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Table of Contents

Nicoleta Cinpoeș, Imke Lichterfeld Introduction: <i>Shakespeare Shelter</i>	7
Irena R. Makaryk Foreword: Shakespeare in Ukraine	13
Part One: Stock-taking	
Ludmiła Mnich The Ukrainian Project in the Free World: The Ukrainian Shakespeare Society	21
Myroslava Tsyhanyk, Khrystyna Novosad-Lesiuk Shakespeare Studies at the Ivan Franco National University of Lviv: Maiia Harbuziuk <i>in memoriam</i>	37
Anna Sverediuk, Oksana Dzera The Quest for Selfhood: Shakespeare's Sonnets Interpreted by Maria Hablevych	49
Olha Kvasnytsia, Nataliya Torkut Britain, Shakespeare, and Ukraine. Interview with Prof. Nataliya Torkut, Head of Український Шекспірівський центр [Ukrainian Shakespeare Centre; Ukraïns'kij Šekspirivs'kij centr] by Dr. Olha Kvasnytsia, journalist at the newspaper <i>День</i> [The Day; Den']	69
Nataliya Torkut, Svitlana Deineka, Roman Lavrentii Virtual Museum “#Hamlet_UA: Act 1, Scene 1943” in the Context of Decolonizing Knowledge about Ukraine	91

Part Two: When Shakespeare Speaks Ukrainian
– On Translations

Daria Moskvitina, Bohdan Korneliuk

Lost (in) Translations: How Ukrainian Shakespeareana Must Be Bigger Than We Think 113

Lada Kolomiyets

Modernising the Ukrainian Language through the Power of Translation: Ihor Kostetskyi's Shakespeare's Sonnets 141

Darya Lazarenko, Yurii Cherniak

"Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind": Reading Vladyslav Yerko's Illustrations to Shakespeare in Ukrainian 163

Part Three: When Shakespeare is Ukrainian

Olha Bandrovska, Nataliya Torkut

The Precariousness of Human Existence in William Shakespeare's Plays: A Ukrainian Perspective 181

Viktoriia Marinesko, Anastasiia Brynko

***Macbeth* in Wartime Ukraine** 201

Roman Lavrentii, Olesia Ostapiuk

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: A Novelty on the Ukrainian Puppet Stage 211

Part Four: Humanitarian / Post-traumatic /
Post-Apocalyptic Shakespeare

Hanna Veselovska

Depicting Collective Support on the Theatrical Stage: The Case of *We Are Hamlet* 233

Sofia Rosa-Lavrentii

Shakespeare, Trauma, and Social Change: Inclusive Ukrainian Theatre Projects (2019–2023)	243
---	------------

Darya Lazarenko, Imke Lichterfeld

<i>“Hereafter, in a better world than this, I shall desire more love and knowledge of you”</i>: Kelly Hunter on Art, Healing, Trauma and Working with Ukrainian Families. A Conversation with Darya Lazarenko and Imke Lichterfeld	257
---	------------

Agnieszka Rasmus

<i>The Hamlet Syndrome</i> (dir. Niewiera & Rosołowski, 2022) – Drawing a Portrait of the Maidan Generation with Piotr Rosołowski	271
--	------------

Yuliia Shchukina, Liudmyla Vaniuha

<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>: From a Performance for Teenagers to an Innovative Dramatic Performance in the Time of War	285
---	------------

Part Five: Displaced Voices

Oksana Fedorkiv, David Livingstone

Shelter from the Storm: Two Recent Shakespeare Stagings by the Ivano-Frankivsk Drama Theatre	303
---	------------

Gabriela Cheaptanaru

War-torn <i>King Lear</i>: Adaptation as Catharsis	315
---	------------

Displaced Externally (Reviews)

Imke Lichterfeld

<i>“Ha*I*t is a play about a play that never happened.” Notes on HA*L*T</i>	331
--	------------

Sorin Cazacu, Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik

**L_UKR_ECE at the Craiova International Shakespeare Festival,
Romania, 2022** 333

Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik

**Exploring Object Afterlives: *Ophelia*. Subject Study at
the 28th Gdansk International Shakespeare Festival, 2024** 337

Philip Parr

Working Title: A Collaboration Made in York 341

Cristie Carson

**Theatre Studio of IDP's Uzhik Production of *King Lear*,
directed by Viacheslav Yehorov, staged at the Other Place,
Stratford-upon-Avon, on 14 and 15 June 2024** 345

Nicoleta Cinpoes, Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik

**Afterword: IF Shakespeare UA. The First International
Shakespeare Festival in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine,
17–23 June 2024** 351

Nataliya Torkut, Daria Moskvitina

In Memoriam: Mark Sokolianskyi (1939–2025) 361

Contributors 363



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Introduction: *Shakespeare Shelter*

We have all taken shelter in Shakespeare and used his works as a temporary sanctuary or to create networks that enable change. Sometimes we look for comfort, sometimes we find support, sometimes we resurface from despair, sometimes we work through rage, sometimes we mourn our lost ones, sometimes we hold one another in silence. In times of censorship, oppression and war, artists and scholars can take shelter in Shakespeare and powerfully reflect their nation's values by creating work that preserves threatened histories, cultures and identities. They can transform acts of literary and artistic expression into direct resistance against erasure. This could not have been more relevant since the escalation of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia with the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, artists in the war-torn country have staged dozens of new Shakespeare productions and revived existing ones with a marked difference. All are testament to their spirit: they are renderings of extraordinary innovation and works of deep individual and collective resonance.

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In 2023, commenting on his *St Crispin's Day* speech film, which 'entangles' Shakespeare's words with footage from war-torn Ukraine, British filmmaker Jack Jewers reminds us that "there is more than one way of fighting a battle" (Jewers). Like Jewers, we – the curators, not editors!, of the present volume – wanted to focus the lens on "the people left at home. [...] they are, lest we forget, fighting a war of their own." This guest issue of *Multicultural Shakespeare* offers a Shakespeare Shelter for Ukrainian scholars, translators and practitioners at a time when their work and very existence remain under threat.

Building on the idea of shelter as a place of safety, temporary respite, care, preservation and solidarity – which we initiated in an online vigil in February 2023 and have continued since – the project to support our colleagues and friends in Ukraine gradually found its way and form. The three-year collective journey that led to the present guest volume hosted by *Multicultural Shakespeare* has enabled a wealth of contributors to take shelter, to find their own voices and to speak up about the undercover work Shakespeare has been doing to provide shelter from the political, ideological and military pressures to which Russia has been subjecting Ukraine for centuries. By "show[ing]" these contributors "on their own battleground" (Jewers), our volume shows how Shakespeare studies serve as community-building. On the one hand, instrumentalising an author and a global phenomenon like Shakespeare helps a nation collectively bear its suffering. On the other, conversing directly with his works, as Ukrainians have been doing for centuries, legitimises Ukraine as an intrinsic voice as much in the Shakespeare dialogue as in the global one.

The present volume is structured in five parts: Part I concentrates on introducing existing Ukrainian Shakespeare works and projects; Part II on translations of Shakespeare into Ukrainian; Part III elaborates on Shakespeare being Ukrainian; Part IV on Humanitarian / Post-traumatic / Post-apocalyptic Shakespeare in recent years; and lastly, Part V gathers together Ukrainian voices displaced since Russia's full-scale invasion of the country. It delves into the history of Ukraine and its Shakespeareana, disinterring evidence that has been buried by centuries of censorship and silencing. It pieces together stories of bulldozed events, lives cut short, and people displaced by Soviet and Russian tyranny. It depicts the descent into bomb shelters, metro stations, and theatre basements to bear witness to the humanitarian work Shakespeare is doing across Ukraine now. It speaks about these new types of theatre, literally underground, that are saving lives while bombs rage outside; it reflects on how theatre creates a new Shakespeare that is physically and metaphysically a shelter. It is drama therapy in action, but most importantly, it is the seedbed of a new and free Ukraine, aware of its European roots, troubled heritage, and values.

In itself a shelter, this guest volume creates a timely and much-needed safe space for Ukrainian scholars and practitioners to look ahead and to explore how

Shakespeare enables new dialogues. It records the present stages of Shakespeare's role in decolonising Ukrainian language, culture, education, and Shakespeare scholarship, tracing the steps between current humanitarian work and future humanities studies.

This volume is prefaced by Irena Makaryk, an expert on Shakespeare reception in Ukraine, particularly in relation to Russian imperial and Soviet contexts during periods of social and political upheaval. In her *Foreword* she explores national identity, resistance, and cultural sovereignty as she conceptualises and surveys the 'entangled' history of Shakespeare and Ukraine. Makaryk argues that Shakespeare has long functioned as a powerful cultural bridge by means of which Ukrainians communicate their identity, values and European orientation to the world. Historically, Shakespeare in Ukraine has been closely tied to struggles for cultural sovereignty, and Ukrainians use Shakespeare to critique violence, oppression, and authoritarianism. Makaryk explains how the greatest surge in productions has occurred during wartime, especially since 2014. Festivals, scholarly work, therapeutic projects for refugees and veterans, and international collaborations demonstrate Shakespeare's ongoing relevance as a humanizing force amid this dehumanizing war.

Part I: "Stock-taking," begins with Ludmila Mnich's examination of the Ukrainian Project in the Free World, focusing on the work of the diasporic Ukrainian Shakespeare Society. Her chapter is followed by Myroslava Tsyhanyk's study of Shakespearean theatre scholarship in Lviv, centred on the contributions of the late Maiia Harbuzyuk. Anna Sverediuk and Oksana Dzera then explore the search for selfhood through the work of another scholar we lost during this journey: Maria Hablevykh's interpretations of Shakespeare's sonnets. The section continues with an interview conducted by Olha Kvasnytsia, journalist for *День / The Day*, in which Nataliya Torkut, founder and director of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Centre, discusses the intertwined relationship between Britain, Shakespeare, and Ukraine. It concludes with a collaborative piece by Svitlana Deineka, Roman Lavrentii, and Nataliya Torkut on the recently opened virtual museum "#Hamlet-UA: Act 1, Scene 1943," which considers its role within the broader movement to recover and decolonize knowledge about Ukraine and its Shakespeareana.

Part II: "When Shakespeare Speaks Ukrainian – On Translations," starts with Daria Moskvitina and Bohdan Korneliuk's exploration of the expansive possibilities of Ukrainian Shakespeare studies. Their „Lost (in) Translations” argues that the field is far larger and more complex than Shakespeare in Ukraine is often assumed to be. Lada Kolomiyets follows with an analysis of the ways in which Ihor Kostetskyi's translations of Shakespeare's sonnets contribute to modernising the Ukrainian language through the transformative power of poetic translation. The section concludes with Darya Lazarenko and Yurii Cherniak's study of visual codes in Vladyslav Yerko's illustrations for Yuriy Andrukhovych's recent

Ukrainian translations of *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *King Lear*, in which they examine how imagery interacts with and enriches the translated texts.

Part III: “When Shakespeare is Ukrainian,” opens with Olha Bandrovskya and Nataliya Torkut’s examination of the fragility of human existence as reflected in Shakespeare’s life and works, which they interpret through a distinctly Ukrainian lens. The section then turns to *Macbeth* in wartime Ukraine, a study in which Viktoriia Marinesko and Anastasia Brinko explore how the play resonates with a nation experiencing war, conflict, and uncertainty. The section concludes with Roman Lavrentii and Olesia Ostapiuk’s analysis of *Hamlet* in Ukrainian puppet theatre, a study that highlights the innovative ways in which this Ukrainian tradition reimagines Shakespeare’s tragedy for new audiences.

Part IV: “Humanitarian / Post-traumatic / Post-apocalyptic Shakespeare,” begins with Hanna Veselovska’s discussion of the theatre project “We Are Hamlet”, which examines how Shakespeare’s most introspective tragedy becomes a vehicle for collective reflection in times of crisis. Sofia-Rosa Lavrentii follows with an exploration of theatre-therapy, considering how performance practices grounded in Shakespeare can support emotional recovery and psychological resilience. The section continues with a conversation between Darya Lazarenko, Imke Lichterfeld, and actor-director Kelly Hunter of Flute Theatre, who reflects on art, healing, trauma, and Hunter’s work with Ukrainian families, framed through the Shakespearean lines: “Hereafter, in a better world than this, / I shall desire more love and knowledge of you.” (*As You Like It*, 1.2.270-271). Agnieszka Rasmus turns to *The Hamlet Syndrome*, analysing – through an interview with filmmaker Piotr Rosołowski – how this film constructs a portrait of the Maidan generation. The section concludes with Yuliia Shchukina and Liudmyla Vaniuha’s study of Rostyslav Derzhypil’skyi’s *Romeo and Juliet* that traces the play’s transformation from a performance designed for teenagers into an innovative dramatic work shaped by the realities of war.

Part V: “Displaced Voices,” opens with Oksana Fedorkiv and David Livingstone’s examination of two recent Shakespeare productions by the Ivan-Franko National Academic Music and Drama Theatre, in Ivano-Frankivsk, framed as forms of shelter amid the storm of ongoing upheaval and war. Gabriela Cheaptanaru offers a study of *King Lear* during the war which explores how adaptation can function as a process of catharsis for both artists and audiences. The section concludes with a series of reviews that, together, map the landscape of Shakespeare performed and reimagined across conditions of displacement, this time outside the borders of Ukraine. Imke Lichterfeld reflects on Tamara Trunova’s *HA*L*T*; Sorin Cazacu and Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik review *L_UKR_ECE* by the ProEnglish Theatre of Ukraine, first staged at the Craiova International Shakespeare Festival, Romania, in 2022 and which continues to develop as the war rages on; Philip Parr discusses his own production, *Working Title*, presented at the York International Shakespeare

Festival in 2024; Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik examines *Ophelia: Subject Study* from the Gdańsk International Shakespeare Festival, Poland, in 2022; and Christie Carson offers insights into *Lear (Lear in Wartime)*, performed in Stratford-upon-Avon, UK, in 2024.

By way of conclusion, we end with a beginning: Ukraine's first International Shakespeare Festival, which debuted in the summer of 2024, and offer an introduction to the recently established Ivano-Frankivsk International Shakespeare Festival. It foregrounds how Shakespeare's human(e) values in performance keep Ukraine's social and cultural practices alive to create shelter and inspiration for a war-torn nation. Shakespearean productions in Ukraine resonate because their themes can be shaped to address current political responsibility, psychological survival, and civic duty in wartime.

Overall, this guest volume of *Multicultural Shakespeare* brings together, shelters and reflects upon the rich Ukrainian Shakespeare legacy. In it, Ukrainians voice their agency in writing Ukrainian Shakespeareana as an integral part of the multicultural European network and wider, global conversation. Our curation of the present volume also argues that Shakespeare and Ukraine are 'entangled': indeed, Shakespeare has shaped Ukrainian cultural history. But the reverse is also true: Ukraine's contemporary experiences of war and resistance have, in turn, transformed how Shakespeare is read and understood globally.

Last but not least, we are deeply humbled by our contributors' work in circumstances that not only involve electricity blackouts and constant alarms, but pose a threat to their lives and livelihoods. If this project has offered even a semblance of shelter, then our aim is fulfilled. Also, we would like to acknowledge all the reviewers for their constructive work and support in helping to shape this volume, as well as the European Shakespeare Research Association (ESRA) and all unaccounted-for supporters of our wider Shakespeare Shelter endeavour during the past three years. This volume is offered in memory of the Ukrainian Shakespeare scholars we sadly lost: Maiia Harbuzuk (August 2023), Mark Sokolianskyi (March 2025) and Maria Hablevych (December 2025). We dedicate it to our colleagues and friends in Ukraine: with love and gratitude for allowing and entrusting us to bear witness.

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Foreword: Shakespeare in Ukraine

How can writers, artists, scholars, performers, best reflect a nation's values, desires, and ambitions in circumstances of censorship, oppression, prohibition, or, most radically, during the upheaval and brutality of war? How to convey the struggle against erasure of history, culture, and identity? And, ultimately, how to convey this to the rest of the world?

One possible strategy is to look outward. For nearly two-hundred years, Ukrainian poets, writers, scholars, dramatists, theatre and visual artists have communicated with the global community through the medium of Shakespeare, the most translated and performed playwright in the world. As more than a classic, as a hyper-canonical figure, Shakespeare inhabits a contact zone where many cultures can meet and, thus, where dialogue can take place. For Ukrainians, Shakespeare has, at various times, served as mirror, prism, and megaphone, amplifying and broadcasting their values, hopes and concerns. Such a long and deep engagement with Shakespeare confirms historian Serhii Plokhy's contention that Ukraine's "claim to independence has always had a European orientation" (353).

Just days after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed the British Parliament. Invoking Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Zelenskyy forcefully asserted Ukraine's affirmative response to the Da nish

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Prince's existential question: it was "to be". As one of the most translated phrases in literature, these two simple words nonetheless carried complex depths of meaning: the gravity of the threat to Ukraine's existence and the equally firm determination to defend Ukraine's sovereignty in the face of unprovoked aggression. In effect, this concise allusion acted as a metaphorical megaphone, asserting Ukraine's message of the right, and the firm intent, to exist. As importantly, it affirmed Ukrainians' identification with Western cultural markers and values. Thus, Hamlet's "to be" linked Ukraine to Britain, and, beyond that, to an international community of like-minded citizens and entities around the globe who instantly understood that message.

The second Shakespearean moment occurred only days after the war began. In Ivano-Frankivsk on 7 March 2022, citizens huddled together for a performance of the neo-opera *Hamlet* in the basement of the Ivan Franko National Academic Music and Drama Theatre. Directed by Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi, the quickly arranged performance, a revival, took on an additional, new function, that of sheltering its audience from air strikes. Derzhypilskyi chose not to stage a reassuring, amusing entertainment for his anxious spectators, nor did he choose a propagandistic play. Instead, he offered a piece about a deeply ethical prince surrounded by corruption and betrayal. A play about a man who thinks. But one gesture changed in this reprise of the play. The Prince, played by Oleksii Hnatkovskyi, came on stage draped in the Ukrainian flag, a poignant rallying gesture visually signalling the existence of Ukraine, its bonds with the 'universal' Bard, and with the West. The production was publicly dedicated to the people of the United Kingdom for unhesitatingly supporting Ukraine, and in recognition of what British civilians themselves had endured during the Blitz of the Second World War. A distillation of memory, identity and trauma, *Hamlet* thus simultaneously served as a wellspring of human connection, unity, and empathy.

The trans-historical and trans-geographical connections encapsulated by the two moments at the very start of the Russian war on Ukraine potentially reveal Shakespeare's significance to the cultural history of Ukraine. Creating and confirming community, Derzhypilsky's production was also a terrible moment of repetition, of being haunted by history, including the history of this play in Ukraine. Nineteenth century imperial Russia censored and attempted to destroy Ukrainian culture, prohibiting performance and translation. But despite (or perhaps partly because of) these prohibitions, writers and translators intensely engaged with Shakespeare. It is notable that Ukraine's great literary trinity – Taras Shevchenko, Lesya Ukrainka, Ivan Franko – responded to the force of Shakespeare's works through poetry, drama and visual art.

Authorization to perform Shakespeare never came from the tsars. Even after the 1905 Revolution, imperial censors refused permission to stage *Hamlet* because, they argued, a Ukrainian production might evoke laughter in its presumption to

treat a world classic in a 'peasant' language. This prohibition forged a link between Shakespeare and Ukraine, and the imperative to stage his works as a symbol of cultural sovereignty and independence.

Maiia Harbuziuk, the late Ukrainian theatre scholar and Dean of the Faculty of Culture and Arts at the Ivano Franko University in Lviv, observed that "Theatre is the art about humans, by humans, with humans and for humans" (n.p.). She therefore considered Shakespeare a counter to war: whereas war is dehumanizing, Shakespeare is humanizing. Canadian scholar Annie Brisset has reminded us that theatre, the most social of the arts, "grows directly out of a society, its collective imagination and symbolic representations, and its system of ideas and values" (5). Unlike literary genres, theatre must stay 'close to the collectivity,' especially in periods in which the collectivity feels imperilled. For these reasons, theatre makes a particularly effective genre by which to examine assumptions about cultural identity, memory and value. Shakespeare, the playwright most often considered beyond nationality and the property of many cultures and nations, presents a useful prism through which to view Ukraine's cultural history. Conversely, Ukraine is able to speak to the rest of the world through the amplified voice of Shakespeare whose works have become, in effect, a shared, understood, symbolic space.

The first Shakespeare play on the Ukrainian stage, *Macbeth*, performed in 1920, was born in the crucible of revolution, world war, civil war and chaos. Despite the circumstances of great political, social, and economic upheaval, stage and film director Les Kurbas pushed his actors to take on this play after only five rehearsals, many on an empty stomach because distribution networks had broken down. Lyubov Hakkebush, his Lady Macbeth, fainted in the wings from lack of food. In his inspiring address to the actors, Kurbas pointedly insisted that, in performing Shakespeare, they were doing a great historical deed for Ukrainian theatre and culture. For Kurbas, the classics were valuable masterly works of construction that knew how to move audiences. He used *Macbeth* to test his theories about the conventions and traditions of theatre, including the concept of representation itself. Returning to *Macbeth* a number of times, the most radical version was created in 1924 and performed shortly after the death of Lenin. Arguably, this was the most remarkable Shakespeare production of the whole Soviet period. Re-imagined through the prism of contemporary early Soviet reality, it interrogated the ethics of a society built on war, violence and destruction.

As well as questioning Soviet reality on the stage, on the page, poets and translators in the 1920s and 1930s alluded to Shakespeare's works, using them to obliquely critique the politics and aesthetics of the times. *Hamlet* was tacitly prohibited by Stalin from being staged; nonetheless, the play and its author continued to be in the minds of creators like Maksym Rylsky, Mykola Bazhan and Evhen Pluzhnyk, including those who supported the regime. From the beginning of the founding of the USSR, the search was on for a Soviet writer who could

not only challenge but also supplant Shakespeare and provide the Soviet polity with an appropriate mythology. For Stalin, the micro-manager of cultural affairs, dramatist-propagandist Oleksander Kornychuk was identified as that champion. His plays pointedly turned Shakespeare's plays inside out, presenting a new myth of the glorious future and of the immortality of the Soviet people.

Yosyp Hirniak's remarkable 1943 production of *Hamlet* in Lviv under Nazi occupation during the Second World War served as an oblique comment on the times, a proclamation of cultural sovereignty and an attack on the prevailing theatrical repertoire of the day. For Hirniak, only this play, performed for the very first time in Ukrainian, could have such a tremendous effect. Indeed, audiences flocked to see the production despite interruptions from air-raid alarms, street roundups, violence and executions.

The reputation of Shakespeare changed in official commemorations sanctioned and directed by Moscow. These served a variety of political purposes, some ambivalently, suggesting a rapprochement with the West but also attempting to elide growing fissures in the Soviet polity. During post-Independence period (1991–), for the first time, Shakespeare could freely flourish in inventive productions, and in new translations and creations, including in puppet shows and cabarets. But, ironically, the real boom in Shakespeare productions came during the war. Since 2014, Ukrainians have been able to see 111 new productions.

During the war, the First Shakespeare Festival in Ivano-Frankivsk took place. Despite air-raids, drones, and Shaheds, the Ukrainian Shakespeare Centre in Zaporizhzhia, headed by Professor Nataliya Torkut, continues its work of publishing two scholarly journals, managing all-Ukrainian Shakespeare competitions; organizing lectures; and celebrating Shakespeare for a whole month in April. Their projects also include collaborations with Flute Theatre in the UK that uses Shakespeare as therapy for refugees and autistic children. A related project has begun for veterans of the war suffering from PTSD. Nataliya Torkut's toast, "To the Eternal Memory of William Shakespeare," delivered on the occasion of Shakespeare's birthday celebrations in Stratford-upon-Avon, U.K. in 2023, underscored Shakespeare's enduring power to inspire, provide solace, and amplify Ukrainians' creative and cultural imagination.

As this brief overview argued, Shakespeare has served in many capacities in Ukraine. Leading towards my conclusion, let us consider one more function: "entanglement," a term taken from quantum mechanics. As Steven Shapin explains, "[t]wo particles are said to be 'entangled', or correlated, when changes in one influence the properties of the other, even if they are separated by vast distances". Shakespeare has been entangled with Ukraine. His works have shaped and changed and enriched Ukrainian cultural history. But Ukraine has also given Shakespeare's works a new turn. A small example will suffice. One of Shakespeare's greatest spine-tingling orations is the famous St Crispin's Day speech when England's warrior

king, Henry V, galvanizes his small, greatly outnumbered troops to engage in battle with the vast French army. This rhetorically brilliant speech was the centerpiece of Laurence Olivier's 1944 film, meant to inspire the wartime defenders of Britain, and has been rousinglly performed by many other actors before and since. In his version of St Crispin's Day speech, British filmmaker, writer and visual artist Jack Jewers shows how Ukraine and Shakespeare have become entangled. Through the juxtaposition of the measured tone of Eliza Butterworth's recitation of this speech with the powerful images from Ukraine today, we see the way in which both are entangled, changed. We see war's terrible, human cost. Can this speech ever be the same again?

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Part One

Stock-taking



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The Ukrainian Project in the Free World: The Ukrainian Shakespeare Society

Abstract

This article analyses the activities of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society between 1957 and 1990 as a unique project of the Ukrainian diaspora. It draws attention to the organisational, scientific and publishing activities of its most prominent members, with a particular focus on Ihor Kostetskyi and Jaroslav Rudnyckyj. The materials analysed in the article provide new insights into the organisational and promotional activities of the Society (USHT). The Ukrainian Shakespeare Society was a significant cultural and scientific project. Aiming to represent the true values and traditions of Ukrainians, fundamentally different from those proclaimed by propaganda in the Soviet Union, the members of the Society contributed to the spread of Ukrainian culture beyond the borders of Soviet Ukraine. The Society's activities involved the publication of translations of Shakespeare's works and Shakespeare studies by authors banned in Soviet Ukraine for being "enemies of the nation" (such as Todos Osmachka). Founded in 1957 and active for over thirty years, the Society's primary goals were to develop and promote Ukrainian culture in the European and global context, in contrast to the presentation of the Soviet

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version of Ukrainian culture as the only “correct” one. This activity focused on two basic goals. On the one hand, it was a continuation of the Ukrainian tradition in translations and studies of Shakespeare, initiated by Osyp Fedkovych, Panteleimon Kulish, and Ivan Franko. On the other hand, the Society became a significant Ukrainian cultural institution that promoted the study and translation of Shakespeare’s works by Ukrainian authors abroad.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Ukrainian Shakespeare Society, Ukrainian emigration, Dmytro Chyzhevsky, Ihor Kostetskyi, Jaroslav Rudnyckyj.

Among the various activities of Ukrainian diaspora groups of the last century, the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society (1957–1990) deserves special attention. The foundation of this Society represents one of the most intriguing Ukrainian projects in exile, serving as a pivotal element within the broader cultural and artistic landscape of Ukraine. Aiming to represent the true values and traditions of Ukrainians, fundamentally different from those distorted by Bolshevik policy and proclaimed by propaganda in the Soviet Union, the members of the Society contributed to the spread of Ukrainian culture in the free world. The objective of this article is to examine the activities of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society as a unique project of the Ukrainian diaspora and to elucidate the diverse organisational, scientific and publishing endeavours of its most active members, namely Ihor Kostetskyi and Jaroslav Rudnyckyj. The materials analysed in the article, particularly the correspondence of Ihor Kostetskyi, provide new insights into the organisational and promotional activities of the Society.

The Ukrainian Shakespeare Society was established in 1957 and continued its activities for over three decades. The first president of the Society was the renowned Slavist Dmytro Chyzhevsky (1894–1977), its vice-president, Jaroslav Rudnyckyj (1910–1995) and its secretary, writer, translator, literary scholar and poet Ihor Kostetskyi (1913–1983). Notable figures of the Society included prominent writers, translators, and scholars among Ukrainian émigrés, such as Vasyl Barka (1908–2003) and Orest Starchuk (1915–1971). Recent publications indicate a growing interest among scholars in the Society and its representatives. In this context, it is worth mentioning the publications of archival material that elucidate the history of the Society’s establishment and its principal objectives.¹ The recently published first volume, *Шекспір українською по той бік залізної завіси* [*Shakespeare in Ukrainian on the Other Side of the Iron Curtain*], edited by the distinguished scholar of Ukrainian culture in Canada Mark Robert Stech, is of particular note. The contents of this volume encompass a wide range of materials relating to the

¹ See Валявко, Лазаренко [Valyavko, Lazarenko]; Mnich, “Ігор Костецький...” [Ihor Kostetskyi...].

USHT's² multi-faceted scholarly and publishing activities. In his introductory article, Stech highlights the achievements of the Society and Ihor Kostetskyi's role as follows:

All those admirable achievements of a small group of Ukrainian writers in exile (chiefly an intellectual author unconnected to any scientific or public institution) are truly impressive, particularly in light of the paucity of notable contributions to Ukrainian Shakespearean literature by state publishing houses and scientific institutions in the Ukrainian SSR during that period. (Стех [Stech], "Український Шекспір" [«Ukrainian» Shakespeare] 11)³

In the contemporary literary discourse (and not solely within the Ukrainian context), the objects of particular interest are primarily the two figures already mentioned above who were associated with the activities of the USHT: the first president of the Society, Dmytro Chyzhevsky, and the secretary of the Society, Ihor Kostetskyi. Both are of great significance in the context of the development of Ukrainian studies, as well as of the twentieth-century European Slavic studies in general. In the case of Chyzhevsky, he also had a crucial influence on the field of American Slavic studies. It is not without reason that Chyzhevsky is regarded as the founding figure of European Slavic studies of the last century (Vincenz 83–92). His versatile activities contributed to numerous exploratory publications and the creation of a general theoretical conception of the history of Slavic literature. In addition to being a renowned researcher of Ukrainian literature, he also made significant contributions to Russian, Czech, Slovak, and Polish literary studies (Mnich, *Рецензивная эстетика* [Dmytro Chyzhevsky's]; Блашків [Blashkiv], *Чеська і словацька культура* [Czech and Slovak Culture]). Kostetskyi, in turn, became known as an outstanding translator and organiser of scientific and cultural

2 Abbreviation used by Marko Robert Stech, the author of the entry on Ukrainian Shakespeare Society in the English-language *Internet Encyclopaedia of Ukraine*, <https://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CU%5CK%5CUkrainianShakespeareSociety.htm>. Accessed 11 August 2024.

3 If not otherwise indicated, all translations are by Ludmiła Mnich; in original: "Усі ті подивугідні здобутки маленького гурту українських літераторів в еміграції (насамперед одного письменника-інтелектуала, який притому не був пов'язаний з жодною науковою чи громадською установою) по-справжньому вражають, особливо в порівнянні з практично тотальною відсутністю значніших досягнень української Шекспіріани серед державних видавництв і наукових структур в УРСР того часу." [Usi ti podivugidni zdobutki malen'kogo gurtu ukraïns'kih literatoriv v emigracii (nasampered odnogo pis'mennika-intelektuala, âkij pritomu ne був pov'âzaniy z žodnoû naukovou či gromads'koû ustanovou) po-spravžn'omu vražauť, osobливо v porivnânni z praktično total'noû vidsutnistû značnîših dosâgñen' ukraïns'koï Šekspiriâni sered deržavnih vidavnictv i naukovih struktur v URSR togo času.]

life, not only in the context of the USHT but also as the founder of the publishing house 'Na Hori' ['Ha ropi'; 'Na gori'], which promoted Ukrainian culture in the West. Additionally, Kostetskyi was a renowned writer and poet.⁴

Despite the significance of these contributions, it can be argued that the activities of the USHT remain relatively unknown among literary scholars and historians. It is, therefore, essential to consider some of the key facts surrounding the establishment of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society before exploring the activities of the Society as a project of Ukrainian intellectuals in the free world. It is crucial to highlight that the founding members of the Society who signed the Statute included prominent figures in Ukrainian culture who had been exiled from their homeland: Dmytro Chyzhevsky, Jaroslav Rudnyckyj, and Ihor Kostetskyi. Indeed, the Society was formed by the most outstanding intellectuals of the Ukrainian diaspora of the twentieth century.⁵ The list of founding members of the Society, which included eminent scientists, philosophers, literary scholars, linguists, translators, representatives of the first and second waves of Ukrainian emigration, as well as letters from Western correspondents with whom Kostetskyi maintained contacts, provides evidence of the significant creative and scientific capacity of the USHT.

The History of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society

The idea of establishing the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society came directly from Ihor Kostetskyi, as apparent in his correspondence with Dmytro Chyzhevsky. In a letter to Chyzhevsky dated 29 March 1956, Kostetskyi wrote: "I'd really like to take the initiative to organise a Ukrainian Shakespeare Society, but who would be its members? We need at least ten members."⁶ ("Листи Ігоря Костецького"

4 The collection of his works, *The Whole World Belongs to You*, was published by the Canadian Shevchenko Scientific Society in 2005 by the publishing house 'Krytyka' in Kyiv on the initiative of the editor of this publication and researcher of Ihor Kostetskyi's work, M. R. Stech.

5 The Ihor Kostetskyi Archive in Bremen (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, FSO 01-242 Kostetzky) contains a wealth of documentation pertaining to the activities of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society, including the original version of its Statute and extensive correspondence of the Board, particularly that of the Society's Secretary Ihor Kostetskyi.

6 The original correspondence is housed at the Dmytro Chyzhevsky Archive, within the Heidelberg University Library. Rep. Heid.Hs.3881. The correspondence of Ihor Kostetskyi and Dmytro Chyzhevsky was included in: Стех, Марко Роберт [Stech, Marko Robert], ed. *Шекспір українською по той бік Залізної Завіси* [Shakespeare in Ukrainian on the Other Side of the Iron Curtain]. Vol. 1. Kyiv: Українські пропілеї [Kyiv: Ukraïns'ki propileï], 2024. 778–794; 804–807. In original: "Мені страшенно б хотілося дати ініціативу для організації Українського Шекспірівського Товариства, але хто ж у нього входить? Треба ж принаймні з десять

[Ihor Kostetskyi's letters] 805). A period of approximately one year elapsed between the initial references to the Shakespeare Society in Kostetskyi's correspondence and the meeting at which the formal establishment of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society was announced. This indicates that Kostetskyi's proposal was the subject of discussion among Ukrainian scholars and writers who were compelled to confront challenging circumstances and were dispersed across various locations and countries during their exile. The concept was met with considerable support from the émigré community, particularly given the frequent lack of financial assistance available to Ukrainian intellectuals. From a pragmatic perspective, therefore, there was also an evident rationale for uniting around the USHT.

The Ukrainian Shakespeare Society was established on 25 August 1957 in Heidelberg, where a significant gathering of immigrant Ukrainian scholars took place on the occasion of the International Congress of Modern Languages and Literatures. The initial members of the Society were Dmytro Chyzhevsky and Jaroslav Rudnycky; the general secretary was Ihor Kostetskyi, while the other founding members were Yar Slavutych, Orest Starchuk, Constantine Bida, Valentyn Gaevsky, Vasyl Barka and Oleh Zuievsky.⁷ The Society's founding members also included Elisabeth Kottmeier, the German writer, poet, and translator of Ukrainian literature, the wife of Kostetskyi, and co-founder of the publishing house 'Na Hori'. During the Society's formation, a number of potential avenues for its future activities were considered. These included Shakespeare conferences, as proposed by Chyzhevsky, and the establishment of a separate publishing house along the lines of the already existing 'Na Hori'. The latter would publish new translations of Shakespeare's works and Shakespearean research by Ukrainian scholars, and Kostetskyi, in particular, was a proponent of establishing such a publishing house. Ultimately, the proposal put forth by Jaroslav Rudnycky was accepted, leading to the establishment of a distinct Ukrainian Shakespeare Society as an academic entity. The most significant contributions to the establishment of the Society were made by its inaugural leadership, comprising Chyzhevsky as president, Kostetskyi as secretary, and Rudnycky as its irreplaceable vice-president.

The activity of the USHT can be divided into three stages. Each stage is connected with the figure of the respective Society's president, but also with the activities of its most prominent members.⁸ The first stage of the development of the USHT took place between 1957 and 1964, when Dmytro Chyzhevsky was president

членів" [Meni strašenno b hotilosâ dati iniciativu dlâ organizacii Ukraïns'kogo Šekspirivs'kogo Tovaristva, ale hto ž u n'ogo vhotitime? Treba ž prinajmni z desât' členiv.]

⁷ The USHT Statute, The Ihor Kostetskyi Archive in Bremen (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, FSO 01-242 Kostetzky).

⁸ A similar division of the USHT's history is presented by M. R. Stech, the author of the entry on *Ukrainian Shakespeare Society* in the English-language *Internet Encyclopaedia of Ukraine*.

and Ihor Kostetskyi secretary of the Society. In recognition of his authority within the academic community, Chyzhevsky was elected as the first president of the Shakespeare Society. However, as researchers have rightly observed, the true driving force behind the Society's activities, particularly during its formative years, was Kostetskyi.

The Society's principal aims were the publication of new Ukrainian translations of Shakespeare's works and the promotion of research in the field of Shakespeare studies. Additionally, USHT aimed to establish connections with a range of academic institutions specialising in Shakespeare studies, as well as individual scholars engaged in research in this field in the West. The Society's most significant achievements during this period included the publication of Kostetskyi's translations of *Romeo and Juliet* (1957) and his complete translation of Shakespeare's sonnets (1958), both with the 'Na Hori' publishing house. Kostetskyi's sonnets were accompanied by detailed annotations, which, according to Stech, represent perhaps the most comprehensive historiographical and literary commentary on Shakespeare's sonnets in the context of Ukrainian Shakespeare studies (Ctex [Stech] "«Український» Шекспір" [«Ukrainian» Shakespeare] 8). During the same period, new translations of *Macbeth* and *Henry IV* by Todos Osmachka were published (1961). In this edition, the translations were preceded by introductory articles written by Kostetskyi, in which the researcher highlights the innovative nature of Osmachka's translations. As Stech notes, these translations have a distinct genesis, diverging from the neoclassical tradition of translating Shakespeare's plays, and therefore are of additional value for the Ukrainian Shakespeare studies:

[...] in examining the basis of Osmachka's translations within the context of Ukrainian Shakespeare studies, it can be argued that they do not originate from neoclassicism (as is often the case with the author's original poetic works). Instead, they appear to draw inspiration from the late Romantic tradition, as exemplified by Panteleimon Kulish. However, they are infused with a distinctly modern sensibility shaped by the experiences of Ukrainian literature during the 1920s, particularly the influence of expressionist aesthetics that resonate with Osmachka's style. (Ctex [Stech], „«Український» Шекспір" [«Ukrainian» Shakespeare] 8)⁹

⁹ “[...] якщо шукати підґрунтя Осьмаччиних перекладів в історії української Шекспіріани, то вони, напевне (як і чимало оригінальних поетичних творів самого Осьмачки), виростають не з неокласицизму, а з пізньюромантичної традиції цілісно скристалізованої Пантелеймоном Кулішем, однак сильно модернізованої досвідом української літератури 20-х рр., а особливо елементами близької Осьмачці естетики експресіонізму”. [[...] âkšo šukati pidğruntâ Os'maččinih perekladiv v istorii Ukraïns'koï Šekspiriâni, to voni, naпевне (âk i čimalo original'nih poetičnih tvoriv samogo Os'mački), virostaût' ne z neoklasicizmu, a z piz'oromantičnoï tradicii cilisno skristalizovanoï Pantelejmonom Kulišem, однак sil'no

Considering the published translations of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, as well as studies on Ukrainian Shakespeare, the initial period of the UShT was its most productive era, particularly in the area of publishing.

The second period of UShT activity commenced in 1964, following the election of Constantine Bida (1916–1979) as president, who succeeded Chyzhevsky. Rudnycky retained the role of vice president, while Kostetskyi continued as secretary. By this time, the Society's activities had relocated to Canada, where its principal focus was the study of Shakespeare's works. During Bida's tenure as president, the Society's publishing activities were nearly halted, while Kostetskyi gradually distanced himself from the UShT. The publication of *King Lear* in translation by Vasyl Barka in 1969 represents one of the most significant achievements of this period. This publication was also Kostetskyi's last contribution to the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society.

Finally, the third phase of the UShT began in 1979 after Bida's death, when Yar Slavutych (1918–2011) became the third and last president of the Society, while Jaroslav Rudnycky retained his position as vice-president. Orysia Prokopiv was appointed secretary, and Oleh Zuievsky and Kostetskyi were elected as board members. Among the active members of the society of that period were Yar Slavutych, Jaroslav Rudnycky, Wolodymyr Zyla, Oleh Zuievsky, Irena Makaryk, Valerian Revutsky, and Ostap Tarnavsky (Stech, "Ukrainian Shakespeare Society"). It is also crucial to highlight that this period of the Society is fundamentally distinct from the previous ones. The UShT operated primarily within the framework of the Canadian Slavic Association, organizing Shakespeare sessions. Six Shakespeare sessions were held between 1980 and 1987, at which members of the UShT presented papers and their translations of Shakespeare's works. The two volumes of *Ukrainian Shakespeare Studies in the West*, published by Slavutych in 1987 and 1990, can be considered a comprehensive summary of the Society's activities, which spanned over three decades.

The Impact of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society and Its Members

The Shakespeare Society project did not emerge among Ukrainian emigrants spontaneously. At the time of the formation of the UShT, Ukrainian emigration in the free world (mainly in Europe, particularly Germany, but also in Canada) was engaged in active scholarly and educational endeavours, which were primarily oriented towards the advancement and dissemination of Ukrainian culture within the European and global context. This was in opposition to the presentation of

modernizovanoï dosvidom ukraïns'koï literaturi 20-h rr., a osoblyvo elementami bliz'koï Os'mačci estetiki ekspresionizmu.]

the 'only correct' Soviet interpretation of Ukrainian culture. In this context, the tasks of the UShT, as set out in the Society's Statute, were defined. These tasks included researching the history of the relationship between Ukrainian culture and Shakespeare, as well as translating and popularising the new Ukrainian translations of Shakespeare's works, and the preparation of the theatrical productions of his plays in Ukrainian in the West. In the inaugural meeting of the Shakespeare Society, Rudnyckyj articulated two principal objectives for the society:

It (UShT – L.M.) should foster an organised, systematic approach to the documentation of Ukrainian Shakespearean studies in the two principal centres of Shakespearean literature so far: Birmingham and Washington, as well as of the creation of a centre for Ukrainian Shakespearean studies. [...]

In addition to the documentation, a crucial task is to develop a Ukrainian-Shakespearean bibliography in Ukrainian periodicals in the free world. Without this basic step, in the absence of a comprehensive bibliographical review of works, articles, reviews, and discussions pertaining to Shakespearean studies in Ukrainian periodicals in the diaspora, it is not possible to draw any meaningful conclusions regarding this aspect of Ukrainian culture.¹⁰

The founders of the UShT, in particular Kostetskyi and Rudnyckyj, sought to ensure that information about the Society was disseminated in the European press and was also accessible in the Ukrainian language to Ukrainians in exile. Brief references to the recently constituted Society appeared in Ukrainian émigré

¹⁰ The Ihor Kostetskyi Archive in Bremen contains a typescript of Rudnyckyj's paper delivered at the Statutory Meeting of the Society (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, FSO 01-242 Kostetzky).

"Воно повинно організованим, систематичним способом подбати про належну документацію української Шекспірії в дотеперішніх двох основних центрах шекспірівської літератури: в Бірмінгемі й Вашингтоні, – а також і про створення осередку української шекспірії. [...] Крім документації важливою справою є опрацювання українсько-шекспірівської бібліографії в українській періодиці вільного світу. Без цього основного кроку, без бібліографічного огляду праць, статей, рецензій, відгуків з Шекспірії в українській періодичній літературі в діяспорі годі й думати про роблення яких небудь підсумків у цій ділянці української культури". [Vono повинно organizovanim, sistematičnim sposobom podbati pro naležnu dokumentaciū ukraїns'koї Šekspiriāni v doteperišnih dvoh osnovnih centrah šekspirivs'koї literaturi: v Birmingemi j Vašingtoni, – a takož i pro stvorennā oseredku ukraїns'koї šekspiriāni. [...]

Krīm dokumentacii važlivoū spravou ē opracūvannā ukraїns'ko-šekspirivs'koї bibliografii v ukraїns'kij periodici vil'nogo svitu. Bez c'ogo osnovnogo kroku, bez bibliografičnogo oglādu prac', statej, recenzij, vidgukiv z Šekspiriāni v ukraїns'kij periodičnij literaturi v diāspori godi j dumati pro roblennā ākih nebud' pidsumkiv u cij dilānci ukraїns'koї kul'turi.]

newspapers in 1957: *Ukrainski visti* (Українські вісті), *Ukrainska literaturna gazeta* (Українська літературна газета), and *Ukrainske slovo* (Українське слово). A noteworthy article on this distinctive occurrence within the context of Ukrainian emigration was published in Toronto by Rudnyckyj; it addresses not only the establishment of the Society but also the circumstances surrounding its creation and its principal objectives. Rudnyckyj highlights that the tradition of “Ukrainian Shakespeare” originated in the 19th century, as evidenced in the works of prominent Ukrainian literary figures, such as Osyp Fedkovych, Panteleimon Kulish, and Ivan Franko. Rudnyckyj emphasises that the Bolsheviks in Ukraine interrupted the Shakespearean activities of Ukrainian poets, scholars and the Ukrainian theatre, so it was for this reason that the USHT set itself the goal of restoring the interrupted tradition in exile, collecting information on Ukrainian Shakespeare studies scattered in Western book collections and archives, and initiating Shakespeare studies and new translations of Shakespeare’s works into Ukrainian. Rudnyckyj also discusses Ukraine’s relationship with European culture, noting that the concept of the USHT represents a continuation of a process that “has an almost century-old tradition, and its origins go back to the depths of the Ukrainian soul which was oriented towards the West and went hand in hand with its culture” (Рудницький [Rudnyckyj], “Українське Шекспірівське Товариство” [The Ukrainian Shakespeare Society] 31).¹¹

From its inception, the USHT, under the guiding hand of Kostetskyi, engaged in a multitude of international endeavours, primarily centred around the establishment of connections with the foremost European institutions specialising in Shakespeare studies and prominent European scholars, philologists and translators from Germany, Austria, Britain, France, and Poland. Kostetskyi could count on substantial assistance from Rudnyckyj in this matter in Canada. A review of the documents in the Kostetskyi Archive in Bremen reveals that Kostetskyi engaged in active organisational and information-sharing endeavours with Shakespearean institutions in Europe, as evidenced by his correspondence with them. For example, Kostetskyi forwarded Osmachka’s translations of *Henry IV* and *Macbeth* to the library of the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford-upon-Avon, his translation of *Romeo and Juliet* to the Shakespeare Memorial Library, and translations of sonnets to the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. Extensive material confirming the involvement

11 “Українське Шекспірівське Товариство – це не якась нова ефемеріда-дальщина, а послідовне завершення того процесу, що в головах у себе має близько столітню традицію й початками сягає в глиб української душі, що завжди була зорієнтована на Захід і йшла в парі з його культурою.” [Ukrains'ke Šekspirivs'ke Tovaristvo – ce ne âkas' nova efemerida-dal'shina, a poslidovne zaveršennâ togo procesu, šo v golovah u sebe maê bliz'ko stolitnû tradiciû j počatkami sâgaê v glib ukraïns'koï duši, šo zavždy bula zoriêntovana na Zahid i jšla v pari z jogo kul'turoû.]

of both Kostetskyi and Rudnyckyj in the promotion of USHT activities in Europe and America can be found in the correspondence of the secretary and vice-president of the Society. In total, this correspondence includes 30 letters between 1956 and 1964.¹²

Another significant contribution of Kostetskyi to the dissemination of Ukrainian translations and Shakespeare studies worldwide was establishing a connection with the oldest Shakespeare society in Europe, the German Shakespeare Society (Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft); founded in the third centenary year (1864), it remains one of the largest Shakespeare societies in the world, with over 2,000 members. Kostetskyi published articles in German in the yearbooks of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft, further confirming the significant impact of these contacts. These publications included material on Slavic (mainly Ukrainian) translations of Shakespeare and issues surrounding the reception of his works in Slavic countries (Kostetzky, "Shakespeares Werk" 216–224).

In the context of USHT's cooperation with scholars in the West, it is also worth noting Kostetskyi's contacts and correspondence with Polish intellectuals. First of all, his contacts with the Polish Shakespeare scholar Jan Kott (1914–2001) should be mentioned. In 1977, Kott came to Europe from the USA to attend the congress of the German Shakespeare Society. Kostetskyi took the opportunity to write to him and send him some of his publications. By this time, Jan Kott was already a well-known Shakespeare critic and an academic at American universities. From Kostetskyi's letter to Kott (dated 14 April 1977), we learn that Kostetskyi sent the Polish scholar a new edition of *King Lear* translated into Ukrainian by Vasyl Barka. This edition also included an abridged version of Kott's essay *King Lear, or Endgame* translated into Ukrainian. Kostetskyi also added his German article on translations of Shakespeare into Slavic languages, *Shakespeares Werk in der Ukraine* and a collection of Kostetskyi's sonnets translated into Polish by Jerzy Niemojowski, *Raw Sonnets (Surowe sonety)*.¹³ The author and the addressee had no prior personal acquaintance, as is evident from the letter. However, they shared numerous interests, and a particular affinity for Shakespeare. Kostetskyi was interested in Kott's publications and translated his essay on *King Lear*. Kostetskyi also tried to introduce the Polish scholar to Ukrainian translations of Shakespeare and his own literary and scholarly works. It is noteworthy that Kostetskyi wrote his letter in Polish as a gesture of respect towards Kott. In his response (20 April 1977), Kott expressed gratitude to Kostetskyi for the books he had sent him and for translating his essay on *King Lear* into Ukrainian, stating, "I never thought I would

¹² These have already been published with a foreword by O. Lazarenko and M. R. Stech (Лазаренко, Стех [Lazarenko and Stech] 813–850).

¹³ The Kostetsky Archive in Bremen holds one copy of Kostetskyi's letter to Kott and three letters from Kott to Kostetskyi from 1977.

live to see this.”¹⁴ The subsequent two letters from Kott to Kostetskyi, dated 25 May 1977 and 12 August 1977, demonstrate that the correspondence between the two scholars continued for some time.

Kostetskyi also corresponded with Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska; however, the content of these letters primarily concerns the problems of translating European modernist works. Given that Kostetskyi himself was both a translator and an advocate of a novel modernist approach to translating classical literature, further scholarly study of Kostetskyi's correspondence with Podraza-Kwiatkowska would be greatly beneficial. It is beyond question that Kostetskyi's organisational and popularising role in disseminating and promoting Ukrainian culture among the émigrés is of the utmost significance. This encompasses not only the aforementioned contacts with significant Shakespearean institutions in Europe, e.g. Kostetskyi's active involvement in the German Shakespeare Society, but also his notable publishing endeavours and the dissemination of Ukrainian literature on a global scale. This includes poetry collections, scholarly works, translations of Shakespeare's works and other world classics. During his life in exile, Kostetskyi disseminated information about the UShT in many ways and documented the lively scientific and educational pursuits of the Society's members. In his article, “На закінчення Шекспірівського року” (At the end of the Shakespearean year), Kostetskyi devoted particular attention to the ‘Ukrainian exegesis’ of Shakespeare studies. He referenced papers presented at scientific meetings by Professor Constantine Bida and his own research on translating Shakespeare into Slavic languages. Furthermore, Kostetskyi discusses the involvement of UShT members in various publication projects, including translations of Shakespeare's works. He highlights the contributions of Yar Slavutych, Oleh Zuievsky, and Vasyl Barka. Additionally, he draws attention to scientific and popular articles, and reviews authored by Ukrainian intellectuals in exile, such as Jaroslav Rudnycky, Orest Starchuk, or Yar Slavutych. Kostetskyi's report is of great significance for comprehending the society's activities and the author's involvement therein. He highlights the principal theatrical and literary events associated with Shakespeare, predominantly new theatrical productions and new translations. The author compares new translations of Shakespeare into Ukrainian by Vasyl Barka and Yurii Klen that emerged in the West, as well as by Maksym Rylsky and Mykola Bazhan that were published in Soviet Ukraine. In the report, Kostetskyi outlines the prospects for further Ukrainian Shakespeare studies and comes to the following conclusions:

Ukrainian Shakespeare studies today, therefore, is not just a statement: here is a new translation in our language, but a promising indication: there are two, three, and so

¹⁴ In original: „Nigdy nie myślałem, że się tego doczekam”. The Ihor Kostetsky Archive in Bremen (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, FSO 01-242 Kostetzky).

on new translations, made in different vocabularies of the same language, made in such a way that their mutual contradiction further confirms the great fact of language, the fact of its all-embracing unity. (Костецький [Kostetskyi], "На закінчення Шекспірівського року" [At the end of the Shakespearean year] 37–38)¹⁵

The activities of the Shakespearean Society were globally oriented with the principal objective of promoting the development of the Ukrainian language and culture. Consequently, Kostetskyi's interpretation of the intended audience for Shakespeare's translations into Ukrainian is both compelling and pertinent:

[...] it should be understood that Shakespeare is translated into Ukrainian not only for those who do not know English but also for those who know English very well. Only the one who, living in a foreign language environment, daily, from the cultural works, is convinced that the language of his parents can cover the world of the most complex spiritual phenomena in full force of expression [...] He has every opportunity to be a Ukrainian calmly, confidently, self-evidently. (Костецький [Kostetskyi] "На закінчення шекспірівського року" [At the end of the Shakespearean year] 39)¹⁶

In examining the history of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society, it is necessary to consider the numerous conflicts that arose within the Ukrainian émigré community. The causes of these conflicts can be attributed to differences in the assessment of Ukraine's historical past, divergent visions for its future, and attitudes towards Soviet Ukraine. It is evident that the conflicts and confrontations

15 "Українське шекспірознавство сьогодні, отже, це не просто констатування, ось, мовляв, з'явився новий переклад нашою мовою, а перспективна вказівка: з'явилося два, три і так далі нових переклади, витворені у відмінних словорядках тієї самої мови, витворені так, що їхня взаємна суперечність дедалі стверджує великий факт мови, факт її всеосяжної єдності". [Ukraïns'ke šekspiroznavstvo s'ogodni, otže, ce ne prosto konstatuvannâ, os', movlâv, z'âvîsâ novij pereklad našoû movoû, a perspektivna vkazîvka: z'âvîlosâ dva, tri i tak dali novih perekladi, vitvorenî u vidminnih slovorâdah tiêi samoï movi, vitvorenî tak, šo îhnâ vzaêmna superečnist' dedalî stverdžuê velikij fakt movi, fakt îi vseosâžnoï êdnosti.]

16 "треба зрозуміти, що Шекспір перекладається українською мовою не тільки для тих, хто не знають англійської, а й для тих, хто англійську знають дуже добре. Лише той, хто, живши в іншомовному оточенні, щодня, з творених фактів культури, переконується, що й мовою його батьків на повну силу виразності можна охопити світ найскладніших духових явищ, [...] Той-бо має всю можливість бути українцем спокійно, впевнено, самозрозуміло". [treba zrozumiti, šo Šekspir perekladaêt'sâ ukraïns'koû movoû ne til'ki dlâ tih, hto ne znaût' anglijs'koï, a j dlâ tih, hto anglijs'ku znaût' duže dobre. Liše toj, hto, živši v îšomovnomu otočenni, šodnâ, z tvorenih faktiv kul'turi, perekonuêt'sâ, šo j movoû jogo bat'kiv na povnu silu viraznosti možna ohopiti svît najskladniših duhovih âviš, [...] Toj-bo maê vsûmožlivîst' buti ukraïncem spokîjno, vpevneno, samozrozumîlo.]

between the various groups of Ukrainian émigrés can today be evaluated and interpreted from a different perspective. In Kostetskyi's case, these conflicts were related to his publishing activities and also to his literary contacts, correspondence and friendships with various groups, including those of the Ukrainian, Polish and Russian emigrations.

The State of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society

In conclusion, it should be noted that the project of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society had a significant impact on the development of Ukrainian culture in exile, as well as on the progress of Shakespearean studies and translation in Soviet Ukraine. According to Stech, there is reason to believe that the factor of 'cultural pressure' exerted by the activities of the Ukrainian diaspora had a significant impact on publishing policy in the Ukrainian SSR. It can be assumed that the publication of new Ukrainian translations in the West by Todos Osmachka, Vasyl Barka, Yuriy Klen, Ihor Kostetskyi, and other representatives of the USHT had an impact on the decision of the Soviet authorities in Ukraine to 'restore' the publication of Shakespeare in Ukrainian. For instance, a complete translation of Shakespeare's sonnets was published in Ukraine as early as 1966 though it was in 1958 that Kostetskyi's translation of the sonnets was published in the West. In 1964, a collection of Shakespeare's works in three volumes was published in Kyiv after new translations of Shakespeare into Ukrainian had been published in the West. The translation of Shakespeare was of such significance to the Soviet authorities that even former Gulag prisoners, Hryhorii Kochur, Borys Ten, and Dmytro Palamarchuk, were involved in the translation.

The USHT's endeavours were directed towards two principal aims. On the one hand, it constituted a continuation of the Ukrainian tradition in translation and Shakespeare studies, initiated by Panteleimon Kulish and Ivan Franko. USHT members asserted that this tradition should have been continued through a dialogue with European experts on Shakespeare's works and representatives of Shakespearean centres in the West. On the other hand, the Society became a significant Ukrainian cultural institution, with its publishing and translation activities encouraging new authors to translate and study Shakespeare's works. Marko Stech, in his preface to the new edition of Shakespeare's translations (2024), rightly remarked that "the founders of the USHT were themselves aware of the imbalance between their capabilities and the scale of the tasks they were undertaking" (Стех [Stech] "Український Шекспір" [«Ukrainian» Shakespeare] 6).¹⁷

¹⁷ "Самі засновники УШТ усвідомлювали диспропорцію між їхніми можливостями й масштабом завдань, які вони брали на себе".

For this reason, the evaluation of the scientific and research activities of the USHT and the assessment of the activities of its members from today's perspective should not be unduly critical. In the current context, the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society represents a potential model for the advancement of Ukrainian culture in dialogue with European culture. The activities and achievements of the Society can serve as a source of inspiration for numerous Ukrainian scholars and artists based in various academic and cultural institutions in Ukraine and abroad.

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Shakespeare Studies at the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv: Maiia Harbuziuk *in memoriam*

Abstract

Several aspects of the development of Shakespearean studies at the Department of Theatre Studies and Acting at Ivan Franko National University of Lviv are explored, highlighting its role as an academic centre fostering theatrical research. Special attention is given to Shakespeare studies, a field initiated by Professor Maiia Harbuziuk. She investigated Shakespeare's theatrical interpretations in Lviv, particularly the tragedy *Hamlet*, and made a significant contribution to the development of Ukrainian Shakespeare studies. Her research sheds light on the

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multicultural growth of Lviv, the influence of theatre on audiences, and national self-identification through stage productions. The department's publishing activities, including the release of Shakespearean research and translations, continue to advance the study and popularization of Shakespeare's works in Ukraine. Harbuziuk's scholarly ideas are carried forward by modern young theatre researchers. The impact of Shakespeare's works is also revealed in the academic process of students enrolled in the "Dramatic Theatre and Film Acting" program. It is emphasized that working with Shakespeare's plays enables future actors to gain a deeper understanding of archetypal characters, honing rhythm through body, voice, and movement. Shakespeare's texts provide useful guidance for character development, making them an integral part of the educational process.

Keywords: Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Department of Theatre Studies and Acting, Shakespeare Studies, Stage Art, Theatre Studies, Bohdan Kozak, Maiia Harbuziuk, William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*.

On 26 March 2024, the Department of Theatre Studies and Acting at Ivan Franko National University of Lviv celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. This milestone is significant for the Theatre Studies school in Lviv, as it laid the foundation for the development of professional higher education in "Performing Arts" and established an academic centre that became the core of research in the field. The department, under the leadership of Bohdan Kozak, People's Artist of Ukraine, academician of the National Academy of Arts of Ukraine, laureate of the Taras Shevchenko National Prize of Ukraine, and an esteemed member of the Shevchenko Scientific Society and the National Union of Theatre Workers of Ukraine, has played a pivotal role in this process.

Shakespearean studies, as a branch of theatre studies, was initiated by one of the department's founders and first professors, Maiia Harbuziuk, a renowned European theatre scholar. In 2007, Harbuziuk defended her doctoral thesis on the topic: *Stage Interpretations of William Shakespeare's Tragedy Hamlet in Lviv Theatres (1796–1997)*. Through the lens of *Hamlet* productions, Harbuziuk scientifically analyses the multicultural development of Lviv in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, tracing how audiences in different eras experienced theatre in German, Polish, and Ukrainian, and examining the impact of theatre on the audience. Harbuziuk notes in her thesis abstract:

The iconic performances of the tragedy in the 20th century – on the stages of Polish (1907) and Ukrainian (1943) theatres – became acts of self-identification for these nations within the European humanitarian space. This was significant in light of the phenomena of the early 20th century when, through theatrical art, oppressed

nations affirmed and realized their programs of 'cultural nationalism' as part of their struggle for political and state self-determination. (Garbuzûk [Harbuziuk], *Scenični pročitannâ tragedii Gamlet* 14)

Harbuziuk also explored the retrospective of stage art in Lviv through the prism of the city's 225-year history of theatre development, arguing that productions of *Hamlet* became examples of the civic position of Ukrainian artists who, through theatre, showcased contemporary problems and conflicts on stage:

The establishment of the Austrian German-speaking theatre (1776) and, alongside it, the Polish theatre (in the 1780s) marked the beginning of the stage history of Lviv's Hamlets. The integrated history of *Hamlet's* stagings in Lviv aims to uncover the unique cultural and artistic codes, as well as the recurring artistic models, within the context of the multicultural and historically interconnected cultures of the city. (Garbuzûk [Harbuziuk], *Scenični pročitannâ tragedii Gamlet* 3)

Her research appeared in several publications, where she presented the history of Shakespearean theatrical practices in Western Ukraine through the lens of global Shakespeare studies. Based on the *Bibliographic Index of Maiia Harbuziuk's Works*, compiled by Halyna Bilovus of the Department of Library Science and Bibliography at the Faculty of Culture and Arts of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, it is important to highlight Harbuziuk's articles in the field of Shakespeare studies. In most of her works, Harbuziuk addresses the issue of national identity, which is evident in articles such as "*Hamlet* in Ukrainian Theatre Studies in the Second Half of the 20th Century, *Hamlet* on the Ukrainian Stage: 'A Mirror and Reflection of the Times' (based on Lviv Productions)" and "The National Premiere of *Hamlet* in Lviv (1943). On the Historical and Artistic Contexts of the Production". Drawing on the theoretical works of A. Greimas and A. Ubersfeld, Harbuziuk analyses the text within the context of drama theory, particularly the actantial model,¹ in her article "How Many *Hamlets* Are There in *Hamlet*? (An Attempt at Structural Analysis of the Dramatic Work)". In her research, Harbuziuk extensively worked on reconstructing scenes from performances to better understand the theatrical process of the time. As a result, she published several works, including *Reconstruction. A Permanent State*, where she examined the style of the performance and the means of actor expression in the climactic scene of *Hamlet* – the "To be or not to be" soliloquy. In the article "Reconstruction of Scenes from W. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in Boris Tiagno's Production at the Maria Zankovetska Theatre in Lviv", using the director's promptbook, press reviews,

¹ The actantial model of semiotic-structural analysis of the play is based on the principles of A. Greimas and A. Ubersfeld.

and eyewitness accounts, Harbuziuk reconstructed individual scenes from the performance, which premiered in 1957.

Having an initial musical education (Harbuziuk graduated from Lviv Professional Music College named after S. Lyudkevych, then known as Lviv Music School, specializing in piano), she professionally analysed the musical arrangement of the 1957 *Hamlet* performance by the composer Oleksandr Radchenko in her article “Works of the Theatre Studies Commission. Music in the 1957 *Hamlet* Production at the Maria Zankovetska Theatre: Collaboration Between the Director and Composer” published on the Ukrainian Shakespearean Portal of Zaporizhzhia National University in 2017. In the article, she defined the role and place of music in dramatic performance, highlighted the musical themes of the characters and, based on the composer’s correspondence, examined the stages of collaboration between the director B. Tiagno and the composer O. Radchenko on *Hamlet*. This article became the first and, until recently, the only publication on music in dramatic theatre performances in Lviv from a theatre studies perspective, setting a new trend in performance criticism in Ukraine. This interdisciplinary research between theatre studies and musicology is being continued by Harbuziuk’s former student, Khrystyna Novosad-Lesiuk at the Department of Theatre Studies and Acting.

Historiographic research on Shakespearean productions on Ukrainian stages is presented in Harbuziuk’s work “The First Performances of William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in Ukraine (late 18th – early 19th centuries)”.² In her articles on translation studies, Harbuziuk revealed the impact of Ukrainian Shakespearean traditions on the development of translation practices, since the majority of translations were carried out specifically for stage productions commissioned by theatres in “Ukrainian Translations of William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in the Context of National Theatre Development” and “Mikhailo Rudnytsky’s Theatrical Shakespearean Studies”.

Established by Harbuziuk, historiographic research into Ukrainian Shakespearean traditions continues, not least through the annual competition in Performing Arts held in Lviv. Winner of this research competition in 2022–2023, which saw work submitted by young scholars from Kyiv, Kharkiv, Ternopil, and Lviv, Olesia Ostapiuk’s monograph titled *Directorial Interpretations of William Shakespeare’s Hamlet in the Repertoires of Theatres in the Western Region of Ukraine* impressed the jury, representing major Ukrainian theatre educational institutions. In her research, Ostapiuk analyses recent *Hamlet* productions: the

² According to the theatre scholar, many Ukrainian translators engaged with Shakespeare’s works, including P. Svetsitsky, Y. Fedkovych, M. Starytsky, P. Kulish, H. Khotkevych, O. Burgardt, L. Hrebinka, M. Rudnytsky, H. Kochur, I. Kostetskyi, and Y. Andrukhovych. See among others, Korneliuk and Moskvitina’s article in this volume.

Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theatre in Ivano-Frankivsk (dir. Rostislav Derzhypilsky) which premiered in 2017 as a *drama per musica*, the Lviv Academic Theatre of Miniatures 2017 *People and Puppets* (dir. Oleksii Kravchuk) as part of the world history of puppetry,³ and the international theatre project *H-effect* based on *Hamlet*, written by Joanna Vikhovska and directed by Roza Sarkisian, that premiered in 2017 as a post-documentary drama. Ostapiuk shared her view on choosing this topic for her first in-depth research:

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is significant to world culture, and Ukrainian theatre, although not having as long a history with the play, holds valuable experience in interpreting this work. The character of Hamlet has become an archetype of the fighter for justice, yet modern directors continue to find and reveal new facets of this hero. Therefore, the most fascinating part of my work was tracing and analyzing the transformations of Hamlet's character in the repertoires of theatres in Western Ukraine. Now, I plan to expand the scope of my research to include stage interpretations of other Shakespearean plays, not just *Hamlet*, and broaden the geographical range of my study. ("Studentka fakul'tetu kul'turi i mistectv Olesâ Ostap'ûk" n.p.)

True to her word, Ostapiuk has developed her research on the topic *Interpretations of William Shakespeare's Hamlet on the Ukrainian Stage (2014–2024): The Image of a Modern Hero*, thus continuing to develop a historically informed practice of performance criticism in Ukraine. By expanding the timeframe and spatial boundaries of her work to twelve productions across dramatic, musical-dramatic, and puppet theatres in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Rivne, Zaporizhzhia, Vinnytsia, Sumy, Zhytomyr, Uzhhorod, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Lviv, her study not only continues the historiographic approach to Shakespeare but argues that *Hamlet* is the play that tells the Ukrainian history as we speak, a national story once again under the threat of erasure by the Russian occupation. Thus, the foundations of Shakespeare studies, established by Maiia Harbuziuk at the Department of Theatre Studies and Acting, continue to be developed by younger generations of theatre scholars. In 2022, Harbuziuk initiated a new phase of revitalizing the academic and educational focus on Shakespeare studies through open dialogue, particularly by establishing and strengthening partnerships with international Shakespearean institutions. During her tenure as Acting Dean of the Faculty of Culture and Arts, she facilitated collaborations with the Craiova International Shakespeare Festival in Romania (2018) and with the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon, University of Birmingham, UK. This outreach and collaborative approach initiated by the Ukrainian scholar was recognised not only at home but also internationally: in

³ Please see the article by Roman Lavrentii and Olesia Ostapiuk on puppet theatre in this volume.

2023, at the end of the first year of the full-scale war in Ukraine, Harbuziuk became an honorary Senior Research Fellow at the Shakespeare Institute.

Maiia Harbuziuk had a wealth of not only scientific but also creative ideas. She was the creative mind behind a media projection dedicated to Shakespeare's works. To commemorate the 80th anniversary of the first Ukrainian stage production of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in 1943, a virtual museum titled "#Hamlet-UA: Act I, Scene 1943" was created. The project was realized through joint, international efforts that brought together the Department of Theatre Studies and Acting at Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (led by Roman Lavrentii), the Ukrainian Interuniversity Shakespeare Center at Zaporizhzhia National University (led by Nataliya Torkut), the Shakespeare Institute at the University of Birmingham (led by Michael Dobson) and The Open University (led by Nicola Watson).⁴ Visitors can view photos and information about the creative team of the production as well as the cast. The following rooms contain posters, title pages of the performance booklet, drawings and caricatures of the characters, reviews in the contemporary press, information about Ukrainian translators of *Hamlet*, and photographs of Lviv during World War II. The museum highlights the rich history of Shakespeare production in Ukraine by focusing on *Hamlet* and therefore speaks even more about guarding national heritage, reclaiming Ukrainian history from Russification and asserting its European roots.⁵

Maiia Harbuziuk was the first scholar to introduce Shakespeare Studies into the Ukrainian academic curriculum, creating the elective course "Shakespeare and World Culture" at postgraduate level in 2022: The course focuses on studying Shakespeare's works and comparing European – among these Polish – American, and post-Soviet experiences. As a result, students examine Shakespearean productions in Ukraine and the post-Soviet space through the lens of political issues, whereas in the United States, the analysis centred on social aspects. They share the understanding that, for Ukrainian audiences, Shakespeare serves as a platform for discussing the political crisis in Ukraine.

