

EXCURSION TO THE THEATRICAL SHAKESPEARIANA OF ZHYTOMYR

The history of Shakespearean productions in the theatres of Zhytomyr dates back to the early 19th century [8; 12; 13]. Our project, the “Theatrical Shakespeariana of Zhytomyr” walking tour, is designed to inform both residents and visitors of the city about the plays performed here, the theatre companies involved, and the translators who have contributed to the promotion of Shakespeare’s works over more than two centuries. The tour was developed in 2024 as part of the broader literary and local history initiative “Reading Zhytomyr”, coordinated by the Faculty of Pedagogical Technologies and Lifelong Education [7].

The excursion was developed on the basis of research that systematizes information about Shakespearean theatrical projects in Zhytomyr from the 19th to the 21st century [3]. The walking tour begins at the historical site of the first theatre in the Volyn province (the original building has not been preserved), continues to the structure that housed the city’s theatre from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century (now the Regional Philharmonic), and concludes at the present-day Zhytomyr Regional Music and Drama Theatre named after Ivan Kocherha. This is the venue where numerous Shakespearean productions were staged, translated, and prepared by the theatre's staff—and where both Borys Ten and Ivan Kocherha worked on their translations. The final stop is the Regional Puppet Theatre, whose history includes a postmodern performance based on Hamlet.

During the tour, participants learn about the history of Shakespearean productions at these venues, the theatre troupes and actors involved, and the languages of the performances, with special attention to translations into Polish and Ukrainian by Ivan Holovynsky, Borys Ten, and Ivan Kocherha [9].

The name of the Great Bard on the literary and theatrical maps of our cities continues to draw the attention of theatre scholars, historians, and local researchers. One notable example is the bilingual virtual museum #Hamlet-UA. Act I, Scene 1943 [1], which documents the history of the first performance of Hamlet in Ukrainian, staged in Lviv. Interactive projects like this help bring classical works closer to the public while accumulating historical, literary, theatrical, and cultural knowledge.

This is why we emphasize the particular importance of mapping the literary and theatrical landscape — offering an opportunity to retrace and reimagine the routes marked by key milestones in Shakespearean performances and translations within our city. The “Theatrical Shakespeariana of Zhytomyr” tour is the first of its kind in the city. It is based on data that has been systematized specifically from a Shakespearean perspective, a type of research that has not been previously undertaken in such a comprehensive form.

The project contributes to the broader framework of historical and theatrical research aimed at collecting and disseminating information about the performance of William Shakespeare’s works in Ukraine. Its relevance lies not only in highlighting local theatres within the context of world classics, but also in fostering public engagement with classical heritage. Notably, there is already interest in the tour from local schools, with a request for an excursion tailored to high school students who study Shakespeare as part of their curriculum.

An equally important dimension of the tour is its focus on translation. The languages of performance, the development of Polish [10; 11] and Ukrainian [4; 5] translations under the constraints of imperial language policies, and the staging of plays banned by the metropolis in the “provincial” city of Zhytomyr all underscore the cultural significance of Shakespearean theatre in the processes of cultural emancipation and nation-building.

In the process of preparing this work, I consulted archival materials, conducted interviews with actors and the theatre director, and analyzed the writings of V. Vrublevskiy, B. Bilous, V. Humeniuk, among others [2; 4; 5]. The findings proved so significant for both the cultural history and the contemporary identity of our city that we decided to develop the walking tour “Zhytomyr Theatre Shakespeariana.”

Our aim is to promote and popularize the outcomes of this research, making the history of Shakespearean performances accessible to the public and contributing to the shaping of Zhytomyr’s literary and theatrical landscape. In the future, guided tours will be offered upon request, and the routes of Zhytomyr Theatre Shakespeariana and Reading Zhytomyr will be integrated as part of a broader initiative to build the city’s historical and literary identity (a dedicated website is currently under development).

At the same time, there remains a gap in available information regarding performances from the early 20th century up to 1944. The hypothesis concerning Borys Ten’s involvement in translating *The Taming of the Shrew*, as well as the fate of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (including variations in the Ukrainian titles across different sources), still requires further verification [2; 4; 5].

The “Zhytomyr Theatre Shakespeariana” project not only uncovers lesser-known aspects of the city’s cultural past but also makes them accessible through an engaging public history format. By combining archival research, translation studies, and community outreach, it bridges academic inquiry and cultural tourism. As the first systematic exploration of Shakespearean theatre in Zhytomyr, it lays the groundwork for further research, particularly into the underexplored period of the early 20th century. Future developments—including a dedicated website and integrated routes—will continue to expand the project’s educational and cultural impact, fostering a deeper appreciation for the global legacy of Shakespeare in a local context.

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