

# Early Ukrainian Identity: The Case of Taras Shevchenko

It does not touch me, not a whit  
If I live in Ukraine or no,  
If men recall me, or forget,  
Lost as I am, in foreign snow, —  
Touches me not the slightest whit.  
Captive, to manhood I have grown  
In strangers' homes, and by my own  
Unmourned, a weeping captive still, I'll die....  
But it does touch me deep if knaves,  
Evil rogues lull our Ukraine  
Asleep, and only in the flames  
Let her, all plundered, wake again...  
That touches me with deepest pain.  
—From "It Does Not Touch Me", Taras Shevchenko

Modern Ukrainian literary consciousness, akin to its forgetfulness, claims several nationalist heroes, chief of which is Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861).<sup>1</sup> As an introduction before discussing the imagined memory that he supplied Ukraine, I hope to supply a literary context and contrast left by Shevchenko's better-known contemporary, Nikolai Gogol (or in Ukrainian, Mykola Hohol, 1809-52). Gogol's works narrowed the distance between Ukraine and Russia, blurring their national distinctions (which works have been much less useful for Ukrainian or Russian nation-building than Shevchenko's). Yet, Gogol embodies perhaps the most true sense of a nineteenth-century Ukrainian national identity—a split-personality: born on Ukrainian territory and lauded for his Russian, Gogol has had much less a nationalizing influence upon Ukraine than has Shevchenko and other nationalist poets. Gogol's approach to blurred nations is found in this excerpt written in 1844:

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<sup>1</sup> Others heroes include Lesya Ukrainka, Ivano Franko, Mykhailo Hrushevskiy, all literary figures (known respectively for their drama, poetry, and history).

I myself do not know whether my soul is Ukrainian [Холхлацкая]<sup>2</sup> or Russian [Русская]. I know only that on no account would I give priority to the Little Russians [Малороссянину]<sup>3</sup> before the Russian [Русским], or to the Russian before the Little Russian. Both natures are too richly endowed by God, and, as if by design, each of them separately contains within itself what the other lacks—a sure sign that they complement one another.<sup>4</sup>

Such fine diplomacy allows for little comment, except to mention that Gogol today is respected by both Ukrainians and Russians, although a tug-of-war similar to the one in his one soul began in 1991 between Ukrainian and Russian scholars in claiming particularly Ukrainian and Russian characteristics in his work. The safest rejoinder to Gogol's identity is his own: men, like nations, are mixed—as Benedict Andersen writes “As with modern persons, so it is with nations.”<sup>5</sup> In brief, Gogol's work forwards both Russian and Ukrainian nations in a broader union of identity than any one nation can circumscribe entirely.

Unlike Gogol, poets in infant states in Eastern Europe have long empowered the rise of national spirit.<sup>6</sup> This spirit, however, has an ethereal identity that, though widely felt, is evanescent when examined directly. Alexander Solzhenitsyn writes of the value of literature in historical identification:

There is one...invaluable direction in which literature transmits incontrovertible condensed experience: from generation to generation. In this way literature becomes the living memory of a nation...woe to that nation whose literature is cut short by the intrusion of force. This is not merely interference with “freedom of the press” but the sealing up of a nation's heart, the excision

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<sup>2</sup> Холхлацкая Gogol used as an endearing, now bucolic, reference to provincial Ukrainians.

<sup>3</sup> Малороссянину is also an earlier name for Ukrainians. See chapter 2, page 29 of this paper.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Gogol to his long-time friend Alexandra Smirnova, also born in Ukraine, 24 December 1844, in N.V. Gogol', *Sobranie Sochinenii*, vol. 10-collected letters (Moscow: Russkaia kniga, 1994), p. 276, as cited from Andrew Wilson's *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, ch. 5, footnote 49, and p. 88.

