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# Modernising the Ukrainian Language through the Power of Translation: Ihor Kostetskyi's Shakespeare's Sonnets<sup>1</sup>

## *Abstract*

A translation project of Shakespeare's sonnets undertaken by a prominent representative of the Ukrainian diaspora in Western Europe, Ihor Kostetskyi, aimed to reconstruct and revitalise the modern Ukrainian language through translation in the 1950s. Kostetskyi saw the creative laboratory of Shakespeare's sonnets as a tool of transformative influence on the state of the Ukrainian literary language, which in the Soviet Union suffered from censorship and countless bans aimed at depriving and Russifying its lexical, grammatical and stylistic diversity. Most Ukrainian writers in the diaspora after the Second World War sought to reconstruct and develop the Ukrainian language. Kostetskyi's formalist translation

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of the complete sonnets into a creatively stylised “Shakespearean” Ukrainian is the object of the present study.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare’s sonnets, Artistic Ukrainian Movement, conventional stylisation, absolutisation, estrangement.

Ihor Kostetskyi<sup>2</sup> (14 May 1913, Kyiv, Russian Empire – 14 June 1983, Schweikheim, Germany) was a Ukrainian modernist writer, literary critic and historian, film director, publisher, and member of the International PEN Club, a unique translator, and literary interpreter whose translation laboratory combined texts by William Shakespeare, Ezra Pound, and Stefan George from the perspective of reforming the Ukrainian translation tradition and establishing the modernist school of translation. Whilst the 1950s are frequently designated as the nascent postmodernist era within broader European literary contexts, a divergent perspective emerges when considering the Ukrainian context. Rather than construct a separate postmodern literary style, in his literary works, criticism and formalist translation techniques, Kostetskyi developed national modernist patterns. His major prose works, translations and literary legacy as a whole represent a link between Ukrainian modernism of the 1920s (expressionist, dadaist, surrealist techniques) and the late modernist trends in Ukrainian literature of the 1950s and 1960s. On the other hand, his experimental mode of creative writing, performative irony and playful use of historical literary styles in his translations brought him closer to early postmodernism, fashioning him into a pioneer of postmodern trends in modern Ukrainian literature.

Kostetskyi spent his formative years in both Kyiv and Vinnytsia, where his maternal grandfather’s estate was located. During the 1930s, he pursued his education in stage directing and acting in Leningrad and Moscow, subsequently spending two years as an actor in the Ural Mountains. It was during this period that Kostetskyi initiated his literary career, authoring Russian-language reviews of theatrical performances. His inaugural publication, signed with his pen name Kostetskyi, appeared in Vinnytsia in 1941. In the early 1940s, he returned to the German-occupied Vinnytsia and resided there until the autumn of 1942, when he was deported to Germany for forced labour. When the Second World War ended, Kostetskyi pursued an active literary career in a Ukrainian DP (displaced persons) camp in Bavaria, West Germany. In his works, he employed a combination of traditional and modernist stylistic approaches. He briefly published an artistic and literary journal *Khors* and became a prominent figure in the Artistic Ukrainian

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<sup>2</sup> The writer’s real surname was Merzliakov; he took his mother’s maiden surname Kostetskyi as a pen name.

Movement (MUR).<sup>3</sup> A significant proportion of MUR's efforts was dedicated to discussions concerning the modernisation of Ukrainian culture and its alignment with world mainstream trends.

Kostetskyi is widely recognised as one of the founders and leading theorists of the Artistic Ukrainian Movement in exile, a movement which is regarded as a seminal moment in the history of Ukrainian literature. The writers of MUR<sup>4</sup> produced some of the most original works of Ukrainian literature during the twentieth century. Kostetskyi is considered to be a prominent Ukrainian modernist writer of his generation. His literary heritage comprises short stories, novels, plays, poems, travel writing, screenplays, essays, and Ukrainian translations of world literature.

In 1955, Kostetskyi founded the small private publishing house "Na hori" [On the Mountain] in Germany (first in Stuttgart, Bavaria, later in Munich), which published the best classics in translation by famous Ukrainian emigré writers, including *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1958), *The Tragedy of Macbeth* and *King Henry IV* (1961), *King Lear* (1969), selected works of Ezra Pound (1960), T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Waste Land* (1963), as well as selected writings of Stefan George (1968–1971; 1973), among others. A writer-translator of enormous literary erudition, Kostetskyi is credited with the first complete translation of Shakespeare's sonnets into Ukrainian (1958). However, due to the large number of rarely used, archaic and/or obscure words, often unusual morphology, and complicated syntactic structure, his translation remains the least popular among readers compared to the subsequent complete translations by Dmytro Palamarchuk (1966), Ostap Tarnawsky (1997), Dmytro Pavlychko (1998), and Hryhoriy Pylypenko (2004).

Kostetskyi was one of the founders of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society (1957), and he participated in the activities of the German Shakespeare Society. He was also the editor of the illustrated magazine "Україна і Світ" [Ukraine and the World], published in Germany from 1946–1969, which focused on the relationship between Ukrainian culture and the cultures of other nations. The first complete Ukrainian translation of the Bible of which he was the literary editor was published by the Basilian Fathers in Rome in 1963.

The present article focuses on Kostetskyi's translatorial practice as an endeavour to undertake a philological analysis of the source text by means of translation. Kostetskyi was the first Ukrainian translator to address methodically the stylistic challenges in translating Shakespeare's sonnets. His work can be regarded as a significant philological experiment, aimed at achieving a balance between

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3 MUR (Mystets'kyi Ukraïns'kyi Rukh), an organisation of Ukrainian writers who lived in camps for displaced persons in post-war West Germany after 1945.

