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Virtual Museum “#Hamlet_UA: Act 1, Scene 1943” in the Context of Decolonizing Knowledge about Ukraine

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Abstract

The article presents the history of the creation of the virtual museum: “#HAMLET_UA: ACT 1, SCENE 1943.” It emphasizes its significance for modern society in Ukraine and beyond, and highlights the features of navigation. The virtual museum elucidates the history of Ukrainian translations and theatrical productions of *Hamlet* in the 1860s and 1940s and demonstrates the importance of the first staging of this play in Lviv (1943, dir. Yosyp Hirniak) as a sign of resistance to both totalitarian regimes: Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union. The information gathered in the museum will help to refute the imperial myth created by Soviet propaganda about the secondary nature of the Ukrainian reception of world classics. The exhibition of the first four halls presents the history of the first translations of *Hamlet* into Ukrainian, carried out in the period between 1865–1943, as well as the biographies of the translators. The following halls are dedicated to the production of *Hamlet*, which was performed by the Lviv Opera House (now The Solomiya Krushelnytska Lviv National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet) during World War II. The museum has collected unique pictures, facsimiles of documents, posters, and newspaper articles. This helps to imagine the character of Yosyp Hirniak’s performance. Of particular interest are the drawings, cartoons, and caricatures made by theatre artist Semen Gruzbenko (real name Gruzberg), and the theatre reviews that appeared immediately after the premiere. The hall entitled the ‘Post-history of the play *Hamlet*: Scattered Around the World’ reflects the life stories of the creators of this production after 1945. The bilingual character of the museum speaks to the intended audience, as inclusion of domestic and foreign audiences in the tour of the virtual museum’s collections is designed to help strengthen the spirit of our nation in times of war and to decolonize knowledge about Ukraine abroad. The idea of this project, initiated by Maiia Harbuziuk, found active support from English scholars (Nicola Watson, Michael Dobson), and was implemented through the joint efforts of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Centre (Head of USC Nataliya Torkut) and the Department of Theatre Studies and Acting of the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (Roman Lavrentii).

Keywords: Shakespeare in translation, *Hamlet*, Lviv, Hirniak, Blavatskyi, Rudnytskyi, decolonization of knowledge, virtual museum, Shakespeare studies, Shakespeare in Ukraine, Shakespeare in performance, intermediality.

You are welcome, masters; welcome all...
Welcome, good friends...

(*Hamlet* 2.2.445–446)

The modern epoch can undoubtedly be called the era of digital technologies that are making their mark on science, education, and culture. In the age of digitization, masterpieces of world classics are also becoming available to users of the world wide web. Shakespeare studies are also represented in numerous online resources.

Shakespeare-related digital platforms, sources, sites, and materials can be classified into the following four categories:

- 1) Internet encyclopedias (e.g., The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Global Shakespeare <https://link.springer.com/referencework/10.1007/978-3-319-99378-2>, Stanford Global Shakespeare Encyclopedia <https://u.osu.edu/mclc/2018/05/07/stanford-global-shakespeare-encyclopedia/> or Shakespeare Online <https://www.shakespeare-online.com/>);
- 2) Shakespeare's works online, i.e., plays, poems, sonnets (e.g., Open Source Shakespeare <https://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/>, Folger Shakespeare Library <https://www.folger.edu/> or The Complete Works of William Shakespeare <https://shakespeare.mit.edu/>);
- 3) Archives with various materials on Shakespeare's works (e.g., Victorian Illustrated Shakespeare Archive <https://shakespeareillustration.org/tag/kings/>) or written references (Shakespeare Documented <https://shakespearedocumented.folger.edu/>);
- 4) Sites of locations and institutions related to Shakespeare (e.g., Shakespeare Birthplace Trust <https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/> or Ukrainskyi Shekspirivskyi Portal <https://shakespeare.znu.edu.ua/uk/>).

Virtual Shakespeare museums, which enable the introduction of a wide scope of information about the author and various forms of his presence in the modern world (theatre performances, intermedial projections, translations, etc.), to numerous categories of visitors (students, theatre practitioners, scholars, or Shakespeare fans), will hopefully set a new trend in the modern digital world of Shakespeare.

One example of such a virtual platform is the museum created in 2023 in Ukraine in order to preserve the memory of the first staging of *Hamlet* in Lviv (1943).¹ It also traces the hardships of Ukrainian Hamletiana for the world. One of the peculiarities of Ukrainian Shakespeareana is its difficult formation, as its early development took place despite the oppression suffered by Ukrainians in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.² For more than 300 years, the major

1 “#HAMLET_UA: ACT1, SCENE 1943” (<https://www.artsteps.com/view/657d8dcb3e7698b59c6de2a7>).