<sup>5</sup> From Benedict Andersen's conclusion to his *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>6</sup> National poets like Shevchenko are not a Ukrainian novelty in recent nation building: most notably, Pushkin has his Russia and Poland has its Adam Mickiewicz (of which poets Shevchenko was well aware as a young man fluent in Ukrainian, Russian, and Polish), as well as, Serbia has its Vuk Karđić, Slovenia its Franz Prešeren, Germany its Goethe, Greece its Coraes, Bolivia its Filmon, even the United States of America with its Whitman or Frost.

of its memory. A nation can no longer remember itself, it loses its spiritual unity, and despite their seemingly common language, countrymen cease to understand one another [italics added].<sup>7</sup>

A walk through a Ukrainian park will tell you as much: public monuments dedicated to passed poets, scholars, and writers continue to haunt the modern public, constantly reminding them of a national heritage ennobled by the living words of dead authors. An atmosphere testifying to Ukrainian nobleness is nearly ubiquitous in public areas, but a clear definition of it as a component to the present-day nation has yet to survive. No one clear Ukrainian literary memory has yet formed, but its breath is felt everywhere.

Monuments tout private verses into patriotic pledges and, in doing so, can breach authorial privacy and even intent in promoting a public national spirit. Words from the author's own mouth or pen enchant monuments that immortalize both author and nation. For instance a statue in L'viv invokes Shevchenko's "І оживе добра слава—слава Україні" (and come to life again good glory—glory to Ukraine) as a reminder to every reader to look to the Ukrainian past for future prosperities. Yet, Shevchenko adamantly disapproved of L'viv because it was more Polish than anything else.

Literature enlivens the national spirit because it can create a distinct national imagination through literary characters that are not copyrights of either the author or his audience. Literature sets the stage for expressing nationality, but, like a theatre, over time that stage is adapted to fit cultural inventions (and adoptions) that accompany a changing sense of cultural identity. Literary characters and their conceptions transcend ordinary national limits of time and space, uniting readers across ages and areas in similar feeling: Ukraine is no exception—romantic tragedies evoke sympathy for locals and antipathy against outsiders; beauty of natural landmarks and landforms testifies to an immortal territory; and recognition of common cultural values, histories, and plights causes modernity to commiserate with history. Such romantic nationalism in Ukraine has since been marshaled under one name, Taras Shevchenko.

Taras Hryhorovych Shevchenko, 19<sup>th</sup> century Ukrainian romantic national poet, is widely accredited with having first demonstrated that the Ukrainian language deserves literary attention and in turn rekindling a latent Ukrainian national spirit. George Luckyj writes "Shevchenko provided in his poems the *raison d'être* of the modern Ukrainian nation. The mythic poet

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<sup>7</sup> Solzhenitsyn, Alexander, *The Nobel Lecture*, trans. Alexis Klimoff, New York: Ad Hoc Committee for Intellectual Freedom, 1973, p 14-15.

became a national prophet”.<sup>8</sup> Thus his first importance to Ukraine is clear: his works for the first time proved the intellectual maturity of the Ukrainian language and culture. Although the Russian Empire would ban the study and even the use of Ukrainian at times, history had already spoken: Ukraine has articulated itself.

Next, tracing the central literary themes within his works does even more to help define the development of Ukrainian national identity to the present-day. Two interlocking central themes permeate his works and therefore early conceptions of Ukrainian identity: alienation (in Ukrainian, *отчуждення*) and dependency (*залежність*), which combine to disclose a new sense of Ukrainian national spirit (*народність*): modern Ukraine resents abuses by, yet recognizes its historical dependency on, outsiders. Depending heavily upon these central themes in Shevchenko, an otherwise callow Ukrainian nation is able to identify itself with distinct and defiant historic claims to territory, memories, and myths that distinguish and thereby legitimize Ukraine as an independent nation.

Concerning the artist himself, in addition to writing extensive poetry in Ukrainian and prose in Russian, Shevchenko—a classic romantic bard—was an accomplished painter, operatic baritone, actor, logician, and philologist. His art contributed to the very inception of a Ukrainian movement for national restoration because, for him, possession was explicitly defined in national terms: he predominantly wrote in Ukrainian, authenticating figurative and literal cultural Ukrainian texts; secondly, he recognized only to reject the outside empires of Russia and Poland as “other”, effectually re-imagining<sup>9</sup> the energetically independent Cossacks as Ukraine’s original national myth.

