trying to gain something, knowing that all what he has for a start is his eloquence, ambition, ideas, words. Here we have Machiavelli’s introducing his gift to his Prince through a Dedicatory Letter:

Therefore since I desire to offer myself to Your Magnificence with some evidence of my devotion to you, and since I have not found among my valuables anything that I hold more dear or estimate so highly as the understanding of the deeds of great men, which I have learned through long experience of modern things and constant reading about ancient things….and now reduced into a small volume… May Your Magnificence therefore take up this small gift in the spirit with which I send it. And if Your Magnificence, from the peak of Your Magnificence’s height, sometimes will cast your cast on these low places, you will understand how undeservedly I endure a great and continuous malignity of fortune. (Machiavelli,40).

In Machiavelli’s vocabulary and treaty of power stand my choices of positioning Peter among the European leaders. In Machiavelli’s letter stand the multitude of letters that are being written, read, received, sent, kept, stolen, soaked in blood. In Machiavelli’s tryouts of gaining favors, his pride (well concealed when needed), his political experience in the Republic of Florence, his imprisonment while being accused of treason, his pardon, release and plans of regaining the trust of the powerful leaders through his writing and actually failing in doing so – stand Peter, Mihnea, the Boyars, Ecaterina, Lady in Black, or Khadim Pasha.

What is probably most interesting is the notoriety his work has achieved, while not being even published while he was alive. The same happens to his persona, due to the word of mouth of the crowned heads, not to mention his work is said to have inspired the bloody act of Saint Bartholomew’s Day and therefore was banned by the Protestants in 1572. Considering Peter had spent an amount of time at court of Catherine de Medici and her son Henric III, it’s a decent assumption to think that Peter knew or studied Machiavelli’s writing; even more so when Peter passed as fluent in six languages as a poet and a writer. How much he would have been inspired by such a writing, it’s hard to tell, unless we analyze step by step his ruling in accordance with the ideas expressed in the actual book. All this, including the reading of the work in its entirety offered me a backup tool, one which cannot be disputed when consulted in the context of writing
a historical piece. Of particular interest to me have been the chapters where Machiavelli compares the French way of ruling with the Ottoman way, especially in terms of occupying and maintaining peace in a province:

In our times the examples of these two different kinds of government are the Turk and the king of France. The whole monarchy of the Turk is governed by one lord: the others are his servants. And since his kingdom is divided into sanjacks, he sends different administrators to them and he substitutes and transfers them as he pleases (Machiavelli, 51).

The chapters on Civil Principality and On Cruelty and Compassion of a Ruler and On Those Whom princes have in their service for secret matters, occupy a special place in my research as well. Especially the latter one which was of great help in portraying Sivori, not only as a companion, but as a counselor. Peter and Sivori’s relationship in the play, their journey as companions to each other and later on as ruler and servant, is based on the following excerpt:

for the man who has someone’s state in his hand should never think of himself, but of the prince, and he should never bring to the prince’s attention anything that does not pertain to the prince. And on the other side, the prince in order to keep him good, ought to think of the minister by honoring him, making him rich, obligating him to himself, and sharing with him his honors and offices, so that he sees that he cannot stand without him, and that his many honors do not make him desire more honors, his many riches do not make him desire more riches, and his many offices make him fear revolutions. Thus when ministers and princes are made in this way, they are able to trust one another, and when otherwise, the end will always be harmful, either for one or for the other”.

It is not for this author to judge how Machiavellian is the play in context, characters and at last, theme. It can be said that when I was not able to make good use of the old masters writings, I got inspired and informed by a book more close to me: that is The Ottoman Law Of War and Peace/The Ottoman Empire and Tribute Payers of Dr. Viorel Panaite. Though a most intense reading for the less knowledgeable such as myself, this work was for me another checking point, especially when it came to accuracy in terms of titles, lands, expressions, foreign relations, political treaties, etc. For example at the time I am writing this chapter, I know at the next redrafting stage I will have to change every mentioning of the term Ottoman with Turk. As I am no Shakespeare, nor Robert Bolt, I also encountered problems with expressing the power rapport through language. Some questions, for example, rose when it came to Peter addressing The Sultan or the Western Powers. How would Sivori address Peter, or Peter- Sigismund? First
of all I chose the term Voivode for Peter, due to its old Polish/Slavic root and the frequent use in the correspondence:

The Turks are to call by this name the Christian princes of Moldavia, Walachia and Transylvania who are tributary to them, especially in the imperial Mandates and Letters of the Prime Vizir… (Panaite, 341).

However in Western sources, besides the borrowed terms hospodars, voyvoda, bey, the titles duke and prince were most frequently used for calling the rulers of the Walachia, Moldavia and Transylvania…”(Panaite, 342).

And if you ask the author why The Pope would call Peter – the thorn of Christianity – this can be easily verified by a scholarly source:

No matter what titles was applied to the rulers they were constantly described by way of accomplishment, with usual phrases for Christian European leaders as – ‘the most excellent of the princes of the sect of the Messia, the greatest of the Nations believing in Jesus” (Panaite 342).

For double checking the ways of classical expression, or researching in detail issues such as Authorization and Nomination by the Porte, learning about the coronation process back in Walachia, quoting Mihnea the Muslim on his second dethronement, finding out the exact amount of tributes being paid, Panaite’s book proved to be a great resource. Since finances constitute a substantial part of the plot, it was useful to find out that around Peter Earring’s reign there was a notorious increase in taxes. If by mid XVI century the amount was of about 15,000- 20,000 golden pieces, after Mircea the Shepherd the amount increased to 50, 000, reaching between 1574-1583 the amount of 104, 000.\(^{39}\) 1583 is the year when Peter comes to the throne\(^{40}\).

It is worthwhile to conclude my research keeping in mind that many a times the Western European States would blame the small principalities of the East for knotting treaties with The Porte. However it is also widely known that:

the capacity to resist of the small Balkan states was conditioned internally by removing of fights for throne and externally by establishing of an anti-Ottoman alliance of first-line states, yet efficiently supported by whole Christendom (Panaite, 314).

\(^{39}\) Sivori’s journals mentions a tribute payment of 150,000 scudis and the same amount in gifts.

\(^{40}\) Panaite, 385.
And here I arrive to the contemporary touch this play wishes to have. Are the days of tribute payers really gone? Are the days when small countries would be simply used as battlefields and small princes used as dummies, gone? Are the great powers blind when it comes to the needs of the weaker? How much of justice is really based on equity and how much is based on power, will and interpretation? Is this play really about the Ottomans, or Peter Earring? I honestly don’t know or perhaps don’t wish to know.

What I had in mind is writing a historical piece. Yet maybe in one of the nights I was writing, Machiavelli whispered in my ear: “Whoever wishes to foresee the future must consult the past” and so I started to pray and think.

CHAPTER 3

“Originality is nothing but judicious imitation. The most original writers borrowed one from another.”

Voltaire

At the very beginning of my career as a novice writer, one of my mentors told me that the best tutor a playwright can have is the sum of all the playwrights before him. I was also encouraged not to borrow, but steal from their proficiency/efficiency. So without further due, in order to bring any originality this play might have, at the surface – I must conform and address the issue of stealing and yes, borrowing: what authors inspired me, which ones helped me solve a solely conflict or action issue, who has helped me to avoid a writer’s block, and so on. Whether I took some decisions on purpose, or whether I have discovered the source of inspiration later on (reading a play a year ago and reading it once more after completing the first draft of Peter Earring), whether some choices enhanced the dynamic or the play while some of them were brought to the page as a simple honest homage (playwright to playwright) I will try and do my best in acknowledging my sources, before I be accused of plagiarism and burned on the stake of high morality.

“The Rise and Fall of Peter Earring according to the stories and journals of his companion, Franco Sivori”. A long title for not such a long play. As a writer, I had to simply question myself what will draw an audience to the theater, especially a non-Romanian audience...
which is less, little or non familiar with the history or the interpretation of history from that
remote part of Europe. I had to choose between reducing the plot of the play to one line, or go for
David Ball’s simple yet effective take on “images in titles”:

Title tells a lot. If you know nothing of seagulls and wild ducks, find out before reading
*The Seagull* or *The Wild Duck*. The words that compose a title are usually most carefully
chosen in the script. If the title contains an image, know its implications and how they
evoke the shape and/or nature of the play (Ball, 73).

Of course I could have baptized the play very easily, *The Marionette* or *The Laws are Straws/ The Straws are Laws*, or for those addicted to post-modernism, I should have simply kept it: *Untitled*. None of these though seemed like they would have served or helped the audience in any way. There are names that are non-Elizabethan, a change of action to places that are familiar to none in contemporary playwriting: Rhodos, Tripoli, Targoviste, etc, and a time span of about ten years which again can be translated for an American audience in terms of “was Elizabeth alive at that time, what was she doing?” The solution finally came not by reading Brecht but Walter Benjamin’s treaty on Brechtian theater. Sure, I kept in the back of my mind all along a title which would remind the audience they are watching a story, a dramatization of a real piece of history, a piece of Romanian history seen through the eyes of a foreign traveler. The idea of naming my play and having it compared even remotely with “The Rise and Fall of Arthuro Ui”, sent cold shivers down my spine. And so I did it.

Walter Benjamin pinpoints better than Brecht himself what epic theater aims to achieve:

> the epic theater purposes to deprive the stage of its sensation derived from subject matter. Epic theater allows for a circumstance which has been too little noticed. It may be called the filling in of the orchestra pit. The abyss which separates the players from the audience as it does the dead from the living. This abyss…has steadily decreased in significance. The stage is still raised, but it is no longer rises from an unfathomable depth, it has become a dais. The didactic play and the epic theater are attempts to sit down on a dais. (Benjamin, 65)

As a playwright I did not aim to achieve a play written in Brechtian style, using and abusing his *verfremdungseffect*. My goal was not to estrange the audience and the actors from the plot, or to make sure that at all times everyone is aware they are watching a play, without giving a chance for identification with the characters or the action taking place. My goal was instead to keep a weary eye over that orchestra pit Benjamin talks about, while filling it just enough so the
audience would dare to reach for this –first time, first told - Romanian story. In a way I used Brecht’s own weaponry so I can actually detach from his epic study. What does fall in the category of epic theater in this circumstance? The title as I said, signals the audience they are to watch a story, the Prologue where Sivori addresses directly to the audience and the last four stanzas told by the Fool at the end of the play reminding us again we did pay to watch a tale, a tale that one day or another will be told once more, in a better or at least different way. It can also be argued that the episodic way of storytelling pertains to the epic form as well.

epic theater is in league with the course of time in an entirely different way from that of the tragic theater. Because suspense belongs less to the outcome than to the individual events, this theater can cover the greatest spans of time. (Benjamin, 64)

The action of my play spans over a period of about ten years (1580-1590). However my time line was used only for unraveling the plot and character development. True to the fact, I was interested in the outcome: one made of gold, pride, villainy, international relations, treason, straws and laws, laws of straws. The time line was an auto-control device for myself, and you can see that in this draft, except the beginning of the play (where the year is communicated using again an epic technical device and not a note in the program), the start of the second act (in the same way) and the very end, I do not keep track of time. I assume the audience is interested enough in seeing the plot unravel, and do not wish to provoke or put to use any other sort of epic distraction.

Again, returning to the title, all what I am shooting for is gaining the audience trust and interest. I declared the Prologue optional, knowing that its sole purpose is didactic, and it can serve a purpose if the play is produced for an American or non-European audience. The use of the same prologue in a Romanian production would have the effect of a boomerang. I am not sure about the trust level, but the level of interest would surely go down. Redrafting the prologue a dozen times for a dozen different cultural and social perspectives seems doable and of common sense. Time is everything in a play, and a two full page exposition on the state of Europe vs. the Ottoman Empire in the context of a Romanian Principality – can be proclaimed as a suicide. The Prologue however suffers not as much from a Brechtian arrow wound, but was written bearing in mind the opening device of Peter Shaffer’s *Equus* or *Amadeus* and in principal Robert Bolt’s *A Man for All Seasons*: that is; a character fading in or focusing his thoughts onto the main action.
of the play. It stands in the qualities and the portrayal of the Common Man (servant to Thomas Moore) I found the courage in opening my play with a character thinking if to tell the story or not, being aware that someone is watching, someone picking his nose, etc.

The style I eventually used was a bastardized version of the one most recently associated with Bertolt Brecht… It does seem to me that the style practiced by Brecht differs from the style taught by Brecht. At all events I agree with Eric Bentley that the proper effect of alienation is to enable the audience – to deepen, not to terminate their involvement with the play” (Bolt, xv)

I agree that the epic touches cover the abyss, deepen the understanding, and may at times help in bolting the plot. I also remember that the real start of the epic theater was a short exchange of lines between someone on the stage and someone coming from the audience. It happened at one of Piscator’s productions and is described in detail in his wife’s book: “The Piscator Experiment”. The story is worthy of being mentioned, because it shows the simplicity of the event and the course dramatic form took ever since. It happens that when the curtain came up, all the actors knew that certain pieces were missing from the set, due to the prop master being late. The task of performing became more challenging, so when the techie finally showed up in the auditorium carrying with him a backdrop, one of the actors went out of character and asked the man where he has been, why was he so late. The actors helped in setting the backdrop and whatever else was needed in order to continue the performance, under the eyes of an intrigued audience.

It is to this story I turn again and again, in understanding with no other sort of pretension the epic form. It is also the story that made me take a closer look into Piscator’s own work, and I must confess that using his “conveyor belt technique” in order to show the audience, the character’s development through time – did seem appealing when it came to Peter and Sivori crossing the Balkans or arriving in Constantinople. Another visually stimulating technique would have been using clay figures representing the Ottoman court or the Ottoman army when we arrive at the crowning scene or invading Bucharest. These, however, were Piscator’s directorial epic choices in adapting a novel such as Tolstoy’s “War and Peace”. Loading my play with such imagery and waiting to have them reinvented once more by a director would have just taken from the sole purpose one of the main characters has: to tell the story for generations to come.

The epic in my play ends at the acknowledgement of both sides, of the abyss, the empty space in between. And it was one of my goals to establishing a common sense awareness, one
that does not become an impediment in either thinking or feeling. It is the awareness of an audience member picking his nose while Peter Earring suffers an incredible injustice, and it’s the same awareness when it comes to the same audience member shedding a tear or cursing the tragic way Peter ended. Such statements might sound boldly hyperbolical, but where there is a lack of dramatic skill there is a surplus of trying to impress through other means, trying to go for theme and mood rather than action. This awareness, made known by both sides, this truce that should not make the playwright smarter than the audience and vice versa – is what makes the same playwright use a word like “shitr” in the opening of his play. And in my case it has not been for any shock or comic value at all. In this case, the choice came as an homage to one of my favorite playwrights, Alfred Jarry. Above having his *Ubu Roi* being criticized as being “a vulgar imitation of Shakespeare and Rabelais because its sets are economically replaced by a placard and a certain word is repeated” – Jarry is shooting for challenging his audience’s psyche. He also dares to describe his contemporary viewers as

suffering from a dearth of sensation, for their senses have remained so rudimentary that they can perceive nothing but immediate impressions. The public is a mass – inert, obtuse and passive – that it needs to be shaken up from time to time so that we can tell from bear like grunts where they are, and also where they land. Light is alive and shade is passive, and light is not detached from shade but, given sufficient time, penetrates it. (Jarry, 125)

Jarry, just like many others of his time and just like Chekhov’s Treplev – is preaching for new forms and sees the audience as being a body in itself, one that is inapt at taking decisions or thinking on its own. People come to see theater because that’s what is right and nice to be doing. This act will be followed by dull and senseless forms of praise, because again that’s what is the common sense standard. Individual critical thinking does not really exist, old values are the values that matter, and trying to scratch your intellect seems an unorthodox act. Jarry challenges the mentality of his age through one word and gets the confirmation he may or may not have been looking for, having his play banned.

My homage to Jarry reduces to using the same word (at the very beginning of the play, when Sivori describes the political situation in Europe), the concept of light and his idea of an audience. There is a passivity of the powerful characters such as Henric, Stephan Bathory and The Pope, passivity which becomes aggressive only when their values are being threatened. They pray and think, think and pray, move armies by playing chess, plan crusades and spread
religions, while not actually popping their heads outside to see what is happening in and to the real world. They do so only when a top dog makes his entrance: The Sultan, and do so then out of fear. They think of change, yet a change that would only contribute to their own good. In the same time they take a stand in front of Peter’s pride/eloquence, responding with a sort of condescending paternal quality. They might as well believe that the worst way of punishing is by not talking to the punished, by exiting the theater of life, by booing without knowing they boo their own mortal existence. In the end they become an audience, with backs turned to the one who wishes to tell a story of life, while more light is being spread around them. It is their choice of not receiving the light. But the light is there to be taken, to be shared and enjoyed. It is a light that for one spectator might have only an aesthetic quality, for another it might mean joy and hope, for another the light of Christ, the one each Eastern Orthodox is supposed to take and share with the next, in the night of Easter. It might have all these physical and metaphysical qualities, yet by page one hundred it dissolves, leaving the stage in darkness, making place for the abyss, where we find ourselves as spectators once again. How are we going to fill this abyss? With Brechtian theories, good deeds, prayers or thoughts? Is it up to us, or up to the time to have its saying, to make us evolve into the old, while the new is trying to find its bearings.

There is one character in this play, who through his “silence and obedience” might actually have an answer to all our questions, fears and resolutions. That is our dummy, our marionette, one controlled by strings more or less invisible. Independent in form but in content made from the same straws, the ones of a king or of a common man, the marionette stands as a witness and a participant. It is as Edward Gordon Craig would put it: ”the perfect actor”, and in his image we can detect our story.

There is only one actor – nay, one man- who has the soul of the dramatic poet and who has ever served as true and loyal interpreter to the poet. This is the Marionette. He has many disguises, and he impersonates known heroes and despised persons equally well. You have come across him in some deserted cathedral in Italy or even in England. There you will have seen him hanging upon the Cross. And many Christians love him: he is interpreting the Drama of the Poets – Man and God. Or you have caught a glimpse of him in some temple in the Far East. Or in the arms of a child – interpreting the little hearts and the larger dreams of love! Yet silently he waits until his master signals him to act, and then in a flash and in one imitable gesture, he readjusts the injustice of justice, the illegality of the law, the tragic farce of Religions, the broken pieces of philosophy and the trembling ignorance of politics. Gentlemen-The Marionette! (Craig, 93,94).
While Craig believes that the director is the one in power to bring new meaning to the written work through color, light, sound and shaping the space, he also introduces the idea of staging around non-living actors: an idea that scared many yet one that gave me a lot of strength in introducing the marionette not as a simple prop or metaphor catcher, but embodiments of the Common Man, Sivori, Peter and Mihnea. After Franco Sivori’s exposition a dummy is raised bringing with it the time of action. Even without the prologue, the event of the dummy appearing brings life, activates the scene. Just a few lines into the first scene between Sivori and Peter, we understand that the dummy is also the body of a man who committed a deed punishable by death. Further on, the dummy takes the place of a crucifix, and becomes a symbol of immortality; yet immortality which becomes mortal or changes its immortal status due to human need and greed. We have workers on one of the platforms who patch one God on top of another. For the spectator I can only hope that the marionette brings theme, color, excitement, and meaning to things which are meant to stay dull. As a dramaturge the marionette serves any function I need it to, and proves Craig’s point: only for the theater, the dummy is alive since it delivers the necessary information, it fills an empty space, it is celebrated outside when Peter is in prison, it gives birth to polemics at the great courts of Europe, and it makes mortals wonder what is better: to be a hanged man or a lifeless dummy and the response stands in Lady Justitia’s balance.