4 Such writers as Viktor Petrov, Ulas Samchuk, Yuriy Shevelev, Volodymyr Derzhavyn, Oleh Zuyevsky, Mykhailo Orest, Ivan Bahriany, Yuriy Kosach, Vasyl Barka, Dokiya Humenna, Todos Osmachka, Yevhen Malaniuk.

accuracy and temporal distance in translation. Kostetskyi had three pivotal objectives in his linguistic and cultural activities. First, he sought to continue the achievements of Ukrainian literary translation, which was the hallmark of the Executed Renaissance,<sup>5</sup> and to preserve and develop these achievements as a continuing cultural tradition. Second, Kostetskyi's translation strategies aimed at modernising Ukrainian culture by replenishing it with translated works by world-class "modernists". Third, literary translation was perceived as the means of modernising Ukrainian by enriching the language with various innovative linguistic and stylistic features that could serve as examples of Ukrainian modernist poetics. Translating Shakespeare's sonnets through this innovative lens was the key to enriching the Ukrainian literary canon of his time.

### Translation as a Linguistic Mission

Kostetskyi saw his own translation practice as a kind of linguistic missionary work, which he believed coincided with a new – catastrophic – stage in the formation of the Ukrainian literary language against the background of its impoverishment and the Russification in Soviet Ukraine. He wrote in the preface to his translation of Shakespeare's sonnets:

Our work on a complete translation of the sonnets [...] coincides with the moment in the life of our language when the language that has been expelled from its natural ethnographic boundaries begins in exile, despite centuries of its achievement, if not all over again, then at least with a more thorough reassessment of the values it has acquired. (Kostetskyi, "Ukraïns'kyi perekladach" 9)<sup>6</sup>

The translator pinned his hopes on a few emigrant writers and saw the lack of uniform norms and rules of word use as fertile ground for language creation. In this sense, he consciously set his main task of language revival, namely the Europeanisation and modernisation of the Ukrainian language through word formation and the activation of potential and peripheral lexical and grammatical forms. As he put it,

before the next sanctioning of norms takes place, the language as such, the means and at the same time the goal of individual wordsmiths, has meanwhile acquired its

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<sup>5</sup> A generation of Ukrainian intellectuals who were oppressed and tortured by the totalitarian Stalinist regime in the 1920s and 1930s is referred to as the "Executed Renaissance".

<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Ukrainian into English are by the author of this article.

unexpected new richness. New, sophisticated uses of noun and adjectival (suffixless) forms that coincide with the word stem, new possibilities of syntactic constructions, new phraseological achievements, new lexical cornucopias – from abstractions to vulgarities. (10)

Kostetskyi's perspective on the history of literature as a structure comprising distinct systems of individual author's means and literary writing techniques, borrowed from structuralists and developed into his own school of translation, was reinforced in his extended introduction to selected works of Stefan George which he published a decade after a complete set of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Although here Kostetskyi rejects stylisation in translation as an attempt to emulate the style of Ukrainian poets-predecessors, he pinpoints the importance of the recognition of individual styles of one's predecessors:

The experience of Lesya Ukrainka, [Mykola] Vorony, and early [Pavlo] Tychyna, therefore, was included in our [translation] work not by way of imitation, but by studying [those writers' stylistic] models and deriving certain sign systems based on them. (Kostetskyi, "Stefan George" 173)

A historical parallel can be drawn between Kostetskyi's publishing house "Nahori" and the Knyhospilka, a cooperative publishing and bookselling union, which operated in Kharkiv, Soviet Ukraine, from the 1920s until the end of 1930. This is particularly visible in the Knyhospilka edition of Nikolai Gogol (Mykola Hohol) in Ukrainian translation (1929–1932).<sup>7</sup> In this edition, the translators (Maksym Rylsky, Mykola Zerov, and others), together with the editors, modelled their Ukrainian version on the works of Gogol's Ukrainian contemporaries: Kvitka, Hulak-Artemovsky, and Hrebinka. Three decades later, Kostetskyi's strategy of searching for different stylistic systems and writing models in the history of Ukrainian literature with the aim of applying them in translation would resonate with their styling strategy.

Kostetskyi accumulated and re-formulated the tasks which the literary critics of the Ukrainian Renaissance decade<sup>8</sup> (Volodymyr Derzhavyn, Oleksandr Biletsky, Mykola Zerov, Hryhoriy Maifet, and others) put forward for translators, namely, to avoid "smooth calligraphic blandscript" ("Stefan George" 166), to rise to the artistic level of the original work, so that the saying "[there should be] no line without a one-time expression" (169), applied to the most creative original works, would

<sup>7</sup> It was planned as a five-volume collection in commemoration of Gogol's Ukrainian stories, written in 1829–1832, though only three volumes were published then.

<sup>8</sup> This decade is also referred to as the "Executed Renaissance" or the "Red Renaissance" (see footnote 6).

also characterise their translations, and to serve as a criterion for the originality of the source work, so that the translation would turn out to be an artistic event, and not a banality (136).

Equating the level of the translator's creativity with that of the source text's author, together with strict translational self-discipline and complete subordination to the artistic form of the original, Kostetskyi strove to break the "barriers of *thinking in language* [language not as a means but as a thinking subject]", *movomyslennia* (132; my emphasis). Perceiving literary translations as an organic part of the target national literature and culture, Kostetskyi believed in complementing it with translations of the great heritage of outstanding poet-thinkers of Europe.

