

MAP OF T/ERROR

by

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In memoriam, to my father, who taught me the real value of a human, of uprooting yourself, and of sarcasm. To my son, M: love is love is love.

Dedic piesa tuturor iubirilor mele multiple: oameni, ape, nehotare.

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PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

Before you get to meet these characters, I'd like you to think about your eyes. In the 13th century, optical lenses were finally discovered/put into usage, even though light refracting through glass can be historically traced back to Romans. Before corrective lenses, people whose eyesight was not perfect were extremely vulnerable to enemies (think about before 13th century when humanity was more hunter-warrior oriented), and, later, they were intellectually disadvantaged because of the inability to read letters and numbers, as other people could. Even more remarkably, once these corrective lenses were introduced to humans, something astonishing happened. The humanity recorded its largest onetime IQ boost in its history because now more people could read numbers, letters, and could thus use their brains more efficiently. The collective human IQ was significantly improved! Later, the optical lenses would birth the creation of the microscope and telescopes, thus adding more and more mysteries to be closer and closer to us, to further our *expansive* desire to discover and accumulate. Consequently, this discovery benefitted the entire human race. In my play, the set, the atmosphere, (some of) the characters suffer from mild (functional) to severe (systemic) myopia. More, the various meanings of myopia shall be tested during rehearsals, yet a consensus should never be reached. The other thing that is important about the play is its connection to something fundamental, i.e., being nourished/nourishing oneself. Food is needed *on* stage, and not used as prop. Again, discover when to make it surreal, essential to survival, excessive/grotesque, joyful, a shared experience, etc.

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SYNOPSIS

Connected by the Ghost of a History Teacher, two pairs of characters, two teens and their respective grandpas, from two geographically distinct places, Romania and the US, respectively, have a chance to break all walls and look at the map of the world via theatrical devices and chance encounters. What happens when bad leaders are in power? How does that change a map, a land, and its people? What could we morally ask theater to do *for* us? Why do we repeat “never again,” yet we witness new atrocities being committed? These questions could serve as a way to look into how the play ends since its final moment is highly exposed to being interpreted. The big reveal is that The Ghost of a History Teacher prefers to die rather than to carry on her shoulder so much weight, burden, dead bodies, destruction, and empty promises.

STATEMENT

I grew up knowing that history was not accurately presented in the highly manipulated textbooks. I grew up in dictatorship. This play is intergenerational, transnational, and immersive. Before the war in Ukraine, few Americans knew about that part of the world (including my motherland). Even right now, Eastern Europe seems like a vague reality. This is my opportunity to bring something rarely seen on American stages, and it is an invitation to improve the *optics* about that part of the world, inclusivity, and morally needed changes.

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CAST: 4 Women, 4 Men

MARIA	16 years old, Romanian
ION	75 years old, Romanian
AUSTIN	15 years old, American
JIM	80 years old, American
THE GHOST OF A HISTORY TEACHER	young female, on stage constantly, country-less
LOST	MARIA's alter ego (towards the end, a free woman in a world that needs to be free), no nationality
FOUND	ION's alter ego, no nationality
ALEXA	As in the device, but played by a woman

TIME: Most likely in the future. In this play, the word/concept “history” is the real measurement of the passing of time.

PLACES: Romania; U.S.A.; “N/Ether”

SETTING: *Living* rooms.

NOTES ON ACTING: The characters Maria and Ion may be speaking with an accent, but that should not be emphasized excessively/grotesquely. Lost and Found play the alter egos of two characters up to a point when they metamorphose into something else. The Ghost of a History Teacher should be a constant presence on stage. There are moments when this character interacts in a certain way, but at other times, these interactions should develop organically, on the spot.

