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Shakespeare, Trauma, and Social Change: Inclusive Ukrainian Theatre Projects (2019–2023)

Abstract

This article focuses on the analysis of art-therapeutic, inclusive theatre projects in Ukraine that were based on Shakespeare's plays and implemented from 2019 to 2023. The goal of these projects was deeply integrative: to draw public attention to people with disabilities, war veterans, and children whose parents were on the frontline. In addition, the aim of the theatre projects was to help these groups be heard, to provide them with the tools and a platform to tell their stories through archetypal, recognisable narrative patterns. The article explores the production of *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* based on Shakespeare's comedy with veterans and volunteers of the Russian-Ukrainian war ('Project W'), directed by Oleksii Hnatkovskiy, 2019; the inclusive project *12 Ophelia* by the Kharkiv Arabesque

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Studio Theatre, 2019; and the production *Monster Opera* based on Shakespeare with children of the military, directed by Nigel Osborne, 2023.

Keywords: inclusive theatre, Shakespeare and disability, Shakespeare and trauma, Shakespeare in Ukraine, theatre as a therapy, art-therapy practicing, integrative theatre, inclusiveness in the theatre.

*In memory of all the theatre artists who have passed
away in the darkness of this unjust, aggressive Rus-
sian war against Ukraine*

Over the past few years, Ukrainian theatre has seen an increased focus on projects that emphasize theatre's integrative function. The main mission of such initiatives is to work with social groups who have difficulties with social integration or need public attention (e.g., veterans, people with disabilities). In such projects, theatre acts as an additional stimulus for the rehabilitation of vulnerable social groups and their (re)integration into society (cf. Kaplan; Schininà 37–47). Theatre often becomes a point of intersection or interaction with the audience, but also as a space for meeting and collaborating with various social and artistic institutions. In Ukrainian theatre, such projects have often been based on Shakespeare's plays. This might be connected to the fact that Shakespeare's plots are distant enough from Ukrainian history or political issues to avoid causing trauma, yet archetypal enough to be used as vehicles for emotion; recognisable enough to give momentum to voices usually unheard in society, yet at the same time, they remain relatively unknown, allowing one to tell one's own story through them.

Twelfth Night, or What You Will

One of the most prominent examples of theatre serving a therapeutic role in the Ukrainian context has been the 2019 Kyiv production of *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*. This production was the result of the art therapy *Project W: Veterans, Volunteers and William*, and was presented to the audience for the first time in Kyiv (30–31 May 2019). The production captivated viewers with its sincerity, confessional style, melancholy, and stormy vitality. From 2019 to 2021, it remained in the Ivan Franko National Drama Theatre's repertoire in Ivano-Frankivsk.¹ The project involved several institutions performing very different activities: the Frankivsk Drama Theatre, the English Among People Modern School of English, and the

¹ Hereafter referred to as the Franko Drama Theatre.

Eleos-Ukraine social service organisation. Its participants included professional theatre artists as well as veterans and volunteers of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The production's backstory began with an idea Captain Ihor Kasyan had, having founded the Modern School of English in Kyiv after his demobilisation/discharge in 2018: to perform the play in Shakespeare's language. Many of the theatre professionals Kasyan approached could not imagine such a project until they met actor and director Oleksii Hnatkovskiy, who was able to provide them with a new perspective on the project:

I have my own personal history with Shakespeare. Do you know what his paradox is, why he is close to me? We can talk about two aspects here. You can look both from the outside and from the inside. That is, to highlight the technological side of the actor and the conceptual side of the director. Shakespeare's drama is unique for productions. But Stanislavski's system is not suitable here. To work on Shakespeare, it's just pointless to use that system. Shakespeare's theatre is playful and... crazy in a certain sense. But the essence of Shakespeare is that he [...] can be staged anywhere, in any way, and still his uniqueness will only multiply. He speaks in modern language about modern things. About those things that are always relevant. He talks about good and evil, love and death, the political system and, most of all, human nature. That is, a human being with all its charms and virtues. Shakespeare has a subtle sense of the human soul, showing that the human soul has not changed since the creation of the world. A person can love and eat the forbidden apple at the same time, i.e., rise and fall at the same time. Shakespeare feels the human soul very much, and that is why he is so relevant. (Hnatkovskiy)²

Hnatkovskiy's remarks frame Shakespeare's drama as inherently adaptable, resisting psychological realism. His emphasis on play, multiplicity, and universality aligns with observations about Shakespeare's dramaturgy, particularly its capacity to accommodate diverse performance styles and cultural contexts. In the context of this project, such adaptability becomes especially significant: it allows non-professional actors, including veterans, to enter the text through imaginative and experiential modes rather than technical psychological training, which is particularly relevant for trauma-sensitive theatre practices. Hnatkovskiy became the main organizer of the theatre performance. The *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* project began with a casting call for veterans willing to participate as well as for other volunteers in 2018. The organisers were surprised by the number of people who appeared at the casting, and at that moment realised the importance and relevance of the project.

