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## Self-Definition and Decentering: Ševčenko's "Xiba samomu napysat'" and the Question of Writing

GEORGE G. GRABOWICZ

In an earlier article on Ševčenko I broached the question of his symbolic autobiography and the general process of his self-definition as a poet, and examined what I believed was a central nexus for this. In it, I argued that the long poem *Trizna* (1843) "culminates the theme of the paradoxically solitary and mute bard who, like Peregondja, speaks only with nature. . . and heralds the Promethean theme and the tribunicial stance of the poetry that follows."<sup>1</sup> While I still hold this notion—of that threshold and, generally, of stages in Ševčenko's poetic development—to be valid, the implied assumption of a moment of definitive self-designation now seems overly optimistic. The thematic and conceptual structures, specifically of the poet as a preternaturally chosen carrier of the Word, do appear as discrete forces, and, in the overarching scheme of his poetry, they do leave an indelible imprint. But the psychological ground, the actual matter on and in which they work, seems disconcertingly fluid. From his very earliest writings, but with a particular intensity in his mature poetry, Ševčenko continually presents himself, his feelings and emotions, perceptions and self-assessments in a heightened state of flux; just as his poetry's system of values unequivocally elevates the affective over the rational, so the discourse of the poetry, and particularly the presentation of the self, seems largely to disregard the logical and the linear and always to sidestep the definitive. Negation, reversal, and then further negation, contradiction and self-contradiction are the very essence of his discourse. There is never a thing, an attitude, or a belief, but a concatenation of responses to it, a force field. In light of this, Ševčenko appears as a remarkably modern poet, articulating a sense of the contingency of existence, and of its absurdity, that few if any of his contemporaries—certainly none in Ukrainian or in Russian literature—come close to perceiving, and which tends to place him more in the twentieth than the nineteenth century.

<sup>1</sup> George G. Grabowicz, "The Nexus of the Wake: Ševčenko's *Trizna*," *Eucharisterion: Essays presented to Omeljan Pritsak on his Sixtieth Birthday by his Colleagues and Students* (= *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 3/4 [1979-1980]) (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), pt. 1, p. 345.

An inevitable consequence of this existential precocity, and directly proportionate to it, was the opaqueness, at times the virtual invisibility, of major features of his poetry for the convention- and tradition-bound reader and critic. Thus, if the essentially decentered nature of Ševčenko's poetry was at all recognized, it was through the keyhole of irony, or Romantic irony. Thus, too, the very force of Ševčenko's presence, the immediacy and uniqueness of his voice—coupled, to be sure, with the (then and now) all-pervasive cultural paradigm that saw literature as but a surrogate for political action—led to the broad conviction that his poetry was a repository (albeit an “artistic” one) if not of outright injunctions then of profound but ultimately unambiguous cultural and historical and indeed political messages. The general critical consensus that Ševčenko's poetry must be probed or simply culled for such or other “views”<sup>2</sup> left little room for the realization that such “views,” given the very nature of this poetry, cannot be made meaningful but in and through the mythic code in which they are imbedded. The further step of examining the poetry not in terms of a linear and teleological rhetoric but as a primarily self-referential discourse, as an essentially ambivalent self-creation and self-effacement, was neither contemplated nor attempted.

\* \* \*

It is also hardly surprising that the primary ground on which this simultaneous creation/effacing or assertion/questioning occurs is that of writing, that is, in the actual, in effect thematic, realization of the poet-as-writer. The multifaceted duality of Ševčenko is expressed most immanently perhaps in the ambivalence of his self-chosen role as carrier of the Word, as prophet, which, as I have argued, devolves into both apotheosis and curse.<sup>3</sup> That role, however, can always be seen as but that—a stance, a goal and ideal, a

<sup>2</sup> Paradigmatic of this are such publications as *Istoryčni pohljady T. H. Ševčenka*, I. O. Huržij et. al., eds. (Kiev, 1964), or, even more reductively and mendaciously, I. D. Nazarenko's *Obščestvenno-političeskie, filozofskie, estetičeskie i ateističeskie vzgljady T. G. Ševčenko* (Moscow, 1961). The paradigm remains firmly in place to this day; cf. *T. H. Ševčenko: Bibliografičnyj pokazčyk, 1965–1988* (Kiev, 1989). On the pragmatic level—both in critical practice, and especially in the domain of public discourse—this is reflected in a relentless citation mania: inexorably and without exception Ševčenko is presented only through a narrowly circumscribed, and now highly canonic repertoire of culled lines. Such an illustrative approach is inevitable and normal for the legacy of culture heroes, but the degree to which it has supplemented reference to and examination of the contextual units—individual works, cycles or clusters, the corpus as a whole—is remarkable. Broadly speaking, this is, of course, a facet of the ritualization of the Ševčenko reception—and as such it deserves special attention.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. my *The Poet as Mythmaker: A Study of Symbolic Meaning in Taras Ševčenko* (Cambridge, 1982), passim, and “Nexus of the Wake.”

strategy of self-projection and self-definition. Here we are dealing with something eminently concrete and as palpable psychologically as it is physically: the writing itself. In his recurrent and relatively extensive focus on this, Ševčenko is again remarkably modern and curiously prescient in the way he inscribes himself, into the contemporary theoretical prioritization of *l'écriture*.

The theme of writing, the depiction of the "writing situation," of the set of feelings, the hopes, fears, and tensions that occasion and directly accompany the act of writing, is fairly discrete in Ševčenko's poetry.<sup>4</sup> As a metathematic presence, a heightened self-consciousness (that resonates with the self-absorption of his insistent self-portraits, and which generally tends to draw all his works into an autobiographic whole), it extends from the early "Dumy moji, dumy moji" (1839) to his very last poem, "Čy ne pokynut' nam, neboho" (1861). But as a more explicit set and focus it is largely concentrated in the intensely personal and largely confessional poetry of the period of his arrest and first years of exile (i.e., 1847–1850), which is textually coterminous with the so-called Small Book ("Mala knyžka").<sup>5</sup> Given the fact that as part of his sentence Ševčenko was officially forbidden to write (and to paint), this poetry was contraband—and the format of the notebooks was expressly designed for easy concealment in the author's boot top (hence, too, the traditional name, *zaxaljavni knyžečky*, or *zaxaljavna poezija*). The notion of "bootleg poetry," however, can hardly convey the radically antipodal, self-negating semiotics of the creative *context*, of the writing situation, of this poetry: the innermost confession that in the eyes of the law is criminal, the labor of love (and Ševčenko's painstakingly neat formatting of the book is but a physical manifestation of this) that serves to narrate a life of anguished solitude and deprivation.

Not all the poems of the "Small Book," of course, are focused on or marked by the fact of writing. But implicitly this structure dominates, or, at the very least, serves to organize the narrative space of the collection. On the one hand it does so by virtue of dramatic-formal highlighting: each of the fascicles of the book is introduced by a poem focused on writing.

<sup>4</sup> Given the operant paradigms (the teleological, the ideological, echoes of nineteenth-century normative poetics, radical anti-psychological attitudes—to name but the major ones) we should be prepared for the fact that "writing" does not at all figure as a category or theme in the Ševčenko studies to date; cf. *T. H. Ševčenko: Bibliografija literatury pro žyttja i tvorčist', 1839–1959*, 2 vols. (Kiev, 1963), *T. H. Ševčenko: Bibliografija juvilejnoji literatury, 1960–1964* (Kiev, 1965), or the *Bibliografičnyj pokazčyk, 1965–1988*, noted above.

<sup>5</sup> The "Mala knyžka" actually consists of four hand-made small octavo notebooks (for each of the years in question—1847, 1848, 1849, and 1850) which Ševčenko subsequently combined (with some inadvertant transpositions), paginated, and sewed together. Cf. Taras Ševčenko, *Mala knyžka: Avtohafy poezij 1847–1850 rr.* (Kiev, 1966), pp. iii–[xxviii].

“Dumy moji, dumy moji,” the incipit for 1847 and putatively for the whole collection, is the most general; clearly echoing his 1839 poem, almost as its new, more sombre and more lapidary variant, it turns to the broad question of making poetry. The other ones, however—“A numo znovu viršuvat” (1848), “Nenače stepom čumaky” (1849), and “Liču v nevoli dni i noči” (1850)—are quite explicit in the way they function as a literal, musical, incipit. Thus:

А нумо знову віршувать.  
Звичайне, нишком. Нумо знову,  
Поки новинка на основі,  
Старинку божу лицовать.  
А сиріч. . . як би вам сказать,  
Щоб не збрехавши. . . Нумо знову  
Людей і долю проклинать. . .  
(lines 1–7)

or:

Книжечки  
Мережаю та начиняю  
Таки віршами. Розважаю  
Дурную голову свою  
Та кайдани собі кую  
(Як ці добродії дознають).  
Та вже ж нехай хоч розіпнуть,  
А я без вірші не улежу.  
Уже два года промережав,  
І третій в добрий час почну. . .  
“Nenače stepom čumaky”  
(lines 4–13)

or finally:

І четвертий рік минає  
Тихенько, поволі,  
І четверту починаю  
Книжечку в неволі  
Мережати,—змережаю  
Кров'ю та сльозами  
Моє горе на чужині,  
Бо горе словами  
Не розкажеться нікому  
Ніколи, ніколи,  
Нігде на світі! Нема слов  
В далекій неволі!  
Немає слов, немає сльоз,

Немає нічого.  
Нема навіть кругом тебе  
Великого Бога!