Craig sees in the return of the marionette the opportunity of returning to “the ancient joy in ceremonies” where Creation will be celebrated and “homage rendered to existence”. He traces back the dummy to the time when forms and masks would make a play work, when the audience was identifying itself in the stories told by these, carrying less about whom brings life to whom. The marionette offers the perfect form, a perfected beauty, and an understanding not of the living reality, but of the deep and immortal soul, the soul which in the first place gave a chance for art to exist. Art and therefore theater cannot be feeding itself from reality in order to recreate reality. The Marionette in the end controls the spectator, his fears, inhibitions and desires and pin points the direction towards a broader understanding of the self. And so in many ways the marionette in this pla, is the one who controls the audience’s strings. There is no need of further subtitles and explicatory notes about its function. The Marionette is another actor, possibly the best on my stage. It is important to consider the role it plays in the scene of bidding, between Peter, Mihnea and the Sultan at the end of Act II. Here I have introduced two marionettes, not one (a question in the redrafting process might actually address this decision). While one is an actor but also can
be translated into a symbol, two straw dummies already seem to regulate the story. At this point I am still not sure what would be more efficient, and will probably remain unsure until actually seeing the script on its feet. Craig himself notes that such a product can be the cause of many cheap smiles and commentaries in the audience, and therefore we can only conclude one way or another someone will look as a fool: perhaps the audience (and we don’t wish for that, unless we have Jarry by us) perhaps the director, perhaps the playwright. Talking of fools, I am fairly certain I am the only Romanian playwright who has tried to write a play about XVIth century Walachia, while introducing an unmistakably Shakespearean character. Our fool, as Shakespeare’s, has been endowed with what’ is often called “the fool’s license”, being of course- “full of folly and jest”. He can speak his mind at all times, trade houses and sing for any master, he can be simple and play the part of comedic relief yet he can offer useful information such as where and when he has seen Franco Sivori.

Our Transylvanian fool does about the same: mocks and comments. He finds a way out of not being punished, many a times philosophizes on madness and who is madder than him, gives lessons of life, purging the mankind of its own folly. He follows whoever he thinks is worthy of his commentaries, serves, observes, dies or disappears, such as Lear’s fool. Our fool, however, transcends death, and plays along the issue of being mad or dead. Gareth Lloyd Evan’s short treaty of Shakespeare’s Fool: The Shadow and the Substance of Drama, confirmed my beliefs and ideas from a scholastic perspective and strengthened the scene when our Fool makes his first appearance, at the court of the Mayor of Medias.

He is almost as free to speak about the world of the play as we are in the audience, but the best kind of critic, like the best kind of Fool, is always at hazard because both are more likely to speak a truth that no-one wishes to hear unless they speak it themselves” (Evan, 132)

I am not aware of any published historical data that treats such a subject in Romanian literature or history. We know however that since Transylvania was under the control of the Habsburg Empire and had stronger connections with the west, the existence of Fools at Transylvanian courts is most likely to have occurred. Sighisoara, a “burg” built by guild masters in XIII century and perfectly preserved to our days, has some sort of physical evidence, if we are to identify one of the wooden figurines hidden in the Clock Tower with a Fool. As for the execution ritual that The Mayor of Medias is employing (ACT II), you can always buy a $2 ticket that will get you in one of the couple of torture chambers in Transylvania. All in all,
picking the character of the Fool over any other kind of servant offered great dramaturgical flexibility and freedom. It is not the kind of freedom that excuses parts of the play from not making sense, but we can actually see that the license works when going back to the Fool’s appearance in the mad or dead scene between Khadim Pasha and Lady in Black. As a spectator I did not need any more information, I accepted both realities with folly. As a playwright of course I had to wonder if this choice will actually work for everyone else. I still have to find out. In the end my fool sings, and does so in the likes of Feste or Puck. Puck in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, asks for understanding, forgiveness if anyone felt offended, also reminding everyone they have witnessed a play. At the end of Twelfth Night, Feste embraces the audience by singing about the stages of life and ends by assuring the audience, the story will be told again and again, better and better. A comparison with my Fool reveals what I have borrowed and shaped according to my dramaturgical needs:

**FESTE**
A great while ago the world begun,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain
But that's all one, our play is done,
And we'll strive to please you every day.

**THE FOOL**
The streets are empty, fire still grunts in the stove
Lady Justitita sleeps tight in the bosom of Jove
If you think our story is not worth two pieces of gold
We promise to find another way of having it told.

To continue on the path of Shakespearean influences, I came up with giving a shot at trying to end a few scenes with a rhyme couplet. The decision came again as an homage, one which might have made a fool out of me and the ability to communicate in English. The ending of a scene with a rhyme increases the dramatic expectations, it sends the spectator into the next scene with great speed, it makes him want to know more.

Based on the historical time line that we have, it is interesting to note that at the time of Peter Earring’s death, William Shakespeare had not started yet his first play. Being done with Shakespearean influences I shall move along to a great dramaturgical dilemma I came across in the Second Act. It refers to the scene happening in two different locations yet in the same time: Ecaterina and Miheana in Targoviste and Peter and Griselda in Venice: two rightful rulers are about to head to the Turkish Gate and bid for the throne once more and two women (a mother, a widow and ex wife, a wife, a future mother and a future widow) who can only be compared with pillars of strength. I confess that while the First Act had a straightforward developmental arc and seems to be tightly knit, the Second Act became the real challenge, and remains in need of a more compelling forward strategy. Franco Sivori’s actual journal becomes abundant in names
and happenings from all the courts of Europe, as he is trying to find Peter and further on get him out of prison. At the time of writing, I didn’t find in myself the skills to dramatize or try to interpret all the political layers, backgrounds, etc. This is when I came up with the romanticized version of Griselda, and the original choice of having her setting Peter free. By doing so however, I came across another obstacle in the likes of: Now what?!

For the first time I had to ask myself what was I trying to achieve with this play, what was I evoking, and after all, what was the theme, knowing that:

Theme is an abstract concept made concrete by play’s action. Theme is not meaning; it is a topic in the play. Theme is a result, it emerges from a script’s workings (Ball, 78).

I searched further in the action of the play – whatever I had so far in the 80 something pages. And that’s when I came across the potential of Griselda…as the embodiment of a circle of existence. By this I mean what I have mentioned in the second chapter: she was a lover, wife, mother, widow. By freeing Peter, she proved as strong as Ecaterina and Lady in Black in one place. By giving her a son, she proved just as motherly. By supporting Peter to the throne, just the same. By becoming a widow…

The scene involving the two rulers and the women who actually saved their lives, is based on Rodolfo Usigli’s – The Impostor, a play I got quite familiar with in my first term as a graduate student in this program. The play follows more or less the same pattern of rise and fall to power, but the rise and fall of an impostor, a failed professor of history - Cesar Rubio - who has the opportunity of selling himself as the embodiment of the great Mexican revolutionary figure. His thirst for recognition, wealth and fame soon gather around his conception of martyrdom. The mother, Elena, a strong woman, carrying a family on her back, is a witness of her own husband’s ascension into the decadent pit of politics and mischief, as he himself becoming more and more proud, feeding off the idea of being invincible. He has a mission to save his people, he looks at himself as to “the chosen one”, he becomes the “axle in the wheel”. In the second to last scene, Elena is trying to convince her husband to stay home, before he heads out to the voting poles – the last obstacle before grabbing absolute political power. He has been warned that he might lose his life there, yet he cannot be stopped. He thinks and feels that since he already changed the course of history, things must follow their course as they are meant to. This idea is also followed by his pride, the self assumption of being quite immortal: immortality coming out of the name he has created, anyway.
The resistance against his wife’s pleading, the taste of martyrdom embedded in pride, served as inspiration to my own dramatic treatment, yet with a twist. In my play, Ecaterina knows that Mihnea’s only way to remain a king is his weakness, lack of strength and pride. Griselda knows that Peter’s loss stands in his own name and pride. It is one of her first remarks when she saves him from prison, and such a quality – if it can be called so, might have stirred her imagination and desire to free Peter Earring the man, not the lawful ruler of Walachia. The scene seems to work due to the many contrasts going on. It does nothing but showing the obvious: a mother advising her son how to stay safe and survive, a wife thinking first and foremost at her future as a mother, and at a child with no father. The scene fits the overall play structure and prepares the audience for a round up. Its invisible quality is that it points towards an ending of the play: this is where we are, and there are so many variables you as a spectator can take into account. Perhaps the play should have ended right there and perhaps because of this scene the play loses momentum, however while listening to a read through, I realized it is an indispensable scene, a strong one (in logic and plot) which can support the action that is to come. It is also the scene that would need to be erased in course of a redrafting process, and the play would need to find its bearings and balance in a different concept, eliminating the complete circle of women, their responsibilities as empowered women and so on.

So far I have talked about homage, direct or inspirational dramaturgical influences. I believe another issue to be noted is the performance space. In this draft, I have chosen to give two options in terms of set requirements. One is for a smaller more intimate theater (in the likes of Studio 88) and one based on what a proscenium theater would offer. Of course it is the actor who should fill up the space, as Peter Brook would declare in his Empty Space. My treatment of a complicated set is due to my interest in art and art history. I must also say that perhaps the best thing in David Edgar’s Pentecost is the way he describes the place where the action takes place. My vision over a complex set design boils down to layers upon layers of art, conquerors, and Gods as well. I chose a courtyard of a Romanesque Basilica, since at best in its simplicity this Romanesque reads as neutral while pre Romanesque as well as Romanesque art found its bearings in Byzantium. Romanesque is not as heavy as Gothic since technically it does not want to reach bigger and higher proportions. The round arch posed a lot of trouble, therefore the focus of the architect and the builder stands in the form, in making the structure resistant enough. The Byzantine style characterizes most of the Romanian monasteries built from XIVth century on.
The space is most intimate, and becomes most heavy in meaning for the one who enters it. Of course in this category it is not suitable to include the majestic Constantinople’s Divine Wisdom/Hagia Sophia, but more likely a church such as Cora, erected nearby. A church in which God can be found in fresco and mosaics, while over time a minaret was placed, as well. Perhaps I was taken by describing the setting in too much of a detail. My choice of picking porticoes/gates of Gothic, Oriental and Byzantine proportions are solid proof in this circumstance.

Also in the likes of Peter Shaffer, Peter Weiss or the directorial approaches of Robert Wilson, the use of scrims will most likely define a more intimate theater space, or save the budget of a bigger one. There is yet another issue to discuss: the area above the platform/balcony, a place where color, artistic rituals, skill and Gods intersect. In our post 9/11 era it’s quite easy to imagine how the image of Muslim architects patching their own God (in this case, not a God, but floral motives) on top of our Christianity can be translated wrongly and blown out of proportions. For this and a handful of other choices (crusade, the idea of spreading religion, etc) that tackle or tickle the beard of our times, I find most valuable a continuous dialogue between the playwright and the ones who will take over the play. The art of “spectacle” might not belong to the “poet” as much as plot, character or thought do, but Aristotle still finds it to be a most important piece of the dramatic puzzle, and I do, too. Believing that such an art can only complete and strengthen our storytelling, I have included detailed descriptions of the space, seen or not seen by the audience. Sure, as a playwright I must learn when to let go of a script and give creative freedom to others, but I believe such freedom should make good use of what already the playwright has offered, in this case: layers upon layers of creation, of color and architecture.
CONCLUSION

So far we have discussed the Renaissance movement set in the context of the Ottoman Empire in what can be called the Classical Age (1300-1600), we have taken a closer look at the historical sources that inspired the play and the borrowed or stolen dramaturgical devices and theater theories/beliefs that influenced and shaped my work.

The means of getting inspired or stealing craft have been quite varied. Here and there the reader might also find the structure of a sentence or certain clumps of words to be utterly familiar, in the likes of a “Damask cheek”. One other thing is worthy of being mentioned: in letting myself be led or inspired by a number of master playwrights I did discover and was offered more creative freedom and input than ever before. The choices of these masters were bulletproof, and so my options however daring seemed safe, of common sense and with no other smart attributes other than what they really are: attempts/tryouts to make the dramatic engine work, move forward, curve the dramatic arc, bring the story to a palpable end, in order for another one can begin.

What conclusion can I draw? That writing a historical piece not only served in improving my skills as a playwright but also my skills as a humanist, and therefore it is highly recommended for each and every one of us to write at least one in a life time.

It is important to acknowledge once more the lack of historical works in contemporary Romanian theater and the need of something else other than what the Royal Court Theater or the American-Romanian cultural partnerships dictate. Apart from the politics and any international and social critical subtext this play might be providing, the work constituted an experiment, one which I wish to continue improving in the near future. It proved first and foremost to myself that I can write something else other than what the contemporary dramaturgical wave asks for. It broke the resistance towards research and brought if you’d like some sort of dignity to the art form I have chosen to pursue. Though the play is far from being fully polished, it seemed to have filled an empty space.

One can only hope that this empty space will at least be noticed by other playwrights as well. I think it is quite healthy to consider that every playwright can differentiate or separate the play he wanted to write from the play he has completed and the play that’s still existing in the back of his psyche. To such an extent, I know for sure I wanted to write a good historical play. I know The Rise and Fall of Peter Earring that made it on paper is an achievement based on a
considerable amount of planning, research and skill improvement. And so I judge it is fair to conclude that this first draft which had as models dramaturgical masterpieces, deals with a historical subject of great magnitude, has an assorted pallet of exotic characters, a story which blends romanticism with the politics and the religious convictions/conventions of the day, can signify at least a healthy amount of potential or lit up the path towards the great play, the one still finding trapped inside the ever changing playwright.
THE RISE AND FALL of VOIVODE PETER EARRING according to the journals and stories of his companion FRANCO SIVORI

A play by Cristian Panaite

Thesis Draft
CHARACTERS

PETER DEMETRIUS a.k.a PETRU CERCEL/PETER EARRING – Prince of Walachia, 1583-1585

FRANCO SIVORI – Peter Earring’s companion, counselor, ambassador.

BOYAR BOGDAN

YOUNG MAN (Gheorghe) – Bogdan’s Son.

STEPHAN BATHORY – King of Poland

SIGISMUND BATHORY – Prince of Transylvania, Stephan’s Nephew

LORD KENDY – regent of Transylvania

GRISIELDA – Stephan Bathory’s niece

HENRIC de ANJOU – King of France

THE POPE

THE SULTAN

KHADIM PASHA – Governor of Rumelia

LADY IN BLACK – past Queen of Walachia, grand grandmother of Mihnea

MIHNEA VOIVODE – Prince of Walachia (1579-1583, 1585-1591)

ECATERINA SALVARESSO – Mihnea’s mother.

HUSSEIN – a messenger, later on the Sultan’s Counselor

THE MAYOR of MEDIAS

THE FOOL

TWO YOUNG WOMEN

VLAD

Prison Guard, Attendants, Ladies, Servants, Boyars, etc.
Complex staging possibility As lights fade in, the audience finds itself facing the courtyard of a Roman Catholic Monastery/Basilica. There are rows of columns and arches, to the left and to the right, porticoes serving as entrances and exits. Upstage the same deal, except for a higher arched gate that can serve as the main entrance in a church, castle, fortress, etc. There is also a second level upstage. A sort of porch/platform with three other entrances. From right to left (audience pov) these entrances can be completed with different designs such as: oriental, Byzantine and gothic. Above this platform, there is yet another scaffolding being held by ropes, moving at times from left to right, up and down. This scaffolding is set up against a wall, one that loses its contour into the wings as well as into the sky, unless it curves, becoming a ceiling. This wall has been the canvas of many artists, and has seen life and death as created solely by mankind. From right to left (audience pov) a portion is covered by a Byzantine mosaic, the central portion is a Eastern Orthodox 15th century fresco and the left side is some sort of Western European Renaissance Painting with a Biblical theme. These three works are melting and molding into each other. At best their beauty lies in the way they interconnect. It’s not the story of God the audience should see, but the progression of beauty, of skill, and to an extent the history of good old Europe. But beauty cannot exist without its opposite. A good part of the Byzantine mosaic has been covered in plaster, another part of is about to suffer a crucial makeover: there’s paper, clay, brushes and more materials waiting to be used. A sketch of a floral motive or some sort of print can be seen covering a very small part of the orthodox fresco. The Western European Renaissance Painting has not been altered yet.

Simple Staging: an empty stage except for a couple of trunks, a throne, a platform upstage central, the straw dummy, visible ropes.

Time of Action: roughly between 1582-1590 A.D.
Places of Action: Bucharest, Targoviste – Walachia
Alba, Medias- Transylvania both regions of present Romania
Constantinople, Ottoman Empire
Venice, Vatican City, Paris, Warsaw, Vienna.
ACT ONE

*The rise and fall*

PROLOGUE (OPTIONAL)

(The FOOL enters, bringing with him a wooden chest. FRANCO SIVORI follows. SIVORI arrives center stage. He rests for a second. THE FOOL brings him a chess board. SIVORI thanks him, and starts arranging the pieces by himself.)

FOOL

Anything else you need, master?

SIVORI

Nothing but a worthy opponent and longer days.

FOOL

Then you must seek help in somebody else, not me. I am but a Fool.

SIVORI

Lucky you. What time is it?

FOOL

When streets are empty and fire still grunts in the stove.

SIVORI

Enough to tell a story?

FOOL

Enough. It's just a story. They will listen.

SIVORI

You are truly a fool if you think mortals are made for listening.

FOOL

Here's my two Scudis master. Tell me the story. I shall listen. Always did.

SIVORI

Keep your gold. It makes me sick just thinking of it. Very well... It is said that in the days of the Byzantines, true love for God was measured by how much one could crush and break Him. Who would have thought that in order to create the perfect image of our Lord, one must reflect the eternal glory and seek for penitence into each of this thousand marble pieces. But the wheel of Gods is always turning, soon one is replaced by another. There is no escape, and
so a poor mortal such as I, can always conclude that man has created God by his own image. Out of clay they say?

(Loud Knocks. Clash of arms. Battle screams. Sivori turns to the audience.)

In 1453 the Ottomans were knocking at Heaven's doors. Constantinople that is. Fifty three days. That's how long it took to break those doors. And it took one sentence, one which does not require more than half a mouth-full of air, to make the West tremble: "Hereafter my capital is Istanbul". Mehmed the Conqueror said it - and so it was.

(More Loud Knocks.)
Some three years later, Belgrade, the last Christian buttress, as the chronicles call it; fell, collapsed, drowned, dissolved. Your pick. The next stop…

(More Loud Knocks.)
Vienna. The word in the streets was, if Vienna falls the fate of Europe is sealed. But then again, some said that man would never come out of the dark ages…and look at us now, getting all fattened in the shade of new religions, new lands and new wars. Vienna escaped - Buda didn't.