² Unless otherwise specified, all translations are by the author.

The selected group of participants began learning English, and six months later in 2019, the rehearsal process started. According to the director, these rehearsals were very challenging. Initially, it was difficult to comprehend and find a theatrical explanation for the entire story. The director also mentioned that it was hard to find a convincing theatrical reason for casting veterans as actors. At first, he faced several conceptual questions: why the veterans should appear on stage, why they should perform a Shakespearean comedy during wartime, and whether such a choice could be seen as a way of celebrating life. In the Ukrainian context, staging a comedy during a time of armed conflict requires a clear theatrical justification. Ultimately, the production's guiding principle became the idea of play. As Hnatkovskyi recalls:

It's actually an ode to love that we sing, and there is indeed cross-dressing and love here. At the beginning [...], I had different visions. The result is a different performance from the one I had planned. Our play is about big children who openly play, openly love life and are not ashamed of their childishness. Just like children who take an umbrella in kindergarten and imagine it's a sword. I admire these people. First, we held a casting call, which was attended by veterans and volunteers. These are different people, with different destinies and difficult life experiences behind them. But they all turned out to be motivated by theatre, even though they live ordinary everyday lives. They meet several times a week to learn English. Perhaps it looks rather strange from the outside. Adults who have been to the front suddenly start playing and behaving like children! But if you look deeper, you will find their great love for life and their desire to pass this love on to others. (Hnatkovskyi)

The final structure of the resulting project took the shape of a two-part play, with each part set in a different style. In the first part, the participants spoke for themselves and shared their personal stories. Each performance differed according to the choice of phrases or explanations used. The audience learned at the very beginning of the production that the actors were veterans and volunteers, as the project participants appeared in military uniforms.³ Their military chevrons made it clear to the audience that the performers were veterans of the 2014 Russian-Ukrainian war. They stood facing the audience, and each of them in turn called out their call sign and battalion number. This information might at first sound very factual, but with every word they spoke, the audience realised that behind these

³ It is important to note here that in times of war in Ukraine, it is forbidden for non-military personnel to wear military uniforms (or similar coloured clothing). This rule does not apply to the theatre stage, but theatres rarely use military uniforms in their productions. For theatres, this is a moral prohibition, because only a military person can wear a military uniform, otherwise it can be perceived as unfair manipulation.

utterances lay their own personal experience of the war. At that moment, the scene facilitated a direct encounter between veterans and the civilian audience. The intimate performance space exposed the veterans' physical tension, including tightened facial muscles, clenched hands, and audible strain in their voices. It was extremely difficult for the participants to come out and address the audience directly. This first scene became, therefore, emotionally intense. The audience did not know what to expect, the veterans how they would be perceived.

This standoff seemed to reflect the current tensions in Ukrainian society, where the military and non-military still do not know how to interact with one another. However, the situation was suddenly relieved with a theatrical twist. The actors announced that they would not bore the audience with difficult stories; they only wanted to perform *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare. Some participants read the play for the first time to prepare for the production; others had read it before. All of them thought it was a great story that they wanted to perform because they were cheerful people who did not want to beg for pity with their adaptation.

In the ensuing second part, the actors performed as the characters in Shakespeare's story. Interestingly, at the climax of the play, the actors stepped out of their roles again, taking off their costumes for a while and voicing their opinions on Shakespeare and the real-life events of the performance. In a playful finale, all the participants returned to their roles in Shakespeare's play, changing into bright, funny costumes once more. The audience then witnessed an unexpected transformation: the actors appeared confident and relaxed, improvised easily, flirted with the audience, and seemed to be enjoying themselves. Shakespeare's intriguing, slightly altered plot captivated everyone – the actors and the audience alike. Hnatkovskiy clearly established a new performance structure, helping the participants to develop their characters and find expression through their roles.

