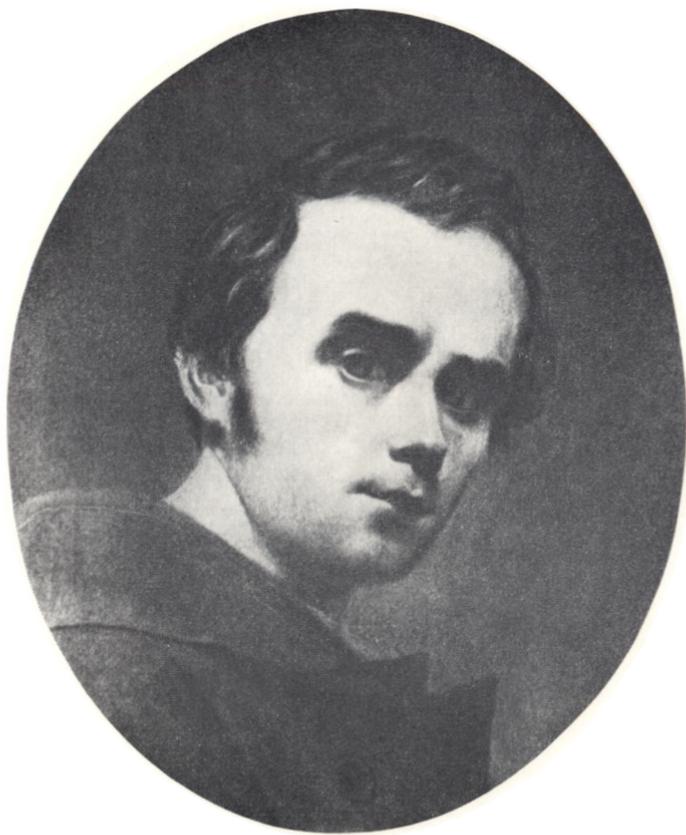


THE POETICAL WORKS OF TARAS SHEVCHENKO



T. Shevchenko, *Self-Portrait* (oil, 1840)

The Poetical Works of
TARAS
SHEVCHENKO

THE KOBZAR



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Preface

WHEN IN MAY 1961 the Ukrainian Canadian Committee asked me to supply it with an English translation of the complete poetical works (in Ukrainian) of Taras Shevchenko, for publication in 1964, I had some natural diffidence about committing myself to so formidable a task. I was sixty-six years of age; I was carrying a full administrative load as the president of an ancient and rapidly growing university; I was just catching my breath after completing my fortieth major volume, an English verse translation of a long Polish epic by Adam Mickiewicz (*Pan Tadeusz*, University of Toronto Press, 1962, pp. 407); and I was deeply involved in a very large anthology of Ukrainian poetry in translation (*The Ukrainian Poets*, University of Toronto Press, 1963, pp. 530) in collaboration with my old friend and former pupil, Dr. C. H. Andrusyshen, head of the Slavic Department at the University of Saskatchewan. I was all too well aware, moreover, of the possible vulnerability of my Ukrainian scholarship. My original field of university training had been Latin and Greek literature, and my later studies in modern languages had run far more to Icelandic, Polish, Magyar, French, German, Dutch, and Italian than to Ukrainian. The complete poetical works of Shevchenko in Ukrainian, as the present volume will demonstrate, totalled several hundred pages and abounded in colloquial and idiomatic phraseology that often defied exact elucidation in English.

It was obvious, however, that such a volume, in an adequate English rendering, was sorely needed, for all existing translations were fragmentary, ranging from about one-fifth of the total in the case of A. J. Hunter to about one-quarter in the case of Clarence A. Manning. The 150th anniversary of the birth of Shevchenko in 1814 was a natural occasion for erecting a massive monument of translation in his memory.

In June 1961, I agreed to the great undertaking, but on clearly defined terms of my own: I was to associate with myself a Ukrainian

scholar of my own choosing (in this case, Dr. C. H. Andrusyshen) and I was to be supplied with a typed triple-spaced working copy in duplicate of the Ukrainian poetry, one set for myself and one for my partner. My chief contribution was to be a dexterity in prosody that was the result of forty years of practice and four thousand pages of published verse. My colleague would have to guarantee the accuracy of the rendering in phrase and in spirit.

As the *textus receptus* from which we were to proceed, we chose Vassil Simovich's edition of *The Kobzar*. On my own responsibility, moreover, I arrived early at certain basic decisions as to the character of our English version. Too literal a rendering could produce language that was neither English nor Ukrainian, a sort of stilted equivalent of the *Babu English* of the old-fashioned Hindu scholar. We must aim rather at renderings which, while following the original meaning as closely as possible, would nevertheless read reasonably well as English poetry. There was also the question of monotony and strange metres. Most of Shevchenko's poetry is in forms of ballad measure (the *Kolomiyka* and the *Koliadka*) that are virtually unknown in English and as uncongenial as quantitative hexameters. For that matter, even the simple Chevy-Chase metre has had small currency in English since the later Middle Ages and its use by poets like Coleridge and Southey is made tolerable only by inflated stanza-forms in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" or by sprung rhythm in "The Old Woman of Berkeley." The standard English narrative metres are octosyllabic couplets, heroic couplets, and blank verse, with a lesser place assigned to such forms as *ottava rima*, the Spenserian stanza, and the heroic stanza. These latter stanza-patterns would not match Shevchenko in form or spirit, but the first three media offered very real possibilities of modulating the Ukrainian poet for the English reader without undue violence to the original. Thus while ballad measure has been very widely used in our volume, as in "Katerina," "The Poplar," "The Owl," "The Blind Man," "The Hired Girl," and most of *The Haydamaks* and "Mariana," I have used octosyllabic couplets in "The Heretic," "My Friendly Epistle," and most of "The Dream" and "The Witch"; heroic couplets in "The Neophytes," "Mary," and most of "The Princess"; and blank verse in "The Great Mound," "I could not sleep," "The Monk," "The Branded Convict," "Tsars," and "Peter." It is hoped that this deliberate use of congenial English metres will make the volume more memorable to English readers. Benedetto Croce once declared that "art is form and nothing but form." By this criterion,

a verse translation that gives the exact literal meaning without poetical form may be scholarship but it is certainly not art. The unconquerable hope has therefore been to achieve versions that combined reasonable accuracy with merit as English poetry.

Those who have never wrestled with the problems of English rhymed verse can scarcely realize the difficulties raised by the need to secure rhymes that are exact in sound, adequate in meaning, and both natural and unprosaic in connotation. Some of the commonest English words—*mother, father, life, death, faith, false, health, help, deaf, starve, revenge, step*, and hundreds of others—have only two or three possible rhymes, none of which may fit a passage except through padded circumlocutions. My attempt to achieve tolerable metre has therefore slightly inflated my text from time to time. The alternative would have been bad prosody and bad English. My predecessors have had to struggle with this same dilemma. Dr. Hunter, with more zeal than art, produced a rough and ready rhymed version. Professor Manning, more scholarly and more cautious, was content for the most part to set down the direct meaning, line by rhythmic line, but with very little attempt at rhyme. The translations of Vera Rich (*Song out of Darkness*, 1961), which are commonly based on assonance rather than rhyme, are even more scrupulously equivalent to the original, line by line, even to the breaking of normal English syntax and rhythm. During the present undertaking, incidentally, I have deliberately avoided looking at anyone else's translation, in order that the Andrusyshen-Kirkconnell version might be fundamentally original in its handling of the text.

The entire English manuscript, when completed, was subjected to an outside audit by the Ukrainian scholar, poet, and painter, Sviatoslav Hordynsky, and his wife. We cannot express too warmly our gratitude to them for reading through 840 pages of typescript and offering many scores of penetrating and sensitive suggestions. The book has been greatly improved by their scrutiny and their counsel. Mr. Hordynsky has also supplied the book with a remarkable series of Shevchenko paintings. This gift crowns his sympathetic generosity towards our enterprise.

Mr. Hordynsky farmed out portions of our manuscript to a panel of young Ukrainian-American poet-scholars—Bohdan Boychuk, Yuri Tarnawsky, Patricia Kylyna, and Bohdan Rubchak—and to these we should like to express our thanks for their suggestions. Professor V. O. Buyniak of the University of Saskatchewan has also been

helpful. Unfailing in his sympathy and encouragement has been Mr. W. S. Kochan, Executive Director of the Ukrainian Canadian Committee, Winnipeg.

The Introduction, on the life and works of Shevchenko, has been the work of Dr. C. H. Andrusyshen, as have been the notes on the translations. The task of the annotator has been rendered less onerous by the availability of Simovich's excellent notes on *The Kobzar*, for from these he has occasionally drawn valuable information regarding the identification of place names and personalities. Some duplications have been deliberately inserted for the benefit of readers who may pick up the book at random rather than read it systematically and at a single stretch.

Since all Ukrainian names are originally in the Cyrillic alphabet, a modified expansion of the Greek, the problem of English transliteration is a vexatious one. With the general reader rather than the specialist in view, we have sought renderings as close as possible to English phonetic values. The following normal equivalents in sound may be noted: *ia* like *ya* in *yard*; terminal *y* like *ee* in *glee*; *i*, short as in *hit*; *kh* like the Scottish *ch* in *loch*; *zh* as the *z* in *azure*; *s*, always soft.

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Introduction

TARAS SHEVCHENKO'S LIFE AND WORK

TARAS SHEVCHENKO'S ancestry has not as yet been established beyond the fact that his grandfather Ivan, according to the baptismal records of his parish church, was born in 1742 in the village of Kirilivka in the region of Kiev, and died there in 1849 at the age of 106. Ivan was a peasant, a serf¹ belonging to the estate of the large landowning family, the Engelhardts, who were of German origin but by then were thoroughly Russianized. Little is known of him, except that as a young man of twenty-five he may have taken part in the peasant uprisings under the Haydamaks, the bloodiest of which occurred in 1768. At least he was its eye-witness; and so vivid were his tales of those events to his younger neighbours who used to gather at his house that the young, sensitive, and imaginative Taras, who listened to them gapingly and wide-eyed, retained them freshly in his memory, and in due course was inspired to write his longest narrative poem, *The Haydamaks*, based mostly on the old greybeard's personal account of that carnage.

In Kirilivka too, in 1781, was born Taras' father, Hrihoriy, who in 1802 married Katerina Boyko, born in 1783 in the neighbouring village of Morintsi. For eight years the couple lived with Ivan, but in 1810 they moved to Morintsi, where on February 25 by the Julian calendar (March 10, Gregorian calendar), 1814, Taras was born, the third of six children in all, three boys and three girls. The following year the family returned to Kirilivka, where they again settled with old Ivan.

Although a serf, Taras' father, owing much to his inborn intelligence, acquired a knowledge of reading and writing, a difficult attainment in those days when out of some 100,000 inhabitants of

¹Most of the serfs were the descendants of the freedom-loving Cossacks who, as they reacted against political and social injustice, created in Ukraine at the end of the sixteenth century an independent Cossack state which was suppressed by Russia in the eighteenth century. The vicissitudes of those champions of liberty will be more fully dealt with in the annotations to Shevchenko's pertinent poems.

Zvenihorod county in the province of Kiev there were only 105 literate persons. On that account Hrihoriy was not compelled to do forced labour in the fields, as were the other serfs, including his wife. (Officially, three full days a week were required of them in the service of the landlord, but much more extra labour was exacted by the master's overseers.) In addition, Hrihoriy learned a cartwright's trade and eventually became a *chumak* or travelling carter. As such, he would seasonally transport goods to Kiev and to other more distant trading centres, including Odessa, and return with other merchandise which he bartered or bought. As a result, the life of the Shevchenko family, although hard enough, was not as unbearable as that of their fellow-serfs.

Taras' childhood was happy enough. He was well taken care of by his sister Katerina, eight years older than himself, who, while his mother toiled in the fields, looked after his needs. It was during this early period that the boy's poetic imagination became so active as to make him once wander away from home to reach the place where, according to the folktales told him, steel pillars supported the sky; this excursion caused much anxiety to his sister whose tenderness towards him he acknowledged later on several occasions. Listening to his father read periodically from the *Mineon* (Lives of the Saints) further fed his phantasy and, in addition to his grandfather's stirring stories of the Haydamak period, was one of the chief predilections of his childhood. His artistic talent was likewise revealed at this early date when, on his own, he began to fashion clay models of birds and animals, as well as to paint figures and scenes on fences, barn walls, and wherever he found space available. Folksinging was also a favourite pastime of his tender years, and in his retentive memory were fixed numberless songs with which he, throughout his life, entertained his friends in the pleasing baritone with which he was gifted.

His first confrontation with the harsh reality of life occurred at the age of eight when his father sent him to the local *diak* (church cantor), Pavlo Ruban, to learn the three R's. For lack of adequate textbooks, his rudimentary education was a laborious two-year process, for he was forced to study from an antiquated primer, a breviary, and the Book of the Psalms, all written in the archaic Church Slavonic language. Moreover, whether he deserved it or not, together with others he was called upon to undergo the inevitable Sabbath treatment, the birching, that savage method of school discipline in the European schools of those days.

He was barely nine when his mother died at the age of thirty-seven. A few months later his father married a widow, Oksana Tereshchenko, who brought into his household three children of her own. The foster-mother was a termagant not only to her husband but also to his children, particularly to young Taras, whose stubbornness irritated her greatly. To prevent as much as he could her harsh treatment of his son, the father would often take him on his carting journeys. During one of those expeditions the older Shevchenko caught a severe chill and shortly after his return home died in the early part of 1825, aged forty-seven, when Taras was about eleven. Life with the foster-mother then became doubly intolerable, and many a time he had to seek protection from her by escaping to his eldest sister, who was by that time married and living apart.

For a time Taras attended the village school conducted by the local church cantor, Bohorsky by name, where he learned precious little and was compelled to perform various menial tasks for his teacher and his more fortunate fellow-pupils. Moreover, the cantor took advantage of the twelve-year-old Shevchenko's knowledge of the Book of Psalms and would often send him in his stead to read from it at the vigils for deceased serfs. A tenth of the fee he would give to the boy and retain the rest to keep himself in liquor. As Shevchenko admitted later in one of his autobiographical poems, he suffered such destitution at that time that he was occasionally compelled to steal money from the *diak* in order to buy paper on which to draw and copy his beloved folk-songs. Once when the cantor lay stark drunk, young Taras availed himself of the opportunity to give him a sound drubbing as a revenge for the maltreatment he had often suffered at his hands.

A period of shiftless existence followed. For a while he lived with his older brother Mikita, who tried to accustom him to the settled life of a peasant, and often beat him for carelessness in the chores he was told to do. For a short time Taras served as a shepherd and as a herd of the community's cattle. It was then that he met the girl Oksana Kovalenko who exerted such a soothing influence on his childhood that the fond memory of her kindness lasted throughout his life, even though she later became wayward and scabrously involved in a love affair with a Russian soldier. The time Taras spent as a servant in the household of the priest, H. Koshetz, was perhaps the mildest of that period, but even there the work was very strenuous, the more so as his wilful, impulsive, and recalcitrant nature began to assert itself increasingly, and his intensely meditative mind prevented him from concentrating his attention on the tasks assigned to him. His relations

with his various masters were further complicated by his frequent disappearances when he wandered off, without permission, to neighbouring villages, seeking local rural painters who might teach him the art in which he dabbled by himself without achieving satisfactory results.

After the death of Count Vassil Engelhardt, his son Paul inherited the landed property together with all its chattels and serfs. Presently the fourteen-year-old Taras was taken into the palace in the nearby town Vilshana to serve as a helper to the cook, but, failing in the kitchen, he was transferred to the apartments to attend his lord as a lackey. However, he was not to be pinned down to drudgery, and whenever he could he would escape to pass his time secretly in musings, drawing, and painting, especially at night when he could not be detected. Once, however, he was surprised by the lord at sketching and was mercilessly beaten for running the risk of setting the house on fire by burning the midnight oil. The next day he was soundly birched to boot. This happened in Vilna, where P. Engelhardt was living, together with his suite, as an adjutant to the Russian governor of the province of Lithuania. However painful the incident may have been, it marked a turning point in the budding artist's life, for it finally dawned on the master that his footman was talented indeed and warranted lessons from a competent teacher. And so in 1830 began his formal art studies at the studio of Jan Rustan of Vilna. With that breakthrough, he was free to visit whatever architectural monuments he wished in that Lithuanian town. It proved a boon to him in another respect, for in the course of his rambling observations, in the Gothic Church of St. Anne he met a young lady, Dunia Husikovska, a Pole. With her he began a romantic friendship which, however, did not last long, for that very year he had to follow his master to Warsaw.

In the Polish capital, Engelhardt sent Taras to study painting under Franz Lampi, the first top-notch teacher he had had thus far, and a man who inspired in the youth a love for Classical art. But his Warsaw sojourn was also short-lived. As a result of the imminent Polish insurrection against the tsarist régime (1831), Engelhardt and his entire entourage had to flee to Russia; and it was in St. Petersburg that young Shevchenko finally became fixed as he reverted to the degrading status of a footman to his owner. In this position he proved so utterly disappointing that Engelhardt, probably out of sheer exasperation, was forced to accede to the youth's entreaties to be allowed to continue his art studies under the painter, V. Shirayayev.

That arrangement proved lucrative to the lord, as he was able to draw monetary profit from his serf's work.

Shiryayev was a crude and cruel taskmaster, but it was impossible for Shevchenko to escape from his ferule because he was contracted to remain as his assistant for a period of four years. The high-handed treatment notwithstanding, the eager learner considered himself fortunate to be able to further his theoretical and practical studies. After long hours, spent mostly in decorating the ceiling of the St. Petersburg Bolshoi Theatre, he would often go out at night to the Summer Garden and there, under the bright northern skies, enjoy and edify himself by sketching the figures of the gods and goddesses who adorned the allées of the park.

There he met a countryman of his, Ivan Soshenko, a student at the Academy of Art, who immediately formed a close friendship with him, encouraged him to paint water-colour portraits, and gave him personal instruction in their execution. Through him Shevchenko was introduced to the Ukrainian writer-fabulist, Evhen Hrebinka, who supplied him with Ukrainian books that inspired him with love for his country's historical and folklorist past. The literary soirées arranged by this author proved especially beneficial to the young artist about to become a poet. One acquaintance led to another, and in time Shevchenko became known to many influential people in artistic circles, including the Ukrainian-born, V. Hrihorovich, the secretary of the board of the Academy of Art; V. Venetsianov, the painter; K. Briullov, the creator of "The Last Day of Pompeii" canvas; and the famous Russian Romantic poet, V. Zhukovsky, the tutor of Tsarevich Alexander. By that time Shevchenko had produced several paintings dealing with old Slavic and Classical themes, and these revealed him to them as an artist of some promise.

Among this coterie it then became a question of freeing Shevchenko from serfdom; and it was finally decided that Briullov would paint a portrait of Zhukovsky that would be auctioned off at the imperial court for at least 2,500 rubles, the sum demanded by Engelhardt for Shevchenko's liberation. The portrait was bought by the Empress Oleksandra Fedorovna, and on April 22, 1838, Shevchenko received a document signed by his landlord releasing him from serfdom. He was then twenty-four years of age. And so, from Shiryayev's workshop Shevchenko now moved as Briullov's student to the comfortable classes of the Academy of Art in which he was permitted to enrol. His friendship with Briullov continued strong,

and he would at times spend days on end in the painter's private quarters where specialized books, journals, and other means of increasing his knowledge of art were placed at his disposal.

The life he led after his emancipation was a lively one, quite in contrast with the previous desperate existence that even a few short days before he attained freedom had brought him to the brink of suicide. But pleasurable living, however unconfined at times, was mixed with serious labour. He continued to pursue his artistic vocation and simultaneously fill in the wide gaps in his education by intensive reading begun in his Shirayev period. The following is a partial list of the items he read: *History of Ancient Greece* by John Gillis, *The Journey of Anacharsis* by Abbé Barthélemy, *Plutarch's Lives*, Michaud's *History of the Crusades*, Dante's *Inferno*, Goldsmith, Byron, Richardson, Macpherson, Shakespeare, Defoe, Walter Scott, Dickens, J.-J. Rousseau, Chateaubriand, Hugo, Sue, Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Körner, Washington Irving, Mickiewicz, Krasinski, and other Polish authors, practically all the Russian classics, and whatever journals on the aesthetic arts were available to him. In addition, he often attended lectures in physics, zoology, and anatomy delivered by his professor friends at the University.

Shortly before his emancipation, and particularly directly following it, Shevchenko's predominance as a poet became quite marked, in spite of his continued cultivation of a career in painting. He began as a strict romanticist with the ballad "The Bewitched Woman" (*Prichinna*) which he wrote in 1837. The next year proved prolific in shorter lyrics and longer poems, twelve items in all, written under the influence of the social conditions either of his day or of the Cossack historical past.

The encouragement and impetus to their publication was supplied by P. Martos, a wealthy Ukrainian landlord from the Poltava region, whose portrait Shevchenko was painting at that time. The story goes that one day, as he was posing, for want of something to do Martos picked up from the table a sheet of paper on which a part of the poem "The Night of Taras" (*Tarasova Nitch*) appeared. So taken up was he with its verbal impact and vivid phraseology that he immediately proposed that all the poems that Shevchenko kept in a box under his bed be published in a collection. The poet agreed, and the brief volume under the title of *The Kobzar* (The Minstrel, *lit.* The Kobza Player) appeared in print in the early days of April 1840. It was illustrated by the author's close friend, Sternberg, who happened to be sharing Shevchenko's living quarters that year.

Besides two highly fantastical ballads in the Romantic vein and several subjective lyrics, *The Kobzar* contained a long poem "Katerina" dealing with the social theme of a young mother out of wedlock. Its subject was borrowed from the Russian poem, "Bednaya Liza," by N. M. Karamzin, but Shevchenko made it his own by giving it a thoroughly Ukrainian setting and colouring. In "To the Eternal Memory of Ivan Kotliarevsky," Shevchenko revealed the powerful rôle the poet plays in the spiritual life of his people, an idea that he intensified in another poem, "Perebendia." In the poems "The Night of Taras," "Ivan Pidkova," and "To Osnovianenko," in which he romantically idealized the Cossack past, are strongly evident the influences exerted on him by the historical works of D. Bantish-Kamensky and H. Poletika and particularly by I. Sreznevsky's *Zaporozhskaya Starina* (The Zaporozhian Antiquities). The imprint of these works upon Shevchenko's sensitively receptive soul proved indelible and marked out the poetic course that he was to follow throughout his life.

The acclaim this brief collection of verse received from his immediate friends and presently from all Ukrainians was immense. It roused the entire nation to an enthusiasm that knew no bounds, for never before in the history of the Ukrainian people had any poet described the vicissitudes of the Ukrainian historical, particularly its Cossack, past in such glowing and exalted terms, or written about it with such patriotic fervour. *The Kobzar* was like a trumpet's clarion sound proclaiming the existence of the Ukrainian nation. For that reason Shevchenko was at once and unequivocally accepted as its chief spokesman.

As regards academic criticism, the outcome was altogether different. Most of the Russian critics took a negative, in fact, a destructive stand with respect to *The Kobzar*. While not denying that Shevchenko possessed genuine poetic gifts, they (particularly one Senkovsky) attacked him fiercely for writing in a peasant (*khokhol*) "dialect," thus depriving Russian literature of a distinct contribution on the part of so great a talent. Others judged its "monstrous" language as a literary joke, a parody, and prophesied for it a bleak fortune in the state archives, if it even got there. Already in his "To Osnovianenko" Shevchenko had anticipated this sort of reaction and braced himself against it. His intransigent answer, however, came in the poetized preface to his longest poem, *The Haydamaks*, in which he in no uncertain terms rejected the judgments of those who maintained that the Ukrainian language could not be employed as a vehicle for poetic

expression, and that it was ridiculous to claim for that "dead" speech more than a plebeian function. To those who advised him that, if he desired fame and money, he should write not in "moribund" phrases about ragged, illiterate people, but on subjects dealing with high society (such as were then treated in Russian literature), and in the Russian language, Shevchenko replied categorically, using a popular saying: "The sheepskin coat is warm, but not made to my measure." Proudly asserting himself as the best judge of the instrument at his command, he in turn ridiculed his critics and affirmed that as long as he himself experienced pleasure and satisfaction from the subjects he dealt with, lowly as they were, nothing else mattered; and, that being the case, the "dead" idiom was good enough for him. The more caustic the criticism in that respect, the more determined Shevchenko became to write in Ukrainian, and even encouraged other Ukrainian writers to endure in the use of their native tongue.

His greatest opponent was the chief Russian critic, Vissarion Belinsky, who was an inveterate enemy of all those who "foolishly wasted" their talents and powers in scribbling Ukrainian (in his terminology—Little Russian) for some benighted southern peasants. It is to be noted that Belinsky, who based his first criticism on certain poems by Shevchenko published in the journal *Lastivka* (previous to their inclusion in *The Kobzar*), did not trouble himself with even remotely attempting to give an evaluation of their poetic worth, but directed his attack against the language itself. Understanding it but poorly, he simply and peremptorily declared that he could not find any worthwhile values in the poems. It was therefore mainly at Belinsky that Shevchenko's emphatic reply at the beginning of *The Haydamaks* was directed. Roused by Shevchenko's reaction, Belinsky continued to pester the poet for the next year or so, not only scoffing at the various episodes in *The Haydamaks* (published in 1841) but denying that he possessed any poetic gift at all, and advising him to abandon poetry altogether to write popular brochures on ordinary social topics dealing with the problems of the "Little Russian" peasantry. Although Belinsky was indisputably a first rate critic in literary aestheticism, in this case he lapsed into a petty, wrangling individual, venting his gall in cruel invective unworthy of his otherwise exceptional talent.

For the next three years Shevchenko, full of zestful energy, continued to live merrily in the circle of his many friends. His almost bohemian life, however, by no means curtailed either his poetic or his pictorial art, both of which he pursued intensively. For a very short time he wrote in Russian, the result being two plays, one of which,

Slepaya (The Blind Woman) he turned into a poem. The other drama *Neviesta* (The Betrothed) dealt with the age of Hetman Khmelnitsky. With neither, however, was he satisfied, and willy-nilly came to the conclusion that he was destined to write effective verse only in his native tongue if he were to remain true to himself and to the spirit of his race.

Towards the end of 1842, for reasons as yet undiscovered, he undertook a journey to Copenhagen and Stockholm, during which he fell seriously ill. He returned to St. Petersburg with his health undermined. Whatever the other results of this trip, it was productive of one of his masterpieces, "Hamaliya," in which he quite dramatically fictionized a Cossack attack on Tsarhorod (Constantinople) amid the elemental fury of the Black Sea, such as he himself experienced in his voyage across the Baltic.

After some fourteen years of absence from his native land, Shevchenko finally, in the summer of 1843, visited Ukraine. A reunion with his brothers and sisters was happy, though tempered by the bitter fact that they still remained serfs. Among the numerous friends on whom he called in various localities, he met in Kiev P. Kulish, the famous Ukrainian poet, novelist, and ethnographer, in whose company he investigated several historical Cossack sites and monuments. Later, Shevchenko alone visited the site of the former encampment of the Cossack Sitch on the Dnieper's island of Khortitsia, and other localities made famous during the period of the Hetmanate. Particularly significant was his sojourn in Yahotin, where his friendship began with Prince Repnin and his daughter Varvara (Barbara), with whom Shevchenko spent much time in pleasant social and literary conversations. His attachment to her developed into a deep affection, and his correspondence with her continued throughout his life. For a time there was even a rumour that they seriously considered marriage, the only drawback to wedlock being the disparity in their respective social status.

Wherever Shevchenko went in Ukraine, he found that his fame had preceded him. Everywhere he was lionized by the very cream of Ukrainian society and celebrated by the populace. Although he enjoyed being so treated in the élite circles, the poet none the less keenly felt the utter disregard with which the higher elements of the Ukrainian community treated the peasant masses. True enough, under the influence of Western ideas and ideals of brotherhood, equality, and freedom, his hosts waxed most eloquent in that democratic respect, but their sentiments, however resoundingly expressed,

were rarely put into practice. And it was with a bitter feeling towards them that Shevchenko, after some ten months of sojourn in Ukraine, returned to St. Petersburg to complete his studies at the Academy.

But it was in political injustice that he found the root of the social evils in Ukraine.² Under that keen impression he wrote such poems as "The Excavated Mound" (*Rozrita Mohila*) in which he bemoaned the sorry state of Ukraine as symbolized by the mutilated mound in which the Cossack freedom of the land lay buried; and above all he wrote the politically significant poem, "The Dream" (*Son*), where his soaring soul, as in a dream, surveyed the entire Russian Empire plundered and oppressed by the tyrant tsars and their underlings. There, in no uncertain terms he attacked the tsarist régime for the injustice perpetrated on his people and on other peoples cruelly coerced into the Russian fold. Under his scathing denunciation, first of all, came Peter I who, after the battle of Poltava, put an end to Cossack freedom as symbolized by the death of the acting Hetman Pavlo Polubotok in one of Peter's dungeons. With telling effect did the poet bring out the vision of the tattered Cossack regiments forced to dig canals under intolerable conditions in the frozen Russian north, and to build for the Tsar on swampy terrain, virtually on their very bones, the imperial capital, St. Petersburg. Likewise ruthlessly did Shevchenko castigate Catherine II who in 1775 destroyed the last vestiges of the Zaporozhian Sitch (the Cossack encampment beyond the Dnieper's rapids) and settled the entire Cossack region with German immigrants. It was also under this ruler that serfdom received the official stamp of approval. The hardest struck, however, was Tsar Nicholas I, whom Shevchenko, in two most ludicrous scenes of "The Dream" presented as an uncouth bear and boor surrounded by his plate-lickers upon whom he was dependent for his power and without whose aid (after he did away with them) he appeared a sorry sight indeed. Not even the Empress escaped Shevchenko's searing ridicule, for her he portrayed as a "dried-up mushroom" and as a stork-like creature with a tremulous head. The insult was remembered by both, and when Shevchenko was later condemned to exile for

²It is to be noted that before his two visits to Ukraine, Shevchenko's poetry was idealistic in its approach to her historical past, which he romanticized in his ballads and heroic poems as one would some distant glowing myth. After his direct contact with Ukraine, however, when he saw with his own eyes the sorry existence of his people, his idealistic attitude changed, and his Romanticism gave way to a creativity full of political and social significance, as is revealed in such poems as "The Dream," "The Great Mound," "My Friendly Epistle," and others, in which he mercilessly (often satirically) exposed the wretched present as being the result of the wicked past.

political reasons it contributed more than anything else to his severe punishment and prompted the Tsar to insist in a personal addition that the poet be strictly forbidden to write and to paint while serving the sentence.

During his peregrinations in Ukraine Shevchenko occasionally sketched the ruins of hetman towns, and from his impression of those sites he conceived the idea of doing a series of paintings under the title of "A Pictorial Ukraine" (*Zhivopisnaya Ukrayina*) in which he intended to illustrate the entire political history of his land. In this he was encouraged by Princess Repnin, and it was decided that he would do ten illustrations a year. The proceeds from these works were to be used for the emancipation of Shevchenko's entire family from serfdom. The whole of 1844 was spent in planning and beginning this project, which unfortunately, but for a few engravings, did not materialize, although not for lack of subscribers.

It may be of interest to note that shortly before this venture Shevchenko did an illustration to Shakespeare's *King Lear*, portraying the hoary man in his last days, during the storm, and accompanied by his clown. He engraved this scene and took part in reproducing it by means of galvanography, or galvanocaustic, then in an experimental stage. The light effects fixed in this work are truly Rembrandtesque.

Having completed his studies at the Academy of Art, Shevchenko in 1845 once more journeyed to Ukraine to further his research in historical and archaeological matters pertaining to his native land. In that connection he worked in conjunction with the Kiev Archaeological Commission, whose purpose was to investigate the ancient monuments of Ukraine which he was to draw or sketch. And again Shevchenko had an opportunity to visit in various parts of the country those historical places which were to inspire him to new heights of pictorial and poetic achievement.

During this second sojourn in Ukraine Shevchenko conceived a desire to marry Teodosia, the daughter of H. Koshetz, the parish priest in his native village of Kirilivka. The matter reached the point where he was emboldened to propose to her; but the father, considering the poet's lowly past, refused his blessing. Teodosia, who loved Shevchenko deeply, could not endure the parental refusal which, it is said, was the cause of her eventual insanity.

The year 1845 proved the most productive of his literary career. Under great inspirational tension he wrote such significant poems as "The Heretic," "The Blind Man" (*Nevolnik*), and the drama-mystery "The Great Mound" (*Velikiy Liokh*), all in a matter of two weeks.