A "Shakespeare_Franco_Garden" in Lviv was another idea that Harbuziuk never had the chance to bring to life as she passed away in 2023. The concept was intended to resemble the famous garden located in Stratford-upon-Avon, UK, with a collection of plants mentioned in Shakespeare's texts, as well as flowers from the Elizabethan era. These include roses, rosemary, rue, yew, daisies, violets, and

⁴ Please see the article "Virtual Museum 'Hamlet UA: Act1, Scene 1943' in the Context of Decolonising Knowledge about Ukraine" by Svitlana Deineka, Nataliya Torkut, and Roman Lavrentii in the present volume.

⁵ *Hamlet* has been the European play and has told the national story of other countries especially in times of occupation, war, as well as internal censorship. See more in Guntner, McLean and Cinpoes.

others. Alongside the plants, she envisaged plaques with quotes from William Shakespeare's sonnets and plays around the garden. Michael Dobson shared his heartfelt memories of Harbuziuk and their joint idea:

Maiia and I talked a lot about the significance of such gardens as bridges between nature and culture. Shakespeare gardens symbolize the flourishing of immortal words, meanings, and ideas, bringing to life the things important to us. [...], she sent me ideas for the creation of a unique project, the 'Shakespeare_Franco_Garden' in Lviv, and prepared suggestions for the plants that could grow there. She wanted a space in the middle of this garden where talented students could showcase their performances. I am very happy that this project will be realized. The great tragedy is that Maiia will not see the realization of the 'Shakespeare_Franco_Garden' concept, but I believe that the plants planted there will soon bloom in a peaceful and independent Ukraine. ("V Unìversitetì obgovorili realizaciù proêktu «Šekspìrìv_Franko_Sad»")

The joint concept was that Ukrainian mallows would grow in the UK, and British roses would bloom in Ukraine. The Department of Theatre Studies and Acting, particularly Roman Lavrentiy, Sofiya-Rosa Lavrentiy, and Myroslava Tsyhanyk, continue to work on realizing this idea – in the spirit of Harbuziuk and full of hope for a peaceful and independent Ukraine.

After her passing, the University of Birmingham established an annual Harbuziuk Scholarship in 2024 in the fields of Theatre Studies and Shakespeare Studies as a tribute. This scholarship offers an internship opportunity at the Department of Drama or the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon. The first recipient was Sofiya-Rosa Lavrentiy, PhD in Art Studies and a lecturer from the Department of Theatre Studies and Acting who spent April to July 2024 in the UK. During her stay, she furthered the cooperation between the departments of Drama and Theatre Studies and Acting concerning postgraduate studies. As a result of the British-Ukrainian collaboration, a joint online course entitled "Shakespeare Studies" will be offered to Ukrainian and British students, taught by specialists from the University of Birmingham and also including a lecture on Shakespeare in Ukrainian culture by R. Lavrentiy. This will strengthen the transcultural experience and broaden British students' understanding of Ukraine's history and Ukrainian theatre.

In September 2023, the Scientific Society of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv established the "Maiia Harbuziuk Award" in Theatre Studies. This award recognizes academic work from students of the Faculty of Culture and Arts, specializing in the "Performing Arts (Theatre Studies)" educational programme. Additionally, Maiia's daughter, Sofia Harbuziuk, together with the theatre studies community, founded the "Maiia Harbuziuk Fund" in 2023. This fund finances

a scholarship to cover part of the tuition costs for postgraduate studies in “Performing Arts (Theatre Studies)” at Ivan Franko National University of Lviv. Such recognitions will help to further theatre studies not only as important artistic degrees but also signpost theatre as an important cultural factor during times of war.

The practical aspect of Shakespeare studies is implemented within the educational programme “Performing Arts (Acting for Drama Theatre and Cinema)”. In the “Acting Mastery” course, developed by Professor B. Kozak, students begin working on Shakespeare’s comedies in their second year, focusing on works such as *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and others.

During the first year, students engage in exercises, improvisations, and etudes, improving their acting skills (body and voice) by staging classical works. By the third and fourth semesters, the focus shifts to further developing each student’s creative individuality. Students are tasked with building their stage temperament, revealing their creative identity, understanding rhythm, and learning to use props and costume elements to create characteristics of their characters. Understanding rhythm through body movement, voice, and physicality is crucial in the role development process. Shakespeare’s dramatic works, in particular, offer deep insights into character traits, which are essential for students’ independent work in the future.

Shakespearean texts are often among the first materials students work with in the “Performing Arts (Acting for Drama Theatre and Cinema)” programme because the playwright provides both creative freedom and clear guidance on how to shape characters. When studying comedies, it becomes evident that Shakespeare not only shows action in one scene but also describes how it unfolds in the next, a feature rarely found in other dramatic works. These and other dramaturgical principles reinforce the necessity of studying Shakespeare’s work for students, as his themes help shape the staging of scenes, ultimately forming a cohesive performance.

Plays by William Shakespeare have been periodically staged at the Department of Theatre Studies and Acting, often serving as bachelor final projects. Examples include *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (dir. by Taras Kyshchun) at Les Kurbas Lviv Academic Drama Theatre in 2006; *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* (dir. Halyna Volovetska, an “Honoured Artist of Ukraine”) staged at the Faculty of Culture and Arts in 2017; *Romeo and Juliet* (dir. Tetyana Lytvynenko, People’s Artist of Ukraine”) performed on the main stage of the Maria Zankovetska National Academic Drama Theatre in 2020; and in 2024, *As You Like It* (dir. Dmytro Zakhochenko) at the Lesia Ukrainka Lviv Academic Drama Theatre.

For students in the “Performing Arts (Acting for Drama Theatre and Cinema)” programme, the course *Stage Speech* is particularly significant. Among the materials covered in this course, Shakespeare’s sonnets hold a key place, helping

students master elements of verbal action through complex exercises. Studying the sonnets is an essential component in developing the students' proficiency in stage speech.

In 2001, under the initiative of the Rector of the University and later Ukraine's Minister of Education (2007–2010), Ivan Vakarchuk, the theatre journal *Proscenium* was founded and continues to be published despite the war.⁶ *Proscenium* is one of the few theatrical periodicals in Ukraine (alongside *Ukrainian Theatre* and *Kino-Teatr*) and as such remains vital for keeping abreast with the developments in theatre and performance studies. It features materials on the history and theory of theatre, theatrical criticism (reviews of performances, festival overviews), theatre pedagogy, dramatic works (often translations), reviews of new theatre literature, and information on theatrical events in Ukraine and abroad. The "First Studies" section allows students of theatre studies from higher education institutions across Ukraine to publish their work, thereby endorsing the future of Ukrainian cultural research. In 2023, Maiia Harbuziuk introduced a new section in the journal called "Shakespearean Studies". The 2023 issue included her article "The First Performances of *Hamlet* in Ukraine (Late 18th – Early 19th Centuries)", the 2024 issue an article titled "Therapeutic Journeys of *Pericles*" by Michael Dobson. Reflecting on his publication in the Ukrainian journal, Dobson writes: "The first version of this article was presented at an online symposium on Shakespeare and healing, organized by the Ukrainian Shakespeare Center in the fall of 2022, when none of us could have imagined how much healing Ukraine would soon require" (Dobson 35).

A broad spectrum of research into the study and exploration of William Shakespeare's works in the context of Ukrainian culture, theatre, literature, and translation studies still lies ahead. Shakespearean studies encompass the analysis of translations of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, theatrical productions of his works on Ukrainian stages, and the examination of Shakespeare's influence on Ukrainian writers, directors, and actors. Scholars who study the staging of Shakespeare's works, their cultural context, and national identity – reflected through performances of his plays – play a vital role in the development of contemporary Ukrainian Shakespeare studies.

Owing to Maiia Harbuziuk's research and pedagogical contribution, Ukrainian Shakespearean scholarship continues to evolve at the Department of Theatre Studies and Acting at Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, fostering new research, translations, and theatrical productions that adapt Shakespeare's works for a modern Ukrainian audience and cultural context.

⁶ From 2001 to 2014, the journal was edited by Bohdan Kozak, followed by Maiia Harbuziuk from 2015 to 2023, and since 2024, the editor has been Roman Lavrenti.

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The Quest for Selfhood: Shakespeare's Sonnets Interpreted by Maria Hablevych

Abstract

The article provides insight into the Ukrainian Shakespeare Studies criticism by presenting an overview of the approach to Shakespeare utilised by Ukrainian scholar, critic, editor, and practising translator Maria Hablevych (1950–2025). In her critical reading of Shakespeare, Hablevych uses two approaches to the text: reader-response theory and the psychoanalytical approach. The scholar perceives the complexity of the authorial self of Shakespeare, mirrored in his works, which is then reflected in her *Commentaries* (1998). These perspectives find their further application in the two translation projects of the *Sonnets* (1998 by Dmytro Pavlychko,

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2011 by Natalia Butuk), in which Hablevych was involved as a critic and an editor. Both Ukrainian translations reveal different degrees of compliance with the editor's view on Shakespeare and his *Sonnets*. Regarding translation as a social practice, we treat Hablevych as a multifaceted agent, namely one with a complex role in both fields of literary studies and of Translation Studies. We seek to illustrate Hablevych's understanding and interpretation of the authorial self of the *Sonnets* against the postulates of reader-response theory (Iser, Ingarden, Jauss), Freud's psychoanalysis as well as Lacan's post-structuralist theses. We further look at their application in the Ukrainian versions of *Sonnets*, whose interpretation and translation were slightly (Pavlyvhko) or more distinctively (Butuk) influenced by Hablevych.

Keywords: Ukrainian Shakespeare Studies, Maria Hablevych, reader-response theory, translation studies, Shakespeare in translation, Shakespeare's *Sonnets*.

Introduction

Twentieth century Ukrainian Shakespeare Studies have largely been translator-oriented and focused predominantly on linguistic and stylistic analysis. This would leave the questions of the author's personality as well as the reader's psychology outside scholarly discourse in Soviet Ukraine. The first in Ukrainian academia to reverse this trend was Maria Hablevych (1950–2025), a contemporary Ukrainian Shakespeare scholar, critic, editor, and translator. In addition to excerpts from various Shakespearean plays – e.g. Hamlet's monologue or the opening scene of *Romeo and Juliet* – she translated *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, *Henry VIII*, and *Anthony and Cleopatra*. These have shaped her understanding of Shakespeare's works and refined her methods for decoding a text's semiotics. More importantly, her work towards the end of the twentieth century, which coincided with the fall of the Soviet Union and the elimination of restrictive Soviet-imposed norms (including the practice of art) allowed her to apply innovative methods of literary criticism and apply them while editing translations. The methods until this point had been largely neglected due to ideological constraints. Her approach to literary criticism of Shakespeare's works, reflected in translations under her editorial supervision, is not limited to structure and stylistics. It includes human-centred theories such as phenomenology, reader-response theory, and psychoanalysis.

In this article, we seek to trace the 'Author's' resurrection within the frames of phenomenology and hermeneutics.¹ We further describe and analyze Hablevych's model fluctuating between reader-response theory and psychoanalysis, drawing

¹ In our paper, the academic criticism is used in Ukrainian translation as it had been inaccessible, deemed as ideologized or heavily censored in the times of the Soviet empire. It is only after

on the key theoretical findings of Freud and Lacan. Hablevych's psychological interpretation holds significance as it opens the text to the 'Reader' and their creative imagination, contributing to the discussion around Shakespeare's texts. At the same time, this assists in redefining the role of the author, whose psyche is seen as a uniting factor in regard to his literary legacy. Finally, we extrapolate Hablevych's interpretive approach on Ukrainian sonnet translations by Dmytro Pavlychko (1998) and Natalia Butuk (2011) to see how far they correlate with the delineated model and the extent of this correlation.

Hablevych's interpretative approach aligns with the nineteenth-century Romantic tradition. Her thinking draws on ideas from phenomenology. According to Hablevych, Shakespeare's dramas and especially his *Sonnets* manifest their potential solely in relation to his life. The psychoanalytical triad of the conscious, the subconscious, and the unconscious allows one to view certain poems (e.g. *A Lover's Complaint*) and some sonnets (e.g. Sonnet 94) as the poet's self-introspection and the quest towards becoming better through choosing pure heavenly love over earthly lust. Translations set boundaries for creative endeavours: they often exclude interpretation and therefore encourage a 'bracketed' experience of reading an original text. This entails suspensive reading of his works, which excludes texts edited by his later publishers or commentators. It also involves a close link with historicity. In particular, Hablevych emphasises the necessity to experience Shakespeare's works through our consciousness alone, without anyone else's imposed interpretation. The reality of his literary world appears as the only absolute information, operating as the basis for the development of one's own understanding.

Hablevych applies elements of phenomenology, advocating for the strategy of direct reading of Shakespeare's work (without the recourse to the existing commentaries and interpretations) and psychoanalysis (Freud's model is traceable in the poems, such as *A Lover's Complaint*) to her close reading of the poet's self-manifestation in particular works. Hablevych approaches texts via phenomenological thinkers, especially Friedrich Schleiermacher and Edmund Husserl. The latter presupposes the return to a pure consciousness, with the exclusion of anything beyond one's immediate experience (Husserl 36–37). According to him, the universe can only be understood in reference to ourselves since we are the only subjects and sources of all meaning. Therefore, his phenomenological criticism encourages reading – and, as we would argue, interpretation and translation of a specific text (cf. Eagleton 51). The following sections will demonstrate key aspects of Hablevych's approach, concentrating on the author, the reader, psychoanalysis, examples from translations, and a brief conclusion.

the 1990s that the large-scale humanities projects such as the *Anthology* by Maria Zubrytska began to emerge.

In Search of the Author

Both traditional and post-structuralist conceptions of the 'Author' underline that category as a component in the overall framework of a narrative text's elements and relations. Even in Barthes's (1968) and Foucault's (1969) restrictive views on the author as an impersonalized and interpretative construct, the term 'Author' is used to determine the meaning of a text, to relate it to other texts by the same person or to historical contexts, and to establish a dimension of norms and values, style, and a thematic unity (Barthes; Foucault).

Phenomenological criticism, on the other hand, challenges the significance of both the author and the context of a literary work in an attempt to ensure a wholly "immanent" and presupposition-free nature of reading (Husserl xv). As such, a text embodies the author's consciousness, manifested in a literary work, rather than merely pointing to biographical details (Husserl 33–36): the author's mind unifies the stylistic and semantic aspects of the work, which then form a complex totality in the text. Recurrent themes and imagery might reveal the way the author 'lived' in their world (Eagleton 51) which is then represented in the text. Roman Ingarden regards reading as the product of the creator's acts of consciousness, gaining independence via creativity (Ingarden, *O dziele literackim* [The Literary Work of Art] 30). Similarly, Wolfgang Iser approaches the author as the reader's construct in the process of reading (Iser, *Protses chytannia* [The Reading Process] 263): most important is the reader's interpretation of the author's voice and perspective as inferred from the text. Hans Jauss situates the author's role within a broader literary tradition (Iser, *Protses chytannia* [The Reading Process] 279). Thereby, the author's intent makes up an important part of the horizon of expectations, determining the reader's interpretation. In general, despite the recognition of a reader's active involvement in the process of constructing meaning, the psychology of the author and their reflection in literary works are seen as a universal theoretical basis for an interpretation. However, for Jauss, too, the authorial intent is perceived as just one element among many that contribute to the overall meaning of a text. Eric D. Hirsch, whose ideas mark the return of reader-oriented literary theory to hermeneutics, ascertains the chief role of the author's meaning in his *Validity in Interpretation* (1969): he distinguishes between 'meaning' as constructed by the author and 'significance' assigned by the reader. This does not exclude the possibility of multiple interpretations as long as the invariant authorial meaning with its system of expectations and probabilities allows for this (cf. Eagleton 39).

Hablevych adopts the general orientation set out by phenomenological theory but puts her own spin on it as well: she assigns the primary role to the author and their self-reflection. In particular, Hablevych emphasises the necessity to experience Shakespeare's works through our consciousness alone, without anyone else's imposed interpretation. The reality of his literary world appears as the only

absolute information, operating as the basis for the development of one's own understanding. She conceptualizes the text as the author's living thought (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 114). Her thinking seems to reveal a similarity with Schleiermacher's hermeneutic circle, particularly with the principle of a reciprocal relationship: just like each particular can be understood through the general and the whole is comprehended through its parts (Schleiermacher 24), Shakespeare's works should be interpreted through the scope of knowledge about his other writings (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 241). More precisely, Hablevych differentiates several contexts of interpretation: 1) the immediate context; 2) the imagery system of the work; 3) the poetics of the author; and 4) the historical context (44). In other words, she underlines the necessity of exploring the social and the linguistic aspects of the work, as well as literary and cultural aspects of Shakespeare's life, which are, she claims, mirrored in his literary works. Practically speaking, this means that her approach allows her to draw parallels between different works by Shakespeare, as each and every one of these have something to say about the living world and the thinking of their creator. In her theoretical approach, engaging with Shakespeare can therefore help readers and translators strive to achieve his high moral principles – including those on of beauty, truth, and love (Hablevych, *Svitlo i sutin* [The Light and Darkness] 27).

Author versus Reader: Construction of Meaning

The hermeneutic perception of the author at the centre of interpretation re-gained currency in the second half of the twentieth century after post-structuralist claims about the death of the 'Author.' Hablevych does not agree with the post-structuralist view (Hablevych, *Svitlo i sutin* [The Light and Darkness] 17). Instead, her ideas follow the recurring thoughts of hermeneutics and, partly, reader response theory. In the context of Shakespeare Studies, the phenomenological viewpoint entails a return to the works of Shakespeare while 'bracketing' the sum of textual explanations and comments as potentially harmful to interpretation "The sole criterion for evaluating Shakespeare should be the original Shakespearean text itself" (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho Khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 241). Such a statement holds especially true in regard to the translator's experience with the text for further interpretation. This, at first glance, rejects the reader as a source of interpretation. Instead, the author's intention works as an integrative tool for the stylistic and semantic elements of the work. Historically, it is true that publishers' comments and the constant editing of the source text, "bring **other, complementing words** [our emphasis] to the fore, overshadowing the text," (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho Khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's

Temple] 231). This in turn impacts the comprehension of the text for readers and, more importantly, in Hablevych's case, for translators.

As Hablevych reads post-structuralist critics Roland Barthes's *The Death of the Author* (1968) and Michel Foucault's *What Is an Author?* (1969), she regards the author as a medium for multiple meanings: an author's negation means the revocation of the privilege the category had enjoyed with critics. In post-structuralist terms, therefore, the interpretation of meaning is not tied to a real individual anymore. In contrast to this, Hablevych's ideas hark back to the author's role in meaning-making; in this she adopts a stance similar to that of Eric D. Hirsch. In his view, an interpreter should primarily attempt to reconstruct the original authorial meaning (cf. Lanovyk 278). The authorial situation and meaning are defined by the extratextual factors, which, however, can be elicited from the text itself (Lanovyk 280). Hirsch's idea of 'recognitive interpretation', based on the reconstructive process of interpretation, resonates with Hablevych, who urges readers to look at the world through Shakespeare's lens. This can be achieved through close textual study:

The goal is instead of interpreting Shakespeare's world through one's own lens, but rather to perceive it through Shakespeare's own – subjective as it might be – vision, and to communicate that vision to others [...]. The key object of study must be Shakespeare's word itself, condensing the entire depth of his resonance. (Hablevych, *Svitlo i sutin* [The Light and Darkness] 30)

In doing so, the reader expands their horizon rather than imposing it on that of Shakespeare (Hablevych, *Svitlo i sutin* [The Light and Darkness] 30). Via such a reading, Shakespeare's literary works serve as a source of comparison: they mirror comprehension and reflect the author's horizon, demonstrating the author's way of thinking. Like Hirsch, Hablevych agrees that a determinate meaning of the text exists independently of the reader's subjective interpretation (Hablevych, *Svitlo i sutin* [The Light and Darkness] 30). In placing a significant value on the author's intention, historical context, linguistic conventions as well as selected psychological aspects, Hablevych deviates from the principles of phenomenological criticism *sensu stricto*. Nevertheless, her approach remains in accordance with the hermeneutic tradition of looking at the text in parts and as a whole, in a hermeneutic cycle. According to reader-response theory, readers have to fill in so-called "places of under-delineation" or 'lacunae' (Ingarden, *Pro piznavannia* [The Cognition] 137). These fillings would depend on their personal characteristics, such as age or background. Such a perspective implies that the meaning of a literary work emerges through the reader's active participation. The existence of these gaps can be explained as an author's intentional act of leaving blank spaces or ambiguous textual passages so that the reader's imagination is mobilised. This is crucial to Hablevych: authors write their texts without the slightest intention for

their reader to become distracted from the poetic world they create by additional commentaries or explanation – in other words, excessive explication (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 242). The danger with Shakespeare's works, especially drama, is, according to Hablevych, that their interpreters are too willing to explain these lacunae and, in fact, deviate from the text itself. In such an instance, the reader does not use the chance to properly engage creatively. Hablevych, therefore, defines the main task for the reader as an active involvement of the imagination within the frames of the original text as intended by the author. This should take place within the limitations allowed by Shakespeare's text only. In other words, Hablevych emphasizes that readers are re-creators rather than co-creators of potential textual meanings.

Hablevych takes a stance different from the views of the chief proponents of reader-response theory. In their view, it is the reader who decides on the potential meaning. Jauss stresses the merging of readers' and texts' horizons (Jauss 137). Iser introduces the category of 'Implied Reader' as the factor of possible meaning realisation (Iser, *Implied Reader*). However, the category in question is abstract, presenting a textual strategy rather than a definite real-life person. The term includes both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process (Iser, *Implied Reader* xii). The 'Real Reader' is the one to make the actualization possible. This type of reader transforms literary texts into aesthetic objects: "the literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the aesthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the esthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader" (Iser, *Implied Reader* xii).

The Ukrainian scholar places the reader in the position of erudition and high moral values – the category becomes a desired collective readership rather than merely the sum of textual strategies (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 132). From her perspective, this educated reader should respond to the issues raised by an author in a pre-designated way, e.g. by projecting Shakespeare's characters as abstract models onto one's own life. Indeed, the skilful playwright would enable the creation of situational and psychological models appearing in his poetic and dramatical works (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 136). Such a reader will likely understand and uphold the high moral ideals in Shakespeare's works. This kind of noble and educated readership with the same or very similar horizon as the author's may be regarded as the 'Ideal Reader'. As such, for Hablevych, this 'Ideal Reader' is both a prototype for and a reflection of Shakespeare's intended audience, whose projected hypothetical existence inspired Shakespeare's best poetry. The 'Ideal Reader' of Hablevych functions as the one totally relating to Shakespeare's values and potentially sharing them (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 232). Her argument is that the reader's understanding is

therefore achieved through their recognition of the author's values and, to a certain extent, a self-identification with the characters of Shakespeare's works.

In some cases, the category of the 'Ideal Reader' by Hablevych often correlates with the 'Real Reader' – the former serves as a mirror for the latter. The 'Real Reader' response to Shakespeare's works is a stimulus for improvement and growth, and development. The 'Ideal Reader' is conceptualized as less of a textual strategy than the sum of textual possibilities, which the 'Real Reader' should recognize. The construction of meaning is achieved either through the careful examination of Shakespeare's works or by sharing identical high moral values and ideals with the characters of Shakespeare's work (Hablevych, *Svitlo i sutin* [The Light and Darkness]). However, Hablevych states, readers often disappoint by failing to comprehend and comply with the set authorial principles (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple]). The disappointment with the 'Real Reader' failing to recognize an author's high ideals can be reflected in some of the author's work which operates on that recognition. The sense of disappointment can be found in Shakespeare's poetry. According to Hablevych, it is apparent in some of the sonnets, such as Sonnet 27 or Sonnet 29. The latter features the poet's creative discontent, "fortune's disgrace" and his "outcast state" (29, ll. 1–2) in regard to his creative endeavours (Hablevych, "Komentari" [Commentaries] 239). Hablevych maintains that the poet's reaction to his readers' response is also reflected in certain dramas by Shakespeare, especially early ones (Hablevych, "Komentari" [Commentaries]).

In the context of translation theory and practice, reader-response theory – as applied by Hablevych – sets certain boundaries for Shakespeare translators who are supposed to be the first and most attentive readers. These limitations on a translator's part might include a vast knowledge of the author's life and a disregard for comments by previous Shakespeare interpreters. Additionally, modern translators of Shakespeare's literary works should be careful not to complete the aforementioned lacunae supposedly left by the playwright. In their understanding and reproduction of an author's text, Hablevych argues, translators should be guided solely by the word of the author. In that way, they become subservient to, in this case, Shakespeare. Even their creative position should not exclude the poet's centrality. As such, Hablevych positions her ideas on translation as touching upon reader response but taking a clear stance towards a different and very specific role of the translator as a mediating reader.

The Author's Self in his Works: The Psychoanalytical Approach

Psychoanalytical literary criticism presents another line of research in Hablevych's Shakespeare Studies. Despite recognizing a possibly restrictive nature of Freudian application to Shakespeare's works resulting in an overgeneralization (Hablevych,

Svitlo i sutin [The Light and Darkness] 15–16), Hablevych employs selected aspects of psychoanalytical criticism in the study of Shakespeare's works. She supports the idea of an author's self-reflection in their creative works. Through the careful examination of the author's life and social context, a scholar and/or a translator can arrive at certain conclusions about, in this case, the peculiarities of Shakespeare's characters. Hablevych criticises Freud's approach to the characters' un- or sub-conscious manifestations of the authorial ego (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 131). Instead, she insists on their essence as conscious creations of the poet, guided by the spirit of altruistic love for others (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 131).

Hablevych highlights allegorical and metaphorical models of the human psyche which she discovers as inherent in the *Sonnets*. As the embodiment of the authorial self in the *Sonnets*, she considers the poet's soul: his subconscious, replicated in the 'Fair Youth' (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 218). While other supporters of Freudian theory mostly focus on plays and dramas, since Freud found most of his examples in *A Midsummer's Dream*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*, Hablevych instead attempts to recreate the poet's psyche by looking at the lyrical material and by contextualizing it with reference to the drama as well as – more importantly – Shakespeare's poetry. This had never been accomplished before in Ukraine during the Soviet times. Indeed, most Ukrainian Shakespeare Studies at that time revolved around the reception of his works rather than the understanding and criticism of his original writings. Even more so, the development of Shakespeare Studies through the lens of psychoanalytical or of feminist criticism became possible only after the fall of the Soviet empire. Even then, the psychoanalytical approach in Ukrainian Shakespeare Studies was still in its infancy. The only successful exception, apart from Hablevych, may be the article by Marina Novikova "Mifosvit *Makbeta*: volodari ta vidmy" [The Mythical World of Macbeth: Lords and Witches]. It examines the relationship between power and lust, stating that "Desire seeks power, power seeks authority, and authority seeks the absolute" (298). However, while Novikova regards lust as a truly destructive feeling, Hablevych sees it as a productive and pro-creative force that needs to be controlled (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple]). Strictly speaking, Maria Hablevych's ideas might be regarded as pioneering ones in the fields of translation and literary studies in Ukraine. Her approach to poetic Shakespeare has largely been neglected by other scholars who focused on Freud's approach to Shakespeare. Hablevych treats the *Sonnets* as a self-introspection of the poetic soul (Hablevych, *Svitlo i sutin* [The Light and Darkness] 29). She draws parallels with the Freudian triad, which identifies the *id* as an instinctual part of the mind, the *ego* as the rational part, and the *superego* as responsible for complying with social norms (Freud, *Vstup do psykhoanalizu* [Introduction to Psychoanalysis] 546).

Hablevych departs from the Freudian interpretation of the *superego* as a moral imperative. She claims that the 'Fair Youth' is only to a certain extent comparable with the *superego* – that is, in the sense that perfection might result in pride (Freud, *Vstup do psykhoanalizu* [Introduction to Psychoanalysis] 532). Hablevych claims that the 'Fair Youth' in his poetic form actually serves as a mirror for the author to express and admire himself. The Youth is also the textual intermediary between the poet, expressing ideal love, and his 'Real Reader', who should be able to recognize this pure feeling (Hablevych, "Komentari" [Commentaries] 300). For Hablevych, love in the Freudian sense is self-love; for her, Shakespeare's love is a selfless altruistic feeling rather than sexual desire (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 131). The 'Fair Youth' is the manifestation of pure love, devoid of earthly lust, which the poet strives to achieve for himself. The image of the young man, the author's "sweet self" (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 128), i.e. his textual reflection, is even more complex. The author's *superego* – reflected in a reading of the 'Fair Youth' as mirroring the author – is also perfect love. This is channelled to the reader, and thus, reveals more altruistic features than Freud's reading of the *superego* (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 131).

Shakespeare's authorial self also reveals itself in the simultaneous presence of the 'Conscious', the 'Subconscious', and the 'Unconscious' mind (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 100). Hablevych argues that this model can be traced in the poem *A Lover's Complaint*, in which an old man plays the part of the Conscious; a seducer, a young man, a creative spirit, incarnates the Subconscious; and a woman embodies the Unconscious. In the *Sonnets*, (most of the Fair Youth cycle and a few in the Dark Lady cycle), this pattern slightly shifts: the poet's voice relates to the conscious, the reason, while his soul correlates with the unconscious, where both love and lust reside (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 129). His subconscious serves as a decisive element in giving preference to the pure heavenly love over the down-to-earth lust. In Freudian terms, the Conscious stands for a keenly aware mind, the Unconscious involves feelings and experiences, often desires, while the Subconscious bridges them together (Freud, *Vstup do psykhoanalizu* [Introduction to Psychoanalysis] 546). It is the young man, who channels love and unites all three characters. Love, in Hablevych's interpretation, is perceived as a stark creative drive, assisting the poet to produce his output: creative literary works (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 122).

This interpretation falls in line with the idea of creativity as a means for self-expression and self-exploration. Though Freud sees self-expression as a peculiarity primarily in psychological novels rather than poetry, we find his ideas also resonant in Hablevych's treatment of Shakespeare's poetic output. This is due to the fact that

she interprets Shakespeare's literary works as a unified entity. In Freud's *The Poet and the Activity of Fantasy* (1907), an author's ideal ego is reflected in the main character of a literary work (Freud, "Poet i fantazuvannia" [Creative Writers and the Activity of Day-Dreaming] 89). Freud claims that the author tends to split his 'self' into part-selves through self-reflection and these would then embody conflicting experiences of his life in his characters (Freud, "Poet i fantazuvannia" [Creative Writers and the Activity of Day-Dreaming] 89). One such contradictory encounter is the division of love and lust. According to Hablevych, this can also be found in Shakespeare. The poet splits his self, assigning his better part, i.e. pure love, to the 'Fair Youth' and lust to the female 'Dark Lady' (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 230), in a binary-centred gender approach.

Additionally, Hablevych posits that Shakespeare's characters are situational and psychological constructs – whether they appear in Shakespeare's dramatic or his poetic works (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 136). In her view, not only the poet, but readers, too, may identify themselves with Shakespearean characters. These were designated as abstract philosophical and psychological models but with Shakespeare's noble and intelligent contemporaries in mind (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 132). Due to internal criticism, a 'Real Reader's' response, by, for e.g. a wealthy aristocrat, might then be rather unwelcome or too topical. External criticism, in fact, is why Hablevych recognizes a pensive mood in sonnets 27–32: the clouded sun of these sonnets reflects the disheartened author (Hablevych, "Komentari" [Commentaries] 243) due to negative criticism. Following such a reading, Hablevych connects the tonality of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* to the dramas that appeared simultaneously; she then draws parallels between the reader-response of the one (drama) to the poet's reflection in the other (poetry), specifically the *Sonnets*.

Texts as Mirror, Characters as Self: Translation

Hablevych's thinking on the "incorporation of the author's self in a text" caused her to work with the Ukrainian translators Dmytro Pavlychko, who revised his first translation of the *Sonnets* (1984–1986) based on Hablevych's thorough critique in 1998 ("Komentari" [Commentaries]). Hablevych's later collaboration with another translator, Natalia Butuk in 2011, demonstrates an even closer cooperation, due to a greater amount of editorial interventions. Notably, in both publications, Hablevych's influence is apparent: both feature the original text of the 1609 *Sonnets* as well as illustrations selected by Hablevych. Pavlychko's translation contains extensive scholarly commentaries on the context of the sonnets. Butuk's version

was later intended as a second edition, similar to Pavlychko's, but with a more pronounced editorial intervention of Hablevych. So far, it has not come into being. As a whole, Hablevych's impact on the understanding of Shakespeare's Sonnets in Ukraine is undeniable.

The following paragraphs will exemplify Hablevych's input into the *Sonnets*' interpretation with its further reflection in two Ukrainian translations, both edited by Hablevych, as described in the above sections, with regard to two specific pieces of the Sonnet cycle. The perceived complexity of the authorial self of Shakespeare, as interpreted by Hablevych, can be demonstrated in the example of Sonnet 10. It quite clearly shows the poet's introspection. As Maria Hablevych highlights, in this sonnet poetic drama evolves, where the Author draws a distinct line between love and lust for the first time ("Komentari" [Commentaries] 218). We shall also briefly touch upon Sonnet 62, as it contains a vivid metaphor of a looking-glass (mirror), which acquires the features of Lacanian interpretation in Hablevych's critical reading.

Shakespeare's Sonnet 10, one of the so-called procreation sonnets, presents a harsh critique against the 'Fair Youth', which is indicated in the *Commentaries* (1998) on the original lines:

For shame, deny that thou bear'st love to any,
 Who for thy self art so unprovident;
 Grant if thou wilt, thou art beloved of many,
 But that thou none lov'st is most evident:
 For thou art *so possessed with murd'rous hate*,
 That 'gainst thy self thou stick'st not to conspire,
 Seeking that beauteous roof to ruinate
 Which to repair should be thy chief desire.
 O change thy thought, that I may change my mind,
 Shall hate be fairer lodged than gentle love?
 Be as thy presence is, gracious and kind,
 Or to thy self at least kind-hearted prove,
 Make thee an other self for love of me,
 That beauty still may live in thine or thee

(Hablevych, "Klasyka vdoma. Shakespeare. Komentari do Sonneti 10" [Classics at Home. Shakespeare. Commentaries on Sonnet 10]; our emphasis)

Hablevych maintains that the addressee is the poet himself rather than a friend or the 'Fair Youth' only (Hablevych, "Komentari" [Commentaries] 215). Here, she asserts, the poet's *I* emerges quite distinctly. The sonnet reveals an appeasement of the author's artistic *selves* and the creation of another *self*, as a leverage for his

conflict that Hablevych attributes to his soul ("Komentari" [Commentaries] 218). The author, considered as an 'I', in fact, is aware of his unconscious (i.e. his soul) as an active, artistic power (Hablevych, "Komentari" [Commentaries] 219). As a result, Hablevych argues, the 'Conscious' holds a conversation with the 'Unconscious'. The conscious part undertakes to compose poetic lines, intended for a reader. The poet's ultimate goal is to phrase his vision of love and eventually impose on or transmit this vision to the reader. With a necessary degree of creative effort, a reader should, as a consequence, easily decode the authorial intention (Hablevych, "Komentari" [Commentaries] 215) and his concept of love. Shakespeare's type of love in this sonnet, Hablevych argues, contains kindness and grace and is devoid of lust, as has been explained further above. Furthermore, the poet attempts to convince his reader that ideal love should 'live in thine' (l. 14) – and proliferate in others (Hablevych, "Komentari" [Commentaries] 215).

Hablevych ponders that the poet had formerly cherished his sweet self as a producer of love. However, the recurrent topic of Sonnet 10 is love connected to beauty, but in contrast to lust. Hablevych states that the 'Unconscious' is the source of love, showing itself in the "sweet" sonnets, thus poetry in general. The poet's soul, though, is tuned for writing other pieces, too, e.g. drama, in quite a different mood "possess'd by murderous hate" (l. 5). Hablevych distinguishes that the poet despises himself for a persistent feeling of lust, though he had tried to eradicate it. Hablevych discusses how far love and lust are realised by the author in his different writings with regard to her critical interpretation of the Fair Youth as the embodiment of pure love and the better part of the author's soul, and the Dark Lady as the bearer of lust.

Hablevych applies Schleiermacher's circle to her analysis (Hablevych, *Svitlo Shekspirovoho khramu* [The Light of Shakespeare's Temple] 45) by placing the sonnets in question within a broader context of Shakespeare's literary works and attempting to explain them on a psychological level. To safeguard himself from becoming purely a writer of lust and giving in to hatred, the poet, Hablevych ascertains, urges himself to create a third dimension – "an other self" (Sonnet 10, l. 13). This part of his soul would be responsible for prophesying true "gentle love" (l. 10), while his unconscious 'I' is occupied with the portrayal and despal of lust in works such as *Titus Andronicus* (Hablevych, "Komentari" [Commentaries] 218). This way, Sonnet 10 can be read as the poet's attempt to find a common ground between his 'Conscious' and his 'Unconscious'. In the interpretation of Hablevych, one part of the author writes about lust, "an other self" (Sonnet 10, l. 13) concentrates on love. As such, Shakespeare could uphold a noble idea of love.

The presence of this line of thinking about the sonnet is quite different in the two Ukrainian translations of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in the independent Ukraine Hablevych is associated with, those by Dmytro Pavlychko and Natalia Butuk.

The original closing lines of Sonnet 10 end with the following couplet: “Make thee an other self for love of me, / That beauty still may live in thine or thee” (Sonnet 10, 13–14). Dmytro Pavlychko translates this as follows: “Будь і в душі таким, яким ти є / На вид, що сяє й ласку роздає!” (Shakespeare, *Sonety* [Sonnets] 25). In English, this re-translates as “Stay in your heart what you are / Shining and giving out affection!”.² As such, the creation of an alternative authorial *self* is not perceptible. Rather, Pavlychko emphasizes the need to remain in the same perfect state.

Natalia Butuk’s translation “Чи задля мене – свій лиши відбиток, / Аби краса могла хоч в ньому жити” reads “Or for me, just leave your imprint, / So that beauty may live in it” (Shakespeare, *Shakespeares Sonnets. Shekspirovi sonety* 10), when translated back into English. As such, this version places a greater emphasis on the poet’s development, rendering the original idea quite precisely. Such an interpretation allows us to firmly place the sonnet in the ‘Procreation’ cycle with its strong theme of producing an heir. According to Hablevych, this heir would then be a corresponding literary work written by Shakespeare around the same time. So, while one part of the author writes *Titus Andronicus* and *Henry VIII*, his “sweet self” (Hablevych, “Komentari” [Commentaries] 219) is absent. Then, “an other self” (Sonnet 10, l. 13) preserves the best feelings by the author in the sonnet. This reading is presented rather differently by the two Ukrainian translators but both allude to Hablevych’s thought.

Another instance of authorial introspection is traceable in Sonnet 62. Hablevych claims that the poet presents his second *self* – a “thee” but refers to a “myself”, condensed in the ‘Fair Youth’ and aimed at the reader of his poetic word (Hablevych, “Komentari” [Commentaries] 275). Hablevych argues that the ‘Fair Youth’ mediates between the author and his ‘Real Reader’, through which the poet channels his soul’s beauty. She interprets “myself” as indicating a part of the poet’s soul, specifically the primary addressee of his words. In Sonnet 62, the author’s contemplation, i.e. Hablevych’s authorial introspection, is presented via “Me thinks no face so gracious is as mine, / No shape so true, no truth of such account” (ll. 5–6) and “But when my glass shows me my self indeed” (l. 9). These excerpts demonstrate an opposition between the ‘imaginary’ idea in lines 5–6, and the ‘real’ reflection as referred to in line 9. A physical mirror would reflect only real objects; instead, complex entities, such as the soul or truth, are reflected in a metaphorical mirror created by the poet. This ‘glass’ not only reflects images, but shows a true essence (Hablevych, “Komentari” [Commentaries] 275). Indeed, through this mirroring technique, readers are therefore even able to examine themselves.

The interpretation delineated above correlates with a Christian reading: it reminds one of the symbolic meaning of a magnifying glass-mirror, i.e. a looking-glass. Metaphorically, this can signify truth or wisdom, which one can achieve in

² Unless otherwise specified, all reverse translations are ours.

unity with one's Creator, e.g. in the Christian sense: "now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face" (1 Cor. 12, 13 qtd. in de Vries 323). The suggested reading allows to consider a religious interpretation that refers to Nature in the sense of being a reflection of God. This association of "glass" may be attributed to the Creation: God contemplates his own mind in His creation, i.e. nature, as in a mirror (de Vries). Consequently, a poet, another type of creator, contemplates his creations. Shakespeare's 'Fair Youth' can therefore be established as a better self with whom he aspires to unite in the "mirror" of his word, i.e. his sonnets. In this unity, the poet discovers the truth. However, he is also the "other self", urging readers to have similar associations and responses, and unite with their better selves through reading. The analysis of Sonnet 62 by Hablevych bears some resemblance to the Lacanian concept of the mirror stage, particularly, the formation of the *I* through transformation during the mirror stage: the image, with a promise of an identity as a mere mirage, leaves the observer (the poet and later the reader) longing to return to this wholesome *self* (Lacan 441). This wholesome *self*, according to Hablevych, is an idealised man with all his "earthly" desires, such as lust, removed from his love. The image also features comparisons to his great predecessors, "the tanned antiquity" (l. 10), such as Ovid or Horace, whose imagery the poet borrows and develops further (Hablevych, "Komentari" [Commentaries] 275). In her Lacanian-like reading, Hablevych observes the poet's desire to unite with his 'Imaginary' representing his better *self*, embodied in the Fair Youth. He possesses a deep understanding, he has an 'inner eye' for truth and beauty as part of a pure heavenly love, which the poet celebrates and hopes to recognise in others.

Such an interpretation of a strife for improvement coincides with the symbolic meaning of the face as "a mirror of one's character" (Vries 174). A "gracious" face (Sonnet 62, 5) mirrors an outward manifestation of the soul (Hablevych, "Klasyka vdoma. Shakespeare. Komentari do Sonnetta 62" [Classics at Home. Shakespeare. Commentaries on Sonnet 62]); hence, the Fair Youth as the poet's personification is indeed insightful, Hablevych argues. His beautiful face demonstrates an inner truth which is then conveyed to the reader (Hablevych, "Komentari" [Commentaries] 275). Reading this in a broader context, the mirror might be interpreted as the poet's literary works, which show the reader the true essence of things. In Lacanian terms, the mirror of the poetic works shows an ideal image. For example, this highlights a poet whose heart is primarily occupied by pure love and who is able to convey this to his readership. They, in turn, have the ability to conceive of his ideas. Therefore, the relationship between the author and his works may be described as the connection between the above-explained *ego* and the *mirror* itself.

Both Ukrainian translators, Pavlychko (1998) and Butuk (2011), maintain key indicators of the perceived author's self-reference in their versions. As will become evident, Butuk can be interpreted as closer to the original in her rendering of the glass metaphor. Shakespeare's original excerpt reads: "But when my glass shows

me my self indeed / Beated and chopped with tanned antiquity, / Mine own self-love quite contrary I read: / Self, so self-loving were iniquity” (ll. 9–12) (Hablevych, “Klasyka vdoma. Shakespeare. Komentari do Sonneta 62” [Classics at Home. Shakespeare. Commentaries on Sonnet 62]). Pavlychko shifts the emphasis to the subject performing the action: Коли ж покаже люстро вид правдивий, / Посічений, побитий давниною – Відчитую інакше гонор хтивий: / Це гріх – так любоватися собою (Shakespeare, *Sonety [Sonnets]* 77), which retranslates into English as “And as I look at myself in the glass / I find my old face full of wrinkles, / I perceive self-love as a delusion / A shameless delusion I’ve taken to.” As such, the complex meaning of the above interpretation of the mirror is obscured because the emphasis is shifted to the observer’s action. As a result, the union with the ‘Imaginary’ is less perceivable and a beneficial self-analysis is lost.

Butuk, on the other hand, translates these lines differently: “Та як на себе я в свічадо гляну – / На тятий зморшками мій давній лик, / Сприймаю себелюбство як оману / Безсовісну, що я до неї звик” (Shakespeare, *Shakespeares Sonnets. Shekspirovi sonety* 62). Translated back into English, this reads: “When the glass shows the true face, / The bruised, battered face of old. / I read it differently, this lustful pride: / It is a sin to so admire oneself.” She preserves the subject, completing the action as a mirror showing “me” (l. 9). Her translation enables a psychoanalytical interpretation of the Sonnet, as it clearly refers to the poet’s self-introspection. This remains in line with Hablevych’s ideas.

Conclusion

The projection of an author-oriented as well as a reader-oriented literary theory onto a literary text reveals the complexity of Maria Hablevych’s approach towards Shakespeare’s work and their translations into Ukrainian. Her views are reflected in the Ukrainian versions of the *Sonnets*. The 1998 translation by Dmytro Pavlychko preserves psychological elements only to some extent. The 2011 translation by Natalia Butuk, however, is closer to Hablevych’s ideas about authorial introspection and self-analysis. Yet both translation projects are explicitly influenced by Hablevych’s critical thought.

In her understanding of Shakespeare, Hablevych advocates for a negotiated author-centred approach to interpreting Shakespeare in the spirit of hermeneutics. What is more, she calls for a firm phenomenological foundation in Shakespeare Studies methodology. The application of reader-response theory notwithstanding, the author’s centrality does not exclude a reader’s creative effort but rather stresses a respect, by the reader, for the author and their lacunae in a text. In a certain way then, this may be called a respect on Hablevych’s part for the reader’s imagination. According to her, it is therefore important that this aspect is taken into consideration

by translators, editors, and publishers, who might be tempted to overexplain the lacunae in a text when interpreting and translating. As such, Hablevych recognizes the categories of the 'Real' and the 'Implied Reader' of Shakespeare, and that they overlap in many aspects. Hablevych's take on them allows us to describe their relation as a constant interchange. Despite being doubtful of the unreserved applicability of psychoanalytic methods to Shakespeare, Hablevych uses Freudian concepts in her interpretation of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. In addition, her attempts to study the author's self in their context fall in line with Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, particularly with the urge to meet one's better self, one's 'Imaginary' in the 'Mirror' of one's works. Altogether, Hablevych's approach constitutes a somewhat eclectic yet thoroughly unique and sound critical approach to Shakespeare Studies. Her readings open the way for a more unified approach to the *Sonnets*. Her line of interpretation treats Shakespeare's poetic works as a display of the poet's psyche in relation to his readers. She also demonstrates their quest for self-improvement, ultimately serving an ideal, including that of Shakespeare's pure love presented in the sonnets.

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Britain, Shakespeare, and Ukraine
Interview with Prof. Nataliya Torkut,
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центр [Ukrainian Shakespeare Centre;
Ukraïns'kij Šekspirivs'kij centr]
by Dr. Olha Kvasnytsia, journalist
at the newspaper *День* [The Day; Den']

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Abstract

As part of this special issue, we are delighted to host a conversation by the journalist, Dr. Olha Kvasnytsia, with Prof. Nataliya Torkut, the Head of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Centre and Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham. The aim of this contribution is to highlight the intellectual and cultural activities of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Centre (USC), its history, conceptual foundations, and present-day mission in response to contemporary challenges and the shifting cultural and civic paradigm. The USC's objective involves selecting appropriate development strategies, particularly in areas of scholarships, translations, and public education. Its mission focuses on overcoming entrenched stereotypes about Shakespeare, de-ideologising his image, freeing it from the remnants of "vulgar sociologism" inherited from the past, and revitalising academic Shakespeare studies in Ukraine. It also seeks to expand research through interdisciplinary approaches, foster international collaboration with global Shakespearean institutions, and promote the multifaceted dissemination of the USC's achievements. This includes popularising Shakespeare's works through various forms, establishing a dedicated Shakespeare Library, founding and publishing specialised scholarly journals such as *Shakespeare Discourse* and *Renaissance Studies*, creating the *Ukrainian Shakespeare Portal* website, and organising *Shakespeare Days in Ukraine*, among other initiatives. With the onset of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the USC redefined its objectives, using public communication tools to decolonise perceptions of Ukraine and Ukrainian Shakespeare studies, particularly through the organisation of the first Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival. The activities of the USC – and Ukrainian Shakespeare scholarship as a whole, both in mainland Ukraine and in the diaspora – serve as a powerful example of cultural diplomacy, demonstrating the presence of Ukrainian culture within the global context.

Keywords: Ukrainian Shakespeare Centre, ESRA, conceptual foundations, mission, Craiova Shakespeare Festival, Russian-Ukrainian War.

O.K. [Olha Kvasnytsia]: Tell us the story behind the establishment of the USC. How did the idea come about? What is its concept?

N.T. [Nataliya Torkut]: Український Шекспірівський центр [The Ukrainian Shakespeare Centre; Ukraïns'kij Šekspirivs'kij centr] was established in the city of Zaporizhzhia at the Classical Private University in April 2009. The idea for its creation emerged from an academic discussion that unfolded in early 2009 within the Ukrainian humanities. This discussion was sparked by an article written by

Mark Sokolianskyi titled *The Crisis in Ukrainian Shakespeare Studies?* which was published on the popular website *LitAccent* of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy.¹ As a renowned specialist in English literature, the author analysed the state of Shakespeare studies in Ukraine during the 1990s and early 2000s, reaching rather disappointing conclusions.

Firstly, according to Mark Sokolianskyi, the process of translating Shakespeare's works in Ukraine has slowed down considerably compared to previous periods. It is worth noting that the first translations of Shakespeare's works into Ukrainian appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century, despite the Valuev Circular (1863) and the Ems Ukaz (1876),² which prohibited the use of the Ukrainian language in the fields of culture, education, and religion. During the Stalinist regime in Ukraine, many translators of Shakespeare's works were killed (Hnat Khotkevych, Yakiv Savchenko, Leonid Hrebinka, Maik Yohansen, and others), repressed (Vasyl Mysyk, Hryhorii Kochur, Dmytro Palamarchuk, Mykola Lukash, Sviatoslav Karavanskyi, and others), or forced to emigrate from the Soviet Union (Yurii Klen, Todos Osmachka, Vasyl Barka, Ihor Kostetskyi, and others).³ Despite resistance from the leadership of the Communist Party of Ukraine, who considered it unnecessary to translate all of Shakespeare's works into Ukrainian since a Russian-language edition *Shakespeare William. Complete Works in 8 Volumes* had already been published and every Ukrainian was capable of reading it, the Ukrainian intellectual elite managed to realize their goal. Between 1984–1986, *William Shakespeare: Works in Six Volumes* was published in Ukrainian, accompanied by extensive Afterwords and Notes. However, in the 1990s, according to M. Sokolianskyi, an obvious decline began in the interest of translators in Shakespeare's works.

Nevertheless, during the first two decades following Ukrainian independence (1991), several Ukrainian translations of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* appeared: most notably those by Dmytro Pavlychko (1998), Iryna and Oleksandr Selezinky (2005), and Heorhiy Pylypenko (2007). In 2008, new translations of several Shakespeare plays were published, including *Hamlet* by Yurii Andrukhovych⁴ and a two-volume collection by Oleksandr Hryaznov that featured *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Henry IV. Part I*, *King Henry IV. Part II*, and *King Lear*. In 2008, an illustrated

1 Sokolianskyi died on 5 March 2025.

2 Both of these decrees were manifestations of the imperial policy of Russification, which significantly intensified in the second half of the nineteenth century and led to a prolonged suppression of Ukrainian cultural development within the Russian Empire. Restrictions on the publication of translations and theatrical performances in Ukrainian were somewhat eased after 1905, but remained in effect until 1917. For more details, see Remy.

3 See Daria Moskvitina and Bohdan Korneliuk's article "Lost (in) Translations: How Ukrainian Shakespeareana Must Be Bigger Than We Think" in this volume.

4 In the following decade, this renowned writer would also publish translations of *Romeo and Juliet* (2016) and *King Lear* (2021).

edition of *Antony and Cleopatra* was published, translated, and annotated by the renowned Shakespeare scholar Maria Hablevych. Shortly thereafter, translations of the complete cycle of the *Sonnets*, rendered by Natalia Butuk with extensive commentary by Maria Hablevych (2011), Oleksandr Vyzhenko (2013), and others, were set to appear.

Secondly, as Sokolianskyi rightly pointed out, in Ukraine between the 1990s and early 2000s, only a few dissertations on Shakespeare were defended, and no substantial Shakespeare focused monographs were published. Indeed, academic Shakespeareana between 1990–2010, compared to previous periods, experienced a downturn. The achievements of Ukrainian Shakespeare scholars of past eras, although they bear the imprint of Soviet ideology,⁵ have not lost their value entirely. As early as the late nineteenth century, the first Ukrainian-language scholarly articles were published, authored by Ivan Franko, the founder of Ukrainian Shakespeare studies (Франко [Franko] 266–279). During the Soviet era, despite the ideological pressures, several monographs were published that proved highly valuable in terms of systematizing material on the Ukrainian reception of Shakespeare (Шаповалова Марія [Šapovalova Mariâ]) as well as theatrical productions (Ваніна [Vanina]). The extremely valuable experience of studying Shakespeare's works by representatives of the Ukrainian diaspora, in particular, Ihor Kostetskyi, Orysia Prokopiv, Iryna Makaryk and others,⁶ deserves attention. The time has come to examine Shakespeare's works through the prism of contemporary approaches.

The third point Sokolianskyi's article makes, and all the participants of the 2009 discussion agreed on, was that Ukrainian Shakespeare studies are not represented internationally, as there are no academic publications by Ukrainian scholars in journals outside the country, and no Ukrainian representatives attended international Shakespeare conferences and congresses. So Sokolianskyi's assessment concluded with a very appropriate emphasis:

Треба, нарешті, серйозніше замислитися над сучасним станом, а ще більше – над майбутнім українського шекспірознавства. Згадую при тому вислів одного

5 In this context, it is worth mentioning the collective scholarly monograph Вільям Шекспір [William Shakespeare; Viliam Shekspir; Vil'âm Šekspir]. Збірка статей [A Collection of Articles; Zbirka statei; Zbirka statej]. К.: Мистецтво [K.: Mistectvo], 1939, as well as Natalia Modestova' preface to the three-volume edition of Shakespeare's works: Н. Модестова [N. Modestova]. "Уільям Шекспір" [William Shakespeare; Uiliam Shekspir; Uil'âm Šekspir]. *Вибрані твори: У 3-х томах* [Vibrani твори: U 3-h tomah]. Київ [Kiïv] 1 (1964): 5–45.

6 For more details, see Марко Роберт Стех [Marko Robert Steh]. *Шекспір українською по той бік Залізної Завіси*. [Shakespeare in Ukrainian Beyond the Iron Curtain; Shekspir ukrainskoïu po toi bik Zaliznoi Zavisy; Šekspir ukrains'koïu po toj bik Zaliznoi Zavisi]. Київ: Українські пропілеї [Kiïv: Ukraïns'kî propileï] 1 (2024): 5–14.

солідного (нажаль, уже покійного) заокеанського історика і теоретика літератури ХТО?: «Стан шекспірознавства визначає культурний рівень літературної науки у кожній країні». Хтось сприйме цей вислів як перебільшення. Але, гадаю, варто поставитися до цих слів досвідченого вченого не просто як до цікавого парадокса. (Соколянський)⁷

[Treba, narešiti, serjozniše zamislitišâ nad sučasnim stanom, a še bil'se – nad majbutnim ukraïns'kogo šekspiroznastva. Zgaduï pri tomu visliv odnogo solidnogo (na žal', uže pokijnogo) zaokeans'kogo istorika i teoretika literaturi HTO?: «Stan šekspiroznastva viznačâe kul'turnij riven' literaturnoi nauki u kožnij kraïni». Htos' sprijme cej visliv âk perebil'sennâ. Ale, gadaû, varto postavitišâ do cih sliv dosvidčenogo včenogo ne prosto âk do cikavogo paradoksa. (Sokolâns'kij)]

The critical remarks Sokolianskyi made, albeit from Germany where he lived at that time but maintaining academic contact with Ukraine as the Ukrainian correspondent of the *Shakespeare World Bibliography*, and the author of several scholarly articles on Ukrainian Shakespeareana,⁸ not only became the subject of serious discussion in academic circles (Наливайко [Nalivajko]; Топкют [Torkut]) but also gave a powerful impetus to the development of Shakespeare studies in Ukraine.

The first step was the organization of the International Conference *The Poetic Universe of Shakespeare's Sonnets: Reception, Scholarly Interpretations, Translation*, which took place between 23–24 April 2009, in Zaporizhzhia. This academic forum was aimed not only at celebrating the 400th anniversary of the first publication of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* but also at bringing together Ukrainian philologists, translators, and theatre scholars interested in Shakespeare. The event was organized by the T. H. Shevchenko Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and Classic Private University. Among the distinguished guests of the conference were Mark Sokolianskyi (Lübeck), Balz Engler (Basel), and Paul Franssen (Utrecht). The conference gathered over 60 participants from 12 Ukrainian universities, who discussed the then-current state of Shakespeare

7 “We must finally start thinking seriously about the current state, and even more so about the future of Ukrainian Shakespeare studies. I recall a statement by a prominent (unfortunately, deceased) overseas historian and literary theorist: ‘The state of Shakespeare studies determines the cultural level of literary science in every country.’ Someone might take this statement as a hyperbole. But I think we should treat these words of an experienced scholar not just as an interesting paradox.”

8 See: *Бібліографічний покажчик опублікованих праць Марка Георгійовича Соколянського* [Bibliographic Index of Published Works by Mark Heorhiiiovych Sokolianskyi; Bibliohrafičnyi pokazhchyk opublikovanykh prats Marka Heorhiiiovycha Sokolianskoho; Bibliografičnij pokažčik opublikovanih prac' Marka Georgijoviča Sokolâns'kogo]. Харків [Harkiv], 2024. <https://library.khpg.org/index.php?id=1738165092>. Accessed 6 February 2026.

studies in Ukraine and concluded that it was necessary to join forces to intensify Shakespeare studies in the country. Two alternative strategies were debated: the creation of a national association of Shakespeare scholars or the establishment of a Shakespeare studies centre. The latter strategy prevailed, and the rest is history.

O.K.: Why did you choose to create a centre rather than an association, since many countries have Shakespeare associations that are working successfully?

N.T.: There are, indeed, a large number of national and international associations related to the works of William Shakespeare. The oldest is the German Shakespeare Society [Deutsche Shakespeare Gesellschaft], founded in 1864, to mark the 300th anniversary of the Bard. This year [2025], the French Association of Shakespeare Scholars [Société Française Shakespeare] celebrates its 50th anniversary. However, societies and associations are usually created when there is already a large group of people working on a common cause and sharing scholarly interests. In our case, it was necessary to create and strengthen such a community first, to unite people: the first conference had gathered scholars whose work related to Shakespeare (comparative studies, translation studies, Renaissance studies), but most of them would not have considered themselves Shakespeare scholars. The generation of scholars who had defended their dissertations on Shakespeare in Ukraine had already passed away by that time. As Mark Sokolianskyi rightly emphasized, the tradition of scholarly study of Shakespeare had been interrupted (Соколянський [Sokolianskyi]) and needed to be revived.

Having familiarized ourselves with the foundational texts written by the founders of the German Shakespeare Society,⁹ including Franz Dingelstedt's preface to his

⁹ This experience became the subject of analytical reflection in one of the chapters of the dissertation by my post-graduate student, Tetiana Brants. See also Т.В. Хитрова [T. Khytrova; T.V. Hitrova]. *Шекспірознавчий дискурс Німеччини XIX століття: механізми інституалізації* [Shakespearean Discourse in 19th Century Germany: Mechanisms of Institutionalization; Shekspiroznavchyi dyskurs Nimechchyny XIX stolittia: mekhanizmy instytualizatsii; Šekspiroznavčij diskurs Nimeččini XIX stolittâ: mehanizm iïnstutualizacii]. Запоріжжя [Zaporizhzhâ] 2008. Particularly valuable to us were the works of German scholars, such as Martin Lehnert, who, by examining the protocols of the first meetings, traces the peculiarities of the formation and development of the Shakespeare Society over a century, see: M. Lehnert. "Hundert Jahre Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft". *Jahrbuch der deutschen Shakespeare-Gesellschaft*. Weimar, 1964. 9–54; Robert Fricker analyses the political nature of the journal's publications. See: Fricker R. "Hundert Jahre Shakespeare-Jahrbuch". *Jahrbuch der deutschen Shakespeare-Gesellschaft [West]*. Bochum, 1964. 33–67; Walter Thomas demonstrates how deeply German Shakespeare studies understood the practical essence of the idea of creating a Shakespeare Society. See: W. Thomas. *Wilhelm Oechelhaeuser-Begründer der Deutschen Shakespeare-Gesellschaft*. Siegen, 1964.

work *Studien und Copien nach Shakespeare* [Studying and Imitating Shakespeare, 1858] and Wilhelm Öchelhäuser's manuscript *Ideen zur Gründung der Deutschen Shakespeare Gesellschaft* [Ideas for the Creation of a Shakespeare Society, 1863], we decided that the priorities outlined in these texts – namely, the popularization and research of Shakespeare's works, the creation of a Shakespeare library, and the establishment of a Shakespeare journal – were important and urgent for Ukrainians at the beginning of the twenty-first century. To some extent, the idea voiced in 1864 by the first president of the German Shakespeare Society, Hermann Ulrich, still holds relevance for the Ukrainian Shakespeare Centre: "The great dramatist should be freed from the captivity of his era, language, and nationality" (Ulrich).

O.K.: Did you face any specific challenges in setting up the Ukrainian Centre?

N.T.: Undoubtedly, every experience of creating a new project, while relying on certain previous models, has its own, unique specificity. It is determined by its prehistory, the characteristics of ethno-cultural mentality, as well as the immediate demands of the time. Among the tasks we faced, one of the priorities was overcoming the entrenched stereotypes in society and, to some extent, even in educational circles regarding the perception of Shakespeare as a rigid, monumentalized classic – one whom the Soviet authorities placed on a literary pedestal of iconostatic value alongside Pushkin and Shevchenko.¹⁰ Numerous cultural initiatives organized

¹⁰ The specific practice of 'canonizing authors' in the Soviet Union and the countries of the so-called socialist bloc, along with its origins, mechanisms, and consequences, has been thoroughly studied by Marko Pavlyshyn. In one of his works, he emphasizes: "У Східній Європі об'єктом пошани в літературі часто був не так текст, як особа, чи, точніше, сукупність біографії письменника, його творів та історичної ролі. Існують культи письменників — Пушкіна, Толстого й Достоевського в Росії, Шевченка, Лесі Українки і Франка на Україні, Купали і Коласа в Білорусі — які своєю спроможністю викликати пієтизм і ритуал не мають еквіваленту на Заході. Літературна канонізація в Радянському Союзі набирає форм, які в дечому нагадують канонізацію церковного святого. Письменник (особотекст!) посідає місце в серії собі подібних особотекстів, яку більш корисно розглядати не як канон, а як іконостас." [In Eastern Europe, literary reverence often focused not so much on the text itself as on the person — or, more precisely, on the combination of the writer's biography, works, and historical role. There exist writer cults — Pushkin, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky in Russia; Shevchenko, Lesia Ukrainka, and Franko in Ukraine; Kupala and Kolas in Belarus — which, in their capacity to inspire piety and ritual, have no equivalent in the West. Literary canonization in the Soviet Union took forms that, in some ways, resembled the canonization of a saint. The writer (a persona-text!) occupied a place within a series of similar persona-texts, which is better understood not as a canon, but as an iconostasis; U Shidnij Evropi ob'ëktom pošani v literaturi často buv ne tak tekst, âk osoba, či, točniše, sukupnist' biografiï pis'mennika, jogo tvoriv ta istoričnoi roli. Ĭsnuût' ku'ti pis'mennikiv — Puškina, Tolstogo j Dostoëvs'kogo v Rosiï, Ševčenko, Lesi Ukraïнки i Franka na Ukraïni, Kupali i Kolasa v Bilorusi — âki svoëû spromožnistû

by Soviet authorities, such as Shakespeare Jubilees (1939, 1964, 1966) and various commemorative events held at universities, schools, theatres, city art centres, and village clubs across the USSR, were designed to glorify and celebrate Shakespeare as a 'socialist realist' and a 'people's dramatist' whose sympathies ostensibly aligned with the working masses.

Thus, a crucial task was the de-ideologization of Shakespeare's reception:¹¹ to liberate him from the remnants of the "vulgar sociology"¹² of the 1930s and 1960s, which continued to resurface in the media, finding its way into school textbooks and the academic discourse. And although the situation in Ukrainian literary studies remained highly challenging until the final decades of the Soviet regime, with its censorship and strict ideological control, the Shakespearean scholarship of Ukrainian researchers such as Dmytro Zatonskyi, Dmytro Nalyvaiko, Olena Alekseenko, Natalia Zhluktenko, and others challenged successfully the ideological constraints of previous decades and laid a solid foundation for the research to come.

viklikati piētizm i ritual ne maūt' ekvivalentu na Zahodi. Literaturna kanonizaciā v Radāns'komu Soūzi nabirāē form, āki v dečomu nagađuūt' kanonizaciū cerkovnogo svātogo. Pis'mennik (osobotekst!) posidaē misce v serii sobi podobnih osobotekstiv, āku bil'sh korisno rozglādati ne āk kanon, a āk ikonostas] (Павлишин [Pavlyshyn] 191).

- 11 For a more detailed examination of Shakespeare's reception in Soviet Ukraine, its representation in scholarly and journalistic texts, and its artistic resonance in the works of Ukrainian poets from the 1920s to the 1980s, see: Yurii Cherniak. "Shakespeare as a Sovietism: The Red Lines on the Map of the Ukrainian Shakespeareana." *Romanian Shakespeare Journal* 1 (2013): 12–17; Yurii Cherniak. "Key Topoi of the Ukrainian Shakespearean Discourse of the Late 19th – Mid 20th Century." *A Sea-Change into Something Rich and Strange: Shakespeare Studies in Contemporary Ukraine*. Lviv-Torun, 2020. 61–82; Nataliya Torkut and Yurii Cherniak. "Ukrainian Hamlet and 'Hamletizing' Ukraine: «Will you play upon this pipe?»." *Renesansni Studii* 22 (2014): 98–115.
- 12 Vulgar sociology is a method in Soviet literary studies that involves a simplistic ideological interpretation of literature through the lens of class struggle and socio-economic factors. It ignores the aesthetic, genre, and individual characteristics of a literary work, reducing its content and value to its conformity with Marxist-Leninist ideological principles. A literary work is evaluated primarily based on its alignment with the official Soviet doctrine and is not viewed as an aesthetic phenomenon but as a product of social conditions. The author is attributed exclusively with class intentions, and their works are interpreted as reflections of the interests of a particular social class. During Soviet times, the classics of world literature, including Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Balzac, were portrayed as 'supporters of the working people', regardless of the actual content of their works. For instance, in the USSR, Shakespeare was interpreted as a democrat and a realist, with the complexity of his worldview deliberately obscured. The personal lives and backgrounds of writers were regarded as key determinants of their creative output. For example, the emphasis on Shakespeare being the son of a craftsman was used to present him as a "representative of the working masses," even though this fact did not define the content of his plays.

O.K.: What exactly was the reception or interpretative tendency that needed to be stopped, and how did it manifest itself?

N.T.: In Soviet Ukraine, as in the USSR as a whole, the assumption that the socialist-realist Soviet interpretation of Shakespeare's work was *the* only correct one dominated for a long time. Soviet Shakespeare scholars were compelled to engage continuously with global Shakespearean scholarship to assert and defend this Soviet perspective.¹³ The ideologues of the communist regime regarded literature and literary studies as crucial components of the so-called 'common' cause:¹⁴ the ideological struggle against the culture and scholarship of the oppositional 'capitalist world'. The desire to enlist Shakespeare in the service of the authorities – using his prestige and works to disseminate ideological messages – was not unique to the Soviet reception of Shakespeare. Similar trends were evident across the 'socialist camp', particularly in Bulgaria, where, according to Shurbanov and Sokolova, the process of appropriation resulted in *Painting Shakespeare Red*, and in Romania, where, as Cinpoș emphasizes, even in the 1970s, the principle of "either red or dead" (19) dictated theatre policy.

A peculiar derivative of the deliberate socialist mythologization of William Shakespeare was the Soviet assertion of a supposedly natural connection between his artistic method and realism, regarded as the highest stage of literary development. The classification of Shakespeare as a realist writer – akin to Balzac or Dickens – persisted in school textbooks and academic studies for secondary school teachers. This not only narrowed and distorted Ukrainian audiences' perception of Shakespeare's work but also led to conceptual confusion regarding literary categories including the Renaissance and Realism. This must be regarded as a potential threat, as reception stereotypes ingrained in mass consciousness tend to be highly persistent. Moreover, 'the iconised classic' appeared rather unappealing to both readers and audiences in the twenty-first century.¹⁵

¹³ Irena R. Makaryk argues: "In criticism, Marx's and Engels's love of Shakespeare is cited in all preliminary remarks. Western views of *Hamlet* are labelled as Freudian, Protestant, melancholic, romantic or aesthetic – that is, as simplifications; and 'shallow psychological interpretations' are vigorously attacked, while Soviet views are lauded for stressing the plebeian origins of Shakespeare, emphasizing the «realism» of his work, the use he made of folk elements (songs, superstitions, rites, and fables), and the class struggle of the Renaissance" (Makaryk 89–290).