### Conventional Stylisation and Absolutisation

With regard to the choice of style, Kostetskyi outlined three possibilities which he posed as questions a translator of Shakespeare's sonnets should ask when deciding on their method. They were:

to look for an adequate means of a completely modern poetics, that is: to retell Shakespeare in the 'language of the present'? to find a middle way between the modern and the traditional? or perhaps to resort to an absolute stylisation of the Ukrainian language of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? (Kostetskyi, "Ukraïns'kyi perekladach" 11–12)

For the most part, he chose the middle way: a conventional stylisation in the newest "post-Kulish" language,<sup>9</sup> with the time limit "no further than Zerov",<sup>10</sup> using the achievements of popular lyrical poetry. His translations highlight the figurative imagery of the original, sharpening the reader's perception. He achieved this through a seemingly paradoxical way of literal translation that refreshed the traditional image; through a conventional stylisation to earlier poetic diction with a chronological shift; and through a figurative modernisation on the verge of

<sup>9</sup> Panteleimon Kulish (7 August 1819 – 14 February 1897) was a Ukrainian writer, public activist, critic, poet, folklorist and translator. He is particularly renowned for his invention and utilisation of a Ukrainian phonetic spelling (orthography) in the late 1850s, which was later termed *kulishivka*, also known as the Kulish spelling. This innovation proved instrumental in shaping the evolution of the Ukrainian orthography and laid the foundation for the development of subsequent Ukrainian orthographies.

<sup>10</sup> Mykola Zerov (26 April 1890 – 3 November 1937) was a Ukrainian poet, literary critic, translator, polemicist, leader of the Neoclassic, and a model for subsequent generations of Ukrainian translators of Roman classics throughout the twentieth century, best known as a master of the sonnet form and a translator of ancient poetry from Latin.

surrealist semantics, or a combination of the incompatible. These three techniques: literal reproduction, conventional stylisation, and modernisation of the traditional canonical image, are closely intertwined and amplified by the associative development of acoustic reverberations.

For example, in Sonnet 95 (ll. 1–4) he decided on a close reproduction of a comparison (italicised):

How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame Which, <i>like a canker in the fragrant rose,</i> <i>Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name!</i> O, in what <i>sweets</i> dost thou thy sins enclose! (1712) <sup>11</sup>	<i>Як солодко ти чуєшся в ганьбі, Що так плямить, немов троянду гусінь, Прекрасну бруньку імени тобі! О, замкнуто твій зріх у ласий кусень!</i> (68) <sup>12</sup>
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In re-translation this reads:

How sweet you sound in disgrace,  
That *stains the rose like a caterpillar,*  
*The beautiful bud of thy name!*  
O, how sweet is thy sin in a *tasty morsel!*

Conventional stylisation implies creation of fresh metaphors within the traditional canonical image, as in Sonnet 34 (l. 3): “To let *base clouds* o’ertake me in my way” becomes in Ukrainian “Щоб потім звисли *мокрі рядна туч*”, in back-translation “So that later, *wet cloud sackcloth* would hang down.”

In Sonnet 150 (l. 8), the italicised phrase “That in my mind *thy worst all best exceeds?*” – “Що *всім добром твоє височу зло?*” in Kostetskyi’s version is transformed into a generalisation: “That *I elevate your evil to all good?*”, becomes a new proverbial expression: “to elevate one’s evil to all good.”

In order to diversify the vocabulary of the sonnets in the translation, Kostetskyi translated the same word in the English source by several Ukrainian synonyms, but placed them in different semantic contexts each time with a new contextual meaning: for example, “canker” is *пістряк* (acne) in Sonnet 35, *короїд* (bark beetle) in Sonnet 70, *гусінь* (caterpillar) in Sonnet 95, and *шашель* (shipworm) in Sonnet 99. The translator chose each word as carefully as possible. To make his

<sup>11</sup> All quotations from Shakespeare’s sonnets follow *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. Eds. Irving Ribner and George Lyman. Waltham and Toronto: Ginn and Company, 1971.

<sup>12</sup> Quotations of Kostetskyi’s translations follow *Шекспірові сонети (Shekspirovi Sonety)* (1958).

choice more convincing, he often commented on the literary history of a word used by Shakespeare, such as the word “canopy” (Kostetskyi, “Prymitky” 181). With a view to justifying his rhyme to “казок” (tales) as “бузок” (lilac), the translator studied the geographical history of lilacs, proving the probability of the presence and even of the popularity of this plant in Shakespeare’s England, and therefore asserted that the poet could have allegorised spring through the scent of lilacs.

Modernisation of traditional figurative language is directed towards the modernist techniques of Imagism and Surrealism, as in Sonnet 90 (l. 2): “Now, while *the world is bent my deeds to cross*” – “Нинь, коли світ навхрест мені нап’ям, in re-translation: “Now, when *the world is strained into a cross for me.*” Kostetskyi’s version concretises the semantics of the verb “to cross” into an image of the world as if crucified on a cross. In the spirit of imagist poetics, the translator often resorted to visual concretisation of abstract metaphors, as in Sonnet 89 (l. 9): “*Be absent from thy walks*” – “Хай вийду з твого кроку”, in re-translation: “Even if I get out of thy step”. In Sonnet 98 (l. 11): “They were but sweet, but *figures of delight*” – “Тих солодкавих, тих тонких скорин”, became in re-translation: “Those sweet, *thin crusts.*” In Sonnet 122 (l. 3): “Which shall above that *idle rank* remain” – “Вона-бо, вільна *літер-поворозок*”, read in re-translation: “This is because it [the memory] is free of *strings of letters.*”