"Liču v nevoli dni i noči"  
(lines 13–28)

The second means for signaling this function is explicitly dramatic. It occurs, for example, in "Moskaleva krynycja'" (the 1847 version), where the opening dialogue between the two personages (in effect, narrative voices) is discretely focused on how to tell, or, actually, how to write down, the story.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, this is conveyed by significant, if at times brief, passages on writing in such works as the long poem "Maryna" (1848), where it appears in the opening lines, in "A. O. Kozačkovs'komu" (1847), "Zarosly šljaxy ternamy" (1849), and others.

And there is yet a third, seemingly paradoxical but altogether revealing, form of highlighting (and ultimately privileging) the theme of writing: erasure. At issue is the following. After his release from exile (in August 1857) but before arriving in St. Petersburg, during an enforced wait in Nižnij Novgorod, Ševčenko worked intensely on preparing an edition of his exile poetry. To this end he began in February 1858 a new manuscript book, of a larger format (crown octavo), now known as the "Bil'sha knyžka" (the Larger Book), into which he recopied various poems from the "Mala knyžka" and into which, virtually until his death, he continued to inscribe finished versions of his poems. The manner of transposition, of the way texts move or do not move from the "smaller" to the "larger" book is most telling.<sup>7</sup> On the one hand, Ševčenko copied about eighty texts, some with few or no emendations, but many with very significant changes. (For some of these, like the long poem "Moskaleva krynycja," which can serve as a paradigm here, or the short lyric "Liču v nevoli dni i noči," the changes are so far-reaching that by general consensus the two versions are considered and presented as distinct, separate poems. The principles for making such distinctions, however, cannot be drawn solely from general textological practice, but must take into account the highly specific nature of Ševčenko's creativity; given the fact that this creativity—its symbolic and

<sup>6</sup> Cf. my "Variations on Duality: Ševčenko's 'Moskaleva krynycja,'" forthcoming in *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Je. S. Šabliovs'kyj's introduction to Ševčenko, *Mala knyžka: Avtohrify poezij 1847–1850 rr.*, pp. iii–[xxviii], and his introduction to Taras Ševčenko, *Avtohrify poezij 1847–1860 rr.* (Kiev, 1963), pp. iii–[ix]. Cf. also V. S. Borodin, "Do istoriji tekstu 'Maloji knyžky' T. H. Ševčenk," *Radjans'ke literaturoznavstvo*, 1976, no. 2, pp. 71–83, and the respective entries on the "Mala knyžka" and "Bil'sha knyžka" in *Ševčenkivs'kyj slovnyk*, vol. 1 (Kiev, 1976).

psychological structures, its coding—is still barely known, the essential question of the *variant* and the final text must be considered open and in need of fundamental rethinking.)<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, Ševčenko neglected to transfer to the “Bil’ša knyžka” about forty-three texts. According to the conventional wisdom of the critics, one has to assume that these poems were considered by Ševčenko to be either inferior to the ones he emended and included in the “Bil’ša knyžka,” or, more plausibly, that he felt that they could not pass by the censor’s watchful eye and heavy hand.<sup>9</sup>

The argument regarding quality is singularly unpersuasive: among the forty-three texts there are such excellent long poems as “Tytarivna,” “Maryna,” “Sotnyk,” “Son (Hory moji vysokiji),” and “U Vil’ni horodi preslavinim,” such essential anthology pieces as “Meni trynadcjatyj mynalo,” “Jakby vy znaly panyči,” and “U nedilen’ku u svjatuju,” and such highly personal and revealing and polished lyrics as “Ne tak tiji vorohy,” “I znov meni ne pryvezla,” “Dobro u koho je hospoda,” “I vyris ja na čužyni,” or “Nu ščob zdavalosja slova.” For its part the argument regarding censorship is in fact one of self-censorship—and with Ševčenko, whether at this or another juncture, it is difficult to demonstrate. The poems transcribed from the “Mala knyžka” to the “Bil’ša knyžka” are hardly (politically or socially) more acceptable (“blahonadijni”); and, given the later poems that are inscribed in it (be it “Neofity” [1857], “Tym nesytym očam” [1860], or “Himn černečyj” [also 1860]), the “Bil’ša knyžka” could hardly expect to pass through censorship intact.

There is, however, a readily apparent, if not hard-edged, principle determining this erasure-by-exclusion. Taken generally, the poems of the “Mala knyžka” that are not transcribed into the “Bil’ša knyžka” are the poems that present with a particular intensity Ševčenko’s feelings of anguish and solitude, alienation and anger and despair. They do not recount, they do not narrate these feelings—they explode with them. As striking as the unprecedented intensity of these feelings is the no less powerful sense of impending death, of a void into which he, the poet, and everything he feels and creates will inevitably disappear. This profound and transcendent sense of

<sup>8</sup> As with so many aspects of official Soviet thought, the operant model here has been teleological, and the movement from the “Mala knyžka” to the “Bil’ša knyžka” seen largely in terms of “improvements.” A typically reductive and dogmatic treatment is found in Je. O. Nenadkevč’s *Z tvorčoji laboratoriji T. H. Ševčenko: Redakcijna robota nad tvoramy 1847–1858 rr.* (Kiev, 1959). The pattern of changes he sees is that of greater revolutionism, realism, materialism, anti-religiosity, and so on; cf. pp. 220–23 and *passim*.

<sup>9</sup> Thus, for example, “Neofity” appeared in the journal *Osnova* (1862, no. 4) with considerable deletions by the censor. Such poems as “Tym nesytym očam” (1860) and “Himn černečyj” (1860) were first published abroad, in the 1876 Prague *Kobzar*. Cf. also V. S. Borodin, *T. H. Ševčenko i cars’ka cenzura: Doslidžennja i dokumenty 1840–1862 roky* (Kiev, 1969).

death appears as a universal theme in such poems as "Čuma" (1848) or "U Boha za dvermy ležala sokyra" (1848). (In symbolically charged and dramatic narrative it appears as murder or parricide, for example in "U tijeji Kateryny" [1848] or "U Vil'ni horodi preslavnim" [1848]. It also appears, by analogy to the poet's fate, in the putatively historical "Zastupyla čorna xmara" [1848] that narrates the apocryphal story of Hetman Dorošenko's exile and solitary death.)<sup>10</sup> In its purest form, however, it emerges in the lyrical, confessional mode, as in the already cited "Liču v nevoli dni i noči" (1850), which takes the catalogue of absence,

Немає слов, немає сльоз,  
Немає нічого.  
Нема навіть кругом тебе  
Великого Бога!  
(lines 25–28)

and turns it inward, into despair and prayer:

Жить не хочеться на світі, волочити  
А сам мусиш жити.  
Мушу, мушу, а для чого?  
Щоб не губить душу?  
Не варт вона того жалю. . .  
. . .  
Дай дожити, подивитись,  
О Боже мій милий!  
На лани тії зелені  
І тії могили!  
А не даси, то донеси  
На мою країну  
Мої сльози; бо я, Боже!  
Я за неї гину!  
. . .  
Донеси ж, мій Боже милий!  
Або хоч надію  
Пошли в душу. . .  
(lines 31–35, 53–60, and 65–67)

And the only response is indeed to hope—and to write:

А може тихо за літами  
Мої мережані сльозами  
І долетять коли-небудь

<sup>10</sup> Cf. in O. Ivankin's comments on Ševčenko's very loose reliance on history here, *Komentar do 'Kobzarja' Ševčenka: Poeziji 1847–1861 rr.* (Kiev, 1968), pp. 151–60.

На Україну. . . і пануть,  
 Неначе роси над землею,  
 На щире серце молодеє  
 Сльозами тихо упадуть!  
 . . .  
 Нехай як буде, так і буде. . .  
 . . .  
 А я таки мережать буду  
 Тихенько білії листи.

