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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.<sup>1</sup> 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:

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<sup>1</sup> 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 ‘vener’ 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,<sup>2</sup> originally published in 2000 in the literary magazine *Thursday*.<sup>3</sup> "Theoretically, this

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2 В. Шекспір [W. Shakespeare; V. Shekspir]. *Гамлет, принц Данський* [Hamlet, Prince of Denmark; Hamlet, prynts 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, prynts 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 Sventsyts’kiy, 1865)<sup>4</sup> 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

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Andrukhovych; Pereklad 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.<sup>5</sup> 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»)<sup>6</sup>

A-BA-BA-NA-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])<sup>7</sup>

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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)<sup>8</sup>

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

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<sup>8</sup> "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).<sup>9</sup> 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.

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<sup>9</sup> For more details see Nataliya Torkut, “‘Is Wispering 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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