The proximity of Shakespeare’s grotesquerie to Kostetskyi’s own stylistic preferences, embodied in his practice of modernist writing with elements of avantgarde techniques, is evidenced by the repeated observation in the Notes (“Prymitky”)<sup>13</sup> that Shakespeare’s visual imagery borders on surrealism (particularly in Sonnet 24). The translator attributed this peculiarity of Shakespeare’s style to his penchant for unusual word combinations, as a modernist of his time and a reformer of the poetic techniques of his day. Kostetskyi saw in Shakespeare’s sonnets many features of a new artistic era, the Baroque, following the late Renaissance, which Shakespeare crowned with his life, ahead of his time, in Kostetsky’s opinion, with his special, “baroque” way of thinking:

Shakespeare was a baroque man in his way of thinking in language [movomyslen-  
nia]. Out of this baroque way of perceiving words, amplified a thousandfold by his  
personal talent for expressing things through an unusual combination of words,

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<sup>13</sup> Kostetskyi unfolds before the reader of his “Notes” the history of the major themes of the sonnet as a poetic form – from antiquity to Shakespeare’s time. His sonnet studies are distinguished by the breadth of their literary panorama and the depth of their penetration into the figurative and thematic structure of the Renaissance sonnet. They reveal to the reader the intertextual nature of many of Shakespeare’s poetic images, motifs and themes, and illuminate their literary genesis.

grew that singularly grandiose Shakespearean art that has lived for centuries. (“Dus-ha storichchia” 61)<sup>14</sup>

On the versatility of Shakespeare’s personality, he observed that the author was:

an actor, entrepreneur and connoisseur of the human heart. A sober calculator and a fantasist who, once captivated by a thought, an image, a phrase, a play on words, could not stop until his enthusiasm had been fully expressed in an intricate verbal creation. (“Dus-ha storichchia” 61)

A great variety of Kostetskyi’s decisions and choices, ranging from literal rendering to stylisation and modernisation, stands in contrast to translations made in a single stylistic key, such as the translations by Yar Slavutych and Oleh Zuyevsky, which, in Kostetskyi’s words, “tend to follow the style of these translators as the authors” (“Ukrains’kyi perekladach” 18). His style of translation can be described as a melting pot for lofty (old-bookish) and colloquial vocabulary, with a distinct propensity for short and truncated grammatical forms, tongue-twisting alliterative wordplay, and imprecise modernist rhymes. For instance, he repeatedly engaged in his own paronymic experimentation, commenting on the most daring of them in his “Notes”, such as the following case of Sonnet 123 (ll. 1–4, the rhyme in question is italicised):

No, Time, thou shalt not boast that  
I do change!  
Thy pyramids built up with newer  
*might*  
To me are nothing novel, nothing  
strange;  
They are but dressings of a former  
*sight*.

*Ні, Часе, не гордій з моїх*  
*відмін;*  
*В міцних новобудовах*  
**пірамід**  
*Мені нема новин, нема*  
*дивин,*  
*Се лиш видовищ давніх **рами***  
**спід.**

In re-translation this reads:

No, Time, be not proud of my changes;  
In [your] strong, newly built *pyramids*  
There is nothing new or wondrous to me,  
It’s of bygone sights but the *back of the frame*.

<sup>14</sup> Though published without attribution, according to irrefutable evidence, this article was written by Ihor Kostetskyi.

In the accompanying note, the translator gives a rationale of his rhyme choice **пірамід – рами спід** (pyramids – the back of the frame) in place of Shakespeare's rhyme *might – sight*:

We have allowed ourselves this experiment, which seems to us to be entirely in the spirit of Shakespeare: 'z ramy spid' [the back of the frame] is, as it were, the acoustic underside of 'pyramids' (in the second line). The word, rhyming with its 'underside', reveals more intensely the form of thought embedded here. (Kostetskyi, "Prymitky" 181)

Kostetskyi carefully preserved the system and types of rhyming in Shakespeare's sonnets. The author's innovative poetic thinking in language (*movomyshlennia*) through translation is achieved by focusing the reader's attention on the artistic word form of the translated work, thereby demonstrating the fusion of meaning with form. Modernist experimentation with verse form became a distinctive feature of Kostetskyi's individual style of translation, evident not only in his translations of Shakespeare's sonnets, but also of his interpretations of the plays *Romeo and Juliet* (1957) and *Hamlet* (1963–1964), and of his work as an editor and translator-contributor to the *Selected Works of Ezra Pound* (1960).

Kostetskyi's translation technique encompasses the entire arsenal of modernist tools: the strictest choice of words based on functional expediency and justification of their use, compositional clarity and concentration of expression. In an attempt to prove the modernist credo that form creates its own unique content, Kostetskyi strove to separate the form of the verse from superficial "content", or an *unprepared reading*, and to bring the reader closer to the form-building strategy of the source. His personalised translation method can be characterised in terms of his own terminology, namely as "absolutisation" – the main principle Kostetskyi adhered to in his versions of Shakespeare's sonnets. He "absolutises" the artistic form of the original as a special way of expressing thought in language, arguing that content is inseparable from form and its inherent meaning(s). The translator explained the principles of his strategy of absolutisation in the following way,

We always looked at the original work through a grid, so to speak, and crossed out the lines schematically. Lines – not only of the image as such, but also of its technique: the structure of the sentence, divided into lines, including – mostly – the punctuation. [...] But 'Grid' does not capture all the nuances, only the most salient ones. It is the most salient that is absolutised, reduced to a norm, cleansed of random arbitrariness. This is the case with the systems of endings discussed above. And so it is with certain unsystematic repetitions in the original, inconsistencies or sloppiness of presentation, random rhymes (repetition of the same rhyme in a sonnet), etc. (Kostetskyi, "Ukraïns'kyi perekkladach" 15).