2 Ukrainians' acquaintance with Shakespeare's works and his integration into the cultural context of Ukraine, which was divided between two empires and later came under the pressure of the communist regime, demonstrate a certain similarity to the reception of Shakespeare in

part of Ukraine belonged to the Russian empire, and in accordance with the Valuev Circular (1863) and the Ems Decree (1876), the Ukrainian language was prohibited in cultural, educational, and religious spheres. However, Ukrainians have repeatedly proved that Shakespeare sounds magical in their language and that Ukrainian translations are worthy of the stage.³

During the early Soviet period in Ukraine, some of Shakespeare's plays were staged, but not *Hamlet*. One of the causes of this theatrical oblivion of the tragedy in the USSR of the 1940s and 1950s was the fact that Yosyp Stalin hated this work by Shakespeare:

Hamlet was never formally banned by the Soviet authorities (no documentary rulings were made). Under Stalin, it was considered an extremely dangerous text that could cost lives for those who dared to deal with it. It was a real tactic of 'text banishment' or 'text exile' which proved to have been no less influential than official directives of the Soviet power. Even an oral negative evaluation of a literary work or its author by 'Comrade Stalin' was enough to exclude it from the Soviet cultural environment. In a totalitarian society, the leader's thought always triggers self-censorship mechanisms that operate no less effectively than laws and directives. (Torkut 136)

Translated by Mykhailo Rudnytskyi, *Hamlet* was performed in Lviv on 21 September 1943 despite the horrors of World War II. As Ukrainian Shakespearean scholars Nataliya Torkut and Yurii Cherniak point out in their article "Ukrainian *Hamlet* and 'Hamletizing' Ukraine: 'Will you play upon this pipe?'"

[T]he Ukrainian nation can be easily compared to *Hamlet* [...] In Ukraine as well as in other European countries Shakespeare proves to be more than an author of one or several genius works but he is a creator of something much more influential and impressive. He has been playing the role of an intellectual inspirer in the process of cross-cultural communication, encouraging further development of mental activity and creative searches. (99–100)

Science and culture, in particular literature, are great tools for speaking to the world about a people's talents and identity. In the era of rapid technological development, this was made possible by creating a bilingual virtual museum and

neighbouring countries – Bulgaria, Poland, and Romania – where the influence of ideological factors was also very strong for a long time. For more details – see Shurbanov and Sokolova; Gibińska; Cinpoș.

³ More about the stage history of *Hamlet* – see Ваніна [Vanina]. About first Ukrainian translations of *Hamlet* – see Коломієць [Kolomiyetz].

creating multi-level public communication aimed at attracting a wide international audience and drawing attention to the problems of studying unknown or little-known facts about Ukraine and its culture.

The Context of the *Hamlet* Museum

The aim of this article is to illustrate the significance of the creative work of Ukrainian artists on global Hamletiana. The example of translations and theatrical performances of the 1860–1940s specifically refutes the imperial myth about the secondary nature of the Ukrainian reception of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Additionally, it aims to acquaint readers with the principles of organizing the virtual museum “#HAMLET_UA: ACT 1, SCENE 1943” and outline the prospects for its continuation.

Created in 2023 on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of the Ukrainian 1943 premiere of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* at Lviv (dir. Yosyp Hirniak), the virtual museum aims to reveal not only the aesthetic features of a particular production, but also the complex political situation in which it was created, as well as the socio-cultural context that preceded it. The idea of creating this virtual project belongs to Maiia Harbuziuk (1965–2023), who, incidentally, was also one of the driving forces behind the initiative to have a Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival, eventually launched in Ivano Frankivsk (17–23 June 2024).

The presentations of the virtual museum “#Hamlet_UA: ACT 1, SCENE 1943”⁴ (by the speakers Nataliya Torkut, Roman Lavrentii, Svitlana Deineka, and Maksym Brychka), which organically intertwined literary, theatre and socio-cultural components, demonstrated how fruitful intellectual and creative interaction between representatives of different sciences and museum workers can be.⁵

4 The museum can be accessed via <https://www.artsteps.com/view/657d8dcb3e7698b59c6de2a7>

5 The creative team of the museum includes employees of the Shevchenko Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Nataliya Torkut, Yurii Cherniak, Svitlana Deineka, Nataliia Lysenko), Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (Roman Lavrentii, Sofia Rosa-Lavrentii, Olha Luchuk, Inna Shklioda), Zaporizhzhia State Medical and Pharmaceutical University (Daria Moskvitina), Kryvyi Rih State Pedagogical University (Liudmyla Fedoriaka), and Volodymyr Vynnychenko Central Ukrainian State University (Maksym Brychka). Students of Zaporizhzhia National University (Veronika Skarzhynska and Bohdan Beliaev) and Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (Maria Tatsynets) also took an active part in the project.