Other masterpieces included "The Caucasus," "The Hired Girl" (*Naymichka*), "The Psalms of David" (a selection of ten), and a most intensely concentrated poem entitled "To the Dead, to the Living, and to Those Yet Unborn, My Countrymen All Who Live in Ukraine and outside Ukraine, My Friendly Epistle." In addition, he wrote a goodly number of shorter pieces of great importance; and all these, together with everything he had written since 1843, he gathered into a collection that he entitled "The Three Years" (*Tri Lita*). Although it was intended for publication, it contained so much matter subversive of the tsarist régime that he could not hope to have it pass the strict censorship. For that reason the collection circulated throughout Ukraine and in parts of Russia in manuscript copies.

All these poems, both short and long, are saturated with the spirit of revolt against the political and social injustice obtaining in Ukraine, and present a succinct record of the wrongs done to the Ukrainian peasantry by the ruling classes. In "The Heretic," Shevchenko reacted fiercely against the unscrupulousness of those who, in the name of Christianity, sought to destroy the least manifestation of truth and justice if these went against the oppressors' autocratic grain. There, too, under the influence of the Slavist revival, Shevchenko expressed himself in favour of a union of all Slavic races into a single fraternal federation (this subject will be expounded further in connection with the aims of the Saints Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood). In "The Hired Girl," he continued the theme he had already presented in "Katerina," but with a more fortunate *dénouement*. "The Blind Man" is a love story abounding in Cossack manners and customs, and includes the famous *duma* in which Shevchenko marvellously captured the measure and the mood of the sixteenth-century specimens of that kind.

The poem which gained him added ire from the authoritarian government was "The Caucasus." Here he gave full vent to his protest against the Russian conquest of the Caucasian peoples who had been subjected by force of arms to the yoke of tsarist imperialism under the guise of Christian ideals which the Russian rulers proclaimed but never practised even in their own midst, let alone on the territories they high-handedly annexed. The poem reeks with bitter irony and sarcasm at the pharisaical attitude of the conquerors, and so cutting is the indictment that it made the despot Tsar and his satraps squirm with irritation and rage at the audacity of the former serf. Two years later, when Shevchenko appeared before his tribunal, Nicholas was ready for him.

It must be noted that during his first visit to Ukraine Shevchenko was under the impression that the injustice done to his people was to be attributed, in the main, to the repressive tsarist rule which sought at every step to destroy not only all vestiges of Ukrainian freedom but also the sights and signs that reminded the race as a whole of its former liberty. During the second visit, while becoming more fully convinced of the Russian guilt, he began to see more clearly that the Ukrainian landlords and a goodly fraction of the élite were even more to blame for the sorry state in which his country found itself. He arrived at this conclusion by personally observing at social gatherings their indifferent and even negative attitude towards the common folk. In spite of their verbosity in extolling the virtues of democracy, of which they had heard perforce during their frequent visits to Western Europe, they continued to neglect the spiritual and material well-being of their less fortunate fellow-men, most of whom were entrusted to their care; and while the serfs vegetated in destitution and ignorance, the masters, waxing ever prosperous on their underlings' labour, vied with each other in seeking to gain decorations, honours, and official ranks from the tsarist government. For that reason, Shevchenko vented his ire against them in his symbolic mystery-poem "The Great Mound," where, in presenting three voracious ravens, Ukrainian, Polish, and Russian, he considered the first as the greatest enemy of the Ukrainian people; and so keenly did he feel the decrepit condition of his people that he deemed even involuntary sins, committed to the detriment of the nation by three innocent female beings, as mortally grave, for they none the less contributed to the calamity of Ukraine. As harsh as was Shevchenko's accusation of the Ukrainian intellectuals in "The Great Mound," that voiced in "My Friendly Epistle" was even more severe. There, with the wrath of a Hebrew prophet and with bitter irony, he exposed the vices, follies, and abuses of the ranking and privileged classes of Ukrainian society with respect to their more humble fellow-countrymen; and having discharged his righteous rage upon them, Shevchenko paternally exhorted them to mend their wicked ways and cease being traitors to their own kin. Only in mutual trust, toleration, and all-encompassing brotherhood, he concluded, were triumph and the welfare of the national soul to be achieved and, through these, the renascence and salvation of the state itself.

Equally as powerful in impact were Shevchenko's marvellous paraphrases of ten Biblical psalms which he made conform to the sorry conditions obtaining in Ukraine, yet resonant with the hope that

justice would in the end prevail and a new and better life would dawn for his captive people. So potent was the message contained in these seemingly innocent psalms that when after his return from exile he wanted to publish them separately, he had a difficult task getting them through the censorship.

In 1845, while on an archaeological mission in Pereyaslav, Shevchenko contracted a serious illness. Fearing that his life was ebbing away, towards the end of that year he wrote a brief poem "My Legacy," in which he expressed himself even more powerfully and directly to his people, enjoining them to bury him in a mound overlooking the Dnieper, then rise to break their chains asunder, sprinkle their liberty with the blood of their enemy, and establish a new community, a nation free from all social and political trammels. Succinct in its directives, this short poem has become the very cornerstone of Shevchenko's bequest to his people.

In the spring of 1846 he settled in Kiev, and there became acquainted with Mikola Kostomariv. This incipient Ukrainian historian grew enthusiastic over Shevchenko's collection "The Three Years," particularly over the Promethean element contained in the poem "The Caucasus." It is claimed that under its influence he wrote the second part of his *The Books of the Genesis of the Ukrainian People*, which work was the ideological basis of the existence of the Saints Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood which Kostomariv, together with P. Kulish and other young Ukrainian idealists founded, and into which he now introduced Shevchenko.

The rôle of the Brotherhood in the political life of Ukraine was of paramount significance. Its general purpose was to foster the spiritual and political union of all Slavic peoples, with the stipulation that in such a federation each contracting nation was to have a complete political, social, economic, religious, educational, and legal independence, based on Christian morality and ethics. Equality of status, self-determination, and self-rule for each republic was to be assured by a central government under a federal president. Serfdom and class distinctions were to be abolished, and a movement to raise the intellectual level of the heretofore benighted masses was to be undertaken in all seriousness. All in all, the federation in its final form would resemble the twentieth-century British Commonwealth of Nations.

That Shevchenko anticipated these ideas in his own writings is quite evident in such poems as "The Heretic," "The Caucasus," and "My Friendly Epistle." With certain reservations in connection with the political contents of its programme, he therefore sympathized with

and approved the general aims of the Brotherhood. However, having to make excursions out of Kiev as a member of the Archaeological Commission, he found it almost impossible to take active part in the secret meetings of that organization. Still, wherever he went, he preached its ideals, and made bold, at times rashly so, to recite his poems in which revolutionary tendencies were expressed, discussing them openly and fearlessly in spite of the warnings from his friends to temper his enthusiasm with reasonable precaution. Especially critical did he at that time become of the Treaty of Pereyaslav (1654), by which Hetman Bohdan Khmelnitsky consented to unite Ukraine politically with Russia in order to save her from Poland and, with Russia's aid, to destroy the Polish state as a threat from the west. As Shevchenko declared in "My Friendly Epistle," Poland was destroyed indeed, but in her downfall crushed Ukraine, for in the accelerated process Ukraine lost its independence and became a mere satellite of Russia.

In this period of his life, marked by his chief political poems written since 1843, and by the furtherance of the ideals expressed in them, Taras Shevchenko from a mere national bard assumed the stature of a national oracle, a seer of his country's future, a luminary of the first magnitude whose like Ukraine had never seen before.

Occasionally he would meet Kostomariv and the other Brothers at the apartment of M. Hulak, where they discussed matters pertaining to the Slavic world. Little did they suspect that one O. Petrov, a student and a spy, was listening to their arguments behind the thin partition separating Hulak's and Petrov's living quarters. It was this student who kept the Russian authorities informed of the activities of the organization and whose final testimony led to the arrest of its adherents.

Towards the end of January 1847, P. Kulish married Oleksandra Bilozerska, a budding writer and a leader of the feminist movement in Ukraine. The event took place at Kulish's manor in the village of Motronivka, and was the more festive as Shevchenko was there in the capacity of the chief attendant to the bridegroom. The bride was so taken up with him as a poet, artist, and singer that she decided to offer her entire dowry of 3,000 rubles to enable him to continue his studies in Italy. The matter was arranged and the poet was overjoyed at the opportunity. The journey, however, was postponed on account of his previous commitments, and the next two months he spent in excursions connected with his current work, in the leisurely intervals of which he continued to write, sketch, paint, and associate with the

rural element in order to study their manners and customs at close hand. In the first days of April that year he started out for Kiev where again he was to act as best man, this time at Kostomarov's wedding. The latter in the meantime had been appointed professor of history at the University of Kiev, while Shevchenko was nominated as an instructor of painting for a period of one year at the same institution. All that, however, was upset by the sudden arrest of all the members of the Brotherhood.

Shevchenko was arrested on the Kiev bank of the Dnieper (on April 5, 1847) as he stepped down on dry land from a ferry. In his baggage the police found, in addition to paintings and sketches, a number of personal letters considered subversive in character and, above all, a copy of the manuscript "The Three Years," containing the already mentioned illegal and incriminatory poems. All this evidence was sent to St. Petersburg. After spending one night in a Kiev prison, Shevchenko was transported under police escort to the Russian capital, which he reached eleven days later. His comrades in the accusation had been imprisoned there several days earlier, Kulish having been arrested while actually on his way abroad to continue his studies in preparation for a professorship.

The provocateur Petrov, who had insinuated himself into V. Hulak's confidence by posing as a republican, and to whom the latter had read Shevchenko's poems (among them "The Dream" and "My Friendly Epistle"), in his denunciation to the authorities, pointed out that Shevchenko not only ridiculed the majesty of the imperial family but sought to incite his people to rebel against the established political order. During the search of Kostomarov's and Bilozersky's quarters, two weeks before the arrest, the police found those inflammatory verses, and no further proof was needed of Shevchenko's influence on the activities of the Brotherhood.

During the interrogation Shevchenko conducted himself both warily and nobly, yet somewhat humbly when he admitted to his interlocutors that he did commit a *faux pas* in deriding the tsarist family, particularly the Empress who, it may be remembered, had bought Briullov's portrait of Zhukovsky, thus contributing to his emancipation. He further declared that even if he did express himself injuriously with regard to the imperialist policies of the tsarist régime, he was merely repeating similar views heard among the Russians themselves in the very capital. To blunt the edge of the accusation that he was inciting his people to rebellion, he attributed his rather radical utterances to his revulsion against the oppression of the peasant masses

by their landlords and the official overseers who persecuted them in the name of the Tsar. Concerning the Brotherhood, Shevchenko maintained that he never belonged to it (which was true) and that his archaeological excursions did not permit him to attend its meetings, as a result of which he was not too familiar with its aims. To attenuate the impression that its members were unduly influenced by his writings, he sought to convince the authorities (lamey enough, it must be admitted) that his poems were read in the Brotherhood's circle as a matter of curiosity, for the mere reason that they were written in Ukrainian.

For three weeks after this interrogation Shevchenko was left in peace. Together with his other fellow-prisoners he was treated well, even to the extent of being supplied with cream for tea, cigarettes, and cognac. His lack of reading matter and his solitary confinement, however, were difficult to bear, although each man was lodged in a clean cell and supplied with a Bible.

In the citadel where he was imprisoned, Shevchenko wrote thirteen short poems. Among them the most poignant was "To N. I. Kostomarov," composed after Shevchenko had seen, from behind a grated window, the historian's utterly dejected mother approaching the prison to visit her son; and the greatest was that which begins with the line "It is all one to me," and in which he expressed his unconcern as to what would happen to him, but keen anxiety at the very thought that Ukraine might be brought to utter ruin by her enemies.

On May 15, when he was called again for further interrogation, Shevchenko was presented with a deposition made to the presiding judges by a nineteen-year-old student Andruzky, who under pressure declared that Shevchenko had indeed taken part in the meetings of the Brotherhood; that he was in fact the most vocal of the Ukrainian party whose purpose was to restore the hetmanate in Ukraine; and that it was he who really incited the other members to subversion by glorifying Ivan Mazepa (whom the Russians execrated as a traitor for making common cause with Charles XII of Sweden against Peter I). That deposition sealed Shevchenko's doom, and all he could do in refuting the accusation was to repeat that although he knew all the members of the Brotherhood, he had never belonged to it. Outwardly, he preserved a cool head and by his imperturbable deportment at the trial encouraged his fellow-prisoners to keep up their spirits; inwardly, however, he was dejected and angry at his Muse for having brought him and them to such a dire pass.

The indictment was drawn, and its conclusion was that Shevchenko

was the greatest culprit of them all in rebelliousness, defiance, and an intransigency that knew no bounds. It was transmitted to Nicholas I by the presiding judge, Count Orlov, who suggested to the Tsar that the poet, being of strong physical constitution, be sentenced for an indefinite period to hard military service in the Orenburg regiment, with the right to clemency for good behaviour. To this written suggestion the Tsar added a personal note in his own hand that the convicted man be "most strictly guarded and forbidden to write and paint."

That was the harshest punishment of all. M. Hulak, who took the blame for all the Brotherhood's activity upon himself and would not in any manner incriminate the other members, received a three-year sentence of solitary confinement in the Schlüssenburg dungeon. Other penalties were less severe: Kulish and Bilozersky, four months imprisonment; Kostomariv, one year; and all were to be severally exiled to various distant Russian towns for civil service, no literary activity being allowed them. In addition, Shevchenko's works were banned from both publication and circulation.

Immediately upon the pronouncement of the sentence Shevchenko was removed to a military prison. The very next day, composed and reconciled to his fate, he set out under heavy horse guard for Orenburg, which he reached after a ten-day journey. From there he was sent about two hundred miles further east, to the Fortress of Orsk, where he was registered as a private.

Then began for Shevchenko a life of monotony and military servitude amid the wilderness of the Kirghiz steppe. Each day he had to drill almost continually under the orders of coarse, drunken sergeants who often threatened him with birching for his awkwardness. But his suffering was much worse when after an all-day muster he found himself in the barracks where in the stench of human sweat and cheap tobacco smoke he had to listen to the intolerable din of the convicts and their inane chatter. For Shevchenko a life among this rabble was a veritable spiritual torture, to which soon was added a physical illness—rheumatism, which henceforth did not leave him. To top it all, he was presently attacked by scurvy, as a result of which his gums became diseased and his body covered with sores. This life of pain and distress is poignantly recorded in his poem, "To A. Y. Kozachkovsky," which is the poet's desperate *de profundis*.

Some respite from those tortures Shevchenko gained from his constant readings of the Bible. In addition, the friendships he contracted with certain more humane officers in the region had a salutary effect

on his melancholy state of mind. Of particular blessing was his warm relationship with the Lazarevsky brothers from Orenburg, one of whom came several times to visit him at Orsk and sent him cigars and occasionally money. He was also a welcome guest (not as a convict) at the home of the physician, M. Aleksandrivsky, where he was able to read recently published books and journals and so keep up with current events. The home of the military clerk, Lavrentiev, was also open to him, and there, in the capacity of tutor to his host's sons, he could enjoy real rest and relaxation. Certain charitable ladies likewise did their best to make life tolerable for him, particularly when they bought him a rabbit fur-coat for the cold winter season.

This amelioration in his existence lasted but six months, at the end of which the commander of the regiment, fearing untoward consequences for himself, ordered him back to the barracks. Shevchenko, after some freedom, now found his prison, by contrast, a greater "dung-heap" than ever, the lowest pit of human misery. At times he longed for death; but depressive as was his mental state, he was constantly buoyed up by the hope that eventually he would be able to tear himself away from those wretched surroundings and return to his native Ukraine again.

In the meantime he besought his friends to intercede for him in St. Petersburg to have at least the prohibition to draw and paint lifted from his sentence. The interdiction to write he could well understand, but there was nothing subversive in his pictorial work. To achieve this end, Shevchenko needed the support not only of his immediate officers and friends at Orenburg and St. Petersburg, but also the good will of Count Orlov, the chief of the police at the capital, who would have to approach the Tsar personally with that petition. The matter, however, was slow even in getting started and, in spite of Princess Repnin's intercession, stagnated for months on end.

To relieve his plight, Shevchenko's friends helped him as much as they could with books, money, and other gifts. Of particular satisfaction to the poet was the receipt of Shakespeare's translated works and an entire painting gear. The Bible continued to be his constant companion, and from it he drew what consolation he needed. While in the Fortress of Orsk, Shevchenko experienced the soothing power of prayer and felt alleviation on meditating Christ's call: "Come to me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." This he confessed in some of the letters to his friends. Of great balm to him also was Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*.

Although strictly forbidden to write, Shevchenko nevertheless found

surreptitious occasions to do so, especially when all in the barracks were asleep; but, as he relates in his "To A. Y. Kozachkovsky," it was "like a thief" that he went about it. Whatever he wrote he recopied in minuscule script and hid it in the leggings of his military boots. By the time his exile was over, he had four such "bootleg" booklets filled with verses. In the Fortress of Orsk he wrote "The Princess" (*Kniazhna*), a long poem, influenced, it is surmised, by Shakespeare's dramatism; "A Dream" (not to be confused with a previous poem bearing a similar title), in which his love of Ukraine is felt to have increased in proportion to his physical and mental sufferings; "Irzhavetz," dealing with the miraculous, tear-shedding icon of the Virgin Mary, which, after the Cossacks' wanderings following the destruction of the Sitch, was finally brought by them to that locality and there placed in a church to continue to weep over their fate; "To A. Y. Kozachkovsky," in which, as already mentioned, his state of mind as an exile is pitifully brought forth; "The Branded Convict" (*Varnak*), a bloody tale by one so marked; and a goodly number of lyrics, among them, the well-known one beginning with the line "I was some thirteen years of age," in which his first meeting with the girl Oksana is described. The Cossack life, rich in colourful manners and customs, continued to interest Shevchenko, as can be gathered from his other poems. Many of the shorter pieces he then wrote were autobiographical, reflecting his sorrowful mood and describing the arid Asiatic wastes amid which he lived. These are quite subjective in tone, replete with plaintive, at times querulous utterances of his longing to return to the paradisaical regions of his native land. To the first "bootleg" collection of his verses, Shevchenko added the thirteen lyrics he wrote in the citadel at St. Petersburg, after he had revised them. As he was meticulously searched before setting out for Orenburg, it is suggested that he smuggled these thirteen either in his boots or copied in the margins of his Bible.

In the spring of 1848, the government organized an expedition under Captain O. Butakov to study the as yet unexplored Aral Sea, its depths and coastline, with a view to the advisability of building fortifications upon its shores for further imperialist expansion in the direction of Afghanistan. The expedition needed an experienced draughtsman to sketch the salient places where fortresses might be constructed. And so, at Butakov's instance and after investigating Shevchenko's behaviour, the military authorities at Orenburg decided to appoint him to that task, although no permission had as yet arrived from St. Petersburg to free him from the curtailment of drawing and

painting. On May 9 Shevchenko received instructions from Orenburg that he was being relieved from the regiment at Orsk and attached to the expeditionary battalion, with the right to draw and sketch anything that was considered necessary. Although, according to those who had lived in the Aral region, life at Orsk was an Eden in comparison, Shevchenko felt a sense of relief. The next day he was on the way to his new destination.

The caravan was made up of 2,500 waggons and 3,500 camels. The sections of the schooner *Konstantin* were being transported on conveyances. The manpower consisted of some 200 infantry, 600 Bashkir horsemen, and a detachment of cavalry, all under the command of General Schreiber. In that conglomeration, Shevchenko was treated not as a common soldier, but as a member of the expedition, and as such enjoyed special privileges from the commanders; among other alleviations, he was not required to wear a uniform. The first day of the journey proved unbearable, and Shevchenko who could not endure the insufferable heat, and was in addition highly excited by the sudden change, experienced a fainting spell. The terrain through which they moved was a monotonous wilderness, a boundless plain wild with the steppe-grass but with no other growth or sign of life. On the way Shevchenko sketched a few landscape scenes, several Russian military forts, and burial mounds. Then followed seven days of tormenting journey across the horrible desert of Karakum with its extremes of temperature—cold, windy elevations and hot valleys full of black sand on which, as Shevchenko noted both in his *Diary (Shchodennik)* and in the novel *The Twins (Bliznetsi)* an egg could be fried in five minutes. The thirst suffered by man and beast was intense, and when finally they reached the desert wells the water in them was so bitter, salty, acid, and full of minute creatures that it was tolerable to drink only after it had been sieved and boiled. Shevchenko was fortunate in having a few lemons with which to flavour his tea and so subdue his thirst. However, the worst was yet to come. Their further journey lay across a pale roseate plain which was the bottom of a dried up lake and, in the intense sunlight, was so dazzling that one could proceed only with eyes closed. Shevchenko, like his companions, was temporarily blinded by it. Finally, the shores of the Aral Sea were reached, and the air became fresher. But there still remained some fifty miles to the Rayim Fort, their destination on the Syr-Daria River. This part of the journey was possible only by night, for the temperature during the day was almost a steady 115° F. On June 19, after thirty-nine days of forging ahead, they

arrived at that Fort which stood solitary amid the utterly gloomy Kirghiz steppe-land.

In that god-forsaken spot, while he waited thirty days for the schooner *Konstantin* to be assembled, Shevchenko sketched and painted the mournful scenes around him, oppressed by unrelenting heat and troubled sorely by scorpions and tarantulas. Then, on July 25, when all was in readiness, the *Konstantin*, in the company of its mate the *Nikolai*, sailed from the Rayim Fort down the Syr-Daria River towards the Aral Sea. Shevchenko was aboard the former together with the commander Butakov and twenty-five others, all in very restricted quarters. It took them about a week to reach the Sea, at the entrance to which the schooners separated, each to investigate different parts of it. Up till September 26 the explorations continued under the most horrible conditions: lack of fresh food, scorching heat, storms, and often hurricanes, the more dangerous because the soundings of the depths had not yet been established and the vessel often ran into shallows and struck against hidden rocks. The topographical measurements and the exploration of the unmapped islands were completed in thirty-eight days, following which the expedition headed towards the island of Kos-Aral where they cast anchor and prepared to pass the winter after two months of almost continuous seafaring.

The winter with its storms began early, on October 22, and in that snow-bound locality Shevchenko spent some four months during which he continued to draw and paint, but mostly to write, in order to obliterate as best he could the monotony and boredom. Vermin, however, with which all the members of the expedition were infested, became an insoluble problem. Mail reached that forlorn spot only twice a year, but Shevchenko failed to receive any communication whatever from the outside world. All seemed to have forgotten him, and this troubled him painfully. Scrofula attacked him, and his physical deterioration continued. It was not relieved even when, at the end of January 1849, he returned for a two-month's stay to the Rayim Fort where two physicians attended him. His appearance also changed. He had now a fully bearded face, his hair began to thin out visibly, and his former sturdy physique became lean. He was aging fast. At times, under the influence of rum, his melancholy would leave him, but a relapse would always follow and he would again grow reticent with his friends or vocal in cursing his evil fate. At least twice he took part in tiger hunts, and on one of them sketched a dead tiger. Occasionally, when the snow-storms subsided,

he and others would visit the local Kirghiz beys. But all those diversions could not in the end alleviate his deep-rooted grief and mental torment.

Willingly would he have exchanged this state for the former at Orsk, but Butakov insisted that he remain with him till the end of the expedition. And so, on May 5, Shevchenko again found himself on board the *Konstantin* as it started on its second voyage of exploration which this time was to last four months. The investigation was begun from the western precipitous shores which made it virtually impossible for the crew to disembark. The squalls continued to plague them, and once the hurricane was so strong that the vessel had to be made fast by three anchors. Although Butakov made certain that this time the provisions were fresher and less perishable, the sea water which they drank during a storm that lasted two weeks made the men so sick at their stomachs that they were incapacitated for any kind of work and brought Shevchenko to such a pass that he cared little whether he lived or died. Once when they went ashore, he felt so desperate that he deliberately separated himself from his companions and would not answer their call when the time for re-embarking came; when he was found, it was with difficulty that he was persuaded to return on board.

The expedition completed its work by September 22. In two excursions, lasting about seven months, the Aral's surface was measured, its depths sounded, and its coast line mapped and studied. Shevchenko's contribution was over two hundred sketches and drawings which enhanced the immense research in both practical and artistic respects. However, it could not be publicly acknowledged, because it was only at Butakov's instance and on the Orenburg military officialdom's sufferance that he did that kind of work; the formal confirmation of his release from the interdict was still lacking. Personally, he profited from the research by often working with the naturalist Werner, thus acquiring considerable knowledge of botany and geology.

The party returned to Kos-Aral and from there to the Rayim Fort, back to vermin, scorpions, and blowing, blinding sands. Shevchenko was pain-stricken that in the mail awaiting them there he received not a single letter. Did his friends forget him altogether? How could they be so ungrateful to him for what he had done to further their national cause at the price of his freedom? Of course, he had no way of knowing that all his mail had been stopped at Orenburg. Even so, the

correspondence he later received was from precious few of his friends (including Princess Repnin); many others in Ukraine who had promised to write him failed to communicate.

On October 10, for the second time, Shevchenko had to cross the dreaded desert on his way to Orenburg, part of the 1,000 kilometers on foot in order to lessen the horses' fatigue as they trudged uphill. Thus, after two and a half years of most bitter experiences since he left the town for Orsk, he reached Orenburg on November 1.

Since his imprisonment at Orsk, his "bootleg" collection had increased by some seventy items, large and small, most of them written on Kos-Aral. A greater part of them was lyrical, subjective, and autobiographical poems into which he poured his distress as he described the wretchedness of his life. Their Dantesque refrain could be reduced to the outcry: "Nessun maggior dolore / Che ricordarsi del tempo felice / Ne la miseria," which Shevchenko paraphrased in one of his lyrics. Besides several longer narrative poems, he wrote ballads and a considerable number of songs with folklorist content. As always, many of his poems of that period derive from his lasting interest in the Cossack age and reveal the manners and customs of those bold and happy-go-lucky warriors in both their exuberant and their subdued moods. The general tenor of his creativeness, however, is grief for his lost youth and sorrow at being forgotten by his countrymen.

Life in Orenburg was a mixed blessing for Shevchenko. He was no longer forced to live in barracks, drill, or wear a uniform. The number of his acquaintances in the town increased, particularly among the Polish political prisoners, and he was able to earn some money by painting portraits of local celebrities. He was heartily accepted in the higher society and for a time was intimately connected with a beautiful Tartar woman called Zaborzhada who accompanied him to many a social gathering. Being on friendly terms with the Governor-General of the Orenburg region, V. Obruchev, afforded him a soothing feeling of protection. The reverse side of the medal, however, was not so bright: he continued to labour under the stress of a man whose movements were fettered and who had to perform even his duties for the good of the state clandestinely, for the authorities in St. Petersburg were stubbornly adamant in their silence as to whether or not they were favourably disposed to grant him permission to pursue his artistic bent freely. If he still was connected with Butakov in the same capacity, it was on the latter's insistence that Shevchenko was indispensable to him in order to complete his part of the work in connection with the Aral expedition.

In the meantime Shevchenko persisted in pressing his local friends and those in Russia to prevail upon the Tsar by all means at their disposal to relieve him from this plight. In March of 1850, after months of trial, General Orlov informed Governor Obruchev that Nicholas had refused the petition. This was a hard blow to the poet, but, encouraged by his numerous friends, who assured him that they would seek other means of approach to the Tsar on his behalf, his despondency was not too grave, and he continued to live seemingly as a free man and to arrange his life as best he could under the circumstances.

At that time Shevchenko lived at the home of Captain K. Gern, who was attached to the Governor's suite. It was actually through the good offices of his host that the poet enjoyed the benevolence of the Governor. However, he was not one to let well enough alone. For some time he noticed that a certain lieutenant, M. Isayev, was paying intimate visits to Gern's wife. When the matter became clear to him beyond any shadow of doubt, Shevchenko, outraged at such an injury to his benefactor, brought Gern home to reveal to him the flagrant misdeed. To revenge himself on the delator, the very next day Isayev reported to Governor Obruchev that Shevchenko, contrary to the prohibition, wore civilian clothes, lived outside the military quarters, wrote verses, and painted. All that was perfectly well known to Obruchev, but, although he would have preferred to let the matter rest there, now that it was made public, he dared not for fear that Isayev might report on his lenience to the authorities at St. Petersburg. He therefore ordered a search of Shevchenko's apartment. There the police found the compromising articles: the civvies, correspondence, paints, and objects necessary for painting. The "bootleg" books were saved, for when Shevchenko learned that his rooms were to be searched, he gave them to Gern for safekeeping. On April 27, 1850, Shevchenko was arrested and imprisoned in Orenburg. After three weeks of detention, he was sent back to the Fortress of Orsk and there remained under strict surveillance, while the investigation of his case was being conducted in Orenburg and St. Petersburg. In the capital, Orlov came to the conclusion that nothing subversive was to be detected in the correspondence, and if Shevchenko did draw and paint, it was his superiors who were to blame for practically forcing him to do so by appointing him a member of the Aral expedition. Still, Tsar Nicholas, on Orlov's advice, again refused to remove the ban and, in addition, ordered that Shevchenko be transferred to another, more distant fort to continue serving his sentence. And so,

after two and a half months' imprisonment at Orsk, on October 8 Shevchenko was taken to the relatively recently established Fortress of Novopetrovsk situated on a peninsula of the Caspian Sea. Sailing down the Ural River and then across the Caspian, he was brought there on October 17, 1850.

The worst period of his life had begun. He arrived there with a band of political "criminals" to whom all correspondence was forbidden. After two and a half years of freedom from military training, he was again subjected to it. He was placed under the supervision of a coarse, brow-beating captain, Potapov, who mocked, drilled, and disciplined him mercilessly and almost each day searched his pockets to see if he had written anything. But an even greater curse than this beastly creature was the bleak environment of sandy, marshy, rocky tracts. With the exception of the Bible, he had no books to read. It was therefore with great relief that Shevchenko welcomed the arrival of an expedition whose purpose was to explore the deposits of hard coal in the Kara-Tau Mountains. Shevchenko was assigned to that expedition in a military capacity, for hard labour, but its leader allowed him to sketch whatever was of interest in that mountainous domain of wild birds and beasts of prey. Upon his return, two months later, these sketches were entrusted to his friends, and it was only later, with the amelioration of his circumstances, that he could, at leisure, bring them out as finished compositions.³

Towards the end of 1852 came a change for the better. His drill-master Potapov was transferred, and the new officer, Captain Kosarev, was not as hard on the artist. To replace the commander of the Fort, Mayevsky, who treated Shevchenko humanely, came Major I. Uskov, who was prevailed upon by the poet's friends at Orenburg to make life easier for him, which the officer did, although he could not relieve him from daily muster or permit him to use his brush. Yet he could not forbid him to occupy himself with sculpture, mostly bas-reliefs, as that was not mentioned in the sentence.

Likewise at that time Shevchenko began to write novels in Russian, the first one entitled *The Servant Maid* (*Naymichka*), which, in order to avoid unpleasantness, he dated back to Pereyaslav, 1845. At this he was engaged fairly regularly, and before his days of exile

³As a pictorial artist Shevchenko cannot be considered of the first rank. However, in his prolific production he did create many works of sterling worth. According to Professor V. O. Buyniak's computation, some 835 items can be credited to him, mostly pen or pencil sketches and drawings (356), water colours and sepias (176). He was quite in demand as a portraitist (and in that respect he often excelled), but it was as an engraver that he was chiefly recognized by the Academy of Art.

were over he had completed seven novels. In addition, he did not neglect his *Diary*. However, not a single original poem in Ukrainian was written by him during his seven and a half years at Novopetrovsk; and it seemed that his Muse, like his friends in Ukraine, had deserted him completely. But he continued to paint surreptitiously, and for some of his works, mostly portraits, which he sent to Orenburg as "cloth material," he occasionally received money. Thus did he while away his time and melancholy, and avoid being completely submerged in despair. On rare occasions he was visited by people travelling through that outlandish place, among them the famous Russian novelist, O. Pissemsky, who was always favourably disposed towards him.

