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# Maiia Harbuziuk (1965–2023) in Memoriam

## Abstract

This text celebrates the legacy of Maiia Harbuziuk, a distinguished Ukrainian theater critic and scholar who recently passed away before her time. The article highlights her significant contributions to theater studies and her unwavering commitment to promoting Ukrainian theater on the global stage. The author reflects on Maiia Harbuziuk's academic achievements in the field of Shakespeare studies, including her work on the Ukrainian reception of *Hamlet*. She discusses the scope of Harbuziuk's work—academic research, cultural exchange, and the organization of a Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival among many others—in all of which Maiia Harbuziuk excelled, leaving an indelible mark on Ukrainian culture and the world of theater.

## Keywords

Maiia Harbuziuk, Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Ukrainian theater studies

## Abstrakt

### Maiia Harbuziuk (1965–2023): Wspomnienie

Tekst upamiętnia postać Maii Harbuziuk, przedwcześnie zmarłej wybitnej ukraińskiej krytyczki teatralnej i badaczki. Artykuł podkreśla jej znaczący wkład w badania teatralne i niesłabnące zaangażowanie w promowanie ukraińskiego teatru za granicą. Autorka omawia najważniejsze osiągnięcia naukowe Maii Harbuziuk w dziedzinie badań szekspiologicznych, w tym jej prace nad ukraińską recepcją *Hamleta*. Omawia różnorodne przedsięwzięcia Harbuziuk – obejmujące badania naukowe, wymianę kulturalną, a także organizację Ukraińskiego Festiwalu Szekspirowskiego i wiele innych – podkreślając, że w każdej z tych dziedzin Maiia Harbuziuk osiągała znakomite wyniki, pozostawiając niezatarty ślad w ukraińskiej kulturze i świecie teatru.

## Słowa kluczowe

Maja Harbuziuk, Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ukraińskie badania teatralne

Shakespeare and the world of theater are inextricably bound together at all levels. It is impossible to imagine a stage where the Bard's plays would not be performed, and the Shakespearean canon constantly stimulates creative experiments, generating original artistic decisions, new images and meanings, and innovative ideas. Shakespeare's famous line "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players" and a number of his metaphors and phrases, such as "The time is out of joint," have become recognizable cultural codes the world over. Shakespearean theater remains an amazing living organism that moves with the energy of millions of people: those who stage plays, those who watch them, and the mediators between them. The social resonance or even the further fate of the production and its creators often depends on this last group.<sup>1</sup> A theater critic who writes about a production of Shakespeare is expected not only to offer a professional assessment of the aesthetic level of the play, but also to feel and understand the worldview of the artists involved in its preparation, because it is precisely this position that determines both the choice of the play and the character of the staging. In addition, it is vital that such a critic knows the works of the English playwright and is well versed in the centuries-old world tradition of Shakespearean theater and its recent history.

Maiia Harbuziuk (May 6, 1965–August 14, 2023) was just such a theater critic, whose untimely death became an irreparable loss for Ukrainian culture and academia and a great sorrow for all those who were lucky to know this incredible person. One of the most active members of the Ukrainian Inter-University Shakespeare Center, she made a significant contribution to the development and creation of the history of Ukrainian Shakespearean theater. A doctor of Art Studies, Professor, and Dean of the Faculty of Culture and Arts of the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Maiia Harbuziuk was awarded the title of Honorary Senior Research Fellow of the Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham in April 2023. A talented scholar and an outstanding personality, she produced extremely interesting scholarly and creative ideas, which she generously shared with her students, colleagues, and the theater community. Charismatic and sincere, she charged everyone around with her amazing creative energy and love of theater. A highly professional theater critic and theorist, she

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<sup>1</sup> Under the conditions of totalitarianism, theater reviews sometimes lead to irreparable tragedies, turning into a sentence for brilliant artists: for example, the devastating criticism of the production of *Macbeth* by the Ukrainian modernist Les Kurbas (1887–1937) caused political repressions, which ended with the execution of the brilliant director at Sandarmokh. Thus, when it comes to the function of the theater critic in the highly complex system of socio-cultural communication, is not limited solely to the evaluation of the aesthetic aspect.

has initiated and participated in many art projects, served as a jury member at a number of theater festivals and was the editor-in-chief of *Простеценіум* (*Prostsenium*), one of the most respected Ukrainian theater journals. She was an excellent and thoughtful organizer, one who united like-minded people around original ideas and made every possible effort to implement them. Her love for Ukraine was selfless: at various foreign venues, in lecture halls of foreign universities, at international conferences, and at theater festivals, Maiia Harbuziuk always represented our country with dignity. Her broad general cultural erudition was combined with spiritual aristocracy, benevolence, and feminine charm. During the war, her civic position and ability to clearly articulate her values contributed to active involvement of many foreign colleagues in fruitful cooperation with Ukrainian theaters and educators. This, in turn, strengthened Ukraine's support by the global intellectual and artistic communities.