(lines 77–83, 88 and 91–92)

Why then the erasure? Why is the very thing that keeps the poet alive rejected, deleted by him? Before attempting to answer one should note that “erasure” as it appears here is not a hyperbole or only a metaphor. For apart from not including some of his very best works in his apparent plans for a future volume, Ševčenko also actively crossed out passages or whole poems while working on the “Mala knyžka.” While the deletion or reworking of individual passages is indeed in a number of instances—but hardly always—an artistic improvement,<sup>11</sup> the crossing-out of whole poems is much less intelligible, especially since these, while few in number, constitute some of Ševčenko’s most revealing works. Apart from the already mentioned “U Vil’ni horodi preslavnim” and “Nu ščob zdavalosja slova,” these are “Čy to nedolja ta nevolja,” “Syči,” “O dumy moji! o slavo zlaja,” and “Xiba samomu napysat’.” Without their existence (especially the simply superb “Nu ščob zdavalosja slova,” “Čy to nedolja ta nevolja,” and “Xiba samomu napysat’”) our understanding of Ševčenko, of his complexity, would be gravely impaired—and yet he himself crossed these works out (although he did not destroy them).

The answer, it seems, is not to be found in speculation about the poet’s intentions. (The one traditional version—that after exile Ševčenko regained his equanimity and hence “toned down” his earlier despondency—merely trivializes the issue.)<sup>12</sup> What is required, rather, is an analysis of the actual textual movement between assertion and doubt, creation and erasure—and the role that writing plays along this interface. “Xiba samomu napysat’,” one of Ševčenko’s best and most elusive poems, and yet one he crossed out,

<sup>11</sup> The question of deleted passages is part of the larger and highly complex issue of Ševčenko’s variants. While some, like the ending of “Černec’,” were justifiably removed for artistic reasons, others, like the passages in “A. O. Kozačkovs’komu,” or the whole passage on poetry in “A numo znovu viršuvat’” (cf. below), create new variants, which make the same basic claim to autonomy as do the already accepted variants of, say, “Liču v nevoli dni i noči.”

<sup>12</sup> While this is generally and officially propounded in Soviet scholarship, it also exists in the non-Soviet version. Cf. Pavlo Zajcev’s *Žyttja Tarasa Ševčenko* (see fn. 33, below).

is clearly a key here:

- Хіба самóму написать  
Таки посланіє до себе  
Та все дочиста розказать,  
Усе, що треба, що й не треба.
- 5 А то не діждешся його,  
Того писанія святого,  
Святої правди ні од кóго,  
Та й ждять немаю од когó,  
Бо вже б, здавалося, пора:
- 10 Либонь, уже десяте літо,  
Як людям дав я "Кобзаря",  
А їм неначе рот зашило,  
Ніхто й не гавкне, не лайне,  
Неначе й не було мене.
- 15 Не похвали собі, громадо!—  
Без неї може обійдусь,—  
А ради жду собі, поради!  
Та мабуть в яму перейду  
Із москалів, а не діждусь!
- 20 Мені, було, аж серце мліло,—  
Мій Боже милий! як хотілось,  
Щоб хто-небудь мені сказав  
Хоч слово мудре; щоб я знав,  
Для кого я пишу? для чого?
- 25 За що я Україну люблю?  
Чи варт вона огня святого? . . .  
Бо хоч зостаріюсь зато́го,  
А ще не знаю, що роблю.  
Пишу собі, щоб не міняти
- 30 Часа святого так на так,  
Та іноді старий козак  
Верзеться грішному, усатий,  
З своєю волею мені  
На чорнім вороні-коні!
- 35 А більш нічого я не знаю,  
Хоч я за це і пропадаю  
Тепер в далекій стороні.  
Чи доля так оце зробила?  
Чи мати Богу не молилась,
- 40 Як понесла мене? Що я—  
Неначе лютая змія  
Розтоптана в степу здихає,  
Захода сонця дожидає.

- Отак-то я тепер терплю,  
 45 Та смерть із степу виглядаю,  
 А за що, єй-богу, не знаю!  
 А все-таки її люблю,  
 Мою Україну широку,  
 Хоч я по їй і одинокий  
 50 (Бо, бачте, пари не найшов)  
 Аж до погибелі дійшов.  
  
 Нічого, друже, не журися!  
 В дулевину себе закуй,  
 Гарненько Богу помолися,  
 55 А на громаду хоч наплюй!  
 Вона—капуста головата.  
 А втім, як знаєш, пане-брате,  
 Не дурень, сам собі міркуй.

Seen from the overall formal perspective, the poem is a curious, and for Ševčenko quite characteristic, conflation of two different modes—the monologic and the dialogic; what begins as a confessional monologue (lines 1–51) becomes, through the last seven lines, a dialogue, a discussion with the preceding, or more precisely, a suspension, a re-statement of the argument. This shift comes unannounced and at the very end contributes to a certain disorientation for the reader: what had just seemed evident and knowable becomes opaque. Self-revelation, seemingly built on the bedrock of emotional intensity, becomes deferred, and that bedrock turns into sand. Characteristically (and essentially) this is conveyed by a shift of voice: not just the meaning but the tone and the personality behind it becomes different (and this, of course, establishes a true shift of meaning). The question of voice is indeed central, and to this I shall return. For the moment, however, one can again note that while at heart such a dialogic cast obtains in all of Ševčenko’s work, it is particularly resonant in the exile poetry by virtue of its pronounced self-referential focus, its dramatization of the writing situation. As in the first (1847) “Moskaleva kryncycja,” the dialogue is about writing, with the difference that there it was about how to write and here it is on why and whether.

But this is the larger picture, which is apprehended only at the end, or upon rereading. A sense of an inner dialogue, more precisely of opposition and negation, comes from the narrative, and from the very outset. Beginning with the paradox of the opening two lines—the opening decision to write an epistle to oneself (which “decision” is itself in a way suspended given the interrogatory, modal, and expressive polysemy of the particle “xiba”)—the text proceeds relentlessly to pile up negation upon negation,

reversal upon reversal. Thus: the task of telling-confessing “everything” (*dočysta*)—but with the addressee still being oneself [3];\* in the very next line this “everything” is qualified as “all that is necessary” and “all that is not necessary” [4]. Further, the proposition that one should write now, since there is no point in waiting any longer [5], is negated by the assertion that there is no one from whom to accept a letter [8]. (In fact this is a double negation: there is no one *available* for this mission of mercy, to send the “holy truth” [7], *and* there is no one who *will* do this [8].) Further still, in ever-expanding gyres of self-analysis, the negation involves his sense of abandonment (he gave his countrymen his poetry, his *Kobzar*, and now no one will even “bark” at him or berate him—as if he did not even exist [10–14]); his claim that he does not want praise but advice and council [15–23]; the series of agonizing questions and doubts as to why he writes at all [24–34]; his sense of his doomed existence, lasting from before his birth to his impending death [35–51]; to, at last, the final coda [51–58] where, in a different voice, he decenters it all and prepares the ground to start another, similar cycle.

The language of the poem, again still on the formal-grammatical level, is remarkably saturated with the lexicon of opposition, of doubt, questioning, and, above all, negation. Thus in the poem’s fifty-eight lines there are four explicit expressions of doubt (“xiba” [1], “lybon” [10], “mabut” [9] and [18]); six explicit questions (two in [24], and [25], [26], [38], and [39]); nine formulations of logical opposition (“xoč” [23, 27, 36, 49, and 55], “bo”/“jak” [9/11], “vse-taky” [47], “a vtim” [57], and “ne”/“a” [15/17]); and twenty-six negations (“ne” [4, 5, 8, twice in 13, 14, 15, 19, 28, 29, 35, 39, 46, 50, 52, and 58], “a” [5, 12, 19, 28, 35, 46, and 55], as well as “ni” [7], “nixto” [13], and “bez” [16]). If one were to add the three usages of “nenače” [12, 14, and 41] as clear instances of “doubtful” or “inadequate” comparisons,<sup>13</sup> it comes out that forty-eight of fifty-eight lines, virtually five-sixths of them, express negation, doubt, or opposition, or, more generally, decentering.

As deeply rooted as it is in language, this tendency always to shift the center, to take the seemingly solid and reveal its fluidity and inadequacy, is something that transcends language. Its basic function is to show that ultimately—even while it remains a fundamental, and for the poet the only, tool—language itself is inadequate to the task of mirroring the flow of the

\* Here and below, the numbers in square brackets refer to lines of “Xiba samomu napysat’.”

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Slovník ukrajinsk’ koji movy*, vol. 5 [N–O] (Kiev, 1974), p. 343. The third meaning of “nenače,” as expressing “incomplete verisimilitude, doubt, lack of confidence, etc. in the expressed proposition,” is illustrated precisely by examples taken from Ševčenko.

mind, of feeling and cognition. Ševčenko, seemingly uniquely among his nineteenth-century contemporaries, is consumed by this awareness, most evidently in his exile poetry where, under the intense workings of solitude and feelings of abandonment, the weight of the poet-prophet's calling and curse, the poetry, as in a crucible, is transformed into a new, transcendent value.