The greatest consolation Shevchenko experienced in that gloomy period of his life was in the person of Uskov's wife Agatha, whom in his letters to his friends he described as "the veritable grace of God" to him in that wilderness. To Bronislaw Zaleski, his Polish friend, he confided: "What a wonderful, marvellous being is that impeccable woman! She is a sparkling gem in the crown of creation. If it were not for this one and only creature so dear to my heart, I would not know what to do with myself. I have come to love her with a chaste, lofty love—with all my heart and soul filled with gratitude. But do not suspect, my friend, that there is any taint in this pure love of mine. . . ." And indeed, it was a platonic affection which Agatha, feeling how it relieved his torment, allowed him to nurture towards her. Almost every day he dined at the Uskovs, and his frequent walks with her in the vicinity of the Fort transported him from hell to the empyrean heights, preventing him from going mad among the uncouth, obtuse, drunken soldiery and convict rabble with whom he had to live.

The death of Nicholas I occurred in February 1855, and immediately Shevchenko saw a ray of hope for himself even so far as regaining his complete freedom. In April of that year he wrote a diplomatically worded letter to the Vice President of the Academy of Art, Count F. Tolstoy, and to his close friend V. Hrihorovich, its Secretary, to petition the sister of the late Tsar, Maria, then the President of the Academy, to help relieve his predicament. Two months later he received an anonymous letter, written probably by Countess Tolstoy, which offered him some assurance that in the near future his hopes might materialize. With the accession to the throne of Tsar Alexander II, an amnesty for political prisoners was proclaimed. The new ruler, however, did not show this favour to

Shevchenko, perhaps being influenced by his mother, in whom the poet's insult ("The Dream") still rankled deeply. He was refused not only a pardon, but also a commission for which he had applied. His bitterness was increased when Agatha Uskov, fearing scandal as a result of his frequent visits and their familiar promenades, broke off her friendship with him and began to treat him coldly. To Shevchenko, who considered her as his only mainstay in life, this was the hardest blow of all those he had experienced in the past eight years, during which his despair often reached such proportions that he was on the point of losing his bearings and sought to drown his sorrow in liquor. Although he certainly did not become an addict, in the last two years of his exile his consumption of alcohol showed a marked increase. It was this proneness, more than anything else, that apparently contributed to Madame Uskov's decision to sever relations with him.

It was only in April 1857 that Shevchenko, in a letter from his constant and assiduous friend, M. Lazarevsky, received news that in January Tsar Alexander had finally given permission to relieve him from military service. The official instruction to that effect, however, arrived in Orenburg only on July 21. Shevchenko was free again, and on August 2, in a fishing boat, he sailed across the Caspian to Astrakhan, which he reached three days later. On August 23, after nearly three weeks in that unattractive city, where he visited many of the friends he had known in Kiev, he sailed on a steamship up the Volga to Nizhni Novgorod. On the way he visited Saratov, Samara, and Kazan. When on September 20 he reached his destination, the police presented him with an order from Uskov to return to Orenburg, for, according to the latest official communication which Uskov received shortly after Shevchenko had left, the poet was not to return to St. Petersburg or to Moscow but was to wait in Orenburg for further instructions as to where he was to go. The difficulty was overcome by his friends in Nizhni Novgorod who advised him to simulate an illness. So influential were they with the police physician that he certified that Shevchenko was actually ailing. That statement was countersigned by the chief of police. The "indisposition" lasted some six months, while his friends in St. Petersburg were making arduous efforts to gain him admittance to the Russian capital.

During his enforced stay in Nizhni Novgorod, Shevchenko plunged into the social life of that provincial city, where he was visited by many of his countrymen. Correspondence from his Ukrainian friends began to increase, and he became pleasantly aware that his fame in

Ukraine, far from suffering an eclipse, as he had feared, on the contrary had reached its zenith. All were expecting new verses from him. Under this exhilarating impression, his Muse suddenly revived, and he began to revise his previous poems and make elaborate plans for his future as an artist and poet. Everywhere he was received with open arms, and matinées and soirées were arranged in his honour. One of the highlights of this carnival period was the special visit on Christmas Eve of the famous seventy-year-old actor, M. Shchepkin, an intimate friend of his, who, besides appearing in several other plays, celebrated the occasion of Shevchenko's release by acting the leading rôle in Kotliarevsky's *Moskal-Charivnik* (Moskal the Wizard), which Shevchenko himself organized for production.

That play afforded Shevchenko another romantic outlet, for in its chief female rôle appeared the fifteen-year-old Katia Piyunov, a talented, lively actress, full of promise. Shevchenko, now forty-three, bald, stooped, grey-bearded, and aged beyond his years, fell deeply in love with her. Naively imagining her already as his wife, he made arrangements to have her engaged in the Kharkiv theatrical troupe, and to that end sought to establish her reputation by writing favourable reviews of her performances. As her protector, he finally wrote her a letter of proposal of marriage and informed her parents of his intention. Secretly, this proposition was ridiculed as a piece of theatrical folly; overtly, it was accepted without any definite answer, for the young woman was still waiting for a successful outcome of her application to join the Kharkiv troupe. Once she received a positive answer from the management, she gave Shevchenko a definite "no." To judge by the entry of this incident in his *Diary*, he did not know what struck him. The blow was softened somewhat by an official document which arrived on February 25, permitting him to return to St. Petersburg on the condition that he remain under strict police supervision and that the administration of the Academy of Art vouch for his future good behaviour. Shortly before his departure on March 8, he was further overjoyed at receiving from Gern his four "bootleg" booklets.

The régime had good reason to suspect Shevchenko, for in spite of the pardon he received, he did not abandon his radical views with regard to the tsarist government, and expressed himself quite openly against it. That attitude is only too evident in the poetry he wrote during his Nizhni Novgorod period, particularly in one poem where he voiced a longing for a Washington to appear in Ukraine (as well as in the entire Russian Empire, for all that) "with

his new and righteous law." In his long masterpiece, "The Neophytes," which he wrote under intense inspiration in a matter of a single week, and which seems to be a sudden artistic outburst of his feelings pent-up in the course of some seven years at Novopetrovsk, he poured out his caustic venom against Tsar Nicholas I and the tyranny he represented. Quite true, he made the action take place in Nero's Rome during the persecution of the first Christians, but the subterfuge was only too ill disguised, and no one could mistake whom Nero delineated. The poem is one of the pearls of Ukrainian literature and a chef-d'œuvre of universal value in that it proclaims the eventual efficacy of the Christian principles of Truth, Justice, and Brotherhood among men, and preaches the ideal of forgiveness as enunciated in the Lord's Prayer.

On the way to St. Petersburg, an inflammation of the eye, which caused painful boils to appear on his head, forced him to stop in Moscow in order to be treated by physicians. Among other friends who came to visit him there, he met Princess Repnin, a life-long friend who had done her utmost to have him freed from exile. The meeting, warm enough though it was, left much to be desired. The impression she received from an ailing, decrepit man who had aged prematurely was painful, and it appeared to her that he was in a decline both physically and spiritually. He, on the other hand, detected in her traces of religious bigotry that were not to his liking. The friendship was preserved, but their feelings towards each other were somewhat cooled.

Having returned to St. Petersburg, his first visits were to his closest friends, M. Lazarevsky and the Tolstoys, who were more instrumental than anyone else in helping him regain his freedom. His arrival at the Russian capital was a social event of the first order, and he was wined, dined, and lionized even to surfeit. In addition, he plunged himself into the cultural and artistic life of that imperial city with as much gusto as if he wanted to make up in a few days for the lack of it he had experienced for ten years.

After a carefree period of several weeks, which occasionally presented the appearance of a carousal, he settled down somewhat in order to plan his future. In the first place, he set about collecting all his poems, many of which were still in manuscripts scattered among his friends, in order to publish them collectively. Simultaneously he began to study in the Academy new methods of engraving as a means of gaining his livelihood, for now, as a result of high living, he began to feel the pinch which could not be alleviated by sporadic sales of works done somewhat half-heartedly and indifferently.

Social and economic conditions in Ukraine, as well as those of other peoples comprising the Russian Empire, continued to trouble him, particularly the sorry status of the serfs for whose emancipation he longed and prayed. These matters were widely discussed in the circles in which Shevchenko moved, but it only unnerved him to have to listen to a mere multiplication of empty words that bore no seed of action. In his irritation, rendered the more acute by the ten-year exile, he finally arrived at the conclusion that the only way to effect an amelioration in that respect was by means of an armed revolution. This radical attitude he could by no means conceal, a fact which made his efforts to publish the entire collection of his verse the more difficult with the censorship.

After three months of boisterous living, Shevchenko, persuaded by Count Tolstoy, settled down to a more serious life at the Academy of Art where he was given simple living and working quarters, each on a separate floor. There he began his studies in engraving with a view to gaining the rank of academician which would enable him to acquire prestige and eventually the opportunity to teach at the Academy. Orders began to increase, and his material resources improved considerably.

His circle of friends likewise began to widen among Ukrainian, Russian, and Polish literati, scholars, and artists, and he was welcomed warmly in all the important literary salons of St. Petersburg, some of which were frequented by I. Turgenev, N. Chernishevsky, N. Leskov, and others of higher magnitude.⁴ Especially pleasing to Shevchenko was his friendship with Ira Aldridge, a negro actor, then performing in St. Petersburg in Shakespearean tragic rôles, particularly in *Othello* and *King Lear* which inspired Shevchenko to the point of tears. Their conversation, of course, was conducted through interpreters and by mimicry, rendered the more animated when there was a bottle to share between them; and the link uniting them became firmer as the two former bondmen related to each other their past experiences and alternately sang the songs of their people. The high-

⁴While it is true that many of Shevchenko's friends belonged to the Russian democratically-minded intelligentsia, with whom he later in life exchanged radical ideas, the claim of some Soviet scholars that he was influenced by them in his political thinking (particularly by N. Chernishevsky and N. Dobroliubov) is somewhat exaggerated. By the year 1845, when he was thirty-one, Shevchenko's political ideas had already become firmly established. At that time, Chernishevsky was seventeen, and Dobroliubov merely nine years of age. If there was any influence, it was in the reverse direction. However, it is true that Shevchenko was taken up with the social ideas as expounded by the older Russian writers, such as A. Radishchev, whom he had in mind in the poem "The Dream."

light of this significant friendship was the portrait which Shevchenko drew of Aldridge, with which both were well pleased.

Now that he had established himself in the Academy, Shevchenko intensified his artistic and literary work. Nothing more, it seemed, could have been desired if his sensitivity and concern for Ukraine, her present state and future destiny, had been less keen at the sight of the wrongs done her by her Russian overlords. He conceived a strong desire to visit his native country again, this time with an added purpose—to get married and raise a family. While waiting for the permission to leave St. Petersburg (he was still under police surveillance), he wrote to several of his relatives and friends to seek out a bride for him. In June 1859, he again found himself on Ukrainian soil, visiting the villages where he was born and brought up and spending leisurely days at the homes and estates of his friends scattered about the province of Kiev. Particularly tender was his meeting with his sister Yarina in the village of Kirilivka and with his sister-in-law's brother, Vartolomiy, a steward on the estate of a Ukrainian landlord in the vicinity of Korsun.

His freedom of movement and of expression, however, were constantly disturbed by police agents who followed him wherever he went. Although he voiced his opinions about the much needed social reforms freely, there was nothing subversive to be detected in his views, and all would have gone well if he had not on several occasions been rather outspoken on certain religious matters. No patent sacrilege was involved in what Shevchenko said (he was a God-fearing man), but it was seriously treated as such by the authorities, and on those grounds he was arrested and brought to Kiev where the Governor ordered him to return to St. Petersburg. Shevchenko, however, took his time about it. After all, he had come to Ukraine to get married.

As far as his "anti-religious" utterances were concerned, Shevchenko was indeed critical of the clergy who did not care for the material or spiritual welfare of the people entrusted to their care. In discussing this matter, he occasionally coupled a certain fraction of the priesthood with the ruling classes. In his conversations he often became heated, and this caused some of his listeners to exaggerate the meanings of his words. But it is a fact that in dealing with the prevailing social, economical, and political conditions, Shevchenko was a radical in this stand, stubbornly so, as for example when he asserted that the common people could well be spared the tsar, the landlords, and the priests from whom they derived no essential benefits. For like reasons he even calumniated the memory of Bohdan Khmelnytsky,

whom he always held responsible for Ukraine's loss of independence through the Treaty of Pereyaslav which the Hetman concluded with Russia in 1654.

Truth to tell, towards the end of his life Shevchenko became highly irritable, even cantankerous, as his poems of that period readily attest, especially those in which he attacked the powers that be, secular and spiritual. As to religion itself, may it be repeated, he never expressed himself with hostility. Still, throughout his life he was often tactless, rash, argumentative, imprudent, in fact, defiant. Sociable and amiable enough though he was, he could, if roused, become morose, and even surly. Often he irked his masters with his inveterate recalcitrancy. Psychologically, such a disposition must have stemmed from the fact that he had been a serf, constrained to be shy and modest, but possessed of an overbearing pride that broke all the barriers as he sought to assert himself.

Instead of remaining in Ukraine five months, as he had intended, Shevchenko was forced to return to St. Petersburg after only two and a half-months' sojourn. On August 13, 1859, he left Kiev, his dream to get married there brought to naught for the time being. That urge, however, did not diminish, and he continued to plead with his friends in Ukraine to continue their efforts to find him a suitable bride. To his relative Vartolomiy he entrusted the task of making a choice of some pleasant spot on a hillock along the Dnieper's bank where a comfortable house might be built for him and his future mate, and even supplied the money for the purchase of construction material.

On his return to St. Petersburg on September 7, Shevchenko was pleasantly surprised to learn that, as a result of his successful experimentation in the *eau forte* method, he had been appointed academician, a rank equivalent to a full professorship at the Academy of Art. Another pleasant surprise was that the officialdom was ready to allow his former poems to be printed, but with certain reservations which were to be decided by the censorship board. It would have now appeared that Shevchenko lacked for nothing—except a wife.

To the forty-five-year-old Shevchenko this matter took on real urgency. He might have fairly easily married an educated city woman, but preferred a simple village type, such as Kharitia Dvohopolenko, a serf, who worked in Vartolomiy's household as a maid, and whom Shevchenko had met only once, and that casually. To that effect he wrote Vartolomiy, asking him by all means to persuade the young woman, some twenty years his junior, to give her consent. After about nine months of inquiries, vain attempts, and false hopes, Shevchenko

was informed that Kharitia was not willing, under the pretext that the suitor, besides being much older than she, was too great a *pan* (gentleman) for a humble woman like her.

The matter of the publication of his collected poetical works was finally settled, although the censors had to a certain extent mutilated some of his poems. About six thousand copies of the collection were printed and appeared in January 1860 under the title of *The Kobzar*, which pleased Shevchenko greatly, for the moral and material uplift he derived from it was considerable. For his close and trusted friends he supplied the deleted passages by inserting them on separate pages. What added to his gratification was the reaction of the Russian critics who this time, on the whole, proved more favourably disposed to his works than their older counterparts had been some two decades earlier.

Another project, to which Shevchenko devoted much attention and attached great importance, was his work on the "Bukvar" (a primer for elementary schools). For him this was a labour of love, and when it was published early in 1861, he boasted about it as if it were a monumental work. Of small literary value, the handbook none the less contributed to the pedagogical resources in Ukraine, where the dearth of just such teaching material was then acute, as the Ukrainian language was prohibited in schools.

During the two years before his death Shevchenko wrote sporadically, but not copiously. The shorter poems and lyrics he produced were not on the par with his former verve, but the same thoughts and ideals were voiced in them as he continued to defend the downtrodden against their oppressors and to preach brotherhood and fraternal unity. Some poems are autobiographical, impressed with his disappointment at his marriage plans going awry; others are based on biblical themes or written in imitation of certain passages from the Hebrew prophets which he could relate to the political and social conditions prevailing in Ukraine and to her future destiny. Among these the poem "Mary" stands out most prominently. In it Shevchenko masterfully depicts the image of the Mother of Christ in a manner that is quite unconventional. The matter of the Annunciation, Conception, and other highlights in her life are treated realistically, at times naturalistically, yet with such a pious approach and prayerful attitude that Mary's sainthood does not suffer; in fact, it increases into a divinity, for Shevchenko revealed that it was through her solicitous, blessed motherhood that she assisted the Saviour to effect His mission during His life, and continued it by influencing His disciples, after His death, to bear His

ideals to the ends of the world. In its idealistic appeal the poem is certainly of universal significance.

The last year of his life was marked by another attempt on his part at matrimony. This final venture centred around another bondswoman, Lykera Polusmak, who was barely literate, plain-looking, and somewhat indifferent as to her reputation. However, she was fairly intelligent, and her vivaciousness appealed to Shevchenko to such an extent that he proposed to her, hoping that she was redeemable and that he himself would be able in a short time to bring her up in good behaviour and improve her mind. Eager for security and greedy for gifts, Lykera was not averse to his advances, and even sent a petition to her master to allow her to marry Shevchenko. During his intimate conversation with her, however, he discovered that emotionally she was cool towards him, did not in the least appreciate his idealistic attitude towards her, and accepted his proposal merely for selfish reasons, to get as much out of him as she possibly could. Although he now felt convinced that it would be hopeless to alter her nature by seeking to educate her, his plans to marry her did not change.

The matter became quite serious, and Shevchenko did not spare money for her trousseau, including jewellery. A month before the marriage date, he had her brought to St. Petersburg and placed in an apartment in care of an elderly lady. There he visited her almost every day, preparing her for her new occupation as a housewife, going so far as to engage a private tutor to teach her the three R's. This "romance" which lasted about a month and a half, however, was to end tragically for the poet, for the stubborn character of Lykera did not change, and she continued in her lax ways even to the degree of seducing the tutor. Although Shevchenko felt the hurt keenly, in his blind infatuation, he was willing to forgive and forget, but she, sensing that the situation was beyond repair, told him frankly that she did not love him and had been only humouring him in order to secure for herself the life of a well-to-do lady. To a conciliatory note he sent her a little later she replied coarsely that she would have nothing to do with him henceforth, and thus broke off their relations completely.⁵ This episode was one of the most disastrous of his life, and there is good reason to believe that the resulting despondency more rapidly hastened his approaching end.

⁵Later, Lykera married a wigmaker, one Yakovlev, and herself plied the trade of a seamstress. After the death of her husband, in her old age, she moved to Kaniv, where she was frequently seen at Shevchenko's grave, watering the flowers that she planted there and speaking kindly of him to the visitors.

Just about that time Shevchenko was formally installed as an academician. The title was proclaimed ceremoniously under the blare of trumpets and drum rolls, as it was considered the highest recognition for one's artistic attainments. This honour, however, failed to alleviate the poet's depression. Surrounded by a host of friends and well-wishers, he felt utterly lonely. He tried to forget his misery by plunging into his artistic work, but to no avail.

He grew more irritable, his nervous condition assumed dangerous proportions, and he began to lose grip on himself. His spleen he vented on all and sundry, the higher the personage the more bitterly, at that moment particularly on the wife of Nicholas I, Oleksandra, who had just died, and whom Shevchenko could not forgive for being the cause of his long exile. On the least provocation, he would burst into unrestrained vituperation against Peter I, Catherine II, and others who by their oppressive measures contributed to the destruction of the Ukrainian people and their statehood. Such outbursts, reflected in the poems he then wrote, of course had a deteriorating effect on his physical constitution, and it became quite apparent that unless he exerted control over himself, he could not last long.

Towards the end of November 1860 he was examined medically and ordered to bed for a long clinical treatment. His impatience, however, proved to be his worst enemy, and his addiction to rum of course did not improve his lung ailment which he now felt quite painfully. On Christmas Eve he left his bed of sickness and went out to visit his friends to celebrate the feast by carolling and carousing. This proved the last straw, and the dropsy from which he was suffering began to progress rapidly.

Being of strong physical frame, Shevchenko might have lived to a ripe old age, in spite of the hardships and illnesses he suffered throughout his life. Unfortunately, he neglected himself by often overindulging in the sheer bohemianism of a carefree artist. His extreme passion for work, without healthful relaxation, increased his tension to the degree of exhaustion and drew his emotions out of bounds. Lack of self-control was therefore the chief deleterious factor that brought him down at the age when life could still be enjoyed tolerably well.

His final weeks, when he was almost completely bed-ridden, were occupied with plans for distributing his *Bukvar* and for arranging for the proceeds from its sales to be transmitted for the support of Sunday schools which were then being established in the villages for the general education of both children and adults. Even on his death

bed he was still dreaming of a cottage overlooking the Dnieper, and sent instructions to Vartolomiy to forget the sites then under consideration and to try to buy him a patch of land on an elevated location near the town of Kaniv, as if he had foreseen that that would be his final resting place. In his last poem, written with a trembling hand two weeks before his death, he addressed his Muse and prepared for the long journey with her to the nether world where, on the banks of the Styx he would finally build himself a dwelling and live there with her as his wife. His earthly course almost over, there remained nothing for him but to suffer and wait for the inevitable end, which came on February 26, 1861, one day after his forty-seventh birthday. The dropsical fluid had reached his lungs. In spite of that impasse to his breathing, he insisted on getting down to his studio on a lower floor. He did not reach it. On the landing his heart, however strong, gave out and he dropped dead. He would have been overjoyed, if he had lived a week longer, to hear the proclamation announcing the abolition of serfdom in the Russian Empire.

His mortal remains were transferred to the Academy church nearby, where two days later a funeral service was held attended by a vast concourse of his fellow-artists and friends. From there the mournful procession moved to the Smolensky cemetery where, after ten orations (seven in Ukrainian, two in Russian, and one in Polish), he was interred. The one in Polish, delivered by the student W. Choroshewski, was characteristic of the fraternal attitude of the more enlightened Poles towards the great man who, as his poetic works were understood by them, dealt harshly with the Polish ruling classes for having oppressed his people when they held sway in Ukraine, but who had always longed for good neighbourly relations with the Polish people (as well as with all the other peoples) on the basis of equality and brotherly justice. Similarly was Shevchenko, the man and the artist, dealt with by most of those who wrote about him on the occasion of his death. In far-away England, Charles Dickens, whom Shevchenko respected as a great writer and humanitarian, added his words expressing his sorrow at the loss of a fellow-craftsman whose views he shared.

Shevchenko's resting place in St. Petersburg was temporary. To honour his wish to be buried in Ukraine in a spot overlooking the Dnieper, it was decided on the very day of his death to seek permission to transfer his remains to his native land. Two months later this was granted, and Shevchenko's body was exhumed and the casket containing it placed in a massive tin coffin. After a farewell ceremony,

again attended by a huge throng, it was entrained for Moscow. From there it was to proceed to and through Ukraine on a specially ordered and well-coiled oxen-drawn carriage.

It was a mournful but triumphant cortège. Before it reached Kiev, it stopped at several points on the way where religious and civil ceremonies were held and valedictories delivered. In Kiev, however, all orations were forbidden; but more eloquent than any eulogy was the gesture of a certain lady who placed on Shevchenko's coffin, as it lay in a church, a wreath of thorns. Following the service there, his body was transported on a barge down the Dnieper to the nearby town of Kaniv where on the Monk's Hill (*Chernecha Hora*) he was laid to his final rest. Over his grave a mound was heaped and on top of it was fixed an oak cross which two decades later was replaced by a wrought-iron one. In 1939 the Communist government of Ukraine removed it and, instead, erected a tall statue of the poet placed on a high, obelisque-like base.

Ever since Shevchenko was laid in that pleasant patch of Ukraine, his burial mound has remained a place of pilgrimage for all Ukrainians. With the exception of Mecca and Stratford-on-Avon, perhaps no other spot on earth has been a greater drawing force to a people than the grave of that greatest of Ukrainians whose flaming words roused in his race the never-to-be extinguished longing for an independent nationhood.

If Shevchenko had been a mere folk bard, his fame by this time would have suffered a partial eclipse, and his significance reduced to that of a simple balladeer and a creator of verses with lilting rhythms and melodies in a romantic vein. The romanticism, however, with which he began his literary, social, and political mission, was but a spring for his bracing, life-giving waters which continued to swell in volume until they became a roaring torrent sweeping down towards the ocean expanse of his country's freedom.

Neither is Shevchenko to be considered solely a poet of national stature, but also a seer thirsting for justice, whose humanitarian spirit extends beyond the confines of his own country to embrace all mankind's righteous aspirations to freedom and self-determination. Prophet-like, he castigated mercilessly all those who trod rough-shod over the defenceless and the humble in his land and in all the lands of the earth. Under the protection of his influential word he took the lowliest illegitimate born, mothers out of wedlock, serfs groaning under their lords' yoke, as well as the peoples subdued by the

imperialist might of powerful states. Prophet-like also he reacted against God's apparent indifference as to the wrongs suffered by the under-privileged, and upbraided the Creator himself for allowing injustice to prevail in the lives of man. His protests, however, were never made at the price of his religiosity, for in spite of his seemingly harsh apostrophes to the Deity, his faith remained unshaken. As a God-intoxicated man, he felt himself called upon to act as one of the spokesmen for his fellow beings, and expressed himself candidly not only to the mighty of this world, but even to the Supreme Ruler of all, with whom, as his own Perebendia, he experienced a sense of intimacy enough to do so. None the less, Shevchenko remains one of the most prayerful poets known to man.

Just as it must not be taken that Shevchenko was irreligious because occasionally he felt compelled to speak his mind to his Creator, neither is it to be deduced from certain passages in his works that he was rabidly anti-this or anti-that. He was, however, an implacable enemy of all oppression and injustice regardless of the quarters from which they arose. These evils, as in his poem *The Haydamaks*, for example, he lays bare as a historical fact and treats them according to the dictates of his sense of justice, but never on the basis of blind anti-racialism. He was too great a humanitarian to allow his moral faculty to be tainted by indiscriminate hatred, which he directed solely against those foreign, as well as domestic, elements who by oppression and persecution sought to destroy the human dignity and identity of his people and by their outrageous acts proved the truth of *homo homini lupus*. His compassion in that respect extended to other conquered and oppressed peoples, as is amply proved by his poem "The Caucasus." With all those who, whether in a political, social, or even religious sphere, perpetrated iniquity as a result of which his or any other race was victimized, Shevchenko did not mince words. All tyranny he abhorred, and when he detected that his own countrymen, having attained a station of power, turned out to be no less oppressive of their underlings than certain foreign elements, he did not spare the lash. In the symbolic mystery-drama, "The Great Mound," it is the Ukrainian raven who proved to be fiercer than either the Russian or the Polish one in her guilt with respect to the Ukrainian people; and no greater condemnation of the Ukrainian landlords' sins of commission and omission with regard to the well-being of the peasant masses was ever expressed by Shevchenko than in "My Friendly Epistle." This should be ample proof that he was the enemy of tyranny, despotism, and the inhumanity of the autocratic powers

holding sway in Ukraine and not of the peoples whom those powers represented.⁶

If, as has been argued, many of Shevchenko's pages appear to be descriptively drenched with bloodshed, it is false to assume that he exulted in gory sights. With a certain poetic licence, he depicted only that which had actually happened, for it is only too true that the land of Ukraine since the dawn of its history has been "soaked with blood, beaten with horses' hooves, and sown with bones," as is succinctly brought out in *The Tale of Ihor's Campaign*. Time and again those bloody scenes are followed by his own asides in which he longs for peace and tranquillity in his native land and pacific relations with its neighbours.

Shevchenko's uncompromising stand against the domination of Ukraine by foreign elements did not preclude his close relations with those Russians, Poles, and other aliens who were not directly instrumental in causing the ruination of his country. The fact that among his intimate friends were to be found influential members of the Russian and Polish national communities bears witness to his broad-minded social outlook.⁷ With respect to the Jewish people in Ukraine, he was sympathetic to them in their plight. It is recorded that during his first visit to Ukraine shortly after his emancipation, at the relay station of Lubny, Shevchenko exerted himself energetically in helping to save as many belongings as he could from the fire of a house tenanted by a Jewish family, remarking that one must always assist one's fellow-beings in trouble. In 1858 he was one of the leading Russian and Ukrainian men of letters who signed a protest against a vicious anti-Semitic article written by one Zotov in the journal *Illustratsiia*. His close friendship with the negro actor Aldridge and kindly interest in his race has already been noted elsewhere, as well as his tender regard for the ill-fated Caucasian races.

⁶This will be further borne out in the annotations to his poems, particularly those in which he castigates the exploiters and oppressors of Ukraine.

⁷Regardless of how harshly he dealt with the Poles in his poem *The Haydamaks*, the enlightened elements of the Polish people well understood Shevchenko's national ideals and held him in great esteem as a social reformer. The Polish poet, Antoniuzs Sowa, translated that poem into his language in 1861, the year of Shevchenko's death. Later, other Polish literary figures followed suit and made much of *The Kobzar* similarly available to their people. By means of translations, Shevchenko's humanitarian ideas spread throughout the Slavic world and penetrated even among the numerous Jewish population there in the renderings of such Yiddish poets as David Hofstein, L. Kvitko, L. Resnik, and I. Fefer (all of whom were liquidated by the Stalin régime for their "Israeli nationalism").



T. Shevchenko, *Katerina* (oil, 1842)
The poet's illustration to his poem of the same name.



T. Shevchenko, *Vidubetsky Monastery in Kiev* (eau-forte, 1844)
This and the following two engravings are from the album "The Picturesque Ukraine," illustrating scenes from Ukrainian history and the country's landscapes.



T. Shevchenko, *In Kiev* (eau-forte, 1844)

Above all the features that distinguish Shevchenko are the altruistic virtues that he extols throughout his work, for he is first and foremost a Christian poet, prophetically inclined, with a meditative, reverent bent of mind. As such, it is not surprising to find him storm and rage against the oppressors of his people and, when all is said and done, to subside into an attitude of forgiveness. Nowhere is that tendency more evident than in the great poem, "The Neophytes," where, after exposing the wickedness of Nero and seeing him doomed to just punishment, he makes the souls of all the persecuted Christians assemble around him at his end for the sole purpose of pardoning him. Thus was Shevchenko willing to forgive the enemies of Ukraine, provided that, after the sufferings they caused her, she emerged free at last.

It has been imputed to Shevchenko as a fault that he dwells excessively on sexual matters resulting in mothers out of wedlock and illegitimate offspring. Here, too, however, he presents a social condition of his day when the landlords and their lordlings made havoc among the flower of Ukrainian maidenhood, their acts of violence as often as not leading to tragic consequences. These episodes are simply glaring reflections of the common immorality prevailing among the ruling classes, and are generally analogous to Ukraine herself being ravished by her oppressors. Shevchenko's sympathy towards these unfortunate victims is so heartfelt that any accusation against him for deliberately indulging in scabrous subjects is invalid—the more so because he extols motherhood, regardless of how attained, as the most blessed state of sanctity. To repeat, even when he presents Mary, the Mother of Christ, quite naturalistically, the consummate image of her is none the less aureoled and her holiness the more intensified.

To Ukrainians, Shevchenko's *The Kobzar*, in which all his poems written in Ukrainian are collected (he wrote some in Russian, but of indifferent worth), has become a secular and spiritual Bible, a vast source from which to draw moral support for their national edification. What, then, can non-Ukrainians derive from it that would be of interest and perhaps inspiration to them? Foremost, those who are intrigued by Eastern Europe's storied past might find it a mine of information, for the collection is a compendium of Ukrainian history, dealing poetically with the vicissitudes of the Ukrainian people, dating from the times of the Kievan Princes, through the Cossack Age, down to the social conditions prevailing in Shevchenko's lifetime. It is also a vast repository of folklorist and ethnographical material. Particularly

vivid are those poems in which he presents various episodes of the hetmanate period of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, for in those succinct, impassioned, poetized accounts Shevchenko casts much light on Ukraine's relations with her immediate neighbours—autocratic Russia to the north, aristocratic Poland to the west, and the "infidel" Turks and Tartars to the south. The struggle of a people hemmed in throughout the centuries by such ruthless enemies offers a rousing canvas of events which cannot but hold the attention of those whose inquisitive minds delve into the subtle and overt manner in which aggressive forces work against a people mighty in spirit but deprived of effectual means of defence; a people who, in spite of almost interminable suppression of their rights and privileges as a nation, like the Jews of the ancient and the recent past, succeeded in preserving their identity intact. If it is argued that Shevchenko presented a biased history of his race, one must bear in mind that the histories of its neighbour nations are also to a certain extent prejudicial in relation to Ukraine. Therefore, an open-minded investigator would do well to study the several points of view, consider them impartially and draw his own conclusions.

Concentration on such political poems as "The Dream," "The Caucasus," "The Great Mound," "My Friendly Epistle," and certain lesser ones, may prove fruitful in that respect, as in them is revealed the prismatic reflection of the essential mentality of a people who, when all is said and done, may have been partly to blame for the sorry plight of its nationhood. In his judgments Shevchenko is just, for while it is true that Ukraine was brought low by the enemies from without, her resiliency to rise up again was weakened by the indifference and lack of stamina on the part of her own leaders. That resiliency she regained only when Shevchenko's mission reinvigorated her mind and spirit to a new action of self-preservation and self-assertion. Especially revelatory of that reality is "My Friendly Epistle," which is considered by Ukrainians as the cornerstone of Shevchenko's national thought.