Maiia Harbuziuk's participation in Shakespeare's birthday celebrations in Stratford-upon-Avon in April 2023 and her visit to the UK in June 2023 as part of a delegation from the Faculty of Culture and Arts of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv to the University of Birmingham launched fruitful cooperation and led to a number of creative projects. One of them is a project supported by the Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Ukrainian first show of *Hamlet* in Lviv in 1943, including a virtual museum of the play. Another of Maiia Harbuziuk's project is a landscape area in Lviv called the Shakespeare-Franko Garden. This complex should become not only an attractive tourist destination and a kind of cultural and artistic business card of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, but also a symbolic representation of the thesis of Ivan Franko, the founder of the Ukrainian Shakespeare studies, about William Shakespeare's importance to the formation of the identity of Ukrainians as a European nation. Together with the Ukrainian Inter-University Shakespeare Center, Maiia Harbuziuk worked on an exhibition about the history of Ukrainian *Hamlet* studies that was scheduled to be presented at the University of Worcester in October 2023. In the *Encyclopedia of Ukrainian Shakespeare Studies* project, she volunteered to head the section on the theatrical component of our Shakespearean discourse.

Since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014, we have been nurturing the dream of launching an International Shakespeare Festival in Ukraine, and Maiia Harbuziuk, who has always had her finger on the pulse of Ukrainian theater life, suggested that Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Academic Ukrainian Musical Drama Theater would be the best place to hold this ambitious and much-needed project. She had a long-standing friendship and creative collaboration with the theater's general director, Rostyslav Derzhypil'skyi, and the

actors, many of whom were her former students. The first stage in implementation of this dream a study of existing Shakespearean festivals. Back in 2016, Maiia Harbuziuk, as the editor-in-chief of the *Prostsenum* journal proposed that I write an article on this topic, and after its publication<sup>2</sup> we have repeatedly returned to discussing the idea of holding a similar large-scale event in Ukraine.

The next step was to join the European tradition of Shakespeare festivals in person. In 2018, Maiia Harbuziuk, as a representative of the Ukrainian Inter-University Shakespeare Center, attended the Craiova International Shakespeare Festival and returned with unforgettable impressions. As a theater critic, she deeply and meaningfully analyzed some of the revised productions in her article about the festival.<sup>3</sup> The final chord of this publication testifies to profundity of researcher's thought and her conviction that Ukraine needs its own Shakespeare festival:

What else was surprising about the Romanian festival? For example, the fact that a select group of Shakespeare scholars from all over the world have shown substantial (for foreigners) knowledge of the history and present of Romanian theater. How this could be explained? Surely, by the almost quarter-century presence of the Romanian Shakespeare Festival on the world's theater map? Shouldn't we also establish our own, Ukrainian Shakespeare point on this map? With a modest goal—to have our theater spoken about with knowledge on all continents?<sup>4</sup>

Maiia Harbuziuk wanted Rostyslav Derzhypil'skyi, People's Artist of Ukraine in 2015 and the winner of the Taras Shevchenko National Prize in 2019 in Theatrical Art category, who has the experience of successfully organizing several major festivals, to be the head of the future Shakespeare festival.

During our stay in Stratford-upon-Avon in April 2023, Maiia Harbuziuk told her British colleagues a lot about the history and present of Ukrainian theater Shakespeare studies. In her talks and conversations, she emphasized that while most of our theaters become bomb shelters in the context of a full-scale war, they were also actively engaged in volunteer work and some continued to perform Shakespeare. These accounts have always made a great impression on British theatergoers and Shakespearean scholars, inspiring a great respect

<sup>2</sup> Nataliya Torkut, "Shekspirivski teatralni festyvali v Evropi: istoriia i suchasnist," *Prostsenum*, no. 1–3 (2016): 80–85.

<sup>3</sup> Maiia Iliuk, "Na hostynu do Shekspira . . . v Rumunii! (Notatky z Shekspirivskoho festyvalu 2018 r. u. m. Kraiova, Rumunii)," *Prostsenum*, no. 50/51 (2018): 48–53. <http://publications.lnu.edu.ua/journals/index.php/proscaenium/article/view/2358/1538>.