According to Hnatkovskiy, the idea of acting in English at first seemed a rather unconventional, difficult choice. After all, the project participants had only very basic knowledge of English and no prior experience with public recitation. However, performing in a foreign language became an effective mechanism that allowed participants to distance themselves from their own experiences and assume their theatrical roles.⁴ The director selected English to avoid the deep psychological engagement triggered by Ukrainian, which had often elicited intense and unmanageable emotions in the non-professional actors. Using a foreign language, therefore, provided a degree of emotional distance. English thus supported the participants in creating another world and telling a story. In fact, the participants' psychological state and resilience were important factors for the project organisers:

⁴ The only joke was that the participants needed more English lessons than acting lessons (English teacher Svitlana Yavorska).

to work towards the participants' health, not to trigger traumatic or emotionally challenging experiences.

The show had a lot of bright moments, a pace that grew faster, its fooling around with fireworks supposed to be an ode to living joy, until someone threw the fireworks into a prop bucket. The bomb-like explosions in the steel bucket seemed to tear everyone from this bright, life-affirming situation. The fireworks that for a few seconds had symbolised joy, turned into a traumatic trigger. This shock prompted the actors to remove their brightly coloured costumes, revealing chevrons and pixelated T-shirts underneath. Everyone froze, like ashamed children whose frantic play is interrupted. Commenting on this scene, Hnatkovskyi shared that almost every rehearsal ended with such a spirit of dread and shame, and therefore he decided it would be unfair to both the actors and the audience to perform only a jolly comedy that finishes with a smile. Therefore, this scene was integrated into the production. When everyone froze, suddenly torn out of the game, spectators – and participants alike – were reminded of the cruel reality of the still ongoing war.

By removing their costumes, the participants symbolically shed their roles, allowing the audience to encounter them once again as veterans and volunteers. One of the participants, Arseniy Prylipka, who performed Feste, began to sing *Where have all the flowers gone* by Pete Seeger, which was accompanied by guitar. During this recital, photographs of the participants' family albums were projected on the backdrop. Images of their pre-war joy, including scenes from the front with their comrades, formed a sincere, confessional climax to the performance. This moment implicitly foregrounded the unresolved ethical tensions that preoccupy society: the possibility of experiencing joy during wartime and the act of participating in cultural life while others remain engaged in combat. The coexistence of happiness and grief – an emotional paradox that resists definitive resolution – was implicitly invoked in this moment. The very articulation of such complexity within a shared space fostered an exceptional sense of unity and trust. The scene underscored the impossibility of segregating the realities of wartime and peacetime: even when war remains unseen, its presence continues to shape collective experience.

This sensitive moment was interrupted by one of the actors who voiced his outrage: "We've ruined everything again, we've ruined the comedy, can we really only talk about war, can we really remain people of war forever?" Following this metadramatic moment, the actors put on their costumes again and acted out the story to the end. Their pace picked up as they found joy in their characters again, lighting up and passing this fervour on to their audience. The production ended on a major life-affirming note.

It is tempting to reach a positive conclusion about the production's contribution to the social reintegration of its veteran participants; for instance, by highlighting that some launched new professional or creative projects, established families, or explored artistic practices. While such developments did occur, they were short-lived. This

outcome underscores a crucial point: trauma recovery is neither linear nor rapid, but rather a long, complex process in which moments of progress can coexist with setbacks.

Following the escalation of the full-scale invasion in February 2022, several participants were redeployed to the front line. Their renewed exposure to violence and loss not only interrupted their artistic plans but also carried the risk of retraumatization, potentially undermining the therapeutic gains made through the project. This development serves as a stark reminder that cultural and therapeutic interventions, while meaningful, operate within circumstances shaped by the unpredictability and recurrence of trauma.