Materials for the museum were provided by: Nataliia Lysenko (Department of Manuscript Collections and Textology at the Shevchenko Institute of Literature of National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine), Olha Luchuk (Ivan Franko National University of Lviv), Olena Drahomyretska, Olha Hural, Ruslana Tovkes (Museum of Outstanding Figures of Ukrainian Culture) Lesia Ukrainka, Mykola Lysenko, Mykhailo Starytskyi, Panas Saksahanskyi, Myroslava Diadiuk (Vasyl Stefanyk Lviv National Scientific Library of Ukraine), Liubov Tepla (Les Kurbas Art Museum in

The online exhibition of the virtual museum presents facsimiles of archival documents, manuscripts, and materials related to translations, Shakespearean theatre performances, and the discourse around its creation, as well as photographs of Lviv during the Second World War. One of the museum's features is an interactive navigation through its halls. The exhibits of the virtual museum are accompanied by detailed textual commentaries in Ukrainian and English, which extend its usage into an open educational and popular science resource.

The museum features ten halls arranged in a logical order: the first four halls introduce visitors to the history of *Hamlet* translations, the translators, and unique documents; the next two halls immerse guests in the atmosphere of Lviv in the early 1940s; and the final four halls are dedicated to the play itself, covering its post-performance history. All contain numerous original testimonies and photographs about the creative team of *Hamlet*, the play itself, theatre reviews, and the fates of all those involved in the production. The names of the inspirers and creators of the virtual museum are also displayed.

The *Hamlet* Museum

The virtual museum's exhibition opens in Hall 1 and introduces the translators of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in nineteenth-century Ukraine.⁶ Visitors see a portrait of Paulin Świącicki (1841–1876), a Ukrainian author of Polish origin, well-known for his translating, editing, journalistic, pedagogical, and public activity. Next to his photo is the text of his translation of Act I of *Hamlet*, which appeared in the *Nyva* magazine (1865, #3–5, #7–9). The translation is signed with his pseudonym: Pavlo Svii.⁷ The same hall hosts a portrait of Mykhailo Starytskyi (1839–1904), a famous Ukrainian writer, theatre practitioner, and translator who first translated the entire play *Hamlet* into Ukrainian in the 1870s. At that time, in accordance with the Valuev Circular of 1863 and Ems Decree of 1876, using the Ukrainian language in public spaces, i.e. in school teaching, church, and

Sambir), Maria Shust, Maria Pevna (Ukrainian Museum in New York), and the translator Mykhailo Rudnytskyi's wife, Liudmyla Rudnytska.

6 More about the Ukrainian Shakespearean discourse, see Черняк [Cherniak], "Шекспірівський дискурс" [Shakespearean Discourse; Shekspirivskyi dyskurs]; Черняк [Cherniak], "Перші українські переклади Шекспіра і дискурс влади" [The First Ukrainian Translations of Shakespeare and the Discourse of Power; Pershi ukrainski pereklady V. Shekspira i dyskurs vlyady]; Cherniak, "Shakespeare as a Sovietism"; Черняк [Cherniak], "Перші українські переклади В. Шекспіра в ідеологічному контексті" [The First Ukrainian Translations of Shakespeare in the Ideological Context; Pershi ukrainski pereklady V. Shekspira v ideolohichnomu konteksti].

7 This topic is addressed by Daria Moskvitina and Bohdan Korneliuk in the article "Lost (in) Translations: How Ukrainian Shakespeareana Must Be Bigger Than We Think" in this volume.

culture was prohibited. In fact, it was forbidden to translate world classics into Ukrainian. As for the theatre, only social melodramas were allowed to be staged in Ukrainian; world classics were allowed in Russian translation only. Thus, an ethno-cultural inferiority complex was imposed on Ukrainians. In order to release his translation and circumvent the Ems ban, Starytskyi had to bribe the censor (Kalnychenko, Kolomiyets 169), and the Ukrainian *Hamlet* was published in 1882. Thus, the publication of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in Ukrainian was an act of cultural resistance to Russia's imperial policy. As Irena Makaryk notes:

[S]ince both native and foreign works had endured a simultaneous ban, it is not at all surprising that in Ukraine (as in most European countries, although for very different reasons), the classics, including Shakespeare, would become associated with national and cultural revival. A theatrical challenge to a neonatal theatre, Shakespeare had all the magnetism and the potency of the taboo. But, although forbidden in the language of the colonized, Shakespeare had also been tantalizingly present in Russian productions in Ukraine. Consequently, Ukrainian cultural aspirations and taste were built upon that which was prohibited and that which was permitted, following the usual paradox of censorship, which predictably creates sophisticated audiences. (Makaryk, Shakespeare 14)⁸

The release of Mykhailo Starytskyi's translation was welcomed by famous Ukrainian writers, such as Ivan Franko, Panas Myrnyi, Lesia Ukrainka, and Olena Pchilka.⁹ Three years before the publication of the Ukrainian *Hamlet* translated by Starytskyi, the first amateur performances took place in the houses of the famous Kyiv photographer Franciszek Mezer and the prominent Ukrainian composer Mykola Lysenko. Museum guests can see photos of the Lysenko-Starytskyi family, who were directly involved in the first production of *Hamlet*. The music for this amateur performance of *Hamlet* was composed by the world-famous composer Lysenko, who also played the role of Polonius. The role of Ophelia was played by Lysenko's wife, Olha O'Connor. Lysenko had dreamt of being an actor and even tried to enrol in an acting school, but was rejected. Instead, he took part in the aforementioned amateur performance as Polonius.¹⁰

Museum visitors see the title page of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* translated by Mykhailo Starytskyi. The first page of Mykola Lysenko's notes for the musical score of the play is also exhibited in this hall. It is worth mentioning that both negative and

⁸ See also: Макарик [Макарук], "Гамлет і проблема зволікання: Шекспір на Україні" [*Hamlet* and the Problem of Hesitation; *Hamlet* i problema zvolikannia: Shekspir na Ukraini].

⁹ For more details see: Старицький [Starytskyi].

¹⁰ There is a humorous anecdote about *Hamlet*, played by Mykhailo Starytskyi, dragging the body of the murdered Polonius when Lysenko began to swat away a fly that landed on his face with his hand. According to another version, he wiped his face with a handkerchief.

positive reviews have been preserved to this day, and very rare photographs of these are valuable exhibits in the virtual museum. One such exhibit is a photo of the newspaper *Kyivlianyyn*, which published a negative review of Starytskyi's translation of *Hamlet* in one of its issues. Pro-imperial critics (the newspaper *Kyivlianyyn* no. 232 of 1882 and *Odesskyi Vestnik* no. 26 of 1883) unleashed a storm of abuse against Starytskyi's translation, claiming that the Ukrainian language was not capable of reproducing the full depth of Shakespeare's original. The article in *Kyivlianyyn* was called "Hamlet in postoly"¹¹ hinting at the rustic nature of the Ukrainian language and culture. Moreover, the writer Daniil Mordovtsev spread the rumour that in Starytskyi's translation, the first line of Hamlet's famous monologue sounds like: "To be or not to be, – that's the snag", when in fact Starytskyi's translation reads "To be or not to be – that is what is at stake". This false fabrication was long used as "undeniable evidence to prove the absurdity of the very idea of translating Shakespeare into Ukrainian" (Шаповалова [Shapovalova] 85). Another item is a photo of the front page of *A. Hatsuk's Newspaper* no. 47 of 1882 and the positive review of Starytskyi's translation of *Hamlet* published in this issue. Pro-Ukrainian newspapers praised Starytskyi's translation, emphasizing its great role in popularising Shakespeare among Ukrainians (*Zoria* of 13 October 1882 and *A. Hatsuk's Newspaper* no. 47 of 1882).

