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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 Hablevych'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’skiy’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 Kowalcz-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 Harbuzyuk (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.

Works Cited

Jewers, Jack. "St Crispin's Day." *in Verse*. Series 2 (2023). <https://inversefilms.co.uk/series2/st-crispins-day>. Accessed 15 September 2025.