The first of Shevchenko’s central themes, alienation, permeates his poetry with the potent terms *чужий*, meaning “alien”, “foreign”, or “strange” and *чужина*, or “foreign land.” His life’s story was perfectly foreign itself and Shevchenko constantly returns to the conception of exile as his personal and Ukraine’s pitiful inheritance: born a penurious serf, household servant, and orphaned in his early teens, Shevchenko left Ukraine at age 14 for St. Petersburg where a Russian, Basil Zhukovsky (1783-1852), bought his freedom in 1838 for 2,500 rubles so Shevchenko could enter a university. Citing his Cossack grandfather often, Shevchenko’s heart filled with personal and, eventually, national pride in the Cossack ethnic distinction of Ukraine

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<sup>8</sup> From Handbook of Russian Literature, ed. By Victor Terras, entry “Shevchenko, Taras Gregorievich.”

<sup>9</sup> Shevchenko was more interested in reinventing a Ukrainian cultural heroism than describing real historical heroes.

from its neighbors.<sup>10</sup> In *Hamaliya* (1844), one of many literary works in which he sympathetically retells Cossack history, Shevchenko excoriates the Byzantium empire of old for the same imperialism that Ukraine suffered under the Russian empire, decrying how mercenaries (Cossacks) that shed their own blood for their employing empire (Moscow) were in turn betrayed by the same.

As a Ukrainian nationalist educated in St Petersburg, Shevchenko's conception of Ukraine is built upon personal, national, and literary layers of alienation. As Shevchenko was embarrassed that the foreigner Zhukovsky promoted him above the socio-economic plight of his serfdom and that he was an exile from his native land and people, the Ukrainian nation appears in Shevchenko's writings as an exiled union falsely sustained by outside influences. The Ukraine national idea, according to Shevchenko, is best understood abroad and is defined by what it is not. As mentioned before, Shevchenko's historical idea for Ukrainian identity is the Cossacks; interestingly, "Cossack" is Turkish for free man (*qazaq*)—in other words, the Cossacks could only be *qazaq* (free) by estranging themselves from the other outsiders. He used the common literary technique of defamiliarization, or estrangement (in Russian *остранение*), to illustrate vividly desolate Cossack characters and to disaffect a Ukrainian union (formed by the idea of a Cossack nation) from their imperial neighbors.

Shevchenko's endearing literary central roles are played by female figures. The female for him is resplendent, divinely innocent, and almost always both the favored audience and character in his work. Ukraine, his favored female, is lamented as lured into the trap of the embrace of one of the Tsar's soldiers in Shevchenko's splendid allegorical poem *Kateryna* (1838):<sup>11</sup>

O lovely maidens<sup>12</sup> fall in love,  
But not with Moskaly<sup>13</sup>  
For Moskaly are foreign folk,  
They do not treat you right.

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<sup>10</sup> Just as Shevchenko's grandfather was Cossack, Pushkin's grandfather was black, marking another national poets as recognizing personal ethnic foreignness as a starting point for their literary nationalism. It comes as no surprise that the Jews also have played a strong cultural role in many nations as artists and poet for this very reason.

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that Ukraine or Україна in Ukrainian grammar is feminine, an easy step for Shevchenko to take toward metaphorically writing about Ukrainian nation as a female character.

<sup>12</sup> "Maidens" here is *чорнобриві*, or literally "dark-browed" referring to the darker Cossack facial traits.

<sup>13</sup> "Moskaly" refers pejoratively to Muscovites, particularly the Tsar's soldiers.

A Moskal will love for sport,  
And laughing depart.<sup>14</sup>

In *Kateryna* the Moskal soldier seduces, impregnates, and unblinkingly abandons this young maiden to suicide. The female figure is modeled after his childhood love, Oksana Kozalenko, a Cossack “dark-brow”, whose presence appears again and again in his literature as a forgotten female unreachably lost and estranged; as a whole, the poem’s content suggests similar topics to Song of Solomon, an original text of forlorn women, forbidden love, and fecundity. Shevchenko’s most passionate fantasy—Oksana Kozalenko—and his bitterest failure—never seeing Ukraine rise free from ashes and alien oppressors—are linked in the literary sub-theme of female alienation. His works autobiographically bespeak Shevchenko as a faithful but exiled lover of the dark-browed, Cossack maiden, Ukraine.