(More Loud Knocks.)
Fool, Fool - I was right. Look…I see some yawning, some nose picking, some not caring for a second about the rise of an Empire? This is perhaps why most of them ultimately fall. I beg of you, let me finish this most comprehensive and useful exposition. It will pay off. Surely there must be something I can catch your attention with: the fact that I, myself am a Western traveler should amaze you. (beat) A traveler - yes. One who saw…

(More Loud Knocks.)
I'll be short (A LONG PAUSE) We're in big shit. That's it. I said it. Don't make me say it again. (pause) Well, since God himself was covered up, maybe he will not care for me saying it over and over: SHIT! That is right. The way I see it - is that…we're not doing too well…for example…Spain and England in big shit. That's because of one Virgin Queen. The French Catholics and the Huguenots - in big shit. That's because of one Frigid Queen de Medicis and her son, Henric III. The Pope - always taking shit from some and spreading shit to many more. The Habsburg Empire…what can you say? Strictness in itself can provoke great moral constipation. Besides Rudolf II was a clown of his own class. Poland looking to import and switch kings. That's more shit to deal with. They ended up with a good one though- Stefan Bathory by name. Russia and Ivan the Terrible - what bigger shit can one get himself into? Serbian Kingdom - down the drain. The Greeks- shitting on the ruins of their own civilization. Then in between, close to the Ottomans, three Principalities: Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania. Same roots, Latin by nature though for centuries trampled by the Tatars and the Slavic migrations. All in all, vassals to the Ottoman Gate. That is to say, they pay tribute and choose their leaders according to what the Sultan dictates. In short, there is a lot of ass kissing going on along with bloody and quick switch of rulers. The nobility moans and cries like a whore every time some new prince steps in. It's tough to explain, but
that's what I am here for…or at least that's why I decided to head for Walachia: the southern principality, separated by one lucky gift: The Danube, a great drainage channel for all the blood spilled across or in the west. One would ask? But why? Why leave such pristine lands? Why not enjoy the crowded streets of some civilized place, of Rome, Paris or London. Why not stick with your old man's business, or sniff under some lady's skirts? Why not serve a cultured master? Why? Why? Why? Why? Man must have created this question after he finished polishing God. Why? Why? Why?

(With each Why? our traveler becomes younger while THE FOOL hands him a dagger, a cape.)

I did find a master in those distant lands…my words are too humble to describe his nature, though many would call him an architect. Alas, one too good for the lands he ruled; too honest for his times…too…sophisticated…yes, sophisticated is good. So sophisticated I even started to write just like he did. Here...

(SIVORI takes out a small piece of paper, unrolls it - struggles to decorate the writing)

It's of no good. It's been a while…the ink has faded just as myself. I think I can remember it though…

SCENE 1

On the scaffolding, the work of covering up the Byzantine fresco has started.

Two or three workers are patching with haste. They will do so, anytime the SULTAN, KHADIM PASHA or HUSSEIN appear.

(SIVORI looks up as he is trying to remember the words. A bright light blinds him. The workers grab some strings and start pulling hard. From a pit a dummy made out of straws, is raised slowly. By its throat hangs a plank. Written on it: 7090: 1582 A.D)

FRANCO SIVORI

A man is but a straw, a king is a whole bundle
The Holy Book teaches us such bundles cannot be broken
Oh, but they can light up and burn
If only their fire would enlighten the others.
If only their smoke would suffocate the sinful

Such is the duty of a king; Not fear he is made of straws
(PETER DEMETRIUS enters. He has been listening for a while to SIVORI.)

PETER
The straws are laws. The laws are straws. Still talking to yourself, Sivori?

SIVORI
Composing my lord.

PETER
Yesterday you were spending time in the company of chess, now you are writing poetry. Is this why you were keeping your gate locked? So I won't see you in such a state of melancholy.

SIVORI
Nothing wrong with feeding my mind and soul.

PETER
I would rather prefer to hear the sound of galloping not rhyme. With the Sultan waiting there is no time to waste. Besides, the clouds above us and the Panonian fields can't do us too much good.

SIVORI
(still staring at the dummy)
I shall make haste, my lord. May the Good Lord protect us.

PETER
I thought Genovese don't fear anything.

SIVORI
Maybe they don't, but Venetians sometimes do. Mixed blood can only mean trouble.

PETER
Such appearances don't frighten me. Not anymore, at least. You know I used to practice hunting on such…phew, he is all rotten.

SIVORI
On dead people, my lord? That's blasphemous.

PETER
Tell me Sivori, what do you see in front of you: a hanged man, or a lifeless dummy?

SIVORI
Is this a test my lord?
PETER
I cannot test the one in whose pockets lays my one chance of being crowned. So tell me…

SIVORI
Both my lord.

PETER
Ah, both. Smart, smart. And yet if you had to choose - which would provoke more pity in your guts?

SIVORI
I pity the hanged man for meeting death, I pity the dummy for not knowing what death is.

PETER
You answered like a true diplomat.

SIVORI
I thank you, my lord.

PETER
And stop calling me, your lord. If for anything - I am your servant. Yours and your noble family's.

SIVORI
You must serve nothing but your earth and your own people. My father lend you his fortune…

PETER
Eighty thousand Scudi to be more precise…right in here.

SIVORI
If you wish…and he did it not because you promised a generous payback, but because he knows you will accomplish great things.

PETER
And all great things come at a price. I've been entitled to the throne of Walachia since the day I knew my name is Peter Demetrius. My father ended up poisoned while I was kicked around by the Selim the Great: from Rhodos to Cyprus and the other way around. The schooling and the beatings must have served me well, since when I finally found myself on some forgotten western shores - the dream of taking what's been mine all along has welcomed me. Soon I learned there is no shame to beg and promise at the great doors of Europe. Though both must be done with the touch of a ladybug. True, when my muse left me - I had to use my gold, when I was out of gold I sent gifts, when I was out of gifts I sent letters, and when I was out of ink and paper all what I had left was the smell of foreign feet in my nostrils and one curved spine from so much reverence.
SIVORI
And soon you shall straighten up and grab the throne.

PETER
Not before a last bend over in front of the great Sultan. I should make sure he does not take it as some other sign of favor.

SIVORI
Why worry so much. You got the letter of recommendation from Henric de Anjou.

PETER
I got more than that. I got an earring and a mustache just like him. See? You should have seen his face when I appeared in front of his mother. All what she said was: Henric, why can't you be a little bit like our Peter?

SIVORI
You also have the Pope's blessing.

PETER
That's because His Eminence Gregory the 14th - no, the 13th th sees in me the thorn of Christianity. I don't know what to make of it.

SIVORI
The French Ambassador at the Gate, is already preparing your entrance.

PETER
I am lucky he likes my poetry.

SIVORI
And Mihnea, will not be lord for long. He cannot possibly outbid you in such a short period of time, especially with the nobility growing weary.

PETER
You forgot about his mother, Ecaterina. A bitch who has much clout at the Gate. And she is not alone. Do you know that all around Constantinople you can trace and sniff the history of our lands...of what has been, of what's to come. Yes, Sivori - There's blood and treason in every inch of a brick. Bastard sons craving for their one chance - just as I did. Men with most royal roots cut short of life. Widow mothers and mothers of mothers waiting like furies to take their revenge on the next chosen one. It's all a great wheel of fortune and we are about to bid as well. Tell me my friend, are you willing to trade your place with mine?

SIVORI
I would rather live the life of a dummy.

PETER

48
That can be fixed once we arrive in Bucharest. All what I remember from that rotten swamp the Turks call our capital, is the perfidy of the rich, the idleness of the poor and my father's Godly goodness.

(BEAT)
It takes a thousand stones to create a mosaic, Sivori, a hundred colors to paint our Lord, and ten commandments to be an Orthodox. But it takes just one thing to have it all -

For the next sequence lights will fade in and out, as the passing of several nights and days. The Dummy disappears as well.

SIVORI

Luck?

PETER
You are too dogmatic, my friend.

SIVORI
Readiness?

PETER
Far from that. It has nothing to do with where we're going.

SIVORI
Is this one of your riddle poems again?

PETER
Could be…

SIVORI
Why are you torturing me?

PETER
Makes the time pass.

SIVORI
The good blood between you and Osman Pasa?

PETER
May his God keep him in peace on the Persian front. Giving up? I'll tell you. You can grasp it all inside your first if…

Drums. They stop.

(HUSSEIN enters.)
HUSSEIN

Peter Demetrius, bastard son of Ioan Patrascu Voievod, who died by your God twenty five years ago, you are welcomed by the Gate to ask what is justly yours, as long as you engage to pay the tribute which is rightfully ours in accordance with the Sultan's wishes. Do you have anything to say or more to offer, Peter Demetrius - new Governor of Walachia?

PETER

I am the Sultan's servant in words and action, though I shall not serve his God.

HUSSEIN

In the year of your God 7091, kneel and receive thy crown.

(The Crowning Drums. SULTAN appears on the balcony followed by an ATTENDANT who carries a crown. THE SULTAN checks the work done in covering the Byzantine mosaics. Satisfied, he takes one of the buckets, and lowers it on a string. PETER and SIVORI wait at the bottom. They load the bucket with bags of money. THE ATTENDANT pulls up the bucket, empties it. THE SULTAN puts the crown in the bucket and lowers it once more. SIVORI takes it and sets it on PETER's head. SULTAN claps. SIVORI and PETER bow and retreat. SULTAN watches them leave. Claps again. MIHNEA, the Wallachian Lord and his widow mother - ECATERINA enter. MIHNEA wears a crown made of straws. ECATERINA brings HUSSEIN a small chest of gold. HUSSEIN takes it.)

HUSSEIN

Mihnea, son of Alexandru Voievod, who passed in the world of your righteous just five years from this day, you have been summoned by the Gate to renounce your crown and people. You must leave at once the land of Walachia which has been given and taken in accordance with the Sultan's will. Do you have anything to say or more to offer? (pause)

ECATERINA

Where to?

HUSSEIN

For now, Istanbul - where you shall remain our servants for the time being.

ECATERINA

We thank the Sultan for his lenience.

HUSSEIN

Oh, if it were for the Sultan - you would have been long gone and drowned.
(HUSSEIN takes MIHNEA's crown. SULTAN claps. HUSSEIN drops the crown, which disintegrates. THE SULTAN exits, followed by ATTENDANT.)

(ECATERINA kneels and starts to gather the straws. MIHNEA exits.)

(On the platform THE POPE, HENRIC III and STEPHAN BATHORY make their entrance.)

THE POPE
This Peter Demetrius…

HENRIC
The legitimate ruler of Wallachia, your Excellency.

THE POPE
Legitimate, illegitimate, it does not concern me…they can be as legitimate and intimate as they wish out there. What does worry me, is his big loud mouth. Crowned just a few months ago and he already talks too much, brags too much. And what's worse - in all kinds of tongues.

STEPHAN B.
His tongue is a sign of renaissance, for those bloody barbarous lands.

HENRIC
And let's not forget you yourself called him…

THE POPE
The thorn of Christianity. I know, I know. I call every single God damn Eastern European voivode as such. How should I call them otherwise? Beggars? Bastards? It wouldn't be proper, would it now?

STEPHAN B.
A fresh throne and an almost impossible country for ruling. Peter's outburst of excitement must be understood. I have great faith in him.

THE POPE
He calls me his pal. His chum. Who does he think he is? Not even the Sultan would dare such a thing. He calls you, Henric - his buddy buddy. I have it on good word. Do you approve of such an attitude?

HENRIC
I…
THE POPE
See? You don't. Not to mention he's interested in mounting your niece, my lord.

STEPHAN B.
Griselda?! It cannot be.

THE POPE
You doubt The Pope?

STEPHAN B.
I doubt nothing which can be proven in words, acts and God, Excellency.

HENRIC
And these words come from the one usurper of Europe, when everybody knows I am the one and true king of Poland!

STEPHAN B.
Why? So my people can find on their own skin what means to celebrate Saint Bartholomew?

HENRIC
It was my mother who did all that shit.

STEPHAN B.
Like mother like son.

THE POPE
Silence! I cannot think because of you two. Where is Lord Rudolf? Why isn't he here?

HENRIC
Give him time, Excellency.

STEPHAN B.
Time that is right.

THE POPE
Bloody German - never on time. I'll teach him what means punctuality. Always busy with making "Habsburgia" look shiny. When the Turks were at Vienna's gates - he would play water music and serenades inside.

STEPHAN B.
It must have sounded horrible indeed if the Turks gave up the siege.
HENRIC
Excellency, I thought we were talking about Peter.

THE POPE
What?! You take me for a stupid. Give Peter time? What about the Ottomans? Will they give us time? It took days to have our Lord patched in the Minster of the Divine Wisdom. They covered Him in the clay of His own Father. Have you heard of such a cruelty before? Turbans that like to call themselves artists, coming from the far of the far east, took upon the challenge of covering my religion. Over night our poor Virgin Marys found themselves walled in alive. (beat) They haven't given time to our God. How will they give it to us - a bunch of mortal hypocrites?

(A LONG PAUSE)

THE POPE
What say you my lord Stephan? What does provoke a flicker in your eyes?

STEPHAN B.
A crusade, most honorable father.

(THE POPE's face suddenly changes for a split of a second, like he is suffocating)

HENRIC (COUGHING IT OUT)
Ouch! Se pa possible.

THE POPE
You want me to start a whole new crusade!? Are you nuts?

STEPHAN B.
No, but from what I hear, our Wallachian prince carries a jot of lunacy.

THE POPE
That's so assuring. With what? With whom? Who's willing to put an army on the line?

STEPHAN B.
I certainly am. And my nephew Sigismund is willing to follow me in any of my endeavors.

THE POPE
Will you Henric? You and your feisty Frenchmen? Will you both follow your pal, your buddy buddy? Hand in hand, nostril to nostril?

HENRIC
I believe my relationship with the Gate is as healthy as one could ask. Commerce and small pleasantries is all we need in order to maintain a successful balance of diplomacy and buried arms. Not to mention in the hands of Peter; Walachia, Transylvania and Moldova might end up united. And that's all what we need: one strong kingdom at the Danube.
THE POPE
I fear one thing other than the Ottoman hordes. And that is your French intuition. You want a Christian Vassal Empire of the East and you want the glory of a crusade, while I - I wish for planting the Catholic seed in those same lands. (beat) All our dreams in the hands of one Walachian poet, a prince who so far has been seen riding gondolas and rich skirts, a man whom I've seen crying at the beauty of my Sistine Chapel. (long pause). We are the mad ones, not he. Enough for today. Though they don't go well together - I must think and pray.

STEPHAN AND HENRIC

Your Excellency!

(STEPHAN and HENRIC exit as the Straw Dummy is lowered in the crucifixion position, THE POPE kneels while lights fade out for…)

SCENE 2

PETER's Royal Court in Targoviste. Months after the coronation. Evening. Torches.

(PETER DEMETRIUS praying with his back to the audience.)

The straw dummy is in the same position of crucifixion. Echoes/voices/murmurs will be heard in the very distance a few times, during PETER's speech.

PETER
Give me time, Lord - to honor and protect you such as my father and his forefathers did. Tell me…look around you.

(A PAUSE)

What do you think? My palace and your house built brick by brick, stone by stone for your glory. Marble from Italy, wood from Bohemia, gold from the heart of the Carpathians. There is not a higher nor sturdier church in the whole country. (pause) Why? So you can feel at home, far away from the luxury of Rome. I moved the capital from Bucharest here - so I can protect you, so nobody can patch or crush or burn you so. Feel safe here, my Lord and forgive my sins. (pause) I know, I said too much. Well, it's true. The change is in me. I can feel it. Can you? Answer me! I beseech you! Maybe next time. (beat) Remember me.

(Door opens. SIVORI enters dressed in a most exquisite coat, decorated with gold. He also wears a dagger)
covered in gold and precious stone. Shortly after ATTENDANTS and the BOYARS will follow.)

SIVORI

It is time my lord.

PETER

So soon. I don't think I am ready.

SIVORI

You must. She is waiting. There is no way back.

PETER

I trust we took the right decision.

SIVORI

God is watching you. Remember...

(THE BOYARS enter. Some murmur, SIVORI claps. Silence.)

PETER

My honorable gentry, I apologize for summoning you so late but the occasion is most urgent.

FIRST BOYAR

Is it the Turks, my lord…

PETER

No: fortunately for some of you and unfortunately for my soldiers. The Turks are far, sleeping tight in their harems. But where was I - oh yes, another month has set since I became your voivode.

SECOND BOYAR

And may you rule in peace for many more.

PETER

I thank you brother. Now tell me, and don't be shy in answering. Have I wronged you in any way so far?

THIRD BOYAR

You've been the kindest prince known to our kind, my lord.

PETER

Have I deserted or fattened myself from your riches?
FOURTH BOYAR
What a thing to say, my lord. Never, ever.

PETER
Then perhaps I had favored the poor and taken from your lands.

FIFTH BOYAR
Though you never did my lord - our lands are rightfully yours to take and do whatever your greatness pleases.

PETER
Have I sold you to the Turks?

SIXTH BOYAR
You protected us better than Mihnea and his mother.

PETER
Then what have I done wrong to deserve such a shame, my lords?

ALL BOYARS
Shame? What shame? Where? Shame? What kind? What is he talking about?

PETER
The lowest kind - of treason.

(SIVORI takes out a letter)

PETER
Do not dare look scornfully at my most honorable counselor. He didn't write it…yet one of you did. He didn't find it - yet one of you sneaked it in. He didn't read it - yet I did…and it's no poetry my friends. There is no rhyme, nor verse, nor metaphor in it - and definitely it does not have the scent of a lady. No, this letter has greasy corners, it's been written after a rich banquet. It could have been written under my own eyes…but alas, I am blind.

ALL THE BOYARS
Blind! No your majesty! You are not blind! You see everything! You see for all of us.

PETER
Of course I am blind and deaf. I bother myself with raising houses for your women. I bother with bringing fresh water so you can wash off that stench and not have ambassadors turn their noses at your sight. I am blind…because I feed the beggars more than once a day. I am deaf because I turn my ear to listen to the poor and the plagued. I might be blind and deaf, but I shall not kneel. Sivori, let them know.

SIVORI
She is waiting, my lords!
ALL THE BOYARS
She? Who? Death! No! It is not right!

PETER
Who said death? Death can come only if guilty and guilt can come only from our Goddess of Justice, Justitia - Themis, name her as you please. Bring her in. We shall find the traitors and then…

(SIVORI brings in a statue of the Goddess, holding the well known balance in one hand.)

SECOND BOYAR
That's some rich jewel my lord.

FOURTH BOYAR
Where did you get it from?

PETER
Distant lands. A small gift of appreciation from one of my protectors.

THIRD BOYAR
I should get one for myself and one for my beloved wife.

FIFTH BOYAR
How expensive is it my lord?

PETER
Lets just say I did not sell my soul yet.

SIXTH BOYAR
It's not my taste.

PETER
This is I - YOUR LORD. More or less a diamond in the rough.

(PETER sets on one plate of the balance his earring. On the opposite plate he is about to set the letter of treason.)

PETER
This is you. All of you my friends. Now let's see what weighs more. If it's the letter then I ask for your forgiveness. I should have never doubted you. Yet, if it's my earring then you are all guilty of high treason and you must pay as such.
THIRD BOYAR
With obedience my lord, but the law of physics…

SECOND BOYAR
And the common sense tell us…

PETER
We're talking of physics and common sense. What do we have here? A cultured court? I never thought our gentry heard of Galileo. Very well then…give me your rings. I only feared physics when it came to ladies bigger than myself. You Sivori?

SIVORI
Only on paper.

PETER
So, where are your rings my lords?