The first step in this direction (and the movement, in fact, is not diachronic but internal and spiritual) is to establish a coincidence of oppositions, where poetry is shown to be at once a task that is holy and profane. The already cited opening lines of "A numo zнову viršuvat'," with their conflation of "reworking God's record" and "cursing people and fate" do this quite obliquely. In "Ne hrije sonce na čužyni" the juxtaposition of praying and cursing (clearly still with reference to poetic activity) is immediate and, for all its irony, programmatic:

Мені невесело було  
 Й на нашій славній Україні.  
 Ніхто любив мене, вітав,  
 І я хилився ні до кого,  
 Блукав собі, молився Богу  
 Та люте панство проклинав.  
 (lines 3–8)

In this same vein, a basic value can turn into its very opposite. Thus, in "N. N. (O dumy moji! o slavo zlaja)," as noted above, a poem of the "Mala knyžka" he crossed out but later rewrote as "Slava" in 1858, he speaks of his fame—which in fact is the concomitant of his poetry!—both as a "faithful wife" and as a whore. In "Mov za podušne, ostupyly" (1848) the coincidence/opposition is presented most succinctly through the device of rhyming "writing" with "sinning" (*pyšu / hrišu*):

Боже милий,  
 Де ж заховатися мені?  
 Що діяти? Уже й гуляю  
 По цім Аралу; і пишу.  
 Віршую нищечком, грішу,  
 Бог зна колишніі случаї  
 В душі своїй перебираю  
 Та списую. . .  
 (lines 3–10)

Or, again, in "Dolja" (1858), even while beginning the poem with "Ty ne lukavyla zo mnoju," he still turns to his fate (with his life's course in mind) with the accusation, "A ty zbrexala," only to exonerate her in lines that are now taken as the very essence of Ševčenko's self-assessment:

—Учися, серденько, колись  
 З нас будуть люде,—ти сказала.  
 А я й послухав, і учивсь,  
 І вивчився. А ти збрехала.  
 Які з нас люде? Та дарма!  
 Ми не лукавили з тобою,  
 Ми просто йшли; у нас нема  
 Зерна неправди за собою.

(lines 7–14)

The conflation of opposites (of poetry as praying/cursing, of the poet as simultaneously apotheized and damned) is but the narrower case. Ultimately, within the force field of poetic perception everything can be turned into its opposite, suspended, decentered. Two striking images of this occur in the exile poems. In the retrospective, nostalgic "My vkupočci kolys' rosly" (1849), the poet imagines returning to his village and seeing the graves of his parents in a dark and cool orchard and the tilted time-worn crosses on them

. . . в садочку  
 Лежать собі у холодочку,  
 Мов у раю, мої старі.  
 Хрести дубові посхилялись,  
 Слова дощем позамивались. . .

and then adds these remarkable lines:

І не дощем, і не слова  
 Гладесенько Сатурн стирає. . .  
 (lines 30–36)

The image is entirely motivated—time effaces everything, and not only words and not only with rain—but the message is systemic and profound: everything in the poetry, its very stuff, *words*, can be shown to have a double bottom. In "Liču v nevoli dni i noči" (the companion piece to "Xiba samomu napysat'"), in its reworked 1858 version, the movement is in the opposite direction. Just as everything in the poetry can be melted by its forces into different shapes, so, too, when the poetic gaze is directed at surrounding reality, everything can appear as the penned script of a secret, higher code:

Каламутними болотами,  
 Меж бур'янами, за годами  
 Три года сумно протекли.  
 Багато дечого взяли  
 З моєї темної комори  
 І в море нишком однесли.

І нишком проковтнуло море  
 Моє не золото-серебро,  
 Мої літа, моє добро,  
 Мою нудьгу, мої печалі,  
 Тії незримії скрижалі,  
 Незримим писані пером.

(lines 13–24)

The image is archetypal in its power and in its open-endedness: time, grief, consciousness all become an invisible text. The text, Ševčenko seems to be saying, is everywhere, and everything his mind touches becomes a text.

In “Xiba samomu napysat’” the key to the text is its self-revelation, a self-baring that in contrast to the imagery of the above-mentioned poems develops its argument through a highly rhetorical mode. On the one hand, as we have seen, it is based on grammatical and syntactic features. On the other, it appears through an alternation of semantic and value-charged moments. In effect, the narrative proceeds like an internal dialogue or polemic through a series of polar reversals. Thus, this is at first [1–4] the *topos* of an “epistle” and the positive assertion of the need to write, even if it is a letter to oneself, saying “everything and nothing”; it is followed by the negative realization that there is only silence on the other end [5–14], which culminates with the horror that as a result one is simply erased out of existence (“nenače j ne bulo mene” [14]).

This, in turn, is followed by an evocation of the positive *topos* of council and support (“rad[a],” “porad[a],” “slovo mudre”) that is interwoven, however, with recurring feelings of hopelessness and doubt [15–28]. In response to the ultimate of these, which is perhaps the fundamental leitmotif of Ševčenko’s exile poetry—“Bo xoč zostarijus’ zatoho/ A šče ne znaju, ščo roblju”—he does find solace, precisely in his writing: “pyšu sobi.” This passage [29–34], bracketed, as it were, between two emphatic negations (the “ne znaju” of [28] and [35]), is unquestionably subdued (writing is depicted as “scribbling” [“pyšu sobi”]), the imagination as empty fantasizing [“verzet’sja”]), but its positive charge is unmistakable, and, for all its understatement, the writing of poetry is still shown as coterminous with “sacred time” [30]. And then again a resurgence of self-doubt and self-negation. With its images of suffering and death, and an overarching curse over his life, the next passage (again bracketed by the “ne znaju” of [35] and [46]) is the nadir in his self-assessment. The response to it [47–51] is minimally positive, being simply an assertion in the face of his overwhelming adversity, of his love for Ukraine: “A vse-taky jiji ljublju, / Moju Ukra-

jinu široku."<sup>14</sup> But this assertion is tempered, in fact all but diluted [49–51], by his sense (foreshadowing the above-cited sentiments of "Dolja") that this love had been betrayed (in effect, unrequited), that no love was shown him, that his world was always a solitary desert, and that ultimately (as in *Trizna*) he was always an exile [49–51]. Existentially this is the *ne plus ultra*; beyond this the argument has nowhere to go.

And yet Ševčenko decenters this as well. For the final coda [52–58] is an ironic *volte-face* that reveals a different voice and a different perspective: its counterpoint emerges not as yet another linear reversal but as a negation and debunking of the discourse itself. Most revealing, it does so with a curious overdetermination, with an adumbrating injunction for self-defense and self-healing in each of its first four lines ("...ne žurysja," "...sebe zakuj," "...pomolysja," and "...napluj"), and with the fifth [56] serving as a dismissive characterization ("Vona—kapusta holovata") of that very community from which he craved recognition and support. The final two lines, however, suspend this as well and provide not an injunction-answer but an injunction-question. In fact, his voice says, the community might *not* be a collective "cabbage-head," and the whole exercise *may* have been worthwhile. At the end, the whole experience is bracketed once more—and left open-ended.

The dialogue on the level of rhetoric and feeling is recapitulated, with further ramifications, on the level of structural symbolic oppositions whose interplay, moreover, is considerably more complex. At its most basic this is the opposition of the poet and the community, the *hromada*, (to which he explicitly refers: [15] and [55]; cf also "ljud[y]" [11]). Like ripples spreading on a once-calm surface, other oppositions and tensions are generated. Characteristically, they develop their own dynamics and turbulences, so that in the end the initial polarities are reversed and the final pattern, again, wholly decentered.

Thus, the basic opposition of the poet and the community—which, more concretely, are both his readers ("...uže desjate lito, / Jak ljudjam dav ja 'Kobzarja'" [10–11]) and his interlocutors, those who should, but do not, write to him [5–8] or give him counsel ("...jak xotilos', / Ščob xto-nebud' meni skazav / Xoč slovo mudre" [21–23])—devolves into several interlocking oppositions: of writing and silence, of remembering and forgetting,

<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that in the first draft of the poem the reference here and throughout lines 47–50 is to "svit" not "Ukrajina." While both are basically in the same semantic field, the shift from one to the other (apart from giving greater concreteness and emotional resonance) does suggest that the issue for Ševčenko here is the *action*—i. e., living or loving—rather than the object or setting, be it "Ukraine" or "the world."

of communicating and ignoring, of knowledge (the triad “rad[a],” “porad[a],” and “slovo mudre”) and ignorance (emblematically the thrice stated “ne znaju”), of love and companionship and solitary suffering. In the course of this elaboration and diffusion, the initial polarity, as noted, is reversed. Most strikingly this is the transformation of the “hromada” from a source of support and wisdom to a “kapusta holovata” and something to be spat on. But this is the finale and in essence only the surface. In the course of the poem, as we have seen, doubt touches virtually each of the positive *topoi* in the poet’s self-reflection. It touches not only his friends, their support, and constancy, in effect society as such, but also the very core of his strength, the touchstone of his life, Ukraine itself—both as ideal and ultimate value (“Čy vart vona ohnja svjatoho?”) and as a concrete setting which withheld its love (“. . . ja po jij i odynokyj/ (Bo, bačte, pary ne najšov)/ Až do pohybeli dijšov”).