Halls 2–4 of the museum introduce several translators of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, from Panteleimon Kulish (1819–1897), to Yurii Fedkovych (1834–1888), Hnat Khotkevych (1878–1938), Yurii Klen (1891–1947), Leonid Hrebinka (1909–1942), Hryhorii Kochur (1908–1994), and Viktor Ver (1901–1944).¹² Panteleimon Kulish, a Ukrainian writer, folklorist, ethnographer, linguist, translator, critic, editor, publisher, and philosopher of history, who planned to translate twenty-seven plays, managed to complete thirteen translations.¹³ The museum exhibits the manuscript sheets of Kulish's translation of *Hamlet* (1885), written in the Ukrainian phonetic spelling <kulishivka>. This translation was first published and commented on in Lviv¹⁴ by the poet and founder of Ukrainian Shakespeare studies, Ivan Franko, who became the editor and commentator of Kulish's translations of Shakespeare in 1899, two years after Kulish's death.¹⁵ Yurii Cherniak, in the article "Key topoi of the Ukrainian Shakespearean discourse of the late 19th – mid 20th century", argues that:

¹¹ Postoly are soft peasant shoes made of a single piece of leather without a sewn-on sole, usually worn with overshoes, tied to the feet with ropes.

¹² For more information about these translations, see the article "Lost (in) Translations: How Ukrainian Shakespeareana Must Be Bigger Than We Think" by Daria Moskvitina and Bohdan Korneliuk in this volume.

¹³ More about Panteleimon Kulish's translations – see Лучук [Luchuk], *Діалогічна природа літератури* [Dialogichna pryroda literatury] and Лучук [Luchuk], "Шекспір у листах Пантелеймона Куліша" [Shekspir u lystakh Panteleimona Kulisha].

¹⁴ At that time, Lviv was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in which there was no restriction on the use of Ukrainian language.

¹⁵ More about Ivan Franko's literary critical articles – see: Франко [Franko], vol. 17 and 18.

P. Kulish considered translation into his native language an important step along this path, as it would make the brilliant masterpieces accessible to a wide range of Ukrainians, and the Ukrainian language would also get a chance for improvement and development. (67)

In the 1870s, the Ukrainian romantic writer Yurii Fedkovych translated Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. The uniqueness of these translations lies in the fact that Fedkovych reproduced the texts of the great tragedies in the Hutsul dialect.¹⁶ The following translations into Ukrainian were made in the first decades of Soviet rule, in the 1920s and 1930s, when the Soviet government temporarily introduced a policy of Ukrainisation, and allowed translations and performances in Ukrainian. At this time, Hnat Khotkevych, who can be called a polymath,¹⁷ took up the translation of Shakespeare into Ukrainian. He translated a total of six Shakespeare plays, including *Hamlet*. However, only the comedies were published in the Theatre Library series by the Kharkiv publishing house “Rukh” during Khotkevych's lifetime. The manuscripts of the translations of *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet* are still kept in the Lviv Central State Historical Archive, and *Hamlet* was first published as late as 1998, in an issue of the *Paradigm* magazine. In 1938, Khotkevych, like many other Ukrainian cultural figures, became a victim of repression from the Soviet authorities. He was accused of spying for Germany and was sentenced to death by firing squad. The sentence was carried out on 8 October 1938. The museum contains photographs of documents related to the case of Hnat Khotkevych, and the SSU (The Security Service of Ukraine) opened the KGB (The Committee for State Security) archives on the execution of the death sentence.

Yurii Klen, a talented Ukrainian poet, translator, and literary critic, translated Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in 1936. Lada Kolomiyets argues that:

Yurii Klen's translation was conventional, accessible to the mass audience, staged and at the same time profound in its treatment of the issues, and highly artistic in its rendering of the poetics of the original work. (168)¹⁸

¹⁶ The Hutsul dialect is a southwestern dialect of the Ukrainian language, with unique phonetic, lexical and grammatical features. Hutsuls are a Ukrainian sub-ethnic group who live in the Carpathian mountains. In customs and traditions, they share their heritage with the Hutsuls in Bucovina, which was also part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and is now Romania.

¹⁷ He was a talented engineer (he developed his own diesel train project), a musician, theatre performer, writer, translator, and an influential cultural figure in Ukraine of 1900–1930s. See Moskvitina.

¹⁸ конвенційним, доступним масовому глядачу, сценічним і водночас глибинним у розкритті проблематики й високохудожнім у передачі поетики першотвору став переклад Юрія Клена.

In 1931, his close friends Mykola Zerov (1890–1937), Mykhailo Drai-Khmara (1889–1939), and Pavlo Fylypovych (1891–1937)¹⁹ were arrested and sentenced to death by the totalitarian authorities. The neoclassicist Maksym Rylskyi (1895–1964), who also belonged to this literary group, was involved in this case as well, but after being severely tortured, he was released because of lack of evidence of any guilty action. Klen had to emigrate and went to Germany for medical treatment; he never returned to the Soviet Union. Since the writer was considered an ‘enemy of the people’ in his homeland, all his poetic works and translations were banned. The museum visitors can see the title page of the textbook that includes the text of *Hamlet* translated by Yurii Klen without mentioning the translator’s name (1936). This translation was made in 1930 at the request of the State Publishing House of Literature and Art.