FOURTH BOYAR
Is this one of your riddle poems again?

PETER
Could be…

FIFTH NOBLE
Why are you torturing us so?

PETER
Makes the time pass. Come on, don't be shy. Set them here, one by one.

(One by one the rings are set on top of the letter.
THE BOYARS grow fearful as they see that the balance still inclines in the favor of PETER's earring.)

PETER
Well. It is done. What more can you ask for?

ALL THE BOYARS (EXCEPT THE FIRST)
Mercy my lord! Mercy! Mercy! Mercy! We are innocent! We know nothing! The balance must have been forged.

PETER
You dare call your prince a liar?

THE BOYARS
Not I my lord! Not in a million years. You are the one and true ruler! Mercy Peter! Don't punish us! We know nothing! We did nothing!

FIRST BOYAR
Let them go my lord. It was I who wrote the letter.

PETER
You realize your head is in the game?

FIRST BOYAR
Treason is no game, my lord. If what I wrote smells of treason to you, then my head must fall in accordance with your Justitia. Isn't it so brother Sivori?

SIVORI
You spoke like a true diplomat, Boyar Bogdan.

PETER
Very well, if you are so excited to meet your end. But first I want to know why did you write all this? Don't kneel, speak.

BOYAR BOGDAN
Not to betray you but to make others wary of your behavior. We are in Walachia my lord, not on foreign lands. I haven't seen much of the world, but I know that you can't feed beggars with viola sounds and rose petals. You take three and sometimes five baths a day and make the one who takes one feel dirty and cheap. You talk and write in verse while the peasant can only count his dead children.

PETER
Enough! Take him away!

BOYAR BOGDAN
(as he is carried away by an Attendant)
You sent six of our sons to learn in the order of the Franciscans when they were born from Orthodox womb. You kiss the Pope's robe and make a knot with the Sultan's. You spend money on exotic gardens while everything dries in the common man's earth. You paid Mihnea's debt when you should have looked for him and stretch his skin.

PETER
Wait! Do you have children, Bogdan?

BOYAR BOGDAN
No! Not my son, your highness. Not my son! I beg of you. He's free of any guilt.

THE BOYARS
It's a sin my lord. It's not necessary! You are a Christian, yourself. Spare him.
PETE
Why? So treason can live? No! Let the son receive the same punishment as his father. It is
my final word.

BOYAR BOGDAN
It takes one thing to be a prince and you abused it tonight. So be it, my prince.

PETE
The rest of you are free to go. Take your rings and leave me! Leave and learn the lesson.

THE BOYARS
Your Lordship!

(They exit, followed by the ATTENDANTS. SIVORI returns. PETER collapses.)

SIVORI
You did well, my prince.

PETE
To take lives?

SIVORI
Would you rather let yourself be a dummy on strings?

SCENE 3

TRIPOLI, the place of exile for MIHNEA and ECATERINA.

(We find MIHNEA central stage, praying in the same way PETER did in the previous scene. The straw dummy is lowered, as a crucifix, once more.)

MIHNEA
Dead! All dead!!! Not one left alive. All butchered in my name. Heads on spikes and bodies in the pit of the devil. Rest them in peace God and make the one whose hands are stained with my servant's blood to pay if not in life then at your final judgment...I am alone and lost.

(ECATERINA enters bringing with her a plate of food.)
ECATERINA

Then you must eat.

MIHNEA

I am not hungry. Leave me please.

ECATERINA

Stop being a stubborn son. It doesn't do you any good. I sometimes wonder how you can live like this.

MIHNEA

I can't.

ECATERINA

Then eat!

MIHNEA

I'm only hungry for revenge, mother.

ECATERINA

The other day you were craving for luck and gold. If you ask me, you should watch your diet.

MIHNEA

How you can mock me, madam.

ECATERINA

I? Mocking you? I'd rather die. Who made you a Voivode? Who kept you on the throne? Who let the Sultan suckle from her golden breast, so you can rule in peace?

MIHNEA

You, madam. You.

ECATERINA

Then do not dare say I mock you! Look at me: I want to see you rule again. I want your name to be remembered. I want it written in the stone of my country.

MIHNEA

You are already thinking at my death.

ECATERINA

I think at mine. I think I have the right to be buried as a mother queen. I think I have the right to sleep by my husband, and not turn myself into dust in this desert.

MIHNEA
Only gold and gifts can seal such rights. Do we have them?

ECATERINA
No, but what we have is your hunger for revenge.

MIHNEA
It faded. It always does, just like blood stains. They wash away. I'm tired. Let me rest.

ECATERINA
I got news the Sultan is not being pleased with Peter's performance.

MIHNEA
What? Did Peter forget his lines so soon? I trust the Sultan will favor him still…

ECATERINA
He might like the man but not the ruler. Besides Earring is too much of a double player.

MIHNEA
Aren't we all. Earring?

ECATERINA
So is the way the mob calls him.

MIHNEA
They named his father the Good. I wonder how I'll end up. Merciful? Corruptible? Mihnea the Dummy?

ECATERINA
See? See? You can't deny it. You want to be up there again. You want the power for life and death and everything in between. Peter might have the gold for now, but he is also in great great debt.

MIHNEA
Who isn't, when he owes the Turks.

ECATERINA
Peter killed your boyars…

MIHNEA
I would have done the same. He is a smart one, I can't deny it. On top of that he got the looks, the style…

ECATERINA
He is a bastard! (beat) He paid to have us sent here in this God forsaken place.

MIHNEA
At least he didn't pay to have us killed.

ECATERINA

Should I be waiting for such a day?

(A PAUSE)

I wrote a letter.

MIHNEA

A letter?! Not again, mother. I am tired of letters. Haven't we learned our lessons yet. You think they change things in good but all they do is stop the natural flow of fate. Why can't we live without their curse?

ECATERINA

I sometimes wonder if your diplomacy and softness hasn't been our doom. Would you have wished to receive one instead?

MIHNEA

I wish nothing. No revenge, no food, no debt, no news of death, and most of all - no letters. They give me an upset stomach.

ECATERINA

Such a son I have. Very well then…rotting in the deserts of Tripoli. I'll get used to that. I will, I promise. It's not your fault, after all. Rest now, alone, with your thoughts of sterile revenge. I'll leave the plate here. It's still warm.

(ECATERINA exits, leaving the letter on the tray)

SCENE 4

September 1584

(Enter onto the balcony: SIVORI, young SIGISMUND BATHORY - crowned as ruler/governor of Transylvania, Noble ALEXANDER KENDY - protector of SIGISMUND and president of the Transylvanian Government followed by Noble WOLFGANG KONACSOCSY, member of the same government.)

KENDY

Our lord Sigismund would like to read the letters now.
SIVORI
The letters, oh yes - the letters. Here they are. My king will be extremely pleased to hear the last of them has reached Princess Griselda in the shortest while.

WOLFGANG
Your prince can be certain we shall grant his wish.

KENDY
Not before we'll have a look ourselves. We know our Princess, and want to make sure she will not find nor take any offence in what's been written.

SIVORI
It's just verse...

KENDY
Crusades and verses are what we fear most.

(SIGISMUND leans towards KENDY and whispers something to him.)

KENDY
But my lord…Very well. As your majesty pleases. Count Wolf gang, make sure this epistle will be found by Princess Griselda, right under her pillows: untouched and with a drop of perfume.

(SIGISMUND smiles satisfied. WOLFGANG exits.)

SIVORI
I am glad to find your lordship in such high spirits.

KENDY
His Excellency is overwhelmed by Peter's abundance of gifts and attention. He would also like to express…

SIGISMUND
I can talk for myself Lord Kendy. Age does not make one mute.

KENDY
Of course sire.

SIGISMUND
As a matter of fact why aren't you helping Count Wolfgang in his most dangerous mission. Indulge me.

(KENDY exits)

SIGISMUND
Finally. Alone. They hold onto me like lice. I'm sorry. They are both competent men, it's just…

SIVORI
You don't have to excuse yourself, sire. You are the ruler.

SIGISMUND
True, true. I am, aren't I?

SIVORI
Remember, regents pass with age. That's all. Don't let them take your vibe.

SIGISMUND
My vibe? Ha! I like you Sivori.

(A PAUSE)
You might not know but I did hear about the noble gesture you did on your way here. Though the crime is punishable by death - I shall pardon the young man and even offer him a function in some office, unless you have a better offer for him.

SIVORI
Your Highness is most kind.

SIGISMUND
I am aren't I? You must also know I did listen to your arrival speech. My drowsiness didn't come from studying Latin all night long, but from a most delicious half a bottle of Walachian wine. A great gift indeed. Promise you will not tell Lord Kendy.

SIVORI
My lips are sealed.

SIGISMUND
Very well then. Your lord wants a stronger alliance between our principalities. I am eager to offer it, without him needing to marry my sister.

SIVORI
He wishes to make Griselda his Queen out of deep love my lord.

SIGISMUND
Love? Why? From what I heard - the matrimonial sacrament between a man and a woman is a pretty lousy bitch. I'm sorry. I should not have said…

SIVORI
You don't have to excuse yourself, sire. You are the ruler. I can only listen and nod.

SIGISMUND
Oh yes, indeed. That's what you're supposed to do.

SIVORI
Good. Very good. You're learning. (beat) So…

SIGISMUND
As I was saying… though I love my sister - I don't think Peter and she, would make a good couple.

SIVORI
The reason my lord?

SIGISMUND (childishly amused)
To tell you the truth - she brakes wind a lot. I mean twice or thrice a day.

SIVORI
That is acceptable, sire. Anything else we should be aware of?

SIGISMUND
She also sweats. Sweats worse than a horse - I saw her sniffing her own armpits. She has a zit the size of a mushroom on her left cheek

SIVORI
It doesn't show in the painting.

SIGISMUND
No no, on her other cheek. Disgusting.

(KENDY enters, agitated - he most probably heard the discussion)

KENDY
I believe Your Excellency must be at his session of Biblical Studies.

SIGISMUND
Crap! Crap! I'm sorry I should not have…I apologize. Lord Sivori…maybe we'll trade a few more thoughts over dinner.

SIVORI
It would be my pleasure, sire.

(SIGISMUND exits. A LONG PAUSE)
KENDY
You really needed to convince yourself he is only half baked. There you have it. There's always a time, a place and one action that are born to make from a child a good ruler - until then though (pause) Deliver to your Peter this message: Princess Griselda's hand can only be obtained with Stefan Bathory's approval. Sigismund's seal and blessings don't mean too much unless endorsed by the Gate or Lord Stephan, and choosing among two evils... well... by the way your lord writes and by the stature of his ambassadors, I myself don't see any problem. Of course there is also the issue of how much he has to offer...

SIVORI
My sovereign lord sets no price on affection.

KENDY
Well that is always nice to hear. Has he paid you?

SIVORI
I'm sorry Lord Kendy. What kind of question is that?

KENDY
One coming from a man who knows how it is to be taken into service by a country other than his own.

SIVORI
I was never taken, sire. It stood in my wish to join and serve my prince.

KENDY
So then, has he paid you?

SIVORI
Isn't my name, my title enough to prove it? My clothes? My horse? The dagger I am holding? The servants. My lands - soon I'll have a village called after me.

KENDY
All his in the end.

SIVORI
Yes, yes - he paid me. Myself and the ones most dear to me, yet far away.

KENDY
And has he paid all the others who helped him take the throne?

SIVORI
Your curiosity is too impulsive for my taste, lord Kendy.
KENDY
I beseech you - apologize my rudeness, but it goes hand in hand with most unpleasant rumors. A prince who does not respect his promises....

SIVORI
It is not up to me, to give an answer. If you really wish to have it, mount your horse Count Kendy and ride to my master. Ask him yourself. I'm sure you'll get the up front answer you are looking for.

KENDY
You and I are so alike my friend. Ready to bite in any kinds of waters. I am afraid you must accept an invitation into my humble home. It would be a great honor…and who knows I might convince you regents do not disappear with age….they get better, just like the wine I'm about to offer you.

SIVORI
You mean?!

KENDY
I mean you need a real friend in Transylvania. Come. Be my guest.

(Exit.)

SCENE 5
Later in September. A hall in PETER's castle, dimly lit by torches.

(PETER center stage in armory. STEPHAN BATHORY appears on the balcony.)

STEPHAN
Peter Demetrius, ruler of Walachia - you have my blessing.

PETER
Thank you, my lord.

STEPHAN
Now tell me. What is your secret? How will you do it? How will you penetrate?

PETER
With extreme care, my lord. Then when least expected, rough and fast.

STEPHAN
I like that. Do you need any more protection?
PETER
Look at me sire, I can barely walk.

STEPHAN
Then go with God and defeat the greedy Ottoman force. May you and your men return victorious.

PETER
I shall your Excellency.

(PETER is about to exit, when THE POPE appears upstairs as well.)

THE POPE
Peter Demetrius, ruler of Walachia…stop in the name of God.

PETER
Yes, your Excellency. What is it?

THE POPE
How is the seed spreading going?

PETER
Better than ever. The job is almost done.

THE POPE
You're fast. I like that. Do you need any more help spreading it?

PETER
More lubrication for the commoners would be good. They take it slowly. Besides, I got a rash from this armor. I might need to take a little break.

(PETER takes off his armor and is ready to sit)

THE POPE
Break? What say you? No, no breaks. Did Lord Jesus have brakes on the cross? Did he get a vacation between floggings? Don't be silly chum. Go with God and impregnate. Spread my religion. May you and your servants return victorious.

PETER
I shall your Excellency.

(PETER is about to exit, when HENRIC III appears
HENRIC
Peter Demetrius, king of the three principalities of Walachia, Moldavia and Transylvania.

PETER
What is it your Excellency?

HENRIC
It's been three nights since you passed by my chamber.

PETER
I was busy fighting the Turks and spreading the Catholic seed, sire.

HENRIC
That's not what I heard. I heard you are sending poems to the Sultan's wives. Is there anything I should be aware of? Because if there is anything…I mean I know distance can change things but…

PETER
Just rumors, your lordship. Can't you see…I am barely moving, I got a great headache,

HENRIC
That's a convincing answer. Well, don't forget how I made you king.

PETER
I won't your Excellency.

(PETER is about to walk again when THE SULTAN enters as the other three characters make haste to exit, at his sight.)

SULTAN
Peter Demetrius…governor of Walachia, vassal to the Gate.

PETER
Yes?! Yes?! Yes?!

SULTAN
Is what I heard true? Are you trying to penetrate me? Are you spilling the Catholic seed around here? Are you and Henric…are you composing for my wives?

PETER
All lies, Pasa. All lies. I don't know who told you such absurdities.

SULTAN
I have more eyes and ears than Medusa herself.
PETER
She had snakes your highness. (beat) Look at me, my legs feel like stones, I got a rash, my stomach hurts, my head is about to explode…and you are mocking me.

SULTAN
Beware Peter. I can only be lenient with honest vassals. If not…

(SULTAN claps. PETER suddenly acts like someone is choking him. He is out of air.)

PETER (barely speaking)
My protector…by my God…I…air…I am…honest…can't breathe…not guilty…mercy... I kneel…

(SULTAN claps. PETER collapses in pain.)

SULTAN
Now you know.

PETER
I ask your lordship forgiveness. How…how did…

SULTAN
Such a pity. I thought you knew your place. Rulers of your kind forget they are only dummies…mere marionettes. Don't get too blind or too deaf Peter. You will end up not seeing the strings. Mine especially happen to be the strongest of all. The rest are more or less invisible.

(A couple of the killed BOYARS, as well as some other attendants, plus STEPHAN, HENRIC and THE POPE appear on top again, clapping in a monstrous way, screaming things such as: Fight Peter, fight! Be a conqueror! Where is my gold? You must pay! How many did you Baptize? Catholicism must prevail"You said you will pay double! He must pay with his life. Gifts are not enough, You owe us. If not gold then his skin. If not his skin then the skin of his people. Stand up Peter! Stand up and fight! You don't need a break, God is waiting for your work.)

(PETER collapses once more - breathless. The other characters disappear with the entrance of BOYAR BOGDAN who rushes to help PETER.)
Your lordship! Sire…I

Sivori!!! Sivori you are here…

It is me Bogdan, your majesty. Bogdan, your humble servant.

Oh my precious friend…I am cold. So cold. Hold me

What happened

Don't you hear their voices?

Not a breath other than ours.

They are here all around - pulling me apart. Whispering…whispering…

Just the wind in the castle.

You think?

The physician asked not to leave your chamber. Who attended your lordship with so much lack of care? Tell me, I'll see to have them punished.

Punish? No, no - no more punishments. Enough with blood, enough with pain. Oh, Bogdan I had a horrible dream.

With all the herbs and medicine they feed you, of course you did. Come on, up we go your majesty.

What time is it?
BOGDAN
Time to put you in bed and not leave my eyes off you.

(A LONG PAUSE as PETER recovers himself)

PETER
I made it Bogdan. I made it. Can you believe it? I crushed fate.

BOGDAN
Your chamber is waiting...

PETER
My father told me once:. Time, cures and God don't work for Walachian princes. They don't give you a chance: an ill Walachian prince is a rotten one. (beat) Has my grave been already dug?

BOGDAN
Yes. The soil in the chapel is most moist and fresh.

PETER
I want to see it as soon as the sun rises. I want to laugh at its mouth. Laugh out loud with my big mouth facing the mouth of death. Ha father! Ha! Ha! Ha!

BOGDAN
We think you were poisoned, your majesty.

PETER
Poisoned?! It cannot be. Someone is having a taste of my food regularly.

BOGDAN
That's just the protocol. It does not mean anything except another mouth gets fed.

PETER
Poisoned? Huh?

BOGDAN
It was either that or you were love sick for someone. That's all the reasons known by your doctors. No wound from no war, no curse from no church, no...

PETER
Very well, I choose being poisoned and most probably by my competitors.

BOGDAN
They are too far away.
PETER
Distance does not make one less dangerous. Let the world know, from Paris to Constantinople how I was wronged, how much I had to suffer. How I suffered and yet had the strength to step over death. Are you writing it down?

BOGDAN
I'm sure I'll remember, your majesty.

PETER
Meanwhile I will write a poem. A book of poems in the honor of my victory. I need Sivori to inspire me. Where is Sivori?

BOGDAN
At Sigismund Bathory's court my lord, still.

PETER (SHARP)

BOGDAN
You sent him there. Maybe you should rest your lord...

PETER
Don't tell me what to do and not do. I fear Sivori will find Transylvania more attractive than my court.

BOGDAN
Then let me inspire you.

PETER
No, you won't. You are too old and got an unshaved face. Tell me Bogdan, since the day our Justitia asked her toll, have I changed?

BOGDAN
Your majesty -

PETER
Please, I spared you because you talked…and did it freely. Do it now again.

BOGDAN
You govern with an open heart my lord. Maybe too open. You speak and act according to the law.

PETER
Ah, the law. Whose law? What law? Is it mine or is it declared by the bigger stars? Can I own it or do I owe it?

BOGDAN
The answer is in you my lord, but for the common man - you had become the change.

PETER
(WALKING AWAY, TALKING TO HIMSELF)
Change? What change can happen when we aren't let to govern by ourselves? When the promises I made turn against me and torment my own fall into grace. I must speak with God, then think.

(PETER Exits. BOGDAN remains alone.)

SCENE 6

Istanbul - Several nights later, a narrow street, lit by a couple of torches. Sound of footsteps, laughter.