Kostetskyi tried to adhere to the “absolutisation” of all interesting literary devices in Shakespeare’s works. He saw his own reinterpretations of the sonnets as a system in which, in addition to intuition and professional training, fluent arithmetic is applied, i.e., a mastery in monitoring compliance with formal requirements, including unique rhymes in order that, ideally, the rhymes for certain words are never repeated, and a creative search for formally precise, unusual and singularly uncommon, translational correspondences. Moreover, all these “correspondences” – stylistic figures and tropes – should be felt in the Ukrainian text not only as unusual, but as unusually Ukrainian (Kostetskyi, “Stefan George” 172). They should resonate with distant, little-used, forgotten layers of Ukrainian vocabulary and phraseology. “Absolutisation” became Kostetskyi’s translation norm in this and other editions, especially “in distinguishing exact rhymes and all other consonances of the original” (176).

Requirement mandatory reproduction of the formal features of the original, on the one hand, acts as a disciplinary factor for the creative individuality of the translator, and on the other, ideally pressurises their creative individuality to a creativity at the level and within the framework of the source text’s author, i.e., it encourages the translator to openly reveal their own creative individuality. Only then can the translated texts be sufficiently original, innovative, and attract the attention of the reader. As a result, striving to produce the “textbook-type” translations, i.e., those in which the translator tries to draw as little attention to himself as possible, Kostetskyi creates somewhat “egocentric” translations.<sup>15</sup> A polymath with a subtle sense of the poetic epoch and poetic style, Kostetskyi was guided by such features of Shakespeare’s sonnets as the opacity and ambiguity of the poetic language. Researchers have repeatedly emphasised these qualities, but he believed that a translator who focuses on conveying the unified meaning of the original work must be careful otherwise, their translation loses “comprehensibility” for readers used to seeing the transparent meaning of the source text in translation.

Kostetskyi’s translations have historically been overlooked by both Soviet and early post-Soviet Ukrainian readers and critics. This can be attributed not only to their historical isolation from the West, but also to the intricate, multi-faceted stylistic composition of Kostetskyi’s texts. The primary objective of his translations was not to cater for the general reader, but rather to meticulously analyze the literary-associational structure of Shakespeare’s sonnets. He achieved this goal by employing a formalist approach and proposing a solution that was both innovative and rigorous. Kostetskyi’s approach to stylisation is underpinned by the formalistic

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<sup>15</sup> As Zuyevsky’s study argues (206), Kostetskyi classifies translations according to the translator’s task into “textbook-type” and “egocentric”.

principle of prioritising form over content. He elaborates on the stylising objective of his translations as follows:

In one way or another, we have finally come to the principle of stylisation. Throughout conventional stylisation because of intermediate factors, but still stylisation. [...] We set ourselves a specific task: to transfer Shakespeare to the poetic and linguistic Ukrainian era, which stands in roughly the same relation to ours as Shakespearean English does to modern English. In this way, we worked for the illusion of 'antiquity,' although, of course, we treated the conventionally selected as real. (Kostetskyi, "Ukraïns'kyi perekkladach" 12, 14)

Kostetskyi's objective, he asserts, is not to "retell Shakespeare 'in the language of the present'" (10); rather, he set himself the task of conventional stylisation, that is to say, stylisation to the "modernity" close to the original work, symbolically transferring the reader to the contemporaneity of the original work.

The eminent Ukrainian poet, translator and dissident Hryhoriy Kochur was critical of Kostetskyi's translation principle but remained highly appreciative of his effort. As a student of the neoclassicist Mykola Zerov and a follower of the neoclassical school of verse translation, he predictably found no artistic merit in Kostetskyi's work, rejecting its formalistic stylisation "achieved at the cost of a certain artificiality and violence against language" (Kochur, "Shekspirovi sonety" 3). At the same time he did not conceal his interest in this translation, claiming that "it is very interesting as an experiment" (3).

The cumulative language of Shakespeare's sonnets has no independent historical correlation in Kostetskyi. In this sense, the translator's stylising approach is paramount, and the linguistic structure of the texts he creates is predicated on the manipulation of temporal paradoxes. This enabled the translator to employ "elements of the Polonising traditions" espoused by Kassian Sakovych, Ivan Velychkovsky<sup>16</sup> and others in collage and parody to adequately convey the stylistic features of those places where Shakespeare – in the translator's opinion – parodies "euphuisms and other excesses of his native Baroque" (Kostetskyi, "Ukraïns'kyi perekkladach" 12).

Kostetskyi projected the source text onto a conventional counterpart of Shakespeare's time in Ukrainian history, essentially combining the vocabulary of different time layers with his own word combinations, using modern Ukrainian,

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<sup>16</sup> Kassian Sakovych (c. 1578–1647) was a churchman, philosopher and polemicist, the author of many poems, theological and political treatises; his preferred languages were Ukrainian and Polish. Ivan Velychkovsky (?–1726) was a poet and archpriest of Poltava; he is renowned for his literary works, including *Poems for Hetman Ivan Samoilovych* and two manuscript collections of Ukrainian poetry, which skilfully capture the stylistic qualities of the Baroque era.

albeit changed beyond recognition, as the basis for his translation. On the one hand, Kostetskyi strictly adhered to the principle of formal accuracy in translation, rendering it as an absolute:

The criterion for our translation is that it should be done in such a way that it can be used as an accurate illustration in a textbook on a given foreign literature compiled in the same language. (“Ukraïns’kyi perekladach” 13–14)

On the other hand, his translations clearly manifested his own creative individuality and personal perception of the original. Consequently, the translations exhibited an egocentric bias. In the words of Orysia Prokopiw, “the content and form are accurately conveyed, but from a different perspective from which the translator sees the original in his own way and brings it to life with the language he has created” (11).

