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## SHAKESPEARE AS RESISTANCE IN THE 21ST-CENTURY UKRAINE

Interview of Olha Kvasnytsia, journalist of the newspaper  
"The Day" with Nicoleta Cinpoes, an ESRA Board member

*Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of russia, the members of European Shakespeare Research Association (ESRA) have always been in a close contact with Ukrainian academic circles and, especially Shakespeare scholars, providing financial support to the Ukrainian military (in particular, through the volunteer group "Shakespeare"), joining numerous projects of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Center, initiating various events that demonstrate solidarity of the European scientific community with the Ukrainian people. One of these events was the Shakespearean round table held at the initiative of Professor Nicoleta Cinpoes (University of Worcester, Great Britain) and Doctor Imke Licherfeld (University of Bonn, Germany) during the biannual ESRA conference (July, 2023). The set of important issues related to specific perspectives on aid to Ukraine at various levels during the war (such as expansion of the space of people's and cultural diplomacy, academic and scientific cooperation, donations for the purchase of medicines for the front, intellectual volunteering etc.) had been discussed and some fruitful solutions were elaborated.*

*During the months of the war, several forms of intellectual volunteering introduced by European and American Shakespeareans proved to be successful. The joint British-Ukrainian-Bulgarian project "Flute's Heartbeat in tune with Ukraine" (Dergach, Torkut, & Lazarenko, 2022) was one of the most impressive among them. Some European Shakespeare scholars (Professor Michael Dobson, Doctor Kelly Hunter, Professor Boika Sokolova, Professor Nicoleta Cinpoes and others) delivered lectures to the Ukrainian students, took an active part in the events of the annual "Shakespeare Days in Ukraine", in All-Ukrainian Shakespeare contest of student research and creative projects named after Vitaly Keis. The Ukrainian scholars were invited to Western Europe to talk about the necessity of decolonizing knowledge about Ukrainian Shakespeareana (Torkut, 2023) and form an adequate reception of the russia-Ukrainian war.*

*The purpose of this publication is to highlight the intellectual and cultural activities of Professor Nicoleta Cinpoes (the University of Worcester), who is one of the powerful promoters of European support for Ukraine. Back in the spring of 2022, she intensified ESRA's constructive communication with Ukrainian Shakespeare scholars and theatre practitioners. And in May 2023, at the invitation of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Center, she came to Ukraine with a series of lectures, attended several Shakespeare performances, and initiated the cooperation of the European Shakespeare Festival Network with the Ivano-Frankivsk National Academic Drama Theater named after Ivan Franko. This is what Olha Kvasnytsia, the journalist of the newspaper "Den", PhD in social communications discusses in the interview with Professor Nicoleta Cinpoes.*

**Key words:** *Shakespeare, Hamlet, war, theater, Ukrainian Interuniversity Shakespeare Center, intellectual volunteering, academic cooperation.*

OK: You came to Ukraine with a lecture "Who is there". What was your main message?

NC: The lecture's message was an invitation to think about decolonizing Shakespeare and culture in general. My focus was one of Shakespeare's most – if not the most – famous plays, namely *Hamlet* in the hope that the Romanian journey of this play in stage productions and Romania's struggle to de-Sovietize and depoliticize its identity and culture after the 1989 Revolution would offer a useful example. Finally, I wish that this encounter was productive and works as an incentive for Ukrainian scholars and students – many in attendance on the day – to think through the question 'Who's there?' and *Hamlet* when exploring Ukrainian identity now and in the future.

OK: As far as I know you are the initiator of the project *Shakespeare as a Shelter*. I was lucky to be at the online meeting on the 21 of February this year and it impressed me much. We have proved that the support of Ukraine among the representatives of "European Shakespeare Research Association" (ESRA) as very powerful. We appreciate it much. Thus, I'd like to ask if you are going to continue this project?

NC: The project 'Shakespeare Shelter' was a joint initiative with my colleague Dr. Imke Licherfeld (University of Bonn, Germany) and we launched it on February 24<sup>th</sup> 2023 to offer a collective embrace and shelter to Ukrainian colleagues on behalf of the European Shakespeare Research Association. 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. We aim to continue this initiative with other events: one of these was the 'Shakespeare Sanctuary' at the York International Shakespeare Festival in York, UK, in April 2023; another will follow at the ESRA Conference in Budapest, 9 July – where as an academic association, we would like to explore ways of supporting Ukraine and plan actions for the future.

