

The Encyclopedia Herald of Ukraine

2024. Vol. 16

DOI: 10.37068/evu.16.10

Article history:

Received 12/11/2024

Accepted 28/11/2024

Published 13/12/2024

Citation: Mukha, V. (2024). On the digital republishing of Ukrainian literary classics. *The Encyclopedia Herald of Ukraine*, 16, 1-6.

<http://doi.org/10.37068/evu.16.10>

© 2024 Author

This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution license, which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.



ISSN 2706-9990 (print)
ISSN 2707-000X (online)

On the digital republishing of Ukrainian literary classics

Vladyslav Mukha

Institute of Encyclopedic Research, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine

ORCID: 0009-0004-3493-2727

Email: mukha@nas.gov.ua

Abstract

This communication examines the creation and implementation of a series of interconnected online encyclopedias dedicated to the works of prominent Ukrainian figures: Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko, Mykhailo Hrushevsky, and Lesia Ukrainka. These digital resources have significantly contributed to Ukrainian culture and literature. The author offers an in-depth look at the technological framework of the project, including the content management system, website structure, and tools for searching and analyzing information. Attention is also given to the process of populating the sites with content and evaluating user traffic. Finally, the review outlines a vision for the project's future development, highlighting plans for expansion and enhancement.

Keywords

digital humanities, online encyclopedias, Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko, Mykhailo Hrushevsky, Lesya Ukrainka.

INTRODUCTION

In 2010–2011, Mykola Zharkyykh created four websites under the collective title “Encyclopedia of the Life and Work of NN”. These sites were designed to provide the most comprehensive online collections of works by Taras Shevchenko¹, Ivan Franko², Mykhailo Hrushevsky³, and Lesya Ukrainka⁴ online.

There is an undeniable need for digital resources about prominent Ukrainians who played a pivotal role in shaping the modern Ukrainian nation, with an emphasis on their creative achievements. Unlike traditional encyclopedias—typically structured as alphabetically ordered collections of reference articles—these websites primarily focus on the works of the featured individuals. Biographical reference information is provided in a dedicated “Reference” section on each website.

The concept behind these digital resources redefines digital encyclopedias in their broadest sense. They aim to deliver exhaustive information about these figures, emphasizing their creative legacies. This focus not only highlights their contributions to national culture but also makes their work relevant and engaging for the modern generation of Ukrainians.

OVERVIEW OF WEB RESOURCES

The project began with a website dedicated to Lesya Ukrainka, where M. Zharykh tested all technological approaches that were subsequently applied to the remaining resources. It’s worth noting that all websites use a single content management system (SMEREKA), which has been in operation since 2010. All sites utilize a unified adaptive basic web design, suitable for both wide screens and smartphones, as well as a single set of page templates (main page for text, wide page for images, etc.). Individual sites differ in their color scheme, a few graphic elements, and minor variations in text styles. A reader familiar with one site can easily navigate the others and quickly find the desired information.

All websites employ the same basic section structure: News — Biography — [Works] — Letters — Gallery — Studies — Reference — For Students (with a list of works included in the school curriculum). The ‘[Works]’ section group contains standard subsections common in collected works: Poems — Epic Poems — Dramatic Works — Prose — Opinion Journalism — Literary Criticism — Other Works — Translations — Folklore Recordings. The “Gallery” section includes standard subsections: Portraits — Autographs and Publications — Historical Sites — Monuments.

¹ <https://www.t-shevchenko.name>

² <https://www.i-franko.name>

³ <https://www.m-hrushevsky.name>

⁴ <https://www.l-ukrainka.name>

If necessary, the aforementioned typical structure can be modified to suit a specific personality. It adapts to the features of each author's creative legacy (this is done by the site editor and does not require reprogramming). For example, on the "Taras Shevchenko" website, the "Poems" and "Epic Poems" sections are combined into one section, "Kobzar", in accordance with established publishing practice. Conversely, a "Painting" section is created, which is not present on other sites. On the "Ivan Franko" website, the "Literary Criticism" section is separated into a separate "History of Literature" section, which Ivan Franko was extensively involved in throughout his life. Instead of "Folklore Recordings", a "Ethnography and Folklore Studies" section is established, as Franko was not only an outstanding collector of folklore but also the author of a large series of folklore studies. The website dedicated to Mykhailo Hrushevsky has a somewhat different structure, reflecting the nature of his work. The "Poems", "Dramatic Works", "Prose", and "Translations" sections are grouped as subsections of the "Fine Writing" section, while the "History of Ukraine-Rus" and "Historical Works" sections are highlighted separately. Similar to the "Ivan Franko" website, a "Biographies. Obituaries" section is singled out. Both authors wrote a great many such articles.