To recapitulate, Shevchenko's humanitarian ideal is to be coupled with his thoroughly Christian outlook. It is precisely this that makes his work universal in its appeal, for regardless of the fact that it deals in the main with a particular East-European race, the application can be made to any land, country, or state where similar conditions obtain. Perhaps the greatest poem in the catholicity of the philanthropic views expressed is "The Neophytes," as in it is to be found

concentrated the essence of Shevchenko's vocation. Both it and another post-exile poem, "Mary," represent the final flowering of his genius as an inspired humanitarian poet who transfigures human suffering into a sublime agency of man's eventual salvation, to be brought about likewise through the instrumentality of beneficent motherhood leading the future generations of men to love, goodness, and brotherhood.

Shevchenko's is a volcanic spirit, towering titan-like above his own people, and high enough to be seen and heard by other nations of the world as he proclaims to all mankind the universally applicable virtues by which the moral fibres of humanity thrive and are strengthened. But whatever stature is conceded to him by those not of his own race, it cannot be denied that in the history of Eastern Europe he was one of the leading formative democratic forces, contributing, as a champion of Liberty, to the social betterment of men and to peaceful coexistence among them. The world has need of him, and of men like him, at this dire and perilous hour.

C. H. ANDRUSYSHEN

THE POETICAL WORKS OF TARAS SHEVCHENKO

1838

THE BEWITCHED WOMAN

The mighty Dnieper roars and groans,
The angry tempest, howling, bends
Tall poplars to the very stones
And down the stream great billows sends.
The pale moon at that hour of night
Kept peering from a cloudy bank
And like a ship on waters bright
In misty waves it rose and sank.
No cock's crow with the darkness strove
Or hailed a sky with dawning streaked;
The owls were hooting in the grove,
The ash-tree without ceasing creaked.

At such a time, below the hill,
Beside those dark trees scowling
Above the river dark and chill,
Something white is prowling.
Perhaps some mermaid has emerged
Her mother dear to spy,
Or waits some Cossack lad to snare
And tickle till he die.
It is no mermaid wanders here,
It is a girl who strays;
She has no notion what she does—
Witchcraft her brain betrays.
A sorceress, to cure her grief,
Has brought her to this state
That she might wander in her sleep
At midnight, and await
The handsome Cossack that she loved:
Last year he rode away

And though he promised to return
 He may be dead today.
 A silken cloth may not have cloaked
 His failing Cossack eyes;
 A maiden's tears may not have washed
 His fair face as he dies.
 An eagle may have gouged his eyes
 In some far, foreign field;
 Wolves may have eaten up his flesh,—
 Such fate the years may yield.
 In vain the young maid every night
 Awaits him, sick and sore;
 The black-browed lad will not return
 To greet her ever more.
 Her long, fair braids he'll not undo,
 No kerchief tie upon her—
 A coffin, not a marriage-bed,
 Will end her maiden honour.

Such is her fortune . . . O dear God of mine!
 Why art thou to the maid not more benign?
 Because she loved the lad with childish art
 For his bright eyes? Forgive her orphan heart!
 Whom should she love? Unparented she stands,
 Lone as a migrant bird in foreign lands.
 Pray send her better fortune—she is young,
 And will be jeered to death by censure's tongue.
 Shall we condemn a dove who loves her mate
 Who in a falcon's talons meets his fate?
 She sorrows, coos, of the bright world grows weary.
 Thinking him strayed, she everywhere makes query.
 Happy that bird—she flies to Heaven above
 And questions God himself about her love.
 But this poor waif—whom shall she ask of hers?
 Who can inform her? Who the place avers
 Where her love spends the night?—In some dark wood
 Or watering his horse in Danube's flood?
 Perhaps in others' arms he fails his duty
 And has forgotten her, his dark-browed beauty!
 If she an eagle's wings could get, no doubt
 She'd fly beyond the sea to search him out:

Then if he lived, his loyalty she'd save;
 If he were dead, she'd join him in the grave!
 The heart in love with no due rival lives,
 Nor is it reconciled with what God gives.
 If he she loves is lost, she wants to die.
 The need to grieve enhances misery.
 Alas, dear God of mine! This is thy will,
 And this her hapless fate and fortune still!

She wanders on, without a word,
 And silence broods on Dnieper's breast;
 The wind, that once the storm-clouds stirred,
 Lies down beside the sea to rest;
 While from the sky the moon shines bright
 Above the water and the grove,
 No whisper now disturbs the night . . .
 When out of Dnieper's depths there rove
 Small, naked girls who laugh and shout.
 "Let's warm ourselves!" they all cry out.
 "The sun has set below Earth's edge!"
 (Their girlish braids are twined with sedge.)
 "Are you all there?" their mother cries.
 "Let's find our supper, I advise,
 Get warm and romp beneath the moon
 And sing ourselves a merry tune!"
 "It's cold! It's cold!

Let's burn some straw upon the wold!
 My sorry mother gave me birth
 But laid me, unbaptized, in earth.¹
 O moon most clear,
 Our precious dear,
 Come be our guest at supper here!—
 A Cossack lies among the reeds,
 Among the sedge he meets our needs;
 A silver ring is on his finger;
 Here, young and handsome he must linger,—
 We found him by the oak-tree's girth.
 Shine longer here on open earth,
 That we may have our fill of mirth!

¹In Ukrainian folklore, female infants who died unbaptized became water nymphs and, as such, would lure anyone who drew near the river bank and playfully tickle him to death.

While the witches still are flying,
 While the cocks restrain their crying,
 Shine for us! . . . There's something moving
 Under the oak, its peace disproving!

It's cold! It's cold!

Let's burn some straw upon the wold!
 My sorry mother gave me birth
 But laid me, unbaptized, in earth!"

The unbaptized sprites in laughter broke . . .
 The grove re-echoed; noise awoke,
 As if a horde were on a spree—
 Then silence cloaks the ancient tree.
 The unchristened children stopped, and saw
 Something imperfectly expressed
 Go crawling up the oak-tree's trunk
 Until it reached the topmost crest.
 It was the sad, enchanted maid
 Who had been roaming in her sleep,
 So strong a spell the sorceress
 Had cast upon her, dark and deep!
 On a thick upper branch she stood;
 Her heart was stung with bitter pain.
 To north, east, south and west she looked,
 Then climbed down to the earth again.
 The mermaids ringed the tree about
 To await her coming, fiery-eyed;
 Then seized upon the sorry girl
 And tickled her until she died.
 Long, long they cast approving eyes
 On beauty in this lifeless daughter . . .
 Then, as the cock proclaimed the dawn,
 They splashed and dove into the water.

The lark begins its lay, its wings
 Go soaring upward now;
 The cuckoo has been heard to speak,
 Perched on an oak-tree bough;
 The twitter of the nightingale
 Throughout the woodland rings;
 Beyond the hill the dawn appears;
 To it the ploughman sings.

Above the river glows the grove
 Where once the Poles went roaming;
 Above the Dnieper lofty mounds
 Grow bluer in the gloaming;
 A rustling fills the woody vale;
 Thick willows whisper low;
 The young maid sleeps beneath the oak
 By roads where travellers go.
 Her sleep were sound if she should fail
 The cuckoo's voice to heed;
 She does not count the cuckoo's notes—
 Her sleep is sound indeed.
 Out of the wooded vale betimes
 A Cossack has come riding;
 The coal-black horse on which he sits
 Is weary in its striding.
 "You are exhausted, comrade mine!
 Today we shall find rest:
 A young maid at a house nearby
 Unbars her gate with zest.
 Perhaps she has undone its bars
 To another's feet that roam . . .
 Quickly, my horse! Make speed, my friend!
 Come, let us hasten home!"

The coal-black steed plods stumbling on,
 Weary from constant toil;
 The Cossack's heart feels crushing pain,
 Caught in a serpent's coil.
 "And here our burly oak-tree stands . . .
 Dear Lord! She lies a-heap!
 The poor dove was awaiting me
 And must have fall'n asleep!"
 He left his horse and rushed to her:
 "Dear God! Her face is pale!"
 He calls to her and kisses her . . .
 No, nothing will avail!
 "Why have they parted you and me?"
 His frenzied laughter broke—
 Then, with a rush, he battered out
 His brains against the oak!

Young women walk a-field to reap
 And sing, in ancient rite,
 Of mothers' sons who go to war,
 Of Tartar raids by night.
 And there beneath the green oak-tree
 A weary horse stands sighing
 And near him, with a Cossack young
 A pretty maid is lying.
 With prying eyes (to tell the truth)
 They stole to fright the pair;
 But when they saw the lad was dead
 They fled in panic there!

Her girl-friends all assembled
 And wiped their tears away;
 His comrades likewise gathered
 To dig two graves that day.
 The priests arrived with banners,
 The bells began to toll;
 All mourned as they were buried
 With customary dole.
 And by the roadside there they raised
 Two mounds amid the rye;
 And there was no one left to ask
 How they were killed, or why.
 Above the Cossack's grave they set
 A maple and a fir,
 And at the maiden's head they plant
 A cranberry bush for her.
 Sometimes a cuckoo comes to grieve;
 Each night a nightingale
 Twitters its heart out as it sings
 Their melancholy tale,
 Until at last the moon appears
 And up those wicked elves
 Come trooping from the Dnieper's wave
 To warm their little selves.

St. Petersburg, 1838

* * * *

O boisterous wind most turbulent,
You parley with the sea.
Awaken it, roar out with it,
And question it for me.
The sea knows where my sweetheart is,
For it has borne him far;
The broad blue sea will tell you where
My fond affections are.

If it has drowned my lover lad,
Break up the dark blue sea!
And I shall seek my dearest out
And drown my grief and me.
And when I find him, I'll embrace
And faint upon his breast;
Then bear us both, O wave, away
Wind-tossed upon your crest!

If he is on the other shore,—
O wind of boisterous whim,
You know his path and what he does
For there you talk with him.
And if he weeps, then so do I;
If not, I sing with joy;
And if my dark-browed lad is dead,
I'll perish like my boy.

Wherever then my sweetheart lies,
Bear me upon the wave;
A cranberry bush then make of me
And plant me on his grave!
'Twere easier in a foreign field
For him, in earthy doom,
If I, his love, should stand above
And as a flower bloom.

For like a cranberry blossom
His comfort I'll entreat
To keep the alien sun away,
The tramp of foreign feet.

And in the evening I shall grieve,
 At dawning I shall weep;
 The sun will rise—I'll dry my tears—
 None at my grief may peep.

O boisterous wind, most turbulent,
 You parley with the sea.
 Awaken it, roar out with it,
 And question it for me.

St. Petersburg, 1838

IN ETERNAL MEMORY OF KOTLIAREVSKY²

The sun shines warm, the breezes fresh
 From field to valley rush;
 They bend upon the willow'd bank
 The bright cranberry bush.
 On the cranberry branch it rocks
 A nightingale's lone nest.
 But whither has the songster gone?
 In vain were such a quest!
 No one recalls misfortune's pang:
 It dies and is no more;
 We swoon to think of pure delight
 That time will not restore.

²Ivan Kotliarevsky (1769–1838), a Ukrainian writer who in 1798 began a new era in Ukrainian literature with his travestied “Aeneid,” the first major work of art written in the Ukrainian idiom as used in the Poltava region. The subject, of course, was borrowed from Vergil’s epic, but its locale was changed to conform completely to the Ukrainian *milieu*, in which Aeneas and his roving band became a troupe of boisterous Cossacks and the Olympian gods and goddesses were representatives of Ukraine’s wealthy landowning class. Although rendered in a humorous vein, the poem seriously depicted the social conditions prevailing in Ukraine in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and exposed the excesses of serfdom. The “Aeneid” proved so powerful in its appeal that it spurred the younger writers of the day to abandon the use of the Russian language and write their works in Ukrainian. Its influence on young Shevchenko was immense, and the melodiousness of its speech prompted him to compare Kotliarevsky to a nightingale whose warbles attracted and delighted all, regardless of their station in life. With his ever popular operetta *Natalka-Poltavka*, and the comedy *Moskal-Charivnik* (*Moskal the Wizard*), Kotliarevsky also initiated a “modern” trend in Ukrainian drama. On the basis of these three works he came to be considered as “the father of Ukrainian literary renaissance.”

And so I glance and call to mind
 How often in the gloaming
 His warbling from that bush was heard
 And all paused in their roaming:
 The wealthy man, whom fortune's hands
 Rich food and dress supply
 As any mother would her child,
 Would never pass it by.
 The orphan lad who stirs at dawn
 To toil bereft of joys
 Would pause and listen, and he seemed
 To hear his parents' voice
 Speak to him in endearing tones:
 His heart new joy must know,
 The whole world seems like Easter Day
 And men more human grow!
 Perhaps a maid who every day
 Awaits her sweetheart there
 And languishes in solitude,
 Bemused in her despair,—
 She looks for him along the road,
 By willows she will cry,
 But when she hears the nightingale
 Her streams of tears grow dry;
 Smiling and listening as she walks,
 Now through the grove she's gone
 As if from converse with her love—
 And still the bird sings on
 Melodiously as if it prayed to God—
 Until a wicked fellow thither trod,
 A dagger in his bootleg—then the song
 Thins and grows silent. Sure, to sing were wrong!
 His evil heart to music's charms is proof
 And from the songster's voice would stay aloof;
 Let him rage on, until he meets his end,
 The croaking raven as his only friend.

The valley sleeps; without ado
 The nightingale is slumbering too.
 Then down the vale the dawn-wind blows
 And through the grove its echo goes

Like God's own word. Poor sons of toil
 Rise up to till the stubborn soil.
 Cows roam the woods; and many a daughter
 Comes to the well to draw up water;
 Sun dawns—it seems a paradise!
 The willow smiles and earth replies!
 The villain now at last will weep . . .
 So was it once—but change is deep:

The sun shines warm, the wind breathes forth
 From field to vale its power;
 It bends upon the willow'd bank
 The cranberry's bright flower.
 On the cranberry branch it rocks
 A bare, forsaken nest.
 But whither has the songster gone?
 In vain were such a quest!
 But recently among us in Ukraine
 Old Kotliarevsky warbled thus, but now
 Is still and leaves in solitary pain
 The hills and sea whence his poetic prow
 Pushed with Aeneas and his vagrant band,
 Guiding them onward to a Promised Land.

All that remains and stands in grief
 Like Troy's dark skeleton;
 Only his glory blazes forth
 As radiant as the sun;
 The minstrel will not die, for Heaven
 Eternal fame will give;
 You will hold sway above us, Sire,
 As long as men shall live;
 As long as sunlight floods the sky,
 Your name's superlative!³

O saintly spirit! Take my speech sincere,
 Though inarticulate, and hold it dear!
 And though no more in yonder groves you range,
 Fly down to me for a brief interchange,
 Sing of Ukraine as you were wont to do,
 That in this alien land⁴ I'll smile with you;

³The above six lines have been often applied to Shevchenko himself.

⁴Shevchenko at that time lived in St. Petersburg.

Nay, I'll rejoice as I shall contemplate
 How your great words of power could translate
 All Cossack glory to a waif's poor home.
 Fly down, O mighty eagle, where I roam
 Alone in this wide world, so strange to me;
 For here I gaze upon the vast, deep sea,
 And fain would cross it—but they grant no bark!⁵
 Then to Aeneas, and my kin, I hark;
 As I recall them, like a child I weep,
 And waves go roaring on across the deep.
 Perhaps I too am blind, and see no more—
 Perhaps misfortune plagues the farther shore
 And there, as here, an orphan scorned must be!
 Yet let them mock; there, seas roar pleasantly,
 And there the sun and moon more brightly shine,
 The grave-mounds with the wind their words combine;
 That land would heal this loneliness of mine.

O saintly spirit! Take my speech sincere,
 Though inarticulate, and hold it dear!
 And though no more in yonder groves you range,
 Fly down to me for a brief interchange:
 Sing of Ukraine! Your converse were not strange.

St. Petersburg, 1838

* * * *

The river to the blue sea flows
 But flows not back again!
 The Cossack seeks his fortune too,
 But all his search is vain.
 Wide in the world the Cossack goes,
 And there the blue sea roars,—
 The Cossack's heart is boisterous too,
 This question it explores:

⁵The poet expresses his yearning to return to Ukraine. He cannot go, however, because he is still a serf and attached to his lord, who will not grant him permission. As a result, he turns to Kotliarevsky's poem and, immersing himself in it, is somewhat relieved of his longing.

"Where have you gone without farewell?
 To whom has all been left—
 Of father and old mother now
 And of your maid bereft?
 These alien folk have alien hearts;
 It's hard with them to live;
 No one is here to share one's tears
 Or gentle words to give."
 The Cossack haunts the farther coast,—
 And still the blue seas roar.
 He hoped to find his fortune there,
 But met with sorrow sore.
 And while the cranes in coveys seek
 The ocean's farther bournes,
 The Cossack weeps—the beaten paths
 Are overgrown with thorns.

St. Petersburg, 1838

KATERINA

TO V. A. ZHUKOVSKY,⁶ IN MEMORY OF APRIL 22, 1838

My dark-browed beauties, fall in love,
 But love no Muscovite,⁷
 For Moscow troopers aliens are,
 And court in your despite.
 A Moscow trooper loves in jest
 And jestingly will leave you;
 When he returns to Muscovy,
 His parting will deceive you.
 If you were one, the care were less,
 But there's a mother too
 Who gave the pretty maiden birth;
 To death the shame she'll rue.

⁶V. A. Zhukovsky (1783–1852), a noted Russian Romantic poet and one of the tutors of Tsarevich Alexander. It was his portrait (painted by K. Briullov) that was sold at the Imperial court and procured the necessary amount for Shevchenko's emancipation from serfdom on the date mentioned.

⁷Muscovite (or Moskal) applied to any soldier serving in the tsarist army, not necessarily to one of Russian extraction. The term was used, because those who were drafted into it eventually became more or less Russianized.

The heart will wither and yet sing
For pleasures sweet and rash;
But people will not hear your heart,
They'll judge you to be trash.
So, dark-browed beauties, fall in love,
But love no Muscovite,
For Moscow troopers aliens are
And court in your despite.

Her father's and her mother's words
Young Katie shunned anon.
A Moscow trooper gained her love—
Her own heart urged her on.
Enamoured of a lad she grew;
In the garden they would meet,
Until her reputation's loss
And ruin were complete.
Mother to supper calls her in,
But deaf in her delight
Where with her Moscow lad she plays
She passes all the night.
And many a night his eyes and cheeks
With kisses she would pillage,
Until at last her evil fame
Was spread through all the village.
Let wicked people speak their will
About her gentle sin:
She is in love and unaware
That evil has crept in.

Bad news arrived—the trumpets rang
Their call to march away;
Her soldier is to Turkey gone—
Her braids her fall betray.
A kerchief on her head she wears
Yet pain she'll not perceive
Since for a lover, says the song,
It is a joy to grieve.
The handsome lad had pledged his word
That if he did not die
He would come back to her again—
And wedding bands would tie:

Katie would be a trooper's wife
 And would forget her sorrow;
 Meanwhile let all the people talk—
 Joy would make bright the morrow.
 She does not grieve on that account
 Yet wipes away her tears,
 Although the maidens on the street
 Reject her with their sneers.
 She does not grieve and yet her eyes
 A tale of teardrops tell
 As she at midnight takes her pails
 For water from the well,
 So that revilers may not see
 The darkened path she's taken;
 Beneath a cranberry bush she stands
 And sings a song forsaken.
 She'd sing her heart out at the well;
 The cranberry seemed to weep;
 Then home she went, content at heart
 Since slanderers were asleep.

Does Katerina still not grieve?
 It doesn't cross her mind!
 With a new kerchief on her head,
 To watching she's resigned.
 Thus Katerina waits and waits,
 And half a year has passed,—
 A sudden nausea she feels
 And pangs come keen and fast.
 Katie is sick; she scarce can breathe;
 But when her pains grow mild,
 A cradle in the ingle-nook
 Helps her to rock a child.
 The women in their malice mock
 Her mother with abuse;
 They say the troopers will return
 And of her home make use:
 "You have a lovely daughter!
 What deeds she must have done,
 Since yonder, in the ingle-nook
 She rears a Russian's son . . .

A lovely babe she has acquired . . .
Perhaps you taught her how! . . . ”
May evil fortune seize you all,
You wicked babblers now,
Just as it has the maid you mock,
The son who marks her vow!

O Katerina, luckless dear,
What woes your days vouchsafe!
Where under heaven will you go
With such a tiny waif?
Who in the world will sympathize,
Now that your lover's left you?
Even your parents are estranged,
Unfeeling words have cleft you!

Now Katerina's strength returns;
Sometimes she views the street
As through the window-gap she peers
And rocks her baby sweet:
She looks, and looks, but sees him not!
Will he return no more?
Out in the garden she would weep,
But neighbors vex her sore.
Yet after sunset, up and down
The garden paths she's found;
She bears her infant in her arms
And casts her glances round:
“Just here I used to wait for him,
And here my words he'd note,
And there . . . and there . . . my son, my son!”
The speech choked in her throat.

The berries and the cherry-trees
Are in the garden green;
As once of old, so now again
Is Katerina seen.
Though she came out, she sang no more
As she was wont to do,
When waiting under cherry-trees
For the young lad she knew.

The dark-browed maid no longer sings
But curses her ill fate;
And meanwhile all her enemies
Speak venom at her gate.
Daily they forge their evil talk.
How may she still such chat?
If only he she loved were there,
He'd put a stop to that!
But he, alas, is far away—
And does not see or hear
Defamers laughing her to scorn
Nor see her falling tear.
Perhaps her lover has been killed
Beyond the Danube shore;
Perhaps in Moscow now he courts
Some pretty maid once more!
But no, her darling is not dead,
He is alive and sound . . .
And where could such fair eyes as hers,
And such dark brows, be found?
Across the world, in Muscovy,
Beyond the sea, God wot,
No peer of Katerina lives—
But sorrow is her lot! . . .
Her mother gave her lovely cheeks
And sparkling hazel eyes,
But could not give her in this world
Good fortune's happy prize.
Without good luck, a pretty face
Is like a flower undone:
By sunlight scorched, tossed by the wind,
And plucked by everyone.
Continue then to wash your face
With floods of tears and woe!
The troopers back to Muscovy
By other highways go.

II

Her father at the table sits,
His head is in his hands;
He does not watch the world about:
Deep grief he understands.
And near him, on a long, hard bench
Her aged mother sits,
And speaking through her struggling tears
The daughter thus she twits:
"It's quite a wedding we have had!
But tell me, where's the groom?
Where are the candle-bearing maids,
The men who grace the room?
In Muscovy, my daughter dear!
Go, then, to find them there!
But never tell a living soul
You had a mother's care.
Curs'd be the hour and curs'd the day
That ever you were born!
If I had known, I would have risen
And drowned you before morn:
A viper should have been your mate,
A trooper takes its place . . .
My daughter, O my daughter, once
A blossom full of grace!
A berry or a darling bird
I loved and reared you up;
But now with grief, O daughter mine,
You fill my bitter cup!
Is this your recompense? Then go
And see your trooper's mother!
My counsel you have laughed to scorn:
Go, listen to another!
Go then to Moscow, seek her out,
And stand not weeping thus,
Be happy among strangers there
But come no more to us!
Do not return, my erring child!
In that far country stay! . . .
Ah, who will shroud my face in death
When you have gone away?"

Who then will mourn and weep for me
 As one's own child should do?
 Who'll plant a red cranberry bush
 Above my grave but you?
 When you are gone, whose loving prayers
 Will aid my sinful soul?
 My daughter, O my daughter dear,
 My child who brought me dole,
 Depart from us! . . ."

To bless the girl
 The strength she scarcely found:
 "May God be with you!" And, as dead,
 She tumbled to the ground.

Then spoke her father: "Now, poor lass,
 What are you waiting for?"
 But Katie fell down at his feet
 And wept with sobbings sore:
 —"Forgive me, dearest father,
 Forgive me for my sin,
 My dear grey dove, my falcon dear,
 For thoughtless I have been!"
 —"May God and all good people here
 Have mercy on your grief!
 But only when you've prayed—and gone—
 Will my heart know relief."

She made an effort, rose and bowed,
 And silently departed,
 And thus the aged pair were left
 Alone and broken-hearted.
 She sought the cherry orchard out
 And said a prayer; a speck
 Of soil she took beneath a tree
 And hung it at her neck.
 Said she: I never shall return!
 And in a distant land
 I shall be laid in alien soil
 By some cold stranger's hand;
 At least this bit of native earth
 Will lie upon me there—

A witness to the alien eye
 Of longing and despair . . .
 Tell not my fault, O precious dust,
 Wherever I may lie,
 Lest people's talk disturb my rest
 With words of infamy!
 You may not speak . . . yet here is one
 Whose sonship will not bide!
 My God! And what a trail is mine!
 And where am I to hide?
 Beneath the surface of the stream
 I'll shroud myself, my child,
 While you do penance for my sin,
 Left among strangers wild,
 A bastard waif! . . ."

And down the street
 Went Katerina, weeping;
 A kerchief covered up her head;
 Her arms the babe were keeping.
 She left the thorp with heart a-throb;
 She turned its homes to spy;
 Then shook her head in boundless grief
 And burst into a cry.
 She stood beside the beaten path
 Like some pale poplar swaying;
 As thick as drops of dew at dawn,
 Tears down her cheeks went straying.
 Through floods of grief she could not see
 The world that round her slept;
 She only cuddled close her son,
 And kissed his face, and wept.
 And he, a little angel, lies
 Unwittingly caressed,
 And reaches with his tiny hands
 And searches out her breast.
 The sun has set; beyond the woods
 The clouds still glow with light;
 She wiped her tears; she turned away
 And slowly moved from sight.
 And long the village people talked
 With pleasure in their leering,

But both her parents soon had passed
 Beyond all human hearing . . .

Such evil in this sorry world
 Do men on men inflict!
 For one they chain, and one they wound,
 And one to death is kicked . . .
 And why? God only knows the cause!
 The world, it seems, is vast,
 Yet nowhere is a shelter left
 To hold the lonely fast.
 One man in boundless luxury
 From land to land is ferried;
 And one inherits but the dirt
 In which his bones are buried.
 Where are the people, where the friends,
 Who match the heart's endeavour
 To live and love in fellowship?
 Alas, they've gone forever!

There is good fortune in the world,
 But who has known its taste?
 And there is freedom on the earth,
 Yet we with chains are faced!
 Some people in the world may shine
 With silver and with gold;
 And yet ill fortune is their lot—
 Though wealth they seem to hold.
 Fortune and freedom seem to smile!
 With weariness and grief
 They put their costly mantles on
 And cannot find relief.

Take all your gold and silver joy
 And thrust in wealth your snout,
 I yet shall bathe my soul in tears
 And pour my sorrow out;
 I'll drown in weeping my distress,
 With tears my fate I'll greet,
 And trample down my servitude
 With my own naked feet!

Then only will I happy be,
 And wealth can have its fill,
 When my poor heart at last is free
 To roam about at will!

III

The screech-owls cry, the valley sleeps,
 The tiny stars shine out;
 Along the road, like tumble-weed,
 The gophers rush about.
 All the good people are asleep,
 Each weary in his way:
 One tired by joy and one by tears—
 Night holds them in its sway;
 The dark has covered all of them
 As might a mother good.
 Where has it cuddled Katie close?
 In cottage, or in wood?
 Do sheaves upon the harvest field
 Her and her babe engulf?
 Is she beneath a forest log
 On guard against a wolf?
 Dark brows of beauty, would that none
 Had such a gift innate
 If through your leading one must bear
 So terrible a fate!
 What later hardships will she meet?
 There will be more distress!
 She will encounter yellow sands,
 Strange, hostile men's address,
 A winter fierce will come at her . . .
 And should she meet that one—
 Will he his Katie recognize
 And greet his little son?
 With him the beauty can forget
 Hard roads, and sands, and grief;
 For motherlike, he'll welcome her;
 As brother, give relief . . .
 What happened then, in course of time
 We all shall hear and see;

But meanwhile, I'll inquire about
 The road to Muscovy.
 That road is far and long, my friends!
 I know it all too well!
 My heart is chilled to think of it,
 I tremble at its spell.
 I've measured it with my own feet—
 May none that fate compel!
 "He lies," you'll say, "the charlatan!
 (But not while I am there.)
 All that he does is waste his words
 And vex folk with his fare."
 Much truth there is in what you say!
 Why should I plague your ears
 By pouring out unnumbered woes
 Together with my tears?
 What good is it? Since every man
 Has troubles of his own,
 So let the wretched chatter go! . . .
 And meanwhile I am prone
 To good tobacco and a flint
 So that I may relax;
 It's really bad to talk of griefs
 And fate's ungodly cracks!
 The devil take it! It were best
 That I should now compile
 Where Katie and her son Ivas⁸
 Are wandering all the while.

Beyond the Dnieper, past Kiev,
 Beside a dark oak grove,
 The carters of the raven sang
 As down the road they drove.
 There likewise a young woman walks—
 Perhaps from pilgrimage.
 But why is she so sorrowful?
 What tears her eyes engage?
 Her single garment's patched and worn;
 Small baggage can she keep;

⁸A diminutive of Ivan (John).

She bears a staff, and one arm holds
 A little lad asleep.
 She meets the carters on the road;
 Her child they must not see;
 She asks: "Good people, whither lies
 The road to Muscovy?"
 —"To Muscovy? You're on it now.
 And are you going far?"
 —"To Moscow. For the love of Christ,
 A coin, if kind you are!"
 She takes a kopeck, trembling much:
 So hard it is to take!
 Why does she then? . . . Her mother love
 Begs for her baby's sake.
 She burst in tears; then made her way
 To Brovari⁹ to rest
 And bought her son a honey-cake
 With such a coin unblest . . .
 Thus on and on the poor soul walked
 By begging's privilege;
 And many a night her child and she
 Slept out beneath a hedge. . . .

Just see what lovely hazel eyes can do:
 Beneath an alien hedge they make you weep!
 Therefore, young maids, let this admonish you
 That on your trooper's trail you need not creep
 And try to seek him out, as Katie does . . .
 In such a case, don't ask for censure's cause
 Nor why, by night, you'll find no home to sleep.

Don't ask, my dark-browed beauties,
 For people will not heed,
 And those whom God on earth afflicts
 They will afflict indeed . . .
 Whichever way the wind shall blow,
 The folk like reeds will bend;
 On a poor waif the sun may shine
 But warmth it will not send . . .

⁹A small town just north of Kiev.

If people only had the power,
 They'd cover up the sun
 Lest on the ophan it might shine
 Until her tears were done.
 Wherefore, dear God, should she be found
 A daily sufferer?
 What has she ever done to them!
 What do they want of her?
 To see her weep . . . Alas, dear heart!
 Nay, Katie, do not cry!
 Show not your tears, endure your grief
 Until you come to die!
 And lest together with your brows
 Your beauty disappears,
 In forests dark before the dawn
 Then wash yourself with tears!
 And if you do—then none will note,
 Nor scoff with glances knowing;
 And so your heart will feel relief
 As long as tears keep flowing.

Such was her fate, young maids—he'd had his fun
 And then abandoned Katie, and forgot.
 Distress is blind, and mocks at anyone;
 And people may discern, yet pity not.
 "Nay then," they say, "let the poor creature cower,
 For from her folly she deserves this plight!"
 Take care, my dears, lest in an evil hour
 You have to trudge to seek your Muscovite!

And where is Katie wandering now?
 A hedgerow was her bed;
 And rising early in the morn,
 Towards Muscovy she sped.
 Then suddenly the winter comes.
 Snow sweeps across the plain;
 In bast shoes and a single shift,
 She presses on amain!—
 She trudges onward; lifts her eyes—
 Something far off she sees . . .
 Perhaps some Russians come this way . . .
 Her heart feels wild unease.

She rushed, she met them, and she asked:

“Good friends, can you not show him,
My dark-haired lover, in your band?”

Said they: “We do not know him.”

And then, as Russians always do,

They laugh and mock the maid:

“Why, what a wench! Our lads are stout!

They ply a fertile trade!”

But Katie looks at them and says:

“You, too, are like the rest!

Weep not, my little son, my grief,—

Let all be for the best!

I will go on—I can endure . . .

Perhaps I'll meet him yet;

Then, dear, I'll place you in his hands,

Though death my path beset!”