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PROLOGUE

THE GHOST OF A HISTORY TEACHER. Welcome to the history in the *making!* What you “see” is the map of Europe after WWII. The war ended. Victory! (*Sounds of clapping and cheering.*) Imagine places where towns have been bombed. Imagine concentration camps. Imagine family members who linger only in memory. Imagine soldiers with limbs amputated and the taste of war still on their tongue. Stop imagining! This was real. (*A moment.*) I know, I know, *something* happened. A glitch. I don’t know where Europe disappeared. Yes, of course, not Europe, duh, the map. (*More to herself.*) A map has soul. A map is not an object. It is full of land. And land attracts people. And people are born, grow up, fall in love, make other people. (*Play news from these events as they were broadcasted then: the end of WW II; the fall of the Berlin Wall; the split of Czechoslovakia into two countries; the civil war in former Yugoslavia; Brexit; Russia invading Ukraine; etc.*)

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TABLEAU I: ROMANIA

We can hear Ciprian Porumbescu's "Rapsodia Română," but not from the beginning, preferably mid-composition.

ION. This damn milk needs to be warmed up! (*Porumbescu's symphony fades gradually. Maria enters.*) Hey, no hello? (*No reaction.*) What's the matter? Another bad day in paradise?

MARIA. You can say that.

ION. What happened?

MARIA. History report.

ION. My, my, that's just unheard of!

MARIA. It's boring.

ION. What else should you do? Reenact a war? Wear a bowtie and an expensive suit and get ready to sign a treaty to fuck up everybody who's not on your elite list?

MARIA. Reenact a war. What the hell, grandpa?

ION. People used to do that.

MARIA. Why?

ION. To learn a lesson.

MARIA. How?

ION. By (*Emphasis.*) reenactment.

MARIA. That's bullshit.

ION. That's how people learn. (*At this point, the milk overflows.*) Damn it! Burned milk is worse than cold milk.

MARIA. Huh?!

ION. This damn milk, first it spills on the floor, now it burns.

MARIA. How many times do I have to tell you to buy insta-milk?

ION. Leave me alone!

MARIA. They serve it in schools and cafeterias. Soon, this liquid nonsense ends.

ION. And will they also make insta-cows, or explode the cows, or... what?

MARIA. Did you take your medication today?

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ION. What medication?

MARIA. Stop fooling around, grandpa, the nurse said you needed to take it daily. Don't you remember what happened last time?

ION. No, no, no, what happened? Did I miss it again?

MARIA. Miss what?

ION. My own show, apparently. Livin' on extreme edge, close to dying. *(Adds amused.)* The senior edition.

MARIA. C'mon, I'm serious. You're the only one I have.

ION. Well, your parents are saving lives in Africa.

MARIA. Don't say Africa like it's a country. *(A moment.)* Where are they now?

ION. I lost track. Zimbabwe?

MARIA. It started with a Z, maybe, yeah, ... no? I don't think it's Zimbabwe.

ION. Zika?

MARIA. I'm not stupid.

ION. Who said you were?

MARIA. You... assuming I didn't know about Zika.

ION. Whatever.

MARIA. Can you help me?

ION. With?

MARIA. That history report.

ION. Do it yourself. I need milk. Cow milk. *(Drinks milk loudly.)* Room temperature. *(Maria does not listen to him. She is typing on the keyboard something. The grandfather starts to smack his lips with pleasure.)*

MARIA. Will you stop? *(Ion ignores her.)* I'm trying to do homework.

ION. Not my problem.

MARIA. No, but you could be civilized.

ION. Am, too.

MARIA. I know, you enjoy that milk. It's not you, it's the milk. I've heard it before.

ION. Is insta-milk as delicious?

MARIA. Who cares? Food is an accessory.

ION. Food is love.

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MARIA. I am (*Fake.*) so happy as is. (*A moment.*) Please enjoy that milk in silence. This damn report...

ION. Yes, ma'am.

MARIA. It's not funny. You know history is not my favorite subject.

ION. Why?

MARIA. Because it's volatile, imperfect, and unreliable. Because it's misleading. History *disembowels* people. (*The Ghost of a History Teacher drops something.*) Did you drop something?

ION. Nope.

MARIA. (*Resuming.*) Evolutionary speaking, we had to be cruel.

ION. Start from that.

MARIA. What?

ION. You are a biology geek, start with that statement. Wanna know something?

MARIA. (*Bored.*) Whaaaaaaat?

ION. Don't say (*Mockingly.*) whaaaaaaat like you don't care... I'm gonna tell you a surviving trick.