<sup>4</sup> Iliuk, "Na hostynu do Shekspira," 53.



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for the Ukrainian theater community. In Stratford, Maiia Harbuziuk met with the acting artistic director at the Royal Shakespeare Company, Erica Wyman: foundations for further cooperation in various areas of theater education and art were laid. Representatives of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Shakespeare Institute at the University of Birmingham welcomed the idea of a future Shakespeare festival in Ukraine and promised their support.

In May 2023, the Ukrainian Inter-University Shakespeare Center invited Nicoleta Cinpoes, a professor at the University of Worcester and a member of two boards—the Board of the European Shakespeare Research Association (ESRA) and Board of the European Shakespeare Festivals Network (ESFN), to Ukraine, and it was Maiia Harbuziuk who not only arranged a lecture by the renowned Shakespearean scholar for Ukrainian students at Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, but also managed to introduce her to Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi and his troupe. After watching *Romeo and Juliet* in the basement of Ivano-Frankivsk theater, which has also become a bomb shelter since the beginning of the full-scale war, there was a lively discussion about the play and the idea of the first Shakespeare festival in Ukraine, which Nicoleta Cinpoes actively supported. Subsequently, in early August, the Ivano-Frankivsk team visited the Gdańsk Shakespeare Festival, and the Board of the European Shakespeare Festivals Network, including its leaders Philip Parr, Joanna Śnieżko, and Nicoleta Cinpoes, enthusiastically agreed to help organize the Ukrainian Shakespeare Festival in June 2024 in Ivano-Frankivsk. According to the festival concept, in addition to performances of Shakespeare, there is also a powerful academic and educational component (including master classes for young actors and directors, workshops for future theater critics, and Shakespearean seminars and exhibitions). Maiia Harbuziuk and Nicoleta Cinpoes have already started working on this component.

Maiia Harbuziuk's contribution to development of Ukrainian Shakespearean literature is extremely significant and valuable, one not limited to the large number of purely scholarly works and active participation in preparation and holding of all (six) International Shakespeare Conferences in Ukraine. Maiia Harbuziuk's reports at plenary sessions of our conferences, as well as public lectures she gave as part of the annual international project Shakespeare Days in Ukraine (2018–2023), have always been marked by academic novelty and depth of theater analysis. As a jury member at the annual All-Ukrainian Shakespearean Competition for Student Research and Creative Projects, she has always actively supported talented contestants, especially authors of theater-related works.

Maiia Harbuziuk's participation in many projects with the Ukrainian Inter-University Center and the world Shakespeare community has always caused a strong media response that not only aroused lively public interest but also stimulated (re-)reading and watching performances of Shakespeare's works. In 2018, with her direct participation, we held a contest among students for the



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best review of a Shakespeare's play. Works of winners, Yuliia Spinchevska and Yelyzaveta Bezushko, were published in *Prostsenium*.<sup>5</sup>

The role of Maiia Harbuziuk in structuring the Shakespearean discourse in the 21st century cannot be overestimated. Owing to her persistent research in Ukrainian and foreign archives today we have a vast number of unique

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<sup>5</sup> Yuliia Spinchevska and Yelyzaveta Bezushko, "Dvanadtsiata nich (Studenty retsenziuit vystavu Dvanadtsiata nich V. Shekspira Mykolaivskoho akademichnoho khudozhnoho rosiiskoho dramatychnoho teatru)," *Prostsenium*, no. 50/51 (2018): 61–64, <http://publications.lnu.edu.ua/journals/index.php/proscaenium/article/view/2361/1539>.

documents about Shakespeare's productions in Ukraine in the late 18th–19th centuries.<sup>6</sup>

Maiia Harbuziuk's PhD thesis, defended at the Institute of Art Studies, Folklore and Ethnology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in 2007, was the first thorough study of the stage history of *Hamlet* in Lviv theaters in 1796–1987. This work reconstructs the chronology of performances of the most famous Shakespearean tragedy in the territory of modern Ukraine by Austrian and Polish troupes from the late 18th till the third decade of the 20th century, emphasizing the relation of Ukrainian *Hamlet* studies to the formation and development of the national theater. The researcher convincingly demonstrates that the premiere of the Ukrainian *Hamlet* at the Lviv Opera House in 1943 was a kind of act of self-identification of the Ukrainians as part of the European humanist space, a part of the “cultural nationalism” program in the struggle for the nation's political self-determination. The author's actantial model of semiotic and structural analysis of the play and performance offered in the dissertation was successfully tested by Maiia Harbuziuk in the course of researching four stage performances of the tragedy *Hamlet* on the Lviv stage (1943, 1957, 1981, 1997). This model, based on principles of Algirdas Greimas and Anne Ubersfeld, has undeniable theoretical and methodological value for theater critics and art historians, and the researcher continued researching Ukrainian theatrical Shakespeare studies in her subsequent publications.