The turbulence generated by these reversals is not pure chaos, however; in fact, from it a new, subtler order begins to appear, one that is based on deeper and more universal binary oppositions. These, too, are closely interconnected, imperceptibly shading off, one into the other. And, again, generally and cumulatively, they throw new and intense light on the basic question of writing.

The first and most overt of these is the opposition between the sacred and the profane. This duality, of course, is unvaryingly central to Ševčenko’s sense of the world, and himself: just as throughout his poetry the surrounding reality is split, without mediation, into absolutized good and evil, so the self-image of the poet, regardless of whether it is in the exile poetry or before or after, is torn between his apotheosized divine calling and his fallen, indeed reprobate nature.<sup>15</sup> (The major modulation within this constant may be the fact that the exile poetry, as shown paradigmatically by “Čy to nedolja ta nevolja,”<sup>16</sup> and by the twin brackets of “Moskaleva krynycja,” is particularly attuned to confessional self-baring and at first glance excessively harsh self-condemnation.) In “Xiba samomu napysat’” the domain of the sacred is profoundly and indeed programmatically stressed: the one adjective that is repeated more than any other is “holy” (i.e., “holy writing” [6], “holy truth” [7], “holy fire” [26], and “holy time” [30]).<sup>17</sup> This is further developed by the explicit references to prayer in [39] and [54].

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *The Poet as Mythmaker*, pp. 1–16 and passim, and “The Nexus of the Wake.”

<sup>16</sup> Characteristically, this was one of the last poems Ševčenko was to write in exile (i.e., in 1850); it is also one of those he crossed out and did not inscribe in the “Bil’ša knyžka.”

<sup>17</sup> Each reference, of course, emphatically adumbrates writing; cf. below.

The meaning of the sacred, however, and in fact the structure as such, arises only when its opposite is articulated. And here it is not simply the "profane" in the sense of the everyday, of the unholy (although it is that, too), but also the profane as the active opposite of the holy, in a word, as the malignant, as the accursed. The reference to the poet's "sinfulness" [32] bridges the two: on the one hand (and withal as a culturally standardized *topos*) it alludes to the sphere of the everyday, with its loneliness, tedium, and massive pettiness (which is anatomized in Ševčenko's *Diary* and shown in highlighted and distilled form in his exile poetry), and on the other it prepares the ground for the anguished question of whether he was cursed by God, even before birth, from his very conception [39–40], and for the arresting grim image of his impending death, like a crushed, poisonous snake in the desert, waiting for the sun to set [40–43]. As striking as the image may be, the feelings that underlie it, far from being unique to the poem, are the warp, so to speak, in the fabric of the poet's self-depiction during his exile. His sense—an angry and tormented mixture of irony, self-reproach and regret, and bitter bravado—that he is indeed (or "in deed") a criminal, a convict, an evildoer punished by society, is a central leitmotif in the lyrical-confessional poetry of this period. (As a narrative and symbolic presence it is most pronounced in both versions of "Moskaleva krynycja," and, in fact, in their synergistic interplay, in such poems as "Varnak" [1848], "Mež skalamy nenače zlodij" [1848], "Petrus" [1850], and others, and, lest we forget the other mode of Ševčenko's creativity, in his series of paintings entitled "Parable of the Prodigal Son.") The peak of his self-laceration occurs in "Čy to nedolja ta nevolja," a poem in which he identifies his utter(!) moral degradation with his writing of wicked verse, and one which, as already noted, he also symbolically erased.<sup>18</sup> The power of this sense of moral culpability, of somehow deserving his punishment, simply cannot be ignored in the manner of the traditional and all-but-universal argument of Ševčenko scholarship, to wit, that the poet, obviously, was the political victim of a repressive autocratic regime, and that nothing further about *his* understanding of it need be said. In reality—and this poetry, this writing is born of reality, and the fact that Ševčenko also became the stuff of primers and political iconography is extrinsic if not altogether extraneous to it—the experience of socially sanctioned punishment, especially when it is unmediated by a consensual, let alone political, sense of a *cause* (and that, clearly, was still in the future),

<sup>18</sup> The question of writing-as-moral debauch (or, more accurately, writing-as-a-concomitant of moral downfall) has its psychological epicenter in this poem. It has a narrative development in various other works, however, including the prose, and it deserves separate attention.

cannot but be assimilated as guilt, and, in one degree or another, refracted as a form of self-loathing. The only alternatives, it would seem, are either obliviousness born of gross insensitivity or habitual asocial behavior (which hardly applies here), or denial and repression by way of psychic dissociation. But while Ševčenko himself—in “Iurodyvyj” (1857), above all—is willing to speak of his opposition to tyranny as a form of holy madness, in actual life the expedient of “madness,” of blocking out extreme trauma by tuning out parts of his psyche, was not his course. Instead he integrates it into his creativity. To the same degree that he is torn by self-reproach and guilt and the pain of solitude, to that degree he continually creates and reasserts his poetic calling as a holy task. And just as his self-excoriation rises to a level of bitterness heretofore unheard in Ukrainian poetry (and perhaps poetry in general),<sup>19</sup> so also, with the same eloquence, he apotheosizes himself as Carrier of the Holy Word, indeed as Prophet.<sup>20</sup>

But it would be only partially true to say that there is a kind of balance, a compensatory equilibrium between these poles. (For the traditional Ševčenko scholarship, and even more so for the popular, iconic perception of the poet, this is nonetheless a radical departure.) The deeper truth, however (and to this day this is a largely impenetrable secret for the whole gamut of the Ševčenko reception), is that these polar stances and self-assessments, and with it the discourse they generate, far from being static are dynamically interconnected: they activate each other, they thrive on and expand each other, in a word, they establish a remarkably powerful synergy. The prophet needs and begets the sinner, the sinner the prophet.

<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the most telling instance of this occurs in the 1848 version of “A numo znovu viršuvat’.” At first, in a variant that is crossed out, poetry is literally compared to cursing (“Jak že joho ne kljasty / I poeziji ne bude. . .”). Subsequently, a remarkable passage is introduced:

А то й поезія зав’яне  
Як кривди не стане  
Заходімося ж ми знову  
Святеє поганить.  
Ні, не до ладу, не до складу,  
І кому завадить  
Моя кривда лукавая?  
Нікому. А зрадить  
Самому зрадить на чужині,  
І на далекій Україні,  
Старому віри не поймуть,  
Старого дурнем назовуть.  
Нехай стара собака гине,  
Коли не вмiє шанувать

Людей та Бога пресвятого  
Не вмiє правдоньки сказать.  
То й цур йому. Нехай блукає  
Дурний свій розум проклинає  
На старість учиться брехать  
А ми не будемо читать  
Його скаженої брехні—  
Правда ваша люде.  
Брехнею, бач вийдеш всюди.  
А не вийдеш в люди.  
Та цур же їй! Нехай собі  
Кого знає шие  
Брехня в дурні. . .

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *The Poet as Mythmaker*, p. 159 and passim. See also my “Iz problematyky symvolicnoji avtobiohrafiji u Mickeviča i Ševčenka,” *Radjans’ke literaturoznavstvo*, 1989, no. 3, pp. 27–35.

The arena, the space in which this agon/generation occurs is the psyche—and to this context, albeit briefly, we shall return. The visible surface, the window on the play, is the writing itself, more specifically the thematically and psychologically charged imperative of self-revelation. In keeping with what necessarily is always self-revealing *and* self-concealing, this focus, as we have seen, is never fixed, but perpetually in movement, decentered.

The second basic and altogether universal opposition is that of presence and absence, of existence and non-existence. The entire monologic first section [1–51] is in essence an extended, “internal” dialogue with the void; as convoluted and inventive as the poet’s strategies for inventing presence may be—beginning with the conceit of a letter to himself—the reality that his thought finds is that “out there” there is only an absence. As we have seen, negation, specifically the sense of absence, surges through the poet’s consciousness in incessant and implacable waves: there is no one out there to write to him, to read him, to respond to him [1–19]; the meaning he invests in it all is reflected back in questions [23–28]; his entire life’s path is cast as a journey between emptiness and emptiness, the curse that was visited upon him before his birth [38–40] and his cursed state as he awaits immanent death [40–45, and 18–19]. Ultimately, the very beacon of his life, the Ukraine he sees himself as living and dying for, is questioned—not only in the rhetorical and “metaphysical” mode (“Čy vart vona ohnja svjatoho?” [26]), but in the existential realization that even though and as much as he loves her, real, human love was withheld from him [47–51].<sup>21</sup> Indeed there is a perfectly balanced inversion here: Ukraine’s very breadth emphasizes his utter solitude [48–49].