(Two young ladies are making their entrance from upstage. They are luring a YOUNG MAN to follow them

FIRST YOUNG WOMAN
Come on, come on - don't be shy.

YOUNG MAN
Stop! What are you doing? Where are you taking me?

SECOND YOUNG WOMAN
He is not shy - he just doesn't know our tongue.

FIRST YOUNG WOMAN
(kissing him passionately)
Then I'll teach him mine.

YOUNG MAN
Yes…no…I must make haste. Wait for me after…

FIRST YOUNG WOMAN
After, there is no after. You can only have us now.

SECOND YOUNG WOMAN
Don't listen to her. I am a much better tutor.

YOUNG MAN
I got orders.

FIRST YOUNG WOMAN
We got orders, too.
SECOND YOUNG WOMAN
We got strict orders to make you forget yours.

YOUNG MAN
If I don't...no, don't do that.

FIRST YOUNG WOMAN
Why can't you love me...just tonight? It's your one chance to feel like Mehmed the Conqueror.

SECOND YOUNG WOMAN
You can love me for free...come... be my first Roman boy.

No! I said no!

FIRST YOUNG WOMAN  SECOND YOUNG WOMAN
Fine! Fine! Go! Be mean!
At your orders, sire!

(YOUNG MAN turns and walks away)

(THE TWO WOMEN follow him closely, and suddenly start screaming)

THE TWO WOMEN
Rape! Rape! Help! Help! Someone! Help! We are attacked!

What are you doing? Are you crazy!

THE TWO WOMEN
No! Run! Rape! Don't! Rape! Somebody save us!

(YOUNG MAN not knowing what to do, if to run or hide, while more lights come up and footsteps of guards can be heard)

Jesus! Mother of Christ!

(LADY IN BLACK enters, face covered. The two women continue screaming while the YOUNG MAN manages to escape. The LADY IN BLACK offers the WOMEN two gold pieces, each.)

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LADY IN BLACK

For your pains!

FIRST YOUNG WOMAN

That was not the deal, lady! You owe us more! Rape! Rape! Save us!

(SECOND YOUNG WOMAN takes out a dagger and stabs the first woman, who falls dead to the ground)

SECOND YOUNG WOMAN

She is right. You do owe me more.

(LADY IN BLACK hands the SECOND WOMAN a few more golden coins.)

SECOND YOUNG WOMAN

And a couple more for the child she was carrying. Good!

(BEAT)

Murder! Murder! Catch the murderer! Matricide! He killed a child! Murderer!

LADY IN BLACK

Murder! The bloody villain is running away! Chase him! Seek him out!

SECOND YOUNG WOMAN

He killed my sister! My dear sister! Kill the dog!!!

(Soldiers come in, dragging the YOUNG MAN with them. From the opposite side, KHADIM PASHA enters.)

YOUNG MAN

I am innocent! Innocent! Let go!

KHADIM

What is the matter?

LADY IN BLACK

I saw everything Pasha. Horrible! Most horrible! Not even the worst animal would kill the way he did.

YOUNG MAN

I have not killed anyone.
SECOND YOUNG WOMAN
He attacked me, Pasha. He tried to cut me - see? I say this town has seen one too many criminals made by Walachian harlots. To death with him.

YOUNG MAN
No! Wait! I am not guilty. It must be a set up.

SECOND YOUNG WOMAN
A set up involving the killing of an unborn child? Maybe in your Christian world.

KHADIM
You said unborn…

YOUNG MAN
It's a lie. All lies.

LADY IN BLACK
Should lies come from the ones who decide to bear life in their bosom - and not death and destruction?

(LADY IN BLACK reveals her face. KHADIM lowers his head immediately.)

KHADIM
Your ladyship…(BEAT) what a surprise. You! How dare you call a liar…one of the greatest jewels this empire saw. Kneel and kiss her foot, or I'll have you dead on the spot.

LADY IN BLACK
I have no desire to be touched by a criminal.

YOUNG MAN
By God I swear my hands are clean.

(KHADIM goes to the young man, searches him, takes his purse)

KHADIM
That's not for you to judge. Take him away.

YOUNG MAN
My Prince will find out how you have wronged me.
(KHADIM searching through the young man's purse, takes a document, scrolls through it.)

KHADIM
I'll make sure he will…courier…courier of pain and death I would add. By the authority I am invested with, I would have you in chains and gagged till your Lord's Judgment. However since we are on different calendars, we might just torture you till we shall find the reason behind your crime.

(Soldiers exit with the YOUNG MAN and the body of the FIRST YOUNG WOMAN. SECOND YOUNG WOMAN exits after them. KHADIM takes from the YOUNG MAN's purse a letter. Brakes the seal nervously and reads it.)

LADY IN BLACK
How wrong was I when I said, there will be no more blood once I move to the capital of the world. I was looking to have a most pleasant stay…and look now…

KHADIM (STILL READING)
You were right…

LADY IN BLACK
Of course I was. I always am. You see, the problem with you - rulers of the East- is that you really don't pay attention to detail. Of course, that's the curse of any empire. You covered mosaics without learning first how they are made. You conquered continents without learning what's hiding underneath.

KHADIM
I must act quickly and let the Sultan know the premise.

LADY IN BLACK
And my dowry, Khadim Pasha…

KHADIM
The winds are blowing in Mihnea's favor. Therefore your grand grandson and his big mouthed mother can return in safety to Constantinople. I will make sure they get a proper welcome.

LADY IN BLACK
I wrote a letter already. (beat)

KHADIM
So be it. I have a feeling next time we meet - it will be for a merrier occasion.
LADY IN BLACK
Maybe in your Heaven, maybe in mine. I believe our Hells are just about the same.

KHADIM
Allah forbid to have you as an enemy

(He exits)

LADY IN BLACK
He has a feeling. A feeling- I wish I had one. And yet there's nothing in my bosom. But what do I have? A dead husband - true, buried as a king in Bucharest. A deformed son ruling Moldavia with his one healthy arm. What else? The nights of gazing over Bosphorus, the days of serving the Sultan's Mother. And in between I am the Mother Queen of Whores and Tramps, a rotten hag still planting seeds of war.

SCENE 7

PETER's ROYAL COURT in Targoviste.

(SIVORI reading a few documents. PETER watches him closely.)

PETER
What do you think? Tell me, I do not fear.

SIVORI
It's simple. One reveals the villainy of some, one disappointment, the next treason, the other fear, and the last hope and truth.

PETER
I wrote them in the last couple of nights. Familiar themes, ready to rest in a book.

SIVORI
Better yet - in libraries all around Europe.

PETER
All these sleepless nights have finally paid off.

SIVORI
Indeed my lord. If you'll excuse me now, I shall return to my chambers.

PETER
So soon brother Sivori?

SIVORI
With all due respect - I've been following your footsteps since noon, just to listen to your plans of glory.

PETER

And you mind that?

SIVORI

No, I mind being carried around - when there are more important issues to be dealt with.

PETER

Important issues? Like what? Writing in your journals about our status quo? Hmmm. Sivori, I must confess since your return you haven't been the same.

SIVORI

I haven't my lord?

PETER

You ask me? You ask me to open the souls of my people, while you yourself are hiding in the darkest corners.

SIVORI

I do not my lord. Honest to God.

PETER

Then speak. If it is about Griselda...yes - I am still mad about her. Though she farts and spits and sneezes like a donkey - I still find her image a good turn on.

SIVORI

My lord, why haven't you told me about your deal with Khadim?

PETER

What deal?

(LONG PAUSE - they look at each other intensely)

Oh...the one hundred thousand scudi I owe him.

SIVORI

Two hundred thousand - with interest.

PETER

So? That's nothing. I have two years to repay him in full.

SIVORI

My lord, two hundred thousand scudi is a serious business -especially when the sum is granted by a Pasha.
PETER
And that's why we shall compose a poem in his honor, right away. Ohhh Pasha - Ohhh you are so great. Ohhh Pasha, - Ohhh, you are so fake!!! Are you satisfied now?

SIVORI
My lord - the law binds you and I to a most clear contract. As your counselor I have the right to be informed about such matters.

PETER
And you found out didn't you? Your new friends must have been a real treat.

SIVORI
My lord you are not fair.

PETER
I am not fair? You know what I find unfair…to be treated like a barren rascal by my one foreign counselor.

SIVORI
You talk about me, my lord?

PETER
Unless everyone else is foreign in these lands, no. I have repaid you and your family as I have vowed. And now you come with these cheap shots about laws and debts. What do you take me for? I sent you to see more of the world and instead the world poisoned your guts. Yes, it's much cleaner across the mountains, yes they are richer and more civilized but people swim in the same dirt. We speak the same tongue and die the same death.

SIVORI
My prince…

PETER
How much more should I offer you? How great is your hunger for Walachian treasures Sivori? Say…what is your heart wishing for now? A ring, a golden cup, a plate, a whore?

SIVORI
I wish only to serve my master.

PETER
It doesn't seem I am the one…since I do not keep you well informed.

SIVORI
Your words my lord…
Stop calling me your lord. As I have broken the binding law, as I have cheated my most modest counselor, and on top of it not paid him enough… I cannot possibly be your master. Therefore go.

SIVORI

Why Peter?

PETER

I said go. Leave at once. Serve other princes if you wish, return to Genova or Venice if you must - but these lands are not for you to prosper on anymore. For the Sultan I am Governor of Walachia, for the rest of Europe, I am its prince and for you - I am but a book.

SIVORI

You are doing much wrong, my lord.

PETER

It's funny. I heard these words said in eight different tongues and yet I could have sworn they don't sound more pathetic than in ours. You bring a different touch to the expression.

SIVORI

I had a great great tutor.

(BOYAR BOGDAN enters in haste)

BOGDAN

My prince, our emissaries come with news - the Turkish troops have reached the Danube.

PETER

So, it's finally happening.

SIVORI

Happening? What say you Boyar Bogdan?

BOGDAN

In two days, three at most - the Turks will be in Bucharest. Lord knows what next.

PETER

He doesn't know. I do. Boyar Bogdan as our tradition commands, tell the courtiers to make provisions.

BOGDAN

What about the boyars?
PETER
Give the news to the ones who fear most, the ones who drink too much and the ones who are too fat to run. You know them all. It's better to have them first out of town.

BOGDAN
Very well, my lord.

PETER
I will speak to the soldiers, myself. The rest is the well known drill: feed the horses, poison the fountains, set the crops on fire, hide the women and children and always - give yourself a break and contemplate at the beauty of nature.

BOGDAN
Still in high-spirits…

PETER
A Pasha can only take my throne. See that it is done.

(BOGDAN exits.)

(PETER to SIVORI who has been listening all along)

PETER
Still here? This is not your fight and definitely not your fall. Go, start packing. Let not my eyes drop on you once more or…

SIVORI
(kneeling)
Forgive me for ever doubting you. Forgive me! Forgive me! Forgive me, Peter.

PETER
Doubt?

SIVORI
I should have known you're trying to protect me.

PETER
I'm trying to protect my country and my current position. I have no time for your mood swings. The West is waiting for you Sivori. Say hi to my Pope Pal.

SIVORI
I am not leaving you. I'd rather be a hanged man than a lifeless dummy. I am here to serve you, to be your shadow, to preserve your honor.

PETER
Transylvania did weird things to you. Why not seek a treatment around the Mediterranean shores.

SIVORI
I will not leave you for a second. Your grave is my grave, sire.

PETER
I've seen it. It's not big enough for both of us.

SIVORI (IN A SPLIT OF FURY)
Throw off your mask, Peter. Throw it now or I swear I will crush it with my own Latin hands.

PETER
How dare you speak this way? I am your true and lawful lord.

(SIVORI kissing PETER's hand and embracing him afterwards.)

SIVORI
Evrika! Indeed - You are my lord! What do you know - the mask can come off by itself?

(PETER kissing SIVORI's hand.)

PETER
And that's because is made of honesty and care.

SIVORI
You are my lord and above all my closest friend…and I do not care if you…

PETER
Sivori…you still haven't learned - you are my lord and above all my most trustworthy friend. I'm sorry for what I said. You didn't deserve any of my childish behavior.

SIVORI
One with which you tried to protect me. What more can a servant ask for, sire?

PETER
I fear falling. I feel it and know now what to do.
SIVORI

Pay the debt.

PETER

Poor friend...how can I make you forget about those bloody money. It's such a miserable long story. Khadim got his hands on what I owed him a while ago. And you know how? Come come, it's not a riddle…

SIVORI

The tribute?

PETER

Exactly. See? You are starting to think like a true Pasha. I sent two carts packed with gold to the Sultan - and he didn't get one coin. Khadim claimed it all as the payment that's rightfully his.

SIVORI

You should have written to the Sultan.

PETER

You know me better than that. I did even a bit more and took the liberty of asking a favor to my good friend Osman Pasha. I asked him to plead in my name directly to the Sultan. That's when things started to smell.

SIVORI

Osman never got the letters.

PETER

That or maybe the Sultan didn't care for how I was wronged, or maybe Khadim has a bigger slice in this game. Ha! Finally I did it - I said: I was wronged.

SIVORI

And why haven't you let me know until now? Why so late? Why when we could have…

PETER

First, because some of the gossip involving my possible dethronement came from the Moldavian Court. I took the news lightly. Moldavia is not Constantinople and Peter The Crippled is not the Sultan.

SIVORI

And?

PETER

And what?
SIVORI

The other reasons.

PETER

Nothing. I just kept hope. And now I fear the worst. There are twenty thousand Turks ready to march in and slaughter if I do not give up the crown. My messenger carrying most unorthodox letters- has not returned, the boyars are craping in their pants and everywhere around us seeds of treason are being watered. May I ask what would you do in my place?

SIVORI (after a pause)

Face the Turkish army. Attack and fight till the last of them either dies or begs to become a Christian. Then grab their flags and march to Constantinople.

PETER

Still too westerner for these lands. Got material for a pope, a king and a tyrant and that’s why I wished to get rid of you in the first place.

SIVORI

Then tell me - what am I good for?

PETER

I am sending you to Transylvania with most of my riches. Sixteen carts fully loaded with my and my father's possessions…

SIVORI

Enough to build a wall around Walachia and laugh at the whole world.

PETER

You are quite right though there would be another danger: having the whole world consider us a great dump.

SIVORI

Sixteen carts - good Lord!

PETER

And that's not all, I am leaving everything else in your care: our Lord, icons, books, monastic treasures, everything that's worth a dime of gold and faith, must be protected and carried on the other side. It's useless to tell you once more how dangerous…

SIVORI

I'll keep an eye behind my back.

PETER

That's not enough, divide the treasure if you can, and always keep on moving. Once you cross the valley and leave the gorges behind - send messengers to Brasov asking for
protection and free passing. The mayor will take care of you. He knows too well what must be done.

SIVORI
I understand.

PETER
If anything goes wrong, I trust you'll take wise steps. And if I ever hear you put your life in danger - I'll hang you by the throat with my own hands.

SIVORI
Don't worry my lord. I loved Transylvania. I know my way around.

PETER
I told you - that's what I was worried about. Sivori, you had one chance to turn against your master. Now you are fully his.

SIVORI
I gladly accept.

PETER
Before you leave, you must write letters and make my fate known to the ambassadors and my allies.

SIVORI
What about yourself?

PETER
No worries. The Sultan likes shiny things. I'll buy my life with one diamond. And then, at worst - I shall be exiled...and exile has been my friend so far. I can always find my way back on the western shores and take what's mine again, and again, and...

(BOYAR BOGDAN enters.)

BOGDAN
Your lordship, Hussein Agha wishes to speak with you.

PETER
It started Sivori. I beseech you, stand by me.

(A PAUSE)

Invite him in...

(HUSSEIN AGHA enters.)
HUSSEIN
My dear Governor, what an unexpected surprise.

PETER (TO SIVORI, ASIDE)
We start with pleasantries. Very well. (pause) My most beloved Hussein, what brings you to
my court?

HUSSEIN
The white stallion you promised me some fifteen months ago.

PETER
Knowing your great strength and courage, I shall let you mount him yourself, for the very
first time.

HUSSEIN
I see. Well then - I shall be brief. I bring the Sultan's message: "Peter Demetrius, bastard son
of Ioan Patrascu Voievod, who died by your God twenty seven years ago, you have been
summoned by the Gate to renounce your crown and people. You must leave at once the land
of Walachia which has been given and taken in accordance with the Sultan's will. Do you
have anything to say or more to offer?"

(A PAUSE)

PETER
You are a true master of oratory.

HUSSEIN
I am here for the crown.

PETER
Are you actually reading what's written down or do you have it memorized?

HUSSEIN
Peter, why do you act like this? You know the law too well.

PETER
The law, the law…always the law. All laws are made of straws. Why don't you give me a
break…and let the Prince think.

HUSSEIN
Ex Governor of Walachia, Peter! Your clock as a ruler has stopped. Our troops had crossed
the Danube and The Governor of Rumelia - wants to have the crown by tomorrow morning.

PETER
Khadim?
HUSSEIN
Himself. He offered to lead this expedition, and the Sultan granted the wish with much admiration.

PETER
The Sultan, not Khadim Pasha crowned me as the ruler of Walachia.

HUSSEIN
Say that again?

PETER
It's very simple - I do not recognize Khadim's right to dethrone me.

HUSSEIN
He bears letters.

PETER
Good for him. Either I ride with you to the Gate, kiss my Sultan's robe and offer him the much desired crown or the Sultan is welcomed at my court to ask what's rightfully his to take. It's an open invitation. Khadim and yourself can join us, as well.

HUSSEIN
Did you forget your place my friend?

PETER
No, but I believe Khadim Pasha did and I will surely convince the Sultan of my…

HUSSEIN
I am afraid the Great Sultan thinks you are gone. The word is - you ran away, you gave up the throne for gold, betraying the very people you were asked to govern.

SIVORI
Gone?

BOGDAN
My lord…

PETER
It cannot be.

HUSSEIN
And to answer your question: yes, Peter - I do have the text memorized. It's been in my blood for more than two hundred years now. You want to know something? I was expecting to find an empty court and peasants with no master. It was in Bucharest where I found out - the Governor is alive, healthy and wealthier than ever.

PETER
Hussein, isn't it clear as daylight? Can't you see - it's not the Sultan who wants my dethronement, it is Khadim himself.
HUSSEIN
Tonight I am but a common messenger, Peter Demetrius. And messengers don't judge, don't see - they just deliver, as they are asked.

(HUSSEIN claps. Two Attendants enter, carrying a chest. They open it central stage. A scream of horror coming from BOYAR BOGDAN, who crashes over the chest, a quick look of sickness and disgust from SIVORI.)

BOGDAN
My son!

HUSSEIN
The head and the arms are to be nailed onto the throne - as a reminder for the next governor.

BOGDAN
Gheorghe my son! My boy! What have they done to you? My son! Why? Why your majesty? He just wanted to see the world as you did. Why? Why did they take from me? What was his fault?

HUSSEIN
None other but the one which your governor has carried so far, too far. You can all learn more, in an epistle which our great Pasha has written in your governor's honor. (pause-pointing to the chest) You'll find it, I'm sure.

PETER
Don't cry Bogdan! Don't you dare drop a tear! I'll have you hanged if I hear you whine. This is no matter of crying, it's one of acting by the law.

HUSSEIN
Smart choice, Peter. Smart choice.