Table 1 demonstrates the amount of information provided by digital resources about notable figures. The unit for determining the amount of information on websites is the digital sheet proposed by M. Zharykh. We see that the largest site is dedicated to I. Franko, and the smallest one to Lesya Ukrainka.

Table 1. Data volume on sites

<i>Websites about</i>	<i>Digital sheets by the end of 2023</i>
Taras Shevchenko	919
Ivan Franko	1791
Mykhailo Hrushevsky	935
Lesya Ukrainka	723

The complete works and letters of Taras Shevchenko and Lesya Ukrainka are made accessible on dedicated web resources. These digital repositories serve as invaluable information sources for scholars and the general public alike. To enhance these platforms, future developments should concentrate on expanding the content in sections such as "Studies", "Reference", and "Gallery". In contrast, the digital representation of Ivan Franko's creative output and, particularly, the extensive archive of Mykhailo Hrushevsky remains incomplete. The comprehensive digitalization of the works of these eminent figures is a significant undertaking that demands considerable time and resources.

The online resources offer readers unique tools that are not found in traditional print publications. A brief overview of these features follows.

1. Paragraph numbering. All paragraphs in each work are numbered, allowing for precise referencing. For instance, while the link <https://www.t->

[shevchenko.name/uk/Kobzar/1845/IMertvymIZhyvym.html](https://www.t-shevchenko.name/uk/Kobzar/1845/IMertvymIZhyvym.html) would lead you to the poem “To the Dead, the Living and the Unborn”, another link, <https://www.t-shevchenko.name/uk/Kobzar/1845/IMertvymIZhyvym.html#Line94>, directs you specifically to the line “If you applied yourselves to study,...” (this is achieved using the anchor “Line94” in the URL). Interestingly, such precise referencing is characteristic of the Bible (e.g., Psalm 1:1-3), and now, thanks to the creation of appropriate resources, similar markup is available for works by our classics.

2. *Textual variants.* Research in Ukrainian literature involves meticulous efforts to identify and reconcile different versions of texts published across various editions, ultimately forming canonical versions. This process is crucial for creating scholarly editions that not only present a consistent canonical text but also document textual variants reflecting historical and editorial changes. Similarly, specialized online resources have implemented systems for managing textual variants, enabling users to compare and analyze texts from diverse sources. The primary version available is typically the canonical text, while variants can be accessed selectively. This approach provides readers and researchers with a multi-layered textual framework that deepens the understanding of literary heritage and enhances its value as a resource. The most extensive collection of textual variants is presented on the “Taras Shevchenko” website.

3. *Hierarchical search.* As a tool, this type of search has significant differences compared to traditional search. On the websites we are describing, including “Taras Shevchenko”, a hierarchical search method is used, which allows you to significantly narrow its focus by limiting its results to a specific section of the site. For example, by selecting the “Kobzar” section and entering a search query, the user will only receive results located in that section. Words or phrases found in other sections of the site will not be included in the search results. This approach has several advantages: hierarchical search is fast, intuitive, and often provides more structured, relevant results compared to the results of general search engines. In addition, links in the hierarchical search provide precise positioning: following them directs the reader directly to the specific paragraph where a match was found — this is facilitated by the aforementioned text markup. Thus, hierarchical search allows you to search within a specific section as well as cover the entire site if the query is made from the root page.

4. *Cross-References.* Cross-references are quite common in articles on individual websites within a larger project. For instance, in his 1881 article “Темне царство” [“The Dark Kingdom”], dedicated to Taras Shevchenko’s political poetry, Ivan Franko quotes the latter’s lines: “Haydamaks are not warriors, but robbers and thieves”. Considering that the project is a digital re-publication, when formatting Franko’s article, these words were presented as a hyperlink leading to Shevchenko’s poem “Холодний яр” [“Cold Ravine”], specifically to line 57 where these words appear. Such cross-references enhance the informativeness of the electronic text and offer additional convenience for the reader.

5. *Backlinks.* The concept of backlinks is borrowed from Wikipedia, where a list of pages linking to a selected page is available. A similar tool has been implemented in the “SMEREKA” system. For example, the poem “Холодний яр” currently has

19 backlinks, with the aforementioned article by Ivan Franko being the second on the list.

6. *Indexes*. There are two types of indexes created by “SMEREKA”: alphabetical, which organizes works by title, and chronological, which sorts works and letters by date. These indexes are generated at the request of the site editor, stored in a separate table, and displayed quickly on the corresponding pages. The “Biography” section for each author includes comprehensive alphabetical and chronological indexes covering all available materials. Additionally, specialized indexes can be featured in specific sections of the site. For instance, the “Taras Shevchenko” section includes a dedicated alphabetical index of works from “Kobzar”, organized hierarchically in a manner similar to search engine structures.