For there to be dialogue, however, even if it be a dialogue with the void, the voice must issue from some vantage point. This point or base is the poet’s will and imagination, and above all his writing. References to writing are even more frequent than references to the realm of the sacred (with which they are clearly and intrinsically interconnected): [1, 2, 6, 24, and 29]. With the ironic reference to imagining-fantasizing [32] and beyond that with the already noted *topos* of communication (“rad[a],” “porad[a],” and “slovo mudre”), this expanded realm of the word becomes the only

<sup>21</sup> This, in turn, is part of the much larger complex of *topoi*, passages, and indeed whole poems that debunk the notion of Ukraine as an idyllic paradise. The paradigmatic statement of this is the poem “Jakby vy znaly, panyči” (1850). In effect, the question of Ukraine’s presence/absence—the fact that for Ševčenko she is “herself” only in an ideal mode (in childhood memory, in the distant past, in the hoped-for future) and that in real life (in the social setting, which includes also the poet’s alienation) she is her own opposite, her self-negation—is intrinsically part of, and provides yet another focused instance of, the overarching mythical code of Ševčenko’s poetry.

counterbalance to the surrounding void. Characteristically, the poem itself does not assert this. Within its confines the tug-of-war between absence and presence, doubt and assertion remains virtually to the end, with only the final coda [52–58] asserting self-reliance—but *still, not an explicit faith in the redemptive, life-giving power of poetry*. In the overall frame of the exile poetry, however, this power emerges as an unmistakable presence. It may be strongly tinged by self-irony and self-mockery,<sup>22</sup> but writing is revealed as the spinning of a lifeline, a thread by which the poet hangs on to existence (for he is a poet only insofar as he makes poetry), the embroidered pattern of his inner life, the minute tracings of his life’s journey. *Scribo ergo sum*. As Ševčenko says in the concluding lines of the second version of “Liču v nevoli dni i noči”:

Нехай гнилими болотами  
Течуть собі меж бур’янами  
Літа невольничі. А я!  
Такая заповідь моя!  
Посижу трошки, погуляю,  
На степ, на море подивлюсь,  
Згадаю дещо, заспіваю  
Та й знов мережать захожусь  
Дрібненько книжечку. Рушаю.  
(lines 25–34)

If the essence of the void is death (and “Xiba samomu napysat’ ” evokes the looming presence of death with particular force), and if the essential value of poetry is its assertion of life, that quality is uniquely colored by the fact that this power, this life-force is self-generating. Poetry is a unique parthenogenesis, a mystery of self-creation born of multiform spiritual resources, which here, for Ševčenko, are primarily and paradoxically doubt and despair. The role of the poet, too, is singularly ambiguous: he is its necessary cause, and yet the very measure of the poetry’s success is the way in which it succeeds in transcending him. For Ševčenko, on the one hand, this is traditionally and with subtle variations captured through the image of children who outlive their parents, of messengers-witnesses who wander over the wide world and who touch many souls, even while their creator is long dead. On the other hand, it is the high calling, finally crystallized in his post-exile poetry, but intuited and claimed virtually from the first, of the Poet-Prophet who speaks as but the mouthpiece of history, of Destiny, or of God Himself. It is in this voice that Ševčenko can, with all

<sup>22</sup> Cf. especially the above-discussed “A numo znovu viršuvat’ ” and its variant “A toj poezija zav’jane” (fn. 19, above).

authority, speak of placing his Word to stand guard over the fate of his countrymen:

Я на сторожі коло їх  
 Поставлю слово. . .  
 "Podražanije 11 Psalmu"  
 (lines 22–23)

The exile poetry, however, reveals the working of yet another, now internal and almost wholly self-referential, form of poetic awareness or self-definition, an awareness that stands apart from the earlier poetry's sense of mission and calling and the later poetry's programmatic and millenarian prophetic stance. It does so above all by virtue of its heightened spiritual suffering, its burden of doubt and solitude, and by the concomitant "removal" of, or bracketing or suspension of, belief in (reflecting as it does the actual physical absence, indeed lack of access to) an audience. Just as a poet who does not write poetry is not a poet, so a prophet *in vacuo* is not a prophet. Thus, too, the poetry generated by this enforced (but in terms of his creativity altogether inevitable and organic) stance becomes a subversion of the privileged and seemingly essential link between "the poet" and "the people." Like so many other fixed relationships and verities, this, too, is decentered.

In the Ševčenko canon—which reflects a deep, collective intuition and not merely broadly political exigencies—the work that is traditionally taken as exemplifying the relationship of the poet to his people is the so-called Testament ("Jak umru to poxovajte"; 1845). In this brief poem the poet establishes an essential link, a contractual relationship between himself and his addressees (and these are not merely his contemporaries, but, as his quintessentially mythical, in effect timeless, formulation has it, all his countrymen—those "dead," "living," and "still unborn").<sup>23</sup> As in life, so after death he will speak for and "represent" Ukraine: on his burial mound he will abide with Ukraine as a silent witness, as part of nature, and he will intercede for his countrymen with God if and when they fulfill his (the poet's) commandment and finally liberate themselves. Similarly, in an implicit exchange of vows, he asks that (just as he gave his people his Word) they remember him with a soft, kind word in the new, free family—the vision of which is his essential legacy.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. both the title and the text of "I mertvym i žyvyv i nenarozhdennym zemljakam mojim v Ukrajinu i ne v Ukrajinu moje družnjeje poslanije" (1845).

That this legacy was so perceived, and the exchange of vows accepted across the divide of generations, is demonstrated by both the icon and the canon of Ševčenko—and not least of all by ritual recapitulation, most strikingly by the fact that in Ukrainian society his “Testament” (*Zapovit*) (specifically its opening and conclusion) is still collectively sung at solemn, public occasions. But the poet—in all his human and historical and psychological complexity—*is not and cannot be coterminous with his legacy*. If he were, he would be wholly the stuff of myth—and while Ševčenko is in an unparalleled way its maker and product, there is much in it that is not solely his and, what is more, much of him that is not in it. Quite apart from the biographical evidence (which in the genre of hagiography can, of course, be put in the service of myth) there is a textual basis for perceiving a “non-mythical” Ševčenko. In one major way it is found in the difference between his prose and his poetry, which devolves, as I have argued, on the difference between the “adjusted” and “unadjusted” sides of his personality.<sup>24</sup> Now, it appears that even within the poetry there is a demarcation between the stance of the Bard and a certain countervailing scepticism and irony. This line runs, with greater or lesser intensity, through the whole poetry and constitutes its essential decentering thrust. It is most evident, however, in the exile poetry and “Xiba samomu napysat’” emerges as its paradigmatic statement.

But the opposition here—and this is the third and perhaps most subtle of the poem’s structuring oppositions—is not between a mythopoeic apotheosis of the Bard and an ironic, deflating counterpoint. As we have seen, the warp and weft of this poem is its suspension and questioning of a number of verities, but especially those that posit the high purpose, the high calling, and the actual achievement (the reference to his own *Kobzar* [11]) of the poet. None of the questions he asks are answered; the only approximation to an answer is that in spite of it all he still loves Ukraine. The opposition—and there surely is one—is signaled not by content but by mode. The demarcation, as noted at the outset, is stressed by the formal divide: on the one hand the monologic self-laceration that is the bulk of the poem [1–51] and on the other the short dialogic envoi [52–58] that counters and redefines all the preceding. The difference in tone, as we have also seen, recapitulates the two voices that were paradigmatically revealed in the first “Moskaleva krynycja” (1847): on the one hand that of “the poet,” literate, intellectual, but also anguished and morbid, and on the other his earthy counterpart, unlettered, but wiser and more resilient. In “Moskaleva krynycja” (1847) their roles were those of “panyč” and

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *The Poet as Mythmaker*, pp. 9–11 and *passim*.

"mužyk," the one writing down and the other telling the story, and their seeming autonomy was motivated by the quasi-dramatic structure of the poem.<sup>25</sup> Here, their true, yoked nature is revealed: they articulate not so much a duality of class and experience (although faint echoes of that do obtain) as two dimensions of the psyche. They give voice, respectively, to the ego and the self.<sup>26</sup>

In a very real way the ego component of the first part [1–51] is so massive as to be overlooked; the "I" is the very fabric of the text. If we could speak of the lexically marked stress on the domain of the sacred (four references) and the act and fact of writing (five), the realm of the ego—as denoted by the reflexive pronoun (seven instances [1, 2, 17, 29, 53, and two in 58]), and especially the first person singular pronoun, "ja"/ "mene"/ "meni" (fourteen: [11, 14, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 33, 35, 36, two in 40, 44, and 48]), and adumbrated by the first person singular verbs—is signaled in virtually every line. (Significantly, it is virtually absent from the envoi, and its two reflexive instances in the last line, ". . . *sam sobi* mirkuj," seem ironically to echo the opening two lines as they close the poem by returning to its beginning.)