12 *Ophelia*

In 2018, four years before the Russian full-scale invasion, the *12 Ophelia* project premiered at the Kharkiv Arabesque Theatre. The text, authored by the American playwright Caridad Svich, was staged by the Ukrainian actress and director Svitlana Oleshko, in collaboration with the NGO “Modern Woman” and the Kharkiv Inclusive Theatre Studio. The production formed part of a long-standing international tradition of reinterpreting Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* through the figure of Ophelia: a character whose silenced and marginalised narrative has often invited feminist re-readings. Svich’s adaptation aligned with this tradition by imagining an alternative trajectory for Ophelia, positioning her not as a drowned victim but as a subject who re-emerges and continues her story. Beyond this feminist framework, the production also interrogated broader social issues, particularly the readiness of Ukrainian society to recognise the agency and visibility of people with disabilities. The performance was collaboratively created by actors of the Arabesque Theatre Studio and performers with limited mobility who used wheelchairs. As in Kyiv’s *Twelfth Night*, the project pursued an integrative approach, challenging normative assumptions about who may participate in and shape theatrical expression. Although it may initially seem paradoxical that a production involving many performers with limited mobility took the form of a dance-based performance, the creative team deliberately foregrounded embodiment as a site of artistic and political significance. Under the choreography of Svitlana Honcharenko and Maria Lozova, movement became a means of constructing character and reclaiming physical presence on stage. The choreography was supported by original music composed and performed by Mykhailo Barbara, who also appeared in the role of Hamlet. According to Oleshko:

Today’s theatre audience often forget that in Shakespeare’s theatre, Ophelia was acted by a guy. In our production, it’s the other way round: the Jester is played by a woman; and Rosencrantz, Hamlet’s friend with whom he studied, is also acted by

a woman. I think the author purposely subverts the Shakespearean canon to make the audience think. [...] Shakespeare's and Svich's female characters are tragic. But life is not a performance. It cannot only be sad, unhappy, and gloomy. We can cry and laugh, make mistakes and take the right decisions, be wise and do or say stupid things at the same time. Our production, in particular, is about the fact that no woman is limited to the role of the mother, the wife, the daughter, or the sister. It's about the fact that if your lover has left you, that is not the point of the story, you don't have to drown in such a situation, you can swim out and create your own story. (Oleshko)

In this production, Svitlana Oleshko challenges the conventional representations of Ophelia as a passive victim within a landscape of male political and emotional manipulation, a portrayal that has long dominated both Shakespeare scholarship and performance traditions. Caridad Svich's adaptation provides the textual foundation for this reconfiguration. The narrative of Ophelia is so culturally entrenched that it has come to signify a behavioural paradigm: within the logic of Shakespeare's tragedy, her suicide appears almost predetermined, the act that 'completes' her character's trajectory. Oleshko's staging deliberately disrupts this canonical endpoint. By refusing Ophelia's death as an inevitable narrative closure, the production reimagines her as a figure capable of "swimming out" rather than drowning: a metaphor for reclaiming agency, pursuing alternative life paths, and articulating presence. This emphasis on alternative forms of visibility and participation extends beyond gender. The production also interrogates societal perceptions of disability, a dimension that Oleshko herself highlights. By including performers with limited mobility as core contributors to the work, the production positions disability not as an obstacle to performance but as a site of artistic and political significance, thereby expanding the interpretive framework through which Ophelia's renewed agency is understood. She explains:

When we started rehearsals, everyone was very worried. Actors and actresses, coaches and trainers were worried about working with people with disabilities, to be honest. In the sense that they were worried about saying something or doing something incorrectly. The actors in wheelchairs were worried whether they would be able to express themselves on stage, because we agreed from the start that everyone should work on an equal footing. And we have very high professional standards. For six months, we were actively engaged in training in vocals, stage speech, stage movement, martial arts, and acting. And it brought us all very close, because we had a common cause and a common experience. I think that all the participants in the project are very brave. They all put aside their fears and concerns, some of their complexes, and they were not afraid to go on stage and perform very difficult tasks. They were also not afraid to speak not only with the voices of their heroes and heroines,

but also in their own voices, and they were not afraid to tell their personal stories on camera. (Oleshko)

The staging engagement with performers with disabilities can be productively situated within key debates in contemporary disability studies. Lennard Davis argues that disability must be understood not as an individual deficit but as a cultural and social construct produced by norms of bodily and cognitive ‘normalcy’. Therefore, theatrical practices that centre performers with disabilities challenge the very standards through which able-bodied performance has historically been legitimised. Tom Shakespeare further underscores the importance of recognising disability as an interaction between embodied variation and social barriers rather than a fixed medical condition. From this perspective, the performance’s choreographic strategies disrupt the assumption that dance – and, by extension, theatrical expression – is bound to normative physical capacities. The work demonstrates that movement vocabularies can be reimagined to accommodate and affirm diverse bodily practices. Dan Goodley extends this argument by framing disability as a site of political and creative possibility. He suggests that disability studies should not merely critique exclusion but also explore how alternative embodiments produce new forms of knowledge and aesthetic innovation. In this sense, the production’s integration of wheelchair users as co-creators not only challenges representational conventions but also generates distinctive modes of storytelling and corporeal presence. Together, these theoretical insights illuminate how this particular production destabilises ableist assumptions embedded in theatrical tradition and opens space for rethinking agency, representation, and the politics of embodiment on stage.