7. *Maps*. Each website’s “Biography” section includes a page with a map illustrating the travels of the featured figure, created using Google Maps technology. This tool enables the creation of customized thematic maps. Taras Shevchenko’s travel map, for instance, features 198 markers distributed across several chronological layers. Notably, the 1851 map of the Aral Sea includes 52 markers, pinpointing Shevchenko’s locations during his 1848–1849 expedition. Separate markers also highlight places where Shevchenko created sketches, with direct links to the artworks. Another type of map focuses on works tied to real-world geography, such as Ivan Franko’s poem “Вандрівка русина з Бідю” [“Wanderings of a Ruthenian with Misfortune”] or his short story “Для домашнього огнища” [“For the Home Hearth”]. These maps allow users to trace the protagonist’s movements step by step through the streets of Lviv. Such maps enhance readers’ navigation of the works while adding depth to their understanding.

Multilingualism. Ukrainian is the primary language used across all websites, with the majority of content presented in this language. However, each website also offers Russian and English versions. Users can select their preferred language by clicking the corresponding button in the top right corner of the page. The structure of the website is identical across all language versions. (If a page is available in only one or two languages, the system automatically hides the selection buttons for unavailable languages.) Many works by Taras Shevchenko and Lesya Ukrainka have already been translated into Russian and English, and populating the websites with these translations is a future goal.

The results of any endeavor serve as a crucial indicator of its success, and website traffic metrics are no exception. In 2023, our websites collectively reached 4.8 million readers. The diagram (Fig. 1) illustrates the dynamic fluctuations in readership over the years, characterized by cyclical patterns of decline, plateaus, and periods of heightened activity. The “Taras Shevchenko” website was the first to surpass 1 million annual readers in 2015, but it was not until 2021 that it managed to sustain this level. Notably, significant anniversaries, such as the 150th birth anniversary of Lesya Ukrainka in 2021, have had a marked impact on increased website traffic. However, we consistently observe a decline in reader interest following such spikes in activity.

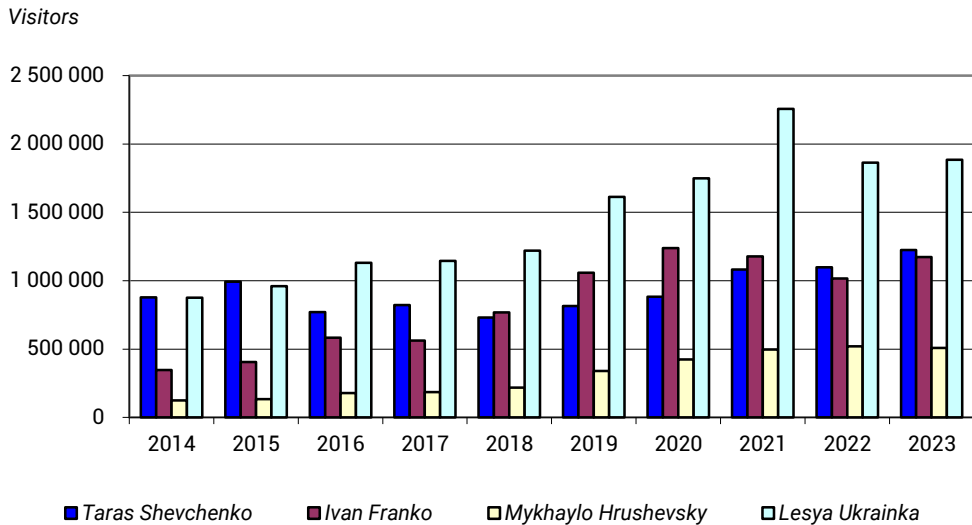


Figure 1. Website traffic trends over the past 10 years

Each website has a star performer: a page that gets the most traffic. For sites dedicated to Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko, and Mykhailo Hrushevsky, it is the homepage (attracting 670,000, 377,000, and 180,000 readers, respectively). However, for the Lesya Ukrainka website, the real crowd-pleaser is the poem “Contra spem spero!” (with a whopping 3,646,000 views, compared to just 983,000 for the homepage). Why so popular? It is likely due to its place in the school curriculum. Students searching for poems online often end up on this page. (This theory is supported by the fact that traffic to this page is lowest on Fridays and Saturdays, when students are less likely to be doing their homework.) We have been tracking website traffic since each site launched, and the numbers are staggering. In some cases, the online audience is even bigger than the total print run of all books about these figures.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This content was prepared based on consultations and advice provided by Mykola Zharkyykh, to whom we express our gratitude.