The snow-storm with great roars and groans

Across the stubble went;

While Katie stood amid the fields

And to her tears gave vent.

At last the storm grew tired out,

And yawned and shook its head;

Though Katie felt like weeping more,

She had no tears to shed.

She gazed upon her little child;

She washed him with her tears;

A flower moist with morning dew

Her little son appears.

She glanced around and saw the wood

In darkening shadows jut;

And at its edge, beside the road,

She seemed to see a hut.

“Come then, my son, it's growing dark . . .

Perhaps they'll take us in;

If not, we'll pass the night outside,

As oft our lot has been.

Beside the hut we'll make our bed,

Ivan, my piteous son!

But where, my baby, will you pass

The night when I am gone?

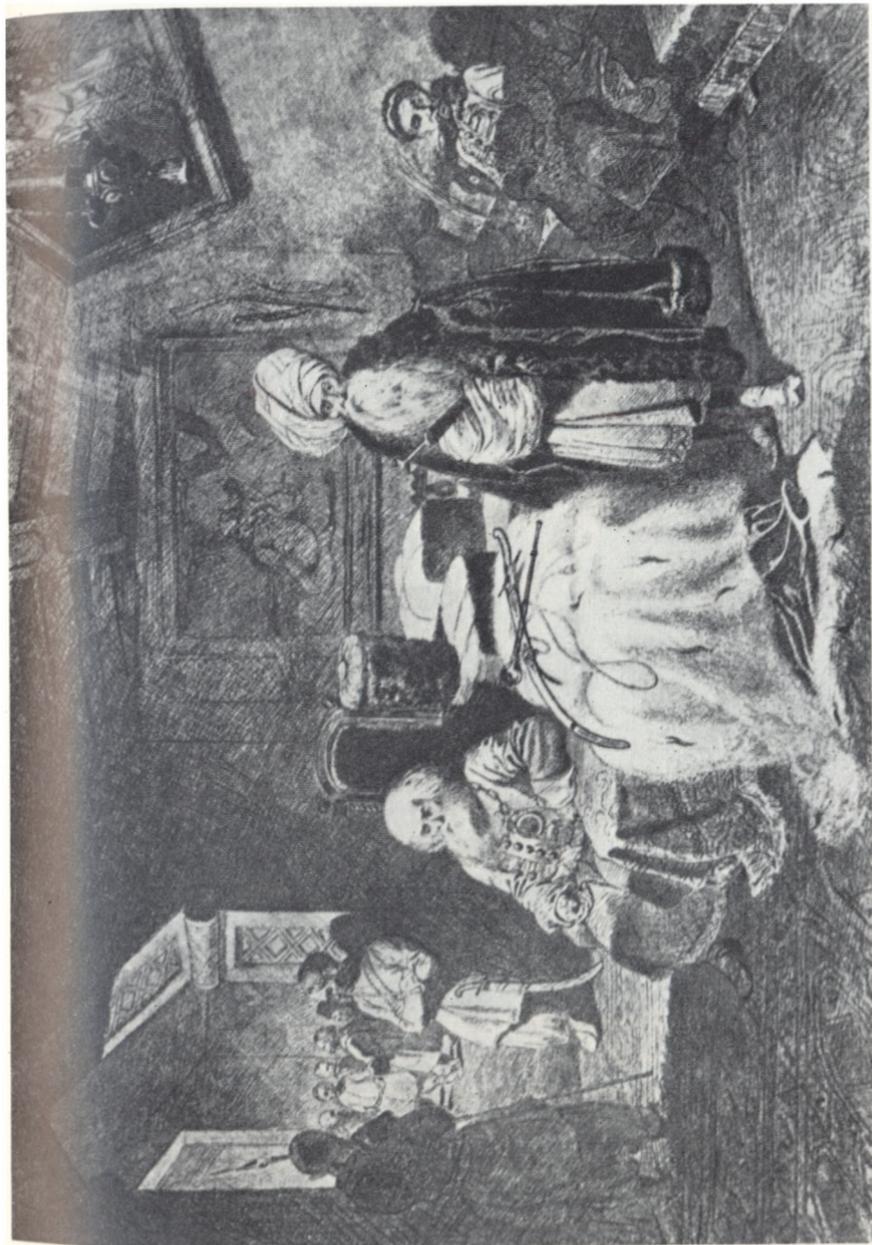
My darling son, with dogs you'll be
 Outdoors in weather bleak!
 Though vicious dogs will bite your hands,
 At least they will not speak
 In mockery and human scorn . . .
 They'll eat and drink with you! . . .
 Alas, how sad a lot is mine!
 Whatever shall I do?"

An orphaned cur has fortunes far more fair
 And meets with kindlier greetings than this other;
 Though he be beaten, scolded, chained with care,
 No one will speak with scorn about his mother.
 But Ivas will be mocked from earliest days,
 Before he talks, he'll know derision's edge.
 Who is the wretch at whom the watchdog bays?
 Who sits in naked want beneath the hedge?
 Who guides a blind and surly beggar's pace?
 His only asset is his lovely face
 Yet men will mock him for that privilege.

IV

In the low valley at the mountain's base,
 Like hoary grandsires with a lofty face,
 Oaks from the Hetman era proudly pose;
 By a small dam the willows stand in rows,
 Ice holds the little pond in grim embrace
 Save for a hole to which the bucket goes.
 Like a metallic disk, the sun shows red
 And through the cloud appears to be aflame;
 The wind is gathering strength, its blows to shed!
 A universal white on earth is spread,
 And dull sounds in the wood the wind proclaim.

The snow-storm roars and whistles;
 Its whine the branches lifts;
 And like a sea the broad white fields
 Roll on in snowy drifts.
 Out of his hut the woodman comes
 To make his morning rounds;



T. Shevchenko, *Foreign Emissaries in Chihirin, 1649* (eau-forte, 1844)
Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky made Chihirin the actual capital of Ukraine.



T. Shevchenko, *Portrait of Mme Mayevska* (oil, 1843)
At that time Shevchenko was already a widely sought portrait painter.

Impossible! The driving snow
 Has smothered all the bounds.
 "Ha, what a beastly storm it is!
 My tasks, I can't surmount them!
 Let's go inside. . . . But what are those?
 So thick a fiend must count them!
 And why the devil are they here
 As if they owned the place!
 Come, lad, and see the Muscovites
 With snow on every face!"
 —"What? Muscovites? Where are they then?"
 —"Leave off that crazy look!"
 —"Where are the Muscovites, my dears?"
 —"Out there, just take a look!"
 And Katie rushed to meet the troops;
 Her heart was all a-stir.
 —"Tis clear that Muscovy has dealt
 Most cruelly with her!
 For she does nothing all night through
 But call her Muscovite."
 Over the stumps and drifts she runs,
 All breathless in her flight.
 She halted barefoot on the road
 And wiped her face confiding;
 The band of Russians nearer drew,
 And all of them were riding.
 —"Ah, heavens! What will happen now?"
 She runs . . . and to her view
 Their chief comes riding at their head!
 "Ivan, my darling true!
 My dearest heart, my precious one,
 Where have you stayed so long?"
 She clutches at his stirrup-straps
 But in aversion strong
 He pricks the charger with his spurs.
 —"Why do you run away?
 Have you forgot your Katherine?
 Can you her face survey?
 Just look at me, my own dear love,
 Just look at me, I plead:

I am your sweetheart, Katie, see!
 Why do you spur your steed?"
 And while he urged his charger on
 As if he knew her not—
 "O stay, my darling!" still she cried.
 "I'll weep no more, God wot.
 Do you not know me, Ivan dear?
 Do you not Katie know?
 I swear to God I am your Kate!"
 Quoth he: "You fool, let go!
 Come, pull the crazy woman off!"
 —"Dear God! Ivas, my dear!
 And would you now abandon me?
 Your love, you swore, was sheer!"
 —"Take her away! Why have you stopped?"
 —"Who, me? Take me away?"
 Oh, tell me why, my precious love,
 You will not with me stay.
 We met of old in garden paths
 After the day was done;
 Yes, I am Katie, who has borne
 Your darling little son.
 My very own, my only one!
 At least be kind to me!
 I shall become your servant maid . . .
 Another's you may be,
 Love all the women in the world! . . .
 I shall forget our love
 And that in bastardy I bore
 A son that love to prove . . .
 In bastardy . . . what shame it is!
 Why must I suffer so?
 Abandon me, forget me quite
 But don't your son forego!
 You will not leave him? Ah, dear heart!
 Seek not to fly from me!
 I'll bring your son to see you now!"
 She set the stirrup free
 And sought the cottage.

She returns,

The infant in her arms

Unswaddled quite and all in tears
 At all the day's alarms.
 —"Now, here he is! Just look at him!
 Alas, what have you done?
 Fled! Gone! The father has disowned
 His son, his very son!
 Dear God above! . . . My little child,
 What are we now to do?
 O Muscovites, beloved friends,
 Take him along with you!
 Forsake him not, good people all!
 An orphan claims your nod.
 Come, give him to your officer,
 His father before God!
 Take him! . . . for I shall leave him too,
 Just as his father did,—
 May evil fortune never fail
 His future to forbid!
 In sin your mother brought you forth
 A curse to her abode.
 Grow then, to know the scorn of man!"
 She placed him on the road:
 "Stay here, and for your father wait!
 I'll look for him no more. . . ."
 She sought the woods like one possessed!
 The baby, sad and sore,
 Wept where it sat. . . . The Muscovites
 Indifferent passed by.
 'Twas just as well. By evil fate,
 The woodmen heard him cry.

 Barefooted through the woods she runs,
 And waves her arms and screams,
 Curses her lover's treachery,
 Then whispers, then blasphemous.
 At last the forest's edge she sought
 And cast a glance around,
 Then hurried till the pond she reached,
 And paused without a sound.
 —"Almighty God, receive my soul!
 My flesh, ye waters blurred!"

Then in she leaped. Beneath the ice
 A gurgling sound was heard.
 The dark-browed beauty, Katherine,
 At last her goal had gained.
 The cold wind blew across the pond—
 And not a trace remained.

In boisterous winds that break the oaks
 No true misfortune lies;
 Nor is it sheer misfortune when
 A wedded mother dies;
 Those children are not orphaned quite,
 Though she has met her doom:
 Good reputation still remains,
 And comfort in her tomb.
 If ever wicked people vex
 Such tiny orphans' part,
 They shed their tears upon her grave
 And gain relief of heart.
 But he who's left a lonely waif,
 Of mother's love bereft,
 Who's never by his father seen—
 What hope in life is left?
 What comfort has a bastard child?
 What voice will bring relief?
 Kinless and homeless, he must face
 Hard roads, and sands, and grief . . .
 His face is lovely as a lord's,
 But was conceived in sin!
 His mother's beauty lives again . . .
 Would it had never been!

v

A kobzar¹⁰ blind, for Kiev bound,
 Sat down to take a rest;
 And tiny satchels hung about
 His tiny servant's breast.

¹⁰A minstrel-bard wandering from village to village and earning his living by entertaining the people with religious canticles, heroic songs dealing with olden times, or simply dance tunes. The name is derived from "kobza," a lute-like instrument on which he accompanied his songs. Kobzars were usually blind beggars.

This little child beside him there
Is dozing in the sun,
While the old minstrel's quavering song
Of Christ is never done.
Whoever walks or drives will pause
And buns or cash will add
To the old man; young women give
A copeck to his lad.
Often at this poor waif they stare,
By rags and beauty struck.
"His mother gave him looks," they'd say,
"But did not give him luck!"

A-down the highway to Kiev
There comes a coach and six,
And in the coach a lady rides,
Her spouse and all their chicks.
It stops before the beggars there—
The dust becomes less dim.
And Ivas to the window runs
Because she beckons him.
The lady gives the boy some coins
And marvels at his face.
The husband glanced, then turned away . . .
The villain knew that grace,
He recognized those hazel eyes,
Those dark brows from the past,
The father recognized his son
And turned away aghast.
The lady asked him for his name:
"Ivas."—"A boy robust!"
On goes the coach, and Ivas stands
Deep in a cloud of dust.
Then, counting up their gathered coins,
The wretches rose in pain,
And praying in the morning light
Trudged down the road again.

St. Petersburg, 1838

THE NIGHT OF TARAS¹¹TO P. M. MARTOS¹²

A kobzar¹³ at the crossroads sits
 And plays to pass the hours;
 Young men and women round him seem
 To bloom like poppy flowers.
 The kobzar plays and blithely sings:
 In words the tale is taught
 How Mongols, Poles, and Muscovites
 Have with the Cossacks fought,
 How early on a Sunday morn
 A crowd has made a rally
 To bury a young Cossack bold
 Deep in a fair, green valley.
 The kobzar sings so lustily
 Misfortune seems to smile:

“There was a time when Hetmans¹⁴ ruled—
 Lost is that ancient style;
 There was a time when we were lords,
 But gone are all those days . . .
 Yet Cossack glory we recall
 In never-ending praise . . .
 O thou Ukraine, my own Ukraine,
 Dear mother past belief,
 When I recall thee, native land,
 My heart is pained with grief!
 What happened to our Cossack realm,
 Its leaders red of cloak?

¹¹Hetman Taras Fedorovich, known better by the surname Triasilo which he acquired among the Cossacks. In 1630 he led his troops in rebellion against the Poles who then held sway in Ukraine and sought to Polishize the Ukrainian population by repressing the Orthodox religion and denying the people the use of their churches. These were being turned over to the Uniates (those Ukrainians who accepted the Union with the Roman Catholic Church, effected in the town of Berest, Western Ukraine, in 1596). The night in question marked the end of the battle in which the Cossacks defeated the Poles who had been besieging them in the vicinity of the town of Pereyaslav.

¹²A Ukrainian landlord who encouraged Shevchenko to publish his first *The Kobzar* in 1840. See Introduction, p. xiv.

¹³See fn. 10.

¹⁴Military commanders of Cossack troops and, later, heads of the Ukrainian Cossack State. The name is derived from the German *Hauptmann* (captain, chief).

Where are our fate and freedom now,
 The standards of our folk?
 Where are they all? Consumed in flames.
 Or did the wide blue sea
 Drown all thy mountains in its depths,
 Thy mounds'¹⁵ sublimity?
 The hills are mute; the sea roars on;
 The mounds in sadness stand;
 Over the Cossack's children now
 There rules an evil band!
 Roar then, O sea! Be mute, ye hills!
 Blow, wind, across the plain!
 Ye children of the Cossacks, weep!
 Your destiny is vain!

"From Liman's¹⁶ shore there lifts a cloud,¹⁷
 Another from the plain:¹⁸
 Ukraine is languishing in grief,
 Her destiny is vain!
 Like an abandoned child in woe
 Our land must tearful lie.
 Nobody comes to give her help . . .
 The wearied Cossacks die;
 The glory wanes, the land declines;
 Where shall men turn for grace?
 Unbaptized¹⁹ up to manhood grow
 The children of our race,
 For out of wedlock men must live;
 Without a priest they die;
 Our faith to Jewry²⁰ has been sold
 And locked our churches lie!
 Like blackbirds covering a field,
 The Poles and Uniates²¹

¹⁵Burial mounds in many of which Cossacks were buried and, with them, symbolically, Ukrainian freedom. For that reason, Shevchenko considered them as sacred. In his time they were still quite numerous on the vast Ukrainian steppes.

¹⁶The estuary of the Dnieper.

¹⁷The Tartars from the south.

¹⁸The Poles from the west.

¹⁹Unbaptized, because the Poles had confiscated the Orthodox churches.

²⁰The Poles often made Jews intendants in occupied territories, and gave them orders to prevent the Orthodox from worshipping in churches other than Uniate.

²¹See fn. 11.

Come swooping down—to save us all
 No word of counsel waits.
 Then Nalivayko²² raised his voice—
 His tailor-band soon fled!
 Cossack Pavliuha²³ next was heard—
 But he in turn was sped!
 Taras Triasilo then spoke out
 With tears of bitter dole:
 ‘Alas! Alack! My poor Ukraine
 Is trampled by the Pole!’

“Taras Triasilo wagged his tongue—
 Our true faith made him do it;
 The dark-blue eagle raised his voice
 And caused the Poles to rue it!
 And thus did Pan²⁴ Triasilo speak:
 ‘Have done with grieving prattle!
 Let us go forth, my trusty friends
 And meet the Poles in battle!’

“For many a day and many a night
 He carries on that war;
 From Liman to Trubailo’s²⁵ bank,
 The plain is wet with gore.
 The Cossack brave was wearied
 And fell in deep despair;
 The villain Konicpolski²⁶
 Rejoiced with pleasure rare;
 He gathered all the szlachta²⁷
 To revel in delight!
 But Taras called his Cossacks
 For counsel in his plight:

²²Severin Nalivayko, one of the Cossack leaders who at the close of the sixteenth century led unsuccessful rebellions against the Poles in western parts of Ukraine. His troops were called “tailor-bands” because his trade was that of a tailor before he joined the Cossacks. He was finally captured by the Poles, who, after subjecting him to savage tortures, quartered him.

²³Pavlo Mikhnovich But, nicknamed Pavliuk by the Cossacks, another insurrectionist leader whose anti-Polish campaigns likewise ended unsuccessfully. He, too, was captured by the Poles and tortured to death. “Pavliuha” is an augmentative of Pavliuk.

²⁴Generally Slavic for “lord,” “master.”

²⁵A small tributary to the Dnieper.

²⁶Commander of the Polish troops.

²⁷Polish term, pronounced *shliakhta*, Polish nobility and gentry; here, by extension, Polish troops.

'Otamans²⁸ bold, my comrades,
 Brothers-in-arms, I vow!
 Give me your own good counsel
 What we shall venture now.
 The fiendish Poles are overjoyed,
 On us confusion falls . . .'
 'Why, let the rascals celebrate,
 Carouse in drunken brawls!
 Till sunset let unmeasured drink
 Make imbecile their souls;
 Our mother, Night, will aid us then
 To ferret out the Poles.'

"The sun had set beyond the hill;
 Bright stars to shine begin;
 And like a cloud, the Cossack crowd
 On all sides hemmed them in.
 The moon rose in the heavens—
 A cannon-shot roared out;
 The noble Poles were roused from sleep
 With no escape from rout!
 The noble Poles were roused from sleep
 But up they could not rise:
 Before the dawn a slaughtered host
 Upon the meadow lies.

"Like a red, twisting serpent,
 The Alta bears the news,²⁹
 To bid the ravens of the fields
 A feast of Poles to use.
 Black ravens to that noble meal
 Came flying, ranks on ranks;
 While the assembled Cossack troops
 Gave the Almighty thanks.
 The ravens screamed, and plucked and ate
 The corpses' eyeballs bright,
 While the bold Cossacks raised a song
 To celebrate that night,

²⁸An equivalent to "lieutenant."

²⁹These two lines particularly impressed Martos, and in them he recognized Shevchenko as a great poet. The Alta is a tributary to the Trubailo. The battle took place between these two streams. The red serpent was the Alta which, reddened by the blood of the Poles, bore the news of the Polish defeat to Pereyaslav.

That sombre night that dripped with blood
 In bringing glory deep
 To Taras and his Cossack troop,
 While Poles were lulled to sleep.

“Along that river, in a field,
 A darksome mound is seen;
 Where once the Cossack life-blood flowed—
 The grass is bright and green.³⁰
 A raven perches on the mound,
 And caws from hunger’s pain . . .
 A Cossack dreams of Hetmans’ days
 And sheds his tears again.
 There was a time when Cossack fame
 And freedom reigned in state—
 The fame still shines, but freedom’s cause
 Has met an evil fate.
 There was a time when we were lords,
 But gone are all those days . . .
 Yet Cossack glory we recall
 In never-ending praise.”

The kobzar ceased, in sorrow plunged:
 His hands no more can play!
 Young men and women round him pause
 To wipe their tears away.
 Along the street the kobzar sad
 Struck up a ditty strong;
 While young lads danced a squatting dance
 In concert with his song:

“Let all be as it is, in fact and form!
 Stay in your ingle-nook and keep you warm!
 I’ll seek a tavern out to soothe my life,
 And there perhaps, in drinking, find my wife,
 And making merry with her, at our ease,
 We’ll scoff at last at all our enemies.”

St. Petersburg, November 6, 1838

³⁰Green, not red, because in the minstrel’s (Shevchenko’s) days nobody cared to fight for Ukraine’s freedom any longer.

1839

SONG

What use are coal-black brows to me?

What use my hazel eyes?

Those years of happy maidenhood—

What joys from them arise?

Years of youth will pass away,

Vanish like the rose.

Eyes will weep and beauty fade,

With the wind it goes.

Aches my heart, 'tis tired of life,

Like a captive bird.

What can beauty do for me

If no luck's conferred?

Hard it is to live alone,

None to have to walk with:

Strangers are my kin to me,

None I find to talk with;

None with whom I dare to ask

Why my tears are thronging,

None to whom I might relate

Why my heart feels longing—

Why my heart is like a dove,

Cooing day and night—

No one ever asks me this,

Sees or hears aright.

Strangers do not care to ask—

Nay, why should they care?

Let the poor waif sob and weep,

Wither in despair!

Weep, my heart, then weep, my eyes,

Till you fall asleep.

Loudly cry and fill with pain

Tempests of the deep.

Let the winds bear my complaint

Over the blue sea

To torment my handsome lad
Who was false to me!

St. Petersburg, 1839

IVAN PIDKOVA³¹

TO V. I. STERNBERG³²

There was a time in our Ukraine
When cannon roared with glee,
A time when Zaporozhian men
Excelled in mastery!
They lived as masters—freedom's joy
And glory were their gain:
All that has passed, and what is left
Is grave-mounds³³ on the plain!
High are those ancient tumuli
In which were laid to rest
The Cossacks' fair white bodies
In silken cerements dressed.
High are those mounds, serene and dark
Like mountains they appear,
Their gentle whispers to the wind
Of freedom's fate we hear.
These witnesses of ancient fame
Hold converse with the breeze;
The Cossacks' grandson reaps the grass
And sings old memories.
There was a time when in Ukraine
Even distress would dance,
And sorrow in a tavern drank
In honeyed brandy's trance.

³¹A renowned Cossack leader in the latter half of the sixteenth century. He warred against the Poles in the western parts of Ukraine, and at one time, by means of conquest, briefly usurped the kingship in Moldavia. He was captured and beheaded by the Poles in 1578. It has not been historically established that he led a raid on Tsarhorod (Constantinople, the Emperor's City, now Istanbul).

³²Sternberg was of German extraction. He studied with Shevchenko at the Academy of Art, and for a time shared the latter's living quarters there. It was he who introduced Shevchenko to Western literatures by taking him to literary soirées arranged by certain German families living in St. Petersburg.

³³See fn. 15.

There was a time when life was good
 In that Ukraine of ours . . .
 Recall it then—perhaps the heart
 May briefly bathe in flowers.

II

A murky cloud from Liman's shore
 Covers the sun from sight;
 The sea is like an angry beast
 That groans and howls with might.
 It floods the mighty Danube's mouth.
 "My fellows, come with me
 Within our barks! The waves are wild.
 Let's have a merry spree!"

The Zaporozhians rushed out;
 The stream with ships was roiled.
 "Roar on, O sea!" they all sang out,
 As waves beneath them boiled.
 Billows like mountains round them surged,
 They saw no land, no sky.
 Yet not a Cossack heart grew faint,
 Their eagerness ran high.
 A bold kingfisher flies o'erhead
 As on they sail and sing;
 The brave otaman³⁴ in the van
 Leads on their mustering.
 He strides the deck, and in his mouth
 His pipe grows cold from thought;
 He casts his glances here and there
 Where exploits may be wrought.
 He curled his long black whiskers,
 He twirled his forelock free,
 Then raised his cap—the vessels stopped:
 "Death to the enemy!
 Not to Sinope,³⁵ comrades,
 Brave lads beyond all doubt!
 We'll drive on full to Istanbul
 To seek the Sultan out!"

³⁴Chieftain.

³⁵A Turkish coastal town on the southeastern shore of the Black Sea.

"Well spoken, our fine chieftain!"
 They roared in chorus back.
 "I thank you, lads!" He donned his cap.
 Again the seaward track
 Beneath their keels began to boil;
 And once more thoughtfully
 He paced the deck in mute content
 And gazed upon the sea.³⁶

St. Petersburg, 1839

THE POPLAR

TO P. S. PETROVSKA³⁷

The wind goes howling down the vale,
 It blusters through the plain;
 A poplar tall beside the road
 To touch the ground is fain.
 Her slender shape, her ample leaves
 In vain expand with green;
 The fields around her like a sea
 Of boundless blue are seen.
 A carter gazes as he goes
 And bows his head in sorrow;
 A morning shepherd with his pipe
 Sits down upon a barrow,
 And as he looks, his heart is pained:
 No blade of grass is found
 About her feet—all, all alone
 She dies in alien ground!

 Who then has reared her, slim and tall,
 To perish on the plain?
 Listen, fair maidens! I shall tell
 The story—for your gain.

 A black-browed beauty loved of old
 A Cossack in his pride;

³⁶The poem illustrates the blind obedience with which the Cossacks followed their leader wherever his whim directed him. It appears not to have been completed, and seems to be the precursor of "Hamaliya," p. 143.

³⁷Mother of a fellow-student of Shevchenko at the Academy of Art. He dedicated this ballad to her in appreciation of the many kindnesses she bestowed upon him.

She loved, but could not hold him here:

He left her, and he died.

Had she but known that he would go,

She had not loved, alack.

Had she but known that he would die,

She would have held him back.

Had she but known, she had not gone

So late to fill her pail,

Nor stayed till midnight with her love

Deep in the willowy dale.

Had she but known! . . .

Foreknowledge too

May likewise be an evil.

Seek not for word of what shall be,

But shun it like the devil!

Try not, young maids, to know your fate!

The heart will find its doom

In love. So, let it throb with pain

Till it is in the tomb!

And not for long, my lovely ones,

Do hazel eyes gleam bright,

Your snowy cheeks will briefly glow

And then will pass from sight!

Your flowers will fade before the noon,

Your beauty will be hid . . .

Love then, and join in mutual vows

As your own heart may bid.

Often the nightingale would chant

Upon the bushy plain;

Often a Cossack lad would sing

A simple lover's strain.

He'd sing and sing, until his love

Out of the hut would stray

And he would ask: "Has mother dear

Yet beaten you today?"

They stand there in each other's arms

And hear the bird-notes pour

Forth joys of heart—and then they part,

Glad to have met once more.

No one will ever see them thus,

No one will ever ask:

“Where have you been? What have you done?”

She plies her own sweet task . . .
 And so she loved, infatuate,
 Although her heart grew faint:
 It sensed misfortune that would come
 But could not speak its plaint.
 It did not speak—and now alone
 She grieves by day and night;
 She coos, a dove without her mate,
 With none to know her plight.

No longer does the nightingale
 Make sweet the bushy plain;
 No longer under willow boughs
 The maiden sings her strain;
 She cannot sing, her orphaned heart
 Feels weary of the earth.
 Her parents seem like strangers both,
 Since love has closed in dearth;
 Without one's love, the sun above
 Seems like a foe to smile;
 Without one's love, as in a tomb
 Life seems corruption vile.

A year passed by, another went,
 No Cossack treads the spot;
 She withers like a dying flower,—
 Her mother notes it not.
 “Why are you pining, daughter dear?”
 Her mother did not ask.
 To wed her to a rich, old man
 Was now her secret task.
 “Marry him, girl!” the mother says.
 “Old maid you should not be.
 The man is rich; he has no child;
 You'll live in luxury!”
 “A lady I refuse to be!
 Such marriages I waive!
 My bridal towels are only good
 To wrap me for my grave!
 Let priests intone and bridesmaids weep
 Above its portal grim:

I'd rather in my coffin lie
 Than see the likes of him."
 The mother paid no heed, but wrought
 To bring the nuptial day;
 The black-browed beauty saw it all
 And mutely pined away.
 At night she sought a sorceress,
 To find the future out,
 Whether she'd live in loneliness
 Or die without a doubt.
 "Granny, my precious darling,
 My dearest friend I vow,
 Tell me without concealment—
 Where is my sweetheart now?
 Is he alive? And loves me?
 Has he forgotten me?
 Where is my love? To find him
 Far in the world I'd flee!
 Granny, my precious darling!
 Tell me—you surely know!
 Mother will now compel me
 To marry a rich, old crow.
 To force me into such a match
 Is not in her control.
 Yes, I would gladly drown myself
 Though loath to lose my soul.
 Then see to it, my birdie,
 That if my lad lives not
 I homeward shall return no more . . .
 Ah, heavy is my lot!
 The old man and the brokers wait . . .
 Tell me what is to be!"
 —"Well then, my child! Rest here awhile,
 And with my words agree!
 I, too, was once a maiden
 And knew the pangs of love;
 All that has passed; the things I've learned
 A help to others prove.
 Your future fortune, O my child,
 I knew two years ago;
 Two years ago I brewed from herbs
 A potion for your woe."

The old crone went and from the shelf
 Took down an inky phial.
 "Here is a drink to serve your need—
 Just give these herbs a trial!
 Go to the well ere cockcrow
 And bathe you in its water;
 Then drink a portion of this brew—
 'Twill cure your mother's daughter.
 Drink it, and run—no matter what
 May strangely cry behind you;
 Don't look around until you reach
 The place he last did find you.
 There rest a while. And when the moon
 Mounts in the sky sublime,
 Drink it again; if he comes not,
 Drink for a third, fierce time.
 At the first sip, your beauty fair
 Will match its former proof;
 After the second, on the steppe
 A horse will stamp its hoof;
 If your young Cossack is alive,
 Then he at once will come;
 After the third—my dearest child,
 Seek not your fate to plumb!
 Only you must not cross yourself—
 Or nothing will appear!
 Now go and see how beautiful
 You looked in yester-year!"

She took the herbs and parting bowed:
 "Granny, my thanks you earn!"
 Then left the hut: "To go, or not?
 I never can return!"
 She washed her face, she took one drink,
 And shone in beauty rare;
 A second and a third she drank,
 Then burst out singing there:
 "Float, ever float, dear little swan,
 Upon the soft, blue sea!
 Grow, lovely poplar, upward grow,
 Still higher you may be!

Grow slender, tall, and beautiful,
 Up to the clouds mount straight;
 Ask God if I'll live long enough
 To find myself a mate.
 Grow, ever upward grow, and gaze
 Beyond the soft, blue sea:
 Across it there my sorrow lies,
 My lover stays from me.
 Somewhere my handsome lover
 Is roaming on the plain,
 While I in weeping waste my years
 And wait for him in vain.
 Tell him, my darling poplar,
 That people at me spurn;
 Tell him that I shall perish here
 If he does not return!
 My mother wants to bury me
 By marriage in despair . . .
 And who, when I am gone, will give
 A daughter's tender care?
 Who will console and tend her,
 And help her in her age?
 O mother! O my wretched fate!
 O God, my prayers engage!
 Look yonder, my dear poplar!
 And if you find him not,
 Shed tears before the sunrise
 Lest people throng the spot.
 Grow then, my darling poplar,
 Still higher may you be!
 Float, ever float, dear little swan,
 Upon the soft, blue sea!"

In such a song the lovely maid
 Recounted what concerned her;
 The herbs were of a wondrous power—
 And to a poplar turned her.
 Back to her home she went no more;
 She never met her mate;
 Up to the clouds her beauty grew
 All slender in estate.

The wind is howling down the vale,
 It blusters o'er the plain,
 The poplar by the highway-side
 To touch the ground is fain.

St. Petersburg, 1839

PEREBENDIA³⁸

TO E. P. HREBINKA³⁹

Old Perebendia now is blind,—
 Who does not know the bard?
 He plays his kobza everywhere,
 He roams in every yard.
 His playing every person knows—
 They pay him without strife
 Because he drives away their cares,
 Though he is tired of life.
 Under the hedge the wretched man
 Must rest by night and day;
 He has no place to call his own,
 And penury makes play
 With scorn about his hoary head;
 Misfortune casts no shadow,
 For there he sits and sings a song
 About the rustling meadow.
 Thus he would sing and grow aware
 He was a lonely sight,
 And pensive grow beneath the hedge
 Where he must pass the night.
 Such is old Perebendia,
 A moody life he spends!
 He often with a dirge begins
 And with a gay song ends.

³⁸Colloquial nickname for one who is garrulous, in this case a poet-minstrel whose rôle is to entertain the people with songs conforming to their moods, thus making them forget their misery. He himself, however, is miserable and full of sorrows, with not a soul to share them except God, with whom he communes in his solitary musings and contemplations.