Leonid Hrebinka,²⁰ another famous Ukrainian poet and translator, made a complete translation of *Hamlet* in 1939 and handed it over to the Ivan Franko Ukrainian Drama Theatre in Kyiv. However, the manuscript was lost until the 1970s, when it was found and transferred to the Archive-Museum of Literature and Art of the Ukrainian SSR. Fleeing repression against the Ukrainian intellectual elite, Hrebinka had to move from Kyiv to Moscow early in 1933. On 24 June 1941, Hrebinka was accused of ‘Ukrainian nationalism’ and the ‘intent to commit a terrorist act against the Soviet leadership’ (Dotsenko 15), and was arrested. The military tribunal of the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) sentenced the poet to death, a sentence that was later revised to ten years in prison. However, Hrebinka never learned about this change: the management of the Saratov prison, where he was kept on death row, ordered the artist’s execution because of his aristocratic background. On 14 April 1942, Hrebinka died in prison of intestinal intoxication, i.e. by poison. Hrebinka’s translation of *Hamlet* was published due to the efforts of two talented Ukrainian translators: Ihor Kostetskyi (1913–1983) and Hryhorii Kochur. Kostetskyi and Hrebinka had been close friends before emigrating, and while exile, he was one of the founders of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society.²¹ The manuscript of the translation of *Hamlet* by Hrebinka was kept in the attic of the Merzliakov (Kostetskyi’s real surname) family estate in Vinnytsia. In the 1970s, Ihor Kostetskyi called his sister, Iryna, asking her to find the text. Iryna found a typewritten copy of Hrebinka’s translation and passed it on to another

¹⁹ All of these talented poets, including Yurii Klen, belonged to the literary group of ‘Neoclassicists’, whose works are characterised by the use of ancient themes, mythological intertextuality and the idea of ‘pure’ art.

²⁰ For more information about this translator see Dziuba.

²¹ For more information about the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society, see the article “Ukrainian Project in the Free World: The Ukrainian Shakespeare Society” by Ludmila Mnich in this volume.

prominent translator, Hryhorii Kochur.²² Kochur, who was also subjected to repression by the Soviet authorities, made great efforts after his return from the Inta gulag to ensure that the text of the manuscript, which had survived Stalin’s regime and the Nazi occupation, would be published. Interestingly, Kochur’s own translation of *Hamlet* from 1964 is considered to be the most accurate. However, at that time, the communist party authorities forbade the inclusion of Kochur’s translation into the six-volume edition of Shakespeare’s works. Instead, the 1964 edition includes Hrebinka’s translation, modified by the editor M. Tupailo, who censored and changed the text substantially.²³

Another translator who contributed to the creation of Ukrainian Hamletiana in the 1940s was Viktor Ver who perished at the front during the Second World War, in 1944. Ver is the pseudonym of the Ukrainian poet Viktor Cherevko, author of several poetry collections. *Hamlet*, translated by Viktor Ver in 1941, was staged by Benedykt Nord at the Taras Shevchenko Drama Theatre of Kharkiv (formerly the Berezhil Theater) in 1956. In this museum hall there is a picture of Yaroslav Helias²⁴ as Hamlet in this adaptation. In the following year, Ver’s translation of *Hamlet* was staged by Borys Tiahno at the Maria Zankovetska Lviv Drama Theatre. Museum visitors can see a picture from this production with Oleksandr Hai as Hamlet and Hanna Bosenko as Gertrude.

Hall 4 of the museum introduces Mykhailo Rudnytskyi (1889–1975), a prominent Ukrainian writer, translator, journalist, literature, and theatre critic, who translated *Hamlet* at the request of the Lviv Opera House in 1942. The subsequent production became the first Ukrainian public presentation of the play. One of the photos featured in the museum hall shows a typewritten copy of his translation. Alongside, there is an issue of the theatrical journal *Proscænium* (Lviv, 2004, Issues 1–2 (8–9)) that published Rudnytskyi’s *Hamlet* for the first time (the 1942 version). In 1954, Rudnytskyi made the second version of this translation. Visitors can also see its cover page published in a separate volume (Lviv, 2008). Information about Rudnytskyi’s translation was systematically suppressed in the Soviet Union. Rudnytskyi himself, who worked as a professor at Lviv University after World War II, did not mention in any of his questionnaires or scientific works that he had translated *Hamlet*, as such a mention would have put him in mortal danger because this fact would have been regarded as a collaboration with the Nazi regime.