¹⁴ According to Lenin's statement, which during 70 years of Soviet rule served as a guideline for action, "Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, 'a cog and a screw' of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically-conscious vanguard of the entire working class. Literature must become a component of organised, planned and integrated Social-Democratic Party work" (Lenin 25–26).

¹⁵ For an exploration of how Shakespeare was represented in the pages of Ukrainian newspapers and magazines, and the peculiarities of the perception of his figure and works by the Ukrainian mass reader/theatre audience in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, see:

O.K.: What approaches did you envision for overcoming entrenched stereotypes, and were you able to implement them successfully?

N.T.: The process of reception is not linear; it is discursive and influenced by numerous factors. In the case of Shakespeare, he is present in the contemporary world in various forms: texts, their translations and interpretations, theatrical performances, intertextuality, intermedial projections, digital representations – including websites, computer games, memes, etc. For example, the publication of the new translations of three Shakespeare tragedies by one of the most prominent contemporary writers, Yurii Andrukhovych, has sparked a Shakespearean boom. Illustrated by the reputed artist Vladyslav Yerko, these books (published by A-BA-BA-HA-LA-MA-HA) became bestsellers from the outset, and theatrical productions based on these translations have been sell-outs for several years now.¹⁶ It is quite evident that Yurii Andrukhovych's postmodern translations help bring the text closer to the audience and significantly increase the number of Shakespeare admirers.

Defining a strategy to overcome the stereotypes formed in previous times, we primarily saw this as demonstrating the unique semantic and aesthetic potential of Shakespeare's works in Ukraine. On the one hand, this involves various forms of popularising Shakespeare in Ukraine¹⁷ (such as organising Shakespeare-centric educational events, radio and television broadcasts, competitions for schoolchildren and students,¹⁸ etc.); on the other hand, it encompasses conducting

Ольга Квасниця [Olha Kvasnytsia; Ol'ga Kvasnică]. "Шекспір у сучасному медіа дискурсі: присутність чи вигнання" [Shakespeare in Contemporary Media Discourse: Presence or Exile; Shekspir u suchasnomu media dyskursi: prysutnist chy vyhnannia; Šekspir u sučasnomu media diskursi: prisutnist' či vignannâ]. *Ренесансні студії* [Renesansni studii] 29–30 (2018): 118–153.

¹⁶ The success of the production of *Hamlet* in Andrukhovych's translation is mentioned in the article: "Шекспір як дзеркало епохи. Інтерв'ю Ольги Квасниці з професором Маклом Добсоном" [Shakespeare as a Mirror of the Age. Interview by Olha Kvasnytsia with Professor Macle Dobson; Shekspir yak dzerkalo epokhy. Interv'iu Olhy Kvasnytsi z profesorom Maklom Dobsonom; Šekspir âk dzerkalo epohi. Ĥinterv'û Ol'gi Kvasnici z profesorom Maklom Dobsonom]. *Ренесансні студії* [Renesansni studii] 29–30 (2021): 288–300. See also the article "«Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind»: Reading Vladyslav Yerko's Illustrations to Shakespeare in Ukrainian" by Darya Lazarenko and Yurii Cherniak in this volume.

¹⁷ See: N. Torkut. "Shakespeare Scholarship in Modern Ukraine: Activity Directions, Challenges and Achievements" *Держава та регіони. Серія: Гуманітарні науки* [Deržava ta regioni. Seriâ: Gumanitarni nauki] 1 (2015): 52–54.

¹⁸ Ю.І. Черняк [Ŭ.ĭ. Černâk]. "Всеукраїнський шекспірівський конкурс імені Віталія Кейса: історія, сучасність і перспективи [The All-Ukrainian Shakespeare Competition Named after Vitaliy Keis: History, Present, and Prospects; Vseukrainskyi shekspirivskyi konkurs imeni Vitaliia Keisa: istoriia, suchasnist i perspektyvy; Vseukrains'kij šekspirivs'kij konkurs imeni Vitaliâ Kejsa: istoriâ, sučasnist' i perspektivi]. *Ренесансні студії* [Renesansni studii] 37–38 (2023): 178–194.

scientific research (dissertations, master and diploma theses, articles) and the multi-directional dissemination of their results (by organising scientific conferences,¹⁹ publishing articles, presenting materials at academic fora). In 2010, the USC launched a specialised scientific journal: *Shakespearean Discourse*. However, we managed to publish only three issues, and after 2013, due to lack of funding, the journal ceased to exist. Today, Shakespeare studies articles in Ukraine are published in the professional journal *Ренесансні студії* [Renaissance Studies; Renesansni studii].²⁰

The Centre's work is presented on the website 'Ukrainian Shakespeare Portal' (<https://shakespeare.znu.edu.ua/>), which currently serves organisational, informational, and resource functions. The site provides all of Shakespeare's texts in Ukrainian translations (some works are presented in multiple translations), highlights key milestones in recent Ukrainian Shakespeare studies, and features recent publications. It also showcases events and activities initiated and organised by the Centre.

O.K.: What are the main areas of the Centre's work: research, translation, education?

N.T.: The areas were initially defined when the USC was established. Primarily, they involve coordinating the Shakespeare-related activities of Ukrainian scholars,

¹⁹ About International conferences held by the Ukrainian Shakespeare Centre, see: Н. М. Торкут [N. M. Torkut]. "Міжнародна шекспірознавча конференція в Класичному приватному університеті" [International Shakespeare Studies Conference at the Classical Private University; Mizhnarodna shekspiroznavcha konferentsiia v Klasychnomu pryvatnomu universyteti; Mižnarodna šekspiroznavča konferenciâ v Klasičnomu privatnomu universiteti]. *Держава та регіони. Серія: Гуманітарні науки* [Deržava ta regioni. Seriâ: Gumanitarni nauki] 1–2 (2009): 199–202; Н. Жлуктенко [N. Žluktenko] "Інтер/національний Шекспір" [Inter/national Shakespeare; Inter/natsionalnyi Shekspir; ĭnter/nacional'nij Šekspir]. *Ренесансні студії* [Renesansni studii] 14–15 (2010): 297–300; Н. Торкут [N. Torkut]. "Український шекспірівський центр: між викликом і покликом" [Ukrainian Shakespeare Center: Between a Challenge and a Calling; Ukrainskyi shekspirivskyi tsentr: mizh vyklykom i poklykom; Ukraïns'kij šekspirivs'kij centr: miž viklikom i poklikom]. *Всесвіт* [Vsesvit] 3–4 (2016): 164–168; Н. Торкут [N. Torkut]. "«Звихнувся час...», або чи допоможе нам Шекспір не заснути під час Армагеддону: філософські розмисли стосовно тематики сучасних шекспірівських конференцій" [The Time is out of Joint..., or Will Shakespeare Help Us Stay Awake during Armageddon: Philosophical Reflections on the Themes of Contemporary Shakespearean Conferences; Zvykhnuvsia čas..., або chy dopomozhe nam Shekspir ne zasnuti pid čas Armaheddonu: filosofski rozmysly stosovno tematyky suchasnykh shekspirivskykh konferentsii; Zvihnusâ čas..., або či dopomože nam Šekspir ne zasnuti pidčas Armageddonu: filosofs'ki rozmisli stosovno tematiki sučasnih šekspirivs'kih konferencij]. *Ренесансні студії* [Renesansni studii] 33–34 (2021): 165–187.

²⁰ See the archive of the journal on its cite: <http://rs-journal.kpu.ua/>. Accessed 18 December 2024.

which include disseminating information about new publications and organising events (conferences, public lectures, discussions, workshops, competitions, theatre festivals, etc.). Its success is evident: today we have a vibrant and effective Ukrainian Shakespearean community, bringing together representatives from various professions (literary critics, translators, theatre scholars, critics and practitioners, philosophers, school teachers, and journalists) from different regions of Ukraine, all united by a shared interest in Shakespeare. Another key area of the Centre's work is research. Under the Centre's auspices, dissertations, master's theses, and diploma theses are supported; its meetings provide a platform for testing new ideas, exchanging views, discussing recent publications by Shakespeare scholars, and reviewing the results of Ukrainian participation in international Shakespeare conferences, congresses, and more. Since its establishment, USC members have defended nine dissertations in Shakespeare studies, and more than ten Ukrainian dissertations now feature chapters on Shakespeare research.

The USC has established partnerships with many international Shakespeare institutions and associations, including the European Shakespeare Research Association (ESRA), the Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham in the UK, the Folger Library (Washington D.C., USA), the Romanian International Shakespeare Centre (Timișoara, Romania), the German Shakespeare Society, the French Shakespeare Association, the Shakespeare Centre of Tbilisi University, the Armenian Association of Shakespeare Studies, and others. These partnerships have become particularly significant during the full-scale war of Russia against Ukraine, as the global Shakespearean community actively supports the Ukrainian people in their just struggle against the aggressor. Many international Shakespeare scholars have joined the volunteer group 'Shakespeare,' which we established at the end of 2022. With donations from the Shakespearean community, we have purchased a vehicle, drones, night vision cameras, thermal imagers, power banks, military-use radios, army boots for intelligence specialists, and medicines for the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The drone, which we purchased thanks to the director of the Shakespeare Institute, Michael Dobson, who donated his award from the Craiova International Shakespeare Festival in the summer of 2022 to the needs of the Ukrainian army, was named 'William Shakespeare' by the scouts. Thus, we have every reason to say that Shakespeare is fighting on the side of Ukraine.

The educational, or more precisely, wide disseminating area of the Centre is achieved through various initiatives for the general public, including TV and radio programmes, intellectual competitions for schoolchildren, and contests for students. Recently, Centre members Daria Moskvitina and Bohdan Korneliuk launched the Telegram channel *Шекспір сказав* [Shakespeare Said; *Šekspir skazav*], which shares engaging insights into Shakespeare's life and works, as well as updates on contemporary theatre and cultural events related to Shakespeare. As

part of these efforts, Serhii Vynnychenko, a marketer and founder of the blogging platform Театральна риболовля [Theatrical Fishing; Teatral'na ribolovlâ],²¹ has collaborated with the USC to launch a factual study on Ukrainian theatre's engagements with Shakespeare during the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian War.²²

The USC does not translate Shakespeare's works itself, but its members remain actively involved in the field of translation. They organise presentations of new translations, host meetings with authors, write scholarly articles on translations, and systematise information about the history of Ukrainian translations of Shakespeare.

O.K.: What is the format of representing the history of translated Shakespeareana? Some of the translations, such as *Hamlet* by Mykhailo Rudnytskyi which was created in Nazi-occupied Lviv, or translations by emigrants such as Todos Osmachka, Vasyl Barka, Sviatoslav Karavanskyi, and others, were largely unknown in Ukraine for a long time. Do you create a repository of texts or develop reference books?

N.T.: One of the Centre's successful projects is the creation of a Shakespearean Library, unique in Ukraine, with over 4,000 publications on Shakespeare and Renaissance studies. The majority of these were generously donated by our international colleagues, in particular by Helmut Bonheim, Adolf Pasche, Edward Doerksen, Mary Smith, Vitalii Keis, Michael Dobson and others. Thanks to the efforts of Ukrainian diaspora scholars, particularly Irena Rima Makaryk and Marko Robert Stech, our library collections include translations and academic works by diaspora Shakespeare scholars. We are planning to digitise the library's collections, focusing primarily on lesser-known translations of Shakespeare's works.

An engaging and highly productive way of presenting information about *Hamlet* translations and its first production on the Ukrainian professional stage has been the virtual bilingual museum *#Hamlet-UA: Act 1, Scene 1943*.²³ We hope to

²¹ This online platform has expanded into a full-fledged knowledge base on contemporary theatre, including a catalogue of premieres by year, reviews, and analytical explorations of theatre seasons. Significant attention is given to Shakespearean productions by Ukrainian theatres, as evidenced by Serhii Vynnychenko's collection of original works on Shakespearean themes (<http://www.t-fishing.co.ua/product/william-shakespeare>) and research on the history of productions of individual plays. As of 2024, materials have been gathered on stage interpretations of *Hamlet* (<http://www.t-fishing.co.ua/product/hamlet>) and *Macbeth* (<http://www.t-fishing.co.ua/product/macbeth>). Accessed 18 January 2025.

²² <http://www.t-fishing.co.ua/product/shakespeare-in-war>. Accessed 18 January 2025.

²³ Created to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the first Ukrainian production of *Hamlet* from 1943, this exhibition provides details about the production, its creators, and their subsequent fate but also features aspects on the history of Ukrainian translations from Pavlo Svetsitsky's 1865 version to Mykhailo Rudnytsky's 1943 rendition. Please see the article "Virtual Museum

continue working with the virtual museum format in the future, as our experience shows that it attracts both experts and general Shakespeare enthusiasts, while also being actively used in school and university curricula. Additionally, the bilingual presentation of exhibit information makes the museum accessible to international visitors, contributing to the decolonisation of knowledge about Ukraine.

O.K.: You have been organising the project *Shakespeare Days in Ukraine* for many years. Have you managed to reach a wider public audience than the academic community?

N.T.: This annual project, launched in 2018, has significantly expanded the USC's reach: several events were held as part of these *Shakespeare Days in Ukraine*, tailored for diverse audiences. Scholars and students can attend public online lectures by renowned Shakespeare experts, schoolchildren engage in competitions and quests, while specialists in translation, theatre studies, and literary studies participate in masterclasses and panel discussions. The USC's public engagement has also grown through another key initiative – the 'All-Ukrainian Vitalii Keys Contest for Student Research and Creative Shakespeare Projects'²⁴, which has been held annually since 2010. Over the years, more than a thousand students have participated; for some, this contest became the starting point of their journey in Shakespeare studies. Notably, past winners such as Bohdan Korneliuk, Viktoriia Marinesko, Ksenia Boryskina (Skakun), and Natalia Gutaruk later defended their doctoral theses on Shakespeare.

O.K.: During the Russian-Ukrainian war, which questions are the Centre's main focus?

N.T.: Since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian War in February 2014, the Centre's priorities have shifted to some extent. Established tasks remain ongoing, however, our international engagement has become increasingly vital. Prior to Russia's full-scale invasion, global interest in the geopolitical threats posed by Putin's actions – such as the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of

«#HAMLET_UA: ACT 1, SCENE 1943» in the Context of Decolonizing Knowledge about Ukraine" by Svitlana Deineka, Nataliya Torkut, and Roman Lavrentii in this volume.

²⁴ See: Юрій Черняк [Yurii Chernyak; Ůrij Černâk]. "Всеукраїнський шекспірівський конкурс імені Віталія Кейса: історія, сучасність і перспективи" [All-Ukrainian Shakespeare Competition Named after Vitalii Keis: History, Present and Prospect; Vseukrainskyi shekspirivskyi konkurs imeni Vitaliia Keisa: istoriia, suchasnist i perspektyvy; Vseukraïns'kij šekspirivs'kij konkurs imeni Vitaliâ Kejsa: istoriâ, sučasnist' i perspektivi]. *Ренесансні студії* [Renesansni studii] 37–38 (2023): 178–194.

southeastern Ukraine – was limited. Recognising the urgency of the situation, we redirected our contributions at international Shakespearean fora to draw attention to the unfolding tragedy in Ukraine. In the current context of the full-scale war since 2022, we see our mission as leveraging every opportunity for public discourse to foster support for Ukraine within the Shakespeare community. By examining Shakespeare's reception in Ukraine, we aim not only to highlight its unique characteristics but also to explore its intersection with broader socio-historical processes, including war and contemporary societal challenges. Ukrainian Shakespeareana, encompassing theatre productions, translations, scholarly research, and educational initiatives, serves as both a reflection of and a response to political realities. We firmly believe that Shakespeare remains a shared cultural value and that public diplomacy is a powerful tool for shaping public opinion and influencing foreign policy decisions. Moreover, during the war, an extremely important task for the USC has been to disseminate truthful knowledge about the history and achievements of Ukrainian Shakespeare studies within the global sphere of Shakespeare scholarship. This is one of the key components of the process of decolonising knowledge about Ukraine in the world, a need that has long been overdue.

O.K.: The decolonisation of Ukraine's reputation²⁵ around the world is a task of geopolitical significance, especially in the context of the current Russian-Ukrainian war. Has something similar occurred within Ukrainian Shakespeare studies in the broader context of global Shakespeare scholarship?

N.T.: Undoubtedly, we are fully aware of the importance, scale, and complexity of this task. For a long time, global Shakespeare studies did not perceive Ukrainian Shakespeareana as an independent and, therefore, distinctive phenomenon, but

²⁵ About the essence and the necessity of decolonization of the knowledge about Ukraine see: Оксана Пахльовська [Oksana Pakhlovskia; Oksana Pahl'ovs'ka]. *Ave, Europa!* Kyiv, 2008; Lyuty, Taras. "Scribes of Kyiv Conquer Muscovy". *Ukraine! Unmuted. Essays*. Lviv, 2022. 149–157; Riabchuk, Mykola. "Mapping a «Nowhere Nation»." *Ukraine! Unmuted. Essays*. Lviv, 2022. 109–115. Ольга Гомілко [Olga Gomilko; Ol'ga Gomilko]. "Деколонізація української культури: політика воук чи національне пробудження?" [Decolonization of Ukrainian Culture: Vouk Policy or National Awakening; Dekolonizatsiia ukrainskoi kultury: polityka vouk chy natsionalne probudzhennia?; Dekolonizaciâ ukrains'koï kul'turi: polityka vouk či nacional'ne probudžennâ?]. *Філософська думка* [Filosofs'ka dumka] 3 (2023): 49–58; Ольга Квасниця [Olga Kvasnytsia; Ol'ga Kvasnicâ]. "Детокс, або Короткий курс для Кремля" [Detox, or a Short Course for the Kremlin; Detoks, abo Korotkyi kurs dlia Kremliâ; Detoks, abo Korotkij kurs dlâ Kremlâ]. *День* [Den'], 22 July 2021. <https://m.day.kyiv.ua/uk/article/den-ukrayiny/detoks-abo-korotkyy-kurs-dlya-remlya?fbclid=IwAR1avaFiZogqkBsZTOzAmlHbFaH3dN7WX S3WOaRKjTMoiPbjePMhKCi-ADo>. Accessed 18 January 2025.

rather as a part of the 'great Russian culture'. The creative pursuits of Ukrainian translators and directors of Shakespeare were largely unknown to the global audience. As explained above, they were viewed through the narrow lens of Russian propaganda – imperial at first, later communist. Here, I must once again express my gratitude to Mark Sokolianskyi, who clearly articulated this serious issue in 2008.

Changing the perspective requires serious theoretical reflection, while forming a new, corrected vision demands systematic work, time, and intellectual effort. We have already begun this work, and one of the important steps on this challenging path was the organisation of the first Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival, held between 17–23 June 2024 in Ivano-Frankivsk.²⁶

O.K.: How did the idea of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival come about?

N.T.: The idea of founding a Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival in Ukraine first emerged at the USC in 2010, when our representatives, Darya Lazarenko and Viktoriia Marinesko, attended the Craiova Shakespeare Festival in Romania for the first time, at the invitation of Nicoleta Cinpoș, who was organising a seminar series entitled *Worldwide Hamlet in Performance and Translation*.²⁷ The 2010 one-off seminar has since become the permanent ESRA Shakespeare in Performance series at the Festival and the largest platform for performance critical practices and groundbreaking Shakespeare research. Other Ukrainian Shakespeare scholars visited the Craiova Shakespeare Festival in the following edition (2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2024)²⁸ and, spurred on by the influence of these unforgettable experiences, the dream of establishing our own Ukrainian Shakespeare festival was born and grew stronger. We spoke about this aspiration at international Shakespeare conferences, both in Ukraine and across Europe. We carefully studied other Shakespeare festivals,²⁹ involved like-minded people, realising that a large-scale event could only be organised by theatre practitioners. Maiia Harbuziuk's visit to

²⁶ Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi, People's Artist of Ukraine and General Director of the Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theatre acted as the festival's director.

²⁷ See: Д. Лазаренко [D. Lazarenko; D. Lazarenko]. "Шекспірів Гамлет: Hic et ubique" [Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: Hic et ubique; Shekspiriv *Hamlet*: Hic et ubique; Šekspiriv *Gamlet*: Hic et ubique]. *Ренесансні студії* [Renesansni studii] 14–15 (2010): 306–314.

²⁸ See: Д. Москвітін, Б. Корнелюк [D. Moskvitina, B. Kornelyuk; D. Moskvitina, B. Kornelûk]. "Urbi et orbi: 9-й Міжнародний шекспірівський театральний фестиваль у м. Крайова" [Urbi et Orbi: The 9th International Shakespeare Festival in Craiova; Urbi et orbi: 9-y Mizhnarodnyi shekspirivskiy teatralnyi festyval u m. Kraiova; Urbi et orbi: 9-j Mižnarodnij šekspirivs'kij teatral'nij festival' u m. Krajova]. *Ренесансні студії* [Renesansni studii] 23–24 (2015): 297–305.

²⁹ See: Н. Торкут [N. Torkut; N. Torkut]. "Шекспірівські театральні фестивалі в Європі: історія і сучасність" [Shakespearean Theater Festivals in Europe: History and Modernity;

the Craiova Shakespeare Festival in 2018 became the starting point of our plans for a Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival implementation. As a theatre historian, Maiia Harbuziuk (1964–2023)³⁰ was well aware of the social significance of a Shakespeare festival for Ukraine and, as a theatre critic, viewed it as a catalyst for invigorating the country's theatrical life. In her opinion, this ambitious dream could only be realised by Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi, the General and Artistic Director of the Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theatre in Ivano-Frankivsk, a man of incredible creativity, charisma, energy, and experience in organising such large-scale events. Derzhypilskyi, winner of the Taras Shevchenko National Award of Ukraine, a talented director whose unique artistic method is increasingly being discussed at international theatre festivals, took on the challenge of transforming the abstract concept into a successful and tangible project.

A distinctive feature of the festival, marked by its evocative logo 'IF Shakespeare UA',³¹ was the harmonious combination of artistic and scholarly-educational elements. The artistic programme included ten Shakespeare productions and an exhibition of illustrations by Vladyslav Yerko for three Shakespeare tragedies translated by Yurii Andrukhovych. The concept of the scholarly-educational component³² was built on the productive interdisciplinary alliance between literary studies and theatre, as well as on the willingness of international Shakespeare scholars who actively support Ukraine in its struggle against the Russian aggression – to participate in academic and educational events. They help share the story of Ukrainian theatrical Shakespearean studies globally, showcasing the vital potential of culture and strengthening the nation's resilience in the face of war.

O.K.: Regarding resilience, art and theatre, in particular, take on several functions during wartime that are atypical in times of peace. Beyond classical catharsis, theatre fulfils an existential mission, acting as a form of psychotherapy that

Shekspirivski teatralni festyvali v Yevropi: istoriia i suchasnist; Šekspirivs'ki teatral'ni festivali v Ėvropi: istoriâ i sučasnis']. *Просценіум* [Proscenium] 1–3 (44–46) (2016): 80–85.

³⁰ About Maiia Harbuziuk's contribution to Ukrainian Shakespeareana see: N. Torkut. "Maiia Harbuziuk in Memoriam (1965–2023)." *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 72, 4 (2023): 13–23.

³¹ This logo encodes both the name of the city where the project is being implemented (Ivano-Frankivsk) and, at the same time, sparks interest in the festival by hinting at the uniqueness of Ukrainian Shakespeare – "if Shakespeare were in Ukraine / what Shakespeare might have been if he were in Ukraine."

³² For more details, see: Н. Торкут, С. Дейнека [N. Torkut, S. Deineka; N. Torkut, S. Dejneka]. "Перший Український шекспірівський фестиваль і його академічна продуктивність" [The First Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival and Its Academic Productivity; Pershyi Ukrainskyi shekspirivskyi festyval i yoho akademichna produktyvnist; Peršij Ukraïns'kij šekspirivs'kij festival' i joho akademichna produktyvnist']. *Слово і час* [Slovo i čas] 6 (2024): 117–118.

addresses trauma and fear on a collective level.³³ It fosters post-traumatic growth for both individuals and the nation, helping to bring audiences back to life.

Returning to the festival: as far as the international Shakespeare scholarly community is concerned, who joined the Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival, and in what capacity?

N.T.: First of all, it is worth mentioning the extensive preparatory work carried out by our international colleagues. In particular, Nicoleta Cinpoeș, who visited Ukraine in May 2023 at the invitation of the USC to give public lectures on the global tradition of Shakespeare festivals, became one of the key promoters of the idea of a festival in Ivano-Frankivsk.³⁴ Deeply impressed by *Romeo and Juliet* directed by R. Derzhypilskyi, she believed that the dream of the festival could be realised and took an active role in developing its concept. She also helped establish international contacts, notably introducing the Ukrainian director and members of his company to the European Shakespeare Festivals Network and its chair, Philip Parr, who later provided significant support. In the early winter of 2024, at the initiative of a ‘Shakespeare Shelter’ event at the ESRA conference in Budapest in July 2023 organised by Nicoleta Cinpoeș and Imke Lichterfeld, representatives of the European Shakespeare Research Association, co-ordinated by Francesca Rayner, and the USC launched a large-scale project titled ‘Reviewing Shakespeare on Stage.’ As part of this initiative, leading Shakespeare scholars and theatre critics from around the world³⁵ conducted a series of masterclasses on writing theatre reviews. One of the key outcomes of this successful project was a collection of reviews of Ukrainian Shakespeare productions published in such prestigious journal as *Shakespeare Bulletin* 42.4 (2025: 525–563) and *Shakespeare en devenir* 18 (2024: 3111–3139). The present volume is the culmination of this ‘shelter’ work over the past three years.

³³ See: Sofiya Rosa Lavrentiy's article “Shakespeare, Trauma, and Social Change: Inclusive Ukrainian Theatre Projects (2019–2023)” in this volume.

³⁴ See: Ольга Квасниця, Ніколета Чинпоеш [Olga Kvasnytsia, Nicoleta Cinpoeș; Ol'ga Kvasnică, Nikoleta Činpoeș]. “Shakespeare as Resistance in 21st Century Ukraine.” *Вісник Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка. Іноземна філологія* [Visnik Kiïvs'kogo nacional'nogo universitetu imeni Tarasa Ševčenko. Īnozemna filologiâ] 54. 1–2 (2023). <https://visnyk.if.knu.ua/article/view/2690>. Accessed 20 December 2024.

³⁵ The masterclasses were conducted by Nicoleta Cinpoeș, Michael Dobson, Boika Sokolova, and Christie Carson (United Kingdom); Francesca Rayner (Portugal); Isabelle Schwartz-Gastine and Janice Valls-Russell (France); Jennifer Low (USA); Veronika Schandl and Natália Pikli (Hungary); Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik (Poland); Imke Lichterfeld (Germany).

During the festival, Shakespeare scholars from around the world contributed to its educational and scholarly programme.³⁶ Several of our international colleagues came to Ukraine despite the serious risks associated with the war and actively participated in the festival. For instance, during the presentation of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival, Philip Parr introduced the Ukrainian festival team to the directors of various European Shakespeare Festivals in the Network. International Shakespeare scholars delivered public lectures “Who needs Shakespeare festival?” (Nicoleta Cinpoș) and “Shakespeare and art” (Michael Dobson), held a workshop “Subtitling Shakespeare translation” (Sorin Cazacu), and a roundtable “European experience of Shakespeare theatrical translations” (Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik, Ema Vyrubalova).

O.K.: What performances did international theatres present?

N.T.: The Moldovan ‘Teatrul fără nume’ [Theatre Without a Name] presented a dynamic and emotionally charged contemporary interpretation of *Macbeth* directed by Mihai Țărnă. This production combined elements from both Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and Eugène Ionesco’s *Macbett*, offering a unique reimagining of the classic tragedy. In this performance, Lady Macbeth desperately tries to wash the bloodstains from her blood-soaked shirts, while a criminal dictator hides behind the walls of the Kremlin-like-Dunsinane. The mummified hands of silent victims rise toward the sky, pleading for justice. The production is rich with allusions to the tragedies caused by the Russian-Ukrainian war, creating a powerful and haunting commentary on modern tyranny and suffering.

The Italian theatre troupe ‘La Ribalta Teatro’ and ‘The English Theatre Company’ presented *Hamlet. Double Bill* – an original reinterpretation of Shakespeare’s most famous tragedy. The first part of the performance, infused with sparkling humour and playful comic twists on well-known lines, cleverly exposed them as stereotypes and clichés, eliciting waves of laughter and enthusiastic applause from the audience. By contrast, the second part, featuring the same three actors in entirely different roles, captured a profound philosophical depth of the renowned graveyard scene, offering a striking reflection on mortality and existential despair.

The Aleksander Zelwerowicz Theatre Academy in Warsaw also participated in the Ukrainian Festival with a student production, the multimedia play *Matulka*, which reimagined the central conflict of *Romeo and Juliet* in modern-day Warsaw. This innovative Polish adaptation explored intergenerational relationships and the

³⁶ These include Boika Sokolova (United Kingdom), Georgi Niagolov, Darya Lazarenko, and Javor Gardev (Bulgaria). Lada Kolomiyets (USA), Sabina Laskowska-Hinz (Poland), Kelly Hunter (United Kingdom), and Marko Robert Stech (Canada) joined online.

tragic consequences of overbearing maternal care. By integrating video, animation, and music, the performance vividly brought these timeless issues to life.

The support of the international community – and the active participation of international theatres and scholars in the Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival – cannot be overestimated. Their contributions not only enriched the festival but also reaffirmed global solidarity with Ukraine’s cultural and artistic resilience.

O.K.: Shakespeare is always searching for answers to complex existential questions. The Ukrainian declaration of “To be!” in times of war is the key marker of the nation’s proactive stance in the struggle for the universal ideals of freedom and independence – a fight for life itself. The work of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Centre, as well as that of both mainland and diaspora Ukrainian Shakespeare scholarship, serves as an example of cultural diplomacy and stands as evidence of the organic presence of Ukrainian culture within the global context.

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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: ACT 1, 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 [Kolomiets].

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 vlady]; 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 [Makaryk], “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 *Kyivlianyin*, which published a negative review of Starytskyi's translation of *Hamlet* in one of its issues. Pro-imperial critics (the newspaper *Kyivlianyin* 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 *Kyivlianyin* 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 *Proscenium* (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 Hryhoriiv, 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 прapрем'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 anhl.]. 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 дію*” [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 – prynitsa Danskohoho: 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; Ukrainskyi khudozhnii pereklad u mizhvoiennomu Lvovi] 233–241; Зорівчак [Zorivchak], “Українська гамлетіяна” [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.

The museum staff expresses special gratitude to those who participated in the project and the originators of the idea – Maiia Harbuziuk, Nicola J. Watson, and Michael Dobson.

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Part Two

When Shakespeare Speaks
Ukrainian – On Translations



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Lost (in) Translations: How Ukrainian Shakespeareana Must Be Bigger Than We Think

Abstract

This article delves into the complex history of Shakespeare translations in Ukraine, with a particular focus on the phenomenon of “lost translations.” These losses are categorized as either ontological (irrevocably lost due to destruction or censorship) or gnoseological (existing but inaccessible or underappreciated). The authors situate these losses within the context of Ukraine’s turbulent history, marked by periods of foreign domination, enforced language bans, and political repression. These historical forces significantly impacted the development and preservation of Ukrainian cultural artifacts, including Shakespeare translations. The study examines various forms of lost translations, including rare manuscripts that have vanished, rumoured but unverified ‘ghost translations,’ and stage scripts that were never published or

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have perished. These lost works not only represent significant cultural losses but also offer unique insights into Ukraine's literary and cultural history.

Shakespeare translations in Ukraine served as more than just literary works: they functioned as tools of resistance and avenues for creative expression during periods of repression. By translating Shakespeare, Ukrainian writers and artists challenged linguistic and cultural suppression, contributing significantly to the formation of a distinct Ukrainian literary canon.

The article underscores the urgent need for rigorous archival research to recover and study these lost works. By analysing the cultural, political, and personal factors that contributed to these losses, the study provides a compelling narrative of Ukrainian cultural survival and its ongoing struggle for identity and self-expression.

Keywords: Shakespeare translations, lost texts, ontological loss, gnoseological loss, censorship, archival research.

Don't forget that some of Sophocles' works have also been lost. Were the lost works of higher quality than those that survived? Perhaps the ones that we still have were those most prized by the Athenian public, which doesn't necessarily make them the most interesting, at least to us. A contemporary reader might prefer the others. [...] How many great authors have we never read? And some of them are very famous, despite us having no access to their work. This brings us back to the concept of the phantom or ghost.

This is Not the End of the Book (103)

Umberto Eco, Jeanne-Claude Carrière

When it comes to losses in literature, it is usually the original lost text that matters on a global scale, and humanity has not yet fully abandoned hope of recovering at least some from the long list of missing ancient, mediaeval, and Renaissance works (including Shakespeare's *Love Labours' Won* and *Cardenio*). In local contexts, however, translations may be even more important than their sources since they facilitate cultural accessibility and adaptation, enable knowledge dissemination, provide new perspectives and interpretative opportunities, and contribute to shaping national identities. For this reason, the loss of translations (particularly of universally significant texts) can erase a vital layer of cultural history, effectively silencing the specific interpretive voice that adapted those texts for a particular audience, place and time.

The phenomenon of literary work loss is the outcome of various factors. The fragility of papyrus, fires in libraries, and endless wars are often blamed for the extensive inventory of the lost Greek and Roman manuscripts. Over time, such losses tend to be associated with personal reasons, since writers have been prone to determining the fate of their works by burning, shredding, or harming them in any other way. A crucial role was also played by political and ideological factors such as censorship, linguicide, colonial policies, etc., that could have prevented certain original texts and translations from reaching their readership. The latter factors are particularly relevant for Ukraine, with many manuscripts unpublished due to the enforcement of laws restricting the use of the Ukrainian language in the nineteenth century, and full print runs brutally destroyed, or book compositions disassembled during Soviet occupation in the twentieth century.¹

A closer look at the history of literary translation into Ukrainian reveals a story worthy of a blockbuster, complete with chases, adventures, imprisonment, and lost (or stolen) treasures. The unique status of translations, unparalleled in any other European culture, was shaped by the conditions of the nineteenth century – a time when the Ukrainian language and culture made audacious and valiant attempts to declare themselves to the world. The unique significance of translations in nineteenth-century Ukrainian culture arose from the determined efforts to elevate the Ukrainian language and literature during the time of cultural vulnerability. Translating foreign authors into Ukrainian has never been smooth sailing, first, due to numerous bans imposed on the Ukrainian language in the Russian Empire,²

1 The second part of the novel *Valdshnepy* [The Woodsnipes] by the classic Ukrainian writer Mykola Khvylovyi is considered lost. It was published in the sixth issue of the journal *Vaplite* in 1927, but the entire print run was confiscated and destroyed by censorship. After this destruction and the increasing censorship of his work, Mykola Khvylovyi faced growing persecution from the Soviet regime. As a leading figure of the *Vaplite* literary group, he championed cultural independence and European orientation for Ukrainian literature, which brought him into conflict with the authorities.

By the early 1930s, Soviet repression against Ukrainian intellectuals intensified, and many of Khvylovyi's colleagues were arrested or executed during Stalin's crackdown on the Ukrainian cultural elite. On May 13, 1933, overwhelmed by despair over the brutal suppression of Ukrainian culture and the devastating effects of the Holodomor, Mykola Khvylovyi took his own life in Kharkiv. His suicide was both a personal tragedy and a symbolic protest against the Soviet regime's destruction of Ukrainian cultural identity.

2 Throughout history, the Ukrainian language faced multiple bans, notably the Valuev Circular (1863) and Ems Ukaz (1876), which restricted publications, education, and performances in Ukrainian. Under Soviet rule, initial Ukrainization policies were reversed in the 1930s, leading to mass repression of Ukrainian intellectuals. Further Russification (1930s–1980s) marginalized Ukrainian in education and public life. These measures severely hindered the language's development until Ukraine's independence in 1991.

followed by both overt and covert restrictions and repressions enforced by the Soviet government. Under such conditions, translation was one of the few realms of relatively free artistic (and linguistic) expression. Mykhailo Starytskyi, the person behind one of the first full Ukrainian versions of *Hamlet* (1878), had a remarkably profound vision of the impact of translation on the development of a suppressed culture – a perspective he articulated in a letter to Ivan Franko:

Переклади – се було й есть у нас пугало і для уряду, і для жандармської літератури [...] і для наших навіть лібералів, а я уважав і уважаю їх за найцінніший труд у добу виховання мови: вони дають найкращу гімнастику слову, найбільше ширють його і, крім того, збагачують читальні засоби для народу на рідній мові, а з тим укоріняють силу і їй самій... (Доценко [Dotsenko] 426–427).³

[Perekladi – se bulo jêst' u nas pugalo i dlâ urâdu, i dlâ žandarms'koï literaturi [...] i dlâ naših navit' liberaliv, a â uvažav i uvažau ih za najcinnišij trud u dobu vihovannâ movi: voni daût' najkrašu gimnastiku slovu, najbil'se širût' jogo i, krim togo, zbagačuût' čital'nî zasobi dlâ naroda na ridnij movi, a z tim ukorinâu silu i ij samij...]

The bumpy path of Ukrainian literary translation has been extensively explored in monographs and papers by Dmytro Doroshenko, Lada Kolomiyets, Maksym Strikha, Roksolana Zorivchak, Rostyslav Dotsenko, Viktor Koptilov, and many more. In this context, translations of Shakespeare can be viewed as a driving force for the development of the Ukrainian language and literature. This significance was conceptualised by Panteleimon Kulish, one of the pioneers and passionate advocates of Ukrainian Shakespeare, with a contribution of thirteen translated plays. He considered rendering the legacy of the Great Elizabethan into Ukrainian to be a vital civilising mission:⁴

³ “Translations were – and still are – a bogey for the government, for police-controlled literature [...] even for our liberals, and I have always considered it the most valuable activity in the period of shaping the language: they challenge the word best of all, broaden it the most, and enrich reading for commoners in their native language thus strengthening it...” (qtd. in Доценко [Dotsenko] 426–427). Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Ukrainian are ours.

⁴ The nineteenth century witnessed a surge in national consciousness across Europe, with translation of canonical works like Shakespeare's serving as a vital ‘civilizing mission’ to enrich national languages and establish cultural parity. This approach was evident in Poland (e.g., Józef Ignacy Kraszewski), Hungary (e.g., János Arany), and Romania, where Shakespearean translations played a significant role in shaping national literary and theatrical cultures, as Panteleimon Kulish's efforts in Ukraine did.

If Shakespeare became our favourite reading, this would sober our pitiful literature and give it wings. If comedies and tragedies by Shakespeare summoned my countrypeople to the theatre, this would be a better education for them than all our writing and singing. This is my aim, and this is my motivation for translating Shakespeare's works. (Барвінський [Barvinsky] 203)

Kulish's Shakespeare project, secured and backed by Ivan Franko, in many ways paved the way for the development of the Ukrainian translation Shakespeareana, dominated by *Hamlet*⁵ and crowned with the first (and so far, only) edition of *The Complete Works* published between 1984 and 1988. However, this history of obstacles overcome and justices reclaimed is also intertwined with a saga of losses and wrecks, one that is even more dramatic and convoluted.

Our concept of the lost translations of Shakespeare's works into Ukrainian recognizes a spectrum of loss including ontological and gnoseological losses. The first category encompasses translations that were or could have been lost due to *force majeure*, political or ideological constraints, censorship, or repressions. The second group comprises those Ukrainian translations that had been published at some point but failed to get an appropriate reception from readers/theatre practitioners/critics due to a variety of factors. Consequently, ontological losses can be attributed to circumstantial factors, while gnoseological ones were deliberately orchestrated for various reasons, the main one to hinder the natural development of Ukrainian culture and its dialogue with the global Shakespearean discourse.

Significantly, ontological losses have been a vast part of the Ukrainian translational Shakespeareana since their very inception. In October 1865, the Lviv newspaper *Slovo* published a notice saying that “у г. Лозовського [псевд. П. Свенціцького], неусипного труженика нашої сцени, вкрали повний пер. «Макбета»” (Мороз [Moroz] 812). [u g. Lozovs'kogo [psevd. P. Svêncic'kogo], neusipnogo truženika našoi sceni, vkrali povnij per. «Makbeta»].⁶ Earlier that year, Pavlin Svetsitskyi started to publish his prose translation of *Hamlet* under the pseudonym Pavlo Svii. This was a continuous publication in *Nyva* journal, though it remained unfinished: six issues included only Act 1 of the tragedy, with the rest never published – perhaps, due to a lack of recognition and an abundance of criticism. Ivan Franko's feedback, for instance, was far from laudatory: he described Svetsytskyi's translation as “лишенная литературной ценности”⁷

5 Excerpts from the tragedy were translated by P. Svetsitskyi and I. Kostetskyi, while the full play was interpreted by Yu. Fedkovych, M. Starytskyi, P. Kulish, L. Hrebinka, V. Ver, H. Khotkevych, M. Rudnytsky, S. Husak, O. Hriaznov, and Yu. Andrukhovych.

6 “A complete translation of *Macbeth* was stolen from a restless toiler of our stage, Mr. Lozovyi (P. Svetsytskyi's penname)”.

7 Lacking literary value (Кочур [Kochur] 27).

(Кочур [Kochur] 27) [lišennaâ literaturnoj cennosti]. This criticism was not entirely unjustified, as Svetsytskyi translated indirectly, from a Polish translation, and his versification skills left room for improvement. However, the rest of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are lost to us forever.

Translations intended for the stage are more prone to ontological losses. This is explained by the particular mode of their production – while it remains in the repertoire, the translation is performed on stage. When a production is archived, the translation, which in such cases exists only in a manuscript form, in the director's promptbook and the actors' copies, at best, merely gathers dust in the archive. Ukrainian translations of Shakespeare created solely for the stage have rarely met such a quiet fate. For instance, the Ukrainian playscript of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Yakiv Savchenko for Hnat Yura's 1927 production for Ivan Franko Theatre in Kyiv is lost, with very little hope of recovering it. This production, though announced as highly realistic, was "premiered as clearly conceptual... with expressionistic constructivist overtones" (Makaryk 167). Yakiv Savchenko,⁸ a former Symbolist poet who embraced Soviet rule and became one of its heralds, translated from the Russian version (Доценко [Dotsenko] 464), presumably one made by Alexandr Sokolovskiy in 1894 – the most recent for the period. Based on the critical appraisal of the production, Irena Makaryk concludes that Savchenko "did not feel compelled to stay with Shakespeare's blank verse but rendered much of the play into rhyme" (Makaryk 167). Critic P. Nestorivskyi made several remarks on Savchenko's method:

стару мову Шекспірову перекладено на нову, що кується, мову нової України [...]. Щоб досягнути найбільше ефектів у передаванні слова, перекладач не обмежився білими віршами, як це звичайно роблять у перекладах, а дав, у чималій частині, музику, ритм. (5)⁹

[staru movu Šekspìrovu perekladeno na novu, šo kuêt'sâ, movu novoï Ukraïni [...]. Šob dosâgnuti najbil'she efektiv u peredavanni slova, perekladač ne обмеживсâ bilimi viršami, âk ce zvičajno roblât' u perekладаh, a dav, u čimalij častini, muziku, ritm.]

⁸ His destiny was quite typical for that time: a renowned poet, translator, critic, and above all a loyalist, whose mobbing of Les Kurbas, Mykola Zerov, and other representatives of the Executed Renaissance contributed to their imprisonment and execution. Nevertheless, he shared the fate of those who had suffered from his devastating criticism: in 1937, at the height of the Great Purge, he was arrested and his death sentence was swiftly carried out.

⁹ "Shakespeare's [early modern] language is translated with vocal verse into the new language, the one that is being shaped, the language of new Ukraine. To make his rendering more efficient, the translator did not limit himself to the usual blank verse, but also introduced some musicality and rhythm" (Несторівський [Nestorivskyi] 5).

The critic also mentions some satirical interludes Savchenko added to Shakespeare's comedy, blaming him for not making those additions more relevant and timely.

An interesting case of loss involves two translations of *Othello* by two theatre practitioners: Marko Kropyvnytskyi and Panas Saksahanskyi. The former, a playwright and a renowned theatre figure, dreamt of staging Shakespeare in Ukrainian in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Still, with the restrictions imposed by the Russian Empire, it was hardly possible. Nevertheless, Kropyvnytskyi made a noteworthy attempt to adapt *Othello* (circa 1900): his loose translation was based on the Russian version by Pyotr Veinberg. As pointed out by Maria Shapovalova (Шаповалова [Shapovalova] 95), the translator had conveyed all its advantages and defects in Ukrainian, though sometimes his slavish adherence to the Russian verse corrupted Ukrainian lines. It is likely that he was going to refine his version further (Шаповалова [Shapovalova] 95). For now, this translation is effectively lost for Ukraine since its only known surviving copy (bearing a censor's license for production dated 5 April 1902 (Мороз [Moroz] 812)) is stored in Saint Petersburg Theatrical Library. There is also no reliable evidence that this translation has ever been staged.¹⁰

Nonetheless, a famous Ukrainian actor and director Panas Saksahanskyi, Kropyvnytskyi's disciple, staged *Othello* in 1926 for Mariia Zankovetska State Theatre (then located in Katerynoslav, later renamed Dnipropetrovsk). Numerous literary sources state that Saksahanskyi personally translated the play. Moreover, Melnychuk-Luchko in *Saksahanskyi the Actor* quotes the theatre practitioner himself:

Мені не довелося грати у п'єсах Шекспіра. В ті часи не було доброго перекладу. Був, правда, переклад Куліша, але дуже незадовільний. Після революції я поставив «Отелло» в театрі Заньковецької. Я ж сам і зробив український переклад цієї п'єси. (58)¹¹

[Meni ne dovelosâ grati u p'êсах Šekspira. V ti časi ne bulo dobrogo perekladu. Buv, pravda, pereklad Kuliša, ale duže nezadovil'nij. Pislâ revolûcii â postaviv «Otello» v teatri Zan'kovec'koï. Â ž sam ì зробив ukraińs'kij pereklad ciï p'êsi.]

¹⁰ In 1908, Kyivan newspaper *Rada* published several announcements (Issue 82 dated April 8 (21) and Issue 133 dated June 11 (24)) of the intent expressed by Lev Sabinin's theatre company to produce *Othello* translated by Kropyvnytskyi for the following theatre season in Kharkiv. We have not found any evidence of this production (yet). One of the announcements also mentioned that Lev Sabinin himself planned to translate *Hamlet*.

¹¹ "I did not have the opportunity to act [in a play by Shakespeare]. At that time, there was no good translation. Although there was a translation by Kulish, it was not good enough. After the revolution, I staged *Othello* in Zankovetska Theatre. I have translated the play into Ukrainian myself" (Мельничук-Лучко [Melnichuk-Luchko] 58).

A theatre review signed by Hliadach (a Spectator) and published in *Zoria* (The Star) monthly magazine praised the translation used for the production (28). However, Irena Makaryk expresses doubts about Saksahanskyi's translating skills. She points out that by 1926, there had only been two translations of *Othello* – the one by Panteleimon Kulish and the other by Marko Kropyvnytskyi. So, her claim is that Saksahanskyi did not translate from scratch, as previously he had not been known as a translator for the stage but rather abridged his teacher's translation for his artistic needs (Makaryk 179–180).

Rising interest in Shakespeare in the Ukrainian Soviet theatre during the 1920s and 1930s encouraged a surge in translators' activity on the one hand, but, on the other hand, failed to preserve its results for the following generations. One of the biggest and most numerous losses (still, with little hope of winning them back) is the loss of the translations by Semen Husak, perhaps the least known of all the Ukrainian translators of Shakespeare, and the most unacknowledged one. In the bibliography of the Ukrainian Shakespeareana by Myroslav Moroz, he is given credit only for a moderate publication in a 1937 issue of *Teatr*, including fragments of his versions of *Othello* and *Macbeth* (Мороз [Moroz] 809). Meanwhile, he was a prolific translator with a particular focus on drama: he translated *The Duchess of Padua* by Oscar Wilde (Селянська біднота [Selâns'ka bidnota] 3), *The Marriage of Figaro* by Pierre Beaumarchais (Червоний шлях [Červonij šlâh] 187), and at least seven plays by Shakespeare, including *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Гусак [Gusak] 171). Iryna Vanina also attributes a translation of *Twelfth Night* (4) to him. Assessing his translations, Vanina admits to their value: "Не позбавлені окремих (часом і серйозних) недоліків, вони, проте, загалом справляли позитивне враження і свідчили про помітне зростання культури перекладацької роботи на Україні"¹² (Ваніна [Vanina] 4). [Ne pozbavleni okremih (časom i serjoznih) nedolikiv, voni, проте, zagalom spravlâli pozitivne vražennâ i svîdčili pro pomîtne zrostannâ kul'turi perekladac'koï roboti na Ukraïni]. Some of Husak's versions were staged by The October Revolution Drama Theatre in Odessa, the first of which was *Othello*, in 1936. His translations were also favourably reviewed by Abram Gozenpud (Гозенпуд *Трагедія* [Gozenpud Tragediâ] 27–29), one of the leading Shakespeare scholars of the time, who secured the one and only publication of their fragments and obviously patronized Husak.

An attempt to reconstruct Husak's biography and creative activity has turned into something of a detective story and has so far only been partially successful. Even finding out his first name was a real quest, as most publications mention only

¹² "Although not without some (sometimes rather serious) shortcomings, they generally made a positive impression and testified to a noticeable growth in the culture of translation work in Ukraine" (Ваніна [Vanina] 4).

his initial. All the same, we occasionally come across a true gem – the manuscript of Husak's dissertation *Shekspir v ukrayinskykh perekladakh (dramatychni tvory)* [Shakespeare in the Ukrainian translations (dramatic works)] dated 1946 and stored in the scientific library of the I. Mechnikov Odessa National University. While it remains unclear whether he eventually defended his (academically rather controversial) thesis or not, the work is a treasure in itself as it contains previously unpublished fragments of his translations, as well as some valuable information about his plans for Shakespeare in Ukrainian. For instance, he took a commission from *Mystetstvo* publishing house for a translation of *Richard III* in 1940, but due to the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, this edition never saw the light of day.

Another important lost translation for the stage is *The Merchant of Venice*, rendered by Severyn Pankivskyi – an outstanding theatrical personality of his time, active in late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. He performed in the theatre companies of Marko Kropyvnytskyi, Mykhailo Starytskyi, Mykola Sadovskyi, and many more. He was also a theatre critic and researcher, frequently contributing to the journal *Teatr* in the late 1930s, and a translator whose legacy embraced Polish, French, and English drama. Pankivskyi dedicated himself to translating Western playwrights in an effort to broaden the repertoire of Ukrainian-language theatres, which predominantly focused on works by local dramatists. His manuscript of a rhymed translation of *The Merchant of Venice* was mentioned (and praised!) in the detailed obituary by Vasyl Simovych published in *Krakovski visti* in February 1943 (Сімович [Simovich]). Hryhorii Kochur also briefly mentioned this manuscript in his detailed paper *Shekspir v Ukraine* [Shakespeare in Ukraine] (47).

A separate group within the broader category of ontologically lost Ukrainian translations of Shakespeare is comprised of so-called 'ghost translations', which we define as translations that had been planned, written about, and announced but were likely never completed. One of the earliest references to such translations is that of *Hamlet* and *Coriolanus* by Vit Kosovtsev, reportedly translated in the 1860s (Мороз [Moroz] 812). The information about these translations is exceedingly scarce, limited to a brief mention in an issue of *Slovo* newspaper in 1866.

Panteleimon Kulish also contributed to the list of ghost translations. Apart from thirteen plays he is known to have translated and published, he might have completed two more: *Cymbeline* and *The Merchant of Venice* (Даниленко [Danylenko] 335). Kulish's widow, Hanna Barvinok, who wrote to his fellow translator Ivan Puliui, in a letter dated April 21, 1897, that the manuscript of *The Merchant of Venice* had been sent to the Chernihiv Museum of Vasyl Tarnavskyi Junior, from where it allegedly disappeared. After Kulish's death, a prominent Ukrainian composer, Mykola Lysenko, took up the search for these lost translations. In May 1898, he wrote to Hanna Barvinok: "Чи є у вас вдома ще які Шекс[пирові] твори, бо у вітрині, коли я переглядав з В.В. Тар[новським], то наприклад, у трилогії «Макбет» стоїть олівцем записано, що до неї належить

ще «Венецький купець» і ще третя – «Доболін» чи що [тут: «Цимбелін»]” (Даниленко [Danylenko] 335).¹³ [Či ê u vas vdoma še âki Šeks[pirovi] tvori, bo u vitrinì, koli â pereglâdav z V.V. Tar[novs’kim], to napriklad, u trilogii «Makbet» stoit’ olivcem zapisano, što do nei naležit’ še «Venec’kij kupec’» i še tretâ – «Dobolin» či šo [tut: «Cimbelin»]]. However, by the following winter, in a letter to Kulish’s widow, Lysenko speculated: “видно, покійник мав лишень на увазі перекласти їх, та й не встиг, або ж, може, у Вас де лишились у господі. Пошукайте...” (Даниленко [Danylenko] 335). [vidno, pokijnik mav lišen’ na uvazi pereklasti ih, ta j ne vstig, abo ž, može, u Vas de lišilis’ u gospodi. Pošukajte...].¹⁴ Later, in the spring of the same year, while discussing plans to publish Kulish’s Shakespeare translations in a letter to Olha Franko, Lysenko concluded: “«Цимбелін» і «Венецький купець» не перекладені, або десь запропащені” (Даниленко [Danylenko] 335). [«Cimbelin» i «Venec’kij kupec’» ne perekladeni, abo des’ zapropašeni].¹⁵ These letters highlight the uncertainty and hope surrounding Kulish’s potential translations of Shakespeare’s plays, as well as the dedicated efforts to recover and preserve his literary legacy. However, Stepan Zakharkin, citing Mariia Shapovalova – who was among the first to question the claims made by Hanna Barvinok and Ivan Puliui about the supposedly lost translations – argues that Kulish did not have the time to complete them:

за активної праці над перекладом Біблії у 1890-х роках... Куліш не мав ні моральної, ні фізичної змоги відновити працю шістнадцятирічної давності, впоратися з таким непростим завданням, як переклад однієї, а то й двох п’єс Шекспіра. (Захаркін [Zakharkin] 62)¹⁶

[za aktivnoi praci nad perekladom Biblii u 1890-h rokah... Kuliš ne mav ni moral’noi, ni fizičnoi zmogi vidnoviti pracu šistnadcătiričnoi давності, vporatisâ z takim neprostim zavdannâm, âk pereklad odniêi, a to j dvoh p’ês Šekspera.]

¹³ “Do you still have any of Shakespeare’s works at home? Because in the display case, when I was reviewing it with V. V. Tarnavskiy, for instance, in the trilogy *Macbeth*, it was noted in pencil that it should include *The Merchant of Venice* and another one – ‘Dobolin’ or something” (referring to *Cymbeline*)” (Даниленко [Danylenko] 335).

¹⁴ “It seems the deceased only intended to translate them but did not manage to, or perhaps they remain somewhere in your household. Please, search...” (Даниленко [Danylenko] 335).

¹⁵ “*Cymbeline* and *The Merchant of Venice* were either not translated or were lost somewhere”.

¹⁶ “...given his intensive work on translating the Bible during the 1890s, Kulish neither had the moral nor physical capacity to resume work from sixteen years earlier (his Shakespeare translations began in the 1880s – D.M. & B.K.) and tackle such a challenging task as translating one, let alone two of Shakespeare’s plays” (Захаркін [Zakharkin] 62).

Another notable case of a ghost translation is *Hamlet*, presumably translated by the Ukrainian poet and actor Yakiv Zharko. Panas Myrny, a distinguished Ukrainian author (Pavlo Rudchenko's pen name), mentioned it in his letter to Zharko dated May 24 (June 5) 1898, while sharing his rather pessimistic view on translating Shakespeare into Ukrainian:

Цікаво б прочитати Ваш переклад «Гамлета». Мені здається, що дуже трудно цю трагедію перекласти на нашу мову. Мова наша ще мало вироблена, щоб нею без запинки можна було переказати Гамлетові думки і почуття. Такий добрий коваль усяких термінів, як Старицький, зробив з «Гамлета» посмішище задля наших ворогів. [...] Я сам перекладав «Ліра» і добре знаю, як-то трудно перекладати Шекспіра. Дехто казав, що мій «Лір» добре перекладений, а мені здається – ні. А все-таки цікаво, як Вам дався «Гамлет». Зашліть, перечитаю, та й свою думку скажу.¹⁷ (433)

[Cikavo b pročitati Vaš pereklad «Gamleta». Meni zdaêt'sâ, šo duže trudno cû tragediû pereklasti na našu movu. Mova naša še malo viroblena, šob neû bez zapinki možna bulo perekazati Gamletovî dumki i počuttâ. Takij dobrij koval' usâkîh termîniv, âk Staric'kij, зробив з «Gamleta» posmîšiše zadlâ našîh vorogîv. [...] Â sam perekладав «Lira» i добре знаû, âk-to trudno perekладати Šekspira. Dehto kazav, šo mij «Lir» добре perekладений, a menî zdaêt'sâ – nî. A vse-taki cikavo, âk Vam davsa «Gamlet». Zašlit', perečitaû, ta j svoû dumku skažu.]

It remains unknown whether the translation had ever been sent, as subsequent letters from Myrnyi to Zharko mention neither Shakespeare nor *Hamlet*. Zharko struggled to publish his works and had difficulties obtaining a censor's permit. In 1929, he was arrested and charged with espionage for Great Britain. Following numerous searches, most of his manuscripts disappeared (1861- народився... [narodivsâ...]).

In the essay *Mykola Zerov and His Poetry*, Ukrainian translator and scholar Hryhorii Kochur outlined Zerov's plans for translating Shakespeare. Zerov, a celebrated translator of Roman classics, was known as the leader of the Neoclassical School, a group of Kyiv-based poets. According to Kochur, he intended to translate several of Shakespeare's works, including *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, and *Julius*

17 "I would be interested in reading your *Hamlet*. I think this tragedy is complicated to translate into our language. Our language is still not elaborate enough to render Hamlet's thoughts and emotions. Such a good wordsmith as Starytskyi made it a laughingstock for our enemies. [...] I have translated *Lear*, so I know how difficult it is to translate Shakespeare. Some people say my *Lear* is well-translated, and I think this is wrong. It is interesting how you have coped with *Hamlet*. Send it to me, I will read it and share my opinion."

Caesar (Kolomiyets 52). Zerov also wrote about his idea to translate *The Winter's Tale* to his wife Sofia (*Родинне вознище* [The Zerov family] 142). However, these ambitious plans were tragically cut short in the mid-1930s when Zerov was arrested, exiled to the Solovki prison camp, and ultimately executed by a firing squad in the Sandarmokh forest, Karelia, on November 3, 1937.

Another instance of a ghost translation, about which we possess very little information, involves Mykola Ivanov, a prose translator from Kharkiv. During the Nazi occupation of Ukraine, he moved to Kyiv and translated *The Merchant of Venice* (Петров [Petrov] 4). Lada Kolomiyets has found a rare quotation from *Ukrayinskyi Zasiv* – a cultural journal published by Viktor Petrov in occupied Kharkiv: “A well-known in Ukraine translator of belle-letters from Kharkiv, M. O. Ivanov has finished translating from English into Ukrainian *The Merchant of Venice* by Shakespeare. At the meeting of the literary section of *Prosvita* society, Associate Professor Yu. V. Sheveliov substantially analysed the translation and commended its high quality” (Kolomiyets 56). The information about Ivanov (or Ivaniv in other sources) translating Shakespeare was later reiterated in Petrov’s article *Povorot do Yevropy (suchasnyi stan ukrayinskoyi poezii)* [A Turn to Europe] (4), reprinted in other newspapers published in Ukraine during the occupation.¹⁸ The fate of this translation is unknown, and Ivanov’s trace, as he allegedly relocated to Western Ukraine and subsequently moved to Germany, was lost after the war (Kolomiyets 56).

So, some ontological losses in the Ukrainian Shakespeareana can be explained by certain backhandedness of theatre practitioners who obviously disregarded preservation of the translations they used. Moreover, World War II and the Great Purge of the Stalinist era are also culprits. Shakespeare scholar and translator Abram Gozenpud recounted that during his time in evacuation, his library was looted by the Nazi occupants and his archive was burnt for heating by his landlords (Гозенпуд [Gozenpud], *У моєму Києві* [U moêmu Kiêvi] 308). In the case of repressed writers and translators, their libraries were usually confiscated and seldom returned.

As for the gnoseological losses in Ukrainian translations of Shakespeare, it makes logical sense to begin with preserved but unpublished manuscripts. These translations never graced a printed page or reached stage spotlights; they eluded critical scrutiny, reader engagement, and the discerning gaze of theatre directors and spectators. They do not yet form a fragment in the mosaic of the Ukrainian translations of Shakespeare’s works since they first need to be “excavated” from the archives. For instance, the Lviv State Historical Archive houses three translations

¹⁸ See: Петров В., Конференція українських письменників. *Донецкий вестник*. № 76. 18.07.1943. С. 3–4 [Petrov V., Konferenciâ ukraïns'kih pis'mennikov. *Doneckij vestnik*. № 76. 18.07.1943. S. 3–4]. Петров В. [Petrov V.]. Поворот до Європи [Povorot do Êvropi].

by a prominent literary scholar, Yaroslav Hordynskyi. He is known to have translated four plays by Shakespeare, with only *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seeing publication in 1927 in Lviv, then part of Poland. Three other translations – *Richard III*, *The Tempest*, and *The Merchant of Venice* – have remained in manuscript to this day (Mopoz [Moroz] 812).

The same archive also stores manuscripts of *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet* translated by Hnat Khotkevych, a prominent theatre practitioner of the first half of the twentieth century. His Shakespeare-related activity stemmed from his views on the principles of Ukrainian theatre development and included translating – or, rather, adapting/abridging¹⁹ – tragedies and comedies for the stage of the time. His versions of comedies – *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *The Comedy of Errors* – were published between 1924 and 1928 in Kharkiv by the publishing house *Rukh*. As Khotkevych fell victim to the Stalinist repressions against Ukrainian intellectuals and people of culture, his translations were removed from the libraries and destroyed, making even the published ones bibliographic rarities, with only a few copies scattered across the country's major libraries. Until 1998, Khotkevych's version of *Hamlet* remained buried in the Lviv archive, alongside his other two translations of the tragedies, brought there in 1941 with other manuscripts, books, and musical instruments (Лучук [Luchuk] 198). That year, the manuscript was discovered, retrieved, typed, and published in issue 1 of the culture journal *Paradyhma* by Olha Luchuk, a prominent Ukrainian researcher of Shakespearean translations.

A version of *Othello* by Mykhailo Rudnytskyi, a Lviv-based theatre and literary scholar and translator, has been awaiting publication for more than a century. Initially commissioned to adapt the already existing translation by Kulish for the 1923 Lviv production directed by Oleksandr Zagarov, Rudnytskyi instead came up with a new translation (Гавалюк [Havaliuk]). As Maiia Harbuziuk points out, this case exemplifies close cooperation between translator and theatre: Rudnytskyi even delivered a lecture on Shakespeare's works before the first night of the show (4). Obviously, this marked a still-rare instance of a translation influencing – if not shaping – a theatrical production.

Since translations are closely tied to the times in which they were created, the longer they remain in manuscript, the lower their impact they could eventually exert. This is evident in the case of the renowned Ukrainian poets Ivan Franko, Lesya Ukrainka, and Panas Myrny. Franko, though far better known as an editor of and commentator on Panteleimon Kulish's and Yurii Fedkovych's translations, also undertook the challenge of translating fragments of *King Lear* (1878–1879) and *The Tempest* (1884), as well as *The Merchant of Venice* (full translation completed in 1912) and several sonnets (1901–1907), of which only the sonnets

¹⁹ For more details about Khotkevych's translation principles, see Лучук [Luchuk]; Moskvitina.

enjoyed timely publications. The translations of the plays were not published until 1956, forty years after Franko's death, when they were primarily of interest to literary scholars. Perhaps the poet's dedication to the publication of Kulish's translations overshadowed his own ambitions as a translator. The same delayed publication fate befell the translation of *King Lear* by Panas Myrny. Completed in 1897, it was published in his *Complete Works* as late as 1970. Likewise, acts 1 and 2 of *Macbeth*, translated by Lesya Ukrainka in 1898, were first printed only in 1947, as a supplement to the monograph *Poetychy teatr Lesi Ukrainky* [The Poetic Theatre by Lesya Ukrainka] by Abram Gozenpud. Supposedly, this is because Kulish's versions eclipsed any other Shakespeare-related translation efforts of the time.²⁰

A remarkable category of gnoseological losses in the Ukrainian translational Shakespeareana comprises editions published during the 1920s–1930s and almost immediately forgotten because the translators fell victim to the Stalinist repressive machine. The policy of *korenizatsia* (nativisation) established by the Soviet government in the national republics aimed at raising the political and cultural elite for every nation of the USSR. It meant full support of the national languages and cultures, as well as the integration of representatives of certain ethnicities into all the administrative levels of local governments. In Ukraine, this resulted in the Red Renaissance, a flourishing period for literature, theatre, cinema, and translation, that would later tragically turn into the Executed Renaissance, with deportations, arrests, executions, and then Holodomor – the artificial famine inflicted on the Ukrainian peasantry. In addition to the aforementioned adaptations by Hnat Khotkevych, there were three more translations between 1924 and 1936 published in Soviet Ukraine: *Othello* (1927) by Maik Yohansen and Volodymyr Scherbanenko, *Macbeth* (1930) by Teodosii Osmachka, and *Hamlet* (1936) by Yuri Klen (Osvald Burgardt). Their critical appraisal was almost non-existent as both Burgardt and Osmachka emigrated from Soviet Ukraine, seeking refuge abroad, and Yohansen was arrested in 1937 and executed soon after. His fate mirrored that of many

²⁰ Kulish's translations set a standard that made other versions less urgent to publish. Moreover, at the time, there was no strong tradition of publishing multiple translations of the same text. Once Kulish's versions were available, publishers and literary circles may have seen little need for additional efforts. For Ivan Franko, Panas Myrny, and Lesya Ukrainka, translating Shakespeare was a notable but secondary endeavour, an episode within their vast and multifaceted literary output. Their Shakespeare translations, though significant, remained peripheral to their broader intellectual and artistic pursuits. In contrast, for Panteleimon Kulish, translating Shakespeare was not merely an undertaking but a deliberate and sustained mission – a project to which he devoted considerable time, effort, and creative energy. Kulish approached translation as both a linguistic and cultural enterprise, striving to refine the Ukrainian literary language and elevate it to the level of European literary traditions. His dedication ensured that his versions set a lasting precedent, overshadowing other translation efforts of the time.

other Ukrainian cultural practitioners during the Stalinist repressions – archives confiscated, books removed from libraries, and names banned from public mention. Burgardt's and Osmachka's emigration saved their lives and allowed them to continue their literary and cultural endeavours in a freer environment. It was not until the 1960s that their names were mentioned in relation to Shakespeare by Ukrainian scholars Rostyslav Dotsenko and Hryhorii Kochur,²¹ who were brave enough to publish their thoughts and relate to recent political history.

A decade later, Abram Gozenpud narrowly escaped execution during yet another devastating tide of Stalinist repressions targeting Ukrainian literati. Before that, he was a key figure among those who reignited interest in Shakespeare in Ukraine after a lull in Shakespeare related activity during the first half of the 1930s. From 1937 to 1941, he worked closely with the Kyiv-based publishing house *Mystetstvo*, which published two of his translations – *Romeo and Juliet* (1937) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1941). In addition, he edited and wrote in-depth, high-quality scholarly afterwords for his own translations, as well as for *Macbeth* in Yu. Koretsky's version (1940), *King Lear* translated by M. Rylsky (1940), and *Hamlet* translated by Viktor Ver (1941). Gozenpud was also an active public lecturer, served as an respondent at dissertation defences, and published scholarly studies. He contributed to the 1939 collection of Shakespeare research edited by O. Biletsky with a section titled *Shakespeare and Music* which had been the topic of his dissertation in 1939. Since 1936, he had been a regular contributor to the journal *Teatr*, likely publishing both under his own name and the pseudonym A. Abramenko. An article by B. Warneke

²¹ In his programmatic article *Shakespeare in Ukraine*, Hryhorii Kochur offers a positive evaluation of O. Burgardt's work. The researcher describes it as "лучший из того, что было сделано за эти годы" [the best of what was done during these years (referring to the Renaissance of the 1920s–30s); lučšij iz togo, čto bylo sdelano za èti gody] (Кочур [Kochur] 48). Kochur praises the thorough commentary accompanying the translation by M. Yohansen and V. Shcherbanenko and notes their meticulous rendering of the original sense. However, in his opinion, the translation itself "может служить разве только в качестве подстрочника" [can only serve as a crib; môžeť služiť razve tol'ko v kačestve podstročnika] (Кочур [Kochur] 47). The translation of *Macbeth* by T. Osmachka, according to Kochur, has some strong points, "хотя достигается это иногда ценой некоторого насилия над языком, некоторой искусственности языковых построений. Не всегда безупречна и техника стиха..." [though this is achieved at the cost of some violence done to the language. The technique of verse is also not always flawless...; hotâ dostigaetsâ èto inogda cenoi nekotorigo nasiliâ nad âzykom, nekotoroj iskusstvennosti âzykovyh postroenij. Ne vseгда bezuprechna i tehnik stiha...] (Кочур [Kochur] 47). In his article, Kochur takes another incredibly bold step by mentioning the translation of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* (Parts 1 and 2), which T. Osmachka published while in exile, together with his improved version of *Macbeth* in 1961 in Munich by I. Kostetskyi's publishing house. More on this topic in Ludmila Mnich's "The Ukrainian Project in the Free World: The Ukrainian Shakespeare Society" in this volume.

in issue 3 of the journal in 1938 contains translations of excerpts from *Richard III* and *Henry IV* attributed to Abramenko (39–45).