³⁹Evhen Hrebinka (1811–48), a Ukrainian writer of fables, who befriended Shevchenko in St. Petersburg, and contributed to his emancipation from serfdom by introducing him to influential friends.

For young maids on the village green
 A lively dance he plays;
 To young blades at the inn he sings
 Of love and tipsy ways.
 Then at a marriage party
 He hymns a daughter's pain—
 Perhaps the enchanted poplar,
 And then a rural strain.
 At market come religious chants
 Or in a dolorous pitch
 He would intone the grief of all,
 The crushing of the Sitch.⁴⁰
 Such is old Perebendia,
 A moody life he spends:
 He starts out with a merry tune
 And with a dirge he ends.

The wind is blowing lightly,
 It roams across the plain,—
 The minstrel on a grave-mound sits
 And plays his kobza's strain.
 The steppe extends around him,
 A mighty sea of blue;
 Beyond his mound still other mounds
 Stretch hazy to the view.
 His whiskers long and hoary locks
 Are fluttering in the breeze
 That sometimes drops to hear his song,
 His plaintive elegies.

To the glad heart and to the eyes that weep
 It hearkens, and blows on . . .

Here will he creep
 To mounds upon the steppe, that none attain;
 There winds will blow his words across the plain
 And people hear them not—his words are God's;
 His heart holds converse with th' Almighty's nods;

⁴⁰Cossacks' first permanent encampment on the Dnieper's island of Khortitsia, beyond the rapids. Established there in the latter part of the sixteenth century, the Sitch was finally destroyed by Catherine II in 1778 and the territory around it was settled by German immigrants whom she favoured. The term derived either from the word "zasika"—the palisade, or from "sikti"—to cut or hew (as one does in battle).

His heart still warbles of the Lord's great glory
 While from the world's far edge he draws his story.
 His thought, a grey-blue eagle, soars and wheels
 Until the very sky his passing feels;
 His thought seeks out the sun and of it asks
 Where in the night it goes, and what its tasks.
 It listens to the sea, and its deep speech;
 Asks the dark mountain what its calm may teach;
 His thought mounts up once more, for earth is sad
 And in its vastness can no nook be had
 For him who hears all mysteries aright,
 What the sea says, where the sun goes at night—
 The world would be no friend to such a one!
 Alone he is among us, like the sun;
 Men see him, for his feet the same earth press,
 But if they heard that in his loneliness
 He sought the mounds and parleyed with the sea,
 They'd make his holy words a mockery,
 Call him a fool and drive the man away:
 "On seashores let him roam, not here!" they'd say.

Thus you do well, my Kobzar,
 You do right well, indeed,
 To seek the ancient grave-mounds,
 With song the earth to heed.
 Wander apart, my own dear friend,
 Before you fall asleep;
 Sing forth your songs where none may hear
 And none attention keep!
 And lest they should disown you quite,
 Humour them, lad, indeed!
 "Dance, fellow, as the lord may bid,—
 His wealth will serve your need."

Such is old Perebendia,
 A moody life he spends:
 He starts off with a wedding tune
 And with a dirge he ends.

St. Petersburg, 1839

TO OSNOVIANENKO⁴¹

The rapids⁴² rage; the moon appears,
 As once it rose before . . .
 The Sitch⁴³ is gone, and gone is he
 Who led them all of yore.⁴⁴
 The Sitch is gone! The reed-beds ask
 The Dnieper and its foam:
 "Oh, where have all our children⁴⁵ gone?
 What country do they roam?"
 The sea-mew, on the wing, laments,
 As weeping for her brood;
 The warm sun and the blowing wind
 Alone reflect her mood.

Across the steppe the grassy mounds
 Still stand and mourn the past;
 They question of the boisterous sea:
 "Where are our dear ones cast?
 Where do they rule and revel now?
 Where are your steps bestead?
 Return! Return! The oats bend low
 Where once your horses fed,
 Where feather-grass once rustled soft,
 Where blood of Tartar fell,
 Where Polish blood once flowed in flood.
 Return, and break the spell!"
 "They never will return at all,"
 The blue sea roared reply,
 "Though hearts may yearn, they'll not return;
 Forever still they lie!"

⁴¹Hrihoriy Kvitka-Osnovianenko (1778–1843), a Ukrainian landlord from the village of Osnova (from which he derived his additional surname). He was a noted writer of long short stories dealing with the life, manners, and customs of the common people, and in that respect was the first writer in Europe (before I. Turgenev and George Sand) to introduce the peasant into the literary scene. His short sentimental novel *Marusia* was the first of this genre to be written in Ukraine. The fact that he insisted on writing in Ukrainian, in spite of the harsh reaction to him on the part of the Russian critics, endeared him to Shevchenko who, for that reason, considered him even greater than himself.

⁴²The Dnieper's rapids near its estuary.

⁴³See fn. 40.

⁴⁴Hetmans, the Cossack commanders.

⁴⁵Cossacks.

Right art thou, sea; right, azure one:
 Such must their dark doom be!
 Those we most long for will not come,
 Here comes not liberty;
 Old Cossackdom will not return,
 Nor hetmans rise again,
 Their scarlet mantles nevermore
 Will cover our Ukraine.
 In tatters, like an orphan waif,
 She weeps by streams of night,
 Sorely oppressed in loneliness
 With none to see her plight,
 Except the enemy who mocks.
 Laugh, then, ferocious foe,⁴⁶
 But not too loudly, for our fame
 Will never be laid low.
 It will not perish, but proclaim
 The annals of our age,
 What is our justice, what our wrong,
 And what our parentage.
 Our epic and our ancient song
 For ever shall remain,
 And that is where our glory lies,
 The glory of Ukraine.
 Most chaste, with jewels unadorned,
 Without embellished speech,
 Yet it is deep-toned and precise,
 A tongue that God might teach.⁴⁷
 Am I not right, my captain,⁴⁸ friend?
 Is it the truth I sing?
 If I but could . . . But what's the use!
 'Tis past my reckoning.
 Besides, I live in Muscovy
 And aliens surround me.

⁴⁶The next fifteen lines constitute one of the highlights of Shevchenko's work, for in them he voices his firm faith in the power of the Ukrainian speech to express the glory of Ukraine's past.

⁴⁷Meaning: the Ukrainian language was not fashioned in learned academies or literary salons, but issued pure from the very soul of the people.

⁴⁸Shevchenko considered Kvitka-Osnovianenko a leader in the movement to foster Ukrainian as a literary language.

"Pay them no heed!" you say perhaps;
 But mocking would confound me.
 This psalm⁴⁹ of mine I chant with tears
 They'll⁵⁰ jeer at as a joke,
 They'll scorn it! And how hard it is
 To live with hostile folk!
 Perhaps I'd grapple with my foes
 If I but had the strength;
 I once could boast a ringing voice
 But it grew mute at length.⁵¹
 Such is my grievous lot today,
 My chieftain and my friend!
 I roam in grief, and softly sing
 As meadow-grasses bend.
 Weak is my song, while you, O Sire,
 As you yourself well know,
 Command the reverence of all,
 Your voice can strongly flow.
 Then sing the Sitch to them, dear man,
 And sing the barrows⁵² bare,
 Sing of the time when each was raised,
 And who lies buried there;
 Sing to them all of olden times,
 The marvel that is past,
 Strike up so loud a tune, O Sire,
 That all may hear at last
 What happened in Ukraine of old,
 Why she in bondage lay,
 And how the Cossack fame was born
 And through the world made way!
 Strike up the tune, grey eagle, now!
 I'd weep to hear your song,
 And see Ukraine revive again
 In accents deep and strong;

⁴⁹His poetry.

⁵⁰Russian critics.

⁵¹Meaning: he lost the power of expression in Ukrainian, because he had to labour in serfdom and live among the Russians. Here Shevchenko falsely underestimates himself.

⁵²Cossack burial mounds, considered by Shevchenko as being the repositories of Ukrainian glory.

In your great song I'd hear again
 The roaring of the sea,
 Or a maiden sing of fruitless love
 Beneath a willow tree;
 So let my heart again rejoice
 In this far, foreign land
 Till coffin'd close in alien wood
 I lie in alien sand.

St. Petersburg, 1839

PRELUDE⁵³

My pensive, heavy-laden songs,
 How dire you are today!
 Why do you stand upon my page
 In such a sad array?
 Why has the wind not scattered you
 Like dust across the plains?
 Why has not Woe, your mother, lulled
 To sleep your sombre strains?

Since Woe in scorn has brought you forth, my tears
 Have laved you—and in them you should have drowned!
 They should have borne you off from plain to sea,—
 Then none would ask me whence my grief I found,
 Nor why I curse my fate, weary of earth . . .
 For people say of me in mockery:
 "The man's a loafer!" . . .

O my flower-children!⁵⁴

Why have I tended you, why set you free?
 Will not one heart in all the world feel grief
 At my sad poems? This is my belief.

⁵³This poem appeared at first in *The Kobzar* of 1840, and was without a title. In later editions, the publishers, or editors, placed it at the end, considering it as a summation of Shevchenko's moods and attitudes expressed in the other poems comprising that collection.

⁵⁴Shevchenko regarded his verses as being the children of his brain, born of his grief and sorrow. As yet he thought them to be inarticulate and immature and, fearing that they might not be well received in Ukraine, begged his countrymen to give them a fair welcome.

For it may be there will be found
 A lass with hazel eyes
 Who'll weep to hear these songs of mine—
 That fortune I would prize . . .
 A single tear from those bright eyes
 Would set me above lords!
 O lays of mine, O lays of mine,
 My heart your burden hoards!

For hazel eyes of brightest hue
 And for those beauteous brows
 My spirit yearned, my heart beat glad
 And poured out all its vows;
 It sought to pour its passion forth,
 It sang of starry nights,
 Of cherry orchards dark and green,
 Of kissing's sweet delights.
 Of grassy steppes and burial mounds
 Within our own Ukraine
 My spirit in an alien land
 Refused to sing in pain.
 It would not, mid these woods and snows
 Call hither from their places
 The leaders of the Cossack host
 With bunchuks⁵⁵ and with maces . . .
 Nay, rather over our Ukraine
 Let Cossack spirits hover:
 There space enough and boundless joy
 The whole vast region cover . . .
 There like the freedom that has passed
 The mighty Dnieper flows—
 The sea, the steppe, the rapids hoarse,
 The mounds like hills that rose.
 There once was born and long prevailed
 The Cossack liberty;
 With bones of Tartars and of Poles
 It strewed the mighty lea.

⁵⁵Cossack commanders' insignia. It was a long pole topped by a ball or arrow to the base of which was attached the hair from a horse's mane or tail. It was of Mongolian origin.

It strewed the plain with corpses,
 And wearied of its blows
 Lay down to rest, and as it slept
 A grassy mound arose.
 Above it the Black Eagle⁵⁶ wheels
 Like a dark sentinel;
 About it too the minstrels sing
 Where all good people dwell.
 Blind wretches sing of long ago,
 And how it came to pass;
 They are well versed in it, while I
 Can only weep, alas;
 Instead of words for my Ukraine
 Only my tears can fall . . .
 As for her doom—enough of that!
 'Tis keenly felt by all!
 And most by him whose tender soul
 The plight of man can see—
 He lives a hell in this our life,
 And in the next . . . like me.
 I shall not pray for better days
 If now I have them not . . .
 Let misery as now prevail,
 I'll hide its torment hot,
 I'll hide the fiery serpent
 Within my very heart,
 So that no enemy may see
 My smiling's but an art . . .
 My black thought, like a raven,
 May fly about and croak;
 My spirit like a nightingale
 That warbles in an oak,
 Yet weeps unseen, will mask its grief
 Avoiding human scorn,⁵⁷
 So let my tears no more be dried,
 Still let them flow forlorn,
 Still let my tears by day and night
 Bedew this foreign strand,

⁵⁶Russia's heraldic double-headed eagle.

⁵⁷See fn. 38.

Until the priests at death will cloak
 My eyes with alien sand . . .
 So let it be! For what's to do?
 For worry will not help.
 But may God smite the envious dog
 Who at my grief would yelp!

My pensive, heavy-laden songs,
 My precious blooms, I vow!
 I've tended you, I've reared you up,—
 Where shall I send you now?
 Go to Ukraine, my children dear,
 To our own dear Ukraine;
 Wander like waifs by hedge and road,
 For here I must remain.
 There you will find a friendly word,
 And there a mood sincere;
 There you will meet an open heart,
 Nay, hints of glory hear . . .

My dearest mother, sweet Ukraine,
 Welcome, though still unknown,
 My children inarticulate
 And claim them as your own!

St. Petersburg, 1839

1840

TO V. J. STERNBERG⁵⁸

FOR REMEMBRANCE

You'll wander far throughout the world,
 And many things you'll see.
 As pensively you view it all,
 Dear friend, remember me.

St. Petersburg, spring 1840

⁵⁸See fn. 32. These lines were written when Sternberg was about to leave for Italy to complete his studies in painting there.

TO N. MARKEVICH⁵⁹

Bandurist, my blue-grey eagle,
 Your fortunes can soar high!
 For you have wings, and you have strength,
 And time in which to fly.
 They wait for you in our Ukraine—
 There fly with vigour free!
 I, too, would fly along with you,
 But who would welcome me?
 A lonely stranger in Ukraine,
 Even as here, I'd stand;
 An orphan am I there, dear friend,
 As in this foreign land.
 Why does my heart then flutter so?
 There loneliness awaits me! . . .
 What, loneliness? In my Ukraine
 Whose mighty steppe elates me!
 For there the boisterous wind will blow
 And speak as to a brother;
 There Freedom roams the boundless plain;
 The blue sea, Freedom's mother,
 In mighty accents praises God
 And scatters grief away;
 And there the burial mounds commune
 With prairie winds that stray.
 With them in sorrow they converse;
 Their speech is filled with pain:
 "Thus once it was, but all has gone
 And will not come again!"
 I, too, would fly to listen there
 And weep with those that weep . . .
 Alas! Harsh fate has clipped my wings.
 With aliens I must creep.

St. Petersburg, 1840

⁵⁹N. Markevich (1804–60), a Ukrainian who wrote Russian verses on Ukrainian themes. He was also the author of a five-volume *History of Little Russia (Ukraine)* which was published in Moscow in 1843, and which was as unbiased as Russian censorship allowed.

1841

THE HAYDAMAKS⁶⁰TO V. I. HRIHOROVICH,⁶¹ IN REMEMBRANCE OF APRIL 22, 1838

All things must ever flow and pass away . . .
 Whence did they come and whither have they vanished?
 Nor fool nor sage an answer can convey.
 Things come by life, by dying they are banished.
 For one thing blooms; one withers now forever,
 Its yellowed leaves are scattered by the blast.
 Suns will still rise, nor cease their vast endeavour,
 The bright-red stars flow on as in the past;
 And you, O silver moon, with visage shining,
 Will rise and wander in the azure sky,
 Peering in troughs and wells with eye designing,
 Painting the sea with glory from on high.
 As once you shone on Babylon of old,
 You'll light our folk in ages yet untold.
 Immortal Moon! . . . I often have desired
 To speak with you as with a sister dear,
 Singing you verses that you have inspired.
 Advise me—for my sorrow's weight I fear.
 Not quite alone am I, nor indigent:
 My heart has children,⁶² though their fate's uncertain.
 Shall they within my soul be basely pent?
 Relief may lie beyond the future's curtain

⁶⁰A derogatory name applied to those rebel bands who attacked and pillaged the estates of the Polish landlords in Ukraine. When the economic oppression became more intense, and the persecution of the Orthodox church increased, these bands were swelled by the outraged rural population (mostly serfs) and Cossacks. In this poem Shevchenko deals with the third such insurrection, which occurred in 1768 (the other two took place in 1734 and 1750 respectively). The term "haydamak" derives from Turkish, and means robber, pillager. The cause of the rebels being just, they considered it an honour to bear that appellative.

⁶¹V. I. Hrihorovich, of Ukrainian extraction, was the secretary of the St. Petersburg Academy of Art. It was he more than any other who was instrumental in assisting Shevchenko to gain his emancipation on the date indicated. Having such an influential protector, Shevchenko here makes bold to ask him to protect his "children," the haydamaks, as they (in this poem) venture among the public.

⁶²The haydamaks, in this poem, and his verses in general.

If someone reads these tearful words of mine
 Which once my heart so fervently poured forth
 In secret. Nay, to hide them I decline.
 My soul is living and its seed has worth!
 Like the blue skies that without bounds extend,
 My soul has no beginning and no end.
 Where will it thrive? Vain question, idly hurled!
 Whoe'er you are, preserve my soul's white ember!
 None without fame would gladly leave this world.
 Maids of my heart, do you at least remember!
 My soul was fond of you, my rosy flowers,
 And of your destiny she loved to sing.
 Then rest, my children, till the dawning's hours!
 A proper guide⁶³ for you I'll seek to bring.

O sons of mine, O haydamaks,
 The world is vast and free,—
 Go forth my sons and roam about
 To seek your destiny!
 O sons of mine, who yet are small
 And inarticulate!⁶⁴
 Who in this world, all motherless,
 Will greet your sorry state?
 O sons of mine, young eaglets all,
 Go, fly to our Ukraine!
 There, rather than 'neath alien skies,
 'Twere best to bear your pain.
 There, sympathetic souls you'll find
 Who will not let you die;
 But here . . . it is so hard,⁶⁵ my boys!
 If as their guests you hie,
 They will but mock you when you meet.
 By censors this is done,
 Enlightened all, with books in print,
 They scold the very sun:⁶⁶
 "In the wrong quarter see it rise;
 It shines with beams untrue;

⁶³Hrihorovich.

⁶⁴Shevchenko still is uncertain about the value of his poetic effort, and fears it may as yet be immature.

⁶⁵Referring to the harsh treatment *The Kobzar* of 1840 received from the Russian critics.

⁶⁶Spoken sarcastically of the "learned" critics who find fault even with the best.

It would be better if the sun . . ."
 So what is there to do?
 We must pay heed to them because
 Perhaps it does not rise
 As scientists have given rules.
 These censors must be wise!
 What, verses, will they say of you?
 Your fate will make me blench!
 For they will scoff and throw you down
 In scorn beneath a bench.
 "There let them lie," they'll say, "until
 A bard comes, noble-souled,
 To tell us in our Russian tongue
 About these hetmans bold.
 He is a fool who tells these tales
 In dead Ukrainian,⁶⁷
 And brings before us in bast shoes
 Some nondescript young man.
 A fool is he! At school he learned
 But little for his pain:
 Of Cossacks and the hetman age
 Only the mounds remain—
 And nothing else; now even these
 Are dug from stern to stem;
 And he, forsooth, would have us hear
 While beggars sing of them!
 It is quite useless, my good friend!
 If payment would be yours
 Along with certain fame to boot,
 You'll sing of court amours,
 Of maids in love, of dogs and steeds
 That hunt across the lea—
 Glory lies there! But no, he sings
 About the murmuring sea,
 And weeps, besides; about him press
 Rude rustics in a throng

⁶⁷This and what follows is Shevchenko's answer to his detractors who advised him to write in Russian and not in a "dead" language; to bring out in his poems characters worthy of being treated in such a medium, and not common, ragged rustics such as appear in *The Haydamaks*; and to forget the Cossack "ignoble" past and deal with "courtly" themes and subjects, such as were then cultivated in Russian literature.

In homespun coats. . . ." Quite true, ye wise!
 Your wisdom could be wrong!
 You've given me a sheepskin coat;
 Alas, it does not fit.
 The garment of your own wise speech
 Is lined with falsehood's wit.

Forgive me! Clamour as you please!
 I'll heed you not at all,
 And shall not even ask you in,
 For you are wise men all
 And I am but a fool; I'll sit
 In my own hut alone,
 And there I'll sing to please myself,
 And like a small child moan.
 I'll sing about the sea that roars
 And of the wind that blows,
 Of the dark steppe and of the mound
 That tells the wind its woes.
 And as I sing, my mind will see
 The high mound open wide
 And Zaporozhians flood the steppe
 In a great human tide;
 Otamans on their coal-black steeds
 Before the bunchuks⁶⁸ rear,
 While rapids roar among the reeds
 Between the margins sheer
 And groan and sing in tones of wrath
 An anthem fierce and bleak!
 I'll hark to them, and grieve awhile,
 And to the ancients speak:
 "Why are you grieving thus, O sires?"
 —"Sad are the times, my son!
 Dnieper is angry; our Ukraine
 Feels tears of anguish run. . . ."
 I, too, must weep. In proud array
 With banners and with swords,
 The hetmans and otamans walk,
 The captains and the lords,

⁶⁸See fn. 55.

And all in gold, with stride superb
 My cottage they salute,
 And as beside me there they sit
 Their converse is not mute,
 Of how they built the mighty Sitch⁶⁹
 And laid its footings fast,
 And how the Cossacks in their barks
 Across the rapids passed,
 And how they roamed the broad, blue sea
 And burned old Scutari;⁷⁰
 And how they lit their pipes at fires
 Where Poland paid the fee;
 And how they came back to Ukraine,
 And feasting turned to rout. . . .⁷¹
 "Come, Kobzar, play! Innkeeper, pour!"—
 Was their incessant shout.
 The tavernkeeper knows his job
 And pours without a pause;
 The Kobzar strikes a tune up—all,
 With tumult of applause,
 Turn to a lively hopak dance
 That makes Khortitsia⁷² quake;
 The tankard makes its endless rounds,
 They drink without a break.
 "Dance, man, and cast your cloak aside!
 Dance like the prairie wind!
 Play, Kobzar, play! Innkeeper, pour,
 Till better days we find!"
 With arms akimbo as they squat,
 All in the dance are set:
 "Go to it, fellows, good for you!
 You will be masters yet."
 Otamans at the feasting talk
 And gravely pace the lea
 As if in solemn conference . . .
 The illustrious company

⁶⁹See fn. 40.

⁷⁰A suburb of Istanbul, on the Asian side.

⁷¹From here on Shevchenko gives his imagination full rein.

⁷²An island on the Dnieper where the first Cossack (Zaporozhian, meaning beyond the rapids) Sitch was located.

At last could not forbear to dance,
 Their legs forgot their years;
 While I cast glances, look about,
 And smile amid my tears,—
 I look, and smile, and wipe my tears away:
 I am not lonely, here are hosts of friends!
 In my low dwelling, as on prairies gay,
 The Cossacks dance, the valley's mirth ascends;
 In my low hut, the blue sea roars at play,
 The mound is sad, the rustling poplar bends,
 A maiden softly sings a love-lorn lay—
 I am not lonely, here are hosts of friends.

There all my welfare, all my wealth,
 And all my glory lie!
 As for your counsels—many thanks
 For reasoning so sly!
 I, while I live, shall be content
 With speech you scorn as dead;
 In it I sing my grief and tears.
 You your own ways may tread!
 I go to see my children off
 On travels long and hard.
 Let them set out; perhaps they'll find
 That ancient Cossack bard,
 Who'll welcome these my children in
 With hoary tears of joy.
 In this I shall be satisfied:
 My heart shall not be coy!

So, at my table as I sit
 I ponder for their sakes:
 Whom shall I ask? Who'll lead them on?
 Outside the morning breaks,
 The moon has set, the sun's ablaze,
 The haydamaks have found me,
 They've said their prayers and dressed themselves
 And ranged themselves around me.
 As sad as orphans do they stand
 And mutely bend their heads:
 "Ah, bless us, Father!" is their plea—
 "Have pity on our dreads,

As into the wide world we go
 To seek our destiny!"
 —"Hold on! The world is not a hut,
 And you are still but wee
 And foolish boys. Who'll lead you on
 To find a welcome due?
 I am in trouble, children dear,
 In grave distress for you!
 I've nourished you, I've reared you up,
 Now ready for your fate
 Out in the world, but everyone
 Is now so literate—
 Forgive me if I failed to school you.
 As for myself, though flayed,
 The flogging brought me literacy—
 For thus are scholars made!
 I know my letters, but still fail
 To place the accent right.
 What will they say to you? Come, sons,
 Advice we must invite!
 I have a spiritual sire⁷³
 (Although my own is dead);
 He'll tell me what to do with you.
 He knows in his own stead
 How hard it is for orphaned waifs
 Forth in this world to pace;
 Moreover, he's a kindly soul
 And of the Cossack race.
 He'll not disown that blessed speech
 In which his mother mild
 Sang to him as she swaddled him
 When he was but a child;
 That blessed speech he'll not disown
 In which a sightless bard
 Sang sadly of our own Ukraine
 Along the hedgerows hard.
 He loves that idiom of truth
 That was the Cossacks' glory.
 He loves it well! Then come, my sons,
 To seek his counsel hoary!

⁷³Hrihorovich.

If he had not once met with me
 Oppressed by all my woes,
 Men would long since have buried me
 Beneath these alien snows;
 They would have buried me and said:
 "He was a ne'er-do-well!"
 It's hard to bear life's heaviness
 Where none the cause can tell.
 Come, little ones, all that is past
 And I am still alive.
 If in this bitter foreign land
 He helped me to survive,
 You, too, he'll welcome as his own:
 To greet you he'll be fain;
 And from him, having said your prayers,
 You'll set out for Ukraine!"
 Our greetings, Sire! At this your door
 We crave your fellowship.
 Pray bless my little offspring all
 To speed them on their trip!

St. Petersburg, April 7, 1841

I. INTRODUCTION

Poland, the land of Gentry,⁷⁴ lived
 A lady much adored,—
 She matched her strength with Muscovites,
 The Sultan, and the Horde,
 The Germans, too. Thus once it was . . .
 But all things pass away.
 The gentry boasted of their deeds
 And feasted night and day
 And mocked to scorn their hapless kings—
 It was not Stephen⁷⁵ then,
 Nor yet Sobieski,⁷⁶ mighty Jan,—
 These were not common men,—

⁷⁴Before her third partition in 1795, Poland, although nominally a kingdom, was actually ruled by her magnates and gentry wealthy landowners (*szlachta*) who, by the power of their individual veto, considered their elective kings as mere puppets, and often sent them packing.

⁷⁵Stefan Batory of Hungary, king of Poland (1576–86).

⁷⁶Jan Sobieski, king of Poland (1674–99) who, with the substantial aid of the Ukrainian Cossacks, defeated the Turks at the gates of Vienna in 1673.

But others. . . . Mute and cowed they reigned;
 The insults did not cease;
 The seyms⁷⁷ and petty diets roared,
 While neighbours held their peace
 As they beheld the wretched kings
 Go fleeting from the realm
 And listened to the gentry shout
 In tones that overwhelm:
 "Ah, veto!⁷⁸ veto!" With a roar
 Resound the gentry's words,
 While magnates burn down many a home
 And sharpen up their swords.
 Year after year such riot ruled
 Until to Warsaw came
 Bold Poniatowski⁷⁹ as their king
 And sought to end the shame.

His reign began; he straightway set his mind
 To clip the gentry's wings—alas, he failed:
 He felt—a mother towards her children—kind,
 Yet one great purpose in his plans prevailed.
 Only that one word "Veto" he desired
 From the mad gentry's use to disengage,
 But then . . . all Poland was to frenzy fired,
 The gentry burst out shouting in a rage:

⁷⁷Legislative assemblies. In the general political confusion in the middle of the eighteenth century, there existed over fifty such petty diets in Poland, each with magnified pretensions of its own.

⁷⁸All decisions in the Polish *Sejm* and provincial diets were to be passed unanimously. A single veto was enough to nullify even the most vital one.

⁷⁹Stanislaw August Poniatowski (1764–95), the last Polish king, who in 1766 unsuccessfully attempted to abolish the nobility's power of veto. Since he favoured closer relations with Russia, the *szlachta* rebelled against him by organizing themselves into so-called "confederations" whose chief purpose, at first, was to preserve Poland from Russia and, of course, their own rights and privileges in Poland. In the beginning there were three main confederations, two of which were led by Jozef Pulawski and Michal Patz respectively. As time went on, other groups were formed, but certainly not to the extent of one hundred as Shevchenko implies. Failing in their purpose in Poland, the rebels, lacking money and supplies, scattered through Ukraine and the neighbouring territories of Lithuania and Moldavia, and became mere predatory hordes. Hence the re-emergence of the haydamaks and the insurrection of the Ukrainian peasant and Cossack population in Ukraine, particularly in the southeastern part of the Kiev region, in 1768. It was as a result of this political havoc that the third partition of Poland between Russia, Austria, and Prussia in 1795 was made possible.

“Upon our word of honour, he’s a knave!
 A rogue he is, and Moscow’s hireling!”
 From Patz clear to Pulawski swept a wave
 Of trepidation like an angry Spring—
 A hundred fierce confederations rave.

Through Poland and Volynia
 These factions rage amain,
 In Litva and Moldavia
 And on through vast Ukraine.
 They spread abroad and quite forget
 Man’s liberty to keep;
 They make the usurers their pals;
 All things away they sweep.
 Havoc and murder are their joy;
 Churches they burn with zest . . .
 And meanwhile all the haydamaks
 Have had their weapons blest.

II. YAREMA

“D’ye hear, Yarema? You’re a villain’s son!
 Go now, and get the mare! And when that’s done,
 Carry my wife her slippers, soft and loose,
 And fetch a pail of water for my use!
 Then sweep the floor! Bring wood in, many a piece!
 Throw grain out for the turkeys and the geese!
 Go to the stable then, to milk the cow,
 Quickly, you scoundrel! . . . Wait a minute, now!
 When you have done that, to Vilshana⁸⁰ speed
 And tell the priest’s wife that her help I need.”

Off went Yarema, mournful, stooping low.
 Thus early in the morning, even so,
 The Jew browbeat the youth, a Cossack lad,
 Who bent his back beneath his fortunes bad
 And did not realize his wings had grown—
 That had he wished, he might to heaven have flown.
 Untaught, he bent his spine.

⁸⁰A village a few miles north of Kiev.

God, mercy give!

How hard is life, yet how one longs to live!
 How sweet it is to see the sunshine pouring,
 To hear the blue sea murmuring or roaring,
 A bird that chirps, a vale where rustlings move,
 Or a young beauty singing in a grove . . .
 Dear God, how sweet it is to live and love!

Yarema is an orphan, waif bereft:
 No sister and no brother has he left!
 Just a Jew's drudge, the lad untended grows,
 And yet he blames no persons for his woes.
 Why should he blame them? Do they know, perchance,
 Who shall be kissed or tortured in life's dance?
 Let them make merry! Fortune is their lot,
 And a poor waif must take the fate he's got.
 Often in silence he to tears will take,
 And not because he feels his bosom ache:
 But at recalling something sweet and fair . . .
 Then back to work: one's fortune one must bear!
 Yet what are parents, or a manor's art,
 Without a lass with whom to share one's heart?
 The waif Yarema warmly rich appears
 In someone who can share his songs and tears.

Lovely hazel eyes there are
 That like stars are shining;
 Dainty white arms tenderly
 Round his neck are twining;
 There's a maiden's lovely heart,
 Rare it is and good,
 Ready still to weep or smile,
 Answering his mood;
 Ready still to smile or weep
 Fainting or reviving,
 Like a holy spirit's gleam
 All his midnights shriving.

Such was Yarema at that time,
 A waif most fortunate.
 And such, young maids, was I of old⁸¹ . . .
 But changed is my estate!

⁸¹Here begins Shevchenko's long autobiographical aside.

Past are those days and vanished quite
 Till not a trace remains.
 My heart grows faint to think of them . . .
 What cause my grief ordains?
 Why has my happiness not lingered on?
 It had been easier to weep things gone.
 Men stole my luck, to heap their own luck high:
 "Why needs he fortune? Let it buried lie,
 He's rich enough without it!"

Yes, in patches,
 And in my tears—unduly dried in snatches! . . .
 My destiny! Where is thy tide compelling?
 Return to me, come to my lowly dwelling,
 At least in dreams . . . tears are my sleep dispelling!

Forgive me now, good people!
 All is not sense I say,
 But one's accursèd misery
 Is always in one's way.
 Perhaps we yet shall meet again
 While down the road I trudge
 And follow on Yarema's track,
 And yet . . . I cannot judge.
 Where'er one turns, misfortune lies,
 No shelter can be found:
 "Wherever fortune tends," they say,
 "There one must shift one's ground"—
 Must shift in silence, and yet smile
 That not a soul may know it—
 The sorrow hidden in your heart—
 And call on you to show it.
 Not even lucky ones may dream
 Of sharing in their favour.
 While orphan lads can never hope
 To sense its slightest savour!
 It's hard to harp on such a theme,
 Yet mute I cannot stay.
 So pour it out, my tearful speech:
 To dry those tears away

—“In no such wise,
 Nay, God forbid! Just let me rise,
 Your Graces!” (*Whispering*, “Swines’ foul kin!”)
 —“Come, Colonel, smash the door right in!”