His graceful but forlorn female figure is frequently contrasted with a second sub-theme to alienation: violence. Ukrainian territory was for Shevchenko the graveyard between Polish aristocracy and Muscovy (Moscow) autocracy whose survivors were nobly distinguished by internal will for independence and democracy. However, his love of liberties is most often expressed through violent dissatisfaction with its neighboring empires. Violence and innocence find full intersection in Shevchenko’s frequent use of forlorn and abused, yet innocent heroines in order to cast a curse upon foreign oppressors as lands without sincerity or simplicity whose people are only able to abuse, scorn, and ravish. Muscovy, for instance, has plenty of

Palaces and churches,  
Pot-bellied worthies,  
[But] nowhere a *simple* house emerges!<sup>15</sup>

And Shevchenko deprecates the eastern throne with lines parodying Pushkin’s *The Bronze Horseman* as he calls Peter the Great

Thou evil tsar!  
Accursed Tsar, insatiate,  
Perfidious serpent, what  
Have you done, then, with the Cossacks?  
You have filled the swamps  
With their noble bones! And then  
Built the capital [St. Petersburg]  
On their tortured corpses.

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<sup>14</sup> From Taras Shevchenko: Selected Works, adapted from “Kateryna”, Moscow: Progress, 1970, p. 37, lines 1-6, as cited in Andrew Wilson’s *Ukrainians: An Unexpected Nation*, p. 92.

<sup>15</sup> From “The Night of Taras”, lines 37-38, in *ibid.*, p. 12. as cited in Wilson *ibid.*, p. 93.

No doubt Shevchenko nursed a deep personal grudge against Tsar Nickolas I who had him arrested for denouncing the throne and forced him to join the Russian institution for education in violence, the Tsar's army. Shevchenko was released in 1857 but never allowed to return to Ukraine, always the epitome of alienation, exile, and violent independence himself. Spreading the blame across ages and empire, he adds:

It was [Peter] the First who crucified  
Unfortunate Ukraine,  
And [Catherine] the Second—she who finished off  
Whatever yet remained.<sup>16</sup>

He disparages both “Poles and Uniates [or, Greek Catholics], like jackdaws covering the plain” and the introduction to his short poem *To the Poles* (1850?) speaks of years gone by when

We were Cossacks still,  
And of the Union [of Brest in 1596] no one had heard,  
How wonderful life was then!<sup>17</sup>

How ironic then that throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century Shevchenko's works would most widely be read by Polish-influenced Greek Catholics (also known as “Uniates” from Union of Brest)! As time progressed after Shevchenko's death (1861), the western portion of Ukraine became progressively more dedicated to the realization of an independent national spirit. In contrast, Shevchenko's original idealized region—central Ukraine and its flowing Dnieper river—became increasingly influenced by the strong Soviet sentiment developing to its east.

Shevchenko's second theme, Ukrainian dependency, tormented Shevchenko perhaps equally as much as the first, Ukrainian alienation. Yet, over next 130 years until 1991, Shevchenko never could have realized the full import that his words would have on initiating Ukrainian independence. Ironically, apart from the obvious antagonism against Muscovy and Poland, Shevchenko's resentment of Ukrainian dependency also admits it: by attacking the enemy he also surrenders to them. Because Shevchenko's writing fought for a reawakening of Ukraine as a morally Christian, mythically Cossack nation, 19<sup>th</sup> century Ukraine was forced to realize that it was still asleep. The Cossack noble spirit of independence that Shevchenko described survives

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<sup>16</sup> From “The Night of Taras”, lines 15-20, as translated by Vera Rich, *Taras Shevchenko: Song out of Darkness*, London: Mitre Press, 1961), p. 11., as cited in Wilson *ibid.*, footnote 57, p. 92.

<sup>17</sup> From “Полякам” short poem in *Кобзар (The Minstrel)* from *Повне Зібрання Творів Тараса Шевченка у 2 тт*, Академія Наук УРСР: Київ, 1953, p. 376. Translation by author.

today even among many Ukrainians, evidence to many that the nation still has yet to arouse itself. Although twentieth-century Cossack history was blemished by the mercenary slaughter of Jews for the Nazis, the Cossack spirit would spark during the short-lived Ukrainian independence in 1917-21 (gaining momentum and reuniting Catholic west with Orthodox East under the historian and then short-lived President Mykhailo Hrushevskiy) and later in the 1940 Ukrainian rebellion. During the Soviet era Shevchenko was retooled into a Soviet independence fighter and today Ukrainian and Diaspora scholars struggle to find an agreeable compromise on the influence that Shevchenko had on prompting modern Ukrainian independence. His words are often too acerbic and ingrained in history to be easily forgiven or forgotten.