In 1944, Gozenpud became one of the founding members of the Department of Western Literature at the Institute of Ukrainian Literature of the Academy of Sciences. In a 1946 article by the department head Agapit Shamrai, it was mentioned that the department's scholars were planning a four-volume edition of Shakespeare's works, and Gozenpud was likely to play an active role in this ambitious project (Шамрай [Shamray] 4). However, this plan was never realized. Instead, between 1950 and 1952, a two-volume collection of Shakespearean translations was published in a limited print run, quickly becoming a bibliographic rarity. By that time, Gozenpud had already been pushed out of the Ukrainian literary studies. In the late 1940s, during the campaign against "cosmopolitanism," he was labelled a "staunch cosmopolitan" and a "snobbish anti-patriot", severely criticized for his monograph on Lesya Ukrainka, dismissed from all positions and ultimately forced to leave Ukraine (*Радянська Україна* [Radâns'ka Ukraïna] 3). Abram Gozenpud's contributions to Shakespeare translation and scholarship remain largely overlooked in contemporary studies. Despite his significant role in reviving interest in Shakespeare in Ukraine during the late 1930s and 1940s, his translations and critical writings have not yet received the recognition they deserve.²²

Another important gnoseological loss was determined both politically and geographically. The Ukrainian émigré community, gradually shaped by the 1950s, comprised intellectuals who opposed the Soviet regime but were able to flee from the USSR. Some of them (Ihor Kostetskyi, Teodosii Osmachka, Vasyl Barka, Svaitoslav Karavanskyi, Yar Slavutych and many more) made significant contributions to Ukrainian Shakespeare studies and translations, particularly during the mid-twentieth century. A key milestone in this tradition was the establishment of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society (USS) on August 25, 1957, on the eve of the Eighth International Congress of Modern Languages and Literature in Heidelberg, Germany. Founded at the Institute of Slavic Studies at Heidelberg University, the USS was spearheaded by three prominent intellectuals of the Ukrainian diaspora: Dmytro Chyzhevskyi, head of the Institute and elected president of the society;

²² Critical assessments of his Shakespeare translations are rare, but one notable evaluation comes from Hryhoriy Kochur. Writing about Gozenpud's version of *Romeo and Juliet* he argues that "this translation (as well as his later translation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) is not without its flaws: it contains linguistic – lexical and accentological – errors and awkward phrasing; at times, the translator simplifies his task by streamlining the original. [...] At the same time, certain passages are rendered successfully. Of particular interest are the introductory articles that A. A. Gozenpud included with his translations (he also authored the prefaces to most of the other Shakespeare translations published during that period). Thus, as a significant stage in acquainting Ukrainian readers with Shakespeare, Gozenpud's translations had their positive value" (Кочур [Kochur] 50).

Yaroslav Rudnytskyi, a linguist from Canada, who served as its vice-president; and Ihor Kostetskyi, a writer and translator, who became the general secretary and its most active member.

The USS aimed to revive and promote Ukrainian engagement with the works of William Shakespeare, which, according to USS members, had been forcibly interrupted by Soviet cultural repression. The society's programme and its declaration of goals, published in the émigré press, highlighted the destruction of Ukrainian culture under Bolshevik rule, where Shakespeare translations and productions were confined within the limits of Marxist ideology. The society pledged to restore this broken tradition, collect Ukrainian Shakespeareana scattered across Western libraries and archives, and encourage new translations and studies by émigré scholars. The USS also resolved to publish a Yearbook of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society (some issues appeared in the 1980s) and other related works (Crex [Stech] 6).

One of the most influential figures in this effort was Ihor Kostetskyi, whose bold translation aesthetics left a lasting mark on Ukrainian Shakespeare studies.²³ Under his leadership, and largely through his "Na hori"²⁴ publishing house, the USS published several significant translations and scholarly works. Kostetskyi's own interpretations, often characterized by baroque stylistics, exemplified a unique and experimental approach to rendering Shakespeare's texts in Ukrainian. These translations departed from the conservative and standardized methods typically employed by mainland Ukrainian translators, embracing innovative linguistic strategies and stylistic boldness. Their unconventional nature often aligned with the tradition of Panteleimon Kulish, exploring the creative potential of the Ukrainian language in new and dynamic ways.

One of the USS's early achievements was the publication of Teodosii Osmachka's translations of *Macbeth* and *Henry IV*, completed in exile and published in 1961 in Munich by Ihor Kostetskyi's publishing house. However, the Ukrainian diaspora's translations of Shakespeare largely remained unnoticed within Soviet Ukraine, where cultural exchanges were heavily restricted. These works, even from today's perspective, are viewed as language experiments, reflective of the cultural and intellectual environment of the émigré community. Despite their innovative qualities, the translations faded from prominence after Kostetskyi's active involvement in the USS ended in the late 1960s, with Shakespeare research initiatives taking precedence over new interpretations in later years.

The diaspora's contributions have only begun to receive wider recognition in independent Ukraine, particularly through efforts such as the extensive three-volume

²³ For more on this, see Lada Kolomiyets' article on Kostetskyi's translations in this volume.

²⁴ This can be translated as "On the mountain" but it also resonates with the Ukrainian word "нагорі" [*nagori*], which means "on top" or "above", implying something placed on a high shelf.

project *Shekspir Ukrainskoyu: po toi bik Zaliznoio Zavisy* (Shakespeare in Ukrainian on the Other Side of the Iron Curtain), edited by Marko Robert Stech. Published in Kyiv as part of the CIUS-sponsored series *Ukrayina i Svit: Perekhrestia kultur* (Ukraine and the World: The Crossroads of Cultures), the project aims to compile Shakespeare translations by Ukrainian émigré interpreters. The first nearly 900-page volume, published in 2024, includes Osmachka's *Macbeth* (in its Ukrainian and émigré revisions), both parts of *Henry IV*, and introductory essays by Kostetskyi and Irena Makaryk on Les Kurbas's groundbreaking staging of *Macbeth* in the Berezil Theatre. Forthcoming volumes are expected to include Kostetskyi's translation of *Romeo and Juliet*, Vasyl Barka's *King Lear*, Yuri Klen's *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*, and fragments of *Hamlet* translated by Kostetskyi. The first of these texts is virtually inaccessible in Ukraine, as it is absent from libraries and digital archives. Their inclusion will offer a broader understanding of the émigré translators' contributions to Ukrainian Shakespeareana, with their experimental approach providing a valuable counterpoint to the more conservative translations that emerged from within the Soviet Union. The diaspora's translations represent not just a cultural achievement but also an act of resistance, preserving and enriching Ukrainian engagement with Shakespeare while separated from the homeland. Through their bold stylistic choices and intellectual creativity, these translations underscore the unwavering commitment, enduring resilience, and remarkable adaptability of Ukrainian culture.

Despite the impression that half the Ukrainian Shakespeareana is composed of translations buried in oblivion, there are a few happy-ending stories to tell. These stories of survival are nothing short of miraculous and involve sheer luck since two translations – *Hamlet* by Leonid Hrebinka and *Romeo and Juliet* by Vasyl Mysyk – were erased from public memory on purpose, as part of the Stalinist regime's brutal campaign to silence and repress Ukrainian writers and people of culture in the 1930s.

Ukrainian poet Leonid Hrebinka²⁵ completed his full translation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in 1939. He brought the manuscript to Kyiv, intending for

²⁵ Leonid Yevhenovych Hrebinka (1909–1942), Ukrainian poet and translator, was born in the village of Maryanivka, in the Poltava region, into a family of minor landowners with ancestral ties to the prominent Ukrainian writer Yevhen Pavlovych Hrebinka. Following the upheavals of the Russian Revolution and the establishment of Soviet power, the family lost their estate, and Leonid, after a series of hardships, ended up in a Kyiv orphanage in 1924. Despite early misfortunes, he demonstrated remarkable literary talent, beginning to write poetry aged 12 and publishing in leading Ukrainian journals from 1926 onward. His sole poetry collection, *Radist chornozemna* [Joy of the Black Soil] (1930), published in Kyiv, showcased his lyrical gift but was met with harsh 'proletarian' criticism. This backlash forced Hrebinka to abandon original literary pursuits and turn to newspaper editing for survival. In 1933, he moved to Moscow, primarily to escape the unfavourable socio-political climate in Soviet Ukraine, where severe

it to be used in a production at the Ivan Franko Ukrainian Drama Theatre. The translation had been in progress long before 1939: Leonid had read excerpts from his version to Valentina Yurchenko, the wife of Hrebinka's elder brother Vadym and a teacher of English by profession, in Kharkiv during 1934–1935, and she was deeply impressed by the elegance and beauty of this version's poetic language (Коломієць [Kolomiets; Kolomîec'], *Український художній переклад* [Ukrainian Literary Translation; Ukraïns'kij hudožnij pereklad] 287). Unfortunately, the manuscript was lost. The theatre was preparing to stage *Hamlet* using Hrebinka's translation, but their plans were disrupted by a Russian-language production of the play in another Kyiv theatre. Subsequent attempts to publish Hrebinka's translation also failed, despite the enthusiastic endorsement it received from the renowned poet Maksym Ryl'skyi, who tried to promote its publication. At that time, however, a different translation of *Hamlet* by Viktor Ver was already in print.

Hrebinka's translation remained unknown to the public until the 1970s, when it was rediscovered and transferred to the Archive-Museum of Literature and Arts of the Ukrainian SSR in Kyiv. Rostyslav Dotsenko, who provided this information, explained that the manuscript had been stored for about 30 years in poor condition in a house in Vinnytsia, which used to belong to Ihor Kostetskyi during the pre-war period. Eventually, it was entrusted to Hryhorii Kochur, a prominent Ukrainian translator who himself rendered *Hamlet* in the early 1960s: he ensured it was added to the Archive-Museum and actively advocated for its inclusion in the six-volume edition of Shakespeare's works published by Dnipro publishing house in 1984–1986 (Доценко [Dotsenko] 219). However, when Hrebinka's translation appeared in volume five of this edition, it had undergone significant intervention by the editor-in-chief of the volume, Mykhailo Tupailo. He smoothed over certain politically and ideologically ambiguous passages, thus altering its expressive and conceptual integrity (Коломієць [Kolomiets; Kolomîec'], *Українські перекладачі* [Ukrainian

ideological criticism had stifled his ability to continue as an original poet. There, he started editorial work for various newspapers, later channeling his poetic energy into translations. He undertook major translation projects, including a rendition of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (for which he undertook intensive studies in English). His translations and original literary work earned him admission to Maxim Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow where he studied from 1939 to 1941. Despite finding temporary refuge, Hrebinka was arrested on June 24, 1941, shortly after the start of World War II, on charges of alleged involvement in an anti-Soviet Ukrainian nationalist group. All his documents and manuscripts were confiscated and later destroyed. On November 17, 1941, he was sentenced to death by a military tribunal in Saratov. Although his sentence was commuted to ten years of imprisonment in April 1942, he died in prison on April 14, 1942, reportedly from an "intestinal infection," a common euphemism for death by starvation (Коломієць [Kolomiets; Kolomîec'], *Український художній переклад* [Ukrainian Literary Translation; Ukraïns'kij hudožnij pereklad] 285–287).

Translators; Ukrainski perekladachi] 169).²⁶ Despite these changes, the inclusion of Hrebinka's translation in this major collection marked an important recognition of his work.

The minimally edited (only in illegible places) text of Hrebinka's *Hamlet* was first published in 1975 in the literary journal *Vsesvit* (issue No. 7). However, parts of the manuscript had deteriorated over time due to poor storage conditions, making certain sections difficult to read. The task of restoring the text was undertaken by the Shakespeare scholar and translation expert Mariia Azhniuk, who carried out meticulous textual analysis and worked to reconstruct the damaged passages. Later, it was included in the collection of Leonid Hrebinka's poetry and translations, *Radist Chornozemna* [The Joy of the Black Soil], published in 1990 by the Kyiv-based Dnipro publishing house. This collection was compiled and annotated by Rostyslav Dotsenko, with a foreword by the critic and literary scholar Ivan Dziuba. The book gathered all of Hrebinka's works that Dotsenko had been able to recover at the time.

The other happy rediscovery amidst the numerous lost, neglected and forgotten translations of Shakespeare into Ukrainian is the story of Vasyl Mysyk's²⁷ *Romeo and Juliet*, completed in 1932. This version marks the culmination of a prolific period of Shakespeare activity in the 1920s and early 1930s. However, its fate as well as the destiny of its translator turned out to be tragic. On the night of November 5, 1934, Mysyk was arrested in his apartment within the 'Slovo' Writers' Building in Kharkiv while editing his translation of a novel by Walter Scott. According to Vasyl Petrovych Mynko, a fellow resident who lived one floor above, Mysyk was arrested by mistake – the warrant was issued in Mynko's name, but the agents did not bother to verify the individual they were apprehending. For them, it was inconsequential, as Mysyk came from what was dismissively referred to as a 'priestly' family, making him a "соціально небезпечною особою"²⁸ [social'no nebezpečnoiu osoboïu] (Коломієць [Kolomiyets; Kolomiêc'], *Український художній переклад* [Ukrainian Literary Translation; Ukraïns'kij hudožnij pereklad] 295). On February 26, 1935, the indictment was approved. However, due to insufficient evidence, the investigation was ultimately halted. After enduring numerous tortures

²⁶ The original, non-edited version was published only in 2003 by *Osnovy* publishing house.

²⁷ Vasyl Mysyk (1907–1983) was a Ukrainian poet, translator, and writer, born into a priest's family in the village of Novopavlivka, in the Dnipropetrovsk region. He developed an early talent for poetry, which was recognized by his teacher, poet Arkadii Kazka, who introduced his student's work to prominent literary figures such as Pavlo Tychyna, Mykola Zerov, and Maksym Rylskyi. Mysyk's poetic debut came in 1923 with publications in leading literary journals. He had a deep interest in languages, mastering several, including English, Persian, and Tajik (Коломієць [Kolomiyets; Kolomiêc'], *Український художній переклад* [Ukrainian Literary Translation; Ukraïns'kij hudožnij pereklad] 293–294).

²⁸ "a socially dangerous individual".

and even a staged execution meant to coerce a confession, on July 19, 1935, the NKVD's Special Meeting, disregarding the lack of evidence, sentenced Mysyk to five years in a labour camp. He served this unjust sentence in the notorious Solovki camps. Upon completing his sentence, Mysyk returned to his native village, Novopavlivka in the spring of 1940. With the outbreak of war in 1941, he voluntarily joined the front and served as an artilleryman. During fierce battles on the Kerch Peninsula, he was encircled by enemy forces along with 150,000 Soviet soldiers. Once wounded, he was captured by the Nazis and placed in a camp for Soviet prisoners of war until the end of World War II. In the spring of 1945, he managed to evade execution, escaping alongside a group of soldiers who were slated for extermination.

Following the war, Mysyk was repatriated to the Soviet Union. Upon returning to Kharkiv, while avoiding re-arrest, he was nonetheless forbidden from pursuing a literary career. Until the late 1950s, he had to work as an accountant in a tram depot. All his attempts to gain permission to publish his translations, including those of Robert Burns, were consistently rebuffed (Коломієць [Kolomiyets; Kolomiêc'], *Український художній переклад* [Ukrainian Literary Translation; Ukraïns'kij hudožnij pereklad] 296). Only after the political thaw of 1956, thanks to the tireless efforts of Maksym Rylsky, Vasyl Mysyk was finally reinstated in his 'literary rights'. According to his widow, Mariia Taran-Mysyk, throughout these harrowing years, "пролежав на горищі... Миші пообгризали кути, папір пожовк, але весь машинописний текст з виправленнями зберігся чудово" ("Ромео і Джульєтта") [proležav na goriši... Miši poobgrizali kuti, papir požovk, ale ves' mašinopisnij tekst z vipravlennâmi zberîgsâ čudovo ("Romeo i Džul'ëtta")].²⁹ The initial publication of the translation appeared in the journal *Prapor* (1988), but no further publications occurred until 2019, neither in Shakespeare's collected works in translation, nor as a separate book. Finally, thanks to the efforts of Professor Eleonora Solovey (Kyiv) and writer Anatolii Stozhuk, director of *Maidan Publishing House* (Kharkiv), this gem of Ukrainian translation was printed as a standalone book for the first time.

The third rediscovery, while perhaps less dramatic than the previous ones, was that *Hamlet* translated by Mykhailo Rudnytskyi for the first Ukrainian production of the tragedy in 1943 in occupied Lviv.³⁰ This legendary production, despite enjoying sold-out performances, had a tragically short run. The swift

²⁹ The manuscript of the translation (*Romeo and Juliet*) lay in the attic... Mice had gnawed at the corners, and the paper had yellowed, but the entire typewritten text with corrections was perfectly preserved (*Romeo i Dzhulietta*).

³⁰ In 2023, to commemorate the 80th anniversary of this production, the Ukrainian Shakespeare Centre in cooperation with the Department of Theatre Studies, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, created a virtual museum #Гамлет_UA: дія 1, сцена [Gamlet_UA: diâ 1,

advance of the Soviet Army towards Lviv instilled widespread panic among the city's inhabitants, prompting Yosyp Hirniak, the production's director, as well as Volodymyr Blavatskyi, the acclaimed actor who played Hamlet, and numerous other members of the Lviv Opera Theatre, the venue of the production, to flee westward, ultimately finding refuge in the United States. Mykhailo Rudnytskyi remained in Lviv, working at Ivan Franko Lviv University as a professor. His activity before 1945 was, to a certain extent, concealed.

After 1991, when it was possible to investigate the non-Soviet history of the Ukrainian theatre openly, the search for Mykhailo Rudnytskyi's translation started. While it was labelled as "brilliant" and "outstanding" even before its premiere (Kozak [Kozak] 171–172), it was nowhere to be found: it was missing from the official archives. Lviv director and theatre scholar, Bohdan Kozak, who was the search enthusiast, tried to find the elusive manuscript's traces in the USA, where Hirniak and Blavatskyi had emigrated. It was eventually found within the Blavatskyi's family archive stored in the Ukrainian Museum in New York. Yuri Levytskyi, the son of Vira Levytska, who played Gertrude in the 1943 *Hamlet*, kindly sent a copy of it to Ukraine (Kozak [Kozak] 177). However, this was not the end of the story. In 2005, Lyudmyla Rudnytska, the translator's widow, shared a 1956 version of *Hamlet*, which incorporated several edits and revisions. Consequently, in 2008, the Department of Theatre Studies and Acting at the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv published the first comprehensive edition of Mykhailo Rudnytskyi's *Hamlet*, primarily based on the 1943 version, with minor adjustments incorporated from the 1956 revision.

It would be too optimistic to think that losses among Shakespeare's translations in Ukrainian are a thing of the past. Some of those translations whose creators are present and accounted for (or have only recently passed away) cannot be labelled as lost but rather endangered: if they are not published, they will be lost forever. For instance, a postmodern translation of *Twelfth Night* by Yuriy Andrukhovych for the 2013 production in Taras Shevchenko Cherkasy Drama Theatre directed by Andrii Kritenko is almost unknown. Moreover, the fate of the translation and production was quite Shakespearean: a great fire dramatically damaged the theatre building. This resulted in a prolonged, five-year repair period, after which many previous box office hits never returned to the stage. Subsequently, only a few copies of the translation survived. There is also some hope to see the translation of *Edward III* by Maria Hablevych, a famous Lviv translator and Shakespearean scholar, which is out of print.³¹ For now, only some excerpts are published as part of her article

scena 1943] 1943: <https://www.artsteps.com/view/657d8dcb3e7698b59c6de2a7>. See the article by Nataliya Torkut, Svitlana Deineka, and Roman Lavrentii in this volume.

³¹ For more information, see the article "The Quest for Selfhood: Shakespeare's Sonnets Interpreted by Maria Hablevych" by Anna Sverediuk and Oksana Dzera in this volume.

on Shakespeare's worldview of the 1590s (Габлевич [Hablevych]). Oleksandr Hriaznov (1940–2021), the most prolific Ukrainian Shakespeare translator of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, with thirteen plays to his portfolio, succeeded in publishing two volumes of his translations, but until recently, eight plays had remained unpublished. His descendants, apparently, published them in a free Ukrainian online library which eventually contributed to his post-mortem fame: two of the recent Shakespearean premieres in Ukraine (*Macbeth* in Taras Shevchenko Cherkasy Drama Theatre (2024, dir. by Stanislav Sadakliyev) and *Othello* in Kyiv Academic Theatre of Drama and Comedy (2024, dir. by Oksana Dmitriyeva)) used Hriaznov's translations, never staged previously.

The history of Shakespeare translations in Ukraine is a poignant reflection of the nation's complex and often tragic past. The numerous instances of 'lost translations' – whether through deliberate destruction, neglect, censorship or the passage of time – serve as stark reminders of the challenges faced by Ukrainian culture in the face of foreign domination, political repression, linguistic suppression, and cultural erasure. These losses represent not merely the disappearance of significant literary works but also the gagging of voices, the silencing of creative expression, and the suppression of Ukrainian identity. The recovery and study of these lost translations are therefore not regarded as an academic pastime. It is imperative that we continue to seek out and preserve these translations, bringing them back to life for modern audiences and scholars alike. Now, at a time of war, this task becomes even more urgent, as these precious texts face the risk of being damaged or irretrievably lost. These efforts are a powerful reminder that even in the darkest times, the preservation of art and culture remains an act of defiance and hope for the future. Rediscovering and meticulously analysing previous translations not only enriches our understanding of Ukrainian Shakespeareana but also provides valuable insights for modern translators. By studying the linguistic choices, stylistic nuances, and interpretative strategies of earlier interpretations, contemporary translators can draw inspiration and develop fresh approaches to Shakespeare's texts. Moreover, such engagement with numerous past translations may ultimately encourage retranslation, fostering a renewed dialogue between the past and the present. This ongoing process ensures the enduring power of Shakespeare's art that never fails to connect, inspire, and endure.

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Modernising the Ukrainian Language through the Power of Translation: Ihor Kostetskyi's Shakespeare's Sonnets¹

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 Kostetskyi² (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

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

Movement (MUR).³ 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 MUR⁴ 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

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,⁵ 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)⁶

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

⁵ 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".

⁶ 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).⁷ 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 decade⁸ (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

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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,⁹ with the time limit "no further than Zerov",¹⁰ 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

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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, *like a canker in the fragrant*
rose,
Doth spot the beauty of thy budding
name!
O, in what *sweets* dost thou thy sins
enclose! (1712)¹¹

Як солодко ти чуєшся
в ганьбі,
Що так **плямить, немов троянду**
гусінь,
Прекрасну бруньку імени
тобі!
О, замкнуто твій гріх у **пасий**
кусень! (68)¹²

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 *ністряк* (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

¹¹ 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.

¹² Quotations of Kostetskyi’s translations follow *Шекспірові сонети* (*Shakespeare’s Sonnets*) (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 нахрест 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”)¹³ 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,

¹³ 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)¹⁴

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. ("Dusha 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" ("Ukraïns'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*.

¹⁴ 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 (*movomyslennia*) 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.¹⁵ 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

¹⁵ 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 perekladach" 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 Velychkovsky¹⁶ 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 perekladach" 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,

¹⁶ 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"¹⁷ ("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"

¹⁷ 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).¹⁸ 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 (“Ukraïns’kyi perekladach” 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” (“Ukraïns’kyi perekladach” 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” (“Ukraïns’kyi perekladach” 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 1928.¹⁹ 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

¹⁸ Ukrainian: *ochudnennia*, *odyvnennia*, Russian: *ostranenie*.

¹⁹ 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” (Khvyliia, “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.²⁰

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.²¹ 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).

²⁰ 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).

²¹ 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, словом (*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
встокротъ.

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.²² His translation of Sonnet 130 develops a parodic use of Ustrytsky's strategy in his

²² 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

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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“Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind”: Reading Vladyslav Yerko’s Illustrations to Shakespeare in Ukrainian

Abstract

The article comments on the intersemiotic translation of Shakespeare’s works in Vladyslav Yerko’s conceptual illustrations to *Hamlet* (2008), *Romeo and Juliet* (2016), and *King Lear* (2021), translated by Yurii Andrukhovych and published by the Ukrainian house A-BA-BA-HA-LA-MA-HA. The paper investigates the way in which Yerko’s richly symbolic visual narratives engage in dialogue with Ukrainian

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culture and history. Situated within a broader tradition of Shakespearean illustration, Yerko's work exemplifies illustration as metatext. His imagery blends Renaissance allegory, surreal detail, and postmodern irony, reflecting influences ranging from Albín Brunovský's art to Kozintsev's cinematic *Hamlet*. The article demonstrates how Yerko's visual interpretations, paired with Yurii Andrukhovych's witty and provocative Ukrainian translations, create a multilayered conversation between Shakespeare's England and contemporary Ukraine. By highlighting the dialogical nature of illustration as a form of adaptation and translation, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about the global afterlives of Shakespeare in new cultural contexts. Yerko's illustrations reveal how visual arts reimagine the Shakespeare's works as both Ukrainian and universal, reaffirming the vitality of printed books as sites of cross-cultural exchange, aesthetic reflection, metatextual play and deep reading.

Keywords: Shakespeare illustration, Vladyslav Yerko, intersemiotic translation, Ukrainian culture, Yurii Andrukhovych, conceptual art, book design, Shakespeare reception.

When questioned by Polonius about the essence of the book he is reading, Hamlet ironically answers, "Words, words, words..." (*Hamlet* 2.2.210). There has been considerable speculation about which book precisely Hamlet is reading.¹ Just as well, it might have even been a prompter's book with the whole text of the play. Shakespeare was exceptionally skilled at incorporating metatextual references. For a contemporary audience, this remark is essential as Hamlet could have been reading images. One thing is certain: with this bare-bone, literal and mocking yet simultaneously ambiguous and enigmatic reply, Shakespeare joined a conversation about the mechanisms and magic of the act of reading and imagination. So, to answer Polonius's question "What is the matter, my lord?" (2.2.211), the reader needs to feed the words, the signs they see on the page, into their consciousness that will translate them into ideas and images. This process is described by Otto F. Ege as using your "inner eye" (4), which seems to be nothing less than Hamlet's "mind's eye" (1.2.193). And while the anatomy of this vital organ cannot yet be effectively explored using MRI or other contemporary methods, the study of illustrations offers us a glimpse into the enchanting world of human imagination.

An illustration is, in fact, an intersemiotic translation of the text at hand. When Mervyn Peake, a famous illustrator, speaks about his first insights into the profession, he remarks the following:

¹ See Craig.

I began to realize that these men had more than a good eye, a good hand, a good brain. These qualities were not enough. Nor was their power as designers, as draughtsmen. Even passion was not enough. Nor was compassion, nor irony. All this they must have, but above all things there must be the power to slide into another man's soul. The power to be identified with the author, character and atmosphere. (16)

The illustrator's craft is compared by Peake to the work of the master perfumer: "One might say that books have different smells. *Wuthering Heights* smells different from *Moby Dick*. [...] It is for the illustrator to make his drawings have the same smell as the book he is illustrating" (17). Thus, the illustrator's role is not just to try and translate the key plot moments and characters into the visual language but also manage to recreate the atmosphere of the book as well as its aesthetic effect on the reader.

Being a specific kind of translation, illustration caters to the tastes of a particular audience and thus needs to be especially time-sensitive and aware of the cultural context in which it will be received together with the text. When illustrations are created in a different epoch, they become a bridge between the epoch of the source text and the contemporary readership. As David Greetham says of annotation, illustration, too, is "always contingent and local, for the relationship between text and audience is always changing" (369). Illustration as a paratextual and metatextual element functions as a commentary on the text and in many instances as its annotation (especially, in the case of book covers, frontispieces and chapter initials). To this end, Stuart Sillars praises Heath Robinson's "inventiveness as a visual critic" (228), which is most strikingly demonstrated in his *Twelfth Night* illustration (published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1908). Considering illustration to be a form of annotation, Emily Lauer stresses the crucial role of an illustrator in shaping the reader's reception of a text:

It is this realization which has made the most recent commentators on annotation regard it as a question of power. [...] The critical view of the annotator is that he or she, in the guise of offering help, is knowingly or otherwise controlling the situation by both enabling and limiting interpretation and both serving and creating the reader. (43)

Thus, the art of illustration is no mere translation. For some types of technical and educational literature, illustrations are indispensable. In picture books for children, we find interdependent storytelling, "where text and illustrations combine to create meaning (at times [...] by delivering contradictory messages) [which] requires readers to attend closely to both" (Sierschynski 291). In such books, the verbal and the visual parts are interdependent and create an integral unity. Thus, the

illustration becomes “an extension of the author’s function” (Lamb 576). However, in the words of Lynton Lamb, “no imaginative work needs illustrating in this sense. The author can create his mood and reach his climax unaided. Therefore, since there is no functional occasion for the illustrator, if he does come in, it should be on a parallel course, and from a separate sovereign art” (Lamb 576). A parallel line can only be considered parallel if there is another line that the first line is parallel to; similarly, illustration, while being “a separate sovereign art”, is at all times dependent on the existence of the text. This constant seems to be a restricting and confining factor, and yet it seems to point towards rather wide possibilities for the creative synthesis of verbal and visual elements.

In Bernard Berenson’s wording, the illustrative element in a work of art is “everything which appeals to us not for any intrinsic quality, as of colour or form or composition, contained in the work of art itself, but for the value the thing represented has elsewhere”. We cannot argue with the metatextual nature of an illustration, but at the same time, this ability to point beyond its own confines opens up completely new and fascinating horizons for this form of art, increasing its aesthetic potential rather than decreasing it. Lamb supports this argument:

[T]his does not conversely mean [...] that if the thing represented has a value elsewhere, there can be no intrinsic qualities of form or of composition in that work of art. If we look at one of the greatest paintings in the world [Piero della Francesca, *The Resurrection*] we find that it has every essential intrinsic quality; and at the same time it is the worthiest conceivable illustration of something that has the greatest conceivable value outside itself – the notion and fact of Easter. (573)

Illustration can serve an ambitious aim: to unite pictorial mastery with analytical insights into the world of the literary work. Thus, the evolution of the illustration, from the splendid decorative miniatures of the illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages, to the narrative illustrations creating suspense in Victorian serial novels, and up to today’s conceptual illustration saturated with symbolism has been a search for the optimal synergy between the word and the image. Within this unique synthesis, the image can both support the word and, at the same time, build on it, allowing the reader to achieve a higher level of insight into the text without feeling confined by the dictates of the visual elements.

With illustrations “now stand[ing] as additional signifiers, imparting information designed to complement the comprehension of the corresponding text” (Berg 73), they should be viewed by scholars as equal partners of the textual elements in the process of meaning-making. In his iconic work, *Radiant Textuality*, Jerome McGann brings the material form of a text into the spotlight by arguing that it always signifies something: the “apparitions of text, its paratexts, bibliographical codes and all visual features [...] are as important in the text’s signifying programs as the linguistic

elements" (McGann 11–12). Likewise, as David Skilton argues, "illustration affects the sheer mechanics of the reading of fiction" (305). According to him, "tools which literary analysts of narrative and reading have at their disposal" (306) should be employed to analyze the role of illustrations during the act of reading.

The "bitextual" relationship, as Lorraine Janzen Kooistra terms it (5), between verbal and visual components can take on different functions. Otto Ege asserts that "fine illustrations can assume many different roles. They can document a text, decorate the page, sell the story, create a mood, or interpret the story" (5). In the conversation between the word and the image, the distribution of roles can acquire varied nuancing. According to Robert L. Patten, illustration may "suppose, support, subvert, explain, interpret, and critique its verbal partner, entering into a complexly reciprocal, interactive, and [...] persuasive dialogue" (Patten 91–128 qtd. in Leighton 66). In some cases, as Mann shows in her analysis, illustrations can be meant to evaluate and interrogate the verbal narrative, and even produce an opposing reading of the text (178). While the power that illustrations wield in shaping the perception of the text might seem to some readers to be overwhelming and confining, this productive tension between the text and the image can also make the reading experience richer, more playful and interactive, and add to it new freshness and liveliness at the same time. In his book, *Words About Pictures* (1988), Perry Nodelman points out that the interplay between the printed word and the graphic representation results in a "unity on a higher level", and the difference between the words and the pictures creates "a significant source of pleasure to the reader" (209). This interplay can be carried out through the interaction of a wide choice of visual elements (such as colour, line, texture, shape, space, etc.) and pictorial tools (montage, positionality, frames, and perspective). Attention should be paid to elements of design such as text fonts, text layouts, book orientation, and borders as well (Villarreal 266). With the development of 'conceptual illustration', this toolkit grew to include visual metaphors, which have taken this art to a new level in terms of the relationship between text and image.

Visual metaphors caught the illustrators' eyes with the development of 'conceptual' visual imagery, which first became popular in the USA in the 1950s when "there seemed a need to present the viewer with much more enigmatic and ambiguous images that invited deeper interpretation" (Male 54) related to the social and cultural issues of the day. With their potential for summarizing a text and commenting on it in more complex and interesting ways than narrative illustrations, conceptual illustrations easily became the dominant style in modern illustration practice and gave the art of illustration a new toolkit in competition with photography. Conceptual illustrations allowed illustrators to create artworks which managed "to be interpretative and to convey the 'texture' of a topic or idea rather than, like photography, present just the 'veneer' or 'surface' of the subject" (Male 54). While this observation seems to be a little unfair

towards the metatextual potential of photographic images accompanying a text, it nevertheless offers an insight into the nature of conceptual illustrations which in its essence attempt not only to represent such classic referents as the plot, the characters, and the motives, but also look deeper and interpret them as creating both a parallel narrative and a metatextual commentary on the text. At the same time, being often symbolic in their nature, such illustrations offer more freedom for the readers' interpretation and thus seem to be less confining and dictatorial in terms of dialogical, bitextual meaning-making.

Words as Images and Images as Words in Vladyslav Yerko's Conceptual Illustrations

With Shakespeare, the greater interpretative freedom is of special importance due to the iconic semantic polyvalency of his works and the ample scope of existing interpretations. There can be no finite Shakespeare, only Shakespeare our contemporary, continually reinvented by us in search of our identity. Shakespeare's works have also known a long and rich history of being illustrated: from the ornamental elements of the first Folio to narrative Victorian illustrations, splendid souvenir editions of the twentieth century to present-day comic books, graphic novels, and multiple-path adventure quests. In this history, a special place is reserved for those artists who have taken the challenge of interpreting the iconic texts through conceptual illustrations while also preserving the veil of mystery enveloping them, which has become an essential part of the text itself.

One such daring creative is Vladyslav Yerko, a prominent and well-known Ukrainian illustrator who has won numerous awards for his work. He has created illustrations for the children's books *The Snow Queen* and *The Tales of the Misty Albion*, a series of books about Harry Potter, as well as for the novels by Paulo Coelho and Richard Bach, among others. His illustrations are famous for being highly detailed, imaginative, and visually rich. Yerko has traditionally worked with A-BA-BA-HA-LA-MA-HA Publishers, and, when in 2008 this publishing house undertook the release of the illustrated edition of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, he was chosen to work with Yurii Andrukhovych's rendering of the seminal tragedy,² originally published in 2000 in the literary magazine *Thursday*.³ "Theoretically, this

2 В. Шекспір [W. Shakespeare; V. Shekspir]. *Гамлет, принц Данський* [Hamlet, Prince of Denmark; Hamlet, pryncs Danskyi]. пер. з англ. Ю. Андруховича [trans. from English by Yurii Andrukhovych; per. z anhl. Yu. Andrukhovycha]. Київ: А-БА-БА-ГА-ЛА-МА-ГА [Kiiiv: A-BA-BA-HA-LA-MA-HA], 2008.

3 Вільям Шекспір [William Shakaspeare; Viliam Shekspir]. *Гамлет, принц Данії* [Hamlet, Prince of Denmark; Hamlet, pryncs Danii]. Переклад Юрія Андруховича [Translated by Yurii

play is to be translated by almost every generation – with their own characteristic vocabulary, accents, and nuancing,” said Ivan Malkovych, the editor of the first translation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in the twenty-first century, published in Ukraine (as cited in Киселева [Kiseleva]). *Hamlet* was the first of Shakespeare’s plays to be rendered in Ukrainian (by Pavlin Svetsyts’kiy, 1865)⁴ and since then, every generation of Ukrainian intellectuals has crafted their own *Hamlet*. Andrukhovych, a famous Ukrainian writer, and Yerko, an outstanding illustrator, have become the perfect team to visualize a twenty-first century *Hamlet*, as the character, in Marvin Hunt’s words, seems to be “a present absence we pursue as a means of finding and knowing ourselves” (Hunt 10), and to open up a door for Shakespeare our contemporary with their further projects *Romeo and Juliet* (2016) and *King Lear* (2021).

Andrukhovych’s translation is certainly unconventional and stands in stark contrast to well-known Ukrainian translations by Hryhoriy Kochur, Leonid Hrebinka, and others, which are considered traditional. His versions are marked by a charismatic style that stems from bold modernisation and domestication, making productive and funny use of slang, obscene language, secondary wordplay, as well as daring references, and allusions to Soviet and contemporary Ukrainian realia. The outcome of this literary blend is three sharp, dynamic, and witty texts – at times raw and provocative, yet also imaginative, authentic, lively, and sparkling with humour. One of their main advantages is their high readability and being highly stage-friendly – these translations are talking both to Shakespeare and to their contemporary readers.

In an interview, Andrukhovych mentions Stanisław Barańczak, who translated Shakespeare into Polish, as one of the major influences on his work:

It was Barańczak who gave me the idea: reading Shakespeare is fun. He destroyed the idea of the great classic Shakespeare, who stands on a high pedestal. He performed the dismantling of Shakespeare, and then the playwright appears before us as a modern idol of pop culture. Shakespeare is still a commercial director of the theater, who is interested in seeing the public come to his performances. Therefore, his plays contain a lot of cheap humor (Киселева [Kiseleva]).

By demolishing the pedestal, Andrukhovych allows Shakespeare to walk among and talk directly to twenty-first century readers and theatre-goers. No wonder that

Andrukhovych; Perekład Yurii Andrukhovycha] *Четвер*. 2000. Вип. 10. С. 2–103 [Četver. 2000. Vip. 10. S. 2–103].

⁴ For more information see “Virtual Museum ‘#HAMLET_UA: ACT 1, SCENE 1943’ in the Context of Decolonizing Knowledge about Ukraine” by Svitlana Deineka, Nataliya Torkut, Roman Lavrentii in this volume.

in Yerko's illustrations Shakespeare can often be spotted among the characters: for example, in the illustration to Scene 2 in Act 2 in *Hamlet*, he is depicted standing among the actors who are being instructed by Hamlet, and while all the other characters have turned towards the melancholic 'Black' Prince, Shakespeare is looking directly at the viewer with a mysterious and knowing Mona Lisa smile on his face.⁵ In Yerko's illustrations, Shakespeare is a prompter in his box, one of the actors instructed by Hamlet, and he is also one with the Globe, towering over it but never divided from it, as well as a priest offering us a vial with poison or, possibly, an antidote. Shakespeare is still in charge and Yerko is doing his best to follow the Bard's directions, translating his words into images without trying to dominate the narrative. In an interview, Yerko confessed the following thoughts:

ілюстрація книг допомагає мені ховатися від свого максимального самовираження. Наприклад, у живописця є полотно, на якому він відображає своє естетичне «я». Тобто художник і є його картина. А я – лише додаток до Шекспіра, Гофмана, Андерсена або кого-небудь іще. («Я ховаюся»)⁶

A-BA-BA-HA-LA-MA-HA's editions are unquestionably translations, they honour Shakespeare and his unchallenged authority. And yet they are parallel sovereign bitextual artifacts that bridge the divide between Renaissance England and twenty-first century Ukraine. The project accomplished by Andrukhovych, Yerko, and Malkovych is an invitation to a conversation with Shakespeare – sent directly to the present-day Ukrainian readership.

Yerko's success is largely rooted in his sources of inspiration, one of which is the work of the celebrated Slovak painter, graphic artist, and educator Albín Brunovský, known for his complex and subtle attention to detail, and his imaginative exploration of the subconscious. Yerko refers to Brunovský as one of his 'starters' or 'launchers', explaining "[s]ometimes it happens that like a blind mouse you are pounding in a corner and cannot find a way out. And then you see the works of another artist, and they give you the key, they launch you to a new level" (Балаева [Valaeva]). In Yerko's art, Brunovský's influence is evident through a surreal interpretation of subjects, a refined line work, the austere expressiveness of icon-like faces, a fascination with enigmatic symbolism, and the merging of animate and inanimate elements.

5 В. Шекспір [W. Shakespeare; V. Shekspir]. *Гамлет, принц Данський* [Hamlet, Prince of Denmark; Hamlet, pryncs Danskyi]. 96–97.

6 "Book illustration helps me to hide from my maximum self-expression. For example, a painter has a canvas onto which he projects his aesthetic self. That is, the artist is his painting. And I am just an appendix to Shakespeare, Hoffmann, Andersen, or anyone else." If not otherwise indicated, translations are our own.

The aestheticisation of the macabre in Yerko's illustrations aligns closely with the elegant black-and-white sinister elegance of the illustrations by John Austen for Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1922), known for their intricate, hypnotic designs, and subtle hints of eroticism. Much like Austen, Yerko deepens the darkness, enveloping the entire scene in shadows. In Yerko's *Hamlet*, his portrayal of the 'Black' Prince reflects the philosophical perspectives of F. Nietzsche and G. Wilson Knight, who claim that Hamlet embodies death itself as "a living death in the midst of life" (45). Just like Shakespeare himself, Death, dressed in black, is a constant presence not only in Yerko's illustrations to *Hamlet*, but in all three editions – i.e. also in *Romeo and Juliet* (2016) and *King Lear* (2021) – appearing among the characters and often trying on their roles. Skulls, bones, and dead insects are integrated into many designs, including the initials of the acts and scenes, as in illuminated manuscripts. While intensifying the feeling of the approaching end and awareness of the finite nature of life, all these elements are also intertwined with all the other illustrations: in Yerko's works, characters are living their lives, thus playing along with a 'carpe diem, memento mori' philosophy of the contemporary society. In fact, the beautifully illustrated editions seem to be saying that life is indeed short, and we need to be able to appreciate the luxury of a gourmet act of reading and decoding the symbolism of its rich illustrations as one of the more delicate privileges of being alive.

Another characteristic feature of Yerko's style is his versatile use of visual symbolism (especially visual metaphors), which is especially pronounced in his illustrations of *Hamlet*. Within traditional illustration, plot and characters have usually been in the spotlight. For example, Howard Pyle, one of the leading American illustrators of the 'Golden Age' of illustration, taught his students to focus on historical accuracy. Pyle, who "was primarily interested in the drama of pictures, had his students illustrate the climactic moments of narrative or historical situations, a practice that reinforced the notion that in art 'the idea' came first" (Goodman 14). However, Yerko disagrees with this approach, clarifying his position in an interview:

В пьесах Шекспира главные события происходят не в действии, а в паузах, характерах, размышлениях героев, в каких-то иронических замечаниях. Мне это гораздо интереснее, чем иллюстрировать просто действие. Я не люблю заниматься кинематографом, хотя иллюстрация в чем-то сродни экранизации. (Олих [Olikh])⁷

7 "In Shakespeare's plays, the main events occur not in action, but in pauses, characters, reflections of protagonists, in some ironic remarks. This is much more interesting to me than simply illustrating the action. I do not like being engaged in the cinema, although the illustration is in a way akin to film adaptation."

By portraying verbal elements such as metaphors, puns, and symbols, Yerko creates pictures that can be read. These accompany a text that can thus be seen as mirroring an essential, fundamental quality of Shakespeare's style. In one of his essays, Alexander Shurbanov comments on Shakespeare's 'anti-nominalism':

Една отличителна черта на зрелия стил на Шекспир е метафоричното конкретизиране/овеществяване на абстрактните понятия. Не познавам друг поет, който да борави по този начин с продуктите на интелекта, за да постигне пълна интеграция на духовното и материалното битие, преодолявайки вековната дихотомия в основите на западната религия и философия и придавайки космически измерения на всичко, случващо се в човешкия свят. (Шурбанов [Shurbanov] 188)⁸

Yerko manages to model this synthesis of spiritual and material elements through portraying in his illustrations "the funeral baked meats" (1.2.187)" that "did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables (1.2.188)", "incestuous sheets (1.2.162)" that bound Gertrude and Claudius into an alliance, and the art of playing on the pipe of a human soul.

Shakespeare's works possess a fairy-tale-like quality in the way they function as wandering plots that are appropriated by different epochs and cultures in hundreds of different ways. Yet, while the plots and characters are iconic and recognized by many, there are always some mysterious omissions and ambiguous half-words that provoke the recipients' desire to offer different theories and versions, explanations and even reworkings, sequels, and prequels, turning the plays into 'colouring books.' In his article "The Gentle Pastime of Extra-Illustrating Books," Robert R. Wark describes a hobby that used to be extremely popular with the British and US-American gentry for about a hundred and fifty years from the mid-eighteenth to the early twentieth century:

The idea was to start with a book that interested you. It might be on almost any subject – biography, history, travel, Shakespeare, and the Bible were among the most frequent choices. You gathered works of art on paper (mostly prints, less frequently drawings, and occasionally, after the mid-nineteenth century, photographs) that could serve as appropriate 'extra' illustrations to the text. You mounted the illustrations

⁸ "One distinctive feature of Shakespeare's mature style is the metaphorical concretization/embodiment of abstract notions. I do not know another poet who handles the products of the intellect in the same way in order to achieve full integration of the spiritual and material existence, overcoming the centuries-old dichotomy which lay the foundations of Western religion and philosophy and imparting cosmic dimensions to everything that happens in the human world."

on sheets uniform in size with the pages of the text; the book was taken out of its binding; the extra-illustrations were interleaved at appropriate places; the whole was rebound, often expanded to several volumes rather than the one or two with which the operation started. (151)

Unsurprisingly, Shakespeare was among the most popular choices: his works are a perpetuum mobile for the human imagination. And Yerko, in his illustrations, is trying to harness the power produced by this engine rather than limit it by offering an exhaustive and finite interpretation. Hence, his illustrations make ample use of visual metaphors, rich and intricate details, his portrayal of mood and atmosphere rather than key plot twists. All these strategies open up additional opportunities for the imagination and give the reader a choice. At the same time, Yerko's illustrations serve as a guide for inexperienced readers in the way they teach their 'inner eyes' to commute between the word and the image, and actively participate in the process of meaning-making.

Another strategy Yerko uses to bridge the gap between Renaissance England and contemporary Ukrainian readers, is building the connection with the present through anachronisms (such as an electric lamp or glasses) as well as allusions. It is not a coincidence that in Yerko's interpretation, Hamlet looks like the outstanding Soviet actor Innokenty Smoktunovsky, who played the eponymous prince in Grigori Kozintsev's iconic film (1964).⁹ Yerko incorporates this visual stereotype into his artwork to allude to the complex symbolic layers between the play and the film. During Soviet times, the regime actively suppressed any signs of independent thought, subjecting intellectuals to a brutal ideological meat grinder. As a result, many were forced to choose between marginalisation, deportation, exile, and imprisonment, or conforming to the regime's rigid norms, effectively becoming instruments of authority. Kozintsev's film captures this atmosphere of isolation, pervasive distrust, suspicion, and despair. In this bleak context, Smoktunovsky's portrayal of Hamlet emerges as the sole beacon of hope. Yerko's illustrations create a powerful intermedial reference to this rebellious film in times when hope is desperately needed. In his more recent work (2021), Yerko makes King Lear resemble the iconic Ukrainian writer Taras Shevchenko who, just like Shakespeare in Western literature, has been a key father figure for Ukrainian intellectuals but has also become a symbol of the search for the Ukrainian national identity and the fight for freedom and independence.

⁹ For more details see Nataliya Torkut, "'Is Whispering Nothing': Anti-totalitarian Implications in Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet*." *"...A sea-change into something rich and strange": Shakespeare Studies in Contemporary Ukraine*. Lviv-Torun: Liha-Pres, 2020. 126–158.

Ukrainians are appropriating Shakespeare through translation and illustration. Yerko's illustrations turn these three tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *King Lear* in his three books into a national cultural and educational project. This is why these texts are so modern, lively, relatable, and reader-oriented, and this is also why these translations are so appealing for directors. Yerko feels this strong connection and improvises by building a theatre on the page and making the illustrated characters come to life and act in it. The playful and complex interaction between the text and his illustrations gives these three books a distinctly theatrical quality, making them truly intermedial creations. The depiction of Shakespeare in the prompter's box, a recurring curtain motif, and the imaginative portrayal of the touring actors in *Hamlet*, the image of the Globe in *Romeo and Juliet*, or Shakespeare in the Fool's attire in *King Lear*, all enhance this effect, inviting the reader to reconnect with the world of the theatre by starting with the theatre of the reading act.

Conclusion

As an invitation is issued for a contemporary readership that is bombarded by visual stimuli on a daily basis, it is only natural that illustrations have to stand out as an aesthetic artifact. In the nineteenth century, "the growth in illustration changed not only reading practices but also the format of the book, in that the book became an intellectual and a visual object, one designed to be read and viewed" (Berg 73). Similarly, in the words of David Greetham, texts began to be seen and analysed "as both artifactual objects and conceptual entities" (x). Lauer emphasizes that "books as objects make meaning visually, and [...] different editions of the same 'text' can have very different tones based on book size, font, paper choices, paratextual material" (41). This ability to function as a luxurious artifact is one of the main advantages of print books in the digital age. They do not have to be "the most expensive édition de luxe, 'on real China paper'" (Sillars 217), popular at the end of the nineteenth century. Still, they need to create additional value by what they are offering the reader to heighten the pleasure of the reading act through aesthetic appeal and the synergy between word and image.

The A-BA-BA-HA-LA-MA-HA editions of Shakespeare's plays, the descendants of the richly illustrated single-play editions which appeared in the nineteenth century, are events per se for contemporary readers. They make the very act of holding the book memorable, and thus they facilitate the (re)construction of Shakespeare's image in contemporary society. Mervyn Peake reminisces about the impact certain illustrations had on him in his school days: "Turning the pages I would come upon these rectangular worlds, these full-page illustrations, charged, some with terror, some with tragedy, suspense or exhilaration – whose haunting

qualities have remained in my mind to this day" (16). Illustrations as complex and intricate as Yerko's artwork can attract and hold the attention of the reader much better than simple narrative ones due to the so-called "seductive detail effect" (Lin 561). Furthermore, according to Lin, abstract images promote more efficient processing of a text than concrete ones or plain text alone due to the greater proportion of time spent studying the text and more frequent transitions from text to image (Lin 561). The interplay between text and image not only brings readers the joy of exercising their literary detective skills but also challenges them to fight the limitations of the short attention span and enhance their reading motivation, creativity, and imagination. When young readers explore illustrations and develop the ability to read images, "they will attain deeper meanings from literature and an awareness of how visual images are used in their own meaning making" (Galda 506). In this context, one can safely say that Andrukhovych and Yerko are 'creating' and educating their own readers into visually literate critical thinkers with an eye for detail, immense curiosity, a flexible cognitive toolkit, and an advanced sense of humor.

As, in the words of Jaleen Grove, "early illustrators established the majority of popular culture tropes used in games, television, film, toys, advertising, and science, and in enduring print forms such as comics, magazines, and books" (Grove 115), one could study the place of Ukrainian illustrations in the ecosystem of Shakespeare discourse – including contemporary hybrid genres. Furthermore, as Lauer writes, "different versions of the same text can be part of a larger textual fabric of culture" (51), and thus textual criticism should be taken "away from the book narrowly conceived [...] toward a consideration of all forms of communication in a society" (Greetham 338–339). By connecting the dots, illustration has the potential to bring together different disciplines and approaches into a productive dialogical space in which Shakespeare discourse can truly flourish.

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Part Three

When Shakespeare is Ukrainian



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The Precariousness of Human Existence in William Shakespeare's Plays: A Ukrainian Perspective

Abstract

The study of precarity has emerged as a new theoretical interest in the humanities in response to contemporary global crises such as military conflicts, terrorist attacks, the COVID-19 pandemic, ecological disasters, and climate change. In the Ukrainian context, where war and geopolitical instability remain ever-present, the exploration of precarity resonates deeply. This article examines the exploration of the precariousness of human existence in William Shakespeare's

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plays through a distinctly Ukrainian lens. It engages with the ongoing war in Ukraine, the nation's experiences of trauma, loss, resilience, and with the therapeutic potential of Shakespeare-related programmes. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of precariousness and precarity, this essay analyses how Shakespeare's plays address the fundamental vulnerabilities of human life linked to health, race, and social inequities. It pays particular attention to the precariousness of human existence, with a focus on the realities of war, political power, and the system of government. The plays used in the analysis are *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Henry V*, *Richard II*, and *Richard III*. The paper concludes that Shakespeare's exploration of precarious existence speaks not only to the fragility of life in his time but also mirrors the existential challenges faced by Ukrainians today, making his works relevant to both local and global audiences.

Keywords: *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Henry V*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*, precariousness, precarity, vulnerability, Judith Butler, human existence, race, epidemics, disability, political power, war, Ukraine.

Recent debates in the humanities have focused on precariousness and precarity, conceptualising a state of heightened vulnerability, marked by ongoing exposure to potential harm or instability. These concepts embrace not only the potential for physical danger but also the social and emotional risks that characterise modern life. Global events such as terrorist attacks, military conflicts, the COVID-19 pandemic, and ecological crises have starkly illustrated the fragile state of humanity. The profound losses and risks faced by civilians, particularly children in war zones, along with the pervasive threat of disease and environmental degradation, have amplified the visibility of pain, trauma, and precariousness in the lexicon of both contemporary politics and the arts. In the context of Russia's war in Ukraine, the consideration of precariousness has taken on a heightened significance. The war has not only brought extensive human suffering and displacement, but has raised urgent questions about the resilience of cultural identity and the endurance of human values in times of extreme crisis. This painful reality underscores the resonance of precarity and vulnerability with current Ukrainian experiences and the global challenges concerning stability and peace.

Humanities today are seriously engaging with these ideas, not only in socio-political but also in aesthetic terms. A host of related terms have entered critical discourse as well, such as precarious, precarisation, and the precariat. They collectively underscore a shared concern with instability and risk. Literature, film, and art reflect and interrogate the experiences of precarity, ranging from post-9/11 fiction, which probes the causes and impacts of the 2001 attacks, to narratives that depict lives shaped by inequality and uncertainty. Through diverse aesthetic

modes, these works strive to mediate experiences of precarity and cultivate a nuanced awareness of these realities.

Recent Ukrainian literature has also engaged with the precarity of human existence amid the realities of war, contributing significant perspectives to this discourse. Alongside other global narratives, the Ukrainian works explore the precarious state of existence in conflict zones, illustrating both the vulnerability and resilience inherent in the human experience. Together, they enrich the understanding of precarity and the diverse ways in which individuals and communities navigate, resist, and endure it.

However, the exploration of precarity is not unique to our contemporary moment. We argue that William Shakespeare's life and oeuvre offer a compelling lens through which the precariousness of human existence can be examined. By analysing his works, one can trace how earlier periods confronted vulnerability and danger, fostered resilience, and can offer insights that resonate with the contemporary struggle for identity and survival in Ukraine. This approach enables us to appreciate the enduring engagement with precariousness across time and place.

Here we study the precariousness of human existence in William Shakespeare's plays through a distinctly Ukrainian perspective engaging with the ongoing war in Ukraine since 2014 and the nation's experiences of trauma, loss, and resilience. The selection of Shakespeare's plays examined in this context includes *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Merchant of Venice* as examples of the way in which Shakespeare dramatises universal human vulnerability and systemic conditions that exacerbate suffering. Additionally, precariousness and war are investigated in three of the histories: *Henry V*, *Richard II*, and *Richard III*, in an attempt to highlight how political and military instability contributes to the precarity of individuals and societies. We seek to provide a nuanced understanding of precariousness across Shakespeare's tragedies and history plays.

The study of the precariousness of human existence has deep roots in philosophy, emerging in existential, phenomenological, and ethical discourses. In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger introduces the concept of "Dasein" ("existence", "being there") as fundamentally shaped by the awareness of mortality: "Death is a possibility of being that Dasein always has to take upon itself. Dasein stands before itself in its almost potentiality-of-being [...]. Death is a possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein. Thus death [...] is an eminent imminence" (241). Such awareness creates a profound anxiety, revealing the precariousness and finitude at the core of human existence.

Philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, and Hannah Arendt further explored fragility and vulnerability emphasizing the dependency and limitations inherent in human life. These thinkers indirectly reflect on precariousness as a universal condition, laying the groundwork for Judith Butler's focus on its philosophical and systemic political dimensions.

Butler's work is foundational for understanding precarity in both its philosophical and political aspects. In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* and *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, she distinguishes between "precariousness" and "precarity". Precariousness, according to Butler, is a universal human condition derived from shared interdependency and vulnerability: "Lives are by definition precarious: they can be expunged at will or by accident; their persistence is in no sense guaranteed" (Butler, *Frames of War* 25). This universal fragility necessitates a new "bodily ontology" that rethinks vulnerability, injurability, and interdependency (Butler, *Frames of War* 3). In contrast, precarity refers to a politically induced condition unequally distributed across societal groups. It highlights systemic inequalities that leave marginalised groups more exposed to violence, economic insecurity, and neglect. According to Butler, "Precarity designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Butler, *Frames of War* 25). Guy Standing's concept of the "precariat," as outlined in his *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, further enriches this analysis. His exploration of precariousness – including economic instability, health vulnerability, conflict, and social inequalities – offers a productive framework for the exploration of the themes of fragility and instability in Shakespeare's works. By employing Standing's approach, Shakespeare's plays can be understood as engaging with precariousness on both existential and systemic levels, connecting the precarities of his time with those of today. By applying this theoretical framework, our study highlights the interconnectedness of human lives and suggests that the precarity evident in Shakespeare's works transcends time and geography, to offer an insight into Ukraine's present challenges.

In recent years, the link between Shakespeare and precariousness has also been explored in relation to race, social inequality, disability, etc. Patricia Akhimie's *Shakespeare and the Cultivation of Difference: Race and Conduct in the Early Modern World* examines, for instance, how Othello's blackness excludes him from upward mobility within Venetian society, which views his skin colour as a marker of distrust and inferiority. Similarly, *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Race*, edited by her, investigates how Shakespeare's characters are shaped by intersections of race, identity, and societal expectations, further illuminating the social precarity associated with race in his plays. As Urvashi Chakravarty notes in her contribution, "Race is made and insistently remade through institutional systems of power" (14), emphasizing how racial identities in Shakespeare's works are both constructed and constrained by societal structures. Thus, this body of work reflects a growing scholarly interest in understanding Shakespeare's treatment of racial inequalities and their impact on identity and social standing.

In *Shakespeare and Disability Studies*, Sonya Freeman Loftis explores another valuable intersection, between Shakespeare studies and disability studies, highlighting how character-based readings of disability deepen the understanding of historical perspectives on it. Loftis notes:

While there are limitations in and complications to applying disability theory to Shakespeare characters, there are also key reasons to keep fields of Shakespeare studies and disability studies in dialogue with each other. Character-based readings of disability contribute significantly to knowledge about what disability was in earlier cultures. (8)

Loftis also suggests that Shakespeare's plays may offer psychological relief, and that Shakespeare therapy programmes can foster "a genuine sense of inclusion for people with disabilities" (14) and provide a path to emotional healing, reinforcing the resilience of those affected by war. For a Ukrainian audience, especially amid the trauma of the Russian invasion against the country, the healing potential of Shakespeare's works holds particular significance, as it does for wounded Ukrainian military personnel and civilians who now live with disabilities.

It is important to emphasise that Shakespeare studies have actively engaged with precarity, vulnerability and the therapeutic use of Shakespeare. A symposium titled *Touching Shakespeare: Proximity, Precarity, and Resilience in Renaissance Drama and Modern Life*, hosted by the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at the University of California explored precarity in Renaissance drama, linking human vulnerability to existential and political themes. Shakespeare's plays were seen as records of survival and insights into precarity, resilience, and interdependence, offering perspectives on modern challenges shaped by human and ecological factors. In 2020, *Representing Disability in Shakespeare's World* examined historical and disability studies perspectives on military-related disability from Shakespeare's England to today. In 2021, Ukraine hosted *The Bard in the Context of the Pandemic: Shakespeare and/as Medicine*, an international conference examining Shakespeare's works through the lens of COVID-19. Scholars explored his texts as reflections on survival and crisis adaptation, highlighting the relevance of precarity in Shakespeare studies and the broader issue of human vulnerability (Topkyt [Torkut] 165–187).

During Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine, which began with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, every Ukrainian has been experiencing various manifestations of existential precarity. Ukrainian artists and researchers have actively employed the therapeutic potential of Shakespeare's works to enhance the resilience of the Ukrainian nation, which faces precarity intensified by the genocidal nature of the war. A notable example of harnessing the psychotherapeutic potential of Shakespeare's works is *Project W: Veterans, Volunteers, and William*, initiated

by combat veteran Ihor Kasyan. This initiative culminated in the creation of an amateur English-language production of *Twelfth Night*, directed by actor and theatre director Oleksii Hnatkovskiy.¹ The performance combined Shakespeare's comedic text with personal accounts and lived experiences of war. The project aimed at involving veterans in the socio-cultural life of the country through art (Костюк [Kostyuk]). It provided a platform for veterans and volunteers – individuals who played an active role in resisting Russian aggression – to explore their inner potential, draw attention to their rehabilitation and resocialisation, and promote a positive image of Ukrainian veterans beyond the country's borders.

Another initiative, *The Flute's Heart Beats in Unison with Ukraine*, by London-based Flute Theatre, led by Kelly Hunter,² has supported Ukrainian refugee children suffering war trauma and children with autism, through performances of *Pericles*, *The Tempest*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The European Shakespeare Research Association (ESRA) has also shown solidarity with Ukraine. The project *Shakespeare Shelter*, launched in 2023 by Nicoleta Cinpoș and Imke Lichterfeld, on the first anniversary of the Russian invasion, provides both intellectual engagement and a space for personal stories and networking. As Cinpoș states, "It was born out of our love, unconditional support, and duty to Ukraine and its people, all of which we wanted to reassert one year after the horrific, full-scale invasion and war atrocities that are plaguing your beautiful country. It was a small gesture to bring friends and colleagues together" (Kvasnytsia, Cinpoș). Subsequent events, including the *Shakespeare and Resistance Workshop* (July 2023) and *Reviewing Shakespeare on Stage* (2024), contributed to the First International Shakespeare Festival in Ivano-Frankivsk, which showcased the wartime resilience of Ukraine.

William Shakespeare's Plays: An Encyclopaedia of Precariousness Existential Precariousness

The fragility of human existence, the inevitability of death, and the inner turmoil stemming from life's uncertainties are recurring themes in Shakespeare's writings. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare meticulously studies existential precariousness through Prince Hamlet's inner conflict. The character's introspection and philosophical musings reveal the fragility of human identity, the burden of choice, and the instability of moral certainty, with Hamlet's emotional and intellectual struggles serving as a profound exploration of the precarious nature of existence. Andy Mousley observes in *Re-Humanising Shakespeare: Literary Humanism, Wisdom and Modernity*: "Rather than acting as sources of identification, human nature and

¹ See the article by Oksana Fedorkiv and David Livingstone in this volume.

² See Daria Lazarenko and Imke Lichterfeld's interview with Kelly Hunter in this volume.

human existence become the site, for Hamlet, of uncertainties and questions. He is exposed to a variety of beliefs and behaviours, each with its own assumptions about what it is to be a human" (33). This insight underscores Hamlet's exposure to conflicting ideas about humanity, intensifying the existential turmoil he faces.

Hamlet's inner crisis begins with the sudden death of his father and the swift remarriage of his mother to his uncle. These disruptive events shatter his sense of stability, leaving him questioning the integrity of his family and the meaning of life itself. His famous soliloquy "To be, or not to be: that is the question," (3.1.55–89)³ epitomizes this crisis, as he contemplates the pain of existence against the fear of the unknown in death. At this point in the play, Hamlet reflects on the inherent suffering of life, expressing a desire to escape it yet hesitating due to an uncertainty about what lies beyond. This moment captures his vulnerability as he confronts fundamental questions about mortality and the purpose of human life. Shakespeare's deployment of Hamlet's personal introspection becomes an exploration of existential precariousness as a universal experience, affecting anyone who confronts life's uncertainties and inevitable end.

This struggle is intensified by Hamlet's loss of moral certainty. When the Ghost reveals Claudius's crime and demands revenge, Hamlet faces a dilemma that conflicts with his Christian values. His inability to act decisively reflects his moral precariousness, as he fears that seeking revenge could ultimately ruin him. In early modern understanding and law, private revenge had become illegal, and regicide an act of both treason and blasphemy when seen according to the doctrine of the divine right of kings. This moral and legal struggle makes Hamlet's existential condition even more precarious, trapping him between the opposing forces of duty and ethical restraint. Hamlet's struggle with identity and self-doubt further intensifies his existential crisis. He questions his role as a son, prince, and avenger, wondering why he cannot meet the expectations he sets for himself. Not once in the play does this self-doubt reflect the precariousness of Hamlet's sense of self, as he grapples with an ideal of himself that he feels he cannot fulfil, fuelling his frustration and despair.

Death as the ultimate escape becomes a persistent theme in Hamlet's existential reflections. As the play progresses, he becomes increasingly preoccupied with the idea of mortality and the futility of human ambition. In Act 4, Scene 3, he muses on the fate of human bodies after death: "A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm" (4.3.27–29). This image of death conveys Hamlet's view of mortality as a leveller of human status, ambition, and identity. For him, death means the end of existential suffering and a kind of refuge, but paradoxically, death is the unknown he fears.

³ *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. (Updated Fourth Edition). Ed. David Bevington. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1997.

Finally, Hamlet's isolation and alienation also contribute to his existential precariousness. As Hamlet's introspection deepens, he grows increasingly distrustful of those around him, distancing himself from his mother and rejecting Ophelia. Even his friendships grow strained, as he sees betrayal in those who were once his allies, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and his only true friend, Horatio, is unable to fully understand the depths of his existential despair. This alienation leaves Hamlet isolated with his thoughts and queries about the sense of existence.

In the context of war, contemporary Ukrainian poetry often echoes Shakespeare's exploration of existential precariousness. Hamlet's meditations on mortality and the arbitrary nature of death resonate deeply in Victoria Amelina's "Alert" ("Тривога"):

повітряна тривога по всій
країні
так наче щоразу ведуть на розстріл
усіх
а цілять лише в одного
переважно, того хто скраю
сьогодні не ти, відбий
(Амеліна 5)
[povitrâna trivoga po vsij kraïni
tak načē šorazu vedut' na rozstril
usih
a cilât' liše v odnogo
perevažno, togo hto skraû
s'ogodni ne ti, vidbij
(Amelina 5)]

Air raid alert across the country,
as if each time, they lead all to be shot —
but no, they aim for just one,
mostly, the one on the edge.
Today, it's not you. End of the air-raid
alert
(Amelina, transl. Bandrovskaya)

Her poem captures the randomness of survival, much like Hamlet's existential crisis in "To be, or not to be", where life and death hang in uncertain balance, exposing human vulnerability in both literature and lived experience.

Social Precariousness: Race Inequalities

In Ukraine, ongoing displacement and migration in the face of war-induced precariousness is exemplified by the forced exile and persecution of Crimean Tatars following Russia's annexation of Crimea. It parallels Shakespeare's exploration of racial and social vulnerabilities, reflected not only through central figures, like Othello, but also through the fates of minor characters across his plays. Through

characters such as Shylock (*The Merchant of Venice*), Cleopatra (*Antony and Cleopatra*), Aaron (*Titus Andronicus*), Caliban (*The Tempest*), and Imogen's cross-cultural ties in *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare examines racial and cultural precariousness across diverse social contexts.

In *Othello*, the focus is on race and its impact on social precariousness, especially channelled through the character of Othello, a Moor and outsider in Venetian society. Although Othello is a respected general, his racial identity places him in a precarious social position, making him vulnerable to prejudice and discrimination despite his achievements. Shakespeare presents Othello as a complex character, both honoured and marginalised, whose status and accomplishments cannot fully shield him from the biases of those around him.

This vulnerability is starkly revealed through Iago's manipulation, which taps into the racial prejudices of Venetian society to undermine Othello's confidence and reputation. From the beginning, Iago and others exploit racial stereotypes, referring to Othello in derogatory terms. Iago incites Brabantio by referring to Othello as an "old black ram" who is "tupping [his] white ewe" (1.1.90–91), using bestial imagery to emphasize racial difference and provoke outrage. This attitude isolates Othello, fostering his sense of alienation and fuelling his self-doubt.

