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The Literary Encyclopedia of Cherkasy: towards reference book implementation

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Abstract

The project report provides an overview of the preparatory stages leading up to the creation of the Literary Encyclopedia of Cherkasy and offers a detailed description of the structural components implemented in the first two volumes of this three-volume reference work, ensuring its thoroughness and comprehensiveness in documenting the region's literary history. Using a combination of historical and literary analysis, systematization, and description, this project report offers a comprehensive exploration of the enduring importance and current applicability of the Literary Encyclopedia of Cherkasy. This Encyclopedia is highlighted as a significant contribution to the preservation and popularization of the Cherkasy region's literary heritage.

Keywords

literary studies, regional encyclopedia, cultural heritage, Cherkasy region.

INTRODUCTION

The current state of historiography in Ukraine is characterized by a “growing interest in regional history, which is manifested in the emergence of historical regional studies as a distinct branch of scientific research” (Saienko, 2017, p. 86). In fact, one can assert that a “specific type of scholarly, cultural-educational, and publishing activity has emerged and is successfully developing — the preparation of regional encyclopedias, primarily with a historical and local studies focus” (Sokolov, 2017, p. 94). This trend is clearly observed in the case of Cherkasy region, as the Corpus of Encyclopedic Publications of Ukraine (Zhelezniak & Ishchenko, 2017) lists almost two dozen reference works about this area, with the Literary Encyclopedia of Cherkasy (Polishchuk, 2020; Polishchuk, 2021) occupying a prominent position. This encyclopedia serves as “evidence of the continuous development of culture, science, and education, and as a testament to the strength and resilience of the Ukrainian nation in its various manifestations, activities, domains, and representatives” (Klymenko-Syniok, 2022).

The aim of our review is to outline the foundation, structure, and features of this encyclopedia, as well as its contribution to the development of regional literary studies. The review employs methods of historical-literary analysis, systematization, and description, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the significance and relevance of the Literary Encyclopedia of Cherkasy.

ENCYCLOPEDIA OVERVIEW

In 2020, the first volume of the Literary Encyclopedia of Cherkasy was published in Cherkasy, followed by the second volume in 2021. The author and compiler of this encyclopedia is the author of this text. Work is currently underway on the third and final volume of the project. Naturally, the idea for such an ambitious endeavor was not spontaneous but rather the result of over 30 years of literary local studies, which gradually took on a more systematic character and clearer structuring of the collected material.

My interest in literary local studies dates back to my student years at Cherkasy Pedagogical Institute, inspired by a large and detailed display titled *Writers — Natives of Cherkasy Region* in one of the classrooms. The display featured about two dozen portraits of writers and stood out for its meticulous craftsmanship. Later, around 1984, while teaching at the Ukrainian Literature Department of the same institute, I conceived the idea of creating a literary local history museum at the institution.

By 1999–2002, this idea materialized into an author-led regional museum, *Literary Cherkasy*, comprising six thematic exhibition rooms. The museum continues to operate, fulfilling an educational mission and serving as a unique research laboratory for philology students.

The path from the museum’s conception to its realization involved collecting and accumulating relevant literary materials and working with various local history sources. By the late 1980s, the region’s main library compiled a biobibliographic index *Writers of Cherkasy Region* (Volynets et al., 1990), containing concise information about approximately 80 writers from Shevchenko’s homeland. In 1988, the biobibliographic reference *Writers of Soviet Ukraine, 1917–1987* (Koval, Pavlovska, 1988) was published, which for the first time in decades included information on writers repressed during Stalin’s era. This directory provided information on over 100 writers related to Cherkasy. These two publications served as a foundation for further research.

Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, I reached out to writers from the region, requesting books, photographs, and documents for the future museum. Many writers responded positively, supporting the museum initiative. One of the first to reply was Oles Honchar, who sent a letter along with several autographed books, mentioning his battalion's battles on the Ros River, as described in his novel *Man and Arms*.

Milestones in the study of Cherkasy's literary local history include small brochures such as *Cherkasy Region in Questions and Answers (Cherkasy Literary Heritage)* and *The Literature of the Native Land in the Schools of Cherkasy Region* (both published in 1990), as well as numerous thematic articles in periodicals. The first brochure provided a district-by-district list of Cherkasy writers, important for the region's teachers, while the second offered lesson plans on literary local history for schools. Over the decades, attention to literary local studies in secondary and higher education has remained a central focus, manifested in various forms—guides, textbooks, specialized courses, scientific conferences at various levels, including international ones, centered on the works of regional writers.

A significant stage in collecting and systematizing literary local history information was the compilation of works by repressed or overlooked writers from Cherkasy. This effort led to the publication of collections featuring works by Todos Osmachka, Stepan Ben, O. Lan, Dmytro Borziak, Yukhym Hedia, Andriy Chuzhyi, Olena Zhurlyva, Mykhailo Drai-Khmara, Pavlo Fylypovych, Vasyl Domanitskyi, and others between the 1990s and 2010s.