The door collapsed; the lash fell crack
 In stripes upon the Jew’s old back.
 —“Good evening, swine! Good evening, Jew!
 Hail, devil’s son, good day to you!”
 Thus on and on the lashing went,
 While the Jew stooped, his body bent.
 —“Stop jesting with me, gentlemen!”
 —“Good night to all within this den!
 Just lash the knave some more! . . . Enough!
 Excuse our call, you evil chough!
 And where’s your pretty daughter now?”
 —“My daughter, sirs, is dead, I vow!”
 —“Judas, you lie! Whip him again!”
 The lashes fall on him like rain.
 —“Alas, my lords, my friends so dear,
 I vow to you she is not here!”
 —“Scoundrel, you lie!”

—“God punish me
 If that’s not truth!”

—“Not God, but we.”
 —“Why should I hide my daughter, sirs,
 If she yet lived? May God’s own curse
 Afflict me if I lie!”

—“Hee-hee!
 The devil intones a litany.
 Now cross yourself!”

—“How do you do it?
 I don’t know how!”

—“Watch me, beshrew it!”
 A Pole’s hand marks the Cross’s pact,
 And the Jew imitates the act.
 “Bravo!” they cry, “We’ve christened him!
 This miracle has pleased our whim;
 Let’s top it by a drink with you!
 Come, do you hear us, christened Jew?
 Give us a drink!”

—“At once, at once!”

The Poles are fierce with growls and grunts;
 They bellow loud with bestial sounds
 While the full tankard makes its rounds.
 “Poland has perished not!” they roar
 In lusty chorus. “More, Jew, more!”
 The coerced Christian limps with pain
 Down cellar steps and up again,
 And fills their glasses up perforce;
 While the confederates, of course,
 Shout: “Jew, more mead!” With steps not slow
 The man is ever on the go.
 —“Where are your cymbals? False one, play!”
 In lusty dance, the floor’s a-sway;
 Krakowiaks their mood exalts,
 With the mazurka and the waltz.
 The Jew beneath his breath salutes
 All with a mutter: “Gentry brutes!”
 —“Fine, that’s enough! A song now chant!”
 —“I cannot! Nay, by God, I can’t!”
 —“Don’t swear, you dog! You’ll not evade.”
 —“What would you have? ‘The Wretched Maid?’”—

*“There once was a Handzia,
 A poor, crippled creature,
 Who swore her sore feet
 Were her body’s worst feature;
 And so to the work in the fields
 Of her lord she’d not go.
 Instead, the young men
 This most cunning of lasses
 Would follow afield
 In the tall clinging grasses,
 Most quiet, and furtive and slow.”*

—“Enough! It is an ugly song:
 Schismatics⁸³ sing it all day long.”
 —“What would you like? This one perhaps?
 But wait! My memory may lapse. . . .”
*“Before the landlord, Theodore,
 A Jew is dancing on the floor,*

⁸³As the Orthodox Ukrainians were called by the Poles.

*At times retreating,
Then forward fleeting,
Before the landlord, Theodore,
Dancing for all he's worth. . . ."*

—"Good, that's enough! Now pay us well!"

—"You're joking, sir! The answer tell—
Pay you for what?"

—"For listening

To hear an ugly fellow sing.

I do not jest. Let's have the gold!"

—"Where can I find it? You've been told
I've not a groat; my only wealth
Is in Your Graces' gracious health."

—"You lie, you dog! You must confess!
Come, gentles, cease from gentleness
And use our whips!"

They swished with pain

And Leiba's back is crossed again.

They flogged so hard without a doubt

That even feathers flew about . . .

—"I've not a copeck, none, I swear!

Though me to little bits you tear
I could not find a coin! Help! Help!"

—"Just wait, we'll give you aid, you whelp!"

—"Stop! Stop! I'll tell you of a thing . . ."

—"We're listening, we're listening,
But do not lie! If you should croak,
Your lying would not stay the stroke."

—"No . . . in Vilshana . . ."

—"There's your wealth?"

—"No, not my money, by my health!

I tried to say, amid your mocks . . ."

—"That in that town the Orthodox
Into each house are forced to squeeze
The folk of many families?

We know it well; the game we're at
Has cut the rascals down to that . . ."⁸⁴

⁸⁴A reference to the Polish pogroms of the Orthodox Ukrainians in the Kiev region in 1766.

—“Not that, ah no . . . I beg your pardon . . .
 I pray your luck may never harden,
 Have gold in fact and in your dreams! . . .
 Now in Vilshana-town it seems
 The sacristan, within the church,
 Has a fine daughter, worth your search.
 Oksana is a maiden rare
 In beauty quite beyond compare.
 And heaps of gold! Not his, of course,
 But you need never ask its source!”
 —“Of course the cash will please our sight!
 Old Leiba is completely right;
 But to make sure he speaks the truth,
 He'll guide us on our way forsooth.
 Get dressed.”

The Poles, in hope to thrive,
 In ardour to Vilshana drive.
 Only a single Polish punk
 Lies underneath a bench, so drunk
 He cannot rise, but mutters this
 In ecstasies of maudlin bliss:
 “While life by such as we is cherished,
 Our Poland has not surely perished.”⁸⁵

IV. THE SACRISTAN

*“In a lovely grove
 Not a breeze is pining;
 The moon rides high
 And the stars are shining.
 Come out, my darling,—
 I wait for you here—
 Come at least for an hour
 My precious dear!
 Appear, my pigeon,
 And we shall coo
 And sorrow together:
 Tonight from you
 I leave on a journey.
 My dearest heart,*

⁸⁵The first two lines of the Polish national anthem.

*Come, coo with me, birdie,
 Before we part . . .
 How heavy and sad
 Is my bosom's smart!"*

Thus, as he walks along the grove,
 Our young Yarema sings
 And seeks Oksana, but the lass
 Seems to have taken wings.
 The stars are sparkling in the sky,
 The silver moon's alight;
 The birch tree hears the nightingale
 Beside the well of night;
 Upon a bush beside the stream
 It pours its song out clear
 As if it knew the Cossack lad
 Awaited his young dear,
 While young Yarema, 'mid that song,
 Can scarcely drag his feet along;
 He does not see or hear.

"What use to me can be my handsome face
 If I have not been blessed with fortune's grace?
 My youthful years are lost; I am alone,
 A blade of grass amid a field of stone,
 Caught by the blustering wind and carried off.
 None know my value, and the people scoff.
 Do men reject me since I'm loved by none?
 Nay, one heart have I held, though only one,
 One sincere soul, and now it seems that she,
 Even my darling, has forsaken me!"
 He wept; then wiped the tears off with his sleeve.
 —"Farewell, then! On my journey I must leave,
 Either to make my fortune or beyond
 The Dnieper find the death of which I'm fond.
 For me you'll shed no tears, without a doubt,
 Nor will you watch the raven pecking out
 Those sparkling eyes, those living Cossack eyes,
 That once you used to kiss with gentle sighs!
 Forget my tears, forget the sorry waif,
 Forget you swore to love me. Marry safe!

I'm not your match, a coarse, grey homespun man,
 While you're the daughter of a sacristan!
 Choose whom you will—such is my destiny!
 Forget me, dear, and do not grieve for me!
 And if you hear that in some foreign field
 Yarema's shattered body lies concealed,
 My soul, dear heart, in all its anguish knows
 That you at least will pray for my repose!"
 Propped on his staff, he wept amid his woes.

Softly he weeps . . . Then suddenly
 A rustle seems to greet him . . .
 Among the tree-trunks, weasel-quick,
 Oksana steals to meet him.
 He rushed to her; the pair embraced . . .
 "Sweetheart!" Their hearts grow faint.
 "Sweetheart!" they frequently repeat.
 Then silence brings constraint.
 "Enough, my bird!"
 —"A little more,
 Again, my falcon fair!
 Draw out my soul! Once more, again . . .
 I'm weary, I declare!"
 —"Then rest awhile, my fairest star!
 Heaven your course begat!"
 He spread his jacket on the ground . . .
 His angel smiled, and sat.
 —"You, too, must sit beside me here!"
 He stooped, and they embraced.
 —"Where were you shining all this while,
 My star, my darling chaste?"
 —"I have been late today because
 My father's ill, you see,
 And all this while I've tended him."
 —"With not a thought for me?"
 —"Oh, what a cruel thing to say!"
 Her bright eyes brimmed with tears.
 —"Don't weep, dear, it was but a jest."
 —"A jest!"

Her smile appears.

She leaned her head against his own
 And seemed to fall asleep.
 —“Oksana, it was but a jest
 And you could really weep!
 Well, no more tears, now; look at me;
 Tomorrow I'll be gone:
 Yes, I shall be too far away
 For you to gaze upon!
 Tomorrow night, in Chihirin,⁸⁶
 I'll get a blessed sword
 To win me gold and silver bright
 And glory all-adored;
 I'll dress you fair, I'll shoe you fine,
 And set you up to view;
 Enthroned you like a hetman's spouse
 And then admire you . . .
 While I shall live, I'll look at you.”
 —“Perhaps you will forget.
 You will grow rich and with the lords
 For Kiev off will set,
 To find yourself a noble dame.
 My name you'll know no more!”
 —“Could any be more fair than you?”
 —“There may be many a score.”
 —“That were a sin to say, my dear,
 For none more fair could be
 Beyond the earth, beyond the sky,
 Beyond the deep, blue sea;
 No one is lovelier than you!”
 —“What foolish things you say!
 Come to your senses!”
 —“Nay, it's true!”
 And then again they sway,
 Locked in each other's arms enlaced,
 With sweetest nothings fed;
 And thus they kissed and thus embraced
 By perfect passion led;
 And still they wept and doubly swore
 The love that each would give.

⁸⁶A provincial town, southeast of Kiev, for a time a hetman capital.

Yarema told her all his dreams
Of how they both would live;
How he would dress her all in gold,
How his career he'd gain,
And how the haydamaks would slay
The Poles in fair Ukraine.
He then would his own master be,
If he from war survived.
Surely, young women, you'd be sick
To hear such dreams contrived:
—"Imagine telling us such stuff!
Disgusting!" If your mother
Or father were to see that you
Your spirits daily smother
In reading nonsense such as this,
They'd cry out at the sin!
And then, and then . . . But don't you find
How interesting it's been?
In spite of all, I'd like to speak
About a Cossack lad
Beneath a willow, by a stream,
Who kissed his sweetheart sad;
While his Oksana, precious dove,
Still coos and kisses back,
As she inclines her head to him
And weeps forebodings black:
"My dearest heart! My treasured one!
My falcon past compare! . . ."
Even the willows bent to hear
The words she whispered there.
What lovely speech! Ah, beauties fair,
I'll tell thereof no whit,
Lest in the dark, approaching night
You all should dream of it.
So let the pair of lovers part
As softly as they met,
As gently and as lovingly,
That none may see with fret
The maiden's and the Cossack's tears
Unhindered, flowing free.
In this life they may meet again . . .
Perhaps . . . but we shall see . . .

Now let us to the sacristan's repair.
 The windows are ablaze. What happens there?
 I must peer in and tell you, by that light . . .
 Would I had never seen so foul a sight,
 Nor that I had such horrors to relate!
 My heart is sick at what men perpetrate.
 See the confederates—at torture tense—
 These men who rise in Liberty's defence!
 How they defend it! For this task before them,
 Curs'd be their hour of birth and she that bore them,
 Bringing them forth to know the light of day!
 See at the sacristan's their devils' play,
 Children of hell! For with the flames of Doom
 The stove-fire blazes, lighting up the room.
 There in a corner, like a pup, is trembling
 The cowering Jew. The Polish lords assembling,
 Shout to the sacristan: "Do you want to live?
 Where is your money?"

Not a word he'll give.

They twist his hands with rope; down to the ground
 They smite him; but he utters not a sound,
 No, not a word.

—"There other tortures are:

Bring on the glowing coals! Where's boiling tar?
 Pour it upon him! What! Too cool for souls?
 Then quickly christen him with white-hot coals!
 Well? Will you tell us? Not a groan of hate!
 My, what a stubborn brute! Well, just you wait!"
 Into his boots the gleaming coals they shed.

—"Come, drive a nail into his stubborn head!"

The torture he no longer could endure
 But prostrate fell, without the shriving pure
 And blessing of the Church. Aloud he cried:
 "Oksana, O my daughter!" And he died.

The hardened Poles, frustrated in their fun,
 Stopped to bethink themselves:

—"What's to be done?"

Come, gentlemen, let us deliberate.
 To cover up this fellow and his fate,
 Let's burn the church down!"

—"Help, now! Help, I pray,
 All who believe in God!" In loud dismay,

A voice is crying, desperate and shrill.
 —“Who utters an alarm?” The Poles grow still.
 Oksana rushes in and screams her loss;
 Then falls a-swoon, her outstretched arms a cross.

The Colonel motioned to his company,
 And all the sullen Poles, like dogs, agree
 And leave the room. The leader, somewhat bolder,
 Bore off the swooned young woman on his shoulder.
 Where are you now, Yarema? Look at this!
 But he is on his journey. Full of bliss,
 A martial song from other days he trolls,
 How Nalivayko⁸⁷ fought against the Poles.

The Poles have disappeared; unconscious, too,
 Oksana has been lost to human view.
 Dogs in Vilshana here and there are fain
 To raise a bark and then are still again.
 The moon is white as silver; people sleep;
 Likewise the sacristan, alas so deep
 That naught can ever wake that man devout.
 His dwelling's light still burned, at last went out
 And as it did, a shudder shook the dead
 As the sad darkness closed around his head.

V. THE FEAST IN CHIHIRIN

Hetmans, O haughty hetmans, if you were to rise again,
 If you were to rise and look at your ancient Chihirin,
 The town that you once erected, the seat of your former reign,
 You would burst into bitter tears, for you would not see therein
 The old-time Cossack glory but ruins upon the plain!
 The squares where the troops you marshalled once flowed like a
 mighty sea,
 Where they blazed at the wave of the bunchuks,⁸⁸ red legions ripe
 for spoil,
 And the great chief on his jet-black steed would rise in rapture free,
 And wave his mace to the mighty waves and the sea would begin to
 boil,

To boil and overflow its ranks,
 Over the steppes and up the banks,

⁸⁷One of the early Cossack leaders. See fn. 22.

⁸⁸See fn. 55.

Calamity itself felt fear . . .
 But not a Cossack now is here.
 Why dwell on that? Their fate is clear.
 And when a thing has met its end,
 Let us not now recall it, friend,
 Perhaps the Muscovites might hear . . .
 For what avails it to recall?
 Your tears would patter down.
 Yet let us glance at Chihirin,
 That vanished Cossack town.

From past the forest, out of mist,
 The moon floats high and fine;
 It glows with round and ruddy face,
 It flames but does not shine;
 It seems to know the Cossack folk
 Will soon not need its light,
 That conflagration's blaze will warm
 And make the country bright.

Then it grew dark. In Chihirin,
 As in a coffin black,
 'Twas very sad. (Aye, thus it was
 Through all Ukraine, alack,
 The Eve of good Saint Makoviy⁸⁹
 When all the swords were bless'd.)
 No voice was heard; at times a bat
 Across the square progressed,
 Or on the village common
 A lonely owl would hoot.
 But where are all the people?
 Where dark trees overshoot
 Upon the Tiasmin's⁹⁰ margin
 They've gathered, young and old,
 The rich man and the poor man,
 A mighty feast to hold.

In a dark grove, in a green wooded pass,
 The fettered horses crop the after-grass;

⁸⁹A church feast occurring on August 1.

⁹⁰A tributary of the Dnieper in the Chihirin region.

Black are the steeds, already saddled there.
Where will they go? What riders will they bear?
Look! You will see!

Low hills the host engird.
Mute as if dead, they utter not a word.
These are the haydamaks . . . at the alarm
The eagles have assembled, swift to harm
With blood and flame their enemies so fell . . .
They will give back to Poles their gifts of hell.

The valley's shadows now conceal
Great waggons filled with fish of steel:⁹¹
This gift a generous lady⁹² gave
Who knew the way her land to save,
A noble lady—let her reign!⁹³
No need to make their purpose plain! . . .
The waggons are so closely spanned,
There's not a spot where one may stand:
From Smila⁹⁴ and from Chihirin
Cossacks and chiefs have ridden in . . .
For a sure deed they gather here.
The Cossacks and their chieftains dear
Pace up and down in mantles black
And softly talk of the attack.
Their celebrations thus begin
As all men gaze at Chihirin,⁹⁵
A kobzar blind in sad array
Sings to them now his mournful lay:

*"Wallachians, Wallachians!
How few of you are left!
And you too, O Moldavians,
Of lordship are bereft.
The lords that once you followed
The Tartars' yoke restrains,*

⁹¹Weapons.

⁹²Catherine II, who was falsely believed to have sent the weapons to the haydamaks to be used against the Poles. Russia favoured any insurrection that might weaken Poland.

⁹³Expressed ironically.

⁹⁴A town in the southeastern part of Kiev province.

⁹⁵A brief prose dialogue is here omitted.

Or as the Sultan's hirelings
 They toil in servile chains!
 Enough, cast off your worries!
 Offer a noble prayer,
 And join with us, the Cossacks,
 In fellowship so rare;
 Call back to mind old Bohdan,⁹⁶
 The Hetman long ago!
 With sharpened blades, beside us,
 New mastery you'll know;
 With blessed blades we'll win it,
 And with our own Maksim⁹⁷
 We shall make merriment tonight
 And smite the Poles with vim.
 Our banquet will make mirth in hell;
 Earth's shudders will be great;
 The heavens will be set ablaze
 Our feast to celebrate!"⁹⁸

The Cossacks and the haydamaks
 Sit listening in their bivouacs,
 And lest the host should fall asleep
 They beg the bard his place to keep
 And stir them with another song.
 His mighty tones the spell prolong:

"The eagle soars, the grey one soars;
 The sky his ardour proves,—
 Maksim the chieftain ranges far
 Throughout the steppes and groves.
 The eagle soars, the grey one soars;
 His eaglets fly behind;
 Maksim the chieftain ranges far;
 Bold lads with him you'll find.
 Those lads are Zaporozhians,⁹⁹
 His sons in freedom's right;
 He stops to think what he should do—
 To drink or else to fight.

⁹⁶Hetman Bohdan Khmelnitsky. See fn. 165.

⁹⁷Maksim Zalizniak, one of the leaders of the haydamaks.

⁹⁸Again a brief prose dialogue is omitted. Instead, the next six lines, which are not actually Shevchenko's, summarize the conversation.

⁹⁹The Cossacks whose permanent encampment was beyond the Dnieper's rapids.

Perhaps to dance, then at the tune
 The very ground will shake;
 He starts a song—they sing so loud
 That fortune's smile will break.
 Brandy and mead he quaffs with joy
 From tankard, not from glass;
 If he should meet an enemy,
 He will not let him pass.
 Such, lads, is now our otaman,
 Our eagle grey of wing!
 With all his might he loves to fight
 And pay the reckoning.
 No dwelling of his own has he,
 No orchard, pond, or field;
 The steppe and sea on which he roams
 Will gold and glory yield.
 Behave yourselves, ye knavish Poles!
 You raging curs must mind him;
 Maksim is on the Highway Black,
 His haydamaks behind him."¹⁰⁰

The mustered haydamaks were fain
 To hear another kobzar strain
 Of ancient deeds his praise might con,
 And so the old blind bard sang on:

"The haydamaks had passed the night
 Within a wooded vale;
 Their fettered horses, pastured well,
 Were saddled for the trail.
 The Polish lordlings passed the night
 In mansions broad and high;
 There they caroused and turned to sleep . . ."
 (The sound of church bells is heard.)
 "The bells! The bells!" they cry.
 The arches of the leafy grove
 Give back the solemn tone.
 "Go, say your prayers!" the kobzar said,
 "I'll end my song alone."

¹⁰⁰Once more a brief prose dialogue is omitted. The next four lines render its gist in verse.

The haydamaks pressed forward—
 Such zeal the chime imparts—
 And high upon their shoulders bore
 The chumaks' heavy carts
 That oxen had been wont to draw.
 The bard resumes his tale:
 "The haydamaks had passed the night
 Within a wooded vale . . ."
 He mutters as he trudges on
 But does not sing it out.
 —"God's beggar, tell another tale!"
 The warriors all shout
 As on their backs they bear the carts.
 —"Fine, lads, here's one for you!
 Here is a tune to move your feet—
 Let's see what you can do!"
 With waggons on their backs they dance
 A lusty rigadoon.
 The kobzar, as he wildly plays,
 Add words to match the tune.¹⁰¹

—"Stop! Stop! Have all the senses left your pate?
 What are you trying now to celebrate?
 And you, old dog, instead of prayers to shake you,
 Are raving drivell! May the devil take you!"
 In anger shouts the otaman; and they halt.
 Here stands a church. A cantor's tones exalt
 The priests' procession where the censers swing;
 The crowd grows silent from all uttering;
 No tinkle sounds; amid the waggons pent,
 The holy priests with long brush-sprinklers went;
 Behind them came the banners, slowly led
 As at the blessing of the Paschal bread.
 "Pray, brothers pray!" in accents high and loud
 The stern archpriest harangues the kneeling crowd.
 "Around our holy Chihirin you'll see
 Great guardians from the other world will be
 And will not let the saint¹⁰² be crucified.
 While in Ukraine's defence your squadrons ride,

¹⁰¹Two songs are omitted for being so colloquial as to be virtually untranslatable.

¹⁰²The town of Chihirin, made sacred by Cossack exploits in the cause of Ukraine's freedom.

Protect your Mother,¹⁰³ let that soul of hers
 Not perish through her executioners!
 From times of Konashevich¹⁰⁴ low we lie;
 The burnings do not cease, our people die;
 In dungeons end their days, in naked woe;
 Our children unbaptized to manhood grow,
 Our Cossack children; and our maidens fair,
 The beauty of our Cossack land so rare,
 Fade, like their mothers, in the Poles' possession,
 While their bared braids, beneath that dire aggression,
 Are white with streaks of shame; those lovely eyes
 Have lost their sparkle as the future dies;
 The Cossack's loath his sister to unchain,
 Nay, he himself all unabashed will deign
 To bear the Polish yoke.¹⁰⁵ Woe to our land!
 Pray, children! The Last Judgment is at hand
 For our Ukraine that Polish hands have rent,
 While the dark hills give back the dark lament.
 Recall the righteous hetmans: Can you tell
 Where are their graves today? And where may dwell
 The bones of Bohdan,¹⁰⁶ now his glory's done?
 Where is the tomb, even a lowly one,
 Of Ostrianitsia,¹⁰⁷ of his meed bereft?
 And where is Nalivayko's?¹⁰⁸ None are left!
 The living and the dead the Poles have burned.
 Where is Bohun,¹⁰⁹ who one great winter churned
 With Polish dead the waters of Inhul,
 Frozen with frost for battles wonderful?
 The Poles range far and wide. Bohdan is dead,
 Who once could render Zhovti Vody¹¹⁰ red

¹⁰³Ukraine.

¹⁰⁴Petro Konashevich-Sahaydachny, hetman of Ukraine (1614–22), who warred successfully against the Turks and the Muscovites.

¹⁰⁵Some Ukrainian Uniates served in the Polish ranks.

¹⁰⁶Polish commander Czarnecki burned and scattered Khmelnytsky's bones in 1664 when he destroyed the Cossack church where they were buried.

¹⁰⁷An earlier Cossack leader who campaigned against the Poles.

¹⁰⁸See fn. 22.

¹⁰⁹Colonel Bohun, one of Khmelnytsky's lieutenants, who defeated the Poles on the banks of the Inhul (tributary to the Buh river) and glutted that stream with their corpses.

¹¹⁰A river in the Kherson region, a tributary to the Inhul; and Korsun, a town in the Kiev province, situated on the Ros River. In both these localities Khmelnytsky inflicted severe defeats on the Polish troops.

And Ros that trims its banks with greenery.
 The ancient Korsun lies in sad debris
 And sees no soul that might its sorrow share.
 The Alta¹¹¹ weeps: "To live is to despair!
 I dry, dry up. . . ." Taras¹¹² is likewise gone—
 Our ancient sire has lost his every son!
 Yet weep not brethren: for beside us stand
 The spirits of the saints of this our land.
 Archangel Michael¹¹³ moves with us today;
 And judgment is at hand. Pray, brethren, pray!"
 And pray they did, as there they knelt,
 In simple faith serenely felt;
 The Cossacks did not doubt their cause
 But felt, like children, that the laws
 Of Heaven would give them victory . . .
 Though otherwise their fate would be—
 Over their Cossack graves too soon
 Were white funereal kerchiefs strewn.
 The only glory that they found
 Was a white kerchief on their mound.
 Soon disappeared that mute lament
 And with it all remembrance went. . . .¹¹⁴

Raising his voice, the deacon cried:
 "Death to the foeman! Hither stride
 And take the knives! They have been bless'd!"
 The heart grew chill at that request.
 The bells broke out in noisy pealing;
 The echo through the grove went reeling:
 "They have been bless'd!" And loud of breath:
 "Death to the Polish gentry, death!"
 Each took his blade; these flashed their bane
 To the far limits of Ukraine.

¹¹¹See fn. 29.

¹¹²See fn. 11.

¹¹³Patron angel of Kiev.

¹¹⁴The Cossack struggle against Poland resulted in failure. Being weakened, Poland was partitioned, and Ukraine, by the Treaty of Pereyaslav, fell under the Russian sway. The Cossack glory now lay buried in the mounds. See "My Friendly Epistle," p. 255, lines 13–16.

VI. THE SIGNAL¹¹⁵

One day of butchery was still in store
 At the hands of raging Poles; just one day more,
 A day on which Ukraine and Chihirin
 Were plunged in sorrow by the alien's sin.
 And yet it passed, St. Makoviy's own Day,
 The great feast of Ukraine, did pass away—
 While all their enemies, with souls of mud,
 Made themselves drunk with brandy and with blood,
 Cursed the schismatics, tortured them unfeeling,
 And damned them when they found naught worth the
 stealing.

Meanwhile the haydamaks due silence keep
 Until the villains should be all asleep.
 These laid them down without the least surmise
 That on the morrow they would never rise.
 The Poles now slept; the usurers' delight
 Was still to count their money in the night;
 They, too, at last lay down upon their gold
 And slept an evil sleep, abhorred and cold!

Meanwhile the moon sailed forth to wander free
 And view the sky, the stars, the earth, the sea,
 And watch mankind to find the way they trod
 And tell it in the morning all to God.
 The bright-faced one lights up the whole Ukraine . . .
 He shines, but does he see where she has lain,
 Vilshana's child, Oksana, sorry waif?
 What sort of torment does her fate vouchsafe?
 Where is she tortured? Does she moan in fear?
 And does Yarema know? And can he hear?
 We shall speak later of that reckoning.
 Of other themes I now must play and sing:
 Woe, not young women, as my tale must stand;
 I sing the sorrow of the Cossack land;
 Hear, then, that you may tell it to your sons
 And they to theirs, while deep remembrance runs,

¹¹⁵The signal to be given at about six o'clock in the morning, at "the third cockcrow," as the episode is entitled in the original.

How the fierce Cossacks smote the gentry down
Because their rule brought evil of renown.

Terror moved through all Ukraine,
Through every field it spread;
Endlessly the blood flowed forth
And stained the steppes with red.
Long it flowed, then dried at last.
Steppes once more are green;
There above our forebears' bones
Purple mounds are seen.
But what avails their lofty height?
It stirs no memory's embers;
For no one weeps above them now,
And no one still remembers.
Only the wind with gentle voice
Above their summits blows;
Only the dews of early morn
Upon their grass repose
And wash it. But the sun comes up;
It heats the grave-mound dry;
Descendants are indifferent;
They sow their landlords' rye!
Of all their number, who can tell
The place of Gonta's¹¹⁶ tomb
And where the blessed martyr lies
After his day of doom?
Where's Zalizniak,¹¹⁷ that soul sincere?
Where does he rest at last?
The times are foul! The hangman reigns,
And none recalls the past.

Terror moved through all Ukraine,
Through every field it spread;
Endlessly the blood flowed forth
And stained the steppes with red.
Loud outrage roars by day and night;
The groaning earth gives way;
Sad, dire it was; but memory
Makes the heart leap today.

¹¹⁶See fn. 135.

¹¹⁷One of the chief leaders of the third haydamak insurrection.

Fair moon, behind the mountain hide your light!
 We do not need you to make darkness bright;
 You would be terrified at sights of woe
 As Alta, Ros,¹¹⁸ and Seine¹¹⁹ now overflow
 And feed the billows of a sea of blood.
 What will come next? Ah, hide you from that flood,
 Behind the mountains, lest this reign of rage
 Doom you to weep in sorrowful old age!

Ah, sadly, sadly through the sky
 Moves on the bright-faced moon.
 A Cossack by the Dnieper walks,
 Perhaps returning soon
 From a gay party; mournfully
 He scarce can drag his feet.
 Perhaps his sweetheart loves him not?
 His poverty's complete?
 She loves him; though his garments scant
 Show patch on patch today,
 He's handsome too; if he survives,
 Sure wealth will come his way.
 Why is he then so sorrowful
 And at the point of tears?
 His quick premonitory heart
 Some dark affliction fears.
 His heart's aware, but will not tell
 What grief he has in store.
 Yet that will pass. . . . Meanwhile, it seems
 None live here any more.
 There's not a sound of cock or dog,
 No voice of beast or fowl,
 Save that far off, beyond the grove,
 One hears the grey wolves howl.

Heedless of them, Yarema walks—
 Not to his lass he goes
 Nor to Vilshana, party-bound,
 Rather, to meet his foes

¹¹⁸Alta, see fn. 29; Ros, see fn. 110.

¹¹⁹A reference to the Night of St. Bartholomew (1572), during which the Huguenots were slaughtered in Paris by French Catholics.

At fair Cherkassy.¹²⁰ There he'll hear
 Third cockcrow¹²¹ give the sign;
 Onwards he walks and musing looks
 On Dnieper's wave divine:

"O Dnieper, my mighty Dnieper, so vast and broad and strong,
 Much hast thou borne, O Sire, of blood to the mighty sea,
 Of Cossack blood, my friend, and more wilt thou bear ere long.
 Thou hast always reddened its blue and for more it has cried to thee.
 But at last will the sea be sated; tonight an infernal feast
 Will roar in turbulent slaughter through the length and breadth of
 Ukraine

And blood will flow in torrents, from the veins of our foes released,
 The blood of the Polish gentry. And the Cossack shall rise again!
 The hetmans will rise once more, in their garments of cloth of gold,
 And liberty will be roused; and a Cossack chorus roar:
 'The Poles, our oppressors, are dead!' In the Steppes of Ukraine as of
 old

Pray grant, dear Lord, that the golden mace may flash to our eyes
 once more!"

Such were the hapless fellow's thoughts
 As in patched clothes he strode
 And bore the blessed blade in hand
 Down the Cherkassy road.
 The Dnieper seemed to hear him speak;
 In heaving ranks on ranks
 Its great waves rose up, broad and blue,
 Between its reedy banks.
 It roars and groans and howls amain
 And bends the reed-beds low;
 The thunders rumble, lightnings flash
 As through the clouds they go;
 While young Yarema goes his way,
 Oblivious to it all;
 At times he smiles, at times he weeps;
 Thoughts hold his heart in thrall.
 "With my Oksana, joy is full,
 Even in homespun dressed;

¹²⁰A provincial town on the Dnieper, southeast of Kiev.

¹²¹The signal for the insurrection to begin.

But in this venture I may die,
 The thought brings sad unrest."
 Beyond the valley, loud and clear,
 The cock salutes the prime!
 "Cherkassy's far! Dear God above,
 May I be there in time!"

VII. THE RED BANQUET

(Halayda)

Throughout the length of our Ukraine
 The church-bells raised their call;
 The haydamaks raised up their cry:
 "Death to the gentry!¹²² All!
 Death to the gentry! Let's to work,
 And warm the very clouds!"
 The Smila¹²³ region is aflame,
 Wrapped in its reddened shrouds;
 But Medvedivka is the first
 To warm the startled sky.
 All Smila's parish is ablaze,
 The blood is flowing high,
 While Korsun burns and Kaniv burns,
 Cherkassy, Chihirin;
 Down the Dark Highway sweeps the fire
 As days of death begin.
 Up to Uman the blood-stream flows;
 Podilia bathes in fire
 As Gonta makes a merry feast;
 Zalizniak slakes his ire
 Up in Cherkassy; likewise there
 Yarema does his best;
 One tempers thus his damask steel
 And one his sword-blade bless'd.
 "Good, good, my lads! Go to it now,
 The evil foeman routing!
 Good work, my boys!"—out in the square
 Bold Zalizniak is shouting.