MARIA. Yeah, right...

ION. How do you think I've managed to get this far?

MARIA. Good genes?

ION. (*Sarcastic.*) Perfect genes: father was an alcoholic and mother suicidal. (*The Ghost of a History Teacher laughs very loudly.*)

MARIA. What's going on?

ION. Nothing is going on. You can't choose your parents.

MARIA. Someone laughed.

ION. Sure, sure, God.

MARIA. Never mind. Your parents...

ION. Yeah...?

MARIA. What they had is not hereditary.

ION. Well, it's history.

MARIA. Personal.

ION. Regardless. (*Pause.*)

MARIA. So?

ION. So???

MARIA. What's this trick to die for?

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ION. You need to live life.

MARIA. Oh, my God! (*Frustrated.*) Going to my room. (*She picks up her backpack and starts walking. Returns. Gives her grandfather a kiss.*)

ION. What was that for?

MARIA. I'll check in on you around (*Fooling around.*) twenty-two hundred hours.

ION. I'll be in deep sleep by then.

MARIA. I'll check in on you anyway.

ION. Then I am running away.

MARIA. Really, where?

ION. Just run.

MARIA. Okay, okay. (*A loud sound. She is out.*)

ION. What the hell is going on over there? (*The noises are still heard. The Ghost of a History Teacher eats a birthday cake and burps.*) STOP it! (*We hear footsteps coming down. Maria enters. She pants. She gasps as if losing air or unable to breathe. Collapses on the yoga map.*)

MARIA. Air! Air! I need air.

ION. What's wrong?

MARIA. There is no trace. No fucking trace.

ION. Trace of...?

MARIA. Trace of history. (*The Ghost of a History Teacher continues to eat.*)

ION. Are you high?

MARIA. Don't you dare look into my pupils again! They aren't dilated.

ION. Seems like they are. A bit.

MARIA. That's because there's no trace. I'm *trying* to alert you here, but you go on and on about drugs.

ION. You need to explain better. And breathe. (*He starts to breathe. Invites Maria to join. She refuses. The Ghost of a History Teacher joins Ion.*)

MARIA. Look, I typed ... (*At that moment, whatever the teenager types is read out loud: Nicolae Ceaușescu, Romanian dictator,*)

and...nothing...nada...zilch. (*Instead of finding information about the Romanian dictator, we hear ads about perfect diets, perfect sleeping methods, perfect massages, etc.*)

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ION. The *fuck* is going on?? (*What happens next feels like a non sequitur. The more confusion, the better the dramatic effect.*)

FOUND. I took such a great nap. What time is it?

MARIA. Digital Armageddon.

LOST. I took such a great nap, too.

ION. Turn that phone off!

LOST. This girl (*Points to Maria.*) has too much passion. I mean I have...

FOUND. She seems too theatrical.

LOST. Excuse me??

FOUND. Close your eyes.

LOST. If I close my eyes, I get dizzy.

FOUND. But I'm here to catch you.

LOST. Really?

FOUND. Cross my heart, ...

THE GHOST OF A HISTORY TEACHER. ... hope to die. (*They greet The Ghost of a History Teacher. They continue to fool around in the background.*)

ION. Maria, what is this damn history report about?

MARIA. A timeline of Ceaușescu's life.

ION. That motherfucker was an illiterate bastard, grew into power, went to China, Mao really fucked him up, came back and fucked us up.

FOUND. I should learn better words. I am kind of tired of swearing.

LOST. What for?

FOUND. To speak more eloquently.

LOST. About a dictator??

MARIA. Grandpa, you did not grow up with him.

ION. Yeah, so what's your point?

MARIA. No point. (*Awkward silence.*)

LOST. Say something back. Fight.

FOUND. Calm the fuck down.

MARIA. Tell me more.

ION. Why?

MARIA. You forgot already? There's nothing online. It's like he's a ghost.

ION. Ceaușescu *is* a ghost.

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MARIA. Really?

ION. How do you make one madman's ideas disappear?? *(The Ghost of a History Teacher plays/sings an eerie song.)*

MARIA. Don't know.

LOST. Try harder, damn it. You are not stupid. I'm not stupid....