In 2012 and 2013, a two-volume textbook titled *The Literature of the Native Land (Literary Cherkasy)* was published, containing diverse methodological, bibliographic, and reference information (authors: V. Polishchuk, M. Polishchuk). This work laid the groundwork for the idea of creating the *Literary Encyclopedia of Cherkasy*. Another crucial element was my long-term agreement with a regional administration department to annually analyze complete sets of district and regional newspapers from Cherkasy, extracting and categorizing literary materials alphabetically into thematic folders. These folders, totaling over 200, became a factual basis for compiling the encyclopedia.

The primary models for structuring and organizing the *Literary Encyclopedia of Cherkasy* were several renowned encyclopedic publications: the three-volume *Ukrainian Literary Encyclopedia*, the six-volume *Shevchenko Encyclopedia*, the ten-volume *Encyclopedia of the History of Ukraine*, and the two-volume *Literary Studies Encyclopedia* (compiled by Yuriy Kovaliv). Additionally, more localized sources were consulted and are thoroughly cited throughout the *Literary Encyclopedia of Cherkasy (LEC)*. Naturally, almost all LEC entries emphasize the regional "Cherkasy" dimension.

A distinctive feature of the LEC is the author-compiler's effort to include evaluative judgments about individuals and phenomena from both prominent scholars and local researchers, historians, and writers.

The vast amount of factual material collected, along with insights from the practices of the aforementioned encyclopedias, shaped the principles underlying the LEC's structure. Ultimately, the content was organized into 17 thematic directions, each encompassing entries on personalities, literary phenomena, concepts, and more. These directions, along with brief comments where necessary, are outlined below.

- **Writers, Literary Critics, and Folklorists Born in Cherkasy:** This section profiles individuals who were born within the administrative boundaries of Cherkasy Oblast since its formation in 1954. The inclusion criterion is the publication of at least one book of creative works or scholarly studies.
- **Writers, Literary Critics, etc., with Roots in Cherkasy:** This category includes individuals whose family origins are in Cherkasy, even if they were not born there.

Examples include Lyudmyla Starytska-Chernyakhivska, daughter of Mykhailo Starytsky, and Ihor Lahoza, son of Viktor Lahoza.

- **Writers, Literary Critics, etc., Born Elsewhere but Connected to Cherkasy:** This section covers individuals who, though born outside Cherkasy, have significant ties to the region through their lives and works. Notable examples include Vasyl Symonenko and Vasyl Zakharchenko, both born in Poltava Oblast.
- **Foreign Writers Who Visited Cherkasy:** This category includes renowned international writers who visited Cherkasy at various times, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Aleksandr Tvardovsky, and Rasul Gamzatov.
- **Foreign Writers Translated by Natives of Cherkasy:** This section highlights the translation work of Cherkasy-born translators, contributing to the region's reputation as a center for translation.
- **Foreign Writers Who Translated Works by Natives of Cherkasy:** This category focuses on foreign translators who have translated the works of Cherkasy writers, particularly Taras Shevchenko.
- **Taras Shevchenko:** This section provides a comprehensive overview of Shevchenko's life, work, and impact on Ukrainian literature and international literary relations.
- **Literary Theory:** This section explores literary theories and concepts, illustrating them with examples from the works of Cherkasy writers.
- **Historical Figures:** This category includes historical figures, both from Cherkasy and elsewhere, who have been the subjects of literary works by Cherkasy writers.
- **Publications:** This section covers journals, almanacs, and collections published in Cherkasy or by natives of Cherkasy.
- **Folklore:** This section includes folklore texts, such as songs, legends, and tales, collected in Cherkasy or related to the region.
- **Toponymy:** This section explores the place names of Cherkasy, including villages, towns, and natural features, and their connections to literary works.
- **Hydronymy:** This section focuses on the names of rivers and other water bodies in Cherkasy and their literary significance.
- **Memorials:** This section covers literary museums, monuments, and other memorials dedicated to Cherkasy writers.
- **Literary Awards:** This section lists literary awards and prizes associated with Cherkasy writers.
- **Publishing:** This section provides information on publishing houses and printing presses in Cherkasy.
- **Journalism:** This section covers periodicals and newspapers published in Cherkasy that featured literary content.

The Literary Encyclopedia of Cherkasy includes photographic portraits only of those writers who are members of the Union of Writers of Ukraine, who were born in Cherkasy region, and who are considered classics of Ukrainian literature of the 19th and early 20th centuries. This principle is almost entirely upheld throughout all volumes of the regional encyclopedia. Illustrations also feature titles of certain periodicals and non-periodical publications, as well as logos of regional and district newspapers, among others.

The author-compilers of the Literary Encyclopedia of Cherkasy view this publication as a token of gratitude to those local historians of Cherkasy, such as Mykola Komarnytskyi, Mykhailo Ponomarenko, Mykola Pshenychnyi, Ivan Sorokopud, Volodymyr Khomenko,

and other dedicated individuals, who in past decades worked diligently to study and preserve the region's rich literary history for future generations.

CONCLUSIONS

The Literary Encyclopedia of Cherkasy is the result of over 30 years of meticulous work, with the third (last) volume currently in progress. It represents a significant achievement in Ukrainian regional literary studies, not only aggregating knowledge about the literary heritage of Cherkasy but also fostering further regional research and promoting the cultural heritage of the area.

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