For Ševčenko the realms of the ego, of writing, and of the sacred (or of the Poet, his Word, and his Prophecy) are all intertwined. Cumulatively they establish the structure of authorship, and, as ever, that structure is coextensive with authority. That authority, in turn, as both an individual and societal force cannot but crave, and cannot exist without, an audience. Without it, ego/authority is diminished and threatened. Its withdrawal—as much or even more so than the mere fact of exile and solitude—is the source of his anguish. In this regard his conflation of writing/authorship and love, and beyond that his suggestion of a necessary reciprocity is revealing:

Для кого я пишу? для чого?  
 За що я Україну люблю?  
 Чи варт вона огня святого? . . .  
 [24–26]

From the point of view of the ego, from its need for love and attention, such an implicit *quid pro quo* is natural and inevitable—but it is hardly the

<sup>25</sup> Cf. my "Variations on Duality: Ševčenko's 'Moskaleva krynycja,'" forthcoming in *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*.

<sup>26</sup> Regarding the interrelation of self and ego, see C. G. Jung, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self* (Princeton, N.J., 1959; German original: *Aion: Untersuchungen zur Symbolgeschichte* [Zurich, 1951]), especially chaps. 1–5. I am grateful to Oksana Grabowicz for bringing this to my attention.

authentic, selfless love that he is implicitly and indeed programmatically seeking. “Love is not love,” in Shakespeare’s formulation, “which alters when it alteration finds, / Or bends with the remover to remove.” And still within the space of the poem, in fact before the end of the monologic part, Ševčenko does express a selfless love, “A vse-taky jiji ljublju, / Moju Ukrajinu šyroku”—even while doing so with feelings of hurt and rejection, “Хо́ч ја по јјј і одынokyj/ (Во, ба́чте, па́ры не најšov),” that continue to emanate from the ego. Similarly revealing is his assertion that what he seeks is not praise, but simple human contact-counsel:

Не похвали собі, громадо!—  
 Без неї може обійдусь,—  
 А ради жду собі, поради!  
 [15–17]

But as plausible as it is, as socially acceptable as is its framing, it is still a form of ego-dissimulation: whether seen as “counsel” or as “praise,” the need for contact, for support, for *external (societal) validation* is unmistakable and unmistakably a part of the ego. From the point of view of his own quest and of his final insight, his request that this “counsel,” this “slovo mudre” be given to him so that he (he!) could know why he is writing—

Щоб хто-небудь мені сказав  
 Хоч слово мудре; щоб я знав,  
 Для кого я пишу? для чого? . . .  
 [22–24]

—is simply absurd; it is a rhetorical conceit, a trick of the ego. The answer can only come from within.

In contrast to the stormy flow and ebb of the preceding, the envoi is calming and laconic. It works not so much through ironic deflation as through a matter-of-fact directness, and practical advice. As in Zen teaching, the tone, the idea, and its implementation are fused: the answer is not in striving for recognition, or counsel, or love, but in self-reliance (“V dulevnyu sebe zakuj”), in self-focusing and harmony (“Harnen’ko Bohu pomolysja”), and in liberation from the external and social (“A na hromadu choč napljuj”). In fact, and most significantly, it is not presented as an *answer*, a ready-made solution, (which by virtue of being fixed could well be unadaptable) but as a mode of being, a search and an openness that is its own reward:

А втім, як знаєш, пане-брате,  
 Не дурень, сам собі міркуй.

As necessary as this course may be for the author's self-healing, as persuasive as it may be in light of his, and the reader's, intuitive understanding of his existential predicament, it is fraught with danger and paradox. For it flies in the face of the overall collectivist ethos of his society,<sup>27</sup> and in particular of the model of holy *communitas* with its privileged and determining role in the Ukrainian experience, that his poetry did so much to confirm.<sup>28</sup> In light of this ethos and model his willingness to say that one *can* transcend the community (that one can "spit" on it, that one can see it as a "cabbage-head") is indeed a radical shift and it dramatizes a dimension of his character that in turn transcends by far his iconic image. This departure is entirely motivated, however. On the one hand, it again illustrates, perhaps most radically, his perpetual readiness to challenge and decenter even those verities that are fundamental for him<sup>29</sup>—here the otherwise never challenged, but now specifically named *hromada*. On the other hand, even more systematically, it reveals the interplay of the poetry of the ego and the poetry of the self and the way in which the latter is essential for the integrity of the former.

In his post-exile poetry, specifically in such works as "Jurodyvyj" (1857), the triptych "Dolja," "Muza," and "Slava" (1858), in his "imitations" of the biblical prophets, particularly of Psalm 11 (1859), in "Marija" (1859), Ševčenko assumes the mantle of prophetic poetry with a new-found confidence that in large measure is based, so we must believe, on his sense of his *fitness* for this high task. As he says in "Dolja," "My prosto jšly; u nas nema/ Zerna nepravdy za soboju." At the same time, as we have already seen, there is ample evidence (paradigmatically given by "Čy to nedolja ta nevolja"—and the decentering interplay of "dolja/nedolja" is clearly at the heart of this) that, especially during the exile period, Ševčenko massively felt and expressed in the sharpest terms the sense of his own guilt and of his fallen nature. How, then, should we understand "u nas nema/ Zerna nepravdy za soboju"? The answer lies precisely in the term *nepravda*: he disavows not his sinfulness, for all men are sinful, and he first among them, but the lie that covers it up. And the poetry of the exile period is a concerted effort to exorcize self-deception, to bare and thus heal the

<sup>27</sup> For the moment we have to understand this as referring both to all-Russian and to specifically Ukrainian society, with the relative degree and prominence of collectivism in each of them and in their respective traditions a matter still to be determined.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *The Poet as Mythmaker*, chap. 3 and passim.

<sup>29</sup> The instance of instances for this is Ševčenko's relationship to God: his profound religiosity is exemplified by his continuing "bohoborstvo."

soul.<sup>30</sup>

At the core of that process is writing—writing as that which articulates and gives shape to both the self and the ego, and to the role that the latter will play in the world and in history. The purpose, the goal, the addressees of the writing assume, therefore, central importance. Hence, too, the questions that are the very hinge of “Xiba samomu napysat’”: “Dlja koho ja pyšu? dlja čoho?” While the sense of an audience (implicitly the “nation” itself)<sup>31</sup> and of the mission to speak to it is never abandoned and emerges with new vigor in the post-exile poetry, the poetry of exile forces an inward look. As he says in the opening lines of one 1848 poem:

Не для людей, тієї слави,  
Мережані та кучеряві  
Оці вірші віршую я.  
Для себе братія моя!

A certain paradox, or the same ongoing decentering, does remain, of course: the claim of writing for oneself is again couched in the rhetoric of a direct address, almost of an epistle (and the narrative content of this poem, in effect, its one extended image, is of the poet’s words, like “light” little children coming to him from Ukraine and flying back to Ukraine, to be received in the archetypal-ideal family: “I v sim’ji veselij tyxo/ Ditej pryvitajut’ . . .”). In this strikingly mediumistic formulation of writing<sup>32</sup> we

<sup>30</sup> The inherent question of “repentance” is polysemous. On the one hand, Ševčenko says explicitly in “N. N. (O dumy moji! o slavo zljaja)” (1847), “Karajus’, mučusja . . . ale ne kajus’!”; on the other hand, the narrative and symbolic movement of many poems (e.g., “Moskaleva kryncycja,” especially the 1857 version, “Varnak” [1848], or “Mež skalamy, nenače zlodij” [1848]) is directed precisely at repentance, forgiveness, and renewal. The two levels implied here are not mutually contradictory: while denying the moral right of the (official) authority that so “fiercely” (*ljuto*) punishes him, he nonetheless, as I have argued, cannot but accept guilt—and utilize it as a form of self-renewal.

<sup>31</sup> The concept of nation has a special complexity when used in the context of Ševčenko’s creativity. The fundamental dichotomy here is that while the formative influence on Ukrainian national consciousness was undoubtedly that of Ševčenko (the consensus in Ukrainian historiography is quite correct here), his own sense of Ukraine is decidedly pre-political and mythical (cf. *The Poet as Mythmaker*). By way of illustration one can note that Ševčenko, who did more than anyone to enable Ukrainians to identify themselves as Ukrainians, never used the term “ukrajinec”/ “ukrajinka.” Similarly, while contributing more than any writer to the establishment of the modern Ukrainian literary language, he continued to write in a general Russian orthography—even though fledgling Ukrainian orthographies were already being utilized. What is at play here, however, is not so much paradox as the difference between the larger and the smaller picture.