Shakespeare consistently and meticulously traces how social instability and racial prejudice increase Othello's self-doubt, and his downfall symbolizes the fragility of identity in a prejudiced society. This dynamic echoes Ukraine's Soviet past, when Ukrainian intellectuals and scientists, despite their achievements, faced repression, forced conformity, and accusations of nationalism. Like Othello, they were made vulnerable by external forces that sought to undermine their self-worth and legitimacy. Their experiences highlight how ideological control shapes both professional and personal destinies, demonstrating that prejudice – whether racial or political – limits individuals, regardless of their virtues or accomplishments.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare explores the theme of social precariousness through the character of Shylock, a Jewish moneylender marginalised within Venetian society. Although Shylock is financially successful and plays a vital role in the city's commerce, his Jewish identity makes him vulnerable to prejudice and discrimination. Shakespeare presents Shylock as both powerful and excluded, with his financial stability unable to shield him from the deep-seated biases of the Christian majority around him.

Shylock's precarious position is evident in his treatment by other characters, particularly Antonio, who openly disdains Shylock's profession and religion. Antonio frequently insults him and even spits on him, calling him a "cut-throat dog" (1.3.109). Such hostility reveals how Shylock's identity as a Jew places him in an uncertain social position, where he is both needed and despised, respected for his wealth yet scorned for his beliefs. This contradictory attitude fosters Shylock's sense of isolation and fuels his resentment. His vulnerability is further

emphasized in the trial scene, where he seeks justice for Antonio's failure to fulfil his obligations. Although Shylock attempts to use the law to his advantage, he is ultimately denied true justice and is instead stripped of his wealth and forced to convert to Christianity. His line "I am content" (4.1.410), which Shylock utters upon resigning to this fate, captures the tragic depth of his social precariousness.

Moreover, in *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare explores the intersection of ethnicity, religion, and gender precarity, particularly through Jessica, Shylock's daughter. As a Jewish woman who converts to Christianity upon marrying Lorenzo, Jessica's identity is marked by complex layers of marginalisation, making her position precarious in both her father's community and in Venetian society at large. Urvashi Chakravarty observes that "the accusation, however brief or foreclosed, of 'theft' here by a white Christian man (despite, or indeed because of, the fact that this man is her own husband) gestures to the continued precarity and marginalization of Jessica's position" (25). This accusation highlights how Jessica's gender and racial background, even after her conversion, render her vulnerable to suspicion and reinforce her status as an outsider within Christian society.

Thus, overall, *The Merchant of Venice*, as well as the other plays, serve as a commentary on the precarious nature of identity within a society shaped by intolerance, demonstrating how discrimination undermines stability and human dignity. Today, this can reflect upon Ukraine's war-induced precariousness.

Health Precariousness: Epidemics and Disease

The time during which Shakespeare lived and worked was marked by frequent and devastating outbreaks of epidemic diseases. Among the many illnesses of the early modern age – including smallpox, malaria, syphilis, and typhus – the plague was the most persistent and deadly, making health during this period particularly vulnerable. Historical records indicate epidemics occurred almost every decade of Shakespeare's life, including 1578–1579, 1582, 1592–1593, and 1603 (Forgeng xiv). In 1564, just three months after Shakespeare's birth, Stratford-upon-Avon experienced a severe flare-up of the plague, which killed a quarter of the population – over 200 residents in six months (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust). The outbreak posed a significant threat to newborn Shakespeare's survival, as the plague claimed the lives of many infants and adults in Stratford-upon-Avon during that period. The death of the playwright, as well as his birth, were also possibly connected with epidemics. Charles Creighton notes that Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616, after three days of fever, during "the most unhealthy" year recorded in parish registers from the beginning of the century (537). Although the specific cause of his death remains unclear, the connection between it and the rampant illnesses of his time underscores the precariousness of individual life and the broader societal context in which it is lived.

The 1603 plague outbreak in London, which claimed over 30,000 lives (Creighton 477), forced theatres to close, disrupting Shakespeare's career. As Andrew Gurr explains, "the playhouses should not open until the weekly bill of victims had been less than fifty for three weeks. In 1604, the Privy Council brought it down to thirty a week" (78). Another outbreak, in 1606, shut the Globe Theatre again, halting a promising season. These disruptions affected theatrical livelihoods and deepened Shakespeare's engagement with human vulnerability, shaping his portrayal of characters and their struggles.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, where the impact of epidemics is direct, disease serves both as a metaphor and a plot device. Mercutio, fatally wounded during the feud between the Montagues and Capulets, curses both families: "A plague o' both your houses! / They have made worms' meat of me. / I have it, and soundly, too. Your houses!" (3.1.105–107). The curse, rooted in the reality of the plague as a deadly force, reflects the character's despair and underscores the destructive consequences of the feud. For contemporary audiences, the plague would have been an all-too-familiar threat, making Mercutio's words a powerful condemnation of the families' relentless conflict. Anticipated by Mercutio, the plague's role becomes literal, enabling the tragic conclusion to the play. Romeo's and Juliet's deaths are indirectly caused by an outbreak of the disease, which prevents Friar Lawrence's message from reaching Romeo, as Friar John, tasked with delivering the letter, explains, "So fearful were they of infection" (5.2.14). Thus, quarantined due to the fear of "infectious pestilence" (5.2.5), Friar John's delay leads to the miscommunication that seals the lovers' fates, making the plague an active force in the tragedy, symbolising the uncontrollable forces that disrupt human plans and lives. This serves as a poignant reminder of the precariousness of existence in Shakespeare's time and its profound impact on his storytelling.

In *Richard II*, the idea of health precariousness is evoked in John of Gaunt's Sceptred Isle speech in which England is a "fortress built by Nature for herself / Against infection" (2.1.43–44), a natural bastion, protected by its geography from external threats of disease. The fear of "infection" reflects both literal fears of contagion and metaphorical concerns about moral and political corruption. While primarily symbolic, the reference resonates with anxieties about epidemics, linking the speech indirectly to themes of health and vulnerability.

Overall, epidemic diseases were a defining feature of Shakespeare's time, and his work shows a deep awareness of humanity's vulnerability and the fragility of life amid widespread illness. His contemporaries were also troubled by and engaged with it, as did Ben Jonson in *The Alchemist*, John Davies in *The Triumph of Death* (1603), and Thomas Dekker in *The Seven Deadly Sins of London* (1606). The global impact of COVID-19 has renewed interest in literary responses to pandemics and has encouraged parallels between past and present crises.

Physical Precariousness: Characters with Disabilities

In Ukraine, the issue of disability has become increasingly significant due to Russia's war, as injured veterans and civilians face challenges of reintegration and social adaptation. This experience resonates with Shakespeare's exploration of how physical precarity can shape identity, social roles, and relationships, as seen in characters whose disabilities influence their place in society and their interactions with others.

Considering the definition of disability as any physical or mental difference that significantly limits activity, Loftis argues that it is too narrow to focus only on the character of Richard III when examining disability in Shakespeare's works. Instead, a wide range of characters and impairments should come into view: Othello's and Caesar's seizures, Gloucester's blindness in *King Lear*, Katherine's limp in *The Taming of the Shrew*, as well as madness, obesity, and infertility experienced by other characters (Loftis 5). By depicting characters whose disability affects their social roles and relationships, Shakespeare examines the complex interplay between physical precarity and its societal implications.

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare presents physical precariousness caused by blindness and madness, intertwining these conditions with ageing and vulnerability. The Earl of Gloucester, violently deprived of his sight through the betrayal of his illegitimate son, Edmund, embodies both physical and emotional fragility. Stripped of sight and independence, Gloucester realises that "[he] stumbled when [he] saw" (4.1.19), suggesting that his blindness symbolises a deeper, existential inability to perceive the dangers within his own family.

King Lear himself, though not physically disabled in a conventional sense, endures the precariousness of ageing, which renders him susceptible to manipulation and ultimately drives him into madness. His gradual loss of power and the disintegration of his authority as he divides his kingdom among his daughters depict a profound instability tied to both age and identity. As he loses his mental faculties, Lear's sense of self erodes: "O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!" (1.5.45). His mental decline becomes a metaphor for the vulnerability of human existence, capturing the fragility of a king who once wielded absolute authority, yet is now at the mercy of Others. These experiences of physical and mental deterioration reflect a broader existential conflict at the heart of *King Lear*, extending beyond the personal to examine state, power, and the nature of existence, heavily resonant in today's world.

In *Richard III*, the protagonist embodies precariousness tied to his physical condition. Born with a spinal deformity, Richard is "rudely stamped" (1.1.18) and "curtailed of this fair proportion" (1.1.19), which contributes to his sense of exclusion and fuels his desire for power. His deformity becomes both a source of marginalisation and a justification for his ambition, as he compensates for

perceived inadequacy with aggression and manipulation, linking his physical condition to psychological and social impact. In Act 5, Scene 3, Richard's language reveals his fractured identity and inner conflict:

Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.
Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am.
Then fly! What, from myself? Great reason. Why?
Lest I revenge. Myself upon myself?
Alack, I love myself... O no, alas, I rather hate myself...
I am a villain. Yet I lie: I am not.

(*Richard III* 5.3.183–191)

Richard's oscillation between self-love and self-hatred captures his existential precariousness, as he struggles to reconcile his actions with his self-concept. His self-interrogation, "Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am" (5.3.184), illustrates his inability to unify his deeds with his identity, reflecting an instability shaped by both his physical difference and his moral degradation.

Richard's deformity influences his statesmanship by prompting a defensive and ruthless style of leadership. Aware of societal prejudice, he compensates for this with a calculated, often aggressive, pursuit of control. The character's self-analysis is marked by bitterness and self-doubt, suggesting that his disability amplifies his existential struggles and drives his quest for power as a means of self-validation.

Besides, in Shakespeare's plays, characters often experience sudden losses of control, which also highlight human vulnerability. Seizures, a key symptom of epilepsy, were largely misunderstood in Shakespeare's time, and the stigma surrounding epilepsy remains a modern issue. For contemporary audiences, it is fascinating to see how Shakespeare, one of the first to represent epilepsy on stage, approached this condition. In *Julius Caesar*, the titular character's epilepsy – 'the falling sickness' – reveals his fragility, foreshadowing his downfall: "Caesar fell down at the market-place, and foamed at mouth, and was speechless" (*Julius Caesar* 1.2. 252–253). In *Othello*, the protagonist suffers a trance or seizure onstage, described by Iago as "epilepsy": "My lord is fall'n into an epilepsy. This is his second fit" (*Othello* 4.1.63).

Shakespeare highlights the unpredictability and fragility of human existence by showing his powerful characters vulnerable to medical conditions and loss of control. His portrayal of precariousness reveals the enduring nature of physical and emotional vulnerability. By depicting characters whose disabilities shape their struggles and societal roles, he highlights the fragility of strength and control, which has remained relevant for centuries and is particularly poignant today in Ukraine.

Political and Military Precariousness: War and Conflict

Reflection on war and conflict is pervasive in Shakespeare's plays, revealing the political and military precariousness of his time, a reality that deeply resonates with Ukraine today as it endures the ongoing Russian aggression, grappling with the human, social, and geopolitical consequences of military aggression. Nowhere is this more evident than in Shakespeare's history plays, where struggles for power and territorial disputes take centre stage. In *Henry V*, the focus is on the war with France, national identity and leadership under the strain of conflict. In *Richard II*, the narrative shifts to civil war, exposing the instability of kingship and the chaos of internal division. Similarly, *Henry IV*, Part 1 portrays rebellion and the looming threat of civil unrest, while *Henry VI* explores the devastating impact of prolonged civil conflict on a nation.

Henry V starts with Henry's transformation from Prince Hal to King, raising the question of moral responsibility and the precariousness of leadership. Seeking advice from his counsellors regarding his claim to the French crown, he acknowledges the human toll of war: "For God doth know how many now in health / Shall drop their blood" (1.2.18–22). Henry not only realises that many healthy men will shed blood and become casualties of war, but is also aware that the innate vulnerability of soldiers is directly related to the political and strategic decisions of those in power. He is aware of the burden of responsibility that he, as king, shares with his advisers; putting the "sleeping sword of war" (1.2.25) into action means risking the stability and security of the kingdom. The metaphor of the 'sleeping' sword indicates that war is a dormant threat, dangerous when it wakes up and difficult to control when unleashed. Henry is conscious of war's consequences, of the inevitable bloodshed and suffering, of the "fall of blood, [...] a woe, a sore complaint" (1.2.28–29) that follow when great powers engage in conflict. This acknowledgement adds a layer of ethical and existential precarity, as it shows that even righteous or necessary wars carry a burden of guilt and the uncertainty of unintended, tragic consequences.

In *Henry V*, the battlefield is a place of total precariousness. In Act 4, Scene 6, Exeter recounts to Henry the last minutes between the Duke of York and the Earl of Suffolk, who bravely died: "Suffolk first died, and York, all haggled over, / Comes to him where in gore he lay insteeped, / And takes him by the beard, kisses the gashes" (*Henry V* 4.6.11–13). This vivid imagery underscores the deep bonds between soldiers, the inevitability of death in battle, where bravery does not ensure survival, and where the line between valour and tragedy is blurred. Henry's emotional response is one revealing vulnerability. His answer to Exeter's account of York and Suffolk's deaths is complex: "For, hearing this, I must perforce compound / With my full eyes, or they will issue too. Alarum. / But hark, what new alarum is this same? / The French have reinforced their scattered men. / Then every soldier

kill his prisoners" (4.6.33–37). At first, Shakespeare humanizes Henry, showing his grief. However, the sudden 'Alarum' shifts the scene, and his ruthless command to execute prisoners reveals the tension between compassion and strategic necessity. This duality highlights the precariousness inherent in leadership in wartime, where moral dilemmas collide with the demands of survival. Ultimately, the scene captures inescapable fragility induced by war, where death remains an ever-present reality, binding soldiers through both valour and loss.

In *Henry V*, Shakespeare highlights the uncertainty of war, the thin, unpredictable line between victory and defeat, a duality which encompasses contradictory, sometimes unexpected outcomes. Uncertainty and unpredictability are inscribed in the stark difference between the victory of the tired English army, achieved with relatively small losses, and the "ten thousand French / That in the field lie slain" (4.8.73–74). Military triumph is unpredictable and comes at the cost of immense human loss. Despite meticulous planning, war outcomes can shift in ways that defy human control, as the almost miraculous victory at Agincourt testifies. The moment also shows the precariousness of both sides.

This menacing speech addressed to the citizens of Harfleur illustrates the brutality of war and the duality of Henry's leadership – both unifying and ruthless. Henry threatens the citizens by invoking terrible images of destructive violence and depravity:

I will not leave the half-achieved Harfleur
Till in her ashes she lie buried.
The gates of mercy shall be all shut up,
And the fleshed soldier, rough and hard of heart,
In liberty of bloody hand, shall range
With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass
Your fresh fair virgins and your flow'ring infants.

(*Henry V* 3.3. 88–95)

While an inspiring ruler, he does not hesitate to use threats of horrible violence to secure victory, revealing the harsh realities of power and conflict.

In *Richard II*, Shakespeare examines the precariousness of monarchy and the chaos that arises in political and civil conflict. The play focuses on the deposition of King Richard II, whose decision to seize the estates of the deceased John of Gaunt to fund his war in Ireland is an act of tyranny that undermines his legitimacy. Richard views the country as his personal possession and wields power to the detriment of the state. As Shakespeare suggests, rebellion against a rightful but unjust king can, under such circumstances, be justified. Richard's abuse of power leads to the precarity of the monarchy, of the nobility, and of virtually everyone involved in these historical events.

At the same time, the civil war triggered by Richard's downfall shows the fragility of any political order. Henry Bolingbroke's return and the popular rebellion which he spearheads expose the vulnerability of a ruler who lacks both military strength and the support of his subjects. Nor does the play skirt around the personal toll of political instability on Richard himself. His poetic meditation in Act 3 Scene 2 pits divine-right against human frailty, the forces of political upheaval, and death.

Finally, by way of the Bishop of Carlisle, *Richard II* envisages the descent into chaos, pointing to the destabilising effect of the deposition of a monarch on the entire political system. It offers a stark reminder of the destructive impact of civil war as the violent transfer of power lays the groundwork for future conflicts, depicted in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays.

Such insights into the precariousness of political life and war resonate with Ukrainian lived experience, bridging the distance between past and present. From the outset of Ukraine's independence, political and military instability have manifested themselves in various forms, culminating in the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022. The objectives of this aggression are openly articulated in Russia, as spelled out in Timofey Sergeytsev's article, "What Should Russia Do with Ukraine?", published in 2022. It lays out a step-by-step genocidal plan of labelling all Ukrainians as "Nazis" and calling for their extermination. This plan ultimately seeks to erase Ukraine as a state, its cultural identity, and even the very word "Ukraine" (Sergeytsev). As Timothy Snyder has observed, in this framework a 'Nazi' is anyone who identifies as Ukrainian. He goes on to describe the publication as "Russia's genocide handbook," "an explicit program for the complete elimination of the Ukrainian nation as such" (Snyder).

The war in Ukraine has intensified multiple forms of precariousness: 1) military – involving death, injuries, and the destruction of infrastructure; 2) social – mass displacement, loss of homes, jobs, and familiar ways of life; 3) psychological – referring to emotional and mental vulnerability. Together, they create a reality where survival becomes an existential challenge, and resilience becomes essential for enduring it.

Shakespeare's plays grapple with crises in human existence, showing how humanity, morality, and freedom can break under the weight of violence and betrayal. Russia's aggression has put to the test humane and moral values by perpetrating war crimes, unleashing poisonous propaganda, and the systematic dehumanisation of Ukrainians. Yet, as in Shakespeare's works, tragedy does not extinguish hope. Solidarity, empathy, and volunteerism in Ukraine show the resilience of its people and the enduring strength of the human spirit.

Conclusion

In the preface to *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599*, James Shapiro observes that from the year 1599, it becomes “no more possible to talk about Shakespeare’s plays independent of his age” (xii). Shakespeare and his fellow players, as Shapiro emphasises, “truly were, in Hamlet’s fine phrase, ‘the abstract and brief chroniclers of the time’” (xii). Among the issues chronicled in his works are political instability, the fragility of power, social inequality, existential doubt, the human consequences of war, plague, ageing, health, racial prejudice, and the estrangement from familial and social interaction. The capacity to articulate the complexities of his own time establishes Shakespeare as a profound early modern chronicler of precariousness, capturing the fragility and vulnerability of human existence in his day, which resonate with the realities of our contemporary world.

To a great degree, Shakespeare’s explorations mirror the existential challenges faced by Ukrainians today, making his works profoundly relevant. In the context of the ongoing war and its devastating effects, they offer a lens through which to reflect on shared human precariousness, vulnerability and resilience. As Judith Butler writes, “peace is the mode of being awake to an Other’s precariousness” (*Precarious Life* 134). It is a message that should resonate particularly with statesmen and leaders of the democratic world as they navigate the complexities of fostering peace and justice in precarious times.

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Macbeth in Wartime Ukraine

Abstract

The article discusses the production of *Macbeth* by The Taras Shevchenko Academic Regional Ukrainian Music and Drama Theatre of Cherkasy, Ukraine. Directed by Stanislav Sadakliiev, this production of *Macbeth* premiered on 27 January 2024 and paved the way for a new series of theatrical adaptations of the Scottish play produced during the Russian-Ukrainian War. The first part of the article provides a brief overview of *Macbeth*'s theatrical reception in Ukraine, while the second part focuses on the 2024 staging, including the translation used to produce the effect of urgency for *Macbeth* in Ukrainian.

Keywords: *Macbeth* in Eastern Europe, *Macbeth* in Ukraine, Shakespeare in performance, Les Kurbas, contemporary Ukrainian theatre.

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After Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, it became only a matter of time before a new 'wartime' production of *Macbeth* appeared, as there was an urgent need to raise the topic of tyranny, provoke a discourse around usurping power, and cautiously predict the inevitable end of a dictator. The Taras Shevchenko Academic Regional Ukrainian Music and Drama Theatre in Cherkasy was the first to respond to the growing tension both on the frontline and in society nearly two years into the full-scale war initiated by the Russian dictator. Stanislav Sadakliiev's *Macbeth* premiered on 27 January 2024 on the 703rd day of the war. This article focuses on the way in which this production used deliberate instability on stage to serve as a reflection of the uncertainty and turmoil faced by contemporary Ukraine, where the unpredictable nature of the production mirrored the harsh reality of a nation grappling with the devastating consequences of war and the fragile state of its future.

Macbeth remains one of the least staged Shakespearean plays in Ukraine, even though it has been labelled one of Shakespeare's four great tragedies at least since A.C. Bradley's famous declaration on the matter. *Macbeth*'s Ukrainian reception history started only in 1920, in the midst of the Russian Civil War, with Les Kurbas (1887–1937), avant-garde director and one of the leaders of the national-cultural movement known as The Executed Renaissance. Kurbas led a revolution in Ukrainian theatre in the early 20th century, bringing it to a world-class standard through highly experimental, intellectually rigorous productions. He both directed and performed the title role in *Macbeth* with the touring KyiDramTe (Kyiv Drama Theatre), and revisited the play four years later, in a new production at his innovative Berezil Theatre. By 1924, the Soviet Union had already been established, shaping a new ideological reality for Ukrainian theatre. The themes of tyranny and dictatorship grew increasingly sensitive as the regime consolidated its power through the Constitution adopted in January 1924. A year after its premiere, Kurbas reflected on the confrontation between the main opposing forces in the play:

Where is the conflict in *Macbeth*? The lust for power is the theme. The witches are the rising action. The conflict is what the play is made of. *Macbeth* standing there and contemplating whether to kill Duncan or not is a conflict of the soul, a moral conflict. That's not what we're interested in [...] but what causes the war, what must cause the war is the conflict. [...] *Macbeth* isn't the centre of the conflict, he is a part of it; the conflict lies in the state of affairs that causes the war, that is, in the contradictions of the social life.¹

¹ Minutes of the Director's Office. The Rylsky Institute of Art Studies, Folklore and Ethnology of NASU. Fund 42. Storage Item 24. Typewriting. (If not indicated otherwise, all translations are our own).

Les Kurbas's socially charged reading of *Macbeth*, which framed the tragedy as a reflection of the broader class struggles rather than a purely personal moral dilemma, soon attracted the attention of Soviet censors. His bold interpretation was met with strict ideological control. The unfortunate fate of Kurbas later made many Ukrainian theatres hesitant to stage *Macbeth* because its leitmotifs too closely mirrored authoritarian realities. From that time on, the play was thought of as political with the criticism of the state expressed through the depiction of internal conflicts happening in the play (Makaryk 66–111).

Still, the bold interpretation of the Scottish play by Les Kurbas impacted the current generation of Ukrainian directors who opted for this particular play in order to make their own social or political statements. *Macbeth. The Prologue* dir. by Vlad Troitskyi (2004), *Macbeth-17* dir. by Yevhen Sydorenko (2019), and *Macbeth* dir. by Roza Sarkisian (2020) all followed in the footsteps of Kurbas's production. Vlad Troitskyi's *Macbeth: The Prologue* reimagined *Macbeth* as part of a never-ending historical cycle of violence and revolution. As Beccy Smith observed in her *Total Theatre* review, the production was "less about *Macbeth* than about the inhumanity and madness borne of political corruption in Ukraine" (Smith). The abuse of power and the descent into tyranny on stage thus mirrored real-world conflict and moral decay, turning *Macbeth* into a pointed social critique of post-Soviet realities. More than a decade later, *Macbeth-17*, adapted by Dmytro Mamchur and staged with a very small cast, distilled the tragedy into the intimate conflict between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. By focusing on their internal struggles and toxic alliance, the production explored the human roots of tyranny and the personal toll of ambition. In 2020, Roza Sarkisian offered a vastly different perspective, reinterpreting *Macbeth* through a feminist and wartime lens. By reversing traditional power dynamics, placing women in control while men remained largely powerless, Sarkisian questioned the very nature of authority, suggesting that the corruption of power transcends gender and persists in every political system.

In 2024, another *Macbeth* was staged, this time at The Taras Shevchenko Academic Regional Ukrainian Music and Drama Theatre of Cherkasy, Ukraine. The production was directed and sound-designed by Stanislav Sadakliiev, the theatre's director, who took on the Shakespearean play and brought about his vision to *Macbeth*, as for him the play is a complex exploration of power and its profound effect on human nature, mirroring the course of world history, as he shared in an interview with Anastasiia Brynko (personal communication, 16 February 2024). Sadakliiev believes that *Macbeth* stands apart from Shakespeare's other works due to its deep character transformations. It needs to be underlined that he chose the most recent translation by Oleksandr Hriaznov (2008) for this production because it featured fewer spells and softened some of the play's more intense

language, offering a slightly different take on the classic tragedy. Sadakliiev was the first to have used Hriaznov's work for a theatre production.

The translation turned out to be one of the easiest for stage adaptation, actors' memorisation and the viewers' perception of the production. For example, Macbeth's renowned quote: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more" (5.5.20–23) underwent a subtle shift in meaning in its Ukrainian translation:

Життя – тремтлива тінь, комедіант, що півгодини блазнював на сцені, забутий і осvistаний.

[Zhyttia – tremtlyva tin, komediant, shcho pivhodyny blazniuvav na stseni, zabutyi i osvystanyi]

Life is a trembling shadow, a comedian who for half an hour played the fool on stage, forgotten and booed.

For comparison, the widely recognized translation by Borys Ten rendered the above quote as:

Життя – рухлива тінь, актор на сцені. Пограв, побігав, погаласував свою часину – та й пропав

[Zhyttia – rukhlyva tin, aktor na stseni. Pohrav, pobihav, pohalasuav svoiu chasynu – ta i propav]

Life is a restless shadow, an actor on the stage. He played, ran around, made noise for his time – and then disappeared.

Meanwhile, the most intricate translation by Todos Osmachka presented it as:

Життя летюча тінь, актор, що на кону нещасний хваста, галасує, потім навіки забувається...

[Zhyttia letiucha tin, aktor, shcho na konu neshchasnyi khvasta, halasuie, potim naviky zabuvaetsia...]

Life is a fleeting shadow, an actor who, miserable on stage, boasts and makes noise, only to be forgotten forever...

Unlike the chosen version, these translations, with their more complex phrasing and heightened poeticism, presented greater challenges for actors and demanded a higher level of linguistic awareness from the audience, making them less accessible for a dynamic stage performance.

The production struck a balance between tradition and experiment. While its concept stayed within the conventional framework of Ukrainian academic theatre – marked by a solemn performance style, a linear narrative, and an audience-oriented approach – the director injected some experimentation. By eclectically blending opera with rap, incorporating pieces by Audiomachine (*Draconian Dream*), Federico Albanese (*Meridian, By the Deep Sea, The Quiet Man*), and Cirque du Soleil (*Vai Vedrai*), he introduced an unexpected sensuality, while moments of comic relief balanced the weight of the tragedy. The Witches (Anna Nimaier, Iryna Zhara, and Anastasiia Ivahnenko) cast their spells through rap, using lyrics drawn from the songs, while Hecate (Nataliia Mamalyha) delivered them as a soaring aria. Lady Macbeth (Olena Brekharlia) delivered a powerful and expressive rap performance reading Macbeth's letter, beginning with "Я зустрів їх у день моєї перемоги..." [They met me in the day of victory...; Ya zustriv yikh u den moyeyi peremohy...], infusing the lines with intensity and rhythm.

Following *Stolen Happiness* by Ivan Franko and *The Rhinoceros* by Eugène Ionesco, *Macbeth* marked the third collaboration between the director and his stage and costume designers, with Serhii Rydvanetskyi designing the stage and Natalka Rydvanetska the costumes. As in their earlier productions, the scenography embraced minimalism while remaining highly functional. The centrepiece was a dynamic, multifunctional platform that transformed seamlessly into a runway, a bridge, a barrier, a clock hand, a castle wall, and a stage – dictating the rhythm and tempo of the performance. The set also featured eight long, transparent sheets, which created an uncanny, ethereal effect: behind them, the souls of the murdered characters emerged, heightening the play's supernatural quality and depth. The unconventional use of scenic space further blurred the boundary between audience and performers. The production fostered a sense of volatility, drawing spectators into its shifting, unstable world, with a moving stage, trapdoors, and action unfolding at the very edge of the proscenium stage and thus within the auditorium itself.

Visually, the production adhered to a monochrome palette dominated by white alongside shades of grey. Despite this restrained colour scheme, lighting played a crucial role in emphasising vibrancy and symbolism – shifting between hues of yellow, blue, purple, turquoise, and red to spotlight key moments. The backdrop featured a semi-abstract grey-and-white tree-like pattern, evoking the ominous presence of Birnam Wood. This motif extended to the characters' costumes – except for the Witches, whose otherworldly nature was underscored

by their flowing, weightless fabrics, which billowed eerily as if charged with an unseen force. Lady Macbeth's costume changes mirrored her psychological descent. Initially, she wore a dark frock over a white, semi-transparent chemise. After the first murder, the white faded into a deep, blood-red hue, and by the final act, consumed by guilt, she appeared in a translucent red chemise, embodying her unravelling. Macbeth underwent a similar transformation: after claiming the crown, he traded his dark thane's attire for a regal white suit, yet his essence – symbolised by his trousers, which retained their deep graphite shade – remained unchanged.

The stage, costume, lighting, and sound design created a captivating environment that reinforced the timeless theme of history endlessly repeating itself. Each element was carefully crafted to enhance the narrative's depth, emphasising the cyclical nature of human civilisation and its repeated failure to heed past mistakes. Natalka Rydvanetska's evocative costume design depicted eras and characters, while Stanislav Sadakliiev's resonant soundscape and Yuliia Obukhova's dynamic lighting seamlessly synchronised to deepen the emotional impact. This cohesive collaboration aligned with the director's vision, illustrating that despite the passage of time, humanity remains trapped in an unending cycle of lessons unlearned, prompting reflection on the importance of true progress.

These visual transformations not only reflected the characters' inner turmoil but also reinforced the production's broader themes of power and its corrupting influence. In this context, the depiction of authority and control extended beyond Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, shaping the dynamics between other key figures on stage. The production's representation of power dynamics was particularly impactful, given the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine and the broader political situation. Influential characters such as the Witches, Banquo (Serhii Bobrov), and the Murderers (Ruslan Lysynskyi and Denys Blyzniuk) maintained their dominance until the final moments of the performance. Bobrov's acting as Banquo was natural and compelling. From the first line, he demonstrated a strong stage presence, effortlessly crafting a well-rounded portrayal of Macbeth's friend and rival. Even as a ghost, he retained an unshakable presence, making Macbeth shudder with horror.



Figure 1. Scene 5, Act 3. The Witches talk to Hecate standing on the balcony while Macbeth is sleeping. The Witches (Anastasiia Ivahnenko – on the left, Anna Nimaier – in the middle, Iryna Zhara – on the right) on the swings and Macbeth (Yakiv Kucherevskiy) sitting on a platform. Photo by Andrii Shepel.

Both the Witches and the murderers performed in an exaggerated, eccentric manner, grimacing and bending their bodies. Despite their contrasting roles, they remained detached from the events unfolding: the Witches floated over the scene, seemingly fully understanding its inevitable outcome and performing their part with clockwork precision, while the Murderers carried out their grim orders with unsettling nonchalance, as if ignoring their power to shape fate. Using a watering can and a metal basin as killing tools, accompanied by a sound effect of water drops falling on a metal surface, they *liquidated* Banquo as well as Lady Macduff (Anzhelina Ivanova) and her son (Danylo Shevchenko). The latter had the weakest position in the production. Being a direct threat to Macbeth and his throne, they had no chance to survive. Lady Macduff inquired before being murdered:

Куди мені тікати? Кому я зло зробила? Що мені робити? Чи допоможе мій жіночий захист – Казати, що невинна?

[Kudy meni tikaty? Komu ya zlo zrobyla? Shcho meni robyty? Chy dopomozhe mii zhinochy zakhyst – Kazaty, shcho nevyynna?]

Where should I run? Who have I done wrong? What should I do? Will my feminine defence help me – saying that I am innocent? (4.2.81–87)

Denys Blyzniuk, who played the Second Murderer, took on seven more supporting roles, including: Messenger, Soldier, Doctor, Porter, Seyton, Servant, and Gentlewoman. With his expressive and slightly grotesque comic technique, Blyzniuk seamlessly combined these characters into one – a clown-trickster, providing much-needed comic relief during the most intense moments of Shakespeare's tragedy.

The director highlighted changes in the power relationship throughout the performance. Lennox (Petro Holubchenko) and Ross (Pavlo Honcharov) had a striking moment of self-punishment – repeated slaps to their own faces – symbolising their awakening to the reality of Macbeth's rule. This act vividly illustrated their realisation of the court's corruption and their own complicity in it. It further revealed how easily they had been seduced by the promise of power, overlooking its inherent decay until its repercussions became inescapable. A comparable effect was achieved through the triple repetition of key phrases:

Та поки не пішов на Дунсинан Бірнамський ліс, боятись мені нема чого”

[Ta poky ne pishov na Dunsynan Birnamskyi lis, boiatys meni nema choho]

Till Birnam Wood remove to Dunsinane I cannot taint with fear (5.3.2–3)

and

Всіх боягузів вішати негайно!

[Vsikh boiahuziv vishaty nehaino!]

Hang those that talk of fear (5.3.43)

These visibly marked Macbeth's inner transformation. Initially, Yakiv Kucherevskyi's Macbeth had much physical dynamism, confidence, and some bravado, which added an unexpected comedic edge to his character. The actor masterfully captured the duality of his character – an outwardly strong military leader who, beneath the surface, was a vulnerable man easily swayed by his wife's manipulations and the allure of power. However, as the weight of ambition bore down on him, his presence became increasingly haunted, culminating in the final monologue full of introspection and melancholy. By the end, crushed by the fulfilled prophecy, he appeared frustrated and acutely aware of his impending downfall.

Olena Brekharia's portrayal of Lady Macbeth exuded a blend of feminine intuition, cunningness, fiery passion, and unwavering determination. The

evolving dynamic between the spouses stirred a range of emotions – an initial sense of unease from witnessing their intimate moments, followed by contempt for Macbeth's cowardice, then resentment at his cold indifference as his wife spiralled into madness, and ultimately, a deep admiration for their spiritual unity in the final scene. Their slow, hypnotic dance to a poignant melody towards the end of the performance was mesmerising, creating the illusion that they existed in a world of their own. Much like Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth appeared bound by an unbreakable connection that transcended the chaos surrounding them. Despite their descent into darkness, their final moments suggested a kind of otherworldly reconciliation, as if, like the Master and Margarita, they had escaped judgment and found peace beyond the constraints of their doomed reality.

Using classical theatrical elements and bold contemporary choices, Stanislav Sadakliiev's *Macbeth* at the Taras Shevchenko Academic Regional Ukrainian Music and Drama Theatre in Cherkasy offered a visually and emotionally gripping interpretation rooted in tradition, as well as an innovatively reimagined performance. The production marked the emergence of new *Macbeths* in Ukraine, with three of them following in 2025: by Ivan Uryvskyi in the Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theater in Kyiv (opening night: 28 February 2025), by Linas Zaikauskas in the Dnipro Academic Drama and Comedy Theatre (opening night: 29 March 2025) and by Maya Kleczewska in the Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theatre in Ivano-Frankivsk (opening night: summer 2025). This resurgence of interest in the play demonstrates its power to convey the current sense of political helplessness which many feel in the face of unrelenting tyranny.

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William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: A Novelty on the Ukrainian Puppet Stage

Abstract

The article examines the first stage performances of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in Ukrainian puppet theatres, which appeared as late as the twenty-first century. The authors examine productions by directors Oleksii Kravchuk (Lviv Academic Theatre of Variety Miniatures "Both People and Puppets", Lviv, 2017), Oksana Dmitrieva (Viktor Afanasyev Kharkiv Academic Puppet Theatre, Kharkiv, 2018) and Nikita Pertsev (Zhytomyr Academic Puppet Theatre, Zhytomyr, 2021), which are characterized by an innovative combination of live action and puppetry. The article analyses the transformation of the performance idea, the construction of *Hamlet* in these performances, and scenographic solutions that reflect the characters' internal conflicts and expand the boundaries of the tragedy.

Keywords: Shakespeare in puppet theatre, *Hamlet* in Ukraine, tragedy adaptation, farce, acting, puppet theatre.

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William Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet* has become an important part of Ukrainian stage culture as it is an integral part of European cultural heritage. The continued popularity of this play among Ukrainian readers and viewers stems from two key factors. First, the universality of the social and political issues raised in the play resonates with audiences. Second, the play's deep cultural code enables philosophical self-awareness and the articulation of national problems specific to a particular time, all through the lens of Shakespeare's work. As Ukrainian theatre critic and Shakespeare scholar, Maiia Harbuziuk, has noted, in the history of Ukrainian theatre every reference to *Hamlet* is symptomatic of significant changes in worldview (Harbuziuk 157–158).

Ukrainian audiences have been familiar with Shakespeare's works since the late eighteenth century, although only through the mediation of non-Ukrainian theatre. In Lviv, the first *Hamlet* in German was staged in 1796, and the first-ever production in Polish was staged in 1797 (Harbuziuk 158). These were productions of the Lviv Austrian Theatre and of the Lviv Polish Theatre. In the nineteenth century, Ukrainians also had the opportunity to watch this tragedy in Russian (Vanina 28). Although the first translations of *Hamlet* into Ukrainian appeared in the 1860s, the first production was not staged until the mid-twentieth century. This was due to the oppression against Ukrainian-language culture by the dominant empires, which many scholars today describe as colonial oppression (Hrytsak and Shapoval).

In the Soviet Union, Shakespeare was allowed to be played on stage, but with(in) certain limits. Even after the Ukrainian premieres of the tragedies *Macbeth* (1920, directed by Les Kurbas) and *Othello* (1923, directed by Oleksandr Zaharov), *Hamlet* failed to make it to the Ukrainian stage. Harbuziuk explains this absence:

The taboo on *Hamlet*, hidden, not directive, but no weaker for it, was in effect almost throughout the entire first half of the twentieth century. This is quite understandable, because the problems of human existence, the relationship between the individual and the government, and the criminality of the government as such – the leading themes of *Hamlet* – were ideologically extremely dangerous for the totalitarian [Soviet] state. (Harbuziuk 157–158)

The first Ukrainian-language production of *Hamlet* was staged outside Soviet influence, namely in 1943 at the Lviv Opera House (directed by Iosyp Hirniak) during the German occupation of Ukraine. In the Soviet space, *Hamlet* could only be performed after the death of Joseph Stalin, from 1956 onwards. Two productions premiered immediately after 1956: one at the Taras Shevchenko Kharkiv Drama Theatre (1956, directed by Benedikt Nord) and the other at the Maria Zankovetska Lviv Drama Theatre (1957, directed by Borys Tiahno). However, this trend did not develop more widely within the USSR. When Ukraine became an independent state

in 1991, theaters' interest in *Hamlet* did not increase immediately, but only in the early 2000s (Trykolenko 267–274; cf. Oliynyk; cf. Antipova). Harbuziuk noted in 2012:

This deliberate and well-planned delay in the development of the Ukrainian national theatre by the authorities has had its consequences: to date, there are barely more than ten staged performances of *Hamlet* in the history of Ukrainian theatre, while the histories of the theatres of our closest neighbors, both to the west and to the east, count in the hundreds. (Harbuziuk 158)¹

Recent political events catalyzed radical change in Ukraine's theatrical processes, however. In 2013–2014, Ukrainians took to the streets in what became known as the Revolution of Dignity or the Euromaidan, attempting to end the colonizing influence of Russia and its domination in culture and politics, and create an irreversible turn to Europe and its values of democracy, decentralization of state power, strengthening the role of civil society, protection of human rights, freedom of speech and opinion, openness of data, strengthening of national identity and ability to defend its borders. In reaction to Ukraine's move towards democracy, Russian aggression began in eastern Ukraine in 2014. These two parallel events fundamentally affected and shifted theatre in Ukraine, opening the door to *Hamlet*. In 2019, Ukrainian theatre critic and scholar, Hanna Veselovska, stated:

It seems that lately, for the vast majority of Ukrainian directors, staging William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a matter of honor. *Hamlet* is staged in various theatres: large, small, dramatic, musical, children's, in short, in all the theatres that exist. (Vasyliiev, Veselovska et al. 185)

By 2024, the range of directorial readings of *Hamlet* in Ukrainian theatre had become extremely wide. These include productions on the stages of state drama theatres: first of all, the post-apocalyptic vision in the basement of the Ivano-Frankivsk National Academic Drama Theatre (2017), which Michael Dobson called one of the most interesting 2018 Shakespearean stage versions of *Hamlet* in the modern theatre world (Verhelis, "Навіщо вони мучать Гамлета?" [Why Are They Torturing Hamlet?; Navišo voni mučat' Gamleta?]; cf. Dobson, "Нестерпно, коли з Шекспіра роблять музей" [It's Unbearable When They Make a Museum Out of Shakespeare; Nesterpno, koli z Šekspira roblât' muzej]; cf. Stelmashevskia). Yet, there are many other interesting productions throughout the country: from Kyiv to Uzhhorod. Unusual interpretations grace the stages of experimental alternative theatres, such

¹ Unless otherwise specified, all translations are by the authors.

as the Nafta Theatre's in Kharkiv or the Zaporizhzhia Municipal Laboratory Theatre VIE, among others.²

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has also inspired post-dramatic interpretations. For example, this trend can be observed in the Ukrainian director Roza Sarkisian's projects – the stage production *H-effect* (2020), created in collaboration with the Polish playwright Joanna Wichowska as part of a Polish-German-Ukrainian co-production, and the documentary film *Hamlet Syndrome*, directed by the Polish tandem Elwira Niewiera and Piotr Rosołowski. An additional example is *Ha*!t*, a co-production of the Theatre on the Left Bank (Kyiv, directed by Tamara Trunova) and the RADAR OST Festival (2023, Deutsches Theatre Berlin, curated by Birgit Lengers) with the support of the Goethe-Institut and Christine Dissmann. Clearly, there have been many *Hamlets* in Ukraine in the past two decades, yet on the stage of the Ukrainian puppet theatre, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has only begun to take its first steps.

Puppet *Hamlets*

Performances of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* on the stages of puppet theatres began appearing in Ukraine in the 2010s, and these productions brought a new vision of Shakespeare's tragedy through the use of puppetry as a medium. However, the first *Hamlet* to appear on the stage of a Ukrainian puppet theatre was not a play by Shakespeare, but a character from Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* (1977), performed at the Oleksandr Dovzhenko Chernihiv Puppet Theatre in 2016. Director Vitalii Holtsov made a stage adaptation of the German playwright's radical retelling, which rethinks Shakespeare's tragedy, focusing on the destructiveness of society and human consciousness (Tomenchuk, "Гамлет-Машина" [*Hamlet-Machine; Gamlet-Mašina*]). In an interview, the Ukrainian director emphasized:

This is a warning play. A warning about the danger of individuality being absorbed by the mass. A play about a time of catastrophe, ruin that has become commonplace.

² The Brothers Yurii-Augustyn and Yevhen Sherehii Transcarpathian Academic Regional Ukrainian Music and Drama Theatre (2016, Uzhhorod, director Yaroslav Helias), the Mykhailo Shchepkin Sumy Regional Theatre of Drama and Musical Comedy (2017, director Anton Mezhenin), the People's Theatre "Bam-Buk" (2019, Kramatorsk, director Mykola Metla), Kyiv Academic Theatre on Pechersk (2019, directors Olha Larina and Denys Martynov), the Mykola Sadovskiy Vinnytsia Regional Academic Ukrainian Music and Drama Theatre (2019, director Taras Mazur), Rivne Regional Academic Music and Drama Theatre (2021, director Volodymyr Petriv), Zaporizhzhia Municipal Laboratory Theatre "VIE" (2021, director Yasha Hudzenko-Tobilevych), the Nafta (the Oil) Theatre (2021, Kharkiv, director Artem Vusyk), the Monotheatre "MIF (the Myth)" (2023, Kyiv, director Mykhailo Fitsa).

On the other hand, every destruction is an attempt at rebirth. But you can't destroy culture, change it endlessly. At some point you have to stop. ("Вистава *Гамлет-машина*" [Performance *Hamlet-Machine*; Vistava *Gamlet-mašina*])

In this sense, the three productions that make the focus of this article map such moments of destruction and rebirth. They reflect a particular period in Ukrainian history, after the war with Russia started in 2014, but before the full-scale invasion in 2022. This period was marked by dynamic changes in theatre, and in particular within *Hamlet* productions. In 2017, the tragedy premiered at the Lviv Academic Theatre of Variety Miniatures *Both People and Puppets* under the direction of Oleksii Kravchuk. It is noteworthy that this was the second time Kravchuk addressed Shakespeare's tragedy: in 2010, he had already staged *Hamlet* at the Ukrainian Music and Drama Theatre in Luhansk, before the city was occupied by Russia from 2014 onwards. Kravchuk's second *Hamlet*, on the puppet stage of the Puppet Theatre in Lviv in 2017, was the first-ever production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the history of the Ukrainian puppet theatre.³

In 2018, the second Ukrainian puppet stage version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was staged at the Viktor Afanasev Kharkiv Academic Puppet Theatre. Directed by Oksana Dmitrieva, this production was created in Russian, which reflects the linguistic specifics of the eastern region of the country, where more people spoke Russian than Ukrainian. Despite this choice, which might appear difficult to understand today, it is worth noting that this was a Russian-language premiere in the puppet theatre of Ukraine. After all, even in the Soviet period, the tragedy was inaccessible to the audience in Russian because of the ideological orientation and control of the performing arts at that time. The only puppet theatre production of *Hamlet* in the entire USSR was a 1981 performance at the Magnitogorsk Puppet Theatre (directed by Mark Bornshtein).

In 2021, the third stage version of *Hamlet*, and thus the second in Ukrainian, was created at the Zhytomyr Academic Puppet Theatre. Titled *Khamlet*, it was based on a text by Nikita Pertsev, a student director at the Ivan Kotliarevskii Kharkiv National University of Arts. The production, Pertsev's graduation thesis, departed from the traditional version of the tragedy. It retained motifs of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but combined tragedy with farce and contemporary topical humour, as

³ An exact copy of the *Hamlet* puppet from this performance is kept in the British Parliament as a gift from Ukraine, which was made by a prominent Ukrainian Shakespearean scholar, Professor Maiia Harbuziuk of the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, on the 26th of June 2023 (Fig. 12). Photo from the University page: <https://lnu.edu.ua/gallery/mayia-harbuziuk-u-parlamenti-velyko-brytanii-ia-vidchula-shcho-ukraina-tut-prysutnia-iak-nevid-iemna-chastyna-ievropeyskoi-kulturny-polytyky-ii-sohodennia-i-maybutnoho/>

its author claimed (“Нікіта Перцев: «Коли приходить Хамлет»” [Nikita Pertsev: When Khamlet comes; Nikita Percev: Koli prihodit’ Hamlet]).

It is noteworthy that these three performances originated in different parts of Ukraine: Lviv in the western region, Kharkiv in the eastern region, and Zhytomyr in the northern region. Chronologically, they appeared within a few years. The third production is currently the most recent stage version of *Hamlet* and is different because of its radical change in the genre from tragedy to farce. This article will pay closer attention to the first two versions as key productions that reflect the breadth of the new approaches to *Hamlet* as a tragedy in Ukrainian puppet theatre.

Hamlet Between a Puppet and a Human. Lviv 2017



Figures 1–4. *Hamlet* by Shakespeare. Lviv Academic Theatre of Variety Miniatures *Both People and Puppets*. Directed by Oleksii Kravchuk (2017).

Sources: Photos kindly supplied by the theatre.

The director of the Lviv *Hamlet* production, Oleksii Kravchuk, combined the puppet form with live acting, thus creating a special atmosphere for working with the playtext. Kravchuk used a new translation by Yurii Andrukhovych, a contemporary Ukrainian poet, prose writer, translator, and essayist. Andrukhovych completed this translation in 2000 at the request of the Kyiv director Stanislav Moiseev for the legendary production of *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* at the Molodyi

Theatre in Kyiv. This translation, based on the English playtext as well as a Polish translation by Stanisław Barańczak, is the most contemporary of the translations that exist in Ukrainian (Bublyk). The text is full of humor and words familiar to people living in the western part of Ukraine. For example, Claudius is addressed by Hamlet with the use of a familiar form, *stryjko*, meaning father's brother, or paternal uncle.

In Shakespeare's play, Hamlet appears as a positive character due to his inner torment, moral dilemmas, and the struggle against betrayal and injustice. However, in this production, he appears in a different light: he is a destroyer who unknowingly does damage to everyone around him, even those whom he seems to love. His actions, aimed at finding truth and exacting revenge, turn out to be destructive for those around him. The key experiment with the role lies in the choice of the performer, Nadia Krat. Although many women have played the role before, her interpretation of Hamlet is different because of her ability to combine traditionally "masculine" traits, such as courage, hot temper, frankness and crude humor, with "feminine" vulnerability, ingenuity and emotionality. Although Krat did not set out to transform herself into a man in her portrayal, she skilfully conveys some of the manners and behavioral characteristics of the male archetype (Verhelis, "Сестра наша – Гамлет" [Our sister – Hamlet; Sestra naša – Gamlet]). This delicate balance between the masculine and the feminine deepens the interpretation of Hamlet's character, highlighting new aspects of the role. Although initially his *Hamlet* did not prioritize gender issues, in an interview Kravchuk explained:

In general, there is something feminine about Hamlet. We know that many actresses have also performed Hamlet. These are Sarah Bernhardt and Alla Demidova. There is such an intuition in him. There is one phrase when Horatio says before the duel: "Prince, don't go." And he replies: "It's a woman's gut feeling." And there is also a monologue when Claudius is praying. Hamlet says that he could kill him here, now, during his prayer. A warrior man would probably do so. But this one, no, not now. Let him go on, let him go on in festivities, in debauchery, let him go. Only a woman can take revenge like this, if she takes revenge and goes to the end in revenge. (Bublyk)

Oleh Verhelis, a Ukrainian journalist and critic, noted that Krat's performance as the Danish prince resonated neither with the legacy of Sarah Bernhardt nor Alla Demidova, but rather with "Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, where Viola and Sebastian are lost and found, where the comedy of the Christmas masquerade is about to turn into a tragedy" (Verhelis, "Сестра наша – Гамлет" [Our sister – Hamlet; Sestra naša – Gamlet]). In this production, the central characters in *Hamlet* appear in two ways: as live actors and their alter-egos as puppets. For Verhelis, this experiment was a great success. This *Hamlet* wins us over with their childish sincerity, they are horrified to realize that the world is infected with the

virus of a “criminal state power” (Verhelis, “Сестра наша – Гамлет” [Our sister – Hamlet; *Sestra naša – Gamlet*]) but the hero is also infected: their struggle is agony, the male puppet’s face is frozen with an expression that resembles surprise and a mute cry, and the female puppeteer’s voice as well as acting style conveys desperate doom (Vasyliev, Verhelis et al. 145). Together with their puppet characters, the actors create images: they act in a shared/common space. The puppeteers do not hide behind their puppets (they act not only on its behalf), but in a playful manner also present themselves as living people, building communication with one another through short exchanges, meaningful looks. Therefore, they also enter into relationships on stage independently of one another, as the puppets seem to symbolise a different reality beyond the familiar world of the traditional play. This ‘other’ reality can be divided into two dimensions: microcosm and macrocosm, each of which is embodied by puppets of different sizes. The puppets were created by two artists, Oksana Rossol and Oleksandr Serhiienko. They skilfully combined different kinds of puppetry, which allowed them to achieve a visual contrast between large puppets (body puppets, half the height of the actor) and small puppets (rod puppets, half the size of large puppets), emphasizing the ambiguity of the images. The large puppets represent a macro world, symbolizing global and external forces that influence the characters. Meanwhile, small puppets, representing an ‘alter ego’ of the larger ones, reflect inner experiences on a micro level of personal conflicts (Verhelis, “Сестра наша – Гамлет” [Our sister – Hamlet; *Sestra naša – Gamlet*]; Vasyliev, Verhelis et al. 143–146). This interdependence is achieved through thoughtful visual solutions. The two worlds interact with each other emphasizing the tension between the external and internal life of the characters. The actors’ dialogue with the puppets symbolizes both a general-scale conflict, in which the characters face great challenges in life, and a local conflict that expresses their internal contradictions. The puppets serve as mediators in this dialogue, lending the performance a multi-layered character.

The actors’ costumes were made of ordinary dark grey knitted fabric with hoods in order not to distract the audience’s attention from the puppets. This is also why the actors’ faces are not made up. The puppets have a rather terrifying appearance: hair torn in different directions, ugly facial features, and somewhat shabby clothing. The appearance of the puppets is meant to convey the state of the characters’ souls. The internal vileness of the characters is externally manifested. Only Hamlet and Ophelia were created as more “attractive” puppets. Their faces are rather pale with dark accents, some deep wrinkles, large noses and ears, the corners of their lips downward, furrowed brows, and slightly sagging cheeks. Their appearance directly conveys the disfigurement, flaws, and low morality of a degraded society. In the performance the small puppets repeatedly served as symbols with surprising playful significance, combining different layers of meaning. For example, in the final scene during Laertes’ fight with Hamlet, the actors performed live, but instead of swords,

they held small puppet figures: a puppet Laertes and a puppet Hamlet. In another scene, when Guildenstern and Rosencrantz announced the arrival of the travelling actors, a mini-Hamlet puppet was used as a microphone.

The production's scenography employed dark colors that emphasized the atmosphere of tension and tragedy. The centerpiece of the stage was a large wooden door in the middle of the stage, symbolizing barriers, both physical and metaphorical, that stand in the way of the characters. Near the right side of the stage, there was a fence made of plastic pipes, which can evoke associations with isolation or separation between different spaces of action. On the left side of the stage, there were light plastic barrels and a suitcase, which later transformed into a coffin for Polonius, emphasizing a minimalist but expressive approach to scenography, where each object acquires an additional semantic load.

According to Kravchuk, the leitmotif of this production is organised around a reflexive path that an individual and their puppet's 'alter ego' follow. They have to analyze what they have seen in order to recognize and understand themselves:

The classic "To be or not to be?" – in this interpretation – is acutely perceived as an attempt by a living being to understand at least himself: who am I in a mad world inhabited by monsters-caricatures-werewolves – a mask-puppet or a person; a man or a woman? (Verhelis, "Сестра наша – Гамлет" [Our sister – Hamlet; Sestra naša – Gamlet])

Together with the actors, Kravchuk explores the mechanisms of manipulation that dehumanise humans. After all, a living person can also be controlled just as a puppeteer controls a puppet. Metaphorically, all the characters in the play are puppets because all of them are being pulled by something or someone. The production accurately conveys the political and social tensions in Ukrainian society, portraying its time in a gloomy, critical way, while simultaneously appealing to the lighter side of each viewer's soul, urging them to consider whether they are themselves or merely hostages of society or the authorities.

The Timeless *Hamlet*. Kharkiv 2018

The Kharkiv production of *Hamlet* combines live acting with puppets, similar to the Lviv one; however, the conceptual content of the performance is significantly different. Following the canonical Shakespeare plot, director Oksana Dmitrieva focused not only on the themes of betrayal, power struggle, and exposing the treachery of others, but also on the power of love, which can lead to rash acts. As Hanna Veselovska emphasizes, this production was "about the incredible power of love that pushes people to commit crimes" (Vasyliiev,

Veselovska et al. 186). The production's interpretation highlights the tragic nature of human feelings, emphasizing their ambiguity and destructive power (Tomenchuk, "Гамлет" [*Hamlet; Gamlet*]).

Dark tones, metal barrels, and wooden elements were key in the set design created by Natalia Denysova. However, one of the central images Denysova put on stage was sails, which, on the one hand, indicate a geographical context (Denmark, washed by the sea), and on the other hand, they perform an important metaphorical function (Tomenchuk, "Гамлет" [*Hamlet; Gamlet*]): the sails symbolize Hamlet's emotions, his inner storm, which propels the hero towards an inevitable catastrophe, like sails that lead a ship straight into the stormy waves of fate.



Figures 5–8. *Hamlet* by Shakespeare. The Viktor Afanasev Kharkiv Academic Puppet Theatre.

Directed by Oksana Dmitrieva (2018).

Sources: Photos by Margarita Kornushchenko. Photos kindly supplied by the theatre.

At the center of the stage stood a two-tiered structure that dominated the scene. Its lower part consisted of a panel divided into two rows with cells that evoked associations with a prison. These cells symbolized the traps or restrictions in which the characters were kept. It was in these cells that the puppets were situated at the beginning of the production, and the cell doors opened once the characters began to act. When a character died, their cell was closed again, while the puppet was taken away, emphasizing the fatality of the events and the inevitability of death. One rather abstract feature of the performance was seemingly disembodied

women in black who appeared next to each living character a moment before their death, acting as harbingers or guides to the afterlife. These images suggested the inevitability of fate, which consumed each character, underlining as well the fragility of life and the inevitable influence of higher forces.

At first glance, the general design of the stage evokes associations with the traditional form of the seventeenth-century Ukrainian 'vertep', the tiny portable puppet theatre scaffold/screen with its typical vertical division of the stage space into upper and lower levels, as in the tradition dividing the universe into the sacred and profane spaces. However, in the production this division is conditional, and in fact, allows for no clear distinction. All the characters acted on different levels, and demonstrated a lack of clarity as to what belongs the world of the sacred and the mundane. For example, in the cemetery scene centring on Ophelia's grave, the gravediggers were located on the upper tier of the structure, although traditionally they would have been "below". The same applied to the appearance of the Ghost, who also entered on the upper level though he should appear from purgatory, below. At the same time, such 'earthly' characters as Claudius and Gertrude also acted on the same tier, an interpretive decision which completely erased the boundaries between the spiritual and material worlds.

The special feature of the production is the seamless integration of live action with puppetry. The puppets used in the staging were mostly rod puppets made of wood, a choice which emphasized their simplicity and symbolism. In addition to the puppets, the production also featured metal birds that imbued the whole a sense of cold, hard reality (also because of their metallic sound). Sometimes the puppet doubles' acting turned into a parody or mockery of the actors' performance. It is interesting that all the characters, with the exception of Hamlet, had their own puppet counterpart. Puppet Hamlet, however, was played by two women in black who accompanied the Ghost and controlled a puppet that repeated the movements of the live Hamlet (Fig. 5). At a certain point, when Hamlet came up with the idea of exposing Claudius through a theatrical performance, this connection reversed: the human Hamlet began to imitate the movements of his puppet, which emphasized his dependence on circumstances and fate (Tomenchuk, "Гамлет" [*Hamlet*; *Gamlet*]). Oleksandr Markin played Hamlet as melancholic, though in some scenes he certainly conveyed other emotions. This was reflected in how the puppet was orchestrated: sometimes the puppet Hamlet was moved by two female puppeteers, and sometimes he was led by a man. Hamlet knew that his desire for revenge may prove fatal, but despite his mental anguish, he understood this hopelessness and decided to act. His love for Ophelia turned out to be genuine, and in the end, he confessed it, when – unfortunately – she was already in her grave.

Dmitrieva added new accents that opened up other layers of interpretation for the viewer. The presence of the Ghost was significantly expanded: he appeared in the middle and at the end of the performance, which created a sense of his

constant influence on the course of events. The director's decision to make the actor who initially played the role of the Ghost a member of a traveling players who arrive in Elsinore and, at Hamlet's request, perform an incriminating play for Claudius was also significant. As such, the character seemed to not only set the beginning of the story, but also accompanied it to the very end. This interpretation opens space for new assumptions and questions. For instance, is the Ghost real? Is it possible that at first only a disguised actor appeared before Hamlet, and due to his emotional shock and grief, Hamlet mistook him for the spirit of his father? This idea prompted the audience to wonder if all the events were merely part of a well-planned scheme to manipulate Hamlet. This directorial decision added depths and mystery to the story. In addition, the emphasis on the figure of the Ghost changes the idea of destructive events in the play. If in the traditional interpretation Hamlet is considered the driving force of the drama, in this version the main responsibility was transferred to his father. It is the Ghost that becomes the starting point of destruction, which then engulfs everyone around him, including Hamlet himself. Hamlet is a puppet in his father's story of revenge. This reinterpretation allowed for a fresh perspective on the issues of guilt and responsibility, compelling the viewer to reevaluate the Ghost's motives and impact on the unfolding events.

As reviewer Liudmyla Tomenchuk highlights, the Kharkiv production tells a story about how insignificant and petty people's efforts seem in the face of eternity, and how eternity – represented by the Ghost cum Commentator/Actor – literally laughs at the characters in this tragedy. The production focused on frozen time, on people who have lost their sense of the passage of time and were effectively stuck in another dimension – in “timelessness” (Tomenchuk, “Гамлет” [*Hamlet; Gamlet*]).

The appearance of such a play in 2018 symptomatically marked the mood of many citizens of Ukraine, who had been enduring Russian military aggression for five years. It was a feeling of helplessness, of being unable to influence the course of events, which for some reason repeated themselves cyclically like a nightmare.

Hamlet as a Tragicomedy. Zhytomyr 2021

The third version of puppet *Hamlet* staged at the Zhytomyr Academic Puppet Theatre, demonstrates a radical departure from Shakespeare's playtext. This leaves more room for improvisation by the production team who added contemporary and local meaning to the plot. The chosen genre of tragicomedy is already evident in the title: *Khamlet* draws us into a linguistic pun, associating the word “boor, cad” with the word “хам [kham]” in Ukrainian, declaring the de-heroization of the protagonist, bringing him closer to our time and devaluing tragic topoi. In an interview, the play's director Nikita Pertsev explained his vision of the ‘hero’ of our time:

Khamlet comes from the word “kham (cad)”, “rudeness”. Yes, our hero is becoming one. He was like that before, but in the form of such an intelligent cad. Remember what it was like in the nineties and after, when bandits tried to look intelligent. [...] That’s all. And we have quite a few of them. But these people can change for the better! If they understand where they came from, understand their growth – the path from who they were to who they are now, that they have a purpose, not just a simple task of sitting and wiping their pants. (“Нікіта Перцев: «У мене лялька»” [Nikita Pertsev: My puppet; Nikita Percev: U mene lâl’ka])

Typical of fairground theatre, the use of hand puppets reinforced the effect of distorted reality, as did the contrast of the live action commentator with caricatured, exaggerated puppets operating behind the screen. The whole production seemed to be structured as a performance of a traveling company, with an open reception at the beginning and at the end of the performance. The actors brought in a chest with puppets, introduced their characters at the beginning, and at the end, they ostentatiously put them back into the chest, which ultimately became a sarcophagus. The metadramatic aspects of the performance were underlined by an added character, the Jester, who communicated with the audience and the puppet characters. He commented on and explained the action. The nature of this conversation was often far from Shakespeare’s playtext, and his way of speaking was close to contemporary spoken Ukrainian.



Figures 9–11. *Khamlet* by Shakespeare. Zhytomyr Academic Puppet Theatre. Directed by Nikita Pertsev (2021).

Sources: Photos by Ruslan Moroz. Photos provided by the theatre.

The way in which the actors performed their roles, the way they controlled the puppets, and the constant metadramatic emphasis on the theatricality of the events in the play highlighted the innovative dynamic between puppets and live actors in the production. For example, Hamlet, in a conversation with Horatio about the question whether they are all hostages or only puppets in the mess of an unfair life, suddenly reflected upon their own nature: "I realized that we are all puppets!" (Hamlet's puppet bangs its head against the stage, making a dull sound to show that it is made of wood).

Pertsev's use of puppets emphasizes a degradation of society. The actor Oleh Yatsenko, who played Hamlet, describes the power of the puppets in an interview:

There are moments when you realize that an actor on stage will not play that [...], there are moments when a puppet can demonstrate this or that emotion much more expressively, because usually in a live performance an actor does not go for such experiments. (Kovalchuk, "У Житомирі" [In Zhytomyr; U Žitomiri])

However, the production extended beyond depicting the grotesque and toxic environment that the protagonist inhabits. In fact, Hamlet himself later turned into an unprincipled and cunning Punch/Pulcinella, the popular fairground theatre character. According to the laws of the farce, he then beat all the other puppets with a huge stick. Perhaps, the production suggests, this is exactly the kind of "hero" – attractive and media-savvy – that modern society needs? After all, he embodies the dubious values of the time, when appearance often prevails over content, and the ability to arouse admiration is the main condition for gaining power and influence. Apart from this social criticism, the director Nikita Pertsev also focused on the degraded people of the imagined country (Kovalchuk, "У Житомирському театрі" [Director Nikita Pertsev; U Žitomir's'komu teatri]). They were depicted as an unprincipled, declassified crowd ready to serve any new king – e.g., a new Claudius – but also ready to distance themselves and bury him if he suddenly lost his status. It is no coincidence that at the end of the play, when the main characters die, the arrival of Fortinbras was cut. Instead, vulgar, common people reappeared, happy to have a job: "to bury or not to rebury" the corpses of the dead Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, and Laertes.

The creators of the production 'dynamized' the plot with the help of wordplay, random allusions, eloquent, though not always appropriate, quotes from other famous works: e.g., King Claudius orders to cut down the "cherry orchard" that grew under the walls of Elsinore. The set design by Viktor Datsun was ironic to the core, as the puppets acted against a backdrop of a fake, toy medieval castle painted on plywood; a stage board was 'propped up' by shovels. This seems to immediately refer to a cemetery, and yet again, the future fate of most of the characters. Later,

this indication was reinforced by another blatant symbol: tombstones appeared on the stage board in place of the cut-down trees.

The metaphor of the cemetery emphasized the diagnosis of a consumerist and unprincipled society: it reflected on its deadness. The technique of double or triple detachment through metadrama, the use of the principle of 'theatre within the theatre' allowed the creators of the production to draw an unattractive image of an 'anti-hero' of our time and modern society unobtrusively. The de-heroization of Hamlet and his transformation into the image of a cynical hero of our time may seem overly radical, as it pushes the central existential questions in Shakespeare's tragedy into the background. The use of farcical elements that devalue pathos and turn the action into a game with caricatured puppets reflects social criticism, but risks depriving the production of the depth associated with *Hamlet*. For those accustomed to the classical understanding of tragedy, this production may look like an exaggerated, ironic reflection, where the important balance between comedy and tragedy is shifted too much towards grotesque and parody. Yet, this adaptation certainly complements the gloomy stage *Hamlet* in the Ukrainian puppet theatre as depicted above.

Three *Hamlets*: The Puppet Scene as a Reflection of Social Processes

Although there have been only three productions of *Hamlet* on the Ukrainian puppet theatre stage to date (2017, 2018, and 2021), they reflect a diversity of interpretations and contexts, while expanding the boundaries of puppet theatre. These three productions offer original solutions to the problems presented by Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, using theatrical techniques that are characteristic of puppetry. The combined use of live actors and puppets reveals the characters' inner worlds more fully, displaying their alter egos. At the same time, this exposes deep-seated traits of their personality and reflects upon their internal and external conflicts.

In particular, the de-heroization of Hamlet is symptomatic of the puppet theatre, it seems, as is the shift of directorial emphasis from the protagonist towards his environment. As a result, these *Hamlets* allow a broad projection onto their society and a reflection of the people who tolerate or encourage criminal power in a regime. Finally, these productions highlight that the characters in Shakespeare's tragedy are all puppets: hostages and victims of manipulation by a third force. Such stage readings also make it possible to diagnose the destructive processes that are quietly unfolding in Ukrainian society, involved in a war against its will since 2014, and subjected to war's destructive influence, sometimes unconsciously.

The *Hamlets* of the Lviv, Kharkiv, and Zhytomyr puppet theatres convincingly demonstrate the expansion of the puppet medium into the sphere of the 'adult

stage', overcoming stereotypes that this art form is intended exclusively for children. Contemporary Ukrainian puppet theatre, as exemplified by these productions, is emerging as a fully-fledged platform for thinking through serious existential issues.



Fig. 12a–12b–12c. An exact copy of the Hamlet puppet from the performance of *Hamlet* by Shakespeare (2017) of the Lviv Academic Theatre of Variety Miniatures *Both People and Puppets*. This copy is kept in the British Parliament as a gift from Ukraine, which was made by a prominent Ukrainian Shakespeare scholar, Professor Maiia Harbuziuk (Ivan Franko National University of Lviv), on the 26th of June 2023.

Sources: Photos from the page of the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv.

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Part Four

Humanitarian / Post-traumatic / Post-Apocalyptic Shakespeare



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Depicting Collective Support on the Theatrical Stage: The Case of *We Are Hamlet*

Abstract

The article describes a unique theatre project recently implemented by an international team of directors, actors, and stage designers representing the Bremer Shakespeare Company, the Prague Shakespeare Company and the Ukrainian Vasylyko Theatre in Odesa. The project's product is a production titled *We Are Hamlet* that was performed in several European cities in 2023. Directed by Guy Roberts, *We Are Hamlet* examines, through the text of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, what defines and makes possible the existence of human beings, despite their social, political, economic, educational, and even ecological differences. The discussed performance can be considered a conceptual statement, one made with the help of traditional artistic means but conveying meanings that acquire particular significance today. The production is analysed with recourse to the impact of

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media-broadcast images of the collective international support for Ukraine as a victim of the Russian aggression. The article looks into the artistic process itself, focusing on how the very idea of collective support is realised on stage through the so-called chorus atomisation.

Keywords: atomised chorus, role dispersion, 'collective' Hamlet, the Russia-Ukraine war.

On a rainy day in early April 2022, the then-British Prime Minister Boris Johnson (nicknamed ever since by many in Ukraine as *Borys Johnsonyuk*) walked down a hill to the main street in Kyiv. The scene seemed miraculous, as the Ukrainian capital had been besieged since the previous month by invading Russian troops. The sense of something extraordinary happening was enhanced by the fact that here was an official top-ranking representative of a state geographically so far away – and not even a member of the European Union that Ukraine had been longing to join. After all, the distance between Ukraine and Great Britain in terms of their political, economic, cultural, and other developments had always been significant. But now, by briskly going down the street called Luteranska, the head of the British government was shortening that very distance: his government was about to take the lead in creating an international coalition to support Ukraine.