²² More about Hryhorii Kochur’s translation, see Ажнюк [Azhnyuk].

²³ As Lada Kolomiyets states “можна без перебільшення вести мову про «двох Леонідів Гребінок» – настільки різняться між собою в мовностилістичному плані ці два варіанти перекладу, приписувані одному автору” [it is no exaggeration to speak of ‘two Leonids Hrebinkas’ – these two translations attributed to the same author are so different in terms of language and style] (171).

²⁴ Yaroslav Helias played the First Actor in the 1943 Lviv Opera House production.

Hamlet in Lviv in 1943

Halls 5 and 6 showcase photographs of Lviv during World War II. They contain geographical maps, a plan of Lviv in 1943, numerous photographs depicting cityscapes, iconic buildings, scenes from the everyday life of the city's residents and visitors (passengers on a tram, people at a market, etc.), the central avenue, and the city's theatre, the Lviv Opera House. Next to these, there are photographs of a prison, a concentration camp, and German soldiers on the streets of the city as markers of the occupation of Ukraine by Nazi Germany between 1941–1944. The exhibition also provides a compact historical account of the history of the city of Lviv in various time periods: from its foundation in 1256 by Ukrainian Prince Danylo Romanovych, through the years of the city's existence as part of Poland, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Habsburg Empire, a short period of Ukrainian statehood as the Western Ukrainian People's Republic, and then again of Poland, the Soviet Union, and since 1991 of independent Ukraine.

Halls 7 to 10 of the museum tell the story of the 1943 performance of *Hamlet*.²⁵ They display photos of the artists who created the first Ukrainian *Hamlet*, in particular its director Yosyp Hirniak, the translator Mykhailo Rudnytskyi, the composer Lev Turkevych, the painter and illustrator Myroslav Hryhoriiiv, and the members of the cast. The actors appear in photographs of their everyday life as well as during their performances: Volodymyr Blavatskyi as Hamlet, Bohdan Pazdrii as Claudius, Vira Levytska as Gertrude, and others. Photos of the performance, the poster, and the programme construct a holistic impression of the 1943 Ukrainian premiere of the Shakespearean tragedy. Theatrical and critical reviews of the production, as well as interviews with its creators, contribute to understanding its main idea which teems with the most burning question about the destiny of the Ukrainian nation. On the Ukrainian stage in 1943, Hamlet's central monologue "To be or not to be?" was addressed to the Ukrainian audience, an answer to the future of Ukraine: neither the Soviet nor the Nazi regime would allow Ukrainian culture to develop freely. The development of the museum, therefore, demands that it is time for Ukrainians to take fate into their own hands and rely only on their own strength.

The subsequent life trajectories of the artists involved in the Lviv production of *Hamlet* would each deserve a separate study. They are presented briefly in the

²⁵ For more information about the 1943 *Hamlet* production in Lviv, see Гарбузюк [Harbuziuk], "Національна прапрем'єра *Гамлета* у Львові (1943) [The First National Staging of *Hamlet* in Lviv (1943); Natsionalna prapremiera *Hamleta* u Lvovi (1943)]; Гарбузюк [Harbuziuk], "Перші постанови *Гамлета* В. Шекспіра" [The First Productions of W. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; Pershi postavy *Hamleta* V. Shekspira]; Гарбузюк [Harbuziuk], "Українські переклади *Гамлета* Вільяма Шекспіра в контексті розвитку національного театру" [Ukrainian Translations of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the Context of the Development of the National Theatre; Ukrainski pereklady *Hamleta* Viliama Shekspira v konteksti rozvytku natsionalnoho teatru].

last hall of the virtual museum. Its name draws on the ‘Post-history of the play *Hamlet: Scattered Around the World*’, which refers to the places where some of the people associated with the production ended up after the Second World War: in Western Europe, Asia (Siberia), North America and Australia. There are several typical scenarios in these life stories: (1) those who remained in Ukraine and were repressed; (2) those who remained in the USSR and, in order to avoid repression, were forced to adapt to the new political realities and keep silent about their previous work; finally, (3) those who emigrated abroad and tried to continue their cultural activities far beyond the borders of their homeland.