OK: It's absolutely evident that all people who are in Ukraine now are in danger of shelling missiles and other unpleasant messages from Russia federation. And we can not say that Ukraine has been often visited by foreign scholars since the beginning of full-scale war. But you dare

and have courage to be with us today, in this horrible wartime, even physically. What makes you to be in a risk?

NC: It has been an extraordinary experience to travel to Ukraine! I did not feel unsafe for a moment: colleagues have been caring every step of the way, explaining procedures for alarms, taking shelter, keeping safe. I am grateful, humbled and amazed at how kind and welcoming everybody has been where I travelled, and how efficient everything runs, completely unbelievable that you all live in a state of war. All credit to the Ukrainian people and to your brave soldiers!

OK: Your visit to our country is of great importance for the further development of Ukrainian Shakespeare Studies. Is anything in common between Shakespeare reception in Romania as your native country and Ukraine?

NC: As my talk suggested, the two countries have a lot in common: sadly, one of the common struggles is being oppressed by Russia; this happened to Romania in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and culturally and politically it has left a strong mark, one we are still undoing. The effects on culture – translations and theatre performance – and education are long-lasting, and Shakespeare has been both an instrument of domination and one of resistance. It is the former that needs de-Russifying and the latter that is alive and fighting today in Ukraine. Romania's journey since 1989 might also offer a possible example for Ukraine after victory and the next stages of development of its culture, education and theatre, when again, Shakespeare is a good barometer of change and transformation.

OK: Why are totalitarian regimes afraid of *Hamlet*?

NC: Because *Hamlet* and Hamlet talk about totalitarian regimes and dictator rulers, about corrupt politicians and methods, about murder and hiding the truth. And about theatre having redeeming powers: it can expose the liars and the guilty, it can purge the evil, it can bring hope. It mobilizes people and they can take heart in their fight to 'be' and 'tell [their] story'.

OK: You are a member of ESRA Board and European Shakespeare Festivals Network. Did this visit to Ukraine prompt you any new possibilities for further collaboration with Ukrainian Shakespeareans and theatre practitioners in the wartime?

NC: As a member of the European Shakespeare Research Association (elected for two consecutive mandates), I have been closely involved in galvanizing the Association's support of the war effort, of continuing the scholarly activities in Ukraine, of finding funding opportunities for Ukrainian students and scholars, and of launching initiatives to keep Ukraine in Europe, its place and home. ESRA was the first Shakespeare organization to express its solidarity with Ukraine and pledge its support; its regular newsletter I have been producing and circulating for the Association to over 750 members across the world has included calls for support (academic and financial) every issue since February 2022. Most recently, at the ESRA conference (July 2023, Budapest), I organized a workshop (with over 50 participants) to respond to the four main challenges Ukrainian colleagues are being confronted with. The workshop galvanized many ESRA members and has led to the organization of two series of masterclasses and two other initiatives regarding the preservation of Ukrainian culture and theatre production. The theatre history and reviewing masterclass, which will be led by a group of specialists (from the UK, France, Hungary, USA, Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, Canada, Germany) will be offered online and free of charge to participants from cities across Ukraine with a background in Shakespeare, in literature, in

theatre, in journalism, in teaching, from 15 January to 19 February 2024. The academic research and writing for publication masterclass will be offered later in the year in a hybrid format that will combine recorded sessions with specialists and interactive workshops with participants so that the focus is on current projects conducted by Ukrainian colleagues.

My long-term commitment to Ukrainian Shakespeareana is linked to one of my other roles, that of organizer of the Shakespeare in Performance conference series at the International Shakespeare Festival, Craiova, Romania since 2010. In this capacity I have ensured that Ukraine is represented at these events and the Ukrainian voices are active participants in the Shakespeare dialogue. In 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2018, I have lobbied for the participation and sponsoring of two Ukrainian speakers at the events. In 2022, we were joined online by colleagues from Ukraine who spoke to room full of academics and artists eager to hear how they could unite their efforts. In 2023, in the small edition to mark 400 years from the publication of the First Folio, entitled Theatre Bridges, the Festival included as its main invited show, the production of *Coriolanus* (from Kyiv). Following my visit to Ukraine in May 2023, I have been lobbying with the director of the European Shakespeare Festivals Network and members of the board to join efforts and support the launch of a Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival. In August 2023, a team of four: the director, two actors and the public relations director of the Ivan Franco Theatre, Ivano-Frankivsk, were invited to the Gdansk Shakespeare Festival to take part in activities of the festival and to have a meeting regarding the potential launch of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival. The experience could not have been more beneficial and productive. Several of the European festivals have pledged to showcase Ukrainian work on their stages. Most importantly, logistics and the calendars were discussed with a view to organizing a Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival in June 2024. I am honoured and humbled to have been part of the birth of this timely and exciting venture, and most delighted to be invited to help with organizing the educational part of the event.