Shevchenko regards the Cossacks as the forefathers of Ukrainian independence, evoking battle and blood, rage and rue:

Why with the Poles did we once fight?  
Engage the Hordes with slashing knives?  
Why did we harry with our pikes  
Muscovite ribs? There once we sowed,  
And well we watered with red blood,  
With sabers harrowed what was sown.  
But in that field what crop has grown?  
Rue, rue has grown,  
And choked our freedom down.<sup>18</sup>

Demographically the predecessors to Ukraine's multifaceted identity, Cossacks were only identified by what they were not: Cossacks were neither Catholic nor Russian Orthodox and were raised fighting neighboring Iranian and Turkic steppe cultures. Early Ukrainian literary identity was founded on the idea of Cossack independence because Cossack identity is by definition built on rejection of others—its identity is formed in the contrast of others and recesses between neighboring empires. In other words, Cossacks could only be free, or *qazaq*, by being what others were not—that meant not being politically Russian or Polish and religiously Greek Catholic and Muscovy Orthodox. The Cossack myth would continue to be reconstructed until today, as its readers and circumstances adapted the Cossack identity of independence as originally laid by Shevchenko to better the new imaginings of Ukraine. Nonetheless, this idea of rejection of others—an externally forced alienation from others metamorphosed into an internal will to alienate oneself from others—would be molded into more friendly forms by Shevchenko's successors, especially

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<sup>18</sup> From "Chyhyryn", lines 17-25, as translated by Vera Rich, Taras Shevchenko: Song out of Darkness, London: Mitre Press, 1961), p. 11., as cited in Wilson *ibid.*, footnote 58, p. 92.

Ivano Franko and Mykhailo Hrushevskiy who attempted to broaden the Cossack national spirit to include Greek Catholics in the west.

Through bringing the concepts of alienation and dependency into the Ukrainian literary canon, Shevchenko reinvented the spirit of the Ukrainian nationality. Although still no clear definition of that nationality exists today, its spirit, or sense of consciousness, has grown successively stronger since its inception with Shevchenko's poetry, being transformed in trajectory as well as force. Nationality was built on the ideal of fierce independence-seeking patriotism rooted in idealized Cossack history:

Once there was the Hetmanate—  
It passed beyond recall;  
Once, it was, we ruled ourselves,  
But we shall rule no more...  
Yet we shall never forget the Cossack fame of yore!

Shevchenko was a radical, a revolutionary, and a romantic—he understood alienation and lived out his exile in verse for all of future Ukraine to reread and reinterpret.

### **Soviet Reception of Shevchenko: Reinterpreting a Ukrainian Radical Revolutionary**

Soviet revision and spread of Shevchenko as a radical revolutionary did more to increase his significance to the public than any of his staunchest intellectual successors (especially Ivano Franko and Mykhailo Hrushevskiy). The Soviets promoted, though an obvious distortion, a new construction of Shevchenko-inspired Ukrainian nationality. In reality, Ukraine today has largely accommodated itself with Soviet elements of the national poet Shevchenko, finding separation of fact from fiction too muddled to clarify immediately, if at all.

Carefully controlled Soviet editing of Shevchenko's works helped, among other imagined social texts, to render a new Ukrainian nationality. Shevchenko was in many ways convenient for the indoctrination of Ukraine into the Soviet Union, while in other ways (e.g. his advocating violence against oppressors from Moscow!) he was not. Ukrainians have argued that Shevchenko was an outcast of his homeland in another nation, while Soviets have argued that he was a convert to a broader universalism while educated in St Petersburg. Now the tendency is returning to envisioning Shevchenko as misplaced national hero—after all, as Sigmund Freud said, “what good is a legend to a people that makes their hero into a foreigner?”<sup>19</sup> Scholars argue

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<sup>19</sup> From Sigmund Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, translated by Katherine Jones, London, 1939, p. 164.

now that the legend of Shevchenko has transformed so substantially over the years that he was probably best understood by only a few, his close contemporaries. Now after the fall of the Soviet Union, there exist almost as many interpretations of his works as there are Ukrainians. Needless to say, the imprint that he left has proven itself indelible and at times illegible upon the public memory of Ukraine.