Particular attention is drawn to the actor Yaroslav Helias, who was lucky enough to work both in the 1943 first public presentation in Lviv as an actor and in the 1956 performance at the Kharkiv Taras Shevchenko Drama Theatre in the title role of Hamlet. Directed by Benedykt Nord, this Kharkiv performance was declared the ‘Ukrainian premiere’ of *Hamlet* in the USSR – the 1943 production in Lviv was strictly forbidden from being mentioned. Even later, due to the ideological pressure by the Soviet authorities, an inscription was engraved on Helias’s tombstone, stating ‘The First Ukrainian Hamlet’, in another attempt to erase Ukrainian history and impose the occupier’s story.

Only in 1991, when Ukraine gained its independence, did it become possible to reveal the truth about the real first performance of *Hamlet* on the Ukrainian stage in 1943. Thanks to the efforts of Bohdan Kozak (1940–2024) and Maiia Harbuziuk (1965–2023), Mykhailo Rudnytskyi’s translation of *Hamlet* was finally printed in 2008.²⁶ The academic press published a number of articles dedicated to its long-silenced translation history.²⁷ As such, the virtual museum is also part of the continuous campaign to decolonize and restore historical memory, and rehabilitate the names of Ukrainian national cultural figures who were unjustly repressed and/or banned by the Soviet regime.

26 Шекспір, Вільям [Shekspir, Viliam]. *Гамлет*. Переклад з англ. [*Hamlet*. Translation from English; *Hamlet*. Pereklad z anh]. Львів, 2008.

27 More about *Hamlet* translated by Mykhailo Rudnytskyi – see Гарбузюк [Harbuziuk], “Рецензія на: Шекспір В. *Гамлет: трагічна історія Гамлета – принца Данського: трагедія на V дій*» [Review of: W. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet: the tragic story of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark: a tragedy in five acts*; Retsenziia na: Shekspir V. *Hamlet: trahichna istoriia Hamleta – prynntsa Danskoho: trahediia na V dii*]; Козак [Kozak], “Палімпсест українського *Гамлета*” [A Palimpsest of the Ukrainian *Hamlet*; Palimpsest ukrainskoho *Hamleta*]; Козак [Kozak], “Післямова” [Afterword; Pisliamova]; Василюк [Vasylyuk], “М. Рудницький як перекладач В. Шекспіра” [M. Rudnytskyi as a Translator of W. Shakespeare; M. Rudnytskyi yak perekladach V. Shekspira]; Василюк [Vasylyuk], “Український художній переклад” [Ukrainian Literary Translation in Interwar Lviv; Ukrainskiy khudozhnii pereklad u mizhvoiennomu Lvovi] 233–241; Зорівчак [Zorivchak], “Українська гамлетіана” [Ukrainian Hamletiana; Ukrainska Hamletiiana] 124–130; Зорівчак [Zorivchak], “Шекспірів *Гамлет*” [Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*; Shekspiriv *Hamlet*] 154–164; Зорівчак [Zorivchak], “Михайло Рудницький” [Mykhailo Rudnytskyi; Mykhailo Rudnytskyi].

Closing Remarks

Ukrainian cultural and intellectual developments are represented by numerous writers, translators, artists, actors, and directors. Many of them contributed to global Shakespeareana. Having translated *Hamlet* into Ukrainian, they enriched the world literary treasury. In spite of all the prohibitions and restrictions during tsarism and the Soviet regime, Ukrainian translations and productions were made possible thanks to dedicated enthusiasts, among them Paulin Świącicki, Mykhailo Starytskyi, Panteleimon Kulish, Yurii Fedkovych, Hnat Khotkevych, Yurii Klen, Leonid Hrebinka, Hryhorii Kochur, Viktor Ver, and Mykhailo Rudnytskyi. Their photographs, historical documents, and illustrations of their invaluable work can be found in the virtual online museum “#HAMLET_UA: ACT 1, SCENE 1943.”

The museum is also devoted to describing the context of the first public production of *Hamlet* in Ukrainian: views of Lviv in 1943, the story of the performance (*Hamlet*, Lviv, 1943, dir. Yosyp Hirniak), theatre reviews, the creative team behind the production as well as their lives after the show. This virtual museum, therefore, conveys a crucial message for Ukrainians: only they themselves have the power to shape their own destiny through the struggle for freedom and independence. At the same time, the museum holds significant importance for international audiences by decolonising knowledge about Ukraine. Its exhibition illustrates how Ukrainians fought to claim their own “Ukrainian Shakespeare” in defiance of both the Russian Empire and the communist regime, asserting their cultural identity, the right to independently choose the vector of further development, and be an equal participant in civilizational processes in the global world.

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