Kostetskyi, the creator of the formalist trend in Ukrainian translation, himself designated his work on Shakespeare’s sonnets as pioneering, acknowledging that it was not without its shortcomings. He was acutely aware that in some respects his work was not intended for his contemporaries, but rather for posterity, specifically for those who would come some fifty years after him (i.e. for us in the twenty-first century) and he erroneously assumed that Ukrainian translations of Shakespeare’s sonnets would be “polished by subsequent masters” (“Ukraïns’kyi perekladach” 18) no earlier than half a century later. The new translations materialised much earlier than he had anticipated.

## Formalist Defamiliarisation and Other Modernist Techniques

Kostetskyi based his method of translation on the structuralist understanding of the nature of poetry, namely on the thesis that the content of thought in poetic creation is inseparable from its form. Together they are defined metaphorically as “thoughts already born in a shirt”<sup>17</sup> (“Ukraïns’kyi perekladach” 7). Kostetskyi perceives his primary responsibility to convey to the intended reader the poetic and stylistic configuration of the original work as a literary phenomenon of a specific historical epoch, encompassing a repertoire of traditional and anti-traditional, innovative poetic techniques. He employed not only the methods of formal textual analysis in the translator’s interpretation and reproduction of the original work, but also directly borrowed the key term of the formal method in literary studies, characterizing his own translation method as “defamiliarisation”

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<sup>17</sup> This expression draws on the analogy to a proverbial saying about a person “born in a shirt”, who is described as being both lucky and brave, and able to overcome any obstacles.

(*uchudnennia*). He states that “a traditional image dressed up in another language, but taken literally, gets a sudden defamiliarisation, and thus expressiveness” (Kostetskyi, “Prymitky” 137).<sup>18</sup> The concept of “defamiliarisation” was introduced by Viktor Shklovsky in his book *The Resurrection of the Word* (1914) and explained in his article “Art as Technique” (1917). According to our contemporary definition, “At the heart of defamiliarisation lies the creator’s desire to disrupt the automaticity of perception of the world around him: a defamiliarised, unusual point of view is the beginning of the beginnings of all creativity” (*Leksykon* 380).

Kostetskyi’s term *uchudnennia* borrowed the idea that originally underpinned it, namely the idea of the psychological renewal of the artistic word. The translator developed the application of this concept not only as a technique, but as an affirmation of the idea of “art as technique” according to which the history of world literature appears as a struggle and change of canonical and free techniques. Thus, Kostetskyi views Shakespeare’s sonnets through the prism of formal structuralism: as a system of techniques in the author’s struggle for novelty and originality.

All in all, Kostetskyi understood the verse form of the sonnet as a fixed limitation containing inexhaustible possibilities for the construction of unique “situations of the word”, also for the competition in artistic perfection of a unique poetic thought (“Ukrain’s’kyi perekładach” 9). According to his understanding of the sonnet as an “art of self-control”, the sonnet “imposes a requirement of consciousness on the poet” and “commands him to follow the narrowest path of all possible paths: the path of refinement” (“Ukrain’s’kyi perekładach” 8). Kostetskyi dynamises the image of Shakespeare as a sonnet writer, perceiving and, therefore, translating his sonnets as an internally dramatic, complex, and purposeful, though not always consistent, march to the peak of poetic perfection.

Kostetskyi associated his innovative method with a new turning point (“catastrophic”) in the formation of the Ukrainian literary language. He refers to the linguistic situation in the condition of emigration, when “two branches [of the Ukrainian language], the Eastern and the Western, suddenly came closer to each other”, specifying that they were in fact “two separate literary languages” (“Ukrain’s’kyi perekładach” 10). This observation refers to the return of the Ukrainian post-war diaspora to the first unified orthography of the Ukrainian language, adopted in Soviet Ukraine in 1928.<sup>19</sup> It united central-eastern (Soviet) and western Ukraine (then part of Poland) by codifying the words and phrases used in both parts of the politically divided Ukraine. The unified orthography was almost immediately subjected to devastating criticism by the ideologues of a new Soviet policy towards Ukrainian culture and language, who branded its norms as

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<sup>18</sup> Ukrainian: *ochudnennia*, *odyvnennia*, Russian: *ostranenie*.

<sup>19</sup> Український правопис (1928) [Ukrainian Spelling Book], <https://r2u.org.ua/node/181>. Accessed 25 October 2025.

“nationalist” and as diverting “modern Ukrainian language” from the work of the toiling masses, while directing it towards “Polish and Czech bourgeois culture”, and erecting “a barrier between the Ukrainian and Russian languages” (Khvyliya, “Vykorinyty, znyshchyty natsionalistychne korinnia na movnomu fronti”).

In 1933, new orthographic rules were published in Soviet Ukraine, bringing Ukrainian closer to Russian and cutting it off from the Western group of Slavic languages. This “orthographic reform” was in fact a battle against the distinctive and original features of the Ukrainian language. In the 1950s, Kostetskyi believed that the eastern and western branches of the Ukrainian language would once again unite under a single orthographic standard in the diaspora, beyond the borders of the ethnographic Ukraine occupied by the Soviet government.<sup>20</sup>

In the 1920s, the development of the Ukrainian language and culture was a hot theme. Kostetskyi was certainly aware of the problems associated with codifying the Ukrainian language, which were discussed in both academic settings, and in open debates and public lectures held by the leading thinkers of the time, especially Mykola Khvylovy and Mykola Zerov.<sup>21</sup> At that time, translation was seen as an important platform for the development and enrichment of the Ukrainian literary language, both concerning vernacular lexical and idiomatic resources, and word formation models of the Ukrainian language. Therefore, Kostetskyi saw translation as a platform for the objective development of the Ukrainian language in a new, modernist sense of language: “The language itself has grown and become more detailed as a cultural fact” (“Ukraïns’kyi perekladach” 10). And he freely imbued his translations with his own modernist sense of this newly unified Diasporic Ukrainian language. He identified the following vectors of Ukrainian language development: 1) new, sophisticated use of noun and adjectival (suffixless) forms that coincide with the root; 2) new possibilities of syntactic constructions; 3) new phraseological achievements; 4) new lexical abundance – from abstractions to vulgarisms, etc. (“Ukraïns’kyi perekladach” 10).