Unlike other early Ukrainian nationalists like Ivano Franko or Mykhailo Hrushevskiy, the official Soviet stance on Shevchenko was beamingly positive, although far from complete. The National Museum of Taras Shevchenko, a large three story building in downtown Kyiv, was begun in 1940 (hardly a coincidence, this was also the same year that Ukrainians led a Shevchenko-inspired uprising against the Soviets in Kyiv) and many collections of his original works were made first available in print to the public in the 50s; thus the general public, and with it its fledgling national spirit, was first acquainted with the Soviet version and selection of Shevchenko. Most tellingly, *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, the secular Bible for Soviet doctrine, continually refers to Shevchenko as a romantic turned realist—one devoted to fighting against Tsarist and Church censorship, inspiring democratic and socialist revolution, and utilizing literary devices similar to Russian literature. According to the Soviet explanation, his use of Christian text and figures are only as metaphor for more important revolutionary ideas: for instance, *the Great Soviet Encyclopedia* writes that “In ‘Neofitakh’ Shevchenko glorifies revolutionary-Decembrists in the allegorical figures of the original Christians; Nikolai I is easily found in the figure of Nehor.... Shevchenko also used imitations of psalms and Biblical motifs (e.g. ‘Imitations of the 11<sup>th</sup> Psalm’, ‘Osii, Chapter XIV’, and the poem ‘Maria’) for expressing the revolutionary-democratic idea”.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, outside of Soviet academia, most scholars recognize Shevchenko clearly in the romantic (and not realist) tradition, which called for a Christian uprising against Moscow regardless of its tsarist or socialist leadership. In the battle between realist and romantic, Soviet and nationalist, we see how politics and literary interpretation too easily obscure original intention in later interpretation.

The Soviet Shevchenko was in part a quasi-religious figure used to replace organized religion in Ukraine. Dominating the central staircase of the Shevchenko national museum, a 15-meter tall statue of Shevchenko stands on top of a giant globe in an almost Christus stance with arms outstretched to the nations beneath. And until Gorbachev’s glasnost, busts of Lenin, Stalin, and

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<sup>20</sup> From the electronic version of Большая Советская Энциклопедия Электронное Издание на 5 дисках, entry heading Шевченко Тарас Григорьевич written in 1965, file: 2918.html. Translated by author.

Shevchenko stood side-by-side in the final room of the museum's tour. Boryz Oliinyk, poet and elected deputy to the USSR People's Congress, asked wryly "Isn't this a striking coincidence" that the same poems of Shevchenko were banned under the tsars and under Stalin and Brezhnev.<sup>21</sup> The Ukrainian scholar Roman Szporluk elucidates what more precisely what was banned under the Soviets:

Those Shevchenko poems (or parts of poems) that were not published until quite recently dealt with the relations of Russian and Ukraine from the times of Bohdan Khmelnytsky in the mid-seventeenth century, through the era of Ivan Mazera<sup>22</sup> and Peter the Great in the early eighteenth century, to the reign of Catherine II at the end of that century.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the censure of history, misinterpretation was another Soviet tactic for dealing with Shevchenko: for instance, though a devout Orthodox, Shevchenko writes of god with a lower case "g" (actually "б" as in "бор") because the god of his literary efforts was secular truth (правда), justice (справедливість), and freedom (свобода). Soviets falsely depicted his secular religiosity as a prophet and precursor of social realism, the Soviet theory of the arts that largely attempts to dismiss God as way of abusive governments to calm their needy masses. As another instance of Shevchenko's ideological distortion of religion, a simplistic explanation reads beneath Shevchenko's painting of Bohdan Khmelnytsky's burial place in a church (Khmelnytskyi was the Cossack Hetman (leader) who allied Ukraine and Russia against Poland in 1648) that Shevchenko once said 'until this church falls, Ukraine will never rise again.'<sup>24</sup> However anti-religious this quote might sound, Shevchenko original statement was not only pro-religious but politically anti-Moscow: in context his comment meant that Ukraine will not rise again as an independent nation from the empire with which Khmelnytskyi

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<sup>21</sup> "Umyty svit zhyvoiu vodoiu pravdu," speech by Borys Oliinyk, in *Literaturna Ukraina*, March 1, 1989, p. 4. From "Chyhyryn", lines 17-25, as translated by Vera Rich, *Taras Shevchenko: Song out of Darkness*, London: Mitre Press, 1961), p. 11., as cited in Wilson *ibid.*, footnote 58, p. 92.