FOUND. How about ...?

LOST. Let me think. You always interfere.

ION. Look, whatever happens in history, happens in us. *(Punches Maria.)*

MARIA. Why did you do that?

LOST. If you don't punch him, I will.

ION. History's rippling effects.

MARIA. If I punch you, would that also count?

LOST. You wuss! *(Lost punches Ion.)*

ION. Like that. An event that's outside of us eventually pulls us in.

LOST. You lost your chance.

MARIA. What else do you know about Ceaușescu?

ION. Hm...

MARIA. I don't want to fail history!

ION. It's going to cost you.

FOUND. No matter what I do, I am constantly hungry. Soon, I will be a sumo wrestler. *(Found discovers the birthday cake and eats voraciously.)*

MARIA. I got money.

ION. Not interested.

MARIA. Then what do you want??

LOST. To be punched!

FOUND. No, you idiot, that means to be pulled back in... maybe this old dude wants out. Maybe I want out. Where the fuck is that exit?? *(Keeps eating. Grandpa does not respond. Grandpa exits. We hear some noises in the back. Grandpa comes back pulling after him three cabinet files stuck to one another. He opens one. Pulls out a file randomly. Does a voice warm-up: do-re-mi-fa... do-re-mi...do-re... Then stretches a little bit. Maria studies him carefully in complete silence.)*

ION. Decree 770 from 1966 according to which a woman who had an abortion would have committed a crime and subjected herself to prison.

MARIA. What?!

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LOST. Why do you act so damn surprised?? Aren't you a woman?

ION. Women died during unsanitary, hushed abortions, or had kids they did not want. Want more?

FOUND. Why didn't you burn those files? I should have burned them.
(Grandpa pulls up another file.)

ION. Communist countries followed a 5-year plan initiated by Stalin, one of the cruelest criminals in the history of mankind. *(A beat.)* Comrade Stalin and I are the *same* species.

FOUND. Call *(Sarcastic.)* Comrade Stalin a *(Infuriated.)* criminal! *(A beat.)* Stalin and I are both humans.

LOST. How can that be?

FOUND. History's terrible mutations.

MARIA. A bad apple?

ION. Wait a minute... *(Taps his head.)* Think, old brain, don't just claim up space. The Danube-Black Sea channel. Well, that cost lives. *(Shows images.)*

MARIA. People died??

ION. They recruited those whom the regime thought should be silenced. The "enemy of the people." They were political prisoners who knew squat about how to build. They were not engineers or architects or hell, workers, they were writers, journalists, musicians, artists... *(Sighs.)* Too many intellectuals died. The authorities said their deaths had been unavoidable. It became "the canal of death," full of water, blood, and drowned dreams. *(The Ghost of a History Teacher pops up a champagne. Grins.)*

MARIA. Slow down, I need to write this.

ION. Want more? *(The Ghost of a History Teacher drinks champagne.)*

MARIA. Yep.

ION. He kept his own people starving to death, turned the lights off, didn't let anyone say shit about his... *(Exhausted. Yells.)* I want milk!

Miiiiiiiiilk! A big glass of milk. And cookies.

MARIA. Calm down!

ION. You know what? It's getting late.

FOUND. I need to go to sleep.

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LOST. C'mon, we always get to sleep too early. Let's stay up. *(They start to fight. The Ghost of a History Teacher looks amused and giggles. Starts recording.)*

LOST. What the hell are you doing?

THE GHOST OF A HISTORY TEACHER. Maybe we can use this footage.

FOUND. For?

THE GHOST OF A HISTORY TEACHER. *(Enigmatically.)* People's convenient amnesia, duh!

MARIA. Grandpa, how did Ceaușescu die?

ION. Romanians shot him.

MARIA. Should I warm this milk up?

ION. Scolding hot.

MARIA. Not on my watch.

ION. Ceaușescu was a two-headed monster. His wife...

MARIA. Was she as bad, too?

ION. Elena? Worse!

MARIA. Seriously?

ION. They say she was even meaner than him.

MARIA. How could this happen?

ION. Lack of education? Greediness? *(He points to food/drink.)* Sheer stupidity on all fronts?