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<sup>20</sup> This did, indeed, take place, not in the diaspora but in geographically united Ukraine, after it had gained its independence in 1991. A new version of Ukrainian orthography was adopted, which was later reprinted several times with minor editorial changes. This orthography was in force from 1993 to 2019, and became invalid on 22 May 2019, when the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted a new version of the orthography developed by the Ukrainian National Spelling Commission. The new version eventually restored some features of the 1928 spelling that were part of the Ukrainian orthographic tradition. The New Ukrainian Spelling Book was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (Resolution No. 437 of 22 May 2019) by a joint decision of the Presidium of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Minutes No. 22/10 of 24 October 2018) and the Board of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (Minutes No. 10/4–13 of 24 October 2018), and approved by the Ukrainian National Spelling Commission (Minutes No. 5 of 22 October 2018).

<sup>21</sup> For more details on the Ukrainian literary discussion of the 1920s, see Shkandrij.

He introduced in his translations a wide range of rare and new lexical material which could contribute to the new orthography, especially in certain directions, such as: a) reduced forms of adjectives and participles, e.g., заручен, люблен, зурочен (*betrothed, loved, jinxed*); b) suffixless nouns, e.g., скін, з'ява, мжич (*the end/demise, appearance, drizzle*); c) short adverbs, e.g., з'юна, наз'яв, зчужа (*youthfully, actually, alienatedly*); d) reduced forms of verbs, e.g., вділя, дба, згаса (*endows, cares, fades away*); e) active voice participles, e.g., голосяча, летючий, мучуще (*crying, flying, tormenting*); f) lexical and grammatical archaisms and conventional Slavisms, new phraseological combinations based on them, e.g., спомагатись, невстрашна, всп'ять, штудерний, скарбівець, вигляд чувань, обіт (*help each other, undaunted, backwards, cunning, treasurer, vigil, vow*); g) distinctive Ukrainian words and phrases that were banned in Soviet Ukraine, and new lexical and grammatical forms that do not contradict the word formation models of the Ukrainian language: інакшення, хвалеба, неприймовне, заховки, навсупір, словомом (*othernessing, praising, unacceptable, hiding places, contrary to, word-breaker*), among numerous others. Unlike form, the meanings of the vast majority of the words Kostetskyi used in his translations can be conveyed by other – normative and non-rare – lexemes.

Overall, Kostetskyi continues to pave the way, albeit rather radically and broadly, of the 1920s, shaping the Ukrainian language into a modern, dynamic, flexible language, rich in synonyms and collocations, capable of conveying complex thought in both a concise and protracted form. His predilection for short and reduced word forms and active participles makes the Ukrainian language more flexible, semantically concentrated and convenient for translating a sonnet. Drawing extensively on his lexical, grammatical and phraseological knowledge and linguistic skills in the above areas, Kostetskyi consistently reproduced wordplays of the original.

Here are some examples of paronymic wordplay, indicated by the use of italics. In Sonnet 5 (l. 4): “And that *unfair* which *fairly* doth excel” – “*І геть потворить світловидий твір*”, in re-translation, “And utterly *distorts* the light-faced *work*”; in Sonnet 26 (l. 4): “To witness duty. Not to show my *wit*” – “*Яка мій довг – не довгий розум – вкаже*”, in re-translation “[A message] that will point to my *debt*, not my *long wit*”; in Sonnet 95 (l. 7): “Cannot *dispraise* but in a kind of *praise*” – “*Не в силі гудити повз хвальний гуд*”, in re-translation “Unable to *condemn* against the praising *buzz*”; in Sonnet 149 (l. 6): “On whom *frown'st* thou that I do *fawn* upon?” – “*Чоломкаюсь, в чий бік чолом ти сумриш?*”, in re-translation, “Do I *kiss* [those] against whom you frown your *forehead*?”

Kostetskyi also repeatedly reinforced Shakespeare's alliterative wordplay, as in Sonnet 27 (ll. 1–2):

Weary with toil, I haste me to the bed,  
The dear repose for limbs with  
*travel tired.*

Докраю зморен, лину в ліжко я,  
Здороженому дорогé  
встокроть.

In re-translation, this reads:

Totally exhausted, I want to go to bed,  
Which is a hundred times *dearer to a road-weary* [man].

The translator often introduces the alliterative wordplay overtly where it may be implicit in the original. What follows exemplifies the play of paronymic attraction conjured up by the translator, as in Sonnet 8 (ll. 7–10):

They do but sweetly chide thee, who  
confounds  
In singleness the parts that thou  
shouldst bear.  
Mark how one string, sweet hus-  
band to another,  
Strikes each in each by mutual or-  
dering

Гуд гудить лиш тебе, що  
перепонив  
Ти самотою співогласів  
рух:  
Ось глянь, одна струна, мов  
милий ладо,  
Стрічає другу в дружнім ладі  
змін

In re-translation, this reads:

*Rumours blame* you for getting in the way  
[Singing] alone against the movement of chants:  
Look, one string, like a sweet *husband*,  
Meets *another in the friendly harmony* of change.