PETER
The law of my God, Agha - not of yours. Bogdan stand up. Stand up man, whip your bloody face. Your son died for a reason, died for your prince...now I take his death into my hands...and want to know why.

HUSSEIN
Don't do anything stupid. If anything happens to me...Your life is in the game, Peter.

PETER
What does my life have to do with what the law says. Boyar Bogdan you are summoned to fulfill your duty as my counselor in chief. Since most of my courtiers had fled I trust you and Sivori will perform an equitable trial.
HUSSEIN

You cannot have a trial.

PETER

Come, come… Hussein. You are nothing but a messenger and therefore we shall judge you accordingly. Have you ever heard of our Lady Justitia?

HUSSEIN

Who?

BOGDAN

Are you afraid of physics, Hussein? My son, whom you had pleased to kill- was an excellent student.

SIVORI

She is waiting, Agha.

HUSSEIN

Wait! Wait! Where are you taking me? I got letters! Most important ones. Peter, surrender your crown and set me free or else the rage of the Ottoman Empire shall fall upon thee and the rats you ruled.

PETER

So be it then! I took an oath not lose one single life while I am King

Alas, I did not know how I'll become a lifeless dummy, a lost and rotten thing.

(TWO ATTENDANTS grab HUSSEIN who struggles for a while as he exits. BOGDAN and SIVORI follow him. PETER remains central stage, looking at the opened chest. He kneels and looks closer at what the audience must not see. He prays in silence, then his look focuses on something inside the box. He reaches in and takes out a small rolled piece of paper. He reads it. Stands up and in a split of a second slams the chest's lid closed. In the same second lights fade out over PETER. Stage remains in darkness and silence. The straw dummy is lowered, with a plank hanging - showing 7093:1585 AD It hangs in the air - condemned by its own nature, lit by "straws" of light. THE POPE, HENRIC and STEPHAN make their entrance onto the balcony. One by one they cut the strings that support the dummy. At last it falls. They turn and exit.)

(Lights fade to black)

(END OF FIRST ACT)
ACT II

Exile, escape and the law of physics

SCENE 1

Fall of 1586.

(Lights fade in over the balcony. THE POPE, STEPHAN B. and HENRIC make their entrance.)

THE POPE

This Mihnea…

STEPHAN B.
The legitimate ruler of Walachia, Excellency.

HENRIC

You know too well it's not so. Mihnea paid to get the throne.

THE POPE

Like your thorn of Christianity, didn't? Mihnea was bloody lucky. Must have sold his soul to the Devil or something.

HENRIC

My thorn?

THE POPE

Your thorn, your minion - I am not interested in him anymore.

HENRIC

Neither am I, but that does not mean we should let the man die.

STEPHAN B.

Who said we'll let him die? (pause) Did you just say you're not interested..

HENRIC

As a ruler he broke even the last trace of trust.

THE POPE

Remember how I had warned you…about him - about many others, Our mistake is that we continue having faith, we hope and pray for a change in those lands when the only logical change should be to turn our backs, shut our ears, close our eyes and forget about the ones who passed, but more importantly the ones who'll follow; the most dangerous kind of all, as you had seen. They suckle their raise into grace like piglets on a tit.
STEPHAN B.
Did you just compare his protégé with a pig?

THE POPE
He just said he doesn't care. I am saying - nothing is what it seems, my lords.

HENRIC
From France everything looked in the proper place. The letters, the poems to my mother, the continuous supply of wine, linen and boors. And yet he disrespected my ambassador by sending a chest with just one silver in it, he set on fire a Turkish fort at the Danube, and he dispatched to have a harlot killed in Constantinople?

THE POPE
On what reason?

HENRIC
She was carrying his child.

STEPHAN
And he wanted to mount my niece.

THE POPE
Do you really believe all these are true?

HENRIC
Did you really believe you'll have Walachia at your feet?

THE POPE
Yes, of course. My Lord had a mighty plan.

HENRIC
Well then, I believe everything when the news come from a note sent by Osman Pasha, himself. The man is a Holy Scripture.

STEPHAN B.
The man is dead and gone.

THE POPE
What?

STEPHAN B.
It happened two weeks after Peter ran away. The Persian sands finally asked for Pasha. And you got the letter when?

HENRIC
Three days ago.
STEVENHAN
Than either your administration and currier service were once more on strike or something is rotten in... Walachia.

THE POPE
Most poetic, Stephan. Bravo. So, our runaway has good reason for revenge.

On who?

HENRIC
If what you say is true - if Peter was wronged- than Mihnea's head will be the first to fall.

THE POPE
The chum is already in his second season. He's bloody out of luck. It's like the Devil is coming to ask for his soul already.

STEVEN B.
And this very devil wears the name of Peter Earring.

HENRIC
I don't even want to know what Peter will do to him.

STEVEN B.
If he kills the way he penetrated my niece's heart.

THE POPE
If he kills the way he spread my seed....

HENRIC
If he sneaks gently in Mihnea's chamber the way he used to sneak into mine, then...

THE POPE
Mihnea is dead. He is dead and gone. Dead.

(Loud laughter coming from inside)

THE POPE
Rudolph? Is it you? Bloody German - always laughing when he shouldn't. I pray day and night to have him straighten up, serious, sober...

STEVEN
It's not him, sire.
HENRIC
It's the Sultan.

THE POPE
The Sultan? Laughing? So Loud?

SULTAN'S VOICE
(interrupted by strong laughter)
What a silly chum... Mihnea how could you let yourself get killed like this... first poisoned, then beheaded, next cut into pieces and stuffed in a trunk. I must confess, Peter did a nice job with the rapping. The whole thing in golden foil and in your mouth an earring. An earring Mihnea? Not a pearl, an earring!!! Not a whole diamond - but a lousy earring! Earring! What a chum...

(Suddenly, lights fade in central stage. All what we can see is a golden trunk on one side. A scream which mixes with the Sultan's last lines: Leave me alone! Mother! I need some light! Mother!)

(MIHNEA enters wearing a night robe. He is tired, nervous, fidgety.)

MIHNEA
Mother! Where are you?

(LADY IN BLACK enters.)

LADY IN BLACK
What is it boy? What do you need? What happened?

MIHNEA
Out of my sight! You make me sick. Where is my mother?

(ECATERINA enters.)

ECATERINA
Who screams in the midst of night?

LADY IN BLACK
The great Prince of Walachia!

MIHNEA
Why won't you let me be?

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LADY IN BLACK
I am myself a mother. I should attend your needs, your highness.

MIHNEA
What a pest!

ECATERINA
Mihnea, I won't allow you treat your blood like…

MIHNEA
Blood? Did you say blood? My blood- He wants my blood! He is coming, mother. I heard it and felt it on my own skin. Peter Earring is here to grab my skin and stuff it with straws.

ECATERINA
Yet another one of your dreams. Yesterday you saw him down the corridor, today you traced his face in a rug.

LADY IN BLACK
I saw him too. I did. Right where my bowels drop.

MIHNEA
How can I not when everyone talks of him. The boyars, my counselors and loyal courtiers, the servants, the cook, even the stall boy. I hear them laughing behind my back, whispering what a miserable prince I am.

LADY IN BLACK
So kill them all.

MIHNEA
I would but it would mean to rule over nobody.

LADY IN BLACK
At least you'll keep your sanity, not act like a madman.

MIHNEA
She doesn't understand a thing. Mother convince her to leave, I beg of you.

LADY IN BLACK
Don't beg your mother. She doesn't deserve to see you act so low. I'll go. If you disturb my sleep once more, you'll make me regret I chose to have you crowned. I am an understanding merciful woman but....

MIHNEA
You chose!? You're merciful!? You lousy bitch, you killed a hundred children.
LADY IN BLACK
You are a child, too - Mihnea Voivode. An old child…but still one.

(LADY IN BLACK exits. ECATERINA slaps MIHNEA)

ECATERINA
Since you called me - I am doing my duty as a mother.

MIHNEA
I am doomed.

ECATERINA
No. You just refuse to accept your luck and glorious fate. You are a King, again!

MIHNEA
Why do you like to lie yourself so much. Even the rotten shrew knows better what I am: a Governor of an insignificant province. A doomed one - just like myself. In this adulterous relationship the ruler not the land is the whore.

ECATERINA
I'm going to lose my wits with you. What do you want? What is your will?

MIHNEA
For tonight - not to be killed by Peter.

ECATERINA
He is far away, across the Carpathians.

MIHNEA
Where? I want to know where. Why isn't Sigismund answering?

ECATERINA
Because he is young and has zits on his face. Peter is lost and lonely. The two don't go well hand in hand. Even his Italian counselor got cold feet. Transylvania is not for him. (pause) Peter has nothing. You got his gold.

MIHNEA
One trunk out of a four and a bunch of crap.

ECATERINA
More than enough, knowing that with the rest, you have the throne assured for life.

MIHNEA
Actually you bought it for me. I wanted to invest in art and physics. I was told that's where the future is.
ECATERINA
Then if you know the future why fear? What does the mob wants anyway?

MIHNEA
Churches and majestic houses like he built.

ECATERINA
So build them. What else?

MIHNEA
Fresh bread and water.

ECATERINA
So share to all with no fuss.

MIHNEA
Why? So he can be remembered.

LADY IN BLACK’S VOICE
So he can be forgotten! Idiot! Now both of you -go to sleep. Why did I return to the lands where you cannot rest?

SCENE 2

Mayor's Court, Fortress of Medias in Transylvania.

A most festive dinner having as main guest - PETER EARRING. The wine is plenty, same with the food. Ambiental music can be heard softly.

(Courtiers, attendants, a fool, a few ladies and the mayor are listening to PETER composing on the spot a poem. Most of the time we'll see him enjoying his cup of wine.)

PETER (COMPOSING OUT LOUD)
Title: Ode Number… what number…Four by God's servant - Peter- after the strongest and most divine cup of Bacchalic potion he ever had the pleasure to drink.

(Loud laughter, especially from the MAYOR)

My royal power was hidden at the bottom of a chest of gold,
My dreams and noble desires, alas - alas - ended being sold,
A rodent took the shape of a humble servant to the Gate,
He challenged my will and changed my luck and fate
Khadim Pasha, by name - played me a wicked farce
And my one wish - is kick his cursed Turkish - ARSE!!!(Loud laughter, applause.)

MAYOR
Most excellent dear Peter. My most esteemed colleagues from Brasov and Alba were absolutely right - you do have a touch of Boticelli…

THE FOOL
Lord Peter Earring has a strong and mighty pen
It's what all ladies wish and pray for in a man.

PETER (TO THE FOOL)
Since my dethronement I've been scribbling the same verses in my head over and over again.

MAYOR
And on good reason. What happened to you is an indecent accident and it should not pass unpunished.

PETER
You really think so?

MAYOR
I know so. You might think it's easy to express such a thought in my position…I mean - being protected by the mountains and all…but let me tell you something Peter, I always lived with the fear of being attacked by the Turks. It happened before and it can always happen again.

THE FOOL
And this is why our great city walls
Are as big and heavy as a bear's balls.

MAYOR
The Fool knows what he's talking about. Come, I have something to show you. Open the doors.

(A noise. MAYOR and PETER walk downstage, close to the audience. From here on, attendants/servants/ladies will disappear one by one.)

MAYOR
What do you see my lord?
PETER
What do I see…Darkness, and a speck of the mountain tops. On the other side- my lands must be longing for me.

MAYOR
No, no! Closer, closer! See the row of chimneys…just one palm lower…

PETER
That must be…shades…forms of…bodies…Bodies…hanging…

MAYOR
Dangling even, and that's because of orders coming from the top, from the regents counsel. (pause). Allow me to introduce these shadows of danger to you. The ones hanging are your own enemies my friend.

PETER
Enemies?

MAYOR
The ones who tried to steal your treasure. Your swift run, must have brought great hunger for riches in Walachia..

PETER
Must I remind you that Khadim's plan was to have my head brought on a plate by my own courtiers.

MAYOR
And your plan?

PETER
Until I found out, to fight till the last drop.

MAYOR
It's history's duty to repot such an adventurous mighty version. Your duty my lord - was to stay alive, for your sake, for ours, for everyone. But now you can rest assured - in front of you hang all the soldiers and boyars, even a couple of counselors whom I believe were most loyal to you in times of peace.

PETER
Sivori!

MAYOR
Who?

PETER
My closest friend, my confidant…he….
MAYOR
I don't believe he's in this group. Should he be? I could check, I'll give orders…

PETER
No, no, no!

THE FOOL
Franco Sivori, the name rings in my ear - I confess
He won three gold pieces - at a game of a chess.

MAYOR
Fool, if you dare hide something from our guest - you will share their punishment.

PETER
Fool, I beg of you - speak. Have you seen him? Where is he? What did he say?

THE FOOL
I believe I met him two weeks from this day - in Sighisoara, where you - my lord- sent me to entertain the guild masters. There, in the town's square, in the midst of the carnival, my eyes got drawn to this man. By the way he looked and addressed, I knew he wasn't from our lands. At a tavern's table he was playing against one of those troubadours…you know the kind who make a living out of having everyone else lose. Well, this man - won.

Sivori, won?!

THE FOOL
Yes, yes, Sivori…Franco Sivori.

MAYOR
Are you sure you heard this name and no other?

THE FOOL
Who do you take me for? A fool? I heard his name as he was cursed by the loser in all kinds of tongues. I'm sure it was him: Franco Sivori, that was his name. It brought him gold, it brought him fame.

PETER
Thank God he is alive.

THE FOOL
Alive, rich and by now across the border.

MAYOR
Not a smart choice going back to Walachia.
THE FOOL (TO PETER)
Your Sivori was headed for Vienna. The rest I do not know…

THE MAYOR
You are talking rubbish. You forget you are a Fool, not Nostradamus.

THE FOOL
You can buy a horse for three pieces of gold
One for the head, one for the body and one for his behind.
At least that's what one should buy and not of any other kind
If you mount the horse and ride towards west
The steam from his arse will choke the Turks fast

PETER
So, to Vienna, my friend. I keep my faith in you.

THE MAYOR
Take the Fool away and teach him how to dangle in this very second.

PETER
What say you my lord? Why?

THE MAYOR
Obviously he has been hiding the matter on purpose.

THE FOOL
What purpose my lord?. My only purpose is to be your fool…and as I very well see - I've been a fool for opening my mouth.

THE MAYOR
One of the traitors who paid already with his neck must have bribed you to plant such blabbing in our guest's ears.

THE FOOL
They are good news my lord. What's wrong with that?

THE MAYOR
I am sick and tired of your pathetic games.

THE FOOL
Fate is no game my lord, and fate made me uncover this story.

THE MAYOR
And the same fate shall have you hanging by your neck.
PETER
I believe in his innocence.

THE MAYOR
You trust him, Lord Peter?

PETER
If the story is true than it's excellent news, and if it happens to be but a lie, a joke - I can only say it saddens me your court has found no better matter for amusement.

THE FOOL
All what I said is true. My mother gave birth to a man of honor, it's this world that brought me up as a fool.

PETER
He speaks wisely, therefore pardon him for any wrong doing.

THE MAYOR
You're lucky our guest is so lenient! Out of my sight!

THE FOOL
Your lordship, I shall sing for you tonight.

(Exits)

THE MAYOR
You are too kind.

PETER
I just wish to have a day when I don't see or hear death.

THE MAYOR
I am sorry this sight has saddened you. You must know, it was done for your best.

PETER
If you will excuse me...

THE MAYOR
There is another matter, yet to be settled - Lord Peter.

PETER
Yes?

THE MAYOR
Under strict orders, your treasure...well, whatever we had recovered - is to be kept in the capital.
PETER

In Alba, and why is that?

THE MAYOR

The high council has decided it's in your best interest to have the goods deposited and protected by the policies under which our principality is governed.

PETER

It sounds too complicated for this late hour.

THE MAYOR

Lord Peter, the regents know you fled Walachia with over one million scudis.

PETER

Part of it hasn't made it across the border. Mihnea made it clear.

THE MAYOR

But part of it did. And again a part of this part was known to be traveling with Sivori, one with you and one…

PETER

There wasn't any other part.

THE MAYOR

There was and we found it. Our army is a vigilant one. And you should be glad we did - otherwise the Turks would have gulped on it.

PETER

To resume - the Transylvanian Court is confiscating my goods.

THE MAYOR

No Peter, the Court is protecting your revenue until you shall find your way back to the throne of Walachia.

PETER (GROWING WEAKER)

I thank the regents for their concern. Please let them know I already feel safer in their hands than in the hand's of Khadim Pasha.

THE MAYOR

Your answer does not make you a good Fool.

PETER (AND WEAKER)

So this is what it was all about? I should have realized warm welcomes are not free.
THE MAYOR
You are talking nonsense. I love having you as my guest. Besides, every penny shall be returned to you in better and healthier times

PETER
In better times…

THE MAYOR
It's the Regent's promise.

PETER
Ode number…ode number…five, that's right. Ode Number Five of Lord Peter who after drinking the strongest cup of wine ever, he feels numb and betrayed for the first time in the lands of Transylvania…

I am nothing but a fool, alas, alas
It takes nothing but a wild guess
To learn I have been cheated by all laws
I am the King of Fools, all made of straws

(PETER kisses THE MAYOR on the mouth and collapses.)

MAYOR
Take the fool away!

(The FOOL enters followed by a couple of attendants. The FOOL grabs PETER and starts dragging his body. The MAYOR exits.)

THE FOOL
Even if you shall not see from now - the light of day
At the next sunrise - I will sing for your soul and pray.

SCENE 3

Upstairs on the platform The POPE, HENRIC and STEPHAN play chess though their opponents are not present.

THE POPE
Stephan admit it, your crusade is a great flop. Look at you, you got no knights left, no horses.

STEPHAN
I still got the Queen…and as long as the Queen lives… well Henric knows better.
HENRIC

Will you stop it. I can't focus.

THE POPE

Just make a move, take a piece, any piece - don't just sit like, like a Frenchman.

HENRIC (DRY)

You're the one to talk? I said - I will not cheat. My partner must return any minute now.

STEPHAN

Mine too but that doesn't mean I must play fair. Besides, haven't you heard the Sultan always likes surprises.

THE POPE

Best thing is to play against God. I can never lose. Come on Henric, can't you see- you got an open field, right there…of course, if he makes the next move by using the rocks, then…

THE POPE

Don't tell him. He'll panic even more. Henric, I'm sorry that Rudolph couldn't make it. A party pooper as always. You must confess your partner is quite good.

(SIVORI makes his entrance downstairs.)

SIVORI

Your Excellencies!?

STEPHAN

Who calls?

THE POPE

Is it you, Rudolf

HENRIC

I told you the Sultan will be back in no time.

SIVORI

Most esteemed sovereigns, I've been looking all over for you.

Is it the Tatars again?

THE POPE

He doesn't look like one.

HENRIC
Maybe it's the Mongols.

SIVORI
My name is Franco Sivori and I come in the name of Peter Earring.

THE POPE
Peter who?

SIVORI
The rightful prince of Walachia, your Grace.

STEPHAN
Ah, the dethroned prince. What is the matter?

THE POPE
Is he dead yet?

SIVORI
Not quite but…

THE POPE
Henric where are you going? Don't you want to hear how your renaissance minion is doing?

HENRIC
How many times I told you he is not…

SIVORI
My lords, Peter is in great danger.

THE POPE
Everyone is. Look at me - I am about to lose my Black Knight.