A week after this miracle, the Ukrainian capital began to see an en-masse arrival of other political leaders and state officials of the highest calibre, in other words, the most influential foreigners coming to show support for Ukraine. For the following year and a half, public displays of solidarity with Ukraine as a victim of the aggression were a popular move that even helped some visitors improve their own political standing at home (Кацевич [Katsevich]). At certain moments – such as at the celebration of Ukraine's Independence Day on 24 August 2023 – the number of international guests would increase so that when photographed in group pictures they would form a solid support group, which appeared to be speaking, through however many different microphones, in one voice.

The parallels drawn between the gatherings of high-level foreign officials and what serves in the case of this article as a key element of a theatrical action, i.e. a chorus, spring to mind when we try to analyse how the emblematic messages generated by media during the Russia-Ukraine war have inspired the creation of a good many interesting works of art. For a while, the visual presentation of the international "chorus", featuring, irrespective of the domestic circumstances, almost always British and Polish state officials and politicians, was quite common. The images of collective support and other media-distributed "pictures from the war" seemed to be making a powerful emotional impression on Ukrainians. The Ukrainian common belief in joint support by foreign countries was strong enough for the same support to be often perceived as direct protection against Russia's bombing. Shelling

is something the enemy would ostensibly not dare to resort to in the presence of foreign diplomats. However, apart from influencing public sentiment in this way, such images also became a source of artistic solutions, including theatrical ones, created by performing collectives both in the country and outside it.

It should be noted that the impact made by the various media types on theatrical practices has a long and substantial research history, ranging from print media to social networks. In the context of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, this impact has also received considerable scholarly attention in recent times. In particular, researchers have observed that in the first months of the war, the Ukrainian theatre effectively assumed media functions by broadcasting in an artistic and yet still documentary manner information about what was happening in local towns and villages under Russia's occupation (Galats'ka 38–41). The new informational, 'media'-related side of theatrical performances also became significantly strengthened through the active use of images related to the war. In other words, the theatrical process involved creative "rearrangements" as a result of which the viewer seemed to be in the epicentre of events and witnessing how they were to unfold (Lavender; Veselovska 152–157), thus increasing the contemporary feel of the productions.

However, internationally made references to the war in that manner, through media pictures projected during a performance, seemed to work only for a relatively short period of time. An apt example of a media-oriented production is a German opera production of Sergei Prokofiev's *War and Peace* staged in Munich in 2023, which used the then-popular image of theatre as a wartime shelter. In the set design in Munich, one can recognise a photograph of early spring 2022, i.e. the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In the photo, the stage of Les Kurbas Lviv Theatre is filled with people sitting or lying on make-shift beds. The scene is meant to depict a typical wartime shelter, and it obviously does so quite convincingly. However, the period during which many local theatres found themselves functioning in such a capacity had lasted for a few months at the most, not least because of a changing war dynamic. Pretty soon, with the general easing of the security situation, theatres were able to return to their primary function. Still, some other popular images and messages widely broadcast by the media continued to be used in theatrical performances outside of Ukraine, and perhaps the most visible of them were designed to underline international support for Ukraine.

The fundamental issue of support for Ukraine in its fight against the aggressor has been present more firmly on the Ukrainian stage since mid-2022. Several children plays based on fairy tales, where the animal characters personify one country or another, have been published and performed. Such productions would end with a demonstration of collective action in support of the victim; thanks to the very positioning of actors on the stage, such an act can be associated with a kind of chorus that teaches the young audience the relevant ethical lesson. As such,

the function of the chorus has once again become important to theatre – but not without help from the media, disseminating the joint photos of political leaders.

The creative purpose behind the chorus employed by modern directors does not fully correlate with the chorus's functions in classical theatre. In general, scholarly studies on the changes that have taken place in relation to the chorus's functions over the history of the European theatrical art are presently quite active and evolve into the two main schools of thought (Fischer-Lichte 347–361). The first one relates to the specifics of the chorus in performances that we call ancient drama (Zira), while the second one is about examining the choric functions that are not of ancient heritage (Maričić, Milanović 58–68).

According to Patrice Pavis, its usage in modern theatre is self-imposed and performs clearly different tasks:

The function of the chorus is not just, as in Greek tragedy, to comment on things and underline a conclusion, delivered in the authoritative voice of the author or the chorus members responsible for emphasizing a moral or political message. Rather, it is a sign of a 'community utopia' (as the director Heinar Schleef calls it). The individual's words are marked by all the protagonists, but also by the *mise en scène*, by the virtual installation on stage of the community of spectators, their collective gaze, their desire to come together as a group through the characters and the ethical or moral forces they represent. (Pavis, *The Routledge Dictionary* 182)

What Pavis notes as the peculiarities of the chorus functioning in the modern theatre is vividly manifested in many stage performances, and perhaps especially so by legendary French director Ariane Mnushkin. In her interpretations of classical texts, including those by Shakespeare, she creates a certain community of characters and endows it with the qualities of a chorus that enters into a controversy or supports a hero, as well as with the qualities of an active crowd that interacts with the audience and provokes the latter into thinking. However, despite the fact that it is through chorality that modern theatre discusses topical issues in the relationship between personality and power and pronounces important political slogans, the chorus in the form of a "cohesive group", according to Pavis, will not be able to play a critical role in such a discourse (Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre* 55). Quite possibly for the sake of any full-fledged discussion and demonstration of "collective self", it would be necessary to voice the personal opinion of individual members of the chorus. And what we may call an atomised chorus, something where each character has a distinct voice – as presented in *We are Hamlet* – becomes a format that convincingly represents the power of collective and individual principles.

The Shakespearean Atomisation of the Chorus

One playwright who employed and, at the same time, modified the chorus in his plays was undoubtedly William Shakespeare (Brennan 109–127). The consensus among researchers is that he personified the chorus via an actor responsible for the Prologue and Epilogue, or entrusted the chorus's functions to a Fool – in terms of stopping the action, interrupting a scene, reflecting on what's happened and anticipate what will come, but most importantly in creating a direct, unmediated, connection with the audience (Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*; Greenblatt, *Hamlet*). The fact that in Shakespeare's works the chorus as a collection of performers can be embodied in one character can be seen not only in his playtexts, but also in the way they were used on stage. The best example of this in the history of Ukrainian theatre is Les Kurbas's stage interpretation of *Macbeth* in 1924, where the figure of the Fool becomes an important commentator on events (Makaryk 100).

According to some scholars and stage practitioners (Vygotsky 166–198), the personification of the chorus also takes place in Shakespeare's works where there is neither a Prologue nor a Fool. Most glaringly, such is the case in the iconic *Hamlet*, where researchers detect a whole range of chorus personifications and a stage implementation of the traditional chorus functions by individual characters (Kitto). For instance, Ophelia calls Hamlet "chorus" when she says: "You are a good chorus, my lord" (3.2.240), because he explains the true meaning of the play about the murder of Gonzago, which is in fact how the ancient Greek chorus would explain the meaning of events to the public in its own time (Arribas 1537–1558). Attention is also drawn to the hidden functions of Fortinbras acting as Chorus or Epilogue to the play (Vygotsky 166–198). But most often, the functions of the chorus as a bearer of common sense rely on Horatio, Hamlet's closest friend (Kitto). Horatio appears both as a luminary of the chorus and as the chorus itself, i.e. he performs several tasks at the same time, and also comments on the theatrical performance, through which the story of the murder of Old Hamlet, the late King and Hamlet's father, is told.

Therefore, there seems to occur a chorus atomisation that is at play in *Hamlet*, meaning a distribution of the chorus functions among several characters and a chorus dissolution. Viewed from a dramaturgical perspective, this would be an exceptionally innovative method, at least for the sixteenth- to seventeenth-centuries theatre. But it is also quite possible that the same method was important not only as a creative technique, but also as a way of conveying a specific meaning, which testifies to the disintegration of something as supposedly wholesome as a state, as in Shakespeare's famous "time out of joint" line (3.5.190). At the end of the day, it is as if through this 'dispersed' chorus, the play aims to demonstrate the absence of a common public cause and the disintegration of human relationships, in contemporary reality accompanied by a multi-media overload.

From *Hamlet* to *We Are Hamlet*

The chorus atomisation in *Hamlet* is also quite telling from the perspective of the representation of the early seventeenth-century political discourse. In the vast majority of stage interpretations Hamlet, the hero, is to appear as a lone figure, someone who independently, and victoriously enters into a duel with the repressive authorities. As the plot shows, only his friends Marcellus and faithful Horatio remain alongside Hamlet, whereas his classmates Guildenstern and Rosencrantz betray him at the very first turn. Contrary to the tradition of depicting Hamlet as a loner, the international project *We Are Hamlet* – implemented jointly by the Shakespeare Theatre in Prague, the Bremer Shakespeare Company, and the Vasyly Vasylo Odesa Theatre – offers a production that can be called a ‘collective’ *Hamlet*. The British director and producer, Guy Roberts, who is both the author of the production’s idea and its director as well as the actor performing Claudius, compares his own vision of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as a tragedy about the confrontation with evil with a popular concept of modern political reality that is formed through the media. Accordingly, the production aims for a stage interpretation of the political formula used by the modern establishment – one best described as the ‘collective West’, a term that has become so salient and omnipresent in the course of the Russia-Ukraine war.

Guy Robert’s idea of the “collective” *Hamlet* is implemented by making his main character personify the joint actions of international forces resisting aggression. For this, Roberts creates a Hamlet of the global world, as it were, internationalizing this character as much as possible. Accordingly, he strips the performance of any local allusions or context. This shift is crucial given the tendency of our times to domesticate, if not politicize, Shakespeare’s tragedy on many a national stage by immersing it into distinct country-specific settings. Most likely, the director was tempted to interpret the play via the specifics of the raging Russia-Ukraine war – not simply as a locale for the conflict, but as a locus for action that impacts the entire world ‘out of joint’. However, as a reference to contemporary events, Roberts resorts to the image of the international chorus in support for Ukraine, led or at least fronted for some time (back in early-mid 2022), by the then-British-Prime Minister.

To enhance the effect of the “collective” *Hamlet*, Roberts utilises the Shakespearean principle of chorus atomisation among characters and distributes Hamlet’s spoken lines among the performers who exchange roles during the performance: everybody becomes Hamlet. Thereby, the director aims to spread the determination, responsibility, and – finally – defeat of the “collective” *Hamlet* among the majority of the participants in the play, both young and old, men and women. In effect, Shakespeare’s vision of the acting trade is also realised: the actors who come to Elsinore are said to be able to play everything from tragedy to comedy (3.2.390), the result being that the heroic Hamlet role can be played by completely different actors, with varying theatre experience, professional skills and schooling.

The role distribution among the performers accentuates not only the situation whereby anyone can become Hamlet and thus face the ultimate choice of whether to act or not to act in defence of certain values. In *We Are Hamlet*, this artistic method assumes a practical meaning, too, in that it allows for the plot to undergo substantive changes. Thanks to the effective character dispersion, Hamlet, the hero, can be shown in different states without resorting to theatrical tricks of the trade – such as make-ups, hairdos or costumes. Thus, spectators first see an excited hero who has just set foot on his native shore – the role assumed by the charming, almost statue-like actress Jessica Boone. Her character resembles the romantically inspired Hamlet, uncompromising and sincere in his feelings. After a few scenes in the conversation with Ophelia, the role of Hamlet behaving like a madman is taken over by an actor whose acting reveals a constant inner tremor – the lean Gregory Gudgeon, sporting long grey hair.

The main character role is passed on throughout the performance. At one point, Hamlet is played by the elegant German actor, Tim Lee, who is originally cast as Guildenstern, and at another, by the fragile Malaysian actress, Renee Lamari, who started out as Ophelia. The same role then goes to Taylor Napier (Laertes), Karel Hermanek (Rosencrantz), US and Czech actors respectively, and the bright German actress, Swea Auerbach, who appears in other scenes as Polonius. In each case, the actors have an opportunity to immerse themselves in another, opposite character: a lover, a friend, a rival or enemy, in order to better understand that character. The only person not playing Hamlet is Claudius, performed by Guy Roberts himself, who never loses his royal superiority and aplomb.

Among those playing the role in *We are Hamlet* are also Ukrainian actresses engaged in the project: Olena Zavhorodnya, whose main stage role is that of Gertrude, and Alina Katrechko who is remarkably flexible and impersonates both Ophelia's double and her soul: with smooth and impetuous movements of her body and arms, Alina conveys the state of Ophelia's restless soul. One should not fail to mention the mobile Vera Timofeeva with her otherwise eccentric treatment of the Gravedigger: because of her dress and funny cap, and with a small shovel in hand, she looked like a character in the open-air performance given by a folk theatre. In the production, these actors without substantial acting background are presented on an equal footing with experienced, media-recognisable German, British, and American actors. Just as much as them, they come ready and equipped to experience a share of Hamlet's responsibility as the one that opposes the oppressor. These Ukrainian actresses assume or do not assume the role of Hamlet – but the roles they play are much more substantial than the relative significance of their respective characters for the plot of *Hamlet*. At the end of the day, it is Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war and Russian shelling who inspired Brits and Germans to create *We Are Hamlet* in 2022 and thereby demonstrate, as a response to the brutal Russian aggression, a common moral imperative.

The Hamlet Coalition

Guy Roberts, a supporter of text-oriented theatre, focuses in his directorial approach on actors' speech, articulation and intonation, essentially leaving other artistic means to enhance the impression of what is heard. However, in *We Are Hamlet*, he does make a calculated choice to include phrases in German, Czech, and Ukrainian. This is not just a gesture, a tribute to political correctness, but rather a way to emphasize the potential of other, non-Shakespearean languages and highlight the significance of a polyphony of languages in a great cultural community. That is why, as a director, Roberts requires from the performers a special ability to speak Shakespeare's words from the stage, and communicate through them, while conveying the meaning of events with eloquent aphorisms, whereas, as an interpreter, he constantly extrapolates the playtext of *Hamlet* to make it speak to modern times and, more specifically, deeds of the international community.

For these purposes, the director conceptually employs a multi-layered system of signification and (literal) reflection in the performance. Framed mirrors that double and even triple reflections of the events are installed on the stage. These reflections work on different meaningful levels: by seeing oneself in the eyes of someone else, one understands one's own personality. Similarly, actors play with doubles of their characters, while mirror effects cut through the darkness and whimsically break the stage space into segments. The character enters into a dialogue with his character's double, which resembles communicating with his own reflection in a mirror. The mirror effect also works in a scene with a ghost, when everyone present seems to freeze in the middle of their frames, thus receiving additional support from their own mirror images. Therefore, it is as if the direct and numerous reflections allow the collective Hamlet(s) to show the effectiveness of multiplying the efforts of many that lead to a real community.

The very idea entailed in the mirroring and playing with reflections/doubles as a means of community-building is made abundantly clear. All this might not have proved so convincing had it not been for the participation of the Ukrainian theatre from Odesa in the project. Essentially, *We Are Hamlet* tells the audience that there is a Hamlet coalition which unites representatives of different countries and continents in one common cause – to defend the principles of humanity in the world 'out of joint'. The Hamlet coalition proposed by Roberts contradicts the plot of Shakespeare's tragedy, since in the play everyone eventually leaves Hamlet and does not necessarily 'tell [Hamlet's] story' as his last words plead with Horatio. But in the global world, lone heroes are more likely to be seen as icons capable to garner wide international support, moral and material.

Conclusion

For a modern viewer, actor and director, *Hamlet* may well be but a source of witty sayings, possibly commenting on almost anything, including war, elections, or even the loss of loved ones and hopes for a better future. The recent retelling of Shakespeare's play in *We Are Hamlet* is more than that. Conceived and carried out as an international project that toured around Europe, the production resonates with one of the most pressing concerns of today: how to create and sustain a collective identity. Through such artistic means as chorus atomisation and role dispersion, as well as complex solutions in stage design, *We Are Hamlet* presents and debates highly relevant concepts of consolidation, international aid, and mutual support. Importantly, the message conveyed by *We Are Hamlet* is not what it may seem when used as much-stocked headline phrases by media and journalists. It is formulated and communicated as a result of the deep exploration and rethinking of classical theatrical forms and methods. Yet there is also a vital reverse process, in the effective extrapolation of modern ideas about the global world to the early modern text. This is what makes *We Are Hamlet* work as theatre that will hopefully be shown in Ukraine, where it has not yet been shown due to security concerns.

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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 Hnatkovskyi, 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 Hnatkovskyi, 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. (Hnatkovskyi)²

Hnatkovskyi'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. Hnatkovskyi 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. Hnatkovskyi clearly established a new performance structure, helping the participants to develop their characters and find expression through their roles.

According to Hnatkovskyi, 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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“Hereafter, in a better world than this, I shall desire more love and knowledge of you”: Kelly Hunter on Art, Healing, Trauma and Working with Ukrainian Families. A Conversation with Darya Lazarenko and Imke Lichterfeld

In this interview, acclaimed actress and theatre director Kelly Hunter, MBE, artistic director of Flute Theatre and creator of the Hunter Heartbeat Method, shares her insights on the transformative power of art and the theatre as a healing place for individuals with trauma, drawing on her experiences working with Ukrainian families in Sofia, Bulgaria, between 2022 and 2024. Hunter discusses the rewards of using sensory games within the framework of her heartbeat method as a medium for emotional expression and connection, highlighting how creative engagement helped provide a sense of community and hope in times of crisis.

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Darya Lazarenko: I first heard about Kelly Hunter from Professor Michael Dobson several years ago. Professor Nataliya Torkut, the Head of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Centre, and I sent Kelly an email saying how impressed we were with the work she was doing but I could never imagine that we would meet under such circumstances. And to tell you the truth it was some kind of magic because Kelly appeared exactly when she was most needed and it was the moment when we thought that nobody could help us, when we felt completely at a loss. When the war started, Nataliya called me and said we needed to do something. We decided to start a fundraising campaign to be able to get medicine to elderly people who lived close to the front lines. And we didn't really know how to go about it. So, we created a Facebook page for the Ukrainian Shakespeare Centre, and we published an appeal there to everyone who could support us and donate money. This was the exact moment when by some wonderful magic Kelly appeared. The first thing that she helped us with was this fundraising campaign. And this is how we first came into contact.

Kelly was so supportive; she helped me pull myself together. It was also the moment when Ukrainian families began arriving in Bulgaria. The first families arrived by car, and they didn't have many warm clothes or toys because they had packed in a hurry. So, it was then that Andrii and Mariia Nikolov created a situational centre called "Open Doors" and the daycare centre for Ukrainian children here in Sofia and this was the place where it all began. And it all began with Kelly: she was the spark that started the whole "Flute for Ukraine" project.

We kept exchanging emails and as the 2022 Craiova Shakespeare festival approached, Kelly offered to come to Sofia and we started planning. We didn't have any resources at that moment but with the help of Andrii Nikolov and my colleague Georgi Niagolov we managed to organize transportation to Sofia for Kelly and her company. So, in May 2022, we played with the Ukrainian families at "Open Doors" and it was magical. I had never seen anything like that before.

Imke Lichterfeld: Should we take a step back and get to Kelly's version of the story. How did you get to that point when you first met?

Kelly Hunter: I had been running Flute Theatre for five or six years in 2022. People who know me well, quote that cliché about me that I am 'wired for war but living in peace'. I'm the kind of person who in an emergency becomes very calm and feels at home and knows what to do. The danger of it is that when there isn't an emergency, I tend to cause a crisis. Consequently, I work in Shakespeare and drama. I think what is important to say is that at that time we had just come out of COVID-19, and I had a very strong core of actors and an incredible assistant called Oscar, from Catalunya. When COVID-19 had struck in 2020, we had been touring in

Poland and Romania and we had been translating our production of *Pericles* into different languages and performing with autistic people, not in a war situation, but going where we felt the need might be greatest. I think this is how Dasha [Darya Lazarenko] and Nataliya [Torkut] first heard about us. So, when COVID-19 struck we just got very busy. We got good at strategizing, mobilizing, organizing, and keeping ourselves going. I adapted my sensory games, which use Shakespeare with people with autism, to be accessible online with one autistic person at a time. We did five online shows a day for 15 months, something like 980 online adapted shows and I kept the company going, my company of Spanish and English actors. It was an amazing story that we all went through together!

In the summer of 2021, we just got back into real spaces as a company. Six months later, in February 2022, the war broke out. I think we all knew that we had something to offer to people. In the event of a crisis and in the event of human emergency, we could find a way – “find a crack and the light comes in”¹ – to adapt ourselves to offering our deceptively simple way of making Shakespeare live for people who find themselves in dire circumstances. I call it simple because I’ve created a way of using theatre that doesn’t need any production values, it doesn’t need a set or extra lights, it simply needs the actors’ bodies, souls, hearts, and minds to be present in the circle – the kind of theatre Shakespeare created his plays for.

I also had an extraordinary company, and we had all been through that pandemic, working remotely online together. Everybody was so cohesive and so strong. We were working on the production of *Pericles* which for me has always resonated so deeply – this idea of people at sea, fleeing from tyrants, losing their loved ones, saying to God: “Why do you make us love your goodly gifts, and snatch them straight away?” At the centre of the play is an exploration what war and grief do to people and in Act 5, the play offers what all people desire, which is to witness an inconceivably beautiful family reunion and to behold impossible dreams coming true.

This play has always been right at the heart of my soul and it was such a pleasure to be doing it. At the same time, I felt goosebumps, because there were these people from Ukraine, whose stories mirrored the story of *Pericles*, with whom we were in contact, and we had something so strong to offer them. So, it seemed, *Pericles* style, the universe had somehow brought us together. I don’t normally say things like that, I’m a very practical person, I find solutions to obstacles, etc., but this play had taught me to follow what happens next. Whom have you met? Follow them! This is what *Pericles* does, and Thaisa, and Marina.

2022, in February, the terrible war breaks out, I was watching television and reading the news and without hesitation, I asked Michael Dobson for Nataliya’s

¹ Hunter refers to Leonard Cohen’s famous *Anthem*: “There is a crack in everything. That’s how the light comes in.”

email and got in touch with her that night; I guess I watched television in the morning and then I was emailing Nataliya asking what we could do. She said: “We need gloves, my son is fighting, they are soldiers, and everyone needs gloves and food, etc.” I am good at fundraising at a grassroots level. It’s a pain in every bit of your body, but you have got to do it. We got busy with that. And we found our purpose.

Meanwhile, we were preparing our mainstage production of *Pericles* to go to the International Shakespeare Festival in Craiova, Romania. So, as Dasha said, I just looked at the map and saw that Craiova is in the south of Romania and Sofia is in the north of Bulgaria, near enough to drive between the two. It is like *Pericles* turning up on the coastline of Mytilene where Marina happens to live. It seemed like the most obvious thing to do, and I remember writing that to you, Dasha, and I remember thinking I could come. “I’ll come and see you” and then at the end of the email I thought, “No, no, no, what am I talking about? We should all come. We should just do this,” and everyone just said yes. We didn’t get paid for that week; we just volunteered our services. To be clear, we were funded to do the big festival in Romania and then we gave our services free for the extra week in Bulgaria with the refugees. Everyone without hesitation said: “Of course, we’ll come.”

And this is how this great adventure began. We were picked up by three complete strangers: myself and nine actors – it’s a lot of people – and all our cases, and our instruments. Again, it was like the play *Pericles*, taking a journey in faith. We were going to be performing in Russian which we had never done before. We had done a lot of translating our performances into different languages, but Russian is very different. Dasha had sent these amazing, perfectly recorded Russian clips, with all the lines of *Pericles*, and how to say ‘hello’ and ‘we stand up’ and ‘we sit down’ – and we had these on our WhatsApp. We wanted to pronounce this well and that was hard. Russian was hard. But we were practicing.

Plus, we were doing our double *Pericles* performances: at the main stage at the Craiova festival and with the Romanian families with autism from ANCAAR, who had welcomed us with open arms, warm bread, salt, and vodkas – they are truly beautiful people. We were doing those performances in Romanian. So, our brains and bodies were very active, and therefore we were at our best; I know for myself that when you’re challenged, and you’re given something really purposeful to do, it is amazing what can be achieved. Especially when you have a team around you, it’s an amazing feeling, so much fun, and, to be honest, it was a gift for us. So, Georgi and two other drivers arrived in Craiova and off we went: three or four of us in each car with all our bags. One of the cars got lost and ended up back in Craiova three hours later, but they somehow arrived in Sofia first. It was funny, great stories as you can imagine. We crossed the Danube and into those mountains we went.

We arrived very late at night, and then stayed up, practicing Russian. The next day, you [Darya] and Georgi took us up the Vitosha mountain and you looked

after us. And there was always food, there were always so many welcoming treats for us everywhere we went. And you sat with us on that mountain, everyone was very tired, and then Tash [Natasha Howard, one of the actors], beautiful Tash, fell over and had a massive bruise on her leg. We got our Russian to some kind of a comprehensible degree and then the next day we went to the children's museum: we performed *Pericles* for autistic people sitting in our circle with Ukrainian refugees. Some of them had autistic children and others were there for reasons of their displacement by the war. There were no filters for who should come and who shouldn't come. The door with Flute Theatre is always just open. And a lot of families came. We did two shows that day.

My overriding memory is of reaffirming that if children are given a space to play, they will do so, they will play in their own way. The families started to feel that they had, at last, a breath to take and a chair or a cushion to sit on. It's exactly the same witnessing the reactions of the families of many autistic people. When I first meet them they are living their lives in this terrible trauma of being told there is something wrong with their child and it will never get better and that there are going to be problems forever and then they come into this theatre space, which is a healing, womb-like space where their children can express themselves in their own way and a feeling of relief and belonging sweeps over them. The feeling of relief existed in both circles – the inner circle of children playing with us but also that outer circle of families and parents who had undergone unimaginable trauma, suffering, and anxiety with not knowing what was coming next. It felt to me like I had come here so that I could create this safe space. It felt like a gift. Out of this horror, there had been a gift for me so that I could give back the thing that I was already doing.

Darya: Parents approached me afterwards to talk to me – not only about the way they responded to Kelly's performance and playing with Flute Theatre, but also to the relief they felt because it was so important for them. When they arrived in Sofia, they felt stressed all the time. Children started playing very soon but they were not loud, they were very quiet, sitting around rather than running around. And with Kelly, they felt free to play, they felt that they were allowed to be themselves, to smile, and to be alright again. But there was something more because some of the parents who approached me several days after playing with Kelly and Flute said that the most important thing for them was that it was the first time that they saw their children genuinely have fun because they were treated as individuals and as equals. They were seen, heard, accepted, and included into the game as equal human beings, and they were even allowed to take the lead.

One of the best things about Flute is that every actor is present in the moment and often allows the child to lead in the game. When children started helping actors

out with the Russian language, slightly correcting or giving hints, just helping to do what they could in a very nice, friendly, and supportive manner, a synergy was created. It was lovely. And the parents were so touched. One of the mothers said that it was the first moment in her whole life that she was truly enjoying herself looking at her child having fun and being completely accepted. In therapy sessions, the framework is a little bit different, and the relationship is different. It is not a relationship between equals having fun. Here, they finally got to experience this – being able to be proud of their own child. I think this was something new for many parents. And it was a transformative experience. One of the mothers said that it had changed her whole life, because before that she used to stay at home a lot, she didn't go out with her child, she used to be quite shy, and she didn't want people to point fingers at her child. But one day of Flute changed her whole experience. She just saw that it could be done in a completely different way, in this accepting and friendly manner, where everyone is equal, and everyone is having fun together. I think it was a life-changing experience for all of us.

Kelly: I get asked a lot, and sometimes quite aggressively, whether what I do is therapy or art – as if these two things are completely separate. And I get accused sometimes, especially in the UK, of doing therapy and calling it art. That's interesting. I never thought about this, but I've been forced to recently because I keep being asked this question.

Art should be therapeutic. Just art. Just looking at a painting. Therapeutic means "I feel better, or I feel different, or I understand myself, or I understand the world, or I just have a feeling." Whatever small incremental thing has happened is a kind of therapy. I think people have got far too bogged down in therapy for autistic people, people with special needs, people who've suffered grief and trauma. It's so transactional because it's done by someone who's got an answer in some way and therefore is kind of better than you or they are separate from you and they will get you to do some exercise. And you do it, and now you're meant to feel something, and then you get judged and evaluated, and it gets written down somewhere. I've seen this happen. That's not art.

So, my way of working is a living theatre practice. I believe in the power of theatre to transform peoples' lives in a therapeutic way. I do not claim that it's drama therapy or music therapy but it's amazing how many people say they were so much better than with anything else they had tried. Flute is not in competition with anyone. We're just doing what we do, other people do what they do. There's an industry of therapy. And I do not belong in that industry.

Imke: I would like us to talk about challenges that you face, not just language problems but traumas, and the way you deal with them and the method that you work with.

Kelly: The work is the challenge. I made something that only comes to life when there is a challenge, a resistance, somebody who is locked away, who isn't going to respond naturally to an impulse, who may take longer, much longer to respond in their own way. That's what this work is. If there's no resistance to it, it's finished in about 10 minutes. The sensory games are repeated, they are based on repetition of rhythm and movement, whereby someone who is locked away from expressing something they want to express is given the time and space to practice and repeat with spontaneity something that is pleasurable, jolly and fun. And that pleasure is not only just humorous, it can also be the pleasure of experiencing a game of grief and loss within a safe environment. For instance, we have a game where we act out the moment that Thaisa loses Pericles, in which you stretch out your hands and you 'lose' the person and you spin on your own in the space, and then you physically catch them again and you hug each other as tightly as you can until you lose them again. This kind of amazing cathartic experience is pleasurable.

The games have a very set and physical pattern: the actors repeat the games, invoking the feeling that each time they play, they have never done it before. In this way, little by little that challenge, that resistance transforms into something else. It just will. Through using repetition, something will always happen inside the repetition, and I love that, it's like oxygen to me. That's what I really enjoy doing – getting into the rhythm of one or two games with a group of people who seem disinterested or unhappy or locked away, or just not in the mood, and then creating an environment, creating a space whereby we explore something, and the walls of resistance fall away. So, I don't see it as difficult because that's just the very thing we do. And that's the gift: being present in the room with someone who opens up, and that doesn't mean they've done it the way we want them to do it, it's just that 'something' has happened, some sound, some movements, some light in the eyes, some version of what we are doing is now owned by them. And to witness these moments, to be honest, is like witnessing a birth. And that's what I believe Shakespeare does, his plays allow us to come back to life, to remember ourselves. So, in a way the sessions and the performances that we have done over the years with refugees and their families were some of the greatest I will ever do with Flute Theatre because there was so much resistance, so much reason why it shouldn't work, why the trauma will just be in the room. The challenge was the gift; without the challenge the work that I make just doesn't exist; so the bigger the challenge, the more profound the work.

The truth is that the real challenge is a very grown-up and boring problem: funding for this work. That's the truth. And no one really wants to talk about that. But if I had more money, I would do it so much more. In 2022, we came that first time without paying anybody, acting on instinct and impetus but we can't continue to do that forever. The challenge of keeping this going is an administrative one. And then you get into the politics of who should be paying for this, what's the worth of it, and all of these things. A long-term project doesn't come from air; it comes from organization.

Darya: I was thinking about something that Kelly said about these games waking us up. This is a very exact metaphor. They are dreams that make us wake up to the immediacy of our lives because we constantly live either in the past being depressed and saddened by what has happened, or in the future being anxious about what is going to happen. When you play with Kelly, you're in the moment. Even if you don't want to, you're at first unwillingly drawn into this whirlpool of energy, you feel involved from the very first moment. Kelly has this mild but very effective approach to those kids who are reluctant to join, who are just running around or sitting somewhere in the corner. They are not pressured into anything. They are just there, and they are allowed to be – to be themselves – there, but also to be a part of the whole of it. And all of them eventually start participating and playing. And it's magical. This was a transformative experience for me, too. I am one of those people who benefited most from Kelly's coming over to Sofia because it changed my life, too.

This being in the moment allowed families to not forget about the war, but to switch to something else because you cannot change your focus unless you are given an alternative strong emotion you can focus on. They got this chance to focus on something new. War was still there, it couldn't go away, but they could finally focus on something else. And that experience helped us overcome all the challenges, including those of an organisational kind.

On different days, we worked in different locations and of course we had to deal with all kinds of situations. Another challenge that we faced was the language. When Kelly first came to Sofia, we worked with Russian because the families that had arrived were primarily from the Eastern part of Ukraine. But some of the children didn't want to speak Russian at all. And the next time Flute came, they had to learn a new translation, into Ukrainian. So, eventually, they mastered the words for the games in two languages. And they learned a bit of Bulgarian, too, because some of the Bulgarian families came to play with us. And it was wonderful and important – all of the children playing together. It was a lovely moment. We were so happy to be doing it together, as if we were carried along by a wave.

Kelly: This idea of using Shakespeare's dreamlike poetry for these productions for autistic audiences, or people who have fled a war, is key. We use moments in Shakespeare that are essential to the experience of being alive. The work is based primarily on finding moments where four key words – eyes, mind, reason, and love – come together and as in a dreamlike montage, you just find yourself in that experience of the 'seeing mind' and the 'loving eye', the deep beautiful poetry of Shakespeare.

It struck me that, of course, there is also the deeply beautiful political nature of *Hamlet*; people who are living in a war can review their lives through watching *Hamlet* and reflecting on politics. I'm a pretty political person but this strand of my work is entirely about exploring the unconscious dreamlike world of Shakespeare, not politics. It just struck me how remarkable the plays are because they express at least these two things – the conscious political reflections and the unconscious state of being – at the same time.

At Flute Theatre, I barely use any narrative in the work for autistic people, we can jump into unconscious deep seas of experience and piece them together with a tiny thread of story. No one ever says, "Oh, but how did he get there? Who's the King currently?" They just want to play. Yet you can also use Shakespeare's extraordinarily acute political vision to illuminate the world for audiences to use as a mirror up to their lives, this is what many theatre makers do and should do and always will, I hope. But there's a whole community of people who can't access that approach: autistic people who need 24/7 care for the rest of their lives are unlikely to access that, children are unlikely to access that and not everyone wants to; people who fled a war might not *want* to do that. So, I offer these people a potentially sublime experience of Shakespeare through using his plays as an unconscious, dreamlike state where narrative is not the focus. My work with these marginalised audiences offers a direct and deeply emotional way into accessing and owning the plays that bypasses the politics and focusses on sensory experience. It's interesting because it's not that politics isn't emotional, but rather it's the dreamlike structure of our shows that explores how it feels to be alive and which frees you from narrative, just as in our dreams we don't need to know how we got from one place to another because our dreams set us down in new places using montage. The poetic dreamlike structure of our versions of the plays gives freedom.

Imke: Can I ask whether that goes hand in hand with the heartbeat method in the sense of the rhythmic quality of the language itself? So, is this a kind of combination: You find the rhythm and you choose some of those words?

I had the privilege of witnessing your work with autistic children in Craiova with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and you performed this with *Pericles*; both of them are plays where, at the end, everything gets resolved. There is a dreamlike quality

to them. And there's some kind of harmony that is soothing and peaceful. Could you elaborate a little more on the workshops themselves: how do this dreamlike quality of the plays and the heartbeat come together?

Kelly: The heartbeat rhythm underpins very specifically how we offer a transition from one space to another, how we begin and how we end. Autistic people or refugees, it is safe to say, are in some kind of trauma. Autistic people have said to me, "My life is like a 24/7 panic attack that just never ever ends." I think that state of panic is going to be the same for someone who must flee their country where the whole family unit is experiencing that never-ending panic attack, sleep is constricted, and therefore critical thinking is impacted.

Shakespeare's plays are written in iambic pentameter and there's this underlying heartbeat; it is endlessly changing and showing us the ever-changing feelings of the different characters but [the heartbeat] is there all the time. The heartbeat is the first sound you hear in the womb before you are born, it's the most womb-like sound, or warm, comforting rhythm that we can make. So, when we sit and make our heartbeat 'hellos', we are offering our calm interior rhythm to somebody else without saying "Oh, please, relax" or "That's okay," – just by doing it, just by creating that womb-like environment. Once we have set that up, we can always go back to it; and if the room is a little dysregulated or people's emotions, or attention, are going all over the place we can always just literally do the heartbeats to come back to the circle. So, it's always there, just like the iambus is always there in Shakespeare's plays.

With the choosing of the words for each game, each sensory game contains a little bit of Shakespeare's dialogue. For example, Thaisa says "He could not please me better," when she first sees Pericles. The line has a little culmination of rhythm at the end of it, where the heartbeat races on the word 'better', reflecting the skipping of her own heart as she looks at the man she has just fallen in love with. Non-verbal people can join in with the plosive 'B' sound of the word 'better'. I'm always finding a line or two from the text where the dramatic poetry releases rhythm, melody, feeling, and narrative in one go. So, the phrases I choose for the actors, children, and participants to say and to repeat, as if they have never said it before, do use the heartbeat rhythm, but it's important to say that the rhythm does not constrict the experience. It's not, 'you must go booboom-booboom-booboom-booboom-booboom', in a steady unchanging drone like some bad actor. On the contrary, our heartbeats change all the time with our feelings and so do the rhythms and feelings of Shakespeare's characters.

It's not just the rhythm of Shakespeare that underpins this work, but also his sound patterns. At the centre of *The Tempest*, for instance, which we also did with the refugee families when we came back in 2023, is the character of Caliban who

says, "This island's mine!" Three words. I have translated these three words into so many languages and across the world many non-verbal people simply make a humming sound 'Hmmmmmm' on the word "mine", thereby claiming it as their possessive pronoun and expressing Caliban's territoriality and the innate feeling of needing to own your own space if it has been taken away from you. They are using what I call the 'mother' sound 'm': it's the warmest consonant that you can make.

A lot of the time it genuinely doesn't matter if the participant is verbal or not because they are given the opportunity to embody ecstatic moments through the sound patterns offered by Shakespeare. This hum is incredibly powerful, an incredibly powerful experience. Shakespeare has given all of this to us to play with – the way that the sound and the rhythm land together to explode the character into life. It's those moments of language that I then put into each sensory game.

Darya: This works incredibly well even after Flute and Kelly have left. Families keep playing on their own at home using the songs and the games as a way to brighten up their day or to calm the child down. And singing 'Hello' or 'Pryvit' is the first reaction that every child has to Kelly's name. These kids become amazingly cheerful when they hear Kelly's voice, they are so happy to see her, it's such a wonderful connection. And together we managed to create a whole network of such connections.

When Flute came for the second time, together with the Ukrainian educational hub in Sofia and the Ukrainian Shakespeare Centre, we organised an online broadcast for Ukraine. Many specialists and families also joined from different regions of Ukraine. During their third and fourth visit, Kelly and Josh [Welch] taught specialists and parents how to go through the steps and to take the child with you. The whole energy was so catchy. Everyone was having fun no matter what their age was. And the families I keep in touch with are so excited about the possibility of meeting them again in the future.

Kelly: It is interesting that what you've picked up on is that everything's okay at the end of the Flute shows like *Dream* and *Pericles* and they have this resolution and that's true. With *Pericles* we offer a deeper experience of grief and loss because obviously you have at the centre of that play the big storm with people drowning. I have enjoyed offering autistic people and refugees the opportunity of showing their feelings of unhappiness – as well as sharing joy and pleasure. I think one can fall into the trap of just wanting to make everything better for the people who are suffering and that's no bad thing. But what I have really learned over these decades is that it's very important to offer an opportunity to be real and to give a space where suffering can be expressed.

My next project is *King Lear*. This play has been in my life for a long time. Having done *Pericles* – with our displaced people and our autistic people – which touches on grief, I saw that if you offer these games of pain and suffering people really want them. So, it seems like a next natural step for me is *Lear*. We are going to do *Lear* for and with autistic people. We are going to make a new set of games using those parts of the play that we choose to be most resonant. We will give people the opportunity to do the storm scene, to play the Fool, and expose themselves to the elements – in that way this just seems like a gift. I am also going to do a mainstage production at the same time with my company of actors with the idea that everyone is going to be the Fool. So there will be seven or eight Fools on stage in a dystopian world in which they will play all the parts with the heightened emotions of the play running through their bodies, souls, and voices.

Imke: *Pericles* touches on grief and then *King Lear* does so much more. You were talking about the cathartic effect earlier on. There is no harmonious end. Will there be the fun of the Fool but also the idea of exploring suffering?

Kelly: I think there is more peace in truth. No-one wants to be lied to ever again. The truth is that the world is a tragic one. As a theatre maker, you need to give something with truth and authenticity and let the participants or audience receive it. I'm going to find a way that gives cathartic experience without patronizing anybody or trying to package things up in some kind of way that isn't honest. But of course, I am not setting out to upset anybody. What I have learnt is that people want more truth. People I work with don't want to be patronized; they want to empower themselves with these experiences. So, I will find a way. My endeavour is not to upset anybody, but to allow people to express that they may be upset.

Imke: Would you like to comment on the possible hopes to work in Ukraine in the future because the traumas of the war will rest in this country for a very long time?

Kelly: I want more than anything to set up a series of courses and a company of Ukrainian people who can use this way of working and pass it on to others for the next generations. I think about it a lot. We want to set up more courses, go to as many places as we possibly can, and pass on how to play these sensory games, and create these productions. There's going to be untold suffering across the world as a legacy of the current wars and the inherent damage that has been done to the generations of families. Ukraine is obviously one of those places. Through my

direct experiences since 2022, I feel very close to the country, and I want to work out the best way to pass on the Hunter Heartbeat method.

There are autistic people everywhere, and in some parts of the world, there are people who have been profoundly damaged by war, so to be honest, if I had a budget at my fingertips, I know exactly what I would do to spread the work. Meanwhile, wherever you are in Europe or the world, if you run a group or teach a course, please invite Flute Theatre to come and teach you and your students, your drama students, your actors, your parents, your teachers, or your therapists how to play these games and create these productions.

In this next phase of Flute Theatre, I want to create these worldwide courses as a legacy. The second edition of my book *Shakespeare's Heartbeat* is coming out in September, and I've written something about the experience with Ukrainian refugees in the book, but I want to write something more substantial that focuses on the specifics of the work. I believe that Dasha and I must write about this experience we've had in the last three years and about the *Pericles* games. To sum up, it doesn't need me to describe the untold tragedy and trauma of what has happened in Ukraine, but I hope I can continue to offer a place of healing with the way that I've used theatre through this time.

Imke: This multiplication especially for teaching degree students, who are now often involved with inclusive work at schools, would help in their work on a small scale, as well as on a larger scale of work with severely disabled or severely traumatised people.

Kelly: You don't even need to adapt because with every single performance of Flute, you adapt to who is there in the room. In any group of autistic people, you are going to find an amazing spectrum of needs, which is true about any group of human beings including those who are refugees. A knowledge of the fundamentals of the methodology, having those skills at your fingertips, and realising you can do it, will be a real gift.

I have also learned through this work that loyalty and just turning up is an invaluable quality and Shakespeare's plays teach us that. You can't be around Shakespeare for a lifetime and not be a better person. I've learned the following in the world of autism: it's nice to do a Flute Theatre performance once with an autistic person but it's profoundly transformative to continue to share the performances for eight years.

With the Ukrainian families whom we have known for three years, our loyalty to them has been the thing that made the difference. We first arrived in May 2022 and then we came back in October 2022 when everything was still so

traumatised and rough and ready; and there we were again: the same group of actors. I remember the parents coming in and one of the mothers, Victoria, literally jumping with joy, “Ah, they’re back!” It is very important to realise that the return visits continue the journey of transformation.

The big question is the next generation of people who have experienced this war in Ukraine. Their feelings go somewhere, and their sense of themselves as more than victims of this horror must change. Otherwise, it will be just self-perpetuating for ever and ever. This is what Shakespeare’s late plays are about, aren’t they? Where is the forgiveness? The late plays ask how on earth human beings can begin to forgive each other because if we don’t, then we are stuck. I am fascinated by that as a question in my own personal life, and by the fact that Shakespeare wrote about it again and again as he got older and wiser. He realised that one of the profound things we are left with is how on earth do we begin to forgive.

I have been running *Flute* for ten years and we keep talking about what the next ten years will be like, and what legacy I would have created. I’d love for the healing power of theatre to be considered more normal and for people to know that healing is possible. We witness families playing these simple games with their locked-away children and finding a way to healing. Perhaps the answer is closer to us than we believe.

I think the work has only just begun; that’s the truth, that’s the actual human truth. I was given the gift to start something small; these families in Ukraine have experienced war and it’s caused a lifetime of trauma. The wounds are going to be there – so the work of healing has just begun. It feels like we need to make some smart long-term strategic plans to make good our dreams for a better world: “Hereafter, in a better world than this, I shall desire more love and knowledge of you.” I love this quote from *As You Like It* so much. If anything, I think theatre should be involved in trying to make a better world.



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The Hamlet Syndrome (dir. Niewiera & Rosołowski, 2022) – Drawing a Portrait of the Maidan Generation with Piotr Rosołowski

Abstract

Several months before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, two Polish filmmakers who specialize in documenting political, social and cultural transformations in Eastern Europe, Elwira Niewiera and Piotr Rosołowski, came up with the idea of combining the Hamlet figure with the then-emerging Ukrainian documentary theatre to draw a portrait of the Maidan generation born following the collapse of the Soviet Union. For this purpose, they cast five Ukrainians and a documentary theatre director, Roza Sarkisian, and asked them to rehearse an experimental version of *Hamlet* on a stage in Kyiv. The script of *The Hamlet Syndrome* documentary is based on stories the protagonists shared

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during and in between rehearsals. The article also features an interview with Piotr Rosołowski, co-director, co-scriptwriter and cinematographer of the film, in which he discusses the origins of the project, its challenges, development, reception, and the use of the Hamlet figure.

Keywords: *The Hamlet Syndrome*, *H-Effect*, war in Ukraine, *Hamlet*, Maidan, documentary theatre, documentary film.

Introduction

Several months before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, two Polish documentary filmmakers, Elwira Niewiera¹ and Piotr Rosołowski,² started an ambitious artistic project whose aim was to offer a complex portrait of the first generation born in independent Ukraine. To this effect, they initiated and then documented the process of rehearsals of an experimental stage production of *Hamlet*. They cast five Ukrainians and also found a talented Ukrainian documentary theatre director, Roza Sarkisian, to realize their goal. As a result of this endeavour, two interconnected yet autonomous projects were finalized: the documentary film *The Hamlet Syndrome* by Niewiera and Rosołowski released in 2022, and Sarkisian's stage production *H-Effect*, whose fragments we see in the film's closing. Sarkisian then continued to independently develop *H-Effect* in co-operation with Internationale Heiner Müller Gesellschaft, the outcome of which was performed, amongst other locations, in Teatr Polski in Poznań, Poland, during the festival "Bliscy Nieznajomi: Wschód" (Close Strangers: East) in September 2021.

Each member of the cast was a young adult when the pro-European Maidan protests began in late 2013 and early 2014, to be soon followed by a military conflict

1 Elwira Niewiera, director and scriptwriter, has studied theater and German studies at the University of Wrocław, in Poland, ethnology in Berlin, and acting in the Centre for Theatre Practices "Gardzienice". She is author of well-known and award-winning documentaries made together with Piotr Rosołowski, including *The Domino Effect* (2014) – winner of the Golden Horn and the Golden Hobby-Horse at KFF 2014, the Golden Dove at DOK Leipzig 2014, and *The Prince and the Dybbuk* (2017) – winner of the Lion for the best documentary about cinema at the Venice Film Festival 2017 and the Eagle 2019 for the best documentary. She co-wrote and co-directed *The Hamlet Syndrome*.

2 Director, cinematographer, and scriptwriter Piotr Rosołowski has over 30 projects under his belt. He studied cinematography at the Katowice Film School, in Poland. Amongst many of his projects, he is co-author of *Rabbit à la Berlin* (2009) – a short documentary film which was nominated for an Oscar. He served as director of photography on another Oscar-nominated short fiction film *On the Line* (2012) by Reto Caffe. He co-wrote and co-directed *The Hamlet Syndrome* as well as served as its director of photography.

in the Donbas region and the annexation of Crimea. Those events marked a turning point in their lives when their hopes of joining Western Europe were brutally crushed. The script of *The Hamlet Syndrome*³ is based on stories they shared during and in between rehearsals. The filmmakers follow them on and off-stage as the actors search for ways to process and communicate their personal traumatic experiences using the Hamlet figure as their template. As the documentary progresses, a multifaceted picture begins to emerge, resulting not just in one but multiple Hamlets, each with their own story to tell and trauma to overcome.

According to Irena Makaryk, Shakespeare frequently serves “as a point of reference for communal memory and understanding”, especially in the troubled times of conflict and war (Makaryk 7) since he “presents a fascinating case study of the nexus of problems binding together concepts of collective remembrance, history, war, and national identity” (4). It is, therefore, no surprise that Niewiera and Rosołowski would look to Shakespeare as “a kind of ‘sign’ or ‘symbol’ of cultural memory” (Makaryk 6), whose plays perform the role of

myths, fairy tales, and folklore which by their very nature depend on a communality of understanding. These forms and genres have cross-cultural, often cross-historical, readerships; they are stories and tales which appear across the boundaries of cultural difference and which are handed on, albeit in transmuted and translated forms, through the generations. (Sanders 45)

Shakespeare’s stories and characters have been adapted to different periods, cultural contexts and national settings, serving as a meaning-making tool. As Jan Kott puts it in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1964), “Shakespeare is like the world, or life itself. Every historical period finds in him what it is looking for and what it wants to see” (3). Writing about *Hamlet*, the Polish critic states that “Many generations have seen their own reflections in the play” (53) because it can serve as a mirror in which we recognize ourselves and our present moment. He further argues that Hamlet is “one of the few literary heroes who live apart from the text, apart from the theatre” (52). Functioning not merely as Shakespeare’s fictional creation but also an archetypal figure who resonates with audiences across different historical and cultural contexts, Hamlet appears particularly worth analyzing through a contemporary lens (52–53).

³ The documentary received numerous awards at different international festivals, including the main prize at Locarno International Film Festival, Hong Kong International Film Festival, Adelaide Film Festival, Golden Hobby-Horse of Cracow Festival, Special Jury Prize for The Most Original and Innovative Film at Millennium International Documentary Film Festival in Brussels, The Audience Award and Best Documentary Award at Trieste Film Festival.

It is for this reason that Niewiera and Rosołowski chose *Hamlet* as a play that is universally known, bringing instant connotations with existential angsts, moral dilemmas, political conflict, and its European legacy. According to Ruth J. Owen:

Hamlet has been a common currency across linguistic and cultural borders for four hundred years. No other English-language play has been the subject of such lasting fascination and appropriation among Europeans. No other translated play has had such a prominent role in the formation of national theatres and national identities in Europe, nor been used there so often to denounce political complacency and oppression. (1)

Boika Sokolova goes as far as proclaiming the play to be “an instrument of self-analysis across Europe, representing national concerns – be they German, Russian, Polish or others – at moments of crisis” (101–102). Similarly, Ton Hoenselaars finds *Hamlet* to be “a tragedy of infinite space and application” because it can appeal “to every nation and creed. It is difficult to find a European country where the play has not left its traces, even if only with a local rendering of ‘To be, or not to be’” (197). For Niewiera and Rosołowski, the *Hamlet*-inspired theatrical performance serves as a starting point for a conversation about the impact of the Maidan Uprising and the ensuing open conflict with Russia on each of the characters’ lives. The documentary presents a multidimensional portrait of young Ukrainian Hamlets, whose experiences, traumas, and views differ. Shakespeare’s tragedy serves as a canvas that unifies these stories and allows us to connect with them through our shared understanding of the play. It also provides the protagonists with a language through which to express themselves and explore their individual identities and viewpoints in the safe space of the bare stage, where opinions meet and clash, and wounds – once acknowledged – can begin to heal.

The film asks if “To be or not to be” is about having a choice or being deprived of an opportunity to even have one (fig. 1).⁴

⁴ All the images are screen grabs publishable under Fair Dealing.

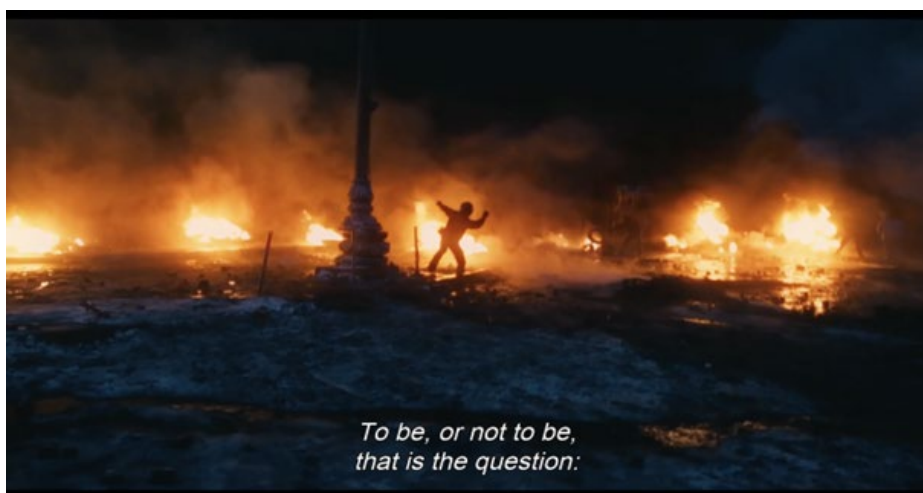


Figure 1.

Indeed, for each of the protagonists, Hamlet's soliloquy means something different. Slavik is a professional soldier fighting on the frontline, for whom Hamlet's speech recalls the moment when he was captured and tortured by pro-Russian separatists (fig. 2).



Figure 2.

Katya volunteered to join the army following her political awakening during the Maidan Revolution. She reminisces about carrying a grenade close to her chest, aware of the fate of captured female soldiers at the hands of the enemy. Roman,

a university student, was drafted as a paramedic, unprepared to witness death daily because, as he explains to Katya, growing up in the times of peace did not prepare him to be “a natural born Rambo” (00:24:36) – that other brooding agent of revenge, Hamlet’s twin brother who does not think twice.

But not all the protagonists are soldiers, as the directors sought that the portrait of the Maidan Revolution is not limited to a military context only. Rodion, a talented stylist from Donbas, is an LGBTQ+ member who has had to fight his own battles, oppressed by his family’s and country’s homophobia (fig. 3). For him, life in Ukraine has never been easy or peaceful.



Figure 3.

Finally, there is Oxana, a feminist actress suffocated by her country’s patriarchy, misogyny and oppressive nationalism which surged following the events of 2014. Despite their diverse and unique perspectives, they all share a sense of shattered dreams and hopes for peace, equality, and sovereignty that their Western colleagues take for granted.

If the term “the Hamlet Syndrome” has become a short-hand for procrastination, the film succeeds in de-trivializing that colloquial usage. Indeed, Slavik, Roman, Katya, Rodion, and Oxana face dilemmas of various proportions, such as the extreme situations described above. Yet, the prevailing sentiment that the film leaves the viewer with is that “the Hamlet Syndrome” now also encompasses trauma. Each of them has some deep wounds that need healing. If trauma is characterized by a broken narrative, then preparing the *H-Effect* and taking part in the documentary gives them a chance to access and verbalize their pain.

With its initial intention of telling the story of the forgotten conflict, the film has become a testament to the strength of the Ukrainian spirit. The reason the documentary resonates so deeply with international audiences is that it speaks to the universally shared dreams of self-determination and dignity. *The Hamlet Syndrome* offers viewers a glimpse into the complexity of the Ukrainian condition. Drawn towards the West and its ideas of democracy and human rights while at the same time enmeshed by its post-Soviet identity and totalitarian past, the young Maidan generation has borne the brunt of Putin's imperial project. The bare stage of the Kyiv theatre where the rehearsals for *H-Effect* unfolded became a safe zone where they were allowed to explore and express their generational trauma. To the directors' own surprise, the project created a space for healing, with sometimes unexpected results.

Since the outbreak of the full-scale invasion, Niewiera and Rosołowski have continued to show their support for the cast and crew of *The Hamlet Syndrome* project. Niewiera regularly organizes charity screenings of the film and meetings with its protagonists in Germany and Poland, to address the atrocities of the war, and emphasize the importance of a pan-European solidarity and the urgent need for material support for Ukraine. The proceeds go to Ukrainian paramedics, firefighters, soldiers and civilians. The artist has set up a charity association in Germany, *Existentia*, which collects money for specialist medical equipment, bullet-proof vests, drones, or sanitary towels for female soldiers. Its activities and the directors' frequent visits to Kyiv to deliver humanitarian aid are documented on her personal Facebook profile. Her unrelenting dedication to the cause is a testament to the power of art as a political and activist project.⁵ It seems that during their filming expedition in Ukraine, Niewiera and Rosołowski temporarily provided their protagonists with a "Shakespeare Shelter", to quote the title of the present volume. Since the full-scale Russian invasion, they have resumed their project of care and solidarity, and continue to provide help to this day.

For the present article, I discussed *The Hamlet Syndrome* with Piotr Rosołowski, co-director, co-writer and director of cinematography in the following section. Our interview-framed conversation focuses on the birth of the project, its creative development, reception, and the use of the Hamlet figure.

⁵ Such a close involvement with the war effort is not without a personal cost, however, as she has admitted to exertion and mental anguish in interviews. To find out more about her personal involvement in the war effort and its mental challenges, see her interview for *Zwierciadło* magazine: <https://zwierciadlo.pl/spotkania/wywiady/543592,1,elwira-niewiera-ukraina-to-moj-bol-fantomowy.read>. Accessed 9 January 2026.

A Conversation with Piotr Rosołowski⁶

What was the genesis of The Hamlet Syndrome?

We started thinking about it while working on our archival film *The Prince and the Dybbuk* about the Jewish Polish filmmaker Michał Waszyński. At that time, the Maidan Revolution was taking place in Ukraine and we were following this political turmoil in the media. We felt that something really important was happening that we wanted to document. We usually focus on Eastern European topics in our work. Waszyński lived at the beginning of the 20th century and was faced with Fascism and nationalism in Europe, so this time we decided that our next project should be about the present. We arrived in Kyiv a couple of years later with the idea of portraying the young Maidan generation who started the Revolution.

Early on, we knew we had to find an artistic key to make a movie about these people and this unique moment in Ukraine's history, just a couple of years after the Revolution, the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the war in Donbas. In the early stages, we felt that we needed to combine our film about the Ukrainian Maidan generation with a documentary theatre because this type of theatre was born during the Revolution, and many young Ukrainian theatre practitioners took part in it, for example, Nataliia Vorozhbit.⁷

At one point, we found an element which connected these two: it was the figure of Hamlet, which we thought was an archetypal figure of European culture that is understandable and known globally. In it, we found the key to tell our story. Our goal after our second visit to Ukraine in 2017 was to start looking for modern Ukrainian Hamlets.

At what point in your creative process did you decide on Shakespeare's Hamlet? Did you contemplate any other works as your template?

We didn't really have to think long and hard about it. Somehow it happened automatically and organically. It was obvious to us that the Hamlet figure fits and links different topics we wanted to explore in our movie, especially the forgotten war in Donbas. Initially, the conflict was a shock for people in the European Union but by the time we started our project in 2017, people had just got used to it. We decided to develop and initiate a theater production which could also be the foundation of our documentary film. Then, the next step was to use this archetypal

⁶ The personal interview was conducted between 19–23 October 2024.

⁷ Born 1975 in Kyiv, she is a Ukrainian playwright, director, screenwriter and theater curator who represents new Ukrainian drama.

Hamlet figure to give the topic a larger context and make it more international, understandable and timeless. As many theatre critics say, every generation has its own Hamlet, and I think at that time in Ukraine, it was quite obvious that this was the moment to search for modern Ukrainian Hamlets. At the beginning, we also considered Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine*. Its connection to the political turmoil in Eastern Europe thirty years ago was our source of inspiration. But in the end, we decided to go back to the core, to the classic figure of Hamlet, and I think it worked out well. In the end, the film is about the people and their stories, and the Hamlet figure serves as a kind of key to open up the stories and make them attractive, accessible and understandable for viewers who don't necessarily follow the political developments and changes in Eastern Europe and Ukraine.

Why did you think Hamlet was the best vehicle through which to communicate and articulate the protagonists' traumatic experiences?

This role of *Hamlet* in opening up the stories of the protagonists was easy to see in the film, especially at the beginning, because *Hamlet* was some kind of a filter which helped our protagonists look at themselves, their stories and the decisions they made. For example, early on, there is a scene with simple exercises that our theatre director, Roza, gives them. She asks if they can remember five different moments in their lives when they had to make a really important decision. At one point, Slavik says: "My dilemma was to live or to die". He then starts to describe a moment when he was almost ready to commit suicide before going into Russian captivity in a destroyed Donbas airport after the defeat of the Ukrainian army. He was ready to kill himself but then he decided against it. For me, it's the best example where you can see how he applied this filter of the Shakespearean tragedy to his own fate and turned "To be or not to be" into "to live or to die" as this most famous monologue corresponded with his own monologue at that moment. That's when we knew that it was the right decision to make this project in one of the Kyiv theatres with Roza Sarkisian and to use *Hamlet* as an impulse to tell real stories. The Hamlet figure was opening up our protagonists, allowing them to dig into their own experiences and memories with the help of the timeless Shakespearean drama.

How did you choose your protagonists for the project? Can you discuss the casting process? You also cast the director, Roza Sarkisian. Why her?

At the beginning of our work, we met a couple of different Ukrainian documentary theatre directors who were also involved in this political and artistic movement in Ukraine. Through Elwira's contacts, we knew Joanna Wichowska, a Polish dramaturg who worked a lot in Ukraine and contacted us with this small

group of people. That's how we met Roza. We decided to work with her early on. We understood each other very well. She was also fascinated by the idea of searching for modern Ukrainian Hamlets and using Shakespeare's drama to make a current documentary theatre production. She also has a very interesting story of her own which was impossible to include in the film. She was a war refugee born in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone in Armenia. She escaped as a child with her family to Kharkiv in Ukraine. I think that's why in her work she's always been interested in how war influences people's lives.

Finding the protagonists was much more difficult and time-consuming. We were not only searching for protagonists for a movie but also for people who could perform on stage. We used our friends' contacts. Pretty quickly we found Slavik, who wanted to be an actor and was studying in a theatre school in Kharkiv. We also found Oxana, a young actress engaged in critical political documentaries and underground independent theatre. We went to Ukraine six or seven times and met many different people: journalists, activists, a former anticorruption department office worker, and a very young policeman who was part of the riot police during the Maidan Revolution, on the other side of the barricade, but later changed his mind completely, and, of course, many volunteers, veteran organizations and soldiers who served in Donbas. Towards the end, we made an open call on Facebook. That's how we found Katya. I remember that when she came, we were sure she had to be in our film because her story resonated with the Hamlet story when at one point you turn everything 180 degrees and go in a completely different direction. Katya told us that when the Maidan Revolution started, she was studying international relations in Kyiv. One day, a huge crowd of people was leaving the subway and pushed her in the direction of Maidan, where she stayed and then eventually decided to go to the frontline. During the protests, she read and discussed topics that she was not interested in before. It was the moment of her political awakening. This confrontation with the truth was also something that changed Hamlet's life.

Was it difficult to find the location for the rehearsals? Why did you chose this particular theatre? Could you comment on the importance of choosing a bare stage?

It was also a long search because we knew it would be the main location of the film and also the theatre performance, so we were looking for a place with the right atmosphere which could house these emotions and this process. After seeing many different stages in Kyiv, we finally decided on the Mala Opera because of the beauty of this place. I still remember when Slavik arrived for the first time in this old partly rundown theatre and said: "Oh, so you chose a place for our rehearsals which has this spirit of our country". That's because it was a unique place, built during the time of the last Tsar of Russia, and then during the Soviet times, it was the Culture House for the local transportation workers in Kyiv. When

we entered, there was a punk band rehearsing and a go-go dancing lesson, but also, as you put it in your question, there was this bare stage, this empty stage which was very beautiful and simple, and probably not renovated in the last 20 years. We decided to use it even though it lacked technical equipment. But we were prepared for this and I think it was the right decision because there was something special about that location. For the participants of the project, they were opening up in that unique atmosphere. For me, it was also a new experience to be part of the project because Elwira already had experience as a theatre practitioner. She had studied in the “Gardzienice” Theatre⁸ in Poland and so she understood all the mechanics of it. But for me, it was my first time working on a stage production.

I also noticed that this simple bare stage was special. The best way to explain it is with the story of Slavik and Rodion. One is an openly LGBTQ+ person from Donetsk, a big city in the eastern part of Ukraine, and the other, Slavik, is quite a straight guy from a conservative family in a western Ukrainian province. Rodion only spoke Russian and was learning Ukrainian and Slavik didn’t speak Russian. But somehow they understood each other very well even though they were so different and came from different places. This relationship was only possible on that stage. We followed Rodion with the camera to the baptism of Slavik’s daughter and could see how Rodion didn’t really fit in that rural part of Ukraine, and that Slavik somehow didn’t have that openness for him. It was different on the stage and in real life because on the stage there was no context. And in normal life, you have all the society and the roles we play. So the friendship between Slavik and Rodion was only possible in that theatre, during that particular performance.

Your characters had undergone therapy before the filming and yet we can see how they still struggle with PTSD. How healing was the process of preparing and staging Hamlet for them? Is it too far-fetched to suggest that the play helps them find a language through which to express their trauma?

Of course, they were all traumatized, especially Roman, Slavik, Katya. Those who served in the army, went through the hell of war or captivity, and also Rodion. The interesting thing is that neither we nor Roza thought about the project as a kind of therapeutic or healing process. We didn’t expect that it could go so deep or have some instant results. We were mainly focused on the artistic challenge of the production. Of course, we were aware that we were working with people who were traumatized. They had different opinions on many topics, different experiences and ways to approach them, so we needed the right balance. But then

⁸ Set up in 1977, the Centre for Theatre Practices “Gardzienice” is an alternative theatre company located in rural Poland. It is known for its experimental projects and rigorous acting training. Over the years, it has produced internationally successful productions.

we also saw, as in the case of Slavik, that it was a kind of a therapeutic process. He came to this project with the idea that it would be healing for him, which we see in the film. One of his psychotherapists told him that his goal was to look at what happened to him at a distance as if you're watching a movie. It's a very emotional, touching and dramatic movie but it doesn't influence your life right now or not in a really strong way. We can see how Slavik develops distance in the film. Afterwards, he even went on to participate in this pretty famous TV show "Voice of Ukraine" where he was singing in the studio and telling his story. So, coming back to the question again, I don't think that it's too far-fetched to suggest that they found on the stage the language to express their trauma through *Hamlet*. I think they tried to find it and in some cases they did.

In your documentary, you made a conscious choice to avoid talking heads and a typical journalistic approach. Could you explain what motivated that artistic decision?

It was obvious from the very beginning that we were not making a journalistic film, a current affairs story. We always try to go deeper and to find some kind of an artistic way to talk about political problems. I think that's the only way to tell timeless stories which could also be watched and enjoyed in the cinema years after the events. I remember that when we were finishing our film, the full-scale Russian invasion happened and somehow the film portrayed our protagonists in a different Ukraine, in different political circumstances than when we were making the movie. At the time of release, the film had the atmosphere of portraying this generation just shortly before the second act of this big tragedy, the second more brutal part of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. All of our protagonists were touched by this war in one way or another. I'm sure that this film will continue to be watched and discussed in the future. There are still screenings of *The Hamlet Syndrome* in Poland, Germany and other countries as we speak. I think it shows that the way we chose to make it was right because it's still relevant even though the moment we portray is already in the past. But the problems we touch on in the film are still present and will continue to be present in Ukrainian society.

Your film is aesthetically beautiful. It feels like a very intimate portrait and a conversation. The camera appears invisible and very close to the protagonists. How did you achieve that level of intimacy and trust with your protagonists?

Maybe the big part of the answer is time because it took us a lot of time to find them. As I mentioned earlier, we initiated this theatrical production, so from the start, we were its artistic core and not observers from outside. Maybe that's why the camera is invisible because we were part of this project, this group, this concept

from the very beginning. We built relationships with them through meetings and time spent together. Here, I must mention Elwira because it was mainly her job to build these relations, to create a really good contact not only with them but also with their parents and friends to then be able to have the trust and be invisible with the camera. That was the key. And, aesthetically, I always wanted to be close to them even when they were trying to remember or perform the most dramatic moments of their lives. I knew that they trusted me and they were ready to be open and share these emotions with the viewers. I think it was unique for us as filmmakers to be so close with them and to participate in this very intense process of rehearsals and then to follow this up shooting intimate scenes with their families.

You completed the shoot before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. How does this tragic context affect your view of your film? How does it impact its reception? I know Elwira is involved in organising humanitarian aid for your protagonists.

We finished the film after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and it was a difficult moment for us because we were still in contact with our friends, with the protagonists of the film. When it happened, we were all shocked by the scale of the invasion. At the same time, we were at the end of the editing and post-production of the film. We stopped our work and felt confused, wondering how to finish the film, whether we should add something or leave it as it is. In the end, we didn't change anything because it talks about the outcome of the war, which is still relevant.

The political situation changed dramatically after the 24th of February 2022 and it also changed our perspective. I will speak here on behalf of Elwira, who started to spontaneously organize humanitarian aid for Ukraine. Right now she's still doing it. She initiated a German association⁹ which supports Ukraine and she's regularly organising charity screenings of *The Hamlet Syndrome* in Germany and other countries. So it was a documentary film that portrayed real people and told real stories in a real context, but it also influenced the lives of the filmmakers, especially in Elwira's case.