<sup>32</sup> This is echoed in a number of exile poems; cf. also the introduction to “Knjažna” (1847). A specific variant here is the depiction of writing (cf., for example, “To tak i ja teper pyšu” [1847]) as a kind of out-of-body experience, where it is not the words that fly from Ukraine, alight on the poet’s pages, and fly back again, but the poet himself. While initiated in “Son (Komediya)” (1844), it was given there only through the device of a “dream.” In the “Testa-

may hear an echo of the poet's "Testament"—with the operant shift, however, that even while the goal of reunion and repose in the bosom of an archetypal, free, and joyous family is the same, the mode is personal and lyrical, while in the earlier poem it is collective and sublime.

The shift to the poetry of the self expressed at the end of "Xiba samomu napysat'" is much more radical: under its impact, and building on the poem's overall fabric of doubt and decentering, the whole begins to function as a kind of "Anti-Testament." The Bard, who spoke of himself as incorporating all of Ukraine, its past and future, into himself, who saw himself, in life and after death, as its singular representative and spokesman before God, now speaks calmly and coldly of encasing himself in the steely armor of indifference, self-reliance and self-validation, and dismisses the community more in mockery than anger. As an antithesis, moreover, it is not a fleeting moment, a flutter on the graph of his writing, but a statement whose subtle play of rhetoric and feeling, especially when seen against the background of the undercurrents and leitmotifs of the exile poetry, assumes programmatic significance. To see it—as is done by both Soviet and non-Soviet critics—as simply momentary disillusionment, as a passing vacillation in an otherwise firm (even "ideological") stance is to misread badly both the intrinsic, the textual, and the large, overarching pattern of Ševčenko's poetry.<sup>33</sup> In terms of the former, as I have attempted to show here, the movement of Ševčenko's thought, its articulation and syntax, is continually marked by reversal and decentering; throughout it acts as a force field and not as a set of syllogisms. In its turn, Ševčenko's life-limned-in-poetry or simply his sense of himself as a poet, *as reflected in the poetry itself*, does show an overall pattern of self-assertion as bard and national spokesman. Its general movement, moreover, is toward a prophetic stance which is built, as I have argued at some length, primarily on structures of mythical thought resonating with the collective ethos. At the same time, *on the personal, psychological level*, this general movement is also

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ment" (1845) the poet—not his soul, but the poet himself—will fly to God from his grave when Ukraine sheds her evil blood. In the exile poetry all of his writing—as a holy experience—implicitly assumes this form of communication. The way in which these various moments adumbrate the shamanic role of the poet requires further elaboration.

<sup>33</sup> Cf., for example, the treatment of "Xiba samomu napysat'" in Pavlo Zajcev's *Žyttja Tarasa Ševčenka* (New York, Paris, Munich, 1955), pp. 245–47, and P. M. Fedčenko's recent *Taras Hryhorovyč Ševčenko* (Kiev, 1989), pp. 184–85. Here, and in general, the naively biographical approach, the virtual absence of a sense of an immanent and overarching poetic systematics or code, is largely occasioned, it would seem, by an implicit (or even explicit) orientation to a popular audience, and with it the need (which is certainly not consciously perceived) to reaffirm a direct, one-to-one relationship between the life and the poetry. One of the very few exceptions to this is Marietta Šaginjan's justly acclaimed *Taras Ševčenko* (Moscow, 1941).

countered by a consistent, decentering pattern of doubt, which ranges from harsh moral self-condemnation to mild self-irony (quintessentially in his very last poems). While it can be shown to be general and basically synchronic, the existential core of this pattern, the locus of its textual and psychological intensity is clearly the poetry of exile.

From this poetry above all (but from his whole oeuvre as well), Ševčenko emerges as a poignantly liminal figure. Like Ukrainian society, which he did so much to animate and mold, and which he feels and intuits more than any of his contemporaries, Ševčenko is caught between powerful antipodes. Just as his society finds itself torn between a historical (albeit nostalgic and mythologized) and a provincially ahistorical consciousness, between a *de facto* regional (and politically utterly passive) and, at this stage, only intuited (and in its articulation only emotional) national existence, so he, too, is no less torn: socially (and psychologically) he is neither a *panyč* nor a *mužyk*. He knows the great power of his calling and with a profound inner vision he sees that it is his destiny to become his nation's beacon ("A slava zapovid' moja"), and yet this same power of insight, with merciless intensity and detail, reveals to him his own and his society's profound flaws and inadequacies. And, as already noted, the all-too-human option of self-delusion or oblivion or even selective, partial vision is denied to him: his blessing and his curse is that the only kind of poetry he can write is the kind that is utterly honest. In this sense his poetry is indeed always a confession and a prayer, a holy task—even when it entails cursing and a challenging of God Himself; the merely decorative, or rhetorical, or conventional quite simply has no place in it.

This altogether organic need to bare his soul, to expose his suffering and his doubts, is what ultimately allows Ševčenko to transcend his oppositions and to turn his liminality into consistently inspired poetry. Specifically, the poetry of the self serves simultaneously as a counterbalance to, and as a means for, legitimizing, on a higher, humane level, the poetry of the ego—his drive to be the nation's spokesman and prophet. In effect, the "Anti-Testament" that we can synecdochically see in "Xiba samomu napysat'" is precisely that which makes the "Testament" (and by extension, of course, the whole modality behind it) legitimate and authentic: if he can free his ideal, his role of being the carrier of the Word, from social approval ("Ne dlja ljudej, tijeji slavy. . .") then he is indeed free and the ideal is real. This freedom becomes categoric, a *sine quo non*, in light of his grim judgment on the slavishness of society. As he says in "Vo ludeji vo dni ony":

Ми серцем голі догола!  
Раби з кокардою на лобі!  
Лакеї в золотій оздобі

Онуча, сміття з помела  
 .го величества. Та й годі.  
 (lines 41–45)

In this same vein (the preceding lines respond to the question: “Ta dež nam tuju matir vzjaty?” and the poem itself is an introduction to his last long poem, “Marija” [1859]), the universal ideal that the Mother of Christ incarnates for Ševčenko is essentially also reflected in the fact that her mission of giving birth to the Word, and providing succor for His disciples, ends—as he casts it—with her dying of hunger, alone and abandoned. Her mission is truly holy precisely because her legacy, her true inner meaning, resists and overcomes the false triumphalist interpretation that society places upon her, and, as Ševčenko so pointedly charges, “crucifies” her with:

А потім ченці одягли  
 Тебе в порфіру. І вінчали,  
 Як ту царицю. . . Розп’яли  
 Й тебе, як сина. Наплювали  
 На тебе, чистую, кати;  
 Розтлили кроткую! а ти. . .  
 Мов золото в тому горнилі,  
 В людській душі возобновилась,  
 В душі невольничій, малій,  
 В душі скорблящей і убогій.  
 (lines 747–757)

That this is a projection of Ševčenko’s own, personal ideal seems beyond doubt—as well as the ironic fact that society, with its structures, its “bonzes and priests,” and its official and self-serving cult of the poet, prepared the same fate for him. And he, clearly, seems to have anticipated this.

But it also seems clear that it was his genius (and in all of modern Ukrainian literature that overworked Romantic notion perhaps applies only to him) that allowed him to evade that societal and egocentric trap of cult and of authority and find that same universal language of common humanity that he apotheizes in “Marija.” For Ševčenko, in fact, never did lay claim to a “rule over men’s souls” (*rzqd dusz*) as did his Polish counterpart, Mickiewicz.<sup>34</sup> (Along with an organic decentering of that kind of authority through the mechanism that I have described, there is also the powerful role of native models and traditions: the *wieszcz*, for Mickiewicz and the entire Polish Romantic period and legacy, is a construct and paradigm that draws as much and even more on the sphere of the elite and of abstract idea than it

<sup>34</sup> Cf. “Iz problematyky symvoličnoji avtobiohrafiji u Mickeviča i Ševčenka,” pp. 34–35.

does on the experience of the common man; the “kobzar,” in contrast, is wholly in the latter sphere, and it is only in literary-critical discourse that this is conflated with the notion of “bard.”) And yet if by “rule” one means not only a cult but a continuing, massive presence and bond of affection, and perhaps most of all an ongoing identification with and through him, achieve it he did.

From our perspective, his movement on this path, the trace he leaves of it in his writings, is as interesting as the final achievement. It is a trace, moreover, that is polysemous and, once recognized, will no longer allow (we must hope) for simplistic readings. Thus we see that upon regaining his freedom, and (as we now assume) marshaling his resources for the large social task ahead, he did cross-out and he did not rework, he “erased,” various poems he wrote during exile, among them “Xiba samomu napysat’,” his most evocative self-deconstruction. For him (we continue to assume) they were no longer functional for the ever-widening role he knew he was destined to play (“A slava zapovid’ moja. . .”). And yet they were not destroyed, they remain, and the trace they leave is no less important than the role itself. In fact, without it the role is not fully comprehensible. They are part of his signature.

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