I cannot emphasize strongly enough how important writing about what theatre and art and education do in Ukraine is. The fight artists and academics, but also students and journalists fight to preserve the Ukrainian heritage and culture, and to decolonize its Soviet history are heroic acts. It is our duty to listen to their work and, as Hamlet puts it, 'give it welcome'.

OK: With what impression will you return to Britain?

NC: I already miss Ukraine: it has been a life changing experience! I return to Britain with a renewed sense of duty, as academic and as a friend, to stand firmly with you, your country and your efforts against this unjust war and to support your work to victory. I also return to Britain richer – having met you all, having seen your beautiful country and people, having met old friends and made new ones, humbled – having experienced such a welcoming place and people, and their resilience and commitment to freedom and democracy, and more hopeful – that Ukraine is on its way to victory.

OK: At the end of our conversation, what would you wish Ukrainians?

NC: I am honoured to have visited Ukraine in May 2023; I have returned home but part of my heart is in Ukraine with you and I know you will keep it safe. I cannot wait to come back and be with you all. You are true heroes – Слава Україні!

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## ШЕКСПІР ЯК СПРОТИВ В УКРАЇНІ ХХІ СТОЛІТТЯ

### Інтерв'ю журналістки газети "День" Ольги Квасниці з Ніколетою Чинпоеш

Від початку повномасштабного вторгнення росії представники ESRA постійно перебувають у тісному контакті з українськими науковими колами, зокрема шекспірозвідувачами, надаючи фінансову підтримку українському війську (зокрема через волонтерську групу "Шекспір"), дополучаючись до численних проектів Українського міжнавітєтського шекспірівського центру, ініціюючи різноманітні заходи, які демонструють солідарність європейської наукової спільноти з українським народом. Одним із таких заходів став проведеній за ініціативи професором Ніколети Чинпоеш (Університет Вустера, Великобританія) та Імке Ліхтерфельд (Університет Бонна, Німеччина) Шекспірівський круглий стіл, на якому обговорювалися питання пов'язані з конкретними перспективами щодо допомоги Україні на різних рівнях в часі війни: розширення простору народної та культурної дипломатії, академічна та наукова співпраця, донати на закупівлю медикаментів для фронту, інтелектуальне волонтерство. Упродовж місяців війни сформувалося декілька навдиговику продуктивних форм інтелектуального волонтерства, серед яких спільні британсько-українсько-болгарський проект "Серце Флейти б'ється в унісон з Україною" (Дергач, Торкут, Лазаренко, 2022). Європейські шекспірозвідувачі, зокрема, професор Майлі Добсон, доктор Келлі Хантер, професор Бойка Соколова, професор Ніколета Чинпоеш та ін. читали лекції українським студентам, брали активну участь у заходах щорічного проекту "Дні Шекспіра в Україні", у Всеукраїнському шекспірівському конкурсі студентських дослідницьких і креативних проектів імені Віталія Кейса". Українських науковців було запрошено до Західної Європи (Torkut, 2023) з метою деколонізації знань про українське шекспірозвідування та формування адекватної рецепції російсько-української війни.

Мета цієї публікації – висвітлення інтелектуально-культурної діяльності професорки Вустерського університету Ніколети Чинпоеш, яка виступає одним із потужних промоутерів європейської підтримки України. Ще на весні 2022 р. вона інтенсифікувала конструктивну комунікацію ESRA з українськими шекспірозвідувачами та діячами театру, а в травні 2023 на запрошення Українського міжнавітєтського шекспірівського центру приїхала до України з циклом лекцій, відвідала декілька шекспірівських вистав і започаткувала співпрацю Європейської шекспірівської фестивальної мережі з Івано-Франківським національним академічним драматичним театром імені Івана Франка. Саме про це йдеється в інтерв'ю журналістки газети "День", кандидата наук з соціальних комунікацій Ольги Квасниці із професоркою Ніколетою Чинпоеш.

**Ключові слова:** Шекспір, Гамлет, війна, театр, Український міжнавітєтський шекспірівський центр, інтелектуальне волонтерство, академічна співпраця.

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