The reception of the film was also affected by the full-scale invasion. As I mentioned earlier, initially we wanted to make a movie about the forgotten war in Donbas, to show the price that young Ukrainians paid for the revolution and the war. And suddenly, it changed to become a film about a stigmatized generation which went through more than this forgotten war. The viewers' perspective also changed. Now it was also a film about the victims and veterans of this war who are still fighting. The discussions after screenings for international audiences focused

⁹ For more information about *Existentia* see: <https://www.existentia-ev.org/>. Accessed 9 January 2026.

mainly on war trauma, how our protagonists are coping and what we can do to support them.

What we show in the film is only a small part because the war is still ongoing. It's not just our protagonists, but also many other people we met during our work in Ukraine, theatre directors, sound recording specialists, artists and writers, who are now part of the Ukrainian army. The country is fighting an epic existential fight for Ukraine, and so there is no space for Hamlet's dilemma. When I think of all the people we know, they have all had to make up their minds about whether to go to war or to leave. It's impossible now to be neutral or indecisive because the aim of this invasion is to destroy Ukraine as an independent country. So you have to make up your mind if you are going to fight or to support this fight, or if you're going to leave the country and try to start building your life somewhere else. I can only compare this again to the fate of Hamlet. We are now in the last act of this drama whose end remains uncertain but I still hope that Ukraine will win.

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Romeo and Juliet: From a Performance for Teenagers to an Innovative Dramatic Performance in the Time of War

Abstract

The article offers an overview of the reception history of *Romeo and Juliet* in Ukraine. In the Ukrainian lands that were part of the Russian Empire, *Romeo and Juliet* began to be staged at Russian-language theatres at the end of the 19th century. In the Ukrainian SSR, the tragedy was performed in Ukrainian translations from the late 1930s. Leading theatres in independent Ukraine also adapted *Romeo and Juliet*. For instance, the Frankivsk Drama Theatre

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(2021, directed by Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi) staged *Romeo & Juliet* using Yurii Andrukhovych's translation. Since the start of the Russo-Ukrainian war, this performance has been experimental in its spatial design and approach to the characters, reflecting the pain of the time.

Keywords: performance, *Romeo & Juliet*, Ivano-Frankivsk Drama Theatre, post-apocalyptic theatre, Russo-Ukrainian war.

When studying the staging history of Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* in Ukraine, it is necessary to distinguish between productions by Russian-language theatres in Ukraine and the enactment of *Romeo and Juliet* in Ukrainian. Since the 1810s, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, *Macbeth* and *Othello* were most often staged in Polish-language and Russian-language theatres in the ethnic lands of Ukraine. The troupe under the direction of Ludwik Młotkowski (1795–1855) even staged *Coriolanus* in Kharkiv in the 1830s.

However, troupes and directors began to turn to *Romeo and Juliet* only at the end of the 19th century. It is known from Maryna Grynyshyna's book (Hrynyshyna 959) that as early as 1894, *Romeo and Juliet* was staged by Nikolai Solovtsov in the Russian language at Solovtsov's Drama Theatre, one of the first permanent theatres of Kyiv. In her memoirs, actress Mariia Velizarii (Velizarii 156), the first Ukrainian performer to appear as Juliet, notes that she was the initiator of the production, choosing the role of Juliet for her benefit performance. The director of the play was not Nikolai Solovtsov, who, after he failed in *Othello* in the previous year, was sceptical about productions based on Shakespeare's pieces, but his assistant B. Borysov (Velizarii 162).

Thanks to the help of theatre scholar Yuliana Poliakova (personal communication, 18 January 2025), we were able to find articles in the Kharkiv press of the turn of the 1900s, which records the facts and circumstances of the first and second productions of *Romeo and Juliet* in Russian on the Kharkiv stage. In 1895, the production was staged by unknown director Aleksandrov (138) in the private theatre enterprise of Aleksandra Diukova in the same premises where the Ukrainian Drama Theatre operates today. The production was initiated by actress Mariia Mondschein, who took the role of Juliet for her benefit performance (*Yuzhnyi krai* 4 February 1895 3). The memoirs of actress Mariia Velizarii, the features of whose live action in the Kharkiv production on tour in 1896 were recorded in a review, helped to clarify the director of the performance (*Yuzhnyi krai* 6 February 1896 2). In 1900, another Kharkiv Russian-language troupe ran by Ivan Tohobochnyi staged the premiere of *Romeo and Juliet* in the Summer Theatre in the Tivoli Garden for the benefit of actress Yelena Kutuzova (*Yuzhnyi krai* 28 May 1900 3). So, the first productions of *Romeo and Juliet* in Ukraine were brought to life by the desire of

the leading actresses to play the role of Juliet, but directing in three performances in Kyiv and Kharkiv was an auxiliary and indistinct component.

The topic of staging Shakespeare's works, in particular, *Romeo and Juliet* in German and Polish in the theatres in the Austro-Hungarian Empire-ruled portion of modern-day western Ukraine in the late 18th–early 20th centuries is not studied enough by Ukrainian art historians and requires further research that goes beyond the subject matter of this article.

The stage performance of Shakespeare's plays in Ukraine, which at that time was divided among the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires, was considered the prerogative of companies that performed in Russian or German and Polish, respectively. Only in 1906, the censorship restriction on the theatres in the ethnic Ukrainian lands belonging to the Russian Empire to stage the pieces of world drama in Ukrainian was lifted. This restriction was regulated by the infamous Ems Ukaz of Emperor Alexander II issued in 1876. Specifically, this explains that the heroes of William Shakespeare's pieces in the full volume of his dramatic heritage began to speak Ukrainian only in theatres of the newly-emerged states: these were the performances of *Macbeth* staged by Les Kurbas in Uman (1921, Ukrainian SSR) and *Othello* staged by Oleksandr Zaharov in the Ukrainian Besida Theatre in Lviv (1923, Poland). It is noteworthy that back in 1918, the avant-garde Ukrainian theatre director Les Kurbas had an idea for the first production of *Romeo and Juliet* in Ukrainian in the Molodyi Teatr (Young Theatre), Kyiv. However, the forced merger of his company with the company of the State Drama Theatre prevented this project from being accomplished.

Romeo and Juliet first appeared on the stage of a Ukrainian theatre in 1938. It was a production directed by Mykola Yesypenko at Dnipropetrovsk (now Dnipro) Theatre for the Young. A Ukrainian translation made by Abram Hosenpoud in 1937 was used for this production. Since then, this tragedy has long been associated by theatre directors with teenage and youth audiences. This was confirmed by the appeal of this play by director Borys Oseledchuk of Chkalov (now Mykolaiv) Theatre for the Young in 1951. The first researcher of stage enactments of William Shakespeare's dramaturgy on the theatre stages of the republic (then the Ukrainian SSR), Iryna Vanina in 1964, noted the excessive sociologisation of the first interpretations of *Romeo and Juliet* (Vanina 147). In fact, in the Ukrainian theatre of the USSR times, the cliché interpretation of this tragedy as a family drama exposing the feudal traditions of the 'Westerners' became the norm. In 1952, a new translation of *Romeo and Juliet* into Ukrainian was published, whose literary and theatrical potential remains relevant today. Its author, Iryna Steshenko – the granddaughter of the famous Ukrainian poet, prose writer, playwright and director Mykhailo Strytskyi – had two educations: acting and classical university, and worked at 'Berezil' Theatre with Les Kurbas. During Soviet political repressions, especially the Great Purge, her mother, aunt, brother, and cousin were executed; after the forced end of her

acting career at the Kharkiv Drama Theatre in 1947, Iryna Steshenko actively took up translations of classical world drama. In addition to productions in theatres for the young, *Romeo and Juliet* was staged in Ukrainian in regional musical and dramatic theatres, the aesthetics of which gravitated toward the mass stage action of actors, choir and ballet, e.g. *Romeo and Juliet* in Drohobych Theatre, 1963, director Mykhailo Hiliarovskyi; *Romeo and Juliet* in T.H. Shevchenko Theatre in Chernihiv, 1986, director Petro Lastivka (Zahurska and Lypkivska 917).

Therefore, both trends highlight the positional inferiority of *Romeo and Juliet* in the Ukrainian theatre of the Soviet period. After all, since the 1940s, other Shakespeare tragedies were staged on the leading dramatic stages of Ukraine. These were *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Richard III*, and *King Lear*.¹ Elvira Zahurska and Hanna Lypkivska argue, however, that the first attempt to modernise the intonations of classic Shakespearean heroes took place in the production of Oleksandr Barsegian in the Kyiv Theatre for the Young (1965) (Zahurska and Lypkivska 917). Many years later, in independent Ukraine, this capital-based Theatre for the Young returned to the Veronese tragedy again (2002). However, this time *Romeo and Juliet* was staged as a musical by director Viktor Hyrych, with music by composer Viacheslav Nazarov and lyrics by Shakespeare and Oleksandr Vratariov. In Ukrainian theatre, *Romeo and Juliet* emerged from the reservations surrounding secondary theatres, and the inferior status assigned to it by the Soviet tradition. Only after Ukraine's independence restoration, the Ukrainian theatre first turned to *Romeo and Juliet* during the early Independence years (Maria Zankovetska Drama Theatre in Lviv, director Fedir Stryhun, 1993). At the Ternopil Drama Theatre, the tragedy translated by Iryna Steshenko was staged by Viacheslav Zhyla (2002). Stage interpretations of the play followed in the decades afterwards with the production by the Ivan Franko National Theatre, directed by Valentyn Kozmenko-Delinde (2005); the Kyiv Theatre of Drama and Comedy, directed by Oleksii Lisovets (2005); the Molodyi Teatr, (former Kyiv Youth Theatre until 1995) in 2005; and the 'Atelier 16' Theatre (2006) both directed by Ihor Tykhomyrov. This was related to the fact that a new conceptualisation of stage adaptations appeared. For example, the transfer of time and place to the present day was a sign of updating the tragedy in Lisovets's production, as was portraying the Montague and Capulet patriarchs

¹ In chronological order: *Hamlet* directed by Yosyp Hirniak, the Drama Sector of the Lviv Opera Theatre, 1943; *Othello* directed by Oleksii Hlaholin, 1952; *Hamlet* directed by Benedikt Nord, 1956, at the Kharkiv Drama Theatre; *Hamlet* directed by Borys Tyahno at the Lviv Drama Theatre, 1957; *King Lear* directed by Vasyl Sychevsky at the Rivne Ukrainian Drama Theatre, 1956; directed by Volodymyr Ohloblin at the Ukrainian Drama Theatre, 1959; and directed by Mykhailo Hiliarovskyi at the Lviv Drama Theatre, 1969; *Richard III* directed by Serhii Danchenko, 1973 – both at the Lviv Drama Theatre, and directed by Anatolii Lytko at the Kharkiv Drama Theatre, 1976.

as mafia Dons like Vito Corleone (Zahurska and Lypkivska 926). According to Zahurska and Lypkivska, this production found an innovative solution for Romeo, performed by the thirty-year-old actor Ahtem Seitablayev with Hamletian maturity and concentration. From his first entrance, the striking difference between Seitablayev's Romeo and the other younger men of the Montague and Capulet clans introduced a tragic dissonance. It was Romeo's worldview, and not his meeting with Juliet, that promised a tragic outcome to the hero's fate.

The fact that Andrii Zholdak's last premiere of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Kharkiv Drama Theatre in 2005 was banned from public performance and that he was fired from his position as the theatre's director is noteworthy for understanding the radical changes in Ukrainian directors' attitude to *Romeo and Juliet*. The performance was staged in the formats of the artist's theatre and post-dramatic theatre, a concept introduced and substantiated by the German theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann, who, in particular, identified the absence of a stable plot in the performance and the focus of its creators on the contact between performers and the audience as a feature of the most radical type of post-dramatic theatre (Lehmann 16). Andrii Zholdak's version of *Romeo and Juliet* included artistic devices that were not standard and acceptable for a state-owned Ukrainian theatre, such as nudity of actors, imitation of mass smearing with excrement, and it carried a shocking social message.

Equally novel and in-the-now was the *Romeo and Juliet* directed by Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi, managing and artistic director of Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theatre in Ivano-Frankivsk. This was not the only Shakespeare play in the repertoire of the 'Frankovians:' since 2017, it included *HAMLET. Neo Horror Opera*, and was followed by *Romeo & Juliet: drama per musica*, which opened in 2021 as part of Derzhypilskyi's duology. According to the Frankovians themselves, *Romeo & Juliet* was produced in the genre of *Dramma per musica*. On the theatre's website, the director's interpretation of the play's connection with contemporary realities is described as: "[a] post-apocalyptic version of Shakespeare's saddest tragedy in an experimental format. The love story of the pure hearts of Romeo and Juliet in the depraved post-apocalyptic Verona" (*Romeo & Juliet*. Ivano-Frankivsk Drama Theatre). Alongside Derzhypilskyi, the creators of the concept of this production were the famous Ukrainian composers and musicians Illia Razumeiko and Roman Hryhoriv, the stage designer Yuliia Zaulychna, and the choreographer Olha Semioshkina. Joining this creative team, the prose writer, poet, essayist, and translator Yurii Andrukhovych was commissioned to supply a contemporised translation of *Romeo and Juliet* by its director, Derzhypilskyi. This was much alike Andrukhovych's *Hamlet* commissioned by director Stas Moiseiev for Molodyi Teatr, used by Derzhypilskyi in his *HAMLET. Neo Horror Opera* (2017). Andrukhovych's translation of *Romeo and Juliet* is characterised by a change in the poetic style of expression of the characters (except for scenes involving the

main characters) to a mundane, everyday style, with the use of cultural quotations, slang and, in some places, vulgar vocabulary.

Sharing the unified concept of Derzhypil'skyi's duology, Andrukhovych's translation of *Romeo and Juliet* is as striking as his *Hamlet*, in its anti-intellectualism, figurative simplification of expression in comparison with the original, the presence of extremely brutal vocabulary – in particular, Yurii Andrukhovych's *Hamlet* is speaking in short lines, without bookish prettyisms' (Kolomiyets 178). As the translation studies scholar Lada Kolomiyets emphasises, a major feature of the translation is the desire to follow the mainstream of mass culture "with an expressive focus on the conversational culture of contemporary regular folks" (Kolomiyets 179). As Polish theatre researcher Ewa Bal wrote about translations of Shakespeare's works by Yurii Andrukhovych: "contemporary Ukrainian translations of the classics are a matter of breaking away from forcibly inculcated Russian modes of literature, to capture the idiom of Ukraine's middle and young post-Soviet generation" (Bal). Indeed, both of the above-mentioned stage productions directed by Derzhypil'skyi challenged audience expectations schooled for decades in the reverential attitude towards William Shakespeare as an untouchable world classic. The director offered his own, completely different *Hamlet*. *Neo Horror Opera*, which cut through theatrical clichés enshrined in the mass consciousness over the many years of the 'sacralisation' of Shakespeare's masterpiece. Bringing the Renaissance story of the Veronese "star-crossed lovers" as close as possible to the tragic and stressful reality of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, the production made the locations, language, and the world in which the play's characters lived painfully recognisable without making the key ideas of the tragedy expendable. It is noteworthy that the director presented the titles of both plays on the posters in the original English language. For *Romeo and Juliet*, Derzhypil'skyi replaced "and" with "&" (i.e. an ampersand), thus presenting the title as *Romeo & Juliet*, a method of writing the title that distinguishes Shakespeare's duology in the repertoire of the Ivano-Frankivsk Drama Theatre by its attempt to attract younger audiences and meet their penchant for pithiness and visual recognition of titles. Derzhypil'skyi's stage version differs from the translation of *Romeo and Juliet* by Yu. Andrukhovych published in 2016 (*Romeo i Dzhulietta* [Romeo and Juliet]), owing to significant abridgements made by the director. The prologue and epilogue of the tragedy are not heard in the performance. Some minor characters are missing: Prince Escalus, Benvolio, the Capulet servants – Peter, Sampson and Gregory, the Montague servants – Abram and Balthazar, Friar John, and the apothecary. The performance includes inserted texts from *Macbeth*, *The Revelation of John the Theologian* and from the *Requiem Mass*.

The concept of the production was based on the duality of existence: sin and holiness, death and life, love and hate, past and future. Instead of the Prologue's sonnet, Derzhypil'skyi's production opened with the three chanting Erinyes

(chthonic goddesses of vengeance in ancient Greek religion and mythology). Seemingly straight out of *Macbeth*, in this production the Erinyes (Halyna Barankevych, Nadiia Levchenko and Olesia Pasichniak) were the harbingers of retribution for sins. Their voices, physical presence, movements, and their costumes created a mystical and disturbing atmosphere for the tragedy. The costumes of these characters combine modern fashion with elements of archaic costume. In particular, the actresses' heads are decorated and their chins are tightly pulled together with cocoon hats, reminiscent of the headdresses of Middle Age noble city women. The whiteness of their faces and necklines contrasts mournfully with the black fabric of their long dresses. The cut of the clothes and details of the props (daggers in the belt) refer the viewer to the images of warlike Amazons. The director committed specifically the performers of Erinyes to pronounce the first words of the play, words taken from *Macbeth* about evil in good and good in evil. Following them, the audience is bombarded with the laser lighting of a nightclub, and loud depressive techno music, accompanied by male homophonic singing live to the text of *Dies Irae*. And the eerie howling of the performers of the roles of Erinyes serves as an echo of the male singing. In direct contrast with the mythical figures of the Erinyes, the action of Shakespeare's tragedy was firmly located in the contemporary world. Romeo met Juliet in a nightclub; Romeo and his father worked out in the gym; the Nurse went out on a drinking spree. The frantic rhythm of the hellish carnival of the first half contrasted with the almost static purgatory of the second. Duality manifested in everything: in locations, costumes, tempo and music.

When the production first opened in 2021, the production's location traded on duality: the first act took place in the post-industrial site of the mechanical workshop of PromPrylad Plant, an Industrial Instruments production site. In doing so, the director introduced an amount of further characters into the performance: by accepting the rules of the performance and their immersion in the production, the spectators fell not only under the spell, but also the responsibility of the director Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi. As active participants, they found themselves in a post-apocalyptic environment and, like the actors, they had to negotiate their way in the vast, derelict Soviet plant, among abandoned machinery covered in rust. Correspondents from the *Reuters* news agency attended the premiere, which marked a breakthrough in the Ukrainian theatre's relationship with the global media. On the peculiarity of immersing the audience in this version of Shakespeare's plot, the *Reuters* wrote: "Before the performance starts, spectators are given hard hats and a map to navigate through the factory's workshops and on to the theatre's basement" ("Romeo and Juliet Find New Stage"). In an interview with *Reuters*, actor Oleh Panas, who plays Romeo, shared his thoughts on the specifics of directing in the immersive theatre: "On one hand, the location swallows the actor, it is hard not to get lost inside this colossal setting," Panas said. "But on the other

hand, it adds value to the performance concept and to the actor's emotions. A cold, massive area, stairs – all these elements strengthen an actor's feelings" (*"Romeo and Juliet Find New Stage"*).² Encapsulating rave music, the sounds of grinding iron, laser nightclub lighting, and the ability to move between locations in the venue, prepared the viewer for the performance. The music grew louder and spectators often began to move to the beat, thus transforming from the state of observers to the state of participants and accomplices to the action. The set of *Romeo & Juliet* was vast: the playing areas were located at different levels from floor to ceiling, which created perceptual difficulties for the audience as they had to quickly adapt to shifting perspectives.

The actors' delivery of the lines did not always reach the recipients due to machinery rattle and loud noises, but the circumstances in which the director immersed those present made it impossible not to understand and feel what was happening around them. The duel between Mercutio and Tybalt, for example, turned into a fight club scene with no rules. The crowd took their seats around a cage, making it impossible to remain indifferent to the stage action unfolding so close. In close combat, "the bodies of the two opponents Mercutio and Tybalt made terrible noises when hitting the floor which was made of a wooden base covered with tatami mats. Tybalt's athletic wear bore the inscription *Bad Boy*, fashionista Mercutio sported expensive leather gloves" (Shchukina and Vaniuha). Underlined by dark and gloomy lighting, "the spectators saw the intertwined athletic bodies of the actors, mixing their fake blood, smelling of male sweat, and hearing their accelerated heartbeat. This [...] hand-to-hand combat was accompanied by the frantic tempo of Balkan-style music" (Shchukina and Vaniuha). The first death, that of Mercutio, leaves a terrible impression on the audience. If Tybalt and Mercutio fight as equals before this, then after Romeo's mistaken intervention Tybalt gains the upper hand over his opponent. The *mise-en-scene* signals the supposed fracture of Mercutio's spine by Tybalt, which becomes the cause of Romeo's friend's death. The horror experienced by Mercutio's last dying convulsions in his friend's arms tripled his strength in the desire to take revenge on Tybalt, who brazenly walked around the ring during the entire time of the friends' dying conversation. Romeo's fight with Tybalt was twice as short as the first. To the screams of the frightened Nurse, Romeo fought with feline dexterity and grace and, in the end, broke his enemy's neck. In fact,

² A noteworthy and at the same time pleasant fact was that, following *Reuters*, information about the Ukrainian premiere of *Romeo & Juliet* was spread by the news portals: *Dubai92* (United Arab Emirates), the Turkish *Daily Sabah*, the Saudi *Asharq al Awsat*, etc., which allowed us to speak about the activation of discourse about Ukrainian theatre in the Near and Middle East.

the metal cage was the center of the universe for the living realm of death: it was multifunctional and polysemantic. It served first as a gym where the youth of Verona hardened their bodies; then as a ring where Ivan Blindar and Yurii Vykhovanets, as Mercutio and Tybalt, enacted a frighteningly real cage match. (Torkut and Shchukina 536)

However, this display of violence was only the beginning of the spectators' experience: in part two, the tragedy extended beyond the production plant and spilt into the streets of Ivano-Frankivsk. Actors and spectators formed Juliet's funeral cortege, walking from the first performance space, i.e. the plant, to the theatre building in the city centre (they are located two blocks apart from each other). The spectators who had turned into participants of the performance had to explain to random passers-by what was happening and who was being buried so magnificently. As such, theatre was seeping into real life.

The second act moved to another location, the Ivano-Frankivsk Theatre basement. This was uncomfortable in its own way: there was little space and air, sounds were muffled under the pressure of the low ceiling as the actors, as well as their audience, were then located underneath the main stage, in the theatre basement. The euphoria of the first act was overshadowed by depression and impasse as the performance of *Romeo & Juliet* descended into this basement that represented the Capulets' crypt, where the audience sat on makeshift raked seats that resembled stadium stands. Those engineering structures, machinery, and technological equipment, which are usually hidden from the audience's view in the theatre, became integral to Derzhypilskyi's *Romeo & Juliet* throughout. From its setting in the abandoned factory to the basement of the theatre, the play's spatial semantics underscored its concept of destroyed and crushed romantic love.

Particularly striking was the intense passion that sprang up at first sight between Romeo and Juliet, a passion that seems doomed in a mechanical, iron, and urban world. The visual image of the heating system hanging over the scenery in the theatre basement added an urbanised interpretation of the tragedy. In this versatile scenographic installation, the metal cage functioned "as the crypt where Romeo comes to die. It was in this very cage that Friar Lawrence (Oleksii Hnatkovskyi) reads aloud the text of the Apocalypse at the beginning of the play's second half" (Torkut and Shchukina 536). By shortening the text of the tragedy, Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi deprived the character of the main heroine of internal conflict and effectiveness. The understanding of the unearthly harmony that a troubled Romeo meets in the person of Juliet was emphasized by the baroque soprano vocal of Inna Bevza (Juliet). In the second version of the performance (only in the basement of the theatre, from the beginning of the performance), the theme of the murdered love of Romeo and Juliet seemed present to the audience as an enchanted, beautiful image: behind the bars of the apocalyptic Verona, Juliet silently mourned dead Romeo lying on her lap.

Designer Yuliia Zaulychna chose the same colour scheme for costumes for almost all the characters. The dark tones of clothing worn by the representatives of both families conveyed the destructiveness of the adult world: this play serves as a tragedy of youth. From the beginning, both the Montegues and the Capulets were doomed to mourn, as their dark robes suggested. Fur accessories emphasised the general atmosphere of the performance in which the rivalry of clans seemed to be the struggle between predatory beasts. In contrast to this image of violence, Juliet was dressed in white, a symbol of purity. At the beginning of part two, however, Romeo and Juliet took turns when watching the action dispassionately from pedestals like statues on tombs as their destinies were decided upon. However, the character created by Oleh Panas had theatrical dynamics. Consistently refusing all the status privileges of a clan descendant, including access to the depraved women at his father's orgy parties, he sought only one true value: the image of pure love and a divinely blessed marriage with Juliet. His costume changed in tune with how the character himself changed. At the beginning, Romeo was dressed in dark colours, no different from his family; later on, he was clad in white – the colour of (his love for) Juliet, which symbolized the purification of his soul.

However, it was not only Romeo and Juliet who attracted attention with alternative attitudes to this apocalyptic reality. The director introduced an innovative reading of the minor characters of Shakespeare's play in the young Ukrainian stage tradition. The actors play their roles with the involvement of physical theatre. Apart from the main characters, all the characters fussed excessively; the actors display exaggerated movement and gestures, and a clearly expressed theatrical delivery of the text. The young boosy Nurse's gait is excessively unsteady, and her movements and facial expressions were also vulgar. In the first part of the play, the director molded all the images of the characters, except Romeo and Juliet, in a tragicomic vein. Even when amplified by microphones, the significance of Shakespeare's words and entire phrases was often drowned by various noises. In the world of gang wars, where young mothers have long turned into soulless style icons, Capulet (Yurii Khvostenko), Juliet's father gets drunk with his business partner Paris (Andrii Melnyk) and gives him a daughter; in part two, he impressed with a tour de force in portraying Capulet as a neurasthenic patriarch.

Derzhypil'skyi enlarged and rejuvenated the Nurse's part. From a service role in Shakespeare's text, the director effectively created another female tragedy. Watching the full-blooded and colourful heroine performed by Olha Komanovska, it became clear that Juliet, fed by the milk of this life-loving German woman, did not inherit her 'wax' mother's features and behaviour but the Nurse's recklessness, directness, and vibrancy. It was these traits that, in a sexualised sense, brought the Nurse closer to Romeo's friend, the witty Mercutio. Ivan Blindar sharpened the features of showiness and the physicality of Mercutio's stage presence; his modernity was emphasized by his vocal range which ran closer to rap. As imagined

by the director, this production's couple: Mercutio and the Nurse had the genre and stylistic colouring of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* rather than that of Shakespearean romantic tragedy. However, as a result of her devastating losses, the death of her beloved Mercutio and Tybalt's demise as the hope of the Capulet dynasty, the Nurse became a shadow of her former self. Olha Komanovska's physical movements and facial expressions often appeared spasmodic in part two – this heroine seemed to be short of breath.

Juliet also changed in the second part of the production: she seemed in an altered state of consciousness. The director achieved this effect not by means of psychological allusions, but by showing the audience a reality through the eyes of the heroine. With Romeo banished, time had stood still for Juliet. Even before she drank the potion, Juliet began to cool down and slowly die. Alongside her, the audience experienced an uncomfortable acoustic haze of exhausting piano sounds and alarming voices – anticipating her funeral lamentations. This is how the pressure of circumstances was physically transmitted to the psyche of Romeo's young wife – and the audience alike. She saw her fiancé, Paris, as a zombie with frightening gestures and intonation, his face a frozen mask. As the only 'living' person among the 'dead' corpses of this post-apocalypse, Juliet perceived Friar Lawrence as a last hope.

Having overcome another stereotype – the age and status of the actor in this role – Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi assigned the Friar's part to the leading actor of the company, the thirty-five-year-old Oleksii Hnatkovskyi. In part one, Friar Lawrence is entirely perceived as an alternative, an anarchist, a representative of the same subculture to which Mercutio and other happy-go-lucky fellows belong. Not so much a Catholic friar as a pagan, a shaman in a state of hallucination under the influence of drugs, this Friar Lawrence was a contrarian in form, yet an essential Free Spirit of the Renaissance era. In the second part, Oleksii Hnatkovskyi's Friar changed dramatically. The tragedy of the separated Romeo and Juliet sobered up Friar Lawrence. Emphatically correct, he got it all together in part 2, dressed and kempt under modern standards of business style. Instead of a pagan shaman, he was a civilised lawyer, an advocate for two children from enemy clans, whom he married.

From 2022, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine affected all aspects of the life of Ukrainians: from the moral and psychological condition to value priorities, from everyday life to self-identification. Naturally, art in general and theatre in particular have become both a living memory as far as media are concerned. They also represent instruments of changes happening to Ukrainians here and now. One of the interesting phenomena of theatrical life in today's Ukraine is the development of a semantic range of productions which premiered before the Russian full-scale invasion and have continued their runs after February 2022. Certain transformations occurred in terms of the theatre functioning as a cultural institution during the war.

Meeting with new existential challenges led theatres to expand their functional range, enhancing their meaning-generating potential, and their therapeutic role in the catastrophic climate of war. Since February 2022, in the context of the full-scale war in Ukraine, Derzhypilskyi was forced to abandon the, now dangerous, logistics of street theatre. His *Romeo & Juliet* lost its innovative mid-performance change of location and has been staged in its entirety in the theatre basement which now also doubles as a designated air-raid shelter in the city centre.

Compared to the production's 2021 vision, the enforced version of *Romeo & Juliet* after February 2022 may appear as an artistic compromise. Little remained of the original idea of the interactive and immersive first part of the tragedy within the space of PromPrylad Plant in the second version of this production, limited by the space in which it is performed. The atmosphere of a crypt on the stage in the basement, into which the spectators descended after seeing Juliet on her last journey – from the plant and through the city, was created by motionless monks, also portrayed by actors who, mystically depersonalised by hooded cloaks, guarded the space and guided spectators through the makeshift auditorium.

The production, which premiered in 2021, continued to be performed under the conditions of the full-scale Russian invasion and war in Ukraine. The fact that the audience of *Romeo & Juliet* now includes both internally displaced persons from combat zones, local volunteers, and wounded servicemen, has sharpened the significance and perception of the theme embedded in the performance from the premiere: the clashes of clans, a war which can only be stopped by the sacrifice of Ukrainian children, who are suffering but somehow portrayed as truer and better than their parents' generation.

During the years of its performance, there have been no changes among the performers, with the exception of Mariia Stopnyk, who joined the performance as one of the Erinyes. At the same time, it is difficult not to take into account that with its age and the experience of life and losses during the war, the cast began to perform Shakespeare's play with a greater sense of the tragic genre. The final word in the performance belongs to Lorenzo (Hnatkovskyi's Friar Lawrence): he pronounces the word 'peace', so coveted by all Ukrainians, not in a major key, but painfully, with fatigue and a sense of the weight of losses.

Unlike previous productions of *Romeo and Juliet* in Ukraine, Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi's version has already crossed the border of the country in which it was first staged. Thanks to the invitation of this *Romeo & Juliet* in the programme of the 14th Craiova International Shakespeare Festival in May 2024 in Romania ("Romeo and Juliet – directed by Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi – Ukraine" 26 May 2024), the inclusion of the Shakespearean duology in the 1st Ivano Frankivsk International Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival (Ukraine, 17–23 June 2024), and the 28th Gdansk International Shakespeare Festival (Poland, 25 July–4 August 2024), this adaptation has already become one of the few performances in the history of Ukrainian Shakespeare

whose form and substance have been recognised at an international level. As noted in the material about the festival on the Polish Radio portal, the Festival director, Agata Grenda, who also heads the Shakespeare Theatre in Gdańsk, has said that “the highlights this year include a production of *Romeo and Juliet* staged by the National Academic Music and Drama Theatre in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine” (“Shakespeare Festival in Poland’s Gdańsk”). Such a high assessment of the Ukrainian version of Shakespeare’s tragedy is important, since the festival that year included performances of theatrical productions based on Shakespeare’s works from Poland, the United Kingdom, Italy, Croatia, Romania, and Peru. Ewa Bal’s review of the Ivano-Frankivsk Festival offered a particularly poignant insight into the staging of *Romeo and Juliet* in wartime Ukraine, as seen through the eyes of a Polish theatre scholar:

However, in Derzhypilskyi’s 2021 production of *Romeo and Juliet*, the masculinist world returns with redoubled force as fate’s imperative. In the opening scenes, the boys of the Montagues and Capulet families flex their muscles in a substandard gym [...]. The budding affection between Juliet and Romeo is thus an unfortunate misstep in a culture dripping with sweat and testosterone. Defending the family honour and being ready to lose one’s life in a fight are elevated to issues of prime importance. Derzhypilskyi is not quarrelling with this patriarchal model of the world; as I read his production, he identifies with it, sidelining the female perspective. These two plays, thus, stand in stark contrast to the widespread feminist critique of Shakespeare in Western culture, especially the pacifist interpretations of *Romeo and Juliet*. I do not, however, see it as an interpretive anachronism but, rather, as a sign of the time and place where the play is being staged. (Bal)

To sum up, we can say that before the restoration of Ukraine’s independence in 1991, there were three types of productions of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* in the Ukrainian theatre. The first historically distinguished tendency was to choose this work for benefit performances of leading actresses of Russian enterprises in Ukraine. In our study, we clarified the authorship of the director of the first production of the tragedy in N.N. Solovtsov’s Theatre in Kyiv and introduced into scholarly discourse information about the first two productions and performers of the character of Juliet in Kharkiv theatres in the private enterprise of Aleksandra Diukova and Ivan Tohobochnyi.

The second and third trends are related to the Soviet period of development of Ukrainian culture and are represented by Ukrainian-language productions of *Romeo and Juliet* in theatres for young audiences from the late 1930s to the mid-1960s, as well as by the embodiment of this play in the traditions of provincial Ukrainian musical and drama theatres. The study revealed that the main state-owned Ukrainian-language drama theatres in Ukraine consistently bypassed this Shakespeare tragedy, staging other dramas at that time.

A new milestone in the play's stage history has been reached since the 1990s. Ukrainian drama theatres have consistently turned to it. The first half of the 2000s was marked by the peak of interest in Ukrainian theatres (mainly in the capital) in *Romeo and Juliet*. It was the period when the first attempts to actualise the tragedy were made due to direct similarities with our time (Oleksii Lisovets) and even a shocking interpretation of post-dramatic theatre (Andrii Zholdak).

Derzhypil'skyi's interpretation of *Romeo & Juliet* could be described as a new step in the stage history of the play in the Ukrainian language and in Ukraine due to it belonging to a conceptual duology alongside Derzhypil'skyi's *HAMLET. Neo Horror Opera*. The peculiarity of the director's interpretation of both tragedies was the hybridisation of drama and opera, the combination of aggressive textures of music with high opera vocabulary, and the anti-poetic contemporary language of Andrukhovych's translation of Shakespeare's play with quotes from the *Revelation of St. John the Evangelist*. This intensified the contrasting struggle of Shakespeare's themes of harmony within the universe, found in love, and, in contrast, the struggle with fate and death. The spatial solution of this performance, with its duality of the world of the dead and that of the living, also enhanced Derzhypil'skyi's post-apocalyptic approach of Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*.

The experimental nature of the performance was reflected in the director's cuts and additions, in the unconventional interpretation of certain images, scenes, and collisions, and most notably in the use of space. As a result of the outbreak of a full-scale war, the play was edited. Its original concept and implementation as an immersive production, with interactive actions by actors alongside the audience (for the first time in the history of Ukrainian theatrical Shakespearean performances in three locations: an abandoned Soviet factory, Ivano-Frankivsk street, and a stage in the basement of the theatre), was replaced by a performance of the entire play on stage in the basement, now primarily serving as an air-raid shelter: In fact, the theatre basement served simultaneously as the air-raid shelter, offering relative safety during missile attacks on the city, and as a combination of stage and auditorium, aligning conceptually and topographically with the director's vision of the production as post-apocalyptic theatre. Rostyslav Derzhypil'skyi's production of *Romeo & Juliet* is the only one in over a century of Ukrainian theatrical history that was performed before a discerning audience at three international Shakespeare theatre festivals in Ivano-Frankivsk (Ukraine), Craiova (Romania), and Gdansk (Poland), and it was well received by the community of Shakespearean scholars. The Frankivsk Drama Theatre's production of *Romeo & Juliet*, unlike any other in Ukraine, embodies the contrasts of light and darkness, Eros and Thanatos, and, overall, the tragedy of the era in which it was staged. In contrast to, for example, the first Ukrainian-language production of *Romeo and Juliet* during Stalinist repressions, which could not reflect the horrific truth about the collapse of democratic values during that dictatorship.

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Part Five

Displaced Voices



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Shelter from the Storm: Two Recent Shakespeare Stagings by the Ivano-Frankivsk Drama Theatre

Abstract

This paper examines two recent Shakespeare productions by the Ivan Franko National Drama Theatre staged in Ivan-Frankivsk, Ukraine: *Hamlet* and *Twelfth Night*. The classic tragedy is directed by Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi, and the celebrated comedy by the actor Oleksii Hnatkovskyi, who also plays the title role in *Hamlet*. Both productions function as a shelter, in a literal and metaphorical sense. The *Hamlet* production opened in 2017 and became known for its use of a contemporary-sounding new translation by the Ivano-Frankivsk native, Yurii Andrukhovych, as well as the new basement stage adapted for the post-apocalyptic

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production. It soon literally became a bomb shelter, used as temporary housing for refugees from Eastern Ukraine, as a result of the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022. The staging of *Twelfth Night* as literally drama therapy in action consisted of a performance by Ukrainian soldiers utilising an abridged English text of the play. The performance served as a psychotherapeutic session and demonstrated the healing power of Shakespeare's plays.

The present article focuses on how this regional Ukrainian theatre has unexpectedly become a cutting-edge venue for Shakespeare performance and, more importantly, a spiritual and intellectual shelter for not only the audience, but also the performers.

Keywords: Shakespeare in Ukraine, theatrical adaptation, experimental theatre, Ivano-Frankivsk Theatre, Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi, Oleksii Hnatkovskyi.

In recent years, the Ukrainian theatre scene has undergone significant changes, in part due to the growing number of productions based on the works of William Shakespeare. This trend not only demonstrates a deep interest in classic texts but also opens up opportunities for new interpretations of Shakespeare's plays. They have become a tool for understanding Ukraine's postcolonial historical heritage, as well as a platform for discussing important political issues such as national identity, cultural revival, and the struggle for independence. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has undoubtedly exacerbated the decolonization theme in Ukrainian theatre discourse, raising the issue of identifying the aggressor country as an enemy. Theatre is becoming not only a means of aesthetic expression but also an important tool for social commentary, contributing to the formation of new narratives that reflect current issues in society. Productions of Shakespeare's plays are gaining new significance, providing directors and audiences with an opportunity to dive into deep philosophical questions, explore the dynamics of power, the relationship between the individual and society, and examine subtle facets of national identity in the face of current challenges. These productions have also become a powerful tool for collective awareness of the traumas and challenges faced by Ukrainian society, demonstrating how art can shape new values.

Within the diversity of Ukraine's contemporary Shakespearean scene, Ivan Franko National Drama Theater, in the city of Ivano-Frankivsk, has become a centre of innovation and experimentation, boldly transforming Shakespeare's texts into resonant, avant-garde performances. The theatre's productions of *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* are an attempt to rethink classical themes in what Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi, the director and managing director of the theatre, calls "the post-apocalyptic world" (Кашперська [Kashperska]). The exploration of the Shakespearean tradition in the Carpathian region has served to demonstrate

the creative maturity of the theatre and its ability to work as a powerful tool for social change, cultural identification, and shared experience. The interpretive tradition established by the Frankivsk Drama Theatre is of interest not only to a local audience but also to the broader theatrical community, engaging theatre in cultural dialogue while popularizing, and integrating Ukrainian theatre into the global context. Maiia Harbuzyuk, a prominent Ukrainian theatre scholar who has made a significant contribution to the study of the history, theory, and practice of theatrical arts, particularly in the field of Shakespearean studies in Ukraine, has explored the post-apocalyptic motifs and avant-garde techniques in Derzhypilskyi's productions of *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*. These performances have been transformed into spaces of artistic innovation and have become a societal reflection on the anxieties of a world in crisis. Nicoleta Cinpoș has also highlighted the contribution of the Frankivsk Drama Theatre to global Shakespearean discourse (Cinpoș). She has focused on how the theatre's productions, particularly *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, have met with recognition at international Shakespeare festivals. Cinpoș emphasizes how these performances resonate with global audiences, blending experimental artistry with deep cultural narratives. Both scholars position the Frankivsk Drama Theatre as an important player on the global theatrical stage, demonstrating its ability to combine Ukrainian cultural identity with universal themes in an innovative and meaningful way. The culmination and highlight of the above was the first Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival held in Ivano-Frankivsk from 17–23 June 2024.

The current article focuses on two of the theatre's productions which make use of the Ivan Franko Theatre site-specificity and the team's readiness to explore Shakespeare in wartime: an ultra-modern reading of *Hamlet: Drama per Musica*, directed by the theatre director Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi, and *Twelfth Night* directed by one of the company's leading actors Oleksii Hnatkovskiyi. The production of *Hamlet*, which premiered on 4 February 2017, opened a new page in the history of the theatre and became the starting point in the transformation of the Frankivsk Drama Theatre into an international performance centre. William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, staged by the Frankivsk Drama theatre, is a unique current experimental rethinking of the classical message in the post-apocalypse. The play becomes a mirror of a society in crisis, but at the same time encourages reflection and dialogue with its own history, which gives new meanings to the struggle for recovery. Its purpose is to engage with the present moment and bring uneasy solace to the audience. The innovative staging of *Hamlet* was the result of a creative collaboration between the actors, the director and scenographer Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi, and young Ukrainian composers from the NOVA OPERA troupe, Roman Hryhoriv and Ilya Razumeiko. The composers had already collaborated on the dream opera *NepriOsti* based on a novel by Taras Prokhasko at the Porto Franko GogolFest in 2016. Their previous experience and Derzhypilskyi's vision

combined to create the production of *Hamlet* in the theatre's basement, which has, since 2022, also served as a bomb shelter.

In numerous interviews, Derzhypilsky has repeatedly emphasized the importance of this genius loci or spirit of place. He argues that the theater's engine room is a ready-made set for a performance in which the concrete slabs are part of a sanctuary at the intersection of different time periods, where meanings are resurrected, and one can easily stumble upon Yorick's skull if one starts digging (HeoOIIIEPA [Neo-opera]). This account is literally complemented by another cemetery story related to the location of the theatre on the site of the former city graveyard. Walking through the park behind the theatre, one can still see crypts and monuments to famous citizens, whose graves survived the destruction of the cemetery by the Soviet authorities attempting to erase any memory of Ukrainian identity. The location of the theatre and the history of the place was tied to the idea that medieval characters could be resurrected in the post-apocalyptic present by means of drama and musical theatre, in the genre of neo-horror opera. According to Derzhypilsky, theatre indeed resurrects people's fates and souls, therefore, this concept became the basis of the neo-horror opera *Hamlet* (HeoOIIIEPA [Neo-opera]).

At the time of the play's premiere, the Ivan Franko theatre had three main stages: a large one, a smaller one, and a separate stage area located on the main stage. The director, with his unexpected vision of the conceptual production of *Hamlet* in the horror genre, decided on a further venue: to use the theatre's basement as a stage. The abandoned space of a former engine room was thus transformed into a basement stage. V. Dutchak describes it as follows: "The basement stage has become a symbol of chaos with its indefinite space and dialectical premise of total transformation" (Дутчак [Dutchak] 8). The basement space is part of the conceptual stage design and an important element of the performance's perception. Its post-industrial character reinforces the sense of decay and apocalypse that permeates the production. It is difficult to imagine transferring this performance to another location, as the loss of the specific basement atmosphere would disrupt the key semantic and visual accents of the play, which are closely related to the specific location. Sergey Vasiliev comments on the director's groundbreaking achievement: "His new play is an underground show (which later turns into a drama of thought, a drama of revenge); and its internal genre is a musical tragicomedy, played out passionately and furiously" (Vasiliev 131). The phantasmagoric and dialectical aesthetics of the basement stage, with its timelessness and illusory nature, serve to reveal the main message, this being a study of Shakespeare's classical narratives in the post-apocalypse.

The explosive creative cooperation quickly sparked a powerful energy fuse and united a cohort of artists from different cities in Ukraine, who began to implement a hitherto unprecedented musical and theatrical project. The actors Irma Vitovska (Gertrude) and Anastasia Blazhchuk (Ophelia), both from the Kyiv National Academic Molodyy Theatre, Yuriy Khvostenko (Claudius), from Maria

Zankovetska National Academic Ukrainian Drama Theatre in Lviv, Dmytro Rybalevsky (Polonius), from National Academic Dramatic Ivan Franko Theatre in Kyiv, were invited and cooperated with local actors: Oleksii Hnatkovskiy (Hamlet), Ivan Blindar (Laertes), Yevhen Kholodniak (Fortinbras) and the witches-Erinyes (Halyna Barankevych, Nadiya Levchenko and Olesia Pasichniak) who the director borrowed from *Macbeth*. The Erinyes introduce Derzhypilsky's Shakespearean productions and serve as linking devices between them. The cast also included fourth-year students from the Institute of Arts of Vasyl Stefanyk Carpathian National University, who played zombie monks doubling as chorus and usherers. Despite their diversity of experience and job locations, the actors formed an ensemble of like-minded people capable of staging an experimental, almost Stoppardian, production: with the entrance of the Erinyes and the monks, all reality becomes an illusion. Their presence and engagement with the actors and the audience create the sense that the characters have been dead for a long time, only to be pulled into a deadly cycle of hell where they helplessly repeat the same pointless mistakes. In ancient Greek mythology, the Erinyes are ruthless pursuers of those who have committed heinous crimes, including those against the family, such as the murder of close relatives. The choice to introduce the Erinyes as instigators of the dramatic action accentuates the production's multilayered, symbolic tenor and adds depth and contrast to the tragedy. Hamlet, as performed by Oleksii Hnatkovskiy, becomes a multi-layered psychological experiment, in which he is both a naked nerve and a skilful manipulator, wearing in turn the masks of a madman, a harlequin, a hero, a victim, and sometimes taking off all the masks and talking directly to the audience. His division of himself was the result of operating in a broken, hysterical world, where there are no clear lines between good and evil. Hamlet is confused and frantic, lonely and frozen in the cold of the cemetery, melancholic and insane, on the brink of madness, but nevertheless remaining the most sober among his truly insane, sin-distorted relatives. The other characters, such as Polonius, Gertrude, and Claudius, demonstrate a certain caricatured grotesqueness, which emphasized their internal conflicts and metamorphoses, the total decline and degradation of the human soul. In contrast, Ophelia and Laertes are carefree, naive, and thus easily manipulated young people struggling to navigate through this world. Some of the original Shakespeare characters, such as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, were cut and this choice strengthened the production's focus on the conflict between blood relatives.

The stage imagery, created by the costume designer Lesya Holovach, strengthened the sense of a world out-of-joint. Dressed in Baroque costumes, with exaggerated wigs, punk-goth corsets and military elements, all the actors looked like participants in a parade of evil. Their expressive manner broke not only the barrier between classical and contemporary theatre, but also the fourth wall, opening up space for nightmarish repetition, where the viewer becomes a participant and where nothing

can be changed, as the tragedy unfolds over and over. One of the most memorable scenes involved Hamlet frying meat in a pan, cutting it into pieces with a knife and offering it to the people in the audience. Oleksii Hnatkovskyi conducted a sincere dialogue with the viewers about social problems and his own pain, but also inflicted a participatory response on unwilling spectators. According to Hnatkovskyi, staging the production in Ivano-Frankivsk broke down the established stereotypes about provincial theatres and their distance from contemporary trends. He also connected the project to post-revolutionary social processes, emphasizing that the production reflects on the relatively recent, still unprocessed, events of the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity of 2014 and amounts to a unique phenomenon in the context of Ukrainian theatre (HeoOIIePA [Neo-opera]).

The production made use of a recent translation into Ukrainian by the local, internationally acclaimed writer Yurii Andrukhovych. As Dasa Kashperska comments on the translation: “You feel a sweet, viscous lexical density that you want to eat with a spoon, to decompose this rich aftertaste into separate shades. In his translation of *Hamlet*, two epochs are pulsating on the tongue – the sixteenth/seventeenth century and our twenty-first century” (Кашперська [Kashperska]). Andrukhovych’s interpretations of Shakespeare, which also include *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet*, are authoritative and popular with the Ukrainian theatre community. The modern Ukrainian language spoken by the play’s characters makes the text comprehensible to the audience and brings *Hamlet* closer to contemporary reality. Commenting on the innovative nature of the translation, Lada Kolomiyets posits that:

Andrukhovych radically modernizes the vocabulary and style of the work. His *Hamlet* turns out to be strewn with reminiscences, not only Shakespearean ones, but also contemporary ones from Andrukhovych’s own arsenal; and the image of Hamlet he created can rightfully be called a new Ukrainian Hamlet. (Коломієць [Kolomiyets])

Derzhypilskyi found inspiration for his staging in this new translation:

The main messages in the play, to be honest, we found in Yuriy Andrukhovych’s translation. I had read *Hamlet* many times in other translations, but this particular translation impressed me. It opened up completely different meanings, which Andrukhovych found and demonstrated from his own perspective. And we have tried to catch and reproduce that perspective. (Дутчак [Dutchak])

The neo-opera horror genre, in which music unites texture and content, is classical in its essence but deployed in atypical time and space dimensions. Only the director’s talent helped to maintain a balance between the musical and

dramatic textures in the production, preventing each from dominating the other. According to the theatre critic Anna Lipkivska, the director managed to enter into a dialogue with Shakespeare's text, without making a detour into the 400-year history of its interpretation, and "the synthesis of musical and dramatic factors in this *Hamlet* is fundamental in its conception and effective in its realization, and corresponds to the nature of Ukrainian theatre, which is musical and dramatic in nature, not just formal, in status" (Vasiliev 136). The composers of the NOVA OPERA formation presented an eclectic, original, distinctive musical score that integrates a variety of genres, from classical music to electronic, creating a soundscape that enhances the dramatic action. The orchestra introduced a six-piece instrumental ensemble: timpani, French horn, cello, double bass, percussion, and keyboards, supplemented by electronic music to dialogue with the text of the play. A more challenging task was addressed when developing the sound score for the performance, which was largely responsible for creating the atmosphere of horror. The composers organised a genuine sound laboratory, collecting various noise effects, such as the echo of voices, the noise of men's footsteps and women's heels, striking on metal rails, a frustrated piano, and the banging of the engine room, which became full-fledged elements of the play's score. In addition to the instrumental and noise components, the performance also includes vocal music, performed by the Erinyes, and a male quartet of monks. Thus, the musical score of the play is eclectic, woven from a variety of noise effects, with citations from various musical styles: Händel, Gregorian chants, electronic meditative motifs related to Schoenberg, and a Balkan 'um-tsa-tsa' from a Serbian wedding. It combines the neo-baroque and folklore, jazz and multi-layered electronics, rock and hip-hop, allusions to 1970s film music and gypsy motifs. The intertextual musical mixing of historical periods, genres, instruments, and past and present conventions, creates the sense of a time continuum in which much changes, but a sin committed centuries ago remains a sin and, thus, a crime which has to be accounted for.

The production received favourable reviews from theatre critics and was highly praised both in Ukraine and abroad. *Hamlet* headlined the International Shakespeare Festival in Gdańsk, Poland (2017) and, in 2018, the production won the first All-Ukrainian theatre Festival Award "GRA" for Best Experimental and Search Performance. In 2021, after a year-long break, the play underwent changes to the cast, among other things. After the full-scale invasion of 2022, the basement stage where *Hamlet* was performed turned into a bomb shelter, and the performance became part of the theatre and its Bomb Shelter project. On the sixteenth day of the war (11 March 2022), the Frankivsk Drama theatre performed *Hamlet* from the basement, streamed live on the Internet, as a sign of gratitude for the unprecedented support of the British people. During the first months of the war in 2022, the theatre continuously hosted internally displaced Ukrainian citizens who were evacuated from eastern and southern Ukraine. These people

had no idea where they would end up and were surprised that in Ivano-Frankivsk, in addition to shelter from the war, they were able to find shelter in a theatre, within Shakespearean productions. In June 2024, the theatre presented *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* at the First Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival in Ivano-Frankivsk.

In recent years, art therapy projects in Ukrainian theatre have met with increased interest and new relevance, especially in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The arts, including theatre, have become a means of healing, allowing people to relive the traumatic experience of war and express their emotions, traumas, and fears in a safe environment. The project ‘W’ *Veterans, Volunteers and William Shakespeare*, initiated in March 2018 by Ihor Kasyan, a veteran of the 95th Airborne Brigade, brought together volunteers and veterans of the Russian-Ukrainian war in a therapeutic theatre project. Kasyan, co-founder of the *English Among People* school, is convinced that there is a critical lack of English-language theatre in Ukraine (Мінняйло [Minyailo]). His main idea was to enable veterans and volunteers to stage Shakespeare’s plays in English. The premiere of *Twelfth Night* at the Globe Theatre in London in 2012 inspired Kasyan to come up with the idea of a theatre with war veterans. He approached Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi, who became the artistic director of the Veteran Theatre, with his initiative. A casting call was held with the main criteria being a basic knowledge of English and no acting experience.

The director of the Frankivsk Drama Theatre, the actor Oleksii Hnatkovskyi, worked on *Twelfth Night* with 14 veterans and volunteers, who made the casting. The idea of staging the play in English seemed highly ambitious, if not insane, as most of the participants had no experience of public recitation. The decision turned out to be a good one, however, and project ‘W’ brought together people from different parts of Ukraine who were looking for a way to recover through art. The play was staged for the first time in 2019 in Kyiv and captivated the audience with its sincerity, confessional character, melancholy, and stormy life-affirmation; the participants received standing ovations in many cities in Ukraine. It is of particular interest that the play was also performed in the city of Mariupol on 14 August 2021 at the Centre for Contemporary Art as part of the iStage 2021 Festival. As Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi explains: “There are times when you don’t fully understand why you do them, or rather, things you can’t help but do. And this project falls into that category” (Українське радіо [Ukrainian Radio]). The play premiered on 30 June 2019. According to the participants themselves, the theatre had become a place for them to be real, without masks or illusions. According to the project’s initiators, veteran theatre is an opportunity to use art therapy to relax and be distracted from problems and difficult memories, as well as to learn or improve English. Kasyan describes the philosophy as follows: “Rehabilitation through art, particularly performing in the theatre, may not be suitable for everyone. It is more of a way of unwinding and learning something new, as well as of overcoming

certain complexes” (#10 Ігор Касьян [#10 Kasyan, Ihor]). They were also united by certain shared values: a belief in personal development, respect for defenders, and love for Ukraine.

When attending the performance, it is immediately apparent that the audience is watching amateur actors. The participants appear on stage dressed in parts of their military uniforms. They are wearing chevrons, khaki T-shirts, and boots worn by real soldiers and volunteers who have been involved in the first wave of the Russian-Ukrainian war since 2014. The small auditorium of the chamber stage of the theatre made it possible to see close up their tense cheekbones, clenched hands, and even hear someone’s voice breaking. Quickly, however, the actors transformed from veterans into Shakespearean characters. Mariia Krutoholova, the costume designer, successfully integrated elements of Shakespearean costumes, combining them with elements of military clothing.

In addition to directing, Oleksii Hnatkovskyi was responsible for the project’s musical score and the stage design. The songs used in the play, especially *Auld Lang Syne*, were integrated into the stage action, creating an atmosphere of uplifting and emotional cleansing, reminding us of hope, community and the power of art to heal the soul. The audience, which came expecting sadness, found a play that was full of joyful emotions, and the actors, although unprofessional, impressed with their confidence, ability to improvise and interact with the audience, filling the well-known texts with new emotions and experiences.

The production was a manifesto of sincerity, and also about the victory of the spirit, victory over fear and the victory of love. In it, the stage has become a place for the veteran actors to recover, express themselves and undergo emotional therapy. Shakespeare’s comedy has become a way to comprehend their personal experiences, find ways to resolve internal conflicts through play, interact with other actors and open up a dialogue with the audience. According to Arseniy Prilipka, one of the war veterans and participants: “Theatre helps you adapt and feel that you are not alone. You are among your own, you have shared themes, a common interest, a shared goal that you are moving toward” (Українське радіо [Ukrainian Radio]). This initiative utilized a range of art-therapeutic techniques designed to create a supportive and engaging environment for the participants. The project provided veterans with a unique opportunity to relax, detach from problems and traumatic memories, and simultaneously engage in skill-building activities such as improving their English language proficiency.

Twelfth Night became not only a theatrical performance, but also an important socio-cultural phenomenon. After one of the Veteran theatre performances at the Les Kurbas National Centre for Theatre Arts in Kyiv, the director Oles Sanin told Hnatkovskyi: “You worked for them, for their rehabilitation, to help them, and now they go on stage and provide rehabilitation for us, the audience, for society” (Базів [Baziv]). The project attracted the attention of a wide audience and received support

from the Ministry of Veterans Affairs. The results of the project are impressive: the theatre already has four Shakespeare plays in its repertoire, successful tours and numerous positive reviews from critics and audiences. *Twelfth Night* was one of the two production which received the best experimental and exploratory performance of year award at the HRA All-Ukrainian Theatre Festival-Premium in 2021. Project 'W' has demonstrated that not only can theatre be an art form, but also a powerful tool for social adaptation, rehabilitation and recovery.

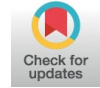
The repertoire of Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theatre in the city of Ivano-Frankivsk now includes four Shakespeare plays, successful tours, and numerous positive reviews from critics and audiences. Although the theatre is located in a mid-size city and seems an unlikely candidate for groundbreaking, innovative Shakespearian theatre, the Ukrainian-Russian war, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the influx of internally displaced people from the east of the country have become impetuses for its team to spark creative and innovative projects in the area of Shakespearian performance. The plays staged by the Ivan Franko Theatre have not only provided entertainment and aesthetic pleasure to audiences both at home and abroad, but have also fulfilled a cathartic role for viewers, particularly those housed temporarily in the basement/bomb-shelter and for the actors themselves, most significantly the war veterans involved in the staging of *Twelfth Night*. While the stage for their *Hamlet* production is literally a shelter from the storm, the overall mission of both productions has been to provide a creative and artistic shelter from the horrors and ravages of war.

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Gabriela Cheaptanaru*

War-torn *King Lear*: Adaptation as Catharsis

Abstract

Ukrainian director Vyacheslav Yehorov staged *King Lear* around war-torn Ukraine, and then in 2024 toured this Ukrainian *King Lear* to Stratford-upon-Avon (Royal Shakespeare Company; see Christie Carson's article in this volume). Yehorov and Dmytro Hreshko collaborated in producing a film documenting the challenges and experiences of staging *King Lear* in such a context: *'King Lear': How We Looked for Love during the War*. This paper examines the significance of *King Lear* as a refuge for Ukrainian communities grappling with the ravages of war, and explores how Yehorov and Hreshko's adaptation serves as a source of catharsis. At the heart of *King Lear* lies the theme of seeking shelter, a resonant motif for communities impacted by war. The characters' struggles for refuge mirror the plight of Ukrainian refugees displaced from their homes. The parallels extend further as Lear's fragmented Britain symbolically reflects the fractured state of Ukraine, pervaded by loss and destitution. The paper traces Lear's evolution from an isolated victim to a figure who discovers solace in human connections, mirroring

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the journey of many Ukrainians enduring hardship, as it is depicted in the film. By examining testimonies from the ad-hoc Ukrainian actors involved in Hreshko and Yehorov's film alongside Lear's development, the study seeks to shed light on how *King Lear* acquires healing powers for communities in distress, offering a portrayal of collective destitution and emphasizing the importance of solidarity, empathy, and love in adversity. Ultimately, Yehorov and Hreshko's initiative is interpreted as a form of *bibliotherapy* on stage, harnessing the therapeutic potential of theatre to provide solace during tumultuous times. Through their adaptation of *King Lear*, the two Ukrainian artists offer Ukrainian audiences a narrative that reflects their experiences and fosters a sense of communal resilience, showcasing the enduring power of Shakespeare's plays to heal and unite even in the darkest of times.

Keywords: adaptation, bibliotherapy, catharsis, *King Lear*, Ukraine.

Introduction

The present article undertakes an analysis of Vyacheslav Yehorov and Dmytro Hreshko's documentary, *'King Lear': How We Looked for Love during the War (KLDoc)*, against the backdrop of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The film presents viewers with a poignant portrayal of how Ukrainian refugees affected by war and displacement come together in the town of Uzhhorod to stage a highly personalised adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The film intertwines scenes of the everyday life of the refugees in Uzhhorod with shots from the performance of *King Lear* itself. The documentary offers viewers insights into the creative and administrative process by which the Ukrainian director Vyacheslav Yehorov formed an impromptu acting company, comprised entirely of refugees who had fled to the city of Uzhhorod for shelter. The participants in this project collaborated to produce a highly personalised rendition of *King Lear*, deeply intertwined with the actors' own experiences of war and displacement. The current article proposes an examination of the therapeutic role of Shakespeare's *King Lear* for Ukrainians affected by the war, as it transpires from this film material. In addition, it seeks to explore how the documentary portrays the play as a reflection on and extension of the actors' tumultuous lives in the context of war. The documentary combines behind-the-scenes moments with adaptations of key passages from Shakespeare's play, thus blurring the boundaries between Ukrainians' concrete experience of the reality of war and the themes of suffering, exile and loss prevalent in Shakespeare's tragedy. To further explore the therapeutic value of such a dramatic exercise, the article will relate the *mise en scène* of key moments in *King Lear* as shown in the documentary to the testimonies of the actors taking part in this project, in order to showcase the play as an example of bibliotherapy for a community in distress.

The aim of the article is to show how the filmic adaptation (documentary) of *King Lear* does not only chronicle the staging of the play but also serves as an in-depth exploration of how performative arts can become a tool for processing collective trauma. Drawing on trauma theory, the analysis will investigate the ways in which the refugee-actors engage with Shakespeare's play as a means of coming to terms with their own displacement and emotional trauma. In addition, this article will make use of the Aristotelian concept of catharsis (10) to emphasize the ways in which the refugees' identification with the characters they play enables them to articulate their traumas and fears in the context of the Russian full-scale invasion and to find solace in a collective artistic endeavour. Through parallels between the play and the Ukrainians' collective plight, and through a discussion of the directorial options seen in the performance shots provided by the documentary, this article will explore the role of performance as a therapeutic tool, but also as a way to re-assert the collective identity of a community in times of uncertainty.

Yehorov's *King Lear*: Therapy through Reading and Performance

The emotional appeal of *King Lear* as a tale of suffering and redemption has been noted repeatedly. Irving Ribner is of the opinion that *King Lear* revolves around "the process of human regeneration", a "spiritual rebirth for which man never can grow too old" (34). Likewise, Arthur Kirsch points out that Shakespeare's plays, particularly *King Lear*, present a strong force of interpellation: "Shakespeare's tragedies are, above all else, plays of passions and suffering that we eventually recognize as our own, whatever their social, political, or religious contingencies may have been in the Renaissance" (154). It is this very force of interpellation, an invitation for readers, audiences and actors alike to step into what Kirsch called the characters' "emotional landscape" (154), which gives the play its universal appeal. Thus, it is not surprising that such a play was chosen to embody the experience of being uprooted and seeking solace in the midst of a full-scale military conflict. However, Yehorov and Hreshko do not merely adapt *King Lear* on stage. They go further in relating their adaptation to the daily lives of the actors working towards this project. Hence, performance itself is integrated into a documentary following the daily lives of the refugees in Uzhhorod. In what follows, the present article will argue that it is precisely the realist bent afforded by the documentary format which gives rise to the idea that staging and acting in *King Lear* is an act of bibliotherapy – the use of reading for therapeutic purposes (Miller 17) or, more specifically, of dramatherapy – therapy through theatre (Landy 104).

However, before delving into the therapeutic implications of the play, it would be useful to establish how the theoretical framework offered by trauma studies illuminates the status of the refugees' *King Lear* as an externalization of the actors'

own personal and collective turmoil. Cathy Caruth, a pioneer of trauma studies, defines trauma (in a psychoanalytical key) as “a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (3). In Caruth’s words:

[T]rauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available (4).

From Caruth’s perspective, literature is the one medium which enables people to express otherwise inexpressible trauma, since it “is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing” (3). According to Caruth, literature helps convey “the story of trauma” (7), not in an escapist manner, but in a way which enables the subject to recognise and share the traumatic experience. Commenting on Caruth’s theoretical framework for understanding trauma, Joshua Pederson makes the point that her correlation between trauma and literature is based primarily on “the testimonial power of literature” (334). In performing arts, the sharing and reworking of trauma through literature that Caruth talks about (7) can be most strongly associated with the Aristotelian concept of catharsis:

Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete and possesses magnitude; in language made pleasurable, each of its species separated in different parts; performed by actors, not through narration; effecting through pity and fear the *purification* of such emotions (10, my emphasis).

For Aristotle, theatre, and particularly tragedy, elicits in the spectator a sort of psychological *catharsis* (10), born out of the confrontation with “pity and fear” (10) – in other words, a reflection on the trauma of another. In similar terms, the actor playing a tragic character is purified by the act and becomes more conscious of their own emotions during performance. Drawing on Aristotle, Michael M. Chemers and Mike Sell couple catharsis with the therapeutic potential of theatre, which fosters “profound emotional engagement” in actors and audiences alike, along with an increased “capacity for empathy and compassion” (53). Thus, when correlated with Caruth’s trauma theory (7), it becomes apparent that catharsis, as understood by Aristotle is a purification of trauma through confrontation, a confrontation between the actors’ personal trauma and the trauma of the characters portrayed on stage. In Sue Jennings’ view, the “embodiment of the character and scenario [...] allows both an inner expansion of experience and an inner clarification of perception” (5). This theoretical framework sets the stage for a deeper exploration of how these concepts are made manifest in the documentary-adaptation of *King Lear*.

The documentary begins with the actors sharing their reactions to the start of the Russian invasion in 2022. They briefly reminisce about how they learned

about the war, and how they came to Uzhhorod. Their accounts are doubled by shots of ruined buildings in Uzhhorod as a result of the Russian bombings, and this association between verbal testimonies and the visual consequences of war institutes a profound sense of loss. Such shots of the city in ruins are paralleled with a scene from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, presumably an addition by the director and writer, in which Lear's Fool asks: "My King! And where is the King?" (*KLDoc* 00:04:42-00:05:10).¹ Often, the documentary joins together the scenes from the play with the testimonials of the actors playing these scenes. Hence, there is a clear connection between theatre and its real-life context. Yehorov himself commented on the process:

I felt that these people were already actors [...] since they are already in a real tragedy, in the conditions of war, and they will be able to convey the feeling of what is happening better than actors. Because actors would need to act, but unfortunately, people don't need to play a tragedy, [be]cause it is happening before our eyes. (*KLDoc* 00:05:28-00:06:15)

What the screenplay writer is indirectly hinting at is a combination between bibliotherapy and dramatherapy. By alternating scenes from *King Lear* with the actors' own experiences of war, the documentary shows that the staging of *King Lear* should be considered an instance of bibliotherapy. According to Jesse Miller, bibliotherapy entails an "intentional use of reading for the promotion of mental and emotional health" (17). In Miller's view, bibliotherapy is based on the ways in which literature can "challenge, disrupt and disturb one's sense of self" (18). Although the artistic exercise under analysis is not a self-proclaimed "bibliotherapy session" by any means, many actors depicted in the documentary confessed that producing *King Lear* in Uzhhorod gave them a sense of consolation (*KLDoc* 01:20:30-39) and an example of resilience, particularly found in the character of Cordelia (*KLDoc* 01:19:57).

The documentary frequently shows its actors trying to make sense of the play, discussing it during auditions and the rehearsals of several scenes. Each of the actors tries to make sense of their own life by appealing to the play, while also interpreting *King Lear* through the lens of their own experiences. During the auditions section of the documentary, Yehorov encourages everyone who wishes to contribute to the staging of *King Lear* to share their individual story. In the screenplay writer's view, "[w]hat these people and *King Lear* have in common is a lack of love" (*KLDoc* 00:11:20-32), adding that working towards a production

¹ For reasons of clarity and consistency, this article makes use of the English subtitles provided by the platform *Taxflix.com*, where the film is available at https://takflix.com/en/films/kinglear?check_logged_in=1. Accessed 29 August 2025.

of *King Lear* would stand testament to the fact that, in spite of their sufferings, the actors “have not lost their humanity” (*KLDoc* 00:11:38). Many of the actors talk about their relatives on the frontline, about losing one’s parents, or about missing home. “Should we not cry?” (*KLDoc* 00:18:40–44), Yehorov asks one of the prospective female actors, who reminisces about the relatives she has been separated from as a result of the war. This, according to Yehorov, is the primary aim of this theatrical project: to offer an emotional release to those inevitably affected by war (*KLDoc* 00:18:41). Partly as a result of the confessional nature of this documentary, there is a clear self-identification between the actors and the characters they play, a connection between their own experiences as war refugees and the experiences they portray on stage (abandonment, banishment, death). This brings Yehorov’s project closer to what in recent studies of psychotherapy has been termed dramatherapy. Robert Landy points out that, at the core of dramatherapy is the idea that people engaging in such a therapeutic exercise, whether clinical or not, “enter into an ‘as if?’ context where [they are] both who [they are] and who [they are] not. In other words, in dramatherapy, transference is overt” (104). Thus, actors take part in a transformative experience, a confrontation between the real-life self and a fictionalised, dramatized version of the self which arises from the encounter with Shakespeare’s play. By coupling scenes from the play with the actors’ musings about the impact of the war, their hopes, dreams and fears, the documentary format aids in bringing together the enmeshed identities of the actors who, after all, act “for real”, to borrow a phrase used by Adam Blatner with reference to dramatherapy (ix).