MARIA. There are no more cookies. Here, your milk.

ION. Leave it there. I'm going out.

MARIA. Yeah, right.

ION. Look, I said I'm going out, *I* am going out. I don't need your attitude.

MARIA. It's too late.

ION. So?

MARIA. It's dangerous.

ION. I need air.

MARIA. Open a window. *(Grandpa ignores Maria. Starts to put his shoes on. Grabs his coat.)*

FOUND. Air!

LOST. I'm so hungry. What time is it?

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MARIA. Grandpa, you are *not* serious.

ION. Get out of my way!

LOST. Cookies... I want something to munch on...

MARIA. You're killing me, grandpa.

ION. I need air and cookies.

FOUND. Yes. Food.

MARIA. I have school tomorrow.

ION. Well, I don't.

MARIA. I can't let you go by yourself.

ION. Stay here.

LOST. No, go out and bring me cookies.

MARIA. I'm coming and that's final. (*A pause.*) So, Ceaușescu served for... eight years, or less ...?

ION. 24 *fucking* years!!

FOUND. Air! I need more air.

MARIA. What?!

ION. Eight years! Pffff!!! He was a dictator.

MARIA. Like a ... god?

ION. More like devil incarnate. (*A beat.*) Are you coming, or what?!

MARIA. Comin', comin' ... tell me more, will you?

ION. Once upon a time, there came a second big war. It ended. Simple people were looking for the missing parts of their city, for peaceful air to breathe, for scraps of life to live. Greedy people were getting *hungrier* by the minute. Europe was sliced up. One big chunk got served to a voracious communist monster, the Soviet Russia. (*The Ghost of a History Teacher starts to sing patriotic songs. She is very motivated by this act, feels history/herself differently, more territorial than ever. She searches into their pockets. Finds a folded paper. Starts to unfold it. We hear loud noises. They are war related. It's a mess.*) So, moral of the story?

MARIA. I dunno, grandpa, like... maybe ... watch your behind?

ION. No, child. Come *prepared*. If they want to slice you up in tiny pieces, bring the cannons. (*We hear news broadcasted during WWII, the Bosnian War, the invasion of Ukraine, etc. Use real footage in their respective language. No translation. Parallels between then and now are needed to come on stage in a montaged footage.*)

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MARIA. Come on, grandpa, *more* casualties?

ION. Kill the monsters to set *yourself* free. That's the ugly truth! (*We hear again Porumbescu's symphony. The sound of the score transitions to noises associated with traveling by boat/ferry and then by plane. Add many border control points from archived images to today.*)

THE GHOST OF A HISTORY TEACHER. Welcome to the United States of America. Bienvenido a los Estados Unidos de America. (*A beat.*) According to a census taken in 2010, there are 308,745,538 people living here. The most populated state is California with 37,253,956 people. The least, Wyoming with 563,826 people. According to a Gallup poll conducted in May 2019, 94% of Americans would vote for a woman. The 116th Congress recorded the most women serving and fighting legally for the U.S. This surge in number was historical. Four sitting U.S. Presidents were killed: Lincoln; Garfield; McKinley; and Kennedy. Three U.S. presidents were impeached: Johnson and Clinton. One was impeached twice: Trump. None was found guilty. Wasted hopes! The white male continued to maintain their privileges. In 2016, Hillary lost the election. Few people know though that before Hillary, Victoria Woodhull ran for the President of the U.S. in 1872. In 2020, Harris became the first female American VP. On June 24, 2022, anti-*abortion* ideologues on the US Supreme Court explicitly *overturned* Roe v. Wade. 150 days, 263 mass shootings reported in U.S. so far for 2023 – CBS News. At the age of 8, Michael Kevin Kearney enrolled at the University of South Alabama where he received in 1994 a bachelor's degree in anthropology. He was 10 years old. (*A moment.*) On January 21st, 2017, the Women's March was the largest single-day protest in the U.S. history. (*An audio is presented.*) In the summer of 2020, during the pandemic, the whole world could not *breathe* and chanted George Floyd's name (*Another audio.*) And here we are now...

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