<sup>22</sup> Ivan Mazera's alliance with Sweden's Charles XII failed to free Ukraine from Russia and ended in defeat against Peter the Great in the Battle of Poltava (July 1709). Soviets called traitors and separatists in Ukraine "Mazerpists" even though Shevchenko would consider himself one as well. From citation in Wilson *ibid.*, footnote 58, p. 92.

<sup>23</sup> From Szporluk, *Roman Russia, Ukraine, and the Breakup of the Soviet Union*. Hoover Institute P: Stanford California, 2001, p. 221.

<sup>24</sup> From author's visit to the National Museum of Taras Shevchenko, Kyiv, Ukraine, 9 August 2003 with many thanks to my vigilant guide of nearly four hours, Natalya Petrenyenko.

made alliance (i.e. Muscovy or later the Soviet central, Moscow) until the Ukrainian people have demolished the institutions (e.g. Russian Tsarism, Russian Orthodoxy, the Soviet command, as symbolized in this church that bears a cursed burial) upon which Ukraine's subordination to Russia was founded.

The ideological transformation of a religious Shevchenko to an atheist one took place in a textual medium that allowed the Ukrainian people to bridge the important gap between scripture and literature. Shevchenko's literature became scripture for many: many uneducated peasants, for instance, attest to how artificial and impossible it was to memorize and recite religious prayers during the Soviet era—yet how these same Ukrainians read Shevchenko with paragraphs falling effortlessly from their lips. Before and during the Soviet era, Shevchenko accumulated many religious titles including national prophet, bard, apostle, martyr, guardian angel, and even savior. As Shevchenko rose as their spiritual forefather, many Ukrainian made pilgrimages to his grave. Another more enduring text of native religion, Ukrainian folklore, frequently cites Shevchenko's promise in his "The Dream" (Сон) that though he may die and his body disappear, his spirit will remain to observe his people. Even modern pop culture has incorporated his verse as lyrics into many rock and roll songs.

In conclusion, Shevchenko was the beginning of Ukrainian nationhood built on the romantic ideas of violent independence and Christian innocence whose works have left literary and contemporary cultural legacies. As a literary figure, he is recognized for his substantive contributions to both the language and the original idea—that is Cossack independence fighters—behind Ukrainian identity. Two interrelated, yet contrasting themes have formed Shevchenko's literary basis for an independent Ukrainian nation: 1) Ukraine as an alienated, innocent female, 2) Cossacks as fierce, noble independent fighters help to form a unique Ukrainian national spirit. Accordingly Shevchenko's texts have grown in cultural influence and interpretations over these periods, at times, inciting rebellion both against and (under Soviet tutelage) for abusive captors. In this sense, Shevchenko's obsession with violence has facilitated his works becoming more political propaganda than poetry. As Lord Beaverbrook wrote in his *Divine Propagandist*, "All propaganda which is powerful and effective must be cumulative in character. It must increase in intensity as it proceeds, until ultimately it reaches a tone not much removed from violence." Cossack Ukraine—originally armed with both sword and cross—has become a platform upon which a set national identity has most often been promoted.

Oddly, the Soviet imagining of Shevchenko can be instructive for contemporary interpreters. The violence of history combines into an ever-present danger, reliving the past as it truly was—if the fires of Shevchenko’s past were fully fanned as he desired, all of Ukraine’s friendly neighbors would be enraged. What Shevchenko wanted politically (romantic rebellion and revenge) is certainly not what Ukraine needs today. Ukrainians would do well even to gently parallel the Soviet approach by revising or “re-visioning” Shevchenko into a gentler, kinder national hero, one who is less melancholy and martial than his past: in other words, a contemporary Ukrainian.

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