***King Lear*: Exile, Refuge and the Problem of Escapism**

The Uzhhorod *King Lear* makes use of the play’s themes of exile and suffering, deepening certain motifs in order to better express the complex reality of being a refugee in a war-torn country. Jane Elizabeth Kingsley-Smith has read *King Lear* as a play of generalized banishment and “schism” (203). In spite of the grim resonances of such concepts as banishment or division, which are at the heart of the play, Kingsley-Smith sees banishment in the play as a dual experience: at once a “cruel disjoining” and a “playful refashioning” (204), a pessimistic tale of suffering which nonetheless presents the hope of self-renewal. In many ways, the *King Lear* put together by the Ukrainian refugee-actors exploits this inherent duality of the status of the exile, which becomes a deeply personal mode of thinking for the actors involved. The experience of fleeing the war, of parting with friends and families, as many of the actors confess, stresses the alienation inherent in the exile status, which is likened, in the documentary, to the alienation faced by the banished characters in the play. However, the very act of putting together a play

as non-professional actors gives the participants a sense of belonging to a greater purpose (*KLDoc* 00:37:00). This can be assimilated to the creative potential presupposed by the experience of banishment, which parallels the banished characters' own attempt to create themselves anew in *King Lear* (Kingsley-Smith 204).

In his *King Lear*, Yehorov generally follows the original structure of the play, while adapting some scenes to better fit the experiences of his community. The personal touch resides in the addition of a prologue (*KLDoc* 00:07:03) intended to preface the action of the play and relate it to the actors' experience of displacement. In the Prologue, the director imagines the evacuation train (prefigured by actors dressed in white) arriving at Uzhhorod train station. As such, the play itself is imagined as a displaced entity, and only after reaching the relative safety of Uzhhorod can the actors "escape" into the world of the play. The place of shelter, Uzhhorod, is thus directly associated with the possibility of performance, and the play itself becomes a safe space for the actors displaced by war. In a behind-the-scenes moment, one of the actors commented that the arrival in Uzhhorod and the staging of *King Lear* were akin to "escaping from hell" (*KLDoc* 00:13:40–49). However, the extent to which the play is prefigured by the creators as an escape from the realities of war is questionable, because the directorial options suggest, as far as setting is concerned, a much more complex amalgamation of different realities. Yehorov and Hreshko have opted for a fairy-tale-like setting for the play, as if the action were unfolding in a forest-like mythical realm. Even the character of the Fool is stylized to resemble a skeleton with the head of a faun, which is in line with his trickster status. Additionally, Lear's throne is made of planks of wood arranged to give it a natural, asymmetrical appearance. To further the association with pastoral greenery, the king and his daughters wear what appear to be twig crowns, reminiscent of Christ's Crown of Thorns. Such aesthetic options are in line with critical opinions that consider *King Lear* a tragedy of biblical dimensions, portraying a type of paradoxical "creation defined by separation" and chaos (Storozynsky 163).

There is a strong impression that the events are unfolding in a Shakespearean romance-like "other" realm, at least in the very beginning of the performance. The arrangement of Lear's "throne room" takes inspiration from the natural world, as wood dominates the stage design and becomes part of Lear's *regalia*, a complex symbol of strength, but also of decay and regeneration. In this respect, there is an indication, in Yehorov's adaptation, of a mingling between the civilised world represented by Lear's court and what Northrop Frye called "the green world" (182). Frye associates the terms with Shakespeare's comedies rather than his tragedies, and indeed the inclusion of the natural world into Lear's court proves to be only an illusory suggestion of the potential romance. Instead, the presence of natural elements, particularly in the first scenes representing the division of the kingdom, constructs only the false hope of a romance, as the play turns out to be, in Maynard Mack's words, an "anti-pastoral" tragedy (65). This generic ambiguity

can be applied to the entire adaptation under discussion. Thus, even if Yehorov and his company of actors envisioned the setting as an extension of the natural world, which, in a typical pastoral, would represent an escape, the aim of their project is not ultimately escapist. This production of *King Lear* starts at the train station, where the actors arrive on the Uzhhorod evacuation train, thus repeating the original scene of their own dispossession and uprootedness. They dress up and assume their roles on the temporary stage/platform, so to speak, and there is no forgetting: the play itself is not an escape from the reality of being a refugee. Instead, as one of the participants explains in the documentary, the play helps him make sense of his own situation, of “living today” (*KLDoc* 00:16:30).

The therapeutic dimension of staging the play comes less from the sense of release such a project affords, and more from the confrontation with one's own trauma, that is externalised on stage and can thus be more readily expressed, as Caruth suggests (7). For example, in a short testimonial during the documentary, the actor playing King Lear expressed disappointment over the director's choice not to change the ending of the play into a happy one, stating: “If I were the author, Shakespeare, I'd let Cordelia live” (*KLDoc* 01:19:40). However, the actor acknowledges that the character's tragic death makes her into a more powerful model of resilience. An escapist project would have probably altered the ending for a more optimistic denouement. Such a directorial option, as Arlen Collier points out with reference to romance-like re-writings of *King Lear*, would have restored the “archetypal pattern” of death and renewal through “poetic justice” (1976: 53). Nonetheless, a return to an imagined state of calm would have probably diminished the therapeutic effect of the play, as it would not have enabled the actors to filter their own tragic reality through the finality of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. To a certain extent, as the lead actor suggests, a happy ending would have conferred on the actors and audiences a futile sense of “distraction” (*KLDoc* 01:21:09). Such a distraction, however, would have taken away the cathartic factor of the bibliotherapeutic journey, since it is only tragedy that can give rise to purification, as the Aristotelian *Poetics* puts it (10).

The appeal of preserving the original tragic narrative in the documentary itself rather than creating a compensatory romance-like adaptation stems also from the documentary format. The film blends the otherworldly atmosphere of the play with the highly realistic depictions of the ruins of Uzhhorod. In a testimonial segment (*KLDoc* 00:25:21–00:28:32), several of the actors/residents of Uzhhorod talk about the uncertainty of ever returning home, and about their perceived self-image as exiles. Such testimonies are prefaced by the storm scene in the play, where the essentially banished Lear chides the elements:

Blow winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!
You cataracts and hurricanes, spout

Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks.
 You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
 Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
 Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
 Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world. (*King Lear* 3.2.1–7)

In this scene, the sound of thunder and the effusion of lightning muffle Lear's speech – it is a scene where both the spectator and the actor playing Lear are clearly overstimulated. Unlike in the original play, however, the Fool stands beside Lear in confusion, unable to make sense of his rage – the alterity which makes sense of Lear's world is silent. Later in the documentary, one of the female actors playing Cordelia presents viewers with the rundown Chuhuyiv House of Culture, destroyed by bombings, and she clearly associates the destitution of the place with the storm scene. She explains that the building had served as a cultural centre in peacetime, and had later been turned into a shelter, but it was eventually destroyed, looking just like the storm scene, “gloom and despair everywhere”, as the female actor suggested, with a laugh (*KLDoc* 01:07:57–01:08:10). Thus, the refugees of Uzhhorod clearly recognise their own predicament in Lear's downfall, and they associate the uncontrollable force of nature in the play with the unpredictability of warfare. As this clip shows, the actors working on *King Lear* are inclined to relate Lear's deep feelings of alienation and helplessness, associating them with the concrete realities of war. Such a strategy helps them create a sense of distance from their own trauma, which enables them to even look at it humorously, in the sense of dark humour. The same female actor links this coping mechanism to the Fool's characteristic way of “joking tragically”, as she puts it at the beginning of the documentary (*KLDoc* 0:10:32). Thus, producing *King Lear* enables the refugee-actors to look their own trauma in the face, and be purified of the psychological load of war, while recognising a likeness between themselves and Lear.

Staging War and Solidarity

According to Gary Taylor, the war in *King Lear* is an integral part of the play's plot (27). Nevertheless, like many of Shakespeare's battles, the final moment of climactic violence is relegated to the off-stage, which turns it into an almost “anti-climactic” moment (27). With reference to the final battle of the play, Taylor stresses the fact that “the playwright presents us, as the world presents his characters, with a ‘fait accompli’” (27). As far as the portrayal of war is concerned, things are wholly different in the adaptation under discussion. As Yehorov states at the beginning of the documentary, “*King Lear* is also about war and relationships and people” (*KLDoc* 00:09:56–00:10:32). In this way, the Ukrainian refugees' adaptation and

treatment of the matter of war can be understood as the resurgence of a traumatic event in Cathy Caruth's interpretation:

Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely not known in the first instance returns to haunt the survivor later on. (4)

This "haunt[ing]" (4) experienced by the survivors of war is, however, directed through a more positive outlet by dramatizing symbolic versions of the concrete traumatic events in a controlled environment. Moreover, changes in the depiction of war in the play lead to a more politicized and actualized version of *King Lear*, one which directly reflects on the reality faced by many Ukrainians.

In Yehorov and Hreshko's adaptation, the division of the kingdom is creatively rendered by having the Fool act as Lear's map of Britain. This potentiates the absurdity presupposed by such a division, since the "cutting up" of the country metaphorically figures the physical disjoining of the Fool. The absurdity of territorial division, of Lear's "darker purpose" (*King Lear* 1.1.35), which serves as an allusion to the absurdity and moral darkness of the Russian invasion, goes further, in associating the representation of the country with the human body. This is essentially a rendering of the Renaissance idea of the body politic, the transcendental and collective counterpart of the king's "body natural" (Kantorowicz 7). However, in the adaptation at hand, the body politic is not the King's, but the Fool's, as he is Lear's sane counterpart. This division anticipates the division presupposed later on by the civil war instituted by Lear's two daughters. The identification of the Fool with the map also provides a degree of comic relief, since the Fool reacts mockingly to the effusions of love and flattery presented by Lear's eldest daughters. By allowing audiences to encounter the Fool right from the beginning, and to associate his body with the body of the country, the adaptation offers a way for the actors and the audience to make sense of disjunction and displacement in lighter terms, through comic understatement. This is in line with the use of humorous reading material in bibliotherapy. The dramatic encounter of humour in a collective dramatic project, even in a tragicomic scene such as this one, is "more than a tool for survival [...] it becomes an act of redemption" in bibliotherapy (Barreca, qtd. in Sturm 175).

Later on in the play, the scenes related to civil war have a powerful resonance in the documentary. In a behind-the-scenes moment, the actors talk about friends and family members who have been drafted, while they themselves live in the relative safety of Uzhhorod. Following these testimonies, Cordelia is shown moments before reuniting with her father, just after the Messenger informs her of the impending attack of "the British powers" (*King Lear* 4.4.21). Cordelia then delivers a speech on the complexity of such a war, in which she is forced to fight against her own siblings in order to protect her father:

O dear father.
It is thy business that I go about;
 Therefore great France
 My mourning and important tears hath pitied.
 No blown ambition doth our arms incite.
 But *love, dear love* (*King Lear* 4.4.23–27, my emphasis).

It is notable that the documentary's subtitle, *How We Looked for Love During the War*, may be read as an indirect reference to the lines emphasized in the above passage. In conjunction with the actors' discussions about the war, about the duty to protect their country, this becomes a significant disclaimer for the creators of the documentary. Far from glorifying violence or a misplaced sense of patriotism, Yehorov points out that the primary drive behind this project is to compensate for a profound feeling of deprivation, what he calls a "lack of love" (*KLDoc* 00:11:32), a suggestion directly related to a sneak peek of this scene. Through Cordelia's wish to restore her father as the rightful monarch of Britain, the Ukrainian directors express a nuanced justification of their countrymen's view of the war, which is not read as "ambition" (*King Lear* 4.4.26), but as a layered expression of one's duty towards one's community. The suggestive power of such a dramatic moment, in the context of discussions about the impact of war among actors off-stage, offers a model of action which promotes fortitude and humility. This enables actors and audiences to reinterpret the ethical complexities of war and to shift the power dynamics from the oppressor to the oppressed by identifying with the moral model presented by Cordelia.

In the documentary, a key moment in the depiction of war is reimagining the confrontation between Lear, Cordelia and the enemy powers of Goneril and Regan. Before offering a glimpse of this final confrontation, the documentary shows the residents of Uzhhorod running to find shelter at the sound of the sirens, explaining that such evacuation signals have become a common occurrence for people living in Ukraine. After this explanation, the documentary shifts its attention to the final battle in *King Lear*. The play's final conflict is rendered into an evocative metaphor for the ongoing war in Ukraine. As noted previously, the director chose to fully represent this episode, going against Shakespeare's "anti-climactic" treatment of the final battle (Taylor 27). As the enemy armies approach each other, there is a deafening siren-like sound and the whole stage is filled with infrared lighting, mirroring the sensory experiences of many Ukrainians who sought shelter during bombardments. In this way, the trauma of war "haunts" (Caruth 4) the victims, and the acts of violence inherent in a military confrontation are symbolically rendered through an appeal to the Ukrainians' sensory experience of the war. This enables the actors to transfer their experiences onto the characters they play, going beyond "the reality of the violent event" (Caruth 6) of war and

gaining the possibility to meditate on previously unknown reactions to the stimulus of trauma, to forge a link between “narrative and reality” (Caruth 6). This correlation is meant to reshape the understanding of their own experiences and thus provide a sense of clarity, and even of freedom (Caruth 26).

There is also an indication, in the documentary, of the actors’ self-identification with the discarded heroes of the play, which is understood as a re-writing of the Ukrainians’ own fate and as a means of expressing solidarity with their countrymen on the frontline. Behind the scenes, as the actors are preparing their armour for the battle scene, they reminisce about their friends who were drafted at the beginning of the war. As their memories of loved ones come into focus, the documentary offers a glimpse into the single combat between Edgar and Edmund: “This sword, this arm and my best spirits are bent / To prove upon thy heart, whereto I speak. / Thou liest” (*King Lear* 5.3.137–139). The documentary pays particular attention to the misunderstood honesty of such characters as Edgar and Cordelia. Already at the beginning of the documentary, one female actor implies that the purpose of the performance is to present viewers with an authentic picture of the Ukrainians as war victims fighting for the rehabilitation of the truth: this goes beyond ideological constructs or propaganda (*KLDoc* 00:03:30). Shakespeare provides the actors with a sympathetic model of collective identity, particularly in the heroic characters of Edgar and Cordelia and, to a certain extent, in the person of the enlightened Lear reuniting with his banished daughter. The last moments of the performance can be discussed as a case of “transference” occurring in the act of performance, as outlined by Landy (104), which enables actors, audiences, but also possibly readers of the play to refashion themselves in times of acute distress and to come to a deeper understanding of their self-image and of their community. Such a therapeutic function of the play builds a sense of togetherness in adversity, of solidarity in the face of war, and presents Ukrainians with models of integrity in times of tragedy, which they explicitly adopt.

Conclusion

The final moments of the documentary are marked by an epilogue, where the actors urge the audience to preserve peace and keep hope (*KLDoc* 01:22:49–01:25:15). Thus, interpellation of the other (“the other” understood both as the spectator of the play in Uzhhorod and as the viewer of the documentary) is paramount. Shakespeare’s *King Lear* is a vehicle for making this interpellation possible. Through the documentary, Yehorov and Hreshko extend the sense of solidarity beyond their tightly knit community and champion the universality of human resilience in the face of tragedy, as expressed by Shakespeare. The shared experience of staging the play, along with the collective adoption of the Shakespearean tragic

hero as a moral model, provides a sense of solace for war victims in distress, while also legitimising the defence and upholding of their core values of integrity and solidarity. What is significant is the fact that Yehorov and Hreshko's documentary in itself has some therapeutic potential and can be read as an instance of bibliotherapy and dramatherapy. The refugees-turned-actors meditate on their war experience and fashion an alternative narrative to express their hardships in a dramatized format. The making of the film allowed them the space and time for reflection and introspection. The Ukrainian refugee-actors' identification with the Shakespearean characters and the use of the play for therapeutic purposes is made apparent by looking at their staging of *King Lear* and at the documentary itself through the lens of trauma studies. As this article has argued, "transferring" war trauma onto the stage, while engaging creatively with the representations of war and chaos provided by Shakespeare, brings about a controlled encounter with one's own traumatic experience through a collective re-interpretation of the war narrative, and reasserts the value of Shakespearean tragedy as a fulcrum in the face of loss. Ultimately, the documentary shows how Shakespeare's universal tale of suffering and of the pursuit of love can be skilfully adapted and actualised so as to express the collective creed that the human spirit is able to find refuge in art and in the encounter with the Other, which art facilitates.

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Displaced Externally (Reviews)



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“*Ha*l*t* is a play about a play that never happened.” Notes on *HA*L*T*

*Ha*l*t*. Directed by Tamara Trunova, Left Bank Theatre, Kyiv, Ukraine. Premiere: 8 March 2023. Running time: 1h 40 minutes. Fokus Ukraine – Europäisches Theaterfestival 777 Tage DHIB Days, Düsseldorf, Germany, 14 April 2024

Hamlet is halted, arrested in time, things fall apart, the centre would not hold. The Left Bank Theatre from Kyiv, known for their provocative and experimental productions, had to cancel their adaptation of *Hamlet* in light of the Russian full-scale invasion in February 2022 when they were about to start rehearsing Shakespeare’s tragedy. In its place, Director Tamara Trunova created *HA*L*T*, a decimated, cut, bombed-out version of the play: Hamlet without “ME”. Hamlet’s doubts and reflections, his distancing and responsibility, directly influence the task that Ukrainian actors face when producing theatre in times of war. As such, *HA*L*T* becomes an adapted version of the impossible choices an individual has to face: “To be or not to be” (3.1.55). *Hamlet* becomes a Shakespeare Shelter, and it does not – “maybe we all dream”, asks Ophelia, “maybe we all dream of war”. As the war tears Ukraine apart, so too does Hamlet become dispersed, fragmented,

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deconstructed, inherently oppositional and dialectical. *Die Deutsche Bühne* confirms how “[t]he production impressively explores the speechlessness and nightmarish aspects of contemporary Ukraine”.¹

Left Bank Theatre attended “Fokus Ukraine – Europäisches Theaterfestival 777 Tage DHIB Days” in Düsseldorf in April 2024 and staged *HA*L*T* on 14 April 2024. The Festival showed through theatre, workshops, and music how Ukrainians defend their country, culture, and independence. At this festival, the Dakh Daughters played to a full house, singing with their engaged audience “To Moyo More” / “That’s my sea” reclaiming their Ukraine; there was also an impressive and bitter contemporary version of *Oresteia*. In *HA*L*T*, Trunova’s limited cast displayed an intensive experience of destruction on a stage set that is simple, dark, and sometimes lit by blood-red light. The performance begins in a metadramatic discussion: the actors provoke, laugh in the face of death, contradict, and allude to military action. Via detours through cultural and political history, *Hamlet* is taken into the traumatic nightmares of everyday air raids, drone attacks, and the reality of a colleague on the frontline. The five actors show how literally some of Shakespeare might be taken in martial conditions: “Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, / And by opposing, end them? To die: to sleep” (3.1.58-59). The blood-red forest approaches towards the end. Danger is more prominent and urgent every single day.

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L_UKR_ECE at the Craiova International Shakespeare Festival, Romania, 2022

L_UKR_ECE, directed by Tania Shelepko, ProEnglish Theatre of Ukraine. Sound director and vocal coach: Olena Levchenko. Choreography: Tatiana Shelepko, Chrystyna Bila, Kateryna Hordiienko. International Shakespeare Festival in Craiova, 29 May 2022.

Teatrul Național MARIN SORESCU Craiova

This fringe project was designed and performed during the Shakespeare Festival in Craiova, Romania, in May-June 2022, at the Gdansk Shakespeare Festival, Poland, in July 2022, and at Pro.Act Fest in Kyiv, Ukraine, in August 2022,¹ which speaks to the strength and resolve of the creative team as well as the readiness of the European theatres and festivals to support one another in time of crisis.

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1 https://www.proenglishtheatre.com/l_ukr_ece/. Accessed 30 January 2026.



L_UKR_ECE was a focused 20-minute performance that became an account, both personal and collective, of rape as a wound and a weapon used to crush resistance: before 24 February 2014 when Lucius Tarquinius Superbus was exiled from the city of Rome, in between, and after 24 February 2022, when the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine started. These two diametrically opposed events, the ousting of the ancient Roman tyrant and the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, were juxtaposed in the video installation offered in lieu of a prologue. Drawing on William Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*, Tania Shelepko's mono-dramatic work empowered the voice of more than one individual. It became the voice of rape survivors that became amplified and embodied by Kateryna Hordiienko. Through dance, song and by invoking Shakespeare's poem as well as Ukrainian folk songs, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the poetry of Taras Shevchenko, Lesya Ukrainka, Christina Bila, and – most importantly – documented stories of women from the Kyiv and Kharkiv regions, the performance spoke out about the violence done to women who refuse to be silenced.

Wearing a simple, torn, white linen dress with a red top underneath, the dancer appeared on the empty stage and performed a dynamically choreographed dance to the sound of Dakha Brakha's *Vesna* [Spring], recorded on a variety of instruments, including an accordion and a cello. This, as well as *Dodecaphony* by the Ukrainian contemporary composer Vitaly Vyshnitsky, served throughout as a distinct aural counterpoint to the cruel objectification of the self, whose trauma was rendered present through the rhythm of the body moving on its own, in disharmony with the rhythm of the music and the verse. In fact, the choreography appeared at times like a violent biomechanical pantomime: the spasmodic body seemed to speak its truth kinetically. This startling effect was further strengthened by the fragmented form in which the poems and songs were delivered, either recited or sung live by Hordiienko, as if they were the shattered bits and pieces of the world before and after the traumatic event, initially narrated only through Shakespeare's verse. Once the actor started talking, her bold, sharp execution of Shakespeare's lines peeled off the veneer of time and pierced through the decorum of the text, which too often had been treated as a pretext for an ornate display of rhetorical acumen and acting skills. The advent of Tarquin was stripped in this way of all its décor; it became the coming of every rapist, whose insolence should not be rewarded with attention: it was, indeed, cut short. Hordiienko's own gestures, the songs of a once-happy girl who felt "sweet as honey," as well as passages from lyrical poetry, an air-raid alarm, and a video installation of war crimes in Ukraine, all worked against the beautiful form of Shakespearean verse. Profoundly ironic, harrowingly honest, and steadfast is the voice of a woman who has survived rape. As the video installation went dark, Hordiienko entered once again and, to end the production, very softly and calmly delivered lines from Lesya

Ukrainka's play *Forest Song*, spoken by the female character who, deeply wounded, transforms into a willow and finds solace in the beyond-her-self:

Ah, for that body do not sigh! [...]
Beside these waters shall a willow grow,
My end give life to something more robust.²

² Lesya Ukrainka. *Forest Song*. Translated by Percival Cundi. <https://www.l-ukrainka.name/en/Dramas/LisovaPisnja/Act3.html>. Accessed 30 January 2026.



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Exploring Object Afterlives: *Ophelia. Subject Study* at the 28th Gdansk International Shakespeare Festival, 2024

Ophelia. Studium przedmiotu. Written and directed by Ewa Kaczmarek in collaboration with Helena Romanova and Patrycja Piwosz. Costumes and set design: Patrycja Pi Pa Piwosz, Music: Marta Knaflewska, Lighting: Marta Figurska, Cast: Ewa Kaczmarek, Helena Romanova, 26 July 2024, Wybrzeże Theatre, Malarnia Stage, 28th International Shakespeare Festival, Gdańsk, Poland.

Since the beginning of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, the International Shakespeare Festival in Gdańsk has hosted a number of theatrical productions by Ukrainian theatres, including mainstream and fringe performances, some in collaboration with Ukrainian and Polish creatives. Among them was *Ophelia. Subject Study*, showcased at the festival's 28th edition.¹ The object-theatre performance with minimalist set design captivated the audience with its unique retelling of the story of the iconic Shakespearean character, earning the production

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1 <https://festiwalszekspirowski.pl/program-2024/ofelia-studium-przedmiotu-rez-kaczmarek-pi-pa-piwosz-romanova/>. Accessed 28 August 2025.



“Prospero’s Book,” the award from the Polish Shakespeare Association.² Using subtle means of expression, the narrative shared by the two female actors (Helena Romanova and Ewa Kaczmarek) linked Ophelia’s story to the tragedy of the ongoing war by highlighting the things (and people) that are usually overlooked and deemed irrelevant.

This modern feminist retelling of *Hamlet* began with the two female actors entering the stage, in conversation. Dressed in black and wearing heavy-duty green cleaning gloves, they brought in mops and buckets of water to clean the theatre after the main show, which had ostensibly already finished: the dim-lit stage was cluttered with clothes, the props still not removed. The centrepiece prop – a large pool decorated with greenery and flowers – a white bathtub, and a green basin evoked clear allusions to Ophelia’s drowning scene, just as much as the green T-shirt with a female portrait positioned above the pool like an altarpiece.

The exchanges between the cleaners initially focused on the mess and the violence of *Hamlet*, with Romanova speaking softly but critically about the differences between onstage and offstage violence. The casual opening immediately placed the production within the public debate about women’s labour and the invisible, underpaid work done in theatres, especially since one actress was Polish (Ewa Kaczmarek) and the other Ukrainian (Helena Romanova). This localised the performance even more: the witty dialogue highlighted both the heartache of those who were forced to become refugees as well as the difficulty of their life situation, as many Ukrainians fleeing the war were pushed into accepting the harsh and exclusionary practices of the Polish job market. While carefully mopping the floors and organising the untidy clothes, the actors playfully referred to the garments as the characters. At first, they treated them as objects to manipulate, bringing them to life as their puppets, and ultimately, they reconstructed the play, focusing it on Ophelia, represented by the greenish dress the pair fished out from the artificial pool in the middle of the stage.

Romanova, who had already spoken lyrically and longingly about acting, pretended to be the youthful Ophelia, first scolded in a hip-hop diatribe by her brother (yellow glasses and Bermuda shorts with suspenders) and Polonius (white clogs). The love letter from Hamlet doubled as a wedding veil, as it was written on a semi-transparent white shawl that Kaczmarek, in the role of Polonius, folded, thereby censoring it. Hamlet’s character was represented by three different objects: a mournful Elizabethan-style T-shirt (representing his melancholic and somber self), a pink T-shirt with red hands for eyes and a hand-painted psychedelic smile (symbolizing pretend madness), and one further outfit – a red T-shirt with a black

² Polish Shakespeare Association gives the award to a festival performance that offers a particularly compelling interpretation of a Shakespearean text. <https://towarzystwoszekspirowskie.org.pl/ksiega-prospersa/ksiega-prospersa-2024/>. Accessed 30 August 2025.

grin and blots for eyes, along with a set of red gloves (the prince as the raging, vengeful, authentic self). While slipping in and out of character, the cleaners deconstructed the play, ironically commenting on the action, and debated what Ophelia could have witnessed and been a part of, and what she was truly oblivious to, effectively centring Ophelia's narrative. The Polish actor underscored that Hamlet kept so much away from his lover, while the Ukrainian actress responded emotively to Ophelia's plight, making her character feel like a tangible presence. When Romanova entered the role of Ophelia despairing over the sad state of Hamlet, the Polish cleaner commented, still cleaning: "Her lines can be skipped just like nature's descriptions" (in Polish nineteenth-century novels – AKP) and then she animated Hamlet to manipulate two decanters full of water: these represented the Player Queen and the Player King in the *Mousetrap* played out and narrated through a theatre of shadows. In this re-telling of the *Mousetrap*, Hamlet did explain his plan to Ophelia, denigrating her over and over again as she mechanically repeated, "You are an excellent narrator, my prince," until the moment when, still talking, Hamlet killed Polonius.

Much stage time was dedicated to the abuse Ophelia suffers from other characters, who repeatedly belittled and humiliated her, also offering snide remarks in the style of a meta-theatrical commentary: "I understand the directors who didn't like this scene and tried to cut it, it's so embarrassing. You don't know how to show madness, Ophelia, you'd better watch Hamlet." This persisted until the final scene, which revealed not only their misogyny but also a toxically mean, narcissistic streak in Hamlet. When Ophelia screamed and called out for her mother, the cleaner playing Hamlet snapped in anger, "It's Gertrude's line. Your mother was not here, and this tragedy is also about that." Very ironically, this comment is indeed painfully accurate. The drowning scene was narrated by the Polish actress, again using a decanter and the bathtub, while Romanova kept draping the dress by the pool. This scene also drew critical commentary from the two cleaners, as Romanova's character accused Horatio of killing Ophelia – after all, he was supposed "Follow her close; give her good watch" (*Hamlet* 4.5.79). The sharp, bitter exchange culminated with Romanova's recitation of "to be or not to be," reworded to reflect Ophelia's experience.

The PSA jury awarded the production the "Prospero's Book" prize "for an emotionally gripping and intellectually profound reading of Hamlet once the Horatian filter has been removed, and for a formally sophisticated storytelling, in which water and decanters convincingly represent the struggle for power".³ The creative team's approach to the production was characterised by a bold, innovative aesthetic that seamlessly blended Shakespeare's text with a modern, visually

³ <https://towarzystwoszekspirowskie.org.pl/ksiega-prospiera/ksiega-prospiera-2024/>. Accessed 30 August 2025.

striking sensibility. The minimalist set design, combined with the strategic use of object theatre, light, and shadow, created an immersive atmosphere that drew the audience into Ophelia's harrowing emotional journey. The most significant framing device was the direct and indirect recollection of the war in Ukraine, which Romanova and Kaczmarek both addressed, especially at the beginning. Romanova's concise comments on blood and violence versus the artificiality of the main show stood in stark contrast with the subject matter of *Hamlet*: the raw experience of war does change how Shakespearean tragedy can be interpreted. The performance concluded with Romanova removing the dress again and placing it in the centre of the stage, while softly singing the Ukrainian folk song *Ne khody ulane* (Don't go, my lancer), whose narrative – suicide by drowning and the plant-like transformation of two lovers – aptly and mournfully reflected both Ophelia's fate and the plight of Ukraine.



Philip Parr*

Working Title: A Collaboration Made in York

Creatives: Mariia Stopnyk, Ivan Blindar, Dara Klymeko, Vika Skirak, Iryna Muza, Nick Jones, Ian Giles, Katie Coen, David Richmond, Daria Furmanova, Carter Lown, Andrea Mitchell, María Victoria López, Skylar Mabry, Lynne O'Dowd, Charis McRoberts, Elizabeth Stanforth-Sharpe, Victoria, Alia, and Kate and Philip Parr. Performed at the Creative Centre Auditorium, York St John University, on Saturday, 20 April 2024, within the York International Shakespeare Festival, UK, 22 April – 4 May 2025.

Actor: How shall we begin?

Actor: Does anyone have a script?

Actor: What did we agree in rehearsal?

Actor: Did we talk about how to begin?

Someone asks for a translation – it's explained in Ukrainian that no one knows how to begin.

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A pause.

Actor: Perhaps..... (but they change their mind)

Actor: What about.....

Actor: I could.....

Actor: Don't look at me.....

A pause

A long speech in Ukrainian about how the director probably said something about it in rehearsal but no one really understood it.

Meanwhile, Ivan clearly has a thought, and idea for how to start....

Others notice – they encourage him.

Go on.

You know you want to.

Go on Ivan.

Finally he moves to centre-stage and declaims in English:

Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this sun of York!

The others applaud him.

A pause

And so, it began. For one night only, one glorious performance built in a week of playing, improvisation, games, trust, singing, drawing, caring, learning, sharing. An exploration, starting from words and phrases, and with the words of Shakespeare embedded throughout, in English and Ukrainian, but also in Spanish and other languages.

Working Title was an idea built from the need to foreground and elevate the displaced Ukrainian community in York, and a desire to build on the successful Ukrainian presence at the 2023 York International Shakespeare Festival, when the Molodyy Theatre from Kyiv presented their much-admired *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In 2024, we wanted to go further and to create something in York, so we invited the Ivan Franko National Academy of Music and Drama Theatre in Ivano Frankivsk, Ukraine, to send us two actors to be part of a new creation – and we

were honoured to have Ivan Blindar and Mariia Stopnyk come and join us for a week. Ivan and Mariia were generous, energetic and vastly talented. They showed us how to be brave in leaving our performing comfort zones, – and Ivan, who would look up hurriedly, whenever the fighter jets from the local airbase flew low over York – reminded us of the weight of responsibility they carried even far from home.

Actors were invited from across York and Yorkshire to join the project; there were students, veterans, and local freelancers, and some came from the Ukrainian community, glad of a chance to be welcomed at last into a familiar environment, in a still strange land. All giving their time to this experiment. Generations of actors with worlds of experience and inexperience. The spirit of collaboration and learning from one another was paramount. Nothing felt impossible. *Romeo and Juliet*, the Nightingale and the Lark speech, with Romeo played in Ukrainian and wearing an army uniform and Juliet in English – two lovers parting at a station, was heart-wrenching. A found poem on dreams made everyone laugh at the absurd comedy. Shakespeare ran through everything. Exploring the idea of home, one of our Ukrainian team spoke of fleeing first from Crimea to Kyiv, and then from Kyiv to York, and quietly said that she did not think she could find the strength to move again. Charis McRoberts wrote us a new piece exploring staying and leaving in a chain of relationships, interwoven with Hamlet and Ophelia. York St John University students joined us for a day of dramaturgy, bringing fresh ideas and brushing away our self-indulgences.

Scenes were separated by Iryna Muza, re-finding her concert pianist-trained touch after a year away from a keyboard. All the while, our artist Lynne O'Dowd constantly created drawings through every rehearsal, her work somehow mark-making the actors' flashes of inspiration immortal. During the show, Lynne continued to draw live, with the images projected onto the back wall to create our scenery. As Ivan Blindar and Mariia Stopnyk work in a theatre in a city named after a poet, we translated a poem by Ivan Franko – heard for the first time in English: *Love Appeared to Me Three Times*. And if you have been with Ukrainians for long enough, you will know that they sing whenever they can. So we sang: all the Ukrainians taught us a song in Ukrainian, which became the end of our show – and we sang as only friends can sing, when words alone are not enough:

To you, dear little river,
Spring will return, spring.
And youth will not return,
She will not return!

It was an unforgettable evening, for those who created it and for the many Ukrainians and others from York and beyond who came to see it. For our Festival,

the determination became fixed then, that although it might only be a little contribution, we will present and celebrate Ukrainian Shakespeare, and will empower our local Ukrainian actors in York, for as long as it is needed.

Opening projected text:

A week ago a group of people came together to make this performance
From York
From Yorkshire
From Ivano Frankivsk
From Ukraine
And from other places too
We threw balls to each other
We told stories
We played games
We ate biscuits and drank tea
We told each other stories, about ourselves, about our lives, about our thoughts
We sang songs
We read Shakespeare
We became friends
We made this



Cristie Carson*

Theatre Studio of IDP's Uzhik Production of *King Lear*, directed by Viacheslav Yehorov, staged at the Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon, on 14 and 15 June 2024

Creative team: Oleksandr Larchenko (Technical Support), Asia Antsyferova (Sound Designer), Yuliia Yehorova (Producer), Veronika Hromadska (Make-Up Artist, Translator and Photographer), Viktoriya Nad (Project Manager), Ahnesa Tsvilodub (Assistant Director) and Hennadii Yeshkunov (Stage Manager).

Cast Members: Olena Aliabieva, Tetiana Holyshevska, Yuliia Horielkova, Veronika Hromadska, Andrii Khomik, Myroslava Koshtura, Viktoriya Lyulko, Viktoriya Nad, Olena Perekotiienko, Olena Potseluieva, Ahnesa Tsvilodub and Hennadii Yeshkunov.

The 15th of June 2024 was a complex day for me. I had recently returned to England from Romania where I had attended a range of productions at the Craiova International Shakespeare Festival and I was about to fly to Canada to visit my elderly

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parents. I had booked my flight just after this production because the inclusion of a Ukrainian *King Lear* in the inaugural season of the new artistic directors of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), Daniel Evans and Tamara Harvey, seemed a conscious statement of the political intentions of the pair. In the programme they state: “We hope that, whether you speak Ukrainian or not, you will be struck by how *King Lear*’s universal themes of bifurcation and loss draw immediate parallels with the experiences of Ukrainian refugees” (RSC Programme 2025).

This engagement with the world outside of the theatre marked a significant departure from the former Artistic Director Gregory Doran, who rarely took political risks in his programming or direction. My expectation was that given my familiarity with ‘global Shakespeare’, with the theatre space (The Other Place) and the hosting theatre company (RSC), not to mention the play, I would have access to the key elements of this theatrical event. But the production of *King Lear* I witnessed was markedly different from other stagings of this tragedy that I have seen in Stratford-upon-Avon or elsewhere.

The production’s opening scene made clear that this was to be a pared-down version of the story, performed by just five actors, all but one of whom was female. This dominance of women on stage reflected the conditions of the company’s town of origin, Uzhorod, which has swollen to quadruple its size since the full-scale conflict began in 2022. It was also born out of the reality of creating a touring theatre with actors who were exempt from combat (a younger actor cast as Lear was denied a visa to travel). When the five actors entered the stage they wore tight beige undergarments, making them look both vulnerable and lost, a far cry from the regal entrance of the King’s court in most productions. Laura King in her *Los Angeles Times* review highlights the opening soundscape: “The sound of a piping flute – a familiar hallmark of Shakespeare productions – gave way to the shriek of train whistles, the thud of pistons, and Ukrainian-language announcements of trains arriving from battered cities across the country”. This presentation of the play was to be a visceral reproduction of the present conditions of war, not an abstract imagining of a long-lost Britain. The actors in this production were themselves displaced people, largely without any experience of acting, many of whom had never read Shakespeare before. As they opened silver trunks to retrieve costume pieces that would denote their characters, a chilling sense of the lives of millions of refugees, who had to flee their homes with only the clothes on their backs, was instantly evoked.

The production’s stage design provided a shifting visual feast. A series of moving frames with lengths of white fabric, which King likens to shrouds, were moved about the stage by the actors to denote scene changes. Intense lighting and an ongoing score that blended Ukrainian traditional and contemporary elements, worked to create a versatile and haunting series of scenes. Lear (65-year-old Andrii Khomik) and his daughters wore crowns made of white twigs, which evoked a devastated

land of fragile beauty. The former museum worker, who fled Crimea for western Ukraine in 2014, presented a formidable but frightened king. The minimalist use of props, combined with a clever use of lighting and sound, created shifts in tone and intensity that allowed the focus to remain on the actors' powerful performances. In this all-female court, the competition between the siblings for their father's favour was intense. Goneril (Olena Perekotiienko) and Regan (Ahnesa Tsvilodub) were both fighting for survival. Cordelia (Myroslava Koshtura) appeared naïve and bewildered. In this adaptation Regan poisoned her sister and then killed herself, rather than the other way around. The King was followed throughout by a wry, playful Fool (Olena Aliabieva), whose slightly distant observations of the family feud allowed her to be the last one standing at the end of the play. Along with the audience, the Fool's role was to witness the devastation.

But the event did not end with Shakespeare's ending. The actors all came on stage, along with members of the crew, and asked the audience to consider the power of love in the face of conflict. Director Yehorov states: "For me, the war in Shakespeare, it's on paper and that's one thing, but the tragedy that happened in real life is absolutely different, it's a different level. We need to learn that war is the equivalent of death" (quoted in Khomami). Yet despite this bleak outlook the story of the theatre company inspired not only this production but also a documentary *King Lear: How We Looked for Love During the War*, which premiered at the SEEFest festival in Los Angeles in 2023.¹ Ultimately the final message of the play was, as Yehorov puts it, "without love ... we are nothing" (quoted in King). The audience in attendance was visibly moved and rose as one to provide a standing ovation.

My own experience of the event was coloured by several overlapping factors. First, I was keenly aware of a group of young Ukrainian audience members, who clearly understood the spoken text, which was not translated or made available for an English-speaking audience through surtitles. I knew that internationally displaced people groups across Warwickshire² were to be given the opportunity to watch a performance before it was presented to the public, but I did not expect the audience at the performance I attended to be so heavily dominated by native speakers. I was struck by how this language barrier also provided a division of experience. I was confronted by my reliance on the existence of surtitles, a practice which is now widely accepted in international Festivals, that provides the illusion of connection with the spoken text. I realised how comfortable I usually feel in a British theatre, or an international Festival, surrounded by other theatre-goers who know these plays intimately. My impression of this production was of

¹ See Gabriela Cheaptanaru's article in this volume.

² These included Welcome Here, Mosaic Church, Hand in Hand and Association of Ukrainians of Great Britain.

experiencing *King Lear* for the first time, but my lack of experience of the world of the players served to make me feel outside the performance, looking in.

My second realisation was that my understanding of the cultural issues relating to the conflict has been very shallow. The pervasive use of the Russian language in Ukrainian, particularly for the performance of Shakespeare and other cultural work, was news to me. I was confounded by the discovery that Ukrainian productions and translations of Shakespeare had been forbidden in the 1800s. Closer to home, the young Ukrainian friend I had invited to join me for the performance told me for the first time that he did not speak Ukrainian at home, either in Ukraine or in his new British home, despite his strong opposition to the war. He was visibly moved to hear this story in his country's native language, despite (or perhaps because) it was not his language of daily use. The third revelation, which caught me off guard was meeting two esteemed Shakespeare colleagues, who are based in the United States, but who I found have close personal connections with Ukraine. Peter Holland and Romana Huk told me during the play's interval that they had created a course to study the writing coming out of Ukraine in response to the war, which was attended by both American students at the University of Notre Dame and students at the Ukrainian Catholic University.

Yehorov's vision that this play could provide a form of therapy for those involved extended to those in the audience who found in this performance a voice for their pain and displacement, as well as a call for hope through the power of collective action. This *King Lear*, which featured displaced Ukrainians, provided an intensity of performance I have rarely experienced, due to the focus on hope and love as the only way to combat the aggressive Russian offensive. For a group of participants, who say that the war has changed them, and audiences who found the performance altered their perception of the war, this production provided a balm for an international affliction.

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Afterword: IF Shakespeare UA. The First International Shakespeare Festival in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine, 17–23 June 2024

A Ukrainian festival dedicated entirely to Shakespeare had been the stuff of dreams for the late Maiia Harbuziuk (Dean of Arts, University of Lviv) since 2018, following her participation in the Craiova International Shakespeare Festival in neighbouring Romania, and for Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi (Artistic Director of the National Academy Theatre of Music and Drama, Ivano Frankivsk). This ‘dream’ has been nurtured by Shakespeare scholars from Ukraine and abroad, and developed by the Ivano-Frankivsk Ivano Franko Theatre team, who refused to let the war already in motion halt their plans.¹ This first, successfully launched,

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1 <https://ifshakespeare.in.ua/en/festival-2024>. Accessed 25 October 2025.



edition enabled the Festival to join the European Shakespeare Festivals Network, a circuit of knowledge and cooperation among festivals in Europe (www.esfn.eu) with unprecedented swiftness: the live ESFN's council meeting confirmed Ukraine's membership 24 hours after the Festival's start.

The Festival's programme was aimed at Ukrainian audiences – save for the very few international festivalgoers making the journey into the war-locked country. It featured performances by leading Ukrainian theatres from across Ukraine, as well as international productions from Italy, Moldova and Poland. Additionally, it offered public lectures, interviews, workshops, and roundtables with academics and art specialists from various Ukrainian universities and cultural institutions, alongside guests from Bulgaria, Ireland, Poland, Romania and the UK.

The main Festival venue was the Ivano-Frankivsk National Academy of Music and Drama Theatre named after Ivan Franko, a cultural landmark situated in the centre of Ivano-Frankivsk, western Ukraine, and the first theatre to reopen under shelling in April 2022. The location choice was deliberate: one of the major cities in western Ukraine, Ivano-Frankivsk boasts a rich multicultural history and is positioned within relatively easy reach from major European cities. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, its location away from the frontline provided a reassuring degree of security that the Festival team, under the steady directorship of Rostyslav Derzhypil'skyi (director of the Ivano-Frankivsk Theatre) and Iryna Chuzhynova (festival director and curator), made their priority. While it has been impossible to fly to Ukraine since February 2022, most creatives and international guests resorted to travelling to a neighbouring country and taking a coach or train to the Festival destination.

The theatre itself is housed in a sizeable brutalist building that functions as a versatile hub for the performing arts in the city. The main stage alone features a 14-metre-diameter revolving platform and a spacious auditorium with comfortable seating and excellent acoustics.² During the Festival, it was mainly used for guest performances from other regions of Ukraine and from abroad. The latter, renamed Stage Basement, had served as an air-raid shelter since 2022 and was, therefore, already adapted to accommodate large groups.

The Festival commenced with a staging of *Coriolanus*, directed by Dmytro Bohomazov and featuring a complex modern set design by Petro Bohomazov, with clear allusions to Rome as a coastal city by nearer shores. Presented by the Ivan Franko National Academy Drama Theatre in Kyiv, this modern production set a vibrant tone for the event. The interpretation of Shakespeare's Roman play was explicitly political and revisited questions of sovereignty and tyranny in a manner that struck an obvious chord with the audience. *Coriolanus* (Dmytro Rybalevski)

² The building houses several other stages, rehearsal spaces and some sizeable workshops that make the production sets, props and costumes.

was imagined as a noble warrior, whose wartime experiences had visibly transformed him; this rendered him incomprehensible to the Roman plebeians, portrayed unflatteringly as the Soviet-like, dangerous, rebellious rabble, sometime comical, sometime Grand Guignol sinister. A transparent screen, made of several door-size panes, separated Rome from the city of Corioles, where the Volscis dwelled – a motley crew sporting Punk-Goth hairdos, an array of black outfits of leather and buckles, and combat boots. It was on this screen that they spelled, in blood, MORI as they prepared to take on Rome; on the same screen, quiet Virgilia made the production's most powerful plea: as she made her exit through the screen doors, she rewrote the entire story by turning the bloody message to AMORI.

The unsettling engagement with the repercussions of political conflicts, set in a post-apocalyptic scenario, was also evident in Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi's imaginative retelling of *Hamlet*, in which Ophelia, Laertes, and the young Prince wandered around the air-raid shelter like abandoned children trying to make sense of the harsh world of adults who forced them to grow up too quickly. Hamlet, performed with energy and bravado by Oleksii Hnatkovskyi, was visibly evolving into a mature and resolved revolutionary, whose choice 'to be' carried not only personal but national consequences. All was performed to live music by the orchestra and witnessed by the three Weird Sisters, who observed the *neo-opera-horror*, having opened it like chthonic priestesses from the underworld, sent to awaken the spirits of the dead so they could perform the play as their penance.

The same 'stage basement' – as staff and spectators now call the space – served as the venue for the second production in the diptych by Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi. *Romeo & Juliet – drama per musica* was a spectacular, imaginative retelling of the story by the ensemble of the Ivano-Frankivsk National Academy of Music and Drama Theatre. It was constructed around strong contrasts: on the one hand, it juxtaposed the operatic-like aesthetic of Romeo and Juliet's love with the brutality of young men duelling, both trapped in a MMA (mixed martial arts) cage. On the other hand, it set the story of the 'star-crossed lovers' in two parts to music, which the live orchestra signalled by alternating the brass funeral marches, redolent of Prokofiev, with local folk-like music. While the basement was initially used for the tomb (in contrast to the derelict Soviet plant where part 1 took place, when the production opened, in 2017), after February 2022, it became the city centre's designated bomb shelter and one of the theatre's two functional stages during air raids. This was a literal descent into the underworld, considering the audience was led into the theatre's basement – which continues to double as the designated bomb shelter in the city centre. Once the basement was repurposed by Yliia Zaulychna, the space was used creatively to convey a sense of audience immersion in the unfolding events. The concrete slabs on wheels (which in *Hamlet* served as makeshift biers from which the characters were raised by the Weird Sisters' invocation) once again became beds, this time for the Capulets, who initially slept

beneath thermal blankets to wake up to a feast, during which the Nurse (Olha Komanovska) was sharing drinks with the audience. The large oven-like structure (centre right) became a temporary stage from which Mercutio (the terrific Ivan Blindar) bellowed his half-crazed Queen Mab rap. The duel between Tybalt and Mercutio, imagined as an MMA judo/Brazilian jiu-jitsu cage match, involved the audience as party-goers again, and the cage-like structure that separated Romeo and Juliet from the violence and from the viewers created a sense of entrapment that was difficult to shake. The production, which had the PTSD-raving Friar Lawrence double as the sober Duke (judge, jury and executioner), ended exactly where it had begun, with dying Romeo in Juliet's lap, a white Pieta inside the wire cage that was gradually obscured by the dark, looming bodies of the quick and the dead in this Verona. This was a powerful reminder of the war outside that continues to sacrifice the young generation.

The last show to take place in the basement was Oksana Dmitriyeva's heart-breaking *The Tempest*, produced by Mariya Zankovetska, Lviv National Academic Theatre (Lviv). This production opened with a grand storm contrived in a realistic fashion with water, light, smoke (revealed to be Ariel's walking around and sprinkling the outcasts from his portable water tank) and the audience's vocal participation under Prospero's close instruction. Prospero (the superb Oleh Stefan) was portrayed as a frail patriarch and a seductive master of words, entrapped on an island that did, in fact, feel and look like a prison. Red metallic cages, heaps of leftover shoes and ancient horns of primaeval rhinoceroses dominated Mikhail Nikolaev's red and white scenography, and created an image of a gruesome past and an even more desolate present, signified also by the large toy-like, oversized Ionescean rhinoceros (made of leftover materials it repurposed – an oil tank, springs, wood, metal net). The rhinoceros, as well as many leftover rhinoceros horns, were used as an element of the island and served as a playground to Miranda and Ferdinand. Caliban also played with the rhino, hiding within it, moving around it, and Prospero finally used it as a large furnace to devour the heaps and heaps of galoshes signifying all those once stranded on the island's forlorn shores – a sinister reminder of an extermination camp. Stefan's Prospero navigated this metallic hell with weary authority, his dark navy and red captain uniform contrasting with both Ariel's white ethereal pilot outfit (Yaroslav Derpak) and Caliban's peasant-like overalls (Volodymyr Panteleev). Strengthening the sense of entrapment visually, all the outcasts were dressed in red-and-white striped onesies; these were no pyjamas, but resembled concentration camp outfits as well as naval military underwear. On the one hand, the overall visual effect was colourful and childlike, and the sense of abandon was created through the object-play with the props: the white horns were used as toys but also acquired sexual significance when handled by Miranda and Ferdinand, as well as Ariel who in a spectacular tableau visualised Sycorax, complete with breasts and horns to accompany Prospero's narrative. On the other

hand, they were symbols of power that identified the position of the shipwrecked in the pecking order: Alonso, the King of Naples, sported a larger horn, while his brother Sebastian and Antonio, the Duke of Milan, had smaller ones. Language and silence were instruments of oppression which Prospero used repeatedly both on the characters (not just of Caliban, but on Ariel and Ferdinand too, when telling him to continue his proposal speech as he's been instructed) and on the audience, whom he charmed into doing his bidding at the beginning – that is, to create the storm sounds –, then terrified with his authoritarian behaviour towards his own child and Ariel, and with the burning of galoshes, the only evidence that made the island a massacre site. Imaginative, dense with theatrical allusions, and politically astute, Dmitrieva's work was something rich and strange.

The Ivano-Frankivsk Festival provided space for young Ukrainian actors in training to showcase their work and perform for large audiences. On June 21, the viewers could attend *Hamlet*, directed by Olha Larina and Denys Martynov, with costume design by Liliya Lutsenko. This production, staged on the Studio Stage of the Ivano-Frankivsk National Academy, showcased the energy and enthusiasm of young performers from the Kyiv Academic Theatre in Pechersk. The following day, on June 22, the same venue hosted *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Andriy Bilous, performed by the talented students of the Kyiv National Academic Young Theatre, who had previously toured the York International Shakespeare Festival in the UK and competed at the Gdańsk International Shakespeare Festival in Poland, where they received the Polish Shakespeare Association award, 'Prospero's Book'. The production blended contemporary youth street culture – evident in the lovers' humorous exchanges and in Helena and Hermia's rap battle – that infused modern energy and rhythm into the comedy, with folk traditions visible in the elements of costume, choreography, set design, and the witty inclusion of *vyshyvanka* dolls (guardians of heritage and family) in the mechanicals' scene, adding a cultural storytelling layer to the very witty whole. The last production was *A Date with William*, performed by first-year students of Ivano-Frankivsk Theatre Academy. Sourced from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the études were linked by *Greensleeves*, which was performed live as a refrain by the actors who played their chosen instruments.

The first international production in the Festival was a large-scale theatrical event by Teatrul Fără Nume (Chişinău, Moldova), which intertextualised *Macbeth* with Romanian folk culture and Eugene Ionesco's *Macbett*. The radical message about the eternal cycle of violence, where one despot is defeated only to be replaced by an even worse tyrant, was visible in the choices made by the director Mihai Țărnă: the Scottish play was bookended by Ionesco's *Macbett*, and it was Ionesco's vision of Shakespeare's play that carried the tenor of the performance. The grotesqueness of power feeding on itself was discernible from the very start, when the actors, whose heads showed through the curtain at varying heights, bellowed their parts.

The gratuitous violence of the theatre of absurd – and of the world outside – clashed strongly with the interweaving love story of Macbeth and his wife, a bare-footed shepherdess sent by her mother to ‘herd the goats’ (a well-known Romanian carol). Their airy ballet on ropes temporarily lifted them above the water, earth, blood, and death down below, only to make their fall more dramatic. The strip of land, stage-fore, no longer able to contain the dead who lost their lives defending it, could not have been a more powerful reminder of the reality outside the theatre: Russia’s invasion of Ukraine *and* its neighbour to the west, Moldova, in its own precarious position and long history of being claimed by Russia.

The political impact of the war also surfaced, this time quite indirectly, in a monodramatic piece with a media twist by two talented actors from the Adam Zelwerowicz Theatrical Academy in Warsaw (Poland). In *Matulka* [Mumsie], written and performed by Julia Bukała (a graduate of both the Kyiv and Warsaw theatrical schools), young Julka grappled with her mother’s decision to leave the country and move to Italy. The absent, abusive, and emotionally detached mother controlled Julka by leaving her completely alone at home and keeping her under lock and key. In this highly modern retelling of *Romeo and Juliet*, the ‘star-crossed lovers’ were already an item; there was no feud between their families, and yet still they had no future together. The main focus was on Julka, who, in her isolation, became increasingly alienated, even though her house arrest was occasionally interrupted by FaceTime calls from her friends, including her boyfriend (Artur Zudzin-Wiśniewski). Unable to influence the outside world, she could only watch in disbelief as a wild party spirals out of control, costing her the lives of her cousin and Romek (Roman), who, in a metatheatrical nod, was addressed as ‘Romeo’ by Julka’s cousin Tymek (Tymon – Tybalt). When Julka received a message from her mother about a fatal car accident, she suspected the worst and acted accordingly. The concise language of youth speak, as well as the sharp localisation of the production in the “now,” resonated especially with younger audience members, while older viewers seemed preoccupied with how Julka’s relationship with her mother unravelled. When Adam Zudzin-Wiśniewski joined Julia Bukała after the performance for the standing ovation, everyone was genuinely surprised – not expecting the ‘Romeo’ to be more than a smartphone presence. When, amid the general disbelief, he knelt and took out an engagement ring to propose to Julia Bukała, she herself seemed not entirely sure whether it was part of the performance or a genuine marriage proposal, which she accepted, to the viewers’ tears, thereby transforming them into moved witnesses. Thus, the first Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival became one of the very few Shakespeare festivals in the world where Juliet got her happy ending and a promise of a bright future, for which we keep our fingers crossed.

The Festival concluded with *Hamlet Double Bill*, written, directed, and performed by actors Adrian Hughes, Alberto Ierardi, and Giorgio Vierda from La

Ribalta Theatre (Italy) and the English Theatre Company (UK). The production was staged in Ivano-Frankivsk as part of their tour of European Shakespeare festivals, having won the 2024 'ShakeSphere' competition organised annually by the European Shakespeare Festivals Network (<https://esfn.eu/shakesphere-call-for-projects/>). This was also a story in two parts: the first was a comic retelling of Hamlet from the perspective of the Gravediggers, tasked with burying all the dead once Hamlet's revenge was over; the second was a more interactive segment focusing on *The Mousetrap* and the discussion over Claudius's guilty conscience and Ophelia's tragedy. Its comic slant and the interaction elicited by the performers (with the help of puppets on sticks for Claudius and Gertrude) provided the much-needed respite for all spectators at the end of the Festival and before returning to their daily reality.

Another highlight of the Festival was the comprehensive educational and academic programme held across multiple city venues, including the post-industrial space known as Promprylad, a bustling resilience centre for culture and business. The programme featured various formats in which academics from the European Shakespearean Research Association networked together with theatre critics and scholars from academic, educational and cultural institutions across Ukraine. The academic programme began with a public lecture titled "Who needs another Shakespeare Festival?" by Nicoleta Cinpoș (Professor of Shakespeare Studies at the University of Worcester, UK, and keen lobbyist for the Ivano-Frankivsk Shakespeare Festival). Later that day, the Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival and the European Shakespeare Festivals Network were officially introduced in the historic hall of the Bastion Gallery. Speakers included Rostyslav Derzhypil'skyi, Philip Parr, Nicoleta Cinpoș, Michael Dobson, Iryna Chuzhynova, Ema Vyroubalova, Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik, in person, and leading members from other festivals who joined online: Joanna Śnieżko (Gdansk), Vlad Drăgulescu (Craiova) and representatives of the newly returned festival initiative in Barcelona. Another event, open to the public, took place at the counter-cultural art space of the Vagabundo club, where Daria Moskvitina (Zaporizhzhia State Medical and Pharmaceutical University) interviewed Yurii Andrukhovych, the local icon and one of the rock-stars of the European literary and translation world.

The 19 June continued to focus on translation, with panels on Ukrainian Shakespeare and the Modern Stage with Bohdan Korneliuk (Khortytsia National Educational and Rehabilitation Academy), the European experience of Shakespeare's theatrical translations with Daria Moskvitina and Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik (University of Lodz), and a roundtable on subtitling Shakespearean translations for stage productions featuring Viktoriia Marinesko, Yevheniia Kanchura (Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University), Sorin Cazacu (University of Craiova) and Nataliia Krynytska. The day concluded with a tour-de-force discussion on the theatricality of Shakespeare's Ukrainian translations, with

two keynote speakers: Nataliya Torkut (Ukrainian Inter-University Shakespeare Centre, Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham) and Lada Kolomiyets (Visiting Professor at Dartmouth College, USA).

The third day was organised around the visual arts. Michael Dobson (Director of the Shakespeare Institute, UK) delivered a public lecture titled “Shakespeare and Art,” followed by a discussion of Shakespeare’s Word in Illustrations by the renowned Ukrainian artist Vladyslav Yerko. Yerko’s art displayed in the theatre foyer enabled audiences and visitors to engage with the topic throughout the Festival. The discussion, moderated by Nataliya Torkut, included Darya Lazarenko from the New University in Sofia, Bulgaria. A panel titled “Shakespeare’s theatrical showbills and posters: advertising or art?” featured Darya Lazarenko, too, as well as postgraduate students Yana Nikityuk (Italy) and Svitlana Deineka (Taras Shevchenko Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine), along with an online presentation on poster art by Sabina Laskowska-Hinz (Polish Shakespeare Association). The day’s academic events concluded with a presentation on the virtual *museum* #Hamlet-UA: *act I, scene 1943*. Speakers for this session included academics who worked on the project: Professor Nataliya Torkut, Roman Lavrentiy (Associate Professor at Ivan Franko Lviv National University) and Maksym Brychka, a graduate student at Volodymyr Vynnychenko Central Ukrainian State University.

The following two days featured roundtables discussing the state of Ukrainian performing arts and changes in the Ukrainian theatre scene. On 21 June, the theatre foyer hosted a panel titled “War and Shakespeare”, moderated by the Festival programme director Iryna Chuzhynova, which explored fundamental questions about the ongoing war and how festival-making can remain meaningful during crises. The discussion at the Promprylad conference hall on drama therapy and the Heartbeat method by Kelly Hunter focused on the role of contemporary theatre as a therapeutic tool. Later that day, the Festival featured the panel “Ukrainian Shakespeare – local or universal?” moderated again by Ira Chuzhynova. The day ended with presentations of two recent publications: the collective monograph: *Shakespeare in Ukrainian on the Other Side of the Iron Curtain*, edited M.R. Stech, and a literary translation of Maggie O’Farrell’s *Hamnet* by Yevheniya Kanchura, published by Vivat Publishing House.

With its elegant foyer, contemporary stage, warm and inviting ambience, and a dedicated, professional Festival team, the theatre in Ivano-Frankivsk was more than prepared to host the 1st International Shakespeare Festival in Ukraine. During the event, it was transformed tangibly from a regular hub of intellectual life and a venue for performances for the local audiences into a vibrant gathering place for cultural events and community engagement that clearly moved beyond the regional. It became a festival hub where the general public, creatives, theatre

workers, specialists, and scholars came to engage in meaningful dialogue, and a platform for discussing the cultural importance of theatre and art in the time of global crisis and their role in the ordeal Ukraine has been facing. The general atmosphere was very sombre at first. As the Festival declared on its digital platform, this was no 'art holiday from the war'. The representation at the formal opening, which comprised of local and regional authorities, as well as cultural representatives of the President's office, businesses that sponsored the event, the British Ambassador, the press, Ukrainian creatives travelling from eastern cities devastated by the war or from exile abroad, confirmed the key role that theatre and this Shakespeare Festival play on the home-frontline, both shelter for its community and guardian of Ukrainian identity.

Throughout the festival, Nicoleta Cinpoes, Philip Parr, and Michael Dobson reflected on the history of creating Shakespeare festivals during times of crisis. The First International Shakespeare Festival in Ukraine served as a vivid testament to the power of the human(e) spirit even in the darkest hours. By providing a platform to showcase diverse Ukrainian Shakespeare performances and international productions, the Festival highlighted Ukraine's unequivocal presence in Europe but also the ongoing struggle of the Ukrainian military and civilians alike to preserve the values of the democratic world. Hosting international productions and joining the European Shakespeare Festivals Network brought attention to Ivano-Frankivsk as a prominent destination on the global artistic map. Creating opportunities for young actors to shine emphasised the importance of nurturing future talent. All of this was, quite impossibly, achieved by the Ivano-Frankivsk Academy of Music and Drama Theatre after Ivan Franko amidst war.

Final Thoughts from the Reviewers

Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik: My visit to Ivano-Frankivsk was a profoundly transformative experience on a very personal level, which goes beyond this writing. I knew that by attending the Festival, I would, in some ways, confront the difficult heritage which still shadows the political relations between our two neighbouring countries, and which is the result of the centuries-long entanglement of our societies in Russia's imperial projects. Though I had friends in Ukraine, I had never ventured there, weighed down by that burden. I now see that while the ghosts of the past may haunt us, they belong to history; the present is the time when we all need friendship, love, and care more than anything else. Indeed, friendship, love and care are what I felt, what I witnessed and what I will carry with me into the future – not as a burden, but as a treasure. The Festival's opening was imbued with solemnity and gravity, as it opened a time of collective reflection on the most fundamental of issues: 'to be or not to be' that resounded with much emotion, on

and off the stage. Throughout the Festival week, it was repeated as a sonorous ‘to be’ with conviction and hope for the future of the Ukrainian theatre and society. At its closing, the Festival overflowed with joy and gratitude at having witnessed something so breathtaking and so beautiful. More than anything else, I felt that this Festival was about people and their stories, understanding their wounds, and offering respite. It performed splendidly and formidably in the most fundamental task you can ask from theatre: to stir thought, to awaken empathy, and to transform us, possibly into better human beings.

Nicoleta Cinpoș: Shakespeare is often discussed in terms of ‘soft power’; there was nothing soft about the Shakespeare made, witnessed and discussed at the 1st edition of the Ivano-Frankivsk International Shakespeare Festival in Ukraine. As the Festival posters and billboards invited us to see it, IF SHAKESPEARE UA stood for Ivano-Frankivsk Shakespeare Ukraine. Yes, that’s what I initially thought, too – a rich programme for what the team was suggesting the ‘DEMO’ festival Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi promised back in August 2023, in Gdansk, where the event was ‘cooked’. But in true Ivano-Frankivsk style, and as the productions reviewed above intimate, the poster title and graphics burst with provocations, symbols, promises, boundless energy, exactly what one should expect – and we experienced aplenty – not just of Shakespeare in Ukraine but, as the poster teased us, IF SHAKESPEARE [is] UKRAINE. Shakespeare is Ukraine, and has certainly been for a good while, especially in Ivano Frankivsk. It is the rest of the world that is in urgent need to wake up from its ‘fearful slumber’. There is much catching-up work to do for all of us, Shakespeare scholars and academics. Like Shakestivallers in Ukraine, back in 2024, and like the curators of this volume, we could not be ‘mutes’ or ‘audiences to this act’. As we live – though pale and trembling at ‘this chance’, we took up the task Hamlet bestows on Horatio: ‘report me and my causes right’.



In Memoriam: Mark Sokolianskyi (1939–2025)



With deep sorrow, we announce the passing of Mark Sokolianskyi, a distinguished Ukrainian Shakespearean scholar, on 5 March 2025, at the age of 85, in Luebeck, Germany.

Born in Yaroslavl in 1939, he was mostly associated with Odessa and dedicated much of his life to the study of William Shakespeare, enriching the field with his keen insights and erudition. For many years, he was a respected professor at Mechnikov Odessa State University, where he inspired generations of students with his passion for Elizabethan drama and literary criticism. His scholarly contributions, characterized by depth, precision, and a profound love for the Bard, earned him recognition both in his homeland and abroad.

In 1993, he made his home in Germany, where he continued his intellectual pursuits, engaging with the academic community and sharing his knowledge with fellow scholars and students. His work will remain a lasting testament to his devotion to Shakespearean studies.

He was an incredibly active person who participated in a wide variety of academic, cultural, and educational projects. A member of the editorial board of *Multicultural Shakespeare* since 2004, he had also been a member of the international editorial board of the Polish literary journal *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* since 1994 and was a long-standing member of the editorial board of

Toronto Slavic Quarterly (2002–2020). The bibliographic index of his published works, which includes 464 items, contains eight monographs. Among them are in-depth studies devoted to the works of Henry Fielding (1975), Oscar Wilde (1990), Alexander Pushkin (1999), William Shakespeare (2000), Nikolai Gogol (2009), a study of the typology of the novel of the Enlightenment (1983), Genre studies (2012), and a book of essays *From the History of Literary Studies* (2019) and *Etudes in Comparative Literature* (2021). The scholar's oeuvre includes 50 Shakespearean publications and theatre reviews of Shakespearean productions in theatres around the world.

In addition, Mark Sokolianskyi has written a biographical novel about Vladimir Zhabotinsky and two non-fiction books, which contain memories of people he met throughout his life and of Odessa, the city where he spent his best years. For his significant contribution to the development of culture and science, the Council of the World Club of Odessans awarded Professor Sokoliansky the title of Honorary Citizen of Odessa.

In 2009, Professor Sokolianskyi initiated a public discussion on the state of Shakespeare studies in Ukraine, drawing attention to their critical condition. He soon became actively involved in creating the Ukrainian Interuniversity Shakespeare Centre in Zaporizhzhia and participated in the editorial board of the academic journal *Renesansni Studii*. In the plenary sessions of seven International Shakespeare conferences held in Ukraine, Professor Sokoliansky delivered topical presentations that not only broadened research horizons but also opened promising new directions for Ukrainian Shakespeare studies.

Mark Sokolianskyi will be remembered not only for his academic achievements but also for his kindness, humor, wisdom, and unwavering dedication to the world of literature. He leaves behind a legacy that will continue to inspire scholars and readers alike.

He will be greatly missed by his family, friends, colleagues, and all who had the privilege of knowing him.

Nataliya Torkut and Daria Moskvitina, Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine

Contributors

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Nicoleta Cinpoieş is Professor of Shakespeare Studies at the University of Worcester, UK, an active member of ESRA, the International Shakespeare Association, and the British Shakespeare Association. In 2010, she founded the Shakespeare in Performance Seminar at the Craiova International Shakespeare Festival, which she now chairs. She is international adviser for the York International Shakespeare Festival, helped launch the Ivano-Frankivsk International Shakespeare Festival, Ukraine (2024), and co-organises the Chişinău International Shakespeare Festival, Moldova. Her latest publication is *Shakespeare on European Festival Stages* (Bloomsbury, 2022), co-edited with Florence March and Paul Prescott.

Svitlana Deineka is a fourth-year PhD student at T. H. Shevchenko Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. She is writing her thesis “Roman Plays by William Shakespeare through the prism of the theory of liminality” (research supervisor – Prof. Nataliya Torkut). She is a member of the European Shakespeare Research Association and one of the creators of the virtual museum *#Hamlet-UA: act I, scene 1943* and a co-author of the scientific programme for the First Ivano-Frankivsk International Shakespeare Festival in 2024. She is the author of seven publications dealing with Shakespeare.

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Oksana Fedorkiv, PhD (Art Studies), is an Associate Professor at the Vasyl Stefanyk Carpathian National University, Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine, where she teaches at the Department of Performing Arts and Choreography. Her research focuses on contemporary Shakespearean performance, musical dramaturgy, postdramatic theatre, and the interaction between drama and music in modern stage practices. She is actively involved in the academic and cultural life of the region and has contributed to the development of the Ivano-Frankivsk International Shakespeare Festival (Ukraine, 2024). Her recent publications explore genre transformations in modern Shakespeare productions, with particular attention to neo-opera, drama per musica, and Ukrainian theatrical interpretations of Shakespeare.

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