Besides the words in italics, there are other similar-sounding words in this excerpt, which follow the sounding of the original, such as: *string–strikes* via **струна–стрічає**.

By highlighting the parodic subtext of some of Shakespeare's sonnets, Kostetskyi emphasised their original stylistic heterogeneity and intertextuality. One way of "absolutizing" the intertextuality of the original is to create new intertextual connections in the translation. Kostetskyi repeatedly resorted to this method, most notably in the translation of Sonnet 82, which parodies words from the work of the seventeenth-century Ukrainian baroque poet Vasyl Ustrytsky.<sup>22</sup> His translation of Sonnet 130 develops a parodic use of Ustrytsky's strategy in his

<sup>22</sup> Vasyl Ustrytsky was one of the authors of the renowned joint eulogy of Petro Mohyla (1596–1647), a Ukrainian political, ecclesiastical and educational figure, Archimandrite of

collected poems *Parnassus*, where conventionality prevails (this form was crucial to Ukrainian Baroque poets). Kostetskyi argues that here Shakespeare resorted to a parody of “the imagery of love poetry as it appears in all its high Baroque splendor in the work of his older colleagues, the legislators of style” (“Prymitky” 186). In “Appendix IV. Shakespeare in a Sonnet Setting”, Kostetskyi provides Ukrainian translations of samples of poetry that he believed Shakespeare parodied (“Dodatky” 224–249). As evidence of Shakespeare’s parody of the poetic diction of his older contemporaries, Kostetskyi cites passages from the works of Henry Constable, Thomas Lodge, Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and other poets of the time, including the imagery allegedly parodied by Shakespeare in Sonnet 130. For him, this sonnet is an instance of “exquisite grotesque” whose object of parody was the Constable-Spenser-Greene school. In contrast to their poetic ideal, Shakespeare presents an “opposite ideal” (“Prymitky” 190). Kostetskyi further argues that Shakespeare not only parodied the poetic devices of Robert Greene’s school but also made straightforward use of them, for example, in Sonnet 28 (192). By pointing out Shakespeare’s sometimes apprentice-like dependence on models, Kostetskyi sought to undermine the “legend” that the Man from Stratford marked the beginning of a new stylistic school (187). Therefore, he found his own “way to make parody more present in translation” – by means of conventional stylisation of the translated text in the spirit of the Ukrainian Polonising Baroque of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, emphasizing that the stylisation he used in his translation “is only intended to reveal the clash of two incompatible semantic planes, which in the relationship of styles always has a comic effect” (193). The stylised parody of High Baroque love poetry is honed by Kostetskyi to the point of deliberate comic grotesque by the figurative vocabulary of Ukrainian Baroque poetics.

## Conclusion

Exploiting the “anarchy” in the linguistic norms of the Ukrainian literary emigration of the post-war decade, Kostetskyi embodied a modernist experiment in the mobilisation and regrouping of the lexical and grammatical resources of the Ukrainian language. His translations are written in a uniquely bizarre, recognisable and, at the same time, defamiliarised and estranged Ukrainian language. The translator called his approach a modernisation of the original, making it clear that his method is linked to literary modernism. At the same time, he justified his conventional stylisation strategy as being akin to the creative

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the Kyiv Cave Monastery (from 1627), Metropolitan of Kyiv, Halychyna and all Rus’ in the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in the Eastern Orthodox Church from 1633 to 1646.

method employed by Shakespeare himself, who, as Kostetskyi argues, “would achieve expressiveness by estranging the traditional,” i.e., was a “modernist” in the way he used literary tradition (“Prymitky” 138).

This translator’s own stylistic technique varied from one sonnet to the next. His approach to stylisation inevitably relied on new literary reminiscences and established new intertextual connections between the translated text and the target literary polysystem. Reproducing the stylistic dominance of each individual sonnet, the translator himself resorted to the poetics of different literary epochs. Sometimes this entails the sharply clashing Ukrainian Polonised Baroque of the seventeenth century with the stylistic expectations of the reader of the second half of the twentieth century; sometimes he amalgamated the enlightenment-populist poetics of the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (which were and still are perceived as poetic language by the Ukrainian reader), sometimes he worked in the spirit of the intellectual wing of Ukrainian modernism. Thus, the pompous and euphuistic style of one sonnet coexists with the remarkably simple and “natural” expression of another. The semantic range of the nineteenth-century ethnographically oriented poetry is combined with the intellectual charge of the Ukrainian Neoclassics (who were among the most brilliant representatives of the Executed Renaissance of the 1920s): banal and refined rhymes, poetic tradition and experimentation. The translator followed Shakespeare’s art of the poetic persona: from lofty bookish rhetoric to aphoristic, lively street expression.

Kostetskyi’s translations, therefore, fully embody the postulate of the stylistic heterogeneity and artistic diversity of Shakespeare’s sonnets as a creative laboratory. They are intended for the reader-philologist or literary gourmet who is interested in understanding the original work as a highly organised system of techniques. Nevertheless, the model of the reader constructed by Kostetskyi, a distinguished literary figure and a true man of letters, was forward-looking. The formalist approach to translation that he advocated, however, remained in its infancy due to a combination of factors including a perceived lack of demand from the general readership and an absence of a discernible dynamic of development through followers and proponents.

Yet, the versatility of the Ukrainian language that Kostetskyi shaped – the lexical, grammatical and morphological resources of the Ukrainian language that he awakened in his translations, the new and activated word forms and patterns, and numerous examples of fresh paronymic attraction and rhyme models – deserves attention not only from historians of literature and translation, but also from linguists. This is pressing especially today, when in its centuries-long history, the Ukrainian language faces a new existential threat from the Russian (neo)empire.

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