SIVORI
Peter was arrested.

STEPHAN
 Arrested, by who?

SIVORI
By your own nephew, Sigismund…

STEPHAN
You must be mad. Sigismund would never do such a thing…he is just a kid.
SIVORI
And that could be a problem. My lord is locked in the Dungeon of Medias. His days are numbered.

THE POPE
Don't be silly, chum.

HENRIC
What is his guilt?

SIVORI
Nothing but being born under an unlucky star, and he'll stay under it, if you don't act quickly and wisely.

THE POPE
And who are you to give orders?

SIVORI
His friend, his traveling companion, his counselor, his messenger and above all - a foreigner in Walachia.

HENRIC
And one who knows how to benefit from the poverty of others. Fellow you are but a scoundrel, your words mean nothing to us.

THE POPE
I am afraid I agree with Henric. Your Peter has broken his oath, his promises were all great lies. Why should we trust a messenger who changes countries like horses?

STEPHAN
Sivori, your lord had a golden mouth - and though he was loved in his times, he never met our expectations.

SIVORI
You mean a crusade started by a new Catholic vassal empire?

THE POPE/HENRIC/STEPHAN
Well yes! All in all yes! That's about it. Plus the accumulated interest! The debt! Yes, the debt!

SIVORI
Mad rulers of the West, hear me!

THE POPE
How dare you?
SIVORI
Though my lord was wronged many a times he never stopped to keep his faith in you.

THE POPE
The faith that I keep my faith in his. That's a great faith indeed. Please be gone now, I have a game to finish.

SIVORI
Walachia needs him, the people ask for him.

STEPHAN
That's no news - we asked for him for two years. He only answered when he needed more money. Leave us friend, we heard enough.

SIVORI
Henric, remember how you raised him in grace once. I beseech you to think this over and lay your eyes upon him. Dispatch your Ambassadors right away and…

HENRIC
Now I understand why people who are born blind, are happier. They don't have to see how low and cheap mortals can get.

(LORD KENDY enters, moves a piece on HENRIC’s chess board.)

KENDY
They also don't get to see when some make big mistakes. Check mate, your lordship.

THE POPE
Kendy, finally! I thought you got lost in the Vatican.

KENDY
How can you get lost when walls are as thin as a Damask cheek. Lord Sivori... (pause)

HENRIC
You know each other?

KENDY
What say you brother Sivori, do we or don't we?

SIVORI
You! You're to be blamed!
KENDY
Why? For treating you nobly in my house? I am afraid I do not understand.

SIVORI
You cheated my faith and locked my master.

STEPHAN
Don't be silly Sivori. Kendy has been at my court for some good weeks now. I myself dissolved the regent's council. I did it in secret because...why did I do it Kendy?

KENDY
Too many voices to rule such a small province...or in your own words: much ado about nothing.

STEPHAN
Yes, yes. So if there is any regent to be blamed is the new and only one - Lord...

KENDY
Lord Gekzy...

STEPHAN
Yes, that's him. I don't think he had the brains to corner our Peter. He's a complete moron and an incompetent. I picked him myself.

KENDY
At least he's loyal.

THE POPE
If I am correct - and please indulge my memory - I believe Lord Kendy's new title is: Chancellor of the Polish Royal Court.

KENDY
Almost right, your Excellency. Should I remind you, Poland is an Empire?

HENRIC
Just by name. Poland is nothing without France. Nothing.

STEPHAN
Nothing is but a word, and France shall be too...

THE POPE
Here we go again...

SIVORI
Who? Who threw my prince into the dungeon?
I didn’t. Maybe Henric did - out of jealousy.

Are you crazy? I haven’t touched the man. Stephan has the right connections…come on Stephan, stop pretending you know nothing about it. Let Peter go.

I thought you didn’t care.

The Sultan did! The Sultan gave the order to have Peter imprisoned and Sigismund had to obey. This was no matter for any regent. Sigismund just did what he was asked.

As a kid…

As the governor of Transylvania, a vassal province to the Gate.

And may I know why this heavy silence, my lord?

Yes? Why wasn’t I informed?

What would you prefer sires? To have you and the people you rule - know that the possessions of a Wallachian prince and therefore part of your belongings, part of your honor, part of your ideas and plans are all in the care of the Transylvanian state or to find out they were carried to Constantinople in order to be enjoyed by our dear friend, the Sultan, and maybe - just maybe - be put to use against yourselves.

We would have looked like fools.

We shall still.

Silence was better, indeed.

My lord, though I feel my head will fall for letting you know so late, allow me to speak again.
STEPHAN

Do so -

KENDY

Though I did not approve the act, I knew Sigismund needed to learn how to take a decision by himself, and he did it sire...he did it with decency, brains and courage.

SIVORI

You used my master so you can teach yours what courage is?

KENDY

You said it yourself Lord Sivori - rulers grow, regents pass. You know too well how I protected Sigismund - my duty as a regent expired not when Lord Stephan dissolved the council, but when I felt as a complete servant, one who truly fears his master.

THE POPE

You fear Sigismund?

KENDY

I fear he is not the child you think he is. (pause) Let it be known I will do whatever it takes to get Peter out of jail, if that's what everyone wishes. And my only wish to you, Lord Stephan - is to judge all of my actions with a merciful heart and great wisdom, for all I did was try to serve solely your interests, while keeping your soul in peace.

STEPHAN

I know Lord Kendy. Good Sivori we will judge the matter and let you know by and by.

SIVORI

There is no time to waste, my lords.

THE POPE

No of course not. Therefore, We must pray! We must pray! We must!

HENRIC

And think.

SCENE 4

KHADIM PASHAS's study. Late at night, as sea waves can be heard in the distance.

(KHADIM admiring the riches from a trunk. He takes out some objects made out of gold, bags of coins and the statue of
BOGDAN
Khadim Pasha, son of Hassan Pasha, who passed in the world of your righteous eighteen
years from this day, you have been summoned by my will to revenge my dead son, to pay in
blood. Do you have anything to say or more to offer?

KHADIM
It cannot be. I killed you. You're dead. Food for wolves in the Carpathians…that's what you
are.

BOGDAN
I am the servant of Prince Peter Earring and have come to collect what's rightfully ours: the
treasure for him, your life for me.

KHADIM
You are not real. You are but an apparition - a thought, one of my childish fears.

BOGDAN
I am a messenger Pasha, and one who knows his text by heart.

(KHADIM falls to the ground in pain)

KHADIM
I bleed! I cannot bleed! It is not right. Only my God and our great Sultan have the right….

BOGDAN
Over your life? To make you bleed? How wrong you are Pasha. See, conquerors like you
forget even men like us, men who call themselves vassals, who pay tribute in blood and act
as marionettes…have the right and strength to kill. True it takes longer for them to learn how
to stand up, how to play dead and when to move but once they do it - you cannot stop them.

KHADIM
I bleed. I die. I'm going to my God.

BOGDAN (CLAPS ONCE MORE)
You wish, alas alas. My son wanted to live and serve his Prince. You didn't grant his wish, so
I won't grant yours. I will let you live and serve your Sultan. You know I am alive just as you
know there are no strings to hold me down. I can visit you at anytime and make you kneel
and bleed the way you made my son, my people and my Prince.

(KHADIM turns to exit.)

KHADIM
Wait! Wait! You cannot do this! By my honor…
BOGDAN
What honor can a dummy have, Pasha?

BOGDAN exits. KHADIM remains alone, checks to see if he is still bleeding.

KHADIM
It's nothing but a dream, maybe a drop of guilt…

(LADY IN BLACK enters.)

KHADIM
You? Here?

LADY IN BLACK
Well of course. What were you expecting? I was right, wasn't I? I always am. There's no difference between our hells.

KHADIM
Hell, what are you talking about? I am alive.

LADY IN BLACK
Alive? You are mad indeed to think so. You were stabbed by one of Peter's Boyars just the other day.

KHADIM
It cannot be. I do not bleed.

LADY IN BLACK
That's not what your servant said when he discovered you inside a trunk, with an earring in your mouth.

KHADIM
An earring? No, no… You are the mad one, not I. There is no wound, see… and you…

LADY IN BLACK
How did I find my end? Old age or poisoned - not much of a difference. (pause) So we are either mad or dead. That's a true punishment for the likes of us, don't you think? Now how on earth will we ever find out?

MIHNEA'S VOICE (COMING FROM THE CASTLE)
Mother! Where are you? Mother! Mother! Why am I so tormented? I need some light!!! Bring me some light!
KHADIM
Who's he?

LADY IN BLACK
The mad Prince of Walachia.

KHADIM
If he is mad - and we are too - it means we speak the same tongue.

LADY IN BLACK
Our insanity or death can only be of a much nobler kind. For a moment I thought he is the matter why I died - but knowing how his madness is born of weakness and fear, I cannot bet on it. His mother though…she's a feisty one. I loved her very much.

KHADIM
The best we can do is wait for the sunrise. Some answers will surely come.

LADY IN BLACK
Can sunrise come for the mad and the dead, Pasha?

(THE FOOL enters on the platform)

THE FOOL
I am a wronged dry fool coming from afar,
For a penny I can sing and make you wonder
If you are all rotten or just under - a lunatic's star.

SCENE 5

PETER EARRING's prison cell.

(PETER in a corner, writing. A carnival mask on his head. Loud cheering and music coming from outside. A GUARD wearing a carnival mask appears in a corner.)

GUARD
And how does Peter Earring feel in the night of Saint Ilie?

PETER
Couldn't be better. Many thanks for the mask.

GUARD
The guardian and the guarded deserve to feel royal - at least for one night.
PETER
You forget I am royal, my friend. (beat) Doesn't the tradition say it should rain at such a celebration?

GUARD
I don't think the Holy Book knows anything about the Transylvanian skies. All what I know is that it will rain with red wine and pour with pristine country ladies.

PETER (STILL WRITING)
Sounds like a great crowd outside.

GUARD
Yes sire - not one Turk nor any dethroned prince in sight.

PETER
Always keeping something up your sleeve for me, huh?

GUARD
Doing the best I can. And tonight instead of a hot bath, the prisoner has a visitor.

PETER
The visitor can wait.

GUARD
The visitor wishes to speak with you.

PETER
If it's about my death - I am not interested. If it's about me escaping again - you are my witness I failed more than once. I am tired of all the freedom plans made in the Balkans. They never work.

GUARD
The visitor insists you should...

PETER
Can I just finish this verse? The rats give me a half an hour break per day. Why does the visitor need to bother me now?

GUARD
Because Lord Franco Sivori cannot wait forever.
PETER
Sivori? Here? I thought he would never venture around these lands again. Well why didn't you say so from the beginning - let him in and bring another cup of fresh water.

GUARD
I am done putting things on your tab, Peter.

PETER
When I'll be Prince again - you'll wish you'd have done it. (beat) Send him in and make haste.

GUARD
You're forgetting your place Peter. (silence) Who is the one who's being kept inside these walls? Who is the one who will not get ink and paper if he does not behave like a gentleman?

PETER

GUARD
Very well…Now, do I need to make sure you will not get too close to your guest? Trying to sneak out some letter, some complaint, some secret, bribe or anything of that sort?

PETER
On my honor I shall keep the distance.

GUARD
Very well. Do so. I have no desire to be called an animal by my master, for chaining you again.

PETER
On my honor, it will not be necessary.

GUARD
Finished with the poem?

PETER (HANDS IT TO HIM)
Here! You can give it to one of your women.

(GUARD exits. PETER remains alone for enough time to fix his mask. The VISITOR enters wearing a black cloak and a carnival mask.)

PETER
Sivori! My most beloved friend…
THE VISITOR makes PETER a sign to stop.

PETER
Yes, yes I know. Keep the distance, speak out loud, don't rise any suspicion. Rules made by imbeciles…but I don't care…I really don't. Come, let me embrace you.

THE VISITOR takes a step back.

PETER
Afraid Sivori? Of me? Of them? Why don't you speak? Say something…

(A LONG PAUSE. The two characters look at each other without moving.)

PETER
Ashamed. Ashamed of me, is that it? You came to punish in the worst of ways. No worries - I can't look at myself either. You can though, you always could…one look of yours made me raise a church, another one saved my soul. And now, what do you see?

(A PAUSE)

A fallen king? The guard is right - many a times I do forget my place. I see myself on the throne, respecting the wishes of the ones who raised me and making from Walachia more than a name. True absolute power doesn't need a name, anyway. But all these are the dreams and crying of a fool. The last I saw you, I promised we shall prevail. I promised safety and glory. You have all the rights to be disappointed. It's funny - I heard Mihnea is not doing too well either. I pity the man…living with the same horror I did. Any news from the west? Don't worry - I wouldn't ask you to beg at the gates of Henric or Stephan again. It's been all in vain, isn't it? At least from my window, I can look up and now and then that's enough. I'm learning how to live with a name, mine - Peter Demetrius, Ruler by the Grace of God 7091-7093, Prisoner by the same Grace 7093, 7094, 7095….

THE VISITOR takes out a dagger, and slowly makes steps towards PETER.

PETER
Sivori? What are you doing? My friend I know I wronged you but...why do this...wait...I am not ready...I haven't even said my prayers...too late? Too soon? You are not him, are you? For Christ sake, I wasted my thoughts on a paid murderer...who sent you? At least grant me this wish? Who sent you? The Sultan? Khadim? Sigismund? You know I won't put up a fight...and not because of cowardice but why some straws should resist against the everlasting strings?

THE VISITOR suddenly leaps by PETER, falling to the ground, trying to stab something.)
THE VISITOR
I hate rats! I hate them! Hate them! Hate them! (beat) By God, I missed him!

(As THE VISITOR's mask fell during this most surprisingly violent episode, we can see that she is none other but GRISELDA, a beautiful young woman. PETER is in shock. He retreats in a corner.)

PETER
You, who are you? Is this an all Saint's prank? Guard? Guard!!! There's a mad woman…Guard!!!

GRISELDA
You haven't screamed when you thought I shall kill you, and you scream now?

PETER
What do you want from me? Money, poems…

GRISELDA
My lord does not seem to remember.

PETER
Remember? Remember what?

GRISELDA (TAKING OUT A LETTER)
If this isn't your hand writing, I am willing to go…but if it is, then…well, first let's see what does it say here…"I shalt braid your hair with garlands taken from a sun's eclipse…"

PETER
I don't think I should pay with my life for a moment of bad inspiration.

(A BRIEF PAUSE)

Griselda?!

GRISELDA
Potential wife, verse lover, rat hater…yes, that's me, my lord.

PETER
But why? Who…how did you get...you don't look anything like in the painting.

GRISELDA
Transylvanian artists are no Leonardo.
PETER
And I am no fool. Why - you were sent to spy on me, is that it?

GRISELDA
I came to set you free my lord.

PETER
Hmmm, that's a surprise. You know how many nobles, mayors and ambassadors entered through the same door and said the very same thing…

GRISELDA
My lord, I am nothing of what they were. I am a woman who wants to see you free.

PETER
Why is that?

GRISELDA
Because I care about you.

PETER
You know nothing about me…nothing but what my stupid letters and poems told you.

GRISELDA
And that's more than enough. I waited for so long…

PETER
Well you are lucky I got imprisoned, then. Here I am - Peter Demetrius, at your orders madam.

GRISELDA
Then follow me. Come!

(She grabs his hand)

PETER
I heard rumors of your unbalanced spirit but this is too much. Guard! Guard!

GRISELDA
Why must you be such a pain…

PETER
Why you? Why…this can't happen. I am mad myself. Some see the devil and I see -

GRISELDA
The one you planned to take as your mistress. The one you thought of as your future servant, child bearer…

PETER
I never dared to think of you in such a way.

GRISELDA (GETTING CLOSER TO HIM)
Then tell me lord- what were you thinking when you called me your diadem, your nectar-your pulse…

PETER
I won't find my freedom in the hands of a woman!

GRISELDA
Only men with Roman blood can think like this. Very well… Vlad! Vlad!

VLAD, a young man enters, holding a bloody knife.

VLAD
Yes, my lady.

GRISELDA
What have you done?

VLAD
Killed all the rats I could find…as you have ordered.

( (to PETER) )
Your majesty…the carnival of life and glory is waiting for you.

PETER
Who is he?

VLAD
Lady Griselda's confidant and your humble servant. I owe the air I breathe today, to your Lord Sivori. He saved my neck a while ago…and he couldn't have saved it, if it wasn't for you sending him to Transylvania in the first place. And so the wheel of life is always turning, and we can only wish to be the axle…

PETER
An ex convict and a poet. Splendid! That's all I could wish for tonight.

VLAD
We don't have much time. The carriage is set to leave at midnight, when the straw devils are being burned.
GRISELDA
I believe our lord is indisposed for the moment. We'll leave him till better times arise.

VLAD
As you wish, my lady.

(GRISELDA walks towards the exit.)

PETER
You're leaving me now?

GRISELDA
I believe you are the one who is leaving us? What a pity.

PETER
What do you mean? Wait! Wait! Wait!

GRISELDA
You never had a woman leave you sire? (beat) The death warrant you've been waiting for- is being written in this very moment.

PETER
Sigismund?

GRISELDA
The letter is meant to reach him shortly, of course. However it just happens that tonight he'll serve his first courtesan and maybe by the time we'll find ourselves sheltered - he'll have a second taste as well. I trust my brother will perform well just as I trust you're taking a wise decision.

PETER
Sivori?

GRISELDA
Alive and waiting for you in Venice.

PETER
Have I been raised on the Walachian throne again?

GRISELDA
You haven't even raised yourself from the floor. Give yourself and others time my lord.

PETER
Time? Who are you taking me for? I need to know what are we to do, who is taking me where, am I being given my possessions back, is Mihnea out of the game…
GRISELDA
So the rumors were true: impatient and insecure out of too much pride.

PETER
Proud but also faithful lady. What about you? You say you bring me freedom - but hast thou any faith? It's easy to find freedom - it's hard to keep it.

GRISELDA
Nothing I haven't heard. It also applies to God, Gold and Mutinies. Let's just say... though I do not burp, nor break wind when nobles are around, nor have an ugly mole on the other cheek...I do see myself as your future love, your wife, and Princess of Walachia.

(He sets the mask on his face and he does the same for her. She kisses him. They run out, as the crowd's cheering gets louder with the music.)

SCENE 6

Night. Though for now, the audience cannot see the characters nor what it is happening, a soft sound of love making and gentle whispers dissolve in the auditorium.

After a while, HUSSEIN makes his entrance on the balcony (possibly carrying a torch). (He bumps into a wall and is about to fall over the balcony. HUSSEIN has lost his eyes, in the Justitia trial.)

HUSSEIN
Your Grace...your grace...

(The love making continues)

HUSSEIN
Your Grace...where are you...it's me...your servant, Hussein.

SULTAN'S VOICE
For crying out loud, Hussein get out of here. Can't you see I am busy?

HUSSEIN
No, your Grace...I really can't. I wish I could though. Your Grace...something terrible has happened.
SULTAN'S VOICE
Of course it did. It happened to me now…and all because of you. You'll pay for this, you know?

HUSSEIN
With what my most beloved Sultan?

SULTAN'S VOICE
I was hoping Earring pulled out only your eyes, and not your brains.

HUSSEIN
He didn't do it. Boyar Bogdan did and I can't wait to disembowel the bastard. When I'll find him, I'll see to have him quartered by. It's going to hurt…really really badly.