These theoretical perspectives provide a conceptual frame for understanding the significance of *12 Ophelia* not only at the level of representation but also in terms of its production process. The project’s development offers a concrete illustration of how inclusive practices operate under real social conditions and how performers’ lived experiences shape the artistic outcome. This becomes particularly evident when considering the circumstances under which the production was created.

Preparations for the production took place during the COVID-19 pandemic quarantine. The play was staged only once in Kharkiv in 2020. Then it was decided not only to record the theatre production on video, but to create a mini-series about the work on the play, as well as the stories of the actors with disabilities and how their experiences intertwined and influenced the creation of roles and characters in the play. As a result, five episodes were filmed: (1) “Let the word agree with the gesture, and the gesture with the word”, (2) “To see what I see, just look”, (3) “Ophelia will not be unhappy anymore”, (4) “There is no story about me. I am Gertrude. That’s all”, and (5) “Breathe Like a Swallow”. The episode titles are taken from songs created by the actors Mykhailo Barbara and Yuriy Yefremov

based on Shakespeare's texts. The songs performed by the choir were newly written, drawing directly on the participants' personal stories. In this way, the production established a multilayered dialogue between Shakespeare's text, Svich's adaptation, and the lived experiences of performers with disabilities. Through these original lyrics, the theatre project wove the participants' narratives into the reinterpretation of Shakespeare's story. Thanks to this approach, the audience saw people with disabilities as ambitious, motivated, desperate, exhausted, and ready for action, to live an active life in society. The production foregrounds a central concern: the extent to which society acknowledges and accommodates the desire of people with disabilities to participate fully in social and cultural life. Much like the marginalisation of Ophelia in Shakespeare's time – where a young woman could be rendered almost invisible – the contemporary experiences of people with disabilities in Ukraine continue to be shaped by forms of social erasure. The project made these dynamics visible, prompting both creators and audiences to reflect on and reconsider prevailing attitudes toward disability and inclusion. Of course, the full-scale war has changed this view, because now Ukrainian society, unfortunately, has a lot of people with disabilities affected by the war (both military and civilians of all ages). However, the *12 Ophelia* project took place before the full-scale invasion of 2022.

Monster Opera

The third project examined in this article is *Monster Opera*, a theatre-therapy initiative developed by the Scottish composer Nigel Osborne in 2022–2023, which also draws on a Shakespearean narrative. Osborne was invited by the NGO Art Dot as part of the ArtTherapyForce project. Art Dot organises artistic and educational events to stimulate civic engagement and create an ecological space for social improvement and responsibility. Their project ArtTherapyForce, which emerged as a response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, aims to consciously use art and creative practices to restore the psycho-emotional well-being of Ukrainians. In partnership with the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Art Dot expanded the ArtTherapyForce activities into another project that focused on working with Ukrainian children whose parents were currently at war. The project included theatre therapy practices for children and concluded with a performance which was presented to the public at the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv.

With the help of giant puppets representing Courage, Danger, and Forest, a story written by the participants themselves, woven from the plots of *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and intertwined with the children's personal experiences, unfolded before the audience's eyes. Drawing on characters such as the Giant Colbrand – an English folkloric figure referenced in *Henry VIII*

and *King John* – as well as Puck, Bottom, Oberon, and Titania from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Caliban from *The Tempest*, the children were first introduced to selected Shakespeare plays and discussed them in depth with the project's tutors. Based on these discussions, they subsequently developed their own narrative, in which these characters became symbolic figures representing various dimensions of the struggle against both internal and external “monsters.” This creative process provided psychologists with insight into the children's emotional states and coping mechanisms.

Although the story takes place in a mystical world where fantastic creatures live, the stage space felt like a public square, very open, with no curtains and no dimmed theatre lights; all the action took place in daylight. Through aural and visual images, the audience was immersed in a fantastic world which came to life with the help of musical instruments and singing. The performance suggested that the characters of this imagined world emerged from the soundscape itself: the choir's vocal textures evoked a landscape of mountains, fields, and open sky, while the large, vividly painted ratyshchy (ritual staffs) held by the choristers contributed to the visual impression of an ancient forest.