Maiia Harbuziuk's academic articles and dozens of theater reviews of contemporary performances of Shakespeare's plays are invaluable for forming a systematic understanding of the genesis and specifics of development of theatrical Shakespeare studies in Ukraine. She actively contributed to returning forgotten names and texts, thanks to which we have an idea of the specifics of the first production of *Hamlet* staged by Yosyp Hirniak at Lviv Opera House on September 21, 1943.<sup>7</sup> Research observations made by Maiia Harbuziuk back in 2011 became one of the cornerstones in the development of the concept of the aforementioned exhibition in Worcester.<sup>8</sup> Theater research devoted to individual stage interpretations of Shakespeare on the Ukrainian stage are of utmost

<sup>6</sup> Maiia Harbuziuk, “Pershi postavy *Hamleta* V. Shekspira na terytorii Ukrainy (kinets XVIII–pochatok XIX st.),” *Zapysky Naukovoho tovarystva imeni Shevchenka. Pratsi Teatroznavchoi komisii* 254 (2007): 129–146; Maiia Harbuziuk, “*Hamlet* V. Shekspira na ukraïnskyi steni: ‘Dzerkalo y vidbytok chasu’ (na materialii lvivskykh postav),” *Renaissansni Studii*, no. 18/19 (2012): 157–180.

<sup>7</sup> Maiia Harbuziuk, “Natsionalna prapremiera *Hamleta* v ukrainskomu teatroznavstvi druhoi polovyny XX st.,” *Zapysky Naukovoho tovarystva imeni Shevchenka. Pratsi Teatroznavchoi komisii* 245 (2003): 325–338; Maiia Harbuziuk, “Teatralna Shekspiriana Mykhaila Rudnytskoho,” *Visnyk Lvivskoho universytetu. Seriya Mystetstvoznavstvo*, no. 9 (2009): 3–15.

<sup>8</sup> Maiia Harbuziuk, “Ukrainski pereklady *Hamleta* Viliama Shekspira v konteksti rozvytku natsionalnogo teatru,” *Zapysky Naukovoho tovarystva imeni Shevchenka. Pratsi Teatroznavchoi komisii* 262 (2011): 80–98.

importance,<sup>9</sup> Shakespeare festivals,<sup>10</sup> as well as Shakespeare-centered interviews (such as one with Michael Dobson, entitled “It’s Unbearable When They Make a Museum out of Shakespeare”<sup>11</sup>).

Having brilliantly defended her doctoral dissertation focused on an extremely complex artistic construct—dramatic and stage representations of hetero-images with Ukrainian semantics in the Polish theater of the 19th century, Harbuziuk continued studying theatrical Shakespeare history. A distinctive feature of academic style of her publications on Shakespearean themes is her interdisciplinarity combining art and literary vectors, as well as the fact that her Shakespearean analytics are always accompanied by a deep understanding of the rules of the stage. It is difficult to imagine contemporary Ukrainian Shakespeare studies without such a bright personality as Maiia Harbuziuk. Her uplifting smile, her eyes radiating joy and shining with love for life will live on in the memory of those who were fortunate enough to know her. Her ideas will inspire more than one generation of theater artists and scholars. We must bring her projects, plans, and dreams to life, and then the words from the great Shakespeare’s 55th sonnet will come true:

’Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity  
 Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room  
 Even in the eyes of all posterity,  
 That wear this world out to the ending doom.



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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Maiia Harbuziuk, “Skilky ‘Hamletiv’ u ‘Hamleti’? Sproba strukturnoho analizu klasychnoho tvoruv,” *Visnyk Lvivskoho universytetu. Seriiia Mystetstvoznavstvo*, no. 4 (2004): 19–27.

<sup>10</sup> Nataliya Torkut, Maiia Harbuziuk, and Oksana Sobol, “Shakespeare Festivals as a Medium of Value,” in *European Values in Ukrainian Education: Challenges and Frontiers*, ed. Olena Tupakhina et al. (Lviv: Liha Press, 2021), 159–173.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Dobson, “Nesterpno, koly z Shekspira robliat muzei,” interviewed by Maiia Harbuziuk, *Prostsenum*, no. 50/51 (2018): 56–60, <http://publications.lnu.edu.ua/journals/index.php/proscaenium/article/view/2359/1537>.

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