SULTAN'S VOICE
But why bother me in the sweetest of all nights.

HUSSEIN
Oh well…because Peter Earring is free. Free as a bird. He escaped and left nothing but an earring behind.

SULTAN'S VOICE
Free? What say you? Free!!!

(Lights fade in, THE SULTAN appears in one of his majestic robes. The SECOND YOUNG WOMAN, appears in a corner.)

SULTAN
Are you completely sure? Is it true? Who told you?

HUSSEIN
I am as sure as I am blind as a brick. The French Ambassador gave me the news at first. Now that's real administrative efficiency your grace. We should seek to implement their system. I would advise for you to catch him as soon as possible.

SULTAN
Hussein, how on earth did I make an idiot messenger my counselor?

HUSSEIN
You didn't make me, but since Khadim Pasha is deadly mad or madly dead…nobody knows or cares - here I am, ready to serve you till my last drop of life. Your grave is my grave,

SULTAN
How dare you? Get out of here! Get out now! You too whore.
YOUNG WOMAN
Me? What have I done to your grace?

SULTAN
Nothing, nothing - and that's the problem.

(The SULTAN remains by himself)

SULTAN (NERVOUS)
Lord Stephan! Lord Henric! Your Excellency! Wake up! Wake up! Up! Up! Up!

STEPHAN, HENRIC and THE POPE make their entrance onto the balcony, one by one, sleepy, wearing their royal night gowns. Without using too much the power of suggestion, perhaps the audience can catch a glimpse of a woman behind STEPHAN, a woman and a couple of young men behind HENRIC, - people whom we see once or twice, just luring the other characters in bed or just waiting anxiously, etc. This choice however should not be in any way the focus of the sequence.)

THE POPE
What is it Great Sultan? Did your God die?

STEPHAN
Is Constantinople burning again?

HENRIC
Great Sultan I told you, I am still reviewing the new commerce treaty.

THE SULTAN
Peter Earring has escaped. He's free.

THE POPE
So? Since when do you care about novice princes who happened to rule an insignificant province?

STEPHAN
That's right. Why worry?

THE SULTAN
Because you recommended him. Does any of you has something to do with it? Who helped him? Where is he heading?
HENRIC
By my honor - I haven't raised a finger.

THE SULTAN
But you knew about his break out?

HENRIC
Well...no...well...Yes, I might have heard a rumor...but it doesn't interest me. I have bigger things on my mind...the Huguenots and Poland.

THE SULTAN
Really? And you dear Pope? You Stephan?

THE POPE
How dare you blame a servant of God? Lord Peter is a dedicated Christian. He knows too well Jesus didn't try to break the chains or throw his cross.

STEPHAN
Not going against my nephew's wishes- should be solid proof, I respect the Turkish Gate as well.

THE SULTAN
Very well, if you say so...

HENRIC
What do you plan on doing?

THE SULTAN
Chain him, as fast as I can.

THE POPE
That's brilliant, my dear Sultan.

STEPHAN
Why don't you let him rule again?

THE SULTAN
You wish that every night, don't you? And You (to THE POPE) pray for the same thing...and you...I have no clue what you are doing. Don't take me for a stupid - I know your monumental plans and tricks too well. I know why you wish an enlightened specimen on the throne of Walachia...

STEPHAN/THE POPE/HENRIC
What are you talking about? Where do you get these ideas? You're not too thrilled by Mihnea's performance, right?
THE SULTAN

I am warning you…

STEPHAN

You're doing what?

THE SULTAN

Better pray to your God to keep my soul in peace, for when I feel as cheated as today - the world stops spinning. Remember Buda, Belgrade…even Vienna with its nasty courtly songs.

THE POPE

Is this a threat?

THE SULTAN (EXITING)

It's a matter of fact.

STEPHAN (LAUGHING)

War for a dethroned Walachian prince?

HENRIC

Europe falling for a poet who has a few verses published in Tuscan?

THE SULTAN (EXITING)

Either way - I'll be satisfied. Ecaterina! Mihnea! Wake up - you vassals!

The world stops spinning…

HENRIC

So Peter made it out…

STEPHAN

What a chum!

(THE FOOL enters. He will pick up straws from around the stage and make a small bundle out of them, perhaps a crown.)

THE POPE

You both want him back, don't you? Don't you?

HENRIC

He's nothing but an escapee. There's a long way for him to win my trust.

STEPHAN

If my niece hasn't fallen for even one of his words - do you think I will?
THE POPE
He chose to brake his chains. That's admirable. I say we should give him some time.

HENRIC
Time? Did you just say…time?

STEPHAN
You want us to risk the stability of our empires for one man? After all he has done and undone. You must be kidding.

I thought you wanted a crusade.

STEPHAN
A crusade? At my age? God forbid!

THE POPE
You wanted a vassal kingdom.

HENRIC
I want Poland. I want Poland!!!

THE POPE
Have you ever wondered what would have happened if our Lord had thrown away his cross, refused to carry it? He could have done it but instead he accepted his mortal fate…and acceptance is the most difficult of a man's inside wars. He kept on climbing Golgotha - because he had a mission.

HENRIC
Or because he had a great thirst for martyrdom.

THE POPE
Either way, the choice and the glory were his.

STEPHAN
As always it's up to us.

HENRIC
Decisions, decisions, decisions...

THE POPE
How wrong can you be my lords. Can't you see- how the small ones rule our lives, change our destinies, become the axle without knowing. Horrible, sad - yet true. Look at Juda…
Oh stop it!

SCENE 7

Two straw dummies are being raised in the air, at the same height.

(The Fool and Sivori appear upstage right, playing chess, sitting on a trunk. The rest of the stage becomes the Throne Room. Ecaterina enters.)

Ecaterina

Mihnea? Mihnea? Where are you hiding?

(Mihnea from behind the throne)

Mihnea

Is it done?

Ecaterina

It didn't take too long. There is yet another great news.

Mihnea's voice

Did the physician arrived at a conclusion? Am I decisively mad or dead?

Ecaterina

Henric III is dead. Murdered in cold blood.

Mihnea

Murdered for the sins of his mother.

Ecaterina

It is a sign. Act now!

Mihnea

A Henric is dead. So what? Another one shall follow, and yet another one. God, isn't power extraordinary, mother? Their rulers are numbered, while we are baptized by our own people.

Ecaterina

This is no time for thinking nor praying. Grab your festive garments, call on your officers, take the horses out of the stables. The gates of Constantinople are waiting for you.
MIHNEA
And once I'll reach them, I'll never come back. I swear to God I'll change my religion. I'll become a Muslim ...yes a Muslim, and leave behind this nightmare.

ECATERINA
If only your grand grand mother could hear you.

MIHNEA
Oh, I'm sure she is. And believe me, I hear her back as well. Every night, right there, right under the royal passage. She scares me to death.

ECATERINA
I'm too tired to call my son a fool. You have everything you need to finish this business: gold, an army, and a Sultan growing impatient. Once it is done...I don't care what you plan to do with your life...a Muslim or not, you'll still be my son.

MIHNEA
I will not have him killed. Though I fear him - I do not fear light. And he still sheds light into these places since the day he ran? I built as you said...stronger and higher than he ever did. And yet he is remembered. True, we both tried to impress our people...but he did for a change while I'm doing it for a mere moral relaxation. And when I pray, I pray in his church. When I hide, I hide behind his throne and when I kill - I still kill in his name. I want out, don't you understand? Isn't it plain enough? It's too much of a burden. I do not wish to rule this country. I don't. He does. It is his place.

ECATERINA
So he can kill me in your name. But I will not let that happen since I'll rather kill myself in front of your eyes....and that's a promise of a Queen Mother.

(ECATERINA takes out one of her brooches)

MIHNEA
You're mad.

ECATERINA
Like mother, like son. That's how the mob will call us in an end. So who are you picking Mihnea, son of Alexandru...the one who gave you life or the one who supposedly feeds you light?

MIHNEA
Mother, don't do it...why must you act so desperately dramatic?

ECATERINA
Because I love this earth and my people.
MIHNEA
You used to hate this earth. It meant nothing to you.
You called us barbarians.

ECATERINA
And so they are all who do not less us rule and live in peace. Besides never think you are one of them. You are made of Western European flesh.

(PAUSE)
Your hesitation makes me want to bleed.

MIHNEA
That's good enough - you'll end up as a martyr.

ECATERINA
I cannot be a martyr while I still have a drop of hope and love for my son. (pause) These hands…your hands…the ones who pressed from inside my womb… will not be stained by one drop of blood. It is a motherly promise, just as the other one is. (beat) All what you must do is outbid Peter and that's so simple.

MIHNEA
As simple as my people's fate. A fate which hasn't been any better under us.

ECATERINA
But it will, in time. All odds are in our favor. Do it. Bid!Bid!

MIHNEA
And his supporters…

ECATERINA
They bid with words…we bid with gold, and something else that pleases many.

MIHNEA
What?

ECATERINA
Your weakness, frailty, insecurity. All perfect for a Prince

(MIHNEA slaps her over the face.)

ECATERINA
Such is the duty of a king.
(ECATERINA bows and kisses him. As they disappear, upstage left THE POPE is playing chess against STEPHAN and HENRIC. On the balcony PETER appears first, followed by GRISELDA.)

GRISELDA

Stay another minute, my lord.

PETER

So after all, you are not indestructible. You want me back in your sheets.

GRISELDA

My lord, I don't want you to go.

PETER

You are the one who wanted to be the Queen of Walachia. As a man, I must provide…

GRISELDA

Not anymore. I'm satisfied with what I own.

PETER


GRISELDA

I had strange dreams, the other night.

PETER

I have them day by day. You should scribble and put them in a book, lady.

GRISELDA

You really don't see the danger.

PETER

Of bidding for what's been rightfully mine from the very beginning - no. I cheated death not once, but twice, I fell in love with you again and again, the faith I lost in some has doubled in others, Henric and the whole gang took a wise decision…True, my skills were stretched but I believed every word I whispered in their ears.

GRISELDA

And gold, my lord?

PETER (SHOWING HIS EARRING)

Nothing but this one. (laughing) Smile my love…why, you never heard a joke before? I'll hire a fool for you once I get the throne.
GRISELDA
And what about me? What am I to do while you are gone?
PETER
Remember me and don't kill any rats.

GRISELDA
And if you are never to return?
PETER
What sort of question is that? You have no faith in me?

GRISELDA
I have no faith in the ones who are waiting for you.
PETER
Well if I don't come back you can act like any honorable widow by either killing yourself, looking for revenge or living a chaste life.

GRISELDA
You mock me, Peter.
PETER
I mock and love you, lady. My men are waiting, the sun doesn't. Take my hands and bid me farewell with a kiss

GRISELDA
A kiss and a thought my lord: upon your return, I hope to be a mother.
PETER
I don't think you'll need another poet kicking inside you. (beat)Sivori!

SIVORI
My lord…
PETER
Everything ready?

SIVORI
Just like six years ago, except now I have to carry an older fool with me.
PETER
I would rather hear the sound of galloping towards the east not your occidental criticism.

SIVORI
As your lordship wishes.
(PETER goes and embraces him.)

**Peter**

I thank you for what you've been and are to me. Have faith. We shall prevail.

**Sivori**

That's what I fear most.

(Lights fade in and out as at the beginning of act i, to suggest the passing of time as...)

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**Scene 9**

(Mihnea enters in armor, pushing a chest of gold onto the stage. Peter in armor, pushing a chest from the opposite side. The Sultan enters.)

**The Sultan**

My most beloved friends...

**Mihnea/Peter**

(Bowing and kissing the Sultan's shoe)

Your grace...

**The Sultan**

We are here gathered...you know well why. I'll be short since I have more important matters to attend. Vienna, Rome and Paris are all waiting for me. The matter is most clear, you are both rightfully and lawfully entitled to the Walachian throne - however only one shall have it. The other can leave and live in peace. Understood?

**Mihnea/Peter**

Yes, our most beloved sovereign.

**The Sultan**

There is one problem though. It was brought to my attention I was accused of favoritism.

**Mihnea**

I never

**Peter**

I would never...

**The Sultan**

Silence! Though I express my disappointment - I do not wish to have it interfere in our business. So in an attempt to erase these villainous rumors I have decided to use something...
beyond my judgment. Something under the name of...(pause) physics. Physics that's it. Boyar Bogdan!

(BOYAR BOGDAN walks in carrying Lady Justitia. BOGDAN lost his sight as well.)

PETER

BOGDAN

Peter, forgive me! Forgive me!

THE SULTAN

You know each other? That's great. Perhaps later on you will share the stories of your lives.

Who did it? Who is the villain?

THE SULTAN

Who did what Peter? I believe everything you see around is part of an equitable trial. Isn't it so? (beat) Isn't it so?

PETER

As your grace, pleases.

THE SULTAN

Do you doubt The Sultan?

(PETER kisses THE SULTAN's robe)

THE SULTAN

Good, good. Now, to move on - this machinery was given to me by great Khadim himself. He brought it from the far far west. Such a wonderful man he was...and in his honor I decided to use it first on both of you. Any objections? No! Then I'll explain to you how it works. It's simple - quite simple - you each place the most valuable thing you brought...and the rest is up to her.

MIHNEA

That's it?

THE SULTAN

That's it. Simple as daylight. You fear physics Peter?

PETER

Only on paper, your grace.
THE SULTAN
I, only in bed. Did I tell you I have over a thousand women in my Harem? I wonder how I will be called, one day, for this reason. So that's that.

MIHNEA (TAKING OUT A GREAT DIAMOND FROM HIS TRUNK)
Then I shall start. Here…the greatest diamond known in these parts of the world.

PETER
And here is mine. Words of praise towards my merits as a ruler and my enlightened work - given by the masters of Europe.

THE SULTAN
I hope you are both have at least a basic knowledge of physics. After all the change, the fate of your people is in your hands. What do my eyes see? Can it be possible? With pride and faith, it can.

(Balance does not lean either way. MIHNEA takes out a bag of pearls and PETER takes off his earring.)

MIHNEA
Pearls from the bottom of an ocean of admiration towards you, great Sultan.

PETER
This Earring - stands for myself. Not more than a nail of gold inside…yet heavy enough to have me raised in your likings.

(The scale does not lean either way. THE SULTAN watches them cautiously. The balance still does not lean either way. A long pause. MIHNEA crosses to PETER, kneels and kisses his hand.)

MIHNEA
I kiss thy hand and recognize you as the true Prince of Walachia.

THE SULTAN
This is not part of the game Lord Mihnea. We're still tight in here.
MIHNEA
It is not my type of game, dear Sultan. I wish to be granted the right to leave and live in peace.

PETER
Your action Mihnea, makes you an honorable and wise ruler.

MIHNEA
I am what I am when I feel I fall. We're both made from the same earth. I choose to step on it, not seek satisfaction above.

THE SULTAN
Very well then. And you Lord Peter?

PETER
If Lady Justitia called us even, but Lord Mihnea wishes for another fate...I will embrace my luck and wait for your approval most beloved Sultan, for I have a future mother waiting for me to bring such glorious news.

THE SULTAN
I think I found an answer by your likings, but first I must pray and think.

(THE SULTAN exits)

PETER (to Bogdan)
Whoever did this to you shall pay.

BOGDAN
According to what my lord. Your law? Their law? Whose God? Let me stay in darkness. It's safer this way. At least I do not have to struggle and see the everlasting strings.

(BOGDAN exits with Justitia. The two rulers remain facing each other.)

SCENE 9

(SIVORI sitting on the same trunk as in the prologue. The straw dummy hanging on the right with a plank: 7098: 1590 A.D. THE POPE, STEPHAN, HENRIC, KENDY, GRISELDA frozen on the balcony, with their backs turned to the audience.)

SIVORI
My lords I bring news of Peter Demetrius's cruel death.
Who?

SIVORI
Peter Earring, as the mob had him baptized. The one and true legitimate ruler of Walachia.

How did he end?

THE POPE

STEPHAN
Hanged by his neck and drowned in Bosphorus. Turn and look at him my lords.

HENRIC

His body?

SIVORI
Intact, though emptied and filled with straws. Turn your eyes upon him my lords.

KENDY

For what purpose?

SIVORI
To be sent from province to province and stand as a lesson for other proud rulers who dare to shed some light where there is not the place, nor the time. Turn and see my lord.

His soul?

THE POPE

SIVORI
He muttered a prayer, as it is the custom, accepting his fate. Turn and see the one you raised in grace.

GRISELDA

And so I am a widow.

SIVORI
So you are my lady. Why won't you lay your eyes upon your dead husband?

GRISELDA

So I can be a sane mother.

SIVORI
Why look you all so disgusted? He wished to do good…to bring the change. Why desert him now? Why wrong him?
What could we do more?

Are you all ashamed? Fearful?

Nothing, it was just a bid. A bid plus the Sultan plus physics. We warned him, didn't we?

Yes we did. We sure did.

Why fear his dead eyes? He is but a hanged man, a lifeless dummy.

A bid for a province that cannot even bury its rulers in a Christian way.

Who has time for such things nowadays.

And Mihnea?

The governor of a country he never wished to have. Cursing, protesting and threatening he will become a Muslim.

Having what she wished for all her life. Sleeping by her husband.

And you, why didn't you help him? Why didn't you try to save his life?

It was his choice. The choice of a Prince. It was his death. The death of a Prince. I learned to respect both in all these years.

A coward!

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You cannot be a coward when the wheel of life is always turning. No, Sire - I am a messenger, one who shall learn his text by heard and tell his story for years to come.

THE POPE

You really think it's worth it?

SIVORI

You think it was worth to start all the crusades, kill in the name of your God and build Empires?

THE POPE

A generous blasphemous remark. I grant it.

STEPHAN

There was no difference between him and us. Nothing, except maybe a touch of Boticelli,

HENRIC

A smaller country.

THE POPE

An unlucky star.

GRISELDA

A true lover.

SIVORI

And the way he burns. Turn your lordships, turn and see how he burns, how he sheds true divine light over our faces, turn and see how a man of straws, a marionette, a dummy can live without you, can suffocate the sinful and cleanse us. Turn, look, look, look, look, look now… look…

Indeed, the straw dummy does start burning, flooding the auditorium with light. The characters upstairs are seen covering their faces with masks. In a last attempt, SIVORI takes out a small piece of paper.

SIVORI

Look, listen, learn. Why won't you turn? Why won't you listen? Why be blind and deaf? Should I read it to you? Do you want to hear if it's his verse or the hangman's? It's not a pearl, nor an earring, nor a diamond, nor gold, nor pride… just words… words...

(Meanwhile THE FOOL comes in and dances under the Dummy singing:)

THE FOOL

Peter Earring I heard of his name
It brought him death, it brought him fame
In the year of our Lord seven thousand and ninety eight
Pride has killed him, and changed the Walachian fate.

The state of our fate, the fate of our state
In the hands of the Sovereign Turkish Gate
Not in the hands of The Pope or Henric's or any other mate.

Such is the duty of a king
Not fear he is made of straws.
The laws are straws, the straws are laws,
The straws of laws, the laws of straws,

The Dummy continues to burn until it crashes to the ground spreading even more light and straws, as everything fades gently out on…

The streets are empty, fire still grunts in the stove
Lady Justitia sleeps tight in the bosom of Jove
If you think our story is not worth two pieces of gold
We promise to find another way of having it told.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF PLAY)
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