The performance was composed so that the entire story was sung and told by the choir, combining rhythmic and recitative passages, enhanced by loud instruments, with melodic solo parts to the accompaniment of piano, guitar, and bandura. The characters were realised through pantomime, at times supported by solo vocal performances. Within this aesthetic framework, a king's crown fashioned from a plastic bag or a coat assembled from discarded materials appeared not incongruous but symbolically resonant, demonstrating the transformative capacity of theatrical representation. The performance climaxed in the battle between Rage and Justice. These allegorical creatures appeared before the audience as huge, twice-human-size puppets created by the actors under the direction of the artist Natalia Rudenko-Kraevska. The final battle was emotionally intensified by a rhythmic background produced by the choir. A huge puppet made of glossy black garbage bags, an allegory of Rage and Cruelty, was finally overthrown with loud noise, and the choir's victorious song resounded. An extremely touching moment was created in connection with the outfit the Hero-Warrior wore to fight Rage. A magical fairy danced with the choir and ‘created’ the strongest armour for the Warrior from moments of joy, care, shared lullabies, football goals scored together, books read together – out of love. This highlights how the production prompted reflections on the emotional resources needed to participate in war and defend loved ones. Small acts of affection and shared joyful moments were seen as sources of resilience, forming a symbolic “armour” for those on the frontlines.

Children's actions and creations – symbols of love, goodness, and justice – showed how these acts of care and moral values could support and sustain their parents during conflict. The process of co-creating a story with the project

participants was very important to Nigel Osborne and Kateryna Ostapovych.⁵ Their first step was to ensure a safe creative space for the participants; everyone got to know each other, practised with simple musical instruments, created joint rhythmic and physical sketches, and learned to understand, respect, and trust one another. The project involved theatre, music, and art teachers, psychologists (students and staff of Lviv University), who worked with a group of children and teenagers aged between 5 and 14. Following the methodology developed by Nigel Osborne, one group of participants worked on adapting selected narratives – including myths, legends, and classical drama – that Osborne identified as likely to resonate broadly with the entire group. The next stage was improvisation, and an important aspect was the ‘appropriation’ of the story through storytelling, in this case from Shakespeare’s plays. The group members could build their own adaptation of a fantasy world, using music and songs they jointly created with the music and theatre teacher. This was an intensive but remarkable process for the participants’ own creativity. The teachers supported, guided, and helped the participants create a world through music, song, rhythms, colour with sounds, plastic, coloured pencils, improvised materials, and words. The participants wrote songs and music; they first drew the characters of their world on paper and then created them as theatre puppets from very simple materials, bags, tapes, or branches. The children thus created a fantastic world in which they could imagine influencing the course of events: this power, even if only through play, served as an important therapeutic tool. At this point in history, it is essential that children also allowed rage and cruelty to enter their fantasy world. By doing so, they projected a situation of war and connected it to their real-life experiences. However, in their stories, they could also give strength and support to the defenders of their world, their parents, to win – the hero-warrior fighting rage.

Conclusion

Contemporary Ukrainian theatre reflects on the war and social challenges in different ways. One way that it has responded to these challenges is by using theatre as a therapeutic tool. Across the three cases examined, professional artists employed theatrical practices not solely as a form of dramatic expression, but also as instruments for promoting social engagement and facilitating social change. The integration of war veterans, people with disabilities, or children in theatre productions draws public attention to the needs of marginalised groups. Such theatre projects reveal the communicative, formative, and therapeutic potential of theatre with a new force, demonstrating how powerful this tool can be when used to shape our society. In

⁵ Kateryna Ostapovych, coordinator and music teacher from Ukraine.

this way, Ukrainian theatre not only addresses these social issues within the artistic domain, but also employs productions such as the three examined in this article as practical instruments for fostering societal development.

The reinterpretation of well-known Shakespearean narratives by Ukrainian artists has created a forum for reflecting on the challenges and issues facing contemporary Ukrainian society. By providing a degree of artistic and emotional distance, these productions create space for creative expression that, in the Ukrainian context, can serve as a constructive means of countering the psychological effects of war-related trauma. Ukrainian theatre, through Shakespeare's stories, creates a space not only for raising questions, but also for rethinking our own experiences as a society. The theatre creates a space that enables the visibility of vulnerable groups in society (people with disabilities, veterans, children of military families, etc.), thereby making their problems and challenges more apparent.

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