¹²²Polish gentry.¹²³This and other localities mentioned here are in the southeastern part of the Kiev province, around Cherkassy, where the rebellion flared up.

A hell surrounds him as he goes;
 In that inferno set,
 The haydamaks all beat about;
 Yarema in a sweat,
 A ghastly sight, hews down the foe—
 Three, four, he makes them fall
 In one fell swoop.—“Good work, my son!
 The devil take them all!
 By this you’ll gain a paradise,
 Or reach a captain’s station.
 Just keep it up! And forward, lads!”
 Thus they, in wild elation,
 In garrets and in storehouse bins,
 In cellars, everywhere,
 Mow down the foe, and loot his nest.
 “Stop, lads! Your bodies spare,
 For you are weary. Take a rest!”
 The streets and the bazaars
 Are strewn with corpses, wet with blood:
 “Too few are yet their scars!
 Their punishment must vaster be,
 That their unchristian souls
 May rise no more to vex our land!”
 His force the square patrols
 And young Yarema with them goes;
 He hears a summons due
 From Zalizniak: “Come here, my lad!
 I will not frighten you!”
 —“I’m not afraid!” he doffed his cap,
 And stood there, brave and brown.
 —“Where are you from? And what’s your name?”
 —“I’m from Vilshana-town.”
 —“Vilshana, where the sacristan
 These evil dogs did slay?”
 —“Where? Who?”
 —“Vilshana was the town . . .
 His daughter, too, they say,
 Has been abducted by the rogues.”
 —“His daughter . . . is that clear?”
 —“The sacristan’s. You know the man?”
 —“Oksana, O my dear!”

Yarema hardly spoke these words,
 And swooned in sheer despair.
 —“Aha! So that’s it . . . shabby luck!
 Mikola, give him air!”
 Revived, he cried: “Dear father, friend!
 Had I a hundred hands,
 I’d arm them all with sabres sharp
 To cleanse our tortured lands.
 Let me inflict revenge on them
 That hell itself may heed!”
 —“Good, O my son, swords will be found
 For such a sacred deed.
 Come with us to Lisianka now;
 With swords we shall descend!”
 —“Let’s go, let’s go, my otaman,
 My father and my friend!
 On to the very ends of earth
 I’ll fly to set her free;
 From hell itself I’d snatch her, Sire,
 If hell should gape for me . . .
 Alas, perhaps at earth’s far bounds
 Oksana I’ll not see!”
 —“Perhaps you will. And, by the way,
 Your name is still unknown.”
 —“Yarema.”
 —“And the surname too?”
 —“Alas, Sir, I have none!”
 —“No surname? . . . You’re a bastard then?
 Why, then, we shall enroll ’ee.
 Mikola, set the youngster down
 And let the name be Holiy!”¹²⁴
 So write it down!”
 —“The name is foul!”
 —“Well, how about Bida?”¹²⁴
 —“That, too, sounds bad.”
 —“Then let us see:
 Pray write down Halayda!”¹²⁴

¹²⁴Holiy (Naked); Bida (Trouble, Misfortune); Halayda (Homeless, Wanderer).
 It was customary among the Cossacks to assume, or be given, nicknames when they
 joined the Sitch forces.

So it was done.—“Well, Halayda,
 Let’s go and fight some more!
 Perhaps you’ll find your fortune there . . .
 On, lads, to pay the score!”
 Then to Yarema, from the camp,
 They give an extra steed.
 Astride the coal-black horse, he smiled,
 Then burst in tears indeed.
 Beyond the town-gate, they beheld
 Cherkassy soar in flames.
 —“Lads, are all here?”—“Yea, Sire, we are!”
 —“Ride on then!” he exclaims.
 Along the Dnieper’s wooded bank
 The Cossack troopers ride;
 Behind them comes the kobzar old,
 Who sways from side to side
 As on his trotting horse he jogs
 And sings them on to war:
 “*O haydamaks, O haydamaks,*
 Maksim is ranging far!”
 So on they ride. Cherkassy’s walls
 Are all ablaze the while.
 But no one bothers to look back!
 All banter, and revile
 The haughty gentry; part converse
 And part the kobzar hears;
 While Żalizniak, who rides in front,
 Is pricking up his ears.
 As thus he rides and smokes his pipe,
 He speaks no word at all;
 Yarema near him gallops mute.
 The grove with tree-tops tall,
 The verdant vale, the mighty stream,
 The hilltops’ bold relief,
 Sky, stars, men, all that’s good and fair,
 Even his savage grief—
 All these have left his consciousness!
 He nothing sees nor hears;
 Our hero is profoundly sad
 And yet he sheds no tears.

No, he weeps not: a viper fierce
 Sucks out with greedy art
 His tears and twines about his soul
 And lacerates his heart.

“Ah, tears, abundant flood of tears!
 You can wash grief away—
 Then vanquish mine! To live is hard!
 The ocean’s surging spray
 And Dnieper are not vast enough
 To wash my sorrow clear!
 And shall I then myself destroy?
 Oksana, O my dear!
 Where are you now? Look hither, pray,
 My love, my only one!
 See your Yarema! Where are you?
 Perhaps her hopes are done,
 And she, too, curses evil fate
 And as she curses, dies;
 Perhaps she spends her days in chains
 In dungeon agonies.
 Perhaps she calls to mind her lad,
 Vilshana calls to mind;
 And speaks to me: ‘Sweetheart of mine,
 Embrace me now, be kind!
 Let us embrace, my falcon fair,
 And swoon forever thus;
 Let Polish torture do its worst,
 We’ll be oblivious!’
 Blows, blows the wind from Liman’s¹²⁵ shore;
 It bows the poplar’s crown;
 A maiden’s heart may likewise bend
 When sorrow stoops her down;
 Though for a while she broods and grieves,
 Already she may be
 A lady dressed in mantles rich,
 A Pole’s mate . . . Misery!

¹²⁵The Dnieper’s estuary.

Punish, O Lord, my soul with hell,
 Pour out a sea of pain,
 Let harshest scourges on me burst,
 But such a grief restrain!
 Even a stone were shattered quite
 Beneath such torment weird!
 Oksana, O my precious love,
 Where have you disappeared?"
 At that, a sudden flood of tears
 Came gushing, warm and salt.
 And meantime Zalizniak cries out
 And bids his troopers halt:
 —"Into the forest, lads! 'Tis dawn;
 Our horses are far spent;
 There let them graze!" And quietly
 In the dark woods they went.

VIII. THE REGION OF HUPALO

The sun had set. Throughout Ukraine
 The flames their hunger glut;
 And everywhere the gentry quaked,
 In lofty buildings shut.
 On gibbets in the villages
 Unnumbered corpses hung;
 These were the chiefs—the common sort
 In nameless piles were flung.
 The dogs and crows, upon the streets
 And crossroads where they lay,
 Devoured their flesh, pecked out their eyes,
 And no one said them nay . . .
 Only the children had been left
 In village bivouacs,—
 The women, with their oven-forks,
 Had joined the haydamaks.

Such was the horror that prevailed
 Throughout the whole Ukraine!

The slaughter was far worse than hell . . .
 Why must these folk be slain?¹²⁶
 For they are of one common stock.
 Could they not live as brothers?
 But no! it was against their will
 That each should love the others!
 They sought to shed a brother's blood,
 They coveted his wealth;
 Although their fields and barns were full,
 They grudged a brother's health.
 "Let's kill our brothers! Burn their homes!"
 They spoke, and it was done.
 It seemed an end! But for revenge
 They left the orphan son,
 Who grew to manhood full of tears
 Until his tortured hands
 Became unbound—and blood for blood
 And pang for pang demands!
 One's heart aches as these brother Slavs
 Tear brother Slavs to bits.
 Who is to blame for such a crime?—
 The Polish Jesuits.¹²⁷

While haydamaks were wandering
 Through forest and ravine
 And Halayda, amid their troop,
 With flowing tears was seen,
 By Voronivka's huts they passed,
 Verbivka and Vilshana.
 Then thought Yarema: "Should I ask
 About my love, Oksana?
 No, I will not, lest I reveal
 The reason for my rue."
 But as the haydamaks prepared
 To leave Vilshana too,

¹²⁶Shevchenko abhorred bloodshed, and longed for Ukraine's peaceful relations with her neighbours, as may be gathered from the lines that follow.

¹²⁷The Polish Jesuits provoked the Orthodox Ukrainians to rise in rebellion by seeking to impose Catholicism on them. That, however, was just one reason among many why the insurrection occurred.

He asked a boy: "And is it true
 They killed the sacristan?"
 —"No, uncle; for my father said
 They burned the holy man,
 Those Poles, and bore Oksana off;
 No one was here to save;
 And yesterday the sacristan
 Was buried in his grave."
 He stayed no more . . . "On, on, my steed!"
 Reinless he turned to ride.
 "Would that before I knew of this
 I yesterday had died!
 Whereas today if I should die
 My coffin I should leave
 To search for you, my sweetheart dear!
 Dying I still should grieve."
 Pensive he grew and mute withal,
 As he rode on apace.
 The poor lad found it difficult
 His sorrow to efface.
 The company was riding past
 The Jew's old quarters spare;
 Tavern and barn were smouldering yet,
 But Leiba was not there.
 And my Yarema smiled at that,
 A bitter smile to view:
 "Here, only two short days ago,
 I bent before the Jew,
 Whereas today! . . ."
 Yet grief he felt
 At dark misfortune's load.
 The haydamaks, above the vale,
 Were turning from the road;
 Up with a boy they caught at last
 Upon that lonely track;
 His coat was patched, his shoes were bast,
 His shoulder bore a sack.
 —"Hey beggar-boy! A moment wait!"
 —"I'm not a beggar, Sir,
 But, as you see, a haydamak."
 —"And ugly, I aver!"

From where?"—"From Kirilivka, I."

—"Know you, from where you dwell,
Budishcha¹²⁸ and the lake nearby?"

—"That lake I know full well.

To find it, follow this ravine;

You'll strike it, I declare."

—"And did you see some Poles today?"

—"None of them, anywhere!

But yesterday they ran in droves,—

Branches could not be bless'd

Because the Poles forbade the priests.

That's why we smote with zest!

Father and I used blessèd blades;

Had Mother not been ill,

She too had gone. . . ."

—"Good work, my boy!

This ducat shows good will

And recompense for what you've done!"

He took the piece of gold,

And looked at it and said his thanks.

—"Ride on, my comrades bold!

But, do you hear, permit no noise!

Come, Halayda, with me!

In this ravine there is a lake;

Woods 'neath a hill you'll see,

And in that woods a treasure lies.

When we the place attain,

Instruct our lads to hem it round:

Some rogues may yet remain

To guard the treasure-caves!" They come,

And range the woods about.

At first they cannot see a soul

Then—"What a crowd!" they shout.

"Just see what pears on oak-trees grow!

Let's knock them down, my boys!

Come, quickly, quickly! That's the way!"

And full of horrid joys,

A crop of rotten pears they reap

And slay them to the man:

¹²⁸A village near Kirilivka. Shevchenko lived in Kirilivka as a child. Near it, surrounding a small lake, is the Forest of Hupalo.

They knock them down, they finish them,
 As only Cossacks can.
 They found the treasure; bore it off;
 The pockets of the Poles
 They stripped; then rode Lisianka-way
 In search of guilty souls.

IX. A BANQUET IN LISIANKA

(The Ancient Building)

It now grew dark. From Lisianka
 Sprang up the light of fire;
 And Zalizniak and Gonta lit
 Their pipes in fashion dire,—
 Grim was the way they lighted them!¹²⁹
 Even the damned in hell
 In such a manner cannot smoke!
 Tikich in fashion fell
 Is reddening with alien blood
 And high above it blaze
 The buildings and the houses all;
 Thus Fate inflicts its ways
 On nobles and on poor alike.
 Out in the public square
 Bold Zalizniak with Gonta stands
 And shouts: "Their doom prepare!
 Punish the Poles and make them weep!"
 The lads do punish them.
 Weeping and groans burst forth; one begs,
 One curses to condemn;
 Another prays, confessing all
 His errors to a mate
 Already dead. No one is spared,—
 The ruthless mete out fate.
 Like death itself, they take no thought
 Of beauty, age, or youth
 In gentle ladies, Jewish maids—
 Their blood's a stream, forsooth.

¹²⁹The action was grim, because they lighted their pipes from the fire of the conflagration. Cf. fn. 160.

Neither the crippled nor the old
Nor even children small
Remained alive; for none escaped
The wretched end for all.
All were laid low, and strewn pell-mell
Till not a soul alive
In Lisianka was left that day.
Now conflagrations strive
In lofty tongues of leaping flame
To reach to heaven's crown.
And Halayda ceased not to shout:
"Strike, strike the Poles all down!"
Corpses he slashes, mad with rage,
Hangs up the dead and burns them.
"Give me more Poles to kill, I say,
For punishment concerns them!
Give me more Poles! To drain their blood
I still would persevere!
A sea of blood were not enough!
Oksana, O my dear,
Where are you?" As he shouts, he leaps
To search the flaming glare.
Meanwhile the haydamaks have placed
Stout tables in the square,
And brought in food that they might sup,
Sought food on every side
To banquet while the light remained.
"Let us begin!" they cried.
They feast and round about them there
Red hell gleams maniac;
Hanging from rafters in the flames
The corpses crackle black.
The rafters flicker in the blaze
And burn along with them.
—"Drink, comrades, drink! Pour out some more!
For such a requiem
May we with Polish gentry meet
Once more and end their reigns!"
And Zalizniak in one great breath
The mighty tankard drains.

—“To all your cursèd corpses now,
 Your cursèd souls’ bad end,
 Once more I drink. Drink up, my lads!
 Drink, Gonta, my good friend!”
 —“A moment, pray. I’m waiting now
 To see about these Poles . . .”
 Yarema leaped:
 —“Where are they all?”
 —“What zeal your heart controls!
 Drink brandy, friend!”—“What Poles are these?
 My brother, speak, I say!”
 —“In yonder building, over there,
 They’ve locked themselves away.”
 —“Let’s blow them up!”—“The ancient hall
 Has walls that we must spare!
 It was, indeed, old Bohdan’s hands
 That set the mansion there!”
 —“Old Bohdan’s? For his handiwork
 Our feelings should be tender.”
 —“I sent a message to the knaves
 To ask them to surrender.
 And if they do, I’ll spare the lot.
 If not, I’ll blow them up . . .
 The subterranean mines are set” . . .
 —“And do the Poles still sup?
 Are they alive to count the stars?
 Yet, friend, your plan is good!
 Meantime, let’s drink a tumbler down!”
 —“Drink, all the brotherhood!
 Not to excess—our slaughterous task
 Perhaps is not complete!”
 —“Nay, it is not! Drink then and strike!
 Sing, kobzar, as we meet!
 Not of our sires—as well as they
 We’ve paid the Poles our debt;
 Not of misfortune, for, my lads,
 We have not known it yet.
 Strike up a merry tune, old man,
 Till the ground sway like mad,
 About a widow, young and gay,
 And what a time she had.”

(The kobzar plays and sings.)
 "From village on to village
 The minstrels dance and booze:
 I've sold my eggs and chickens off
 To buy a pair of shoes!

From village on to village,
 I'll dance with trippings deft:
 I've sold my cow, I've sold my ox,
 Only my house is left.

Now to my crony will I sell
 That house of mine, I pledge,
 And buy myself or build myself
 A booth beside a hedge;

And there I'll trade and there I'll sell
 Good brandy by the glass;
 I'll dance and have a merry time
 With all the lads who pass.

Poor little doves, my children all,
 You'll have to take your chances!
 Don't worry, though; just take a look
 At how your mother dances!

I'll hire myself for kitchen work,
 My children send to school,
 But those red shoes I'll surely get
 To be a dancing fool!"

—"The song is good! Come, let us dance!
 Kobzar, a tune we'd share!"
 The kobzar plays, and squattingly
 They whirl about the square.

The ground's a-sway . . . —"Good, Gonta, good!"

—"Maksim, good steps you ply!
 Let's go my friend, let's trip it up,
 Before we have to die!"

(*Gonta sings.*)

"Oh, wonder not, my maidens,
I've rags on every limb;
My father took it easy,
And I take after him."

—"A splendid song! How well you sing!"

—"Maksim, it's now your turn!"

—"A moment wait while I debate
What song your praise may earn."

(*Maksim Zalizniak sings.*)

—"Love anybody's daughter, lad!

I do, and so can you:

The priest's young girl and the cantor's pearl
And the peasant maiden too!"

All of them dance but Halayda,

Who nothing hears or sees;

He sits there at the table's end

And weeps his miseries.

And why? a cloak of richest red

Upon his shoulders shone

And gold he has and glory too . . .

But his Oksana's gone!

No one has he to share his wealth,

No one to share his praise,

And he in utter loneliness

Must end his bitter days!

As yet the poor lad does not know

That his Oksana fair

Is in that building with the lords

Beyond the river there,

Those very Poles who did to death

Her sire, the sacristan.

You monsters! Now behind these walls

You've hidden, to a man.

Look, how your brothers, wicked friends,

Are perishing in pain!

Oksana through the window peeps

At where, amid the slain,

The flames of doomed Lisianka rise.
 "Yarema, where is he?"
 She fondly asks. She does not know
 Of his proximity
 In yonder town, not coarsely clad
 But dressed in rich array:
 Sitting alone and wondering:
 "Where is my lass today?
 My pretty dove whose wings are clipped,
 Where does my darling weep?"
 Then stealthily from the ravine
 He sees a figure creep,
 Dressed like a Cossack. "Who goes there?"
 Yarema's call came straight.
 —"I am Pan¹⁸⁰ Gonta's messenger;
 His pleasure I'll await."
 —"No, you will not, you Jewish dog,
 For death has come for you!"
 —"Good God, I am a haydamak,
 I tell you, not a Jew!
 Here is the Empress' copeck,
 You'll know what that must mean!"
 —"I know, I know!" and from his boot
 He pulls a dagger keen.
 —"Leiba, confess, you cursèd Jew,
 Where my Oksana lies."
 And stabbed at him.

—"She's with the lords,
 Of yonder walls the prize . . .
 Dressed all in gold . . ."

—"Then ransom her!
 Move faster, fellow, faster!"
 —"I will, I will . . . How stern you are,
 Yarema, my young master!
 I'll go at once and ransom her
 For money breaks the wall.
 I'll tell the Poles, instead of Patz . . ."
 —"Yes, yes, I know it all.
 Go quickly!"

¹⁸⁰Master, Sir.

—“Yes, at once, at once!
 Hold Gonta back two hours—
 Then let him do the thing he'd do!
 Where take her, while there lours
 Dark death?”

—“To Maydanivka go,
 That village, do you hear?”
 —“I do, I do.”

And Halayda
 With Gonta makes good cheer.
 Zalizniak then the kobza takes:
 —“Dance, kobzar! Do your share!
 Myself I'll play.”

And squattingly
 The blind man in the square
 Goes stamping with his shoes of bast
 And sings the hopak rare. . . .¹³¹
 (*The dance continues for some time.*)
 —“Enough, enough!” cries Gonta then.
 The fire is almost out.
 We need more light! . . . Where's Leiba now?
 He should be here, past doubt.
 Just find the swine and string him up,
 Hang him before we go!
 Come, children, for the fire subsides,
 The Cossack wick¹³² burns low!”
 Said Halayda: “Good otaman,
 Let's dance a little more!
 Look, how the town is still ablaze,
 The square's a lovely floor.
 Still let us dance! Come, kobzar, play!”
 —“I will no longer dance!
 Prepare to fire! More tar, more tow!
 Roll up the ordinance!
 Light fuses in the underground!
 This is no jest to flee you!”
 The haydamaks roared back with zest:
 “We hear you, father, hear you!”

¹³¹Here several dance songs are omitted.

¹³²The fire they set to the town occupied by the enemy.

With joy they race across the dam,
 With joy they sing and shout.
 But Halayda cries: "Father, wait!
 You'll slay me, past all doubt!
 Just wait an hour! Don't kill my lass:
 My dear Oksana's here!
 Just wait an hour, my comrades all,
 And I shall get her clear!"
 —"On with your job!" says Zalizniak.
 "Tell them to light the fuses!
 She's playing with the Poles, is she?
 Lad, love has other uses.
 You'll find another!"

Then he turned

But Halayda was gone.
 The hills roared out. Up to the sky
 A flaming geyser shone,
 Fed full with Poles. All that remained
 A foul Inferno blazed . . .
 —"Where's Halayda?" Maksim inquires.
 In vain for him they gazed.
 Meanwhile to dungeons of that pile
 With Leiba he'd slipped in,
 And snatched his sweetheart safe away,
 And gone to Lebedin.

X. LEBEDIN

—"An orphan from Vilshana, granny,
 An orphan sad am I!
 The Poles my father tortured, granny,
 Until they saw him die.
 Just to recall it, gives me fright!
 They carried me away.
 Dear lady, do not bid me tell
 My sufferings that day.
 I prayed to them, I wept to them,
 My soul was torn apart,
 Until my grief was staunch'd by time
 And petrified my heart . . .

Had I but known we'd meet again,
 And would once more embrace,
 I should have borne three times my lot
 With that one word of grace!
 Forgive me, O my darling!
 My record I may smutch,
 And Heaven now may punish me
 Because I loved too much
 My sweetheart's noble stature,
 His handsome hazel eyes;
 I only loved because my heart
 Would take no compromise.
 Not for myself, nor father,
 My captive prayers were said;
 No, granny, for my lover's fate
 My orisons I pled.
 Punish me, God! Your just rebuke
 My soul must now endure.
 Grim to admit, my hand was fain
 My own death to procure.
 Had it not been for him, perhaps
 Myself I should have slain.
 I suffered so! I thought: 'Dear Lord,
 Help me in all my pain!
 My love's alone—and who but I
 His service will attend?
 Who'll share his joys and lift his griefs
 But I, his only friend?
 Who could more tenderly embrace?
 Who keep his spirit safe?
 Who else would say a kindly word
 To such a hapless waif?'
 Yes, granny, that is what I thought.
 My heart rejoiced to tell:
 'I am an orphan, motherless
 And fatherless as well.
 My love alone in this wide world
 Adores me faithfully;
 And if he hears I've killed myself,
 He'll die because of me.'

Thus did I reason, thus did pray,
 Thus did I yearn and moan:
 He did not come, there was no hope,
 And I remained alone! . . ."

She burst in tears. The agèd nun
 Who stood in silence by
 Grew pensive.—"Tell me, granny dear,
 Ah, tell me, where am I?"

—"In Lebedin, my birdie sweet!
 Don't rise, you have been ill."

—"In Lebedin? Am I here long?"
 —"Two days. Now pray be still."

—"Two days? . . . Wait, wait! . . . I now recall . . .
 The stream on fire I saw,
 The Jew, the fort; a refuge sought . . .
 And one named Halayda . . ."

—"Yarema Halayda he's called,
 The man who brought you here."

—"Where is he, tell me, where is he?
 Now, now, I know my dear! . . ."

—"He promised in a week to come, ..
 That nuptial joy might bless."

—"Then in a week I shall be his!
 What joy, what happiness!
 O granny dear, the time is past,
 For all our grief and pain!
 That Halayda my darling is,
 Renowned throughout Ukraine.
 Men know him well. Myself I saw
 The villages on fire;
 I saw the Poles, our hangmen, pale
 At the mention of his ire.
 They know him well, they do indeed,
 And oft of him they're speaking,
 And who he is, and whence he comes,
 And who it is he's seeking.
 For me he sought and me he found,
 My grey-winged-eagle-love!
 Fly down to me, my falcon, come!
 Descend my precious dove!

How fair the world has just become!
 To be alive, what joy!
 Only a scant three days remain
 Until I clasp my boy . . .
 How wonderful it is to live!
 Do you feel happy too?"
 —"Indeed I am, my birdie fair,
 To share this joy with you."
 —"Then why do you not also sing?"
 —"My singing days are done . . .
 Now must I go . . . the vesper rings."
 Oksana was alone.
 Pensive she grew, then smiled once more
 And on her knees she fell,
 And childlike for Yarema prayed
 That God might keep him well.

Within a week, at Lebedin,
 A church's chant was heard:
 "Rejoice, Isaiah!"¹³³ For that morn
 Yarema pledged his word
 With his Oksana as they wed;
 And yet that very night,
 As duty called him, and his chief,
 He rode away to fight,
 And slay the Poles. His wedding feast
 In war he celebrates
 Near Uman amid fires; his bride
 Her man with hope awaits.
 She watches for his safe return
 By boyar friends¹³⁴ attended,
 To take her to a rich new house
 With all their warfare ended.
 Don't worry, lass, but wait for him!
 Commit to God your care!
 While I to Uman turn my gaze
 To see what happens there.

¹³³One of the canticles in the Orthodox marriage service.

¹³⁴Bridegroom's attendants.

XI. GONTA¹³⁵ IN UMAN

As haydamaks on Uman marched,
 They spoke with scornful lips:
 "Comrades, we'll tear their silken cloths
 To make our puttee-strips!"

—*from a folksong*

The days pass on, the fearful summer days,
 And all of our Ukraine is still ablaze.
 In villages, the naked children weep:
 The parents are not there their charge to keep.
 The yellow leaves in wooded vales grow dun;
 The clouds prevail and cover up the sun.
 Only wild beasts upon the outskirts howl,
 And into villages they boldly prowl,
 Scenting the corpses. Not a man would bury
 The Poles but let the hungry wolves make merry;
 Till the snow covered with its silent weft
 The tooth-scarred skeletons the wolves had left.

The winter tempests did not check
 The slaughter's hellish ires;
 Poles froze to death, and Cossack bands
 Kept warm at savage fires.
 Then spring arose, to wake again
 The black and sleepy earth;
 Primrose and periwinkle spread
 A coverlet of mirth;
 In fields, the lark soared; in the grove,
 The nightingale would sing
 An early morning welcome to
 The earth adorned with spring . . .

¹³⁵Ivan Gonta who was the commander of the "court" Cossacks who from 1757 served the Polish magnate Potocki. The latter trusted him so much that he sent him to the town of Uman to be at the disposition of the Polish Governor Mladanowicz there. For his services to the Poles he was given two nearby villages as usufruct. While with the Poles, Gonta married a Polish lady and by her had two sons who were baptized into Roman Catholicism. When the insurrection of the haydamaks under Maksim Zalizniak began, Gonta was ordered to suppress it. However, his patriotic feeling asserted itself, and he joined forces with Zalizniak. Both of them captured Uman by storm. After changing sides, Gonta's ferocity in battle knew no bounds, and he allowed no mercy in his dealings with the Poles and their allies.

A veritable paradise!
 For whom? Alas, for men . . .
 Why do they fail to glance at it?
 Why desecrate it then?
 That beauty must be smeared with blood,
 And lit with flames of ill;
 Sunlight and flowers do not suffice;
 Clouds must be thicker still.
 Hell does not satisfy! . . . Mankind!
 When will you be content
 With all the good things that you have?
 Why so malevolent?¹³⁶

Spring has not stopped the flow of blood
 Nor turned man's wrath to joy.
 How foul it is; yet thus it was
 In the far days of Troy,
 And so it will hereafter be.
 The haydamaks bring doom;
 Where'er they pass, the world's on fire
 And blood befecks the gloom.
 Maksim has got himself a son
 Most famed through all Ukraine;
 Yarema's not his son, of course,
 Yet dearest of his train.
 Maksim assails the enemy;
 Yarema ruthless rages:
 No mortal fight by day or night
 His savage blade assuages.
 Thus none he misses, none he spares,
 No, not a single soul,—
 To avenge the saintly sacristan
 He hews down every Pole.
 And for his dear Oksana's wrongs
 He smites with heart of hate.
 While Maksim says: "Lay on, my son!
 Before we meet our fate,
 Let's have a merry time!"

They did:
 And still the foemen fell;

¹³⁶Another aside in which Shevchenko deprecates all bloodshed.

The Polish corpses from Kiev
To Uman lay pell-mell.

In countless numbers, haydamaks
Ringed Uman with their ire
At midnight; and before the dawn
They'd set the place on fire.
They set the blaze and shouted loud:
"We'll smite the Poles, we swear!"
Again the national dragoons
Were mowed down in the square
And with them little children died,
Even the sick and maimed.
Mid shrieks and cries upon the square,
That in full frenzy flamed,
Stands Gonta in a sea of blood,
Maksim beside him stern;
Both cry: "Most royally, my lads,
You make them pay their turn!"

Then suddenly the haydamaks
Lead out a Jesuit
And two boys. "Gonta," says the priest,
"Your children I submit.
You slaughter us—then kill them too:
For they are Catholics!
Why do you pause? Why stay your hand?
Their years are eight and six.
Slay them, for they, to manhood grown,
Will see our debt is paid! . . ."
—"Kill the black dog! And these two pups
I'll kill with my own blade.
Summon assembly! Now confess!
What are you? Catholics?"
—"We are, because our mother was . . ."
—"God, let not mercy mix!
Be quiet, lads! I know, I know!"
The haydamaks attend.
—"My children—they are Catholics . . .
Our cause I'll not offend,
Lest any idle talk should say
That I am not your friend.

Come, friend!"

Maksim was at his side;

Across the square they went;

And both cried out: "No mercy, men!

To not a Pole relent!"

They showed no mercy: Horribly

That Uman region flared;

In not a home, in not a church

Were any living spared—

All were cut down. The hands of death

All reason overrule

In Uman in despair that day!

The old Basilian school¹³⁸

Where Gonta's children had been taught

Great Gonta sets on fire:

"My children you have eaten up!"

He rages in his ire:

"You have devoured the tiny ones,

And taught them nothing good . . .

Tear down the walls!"

The haydamaks

Obedyed him where he stood;

They tore them down; they dashed the priests

On stones in frenzy fell;

And threw the schoolboys, still alive,

To perish down the well.

Till late at night the task of death went on

And not a soul remained. Now fierce and wan,

Gonta cried out: "Where are you, cannibals?

You ate my sons—the curse upon me falls!

How bitterly I weep, how lonely feel!

My precious children and my dearest weal!

Where from my fury do my foemen shrink?

Blood of the gentry I would gladly drink;

¹³⁸Basilians were Uniate monks who, like the Jesuits, established schools in Ukraine for the purpose of fostering the Union with Rome among the Ukrainians. They originated in Western Ukraine, where virtually the entire Ukrainian population (about three million) accepted Catholicism, but retained the Byzantine rite, which hardly differed from that of the Orthodox denomination. Their schools were conducted in the best West European traditions and were supported by the Poles and the Uniate priests.

I want to see it redden all around,
 To feast on it! Why can no wind be found
 To blow me still more Poles? Weary am I,
 And bitterly must weep! Ye stars on high,
 Hide in the clouds! Your light I would not know!
 I slew my children! . . . And my lot is woe!
 Where can I now find peace?"

Thus Gonta cried
 And rushed across the town from side to side.
 In the square's blood, the troops their tables set,
 And gathering such food as they could get,
 Sat down to eat . . . Their last grim slaughter this,
 And their last supper!

—"Lads, be full of bliss!
 Drink while you can! Strike while you have the chance!"
 Shouts Zalizniak: "Give us a tune to dance,
 You madcap kobzar, that the ground may sway!
 Thus let my Cossacks finish off the day!"
 And so the bard struck up a tuneful lay.¹³⁹

All dance. But where has Gonta gone?
 He's left the merry throng.
 Why does he not with Cossacks drink?
 Why does he sing no song?
 He is not there: at such a time,
 He has no will to sing!
 But who is this in mantle black
 Through corpses rummaging?
 He stops; he pulls a pile apart;
 Dead Poles in tumbled rout
 He searches; then, with sudden stoop,
 Draws two small corpses out;
 He takes them on his shoulders broad;
 He steals across the square;
 Over dead bodies, through the flames,
 He seeks the dead to bear
 Behind a Polish Catholic church.
 'Tis Gonta, deep in dearth,

¹³⁹Several short dance songs are here omitted on account of their utter colloquialism.

Who carries thus his little sons
 To bury them in earth,
 So that the tiny Cossack forms
 The dogs may not devour.
 Along the darkest streets he goes
 Where flames have lost their lour;
 He bore his little sons away,
 So that no soul might see
 The spot where they were laid to rest
 Or mark his misery.

He bore the bodies to the field;
 Pulls out the blessèd blade,
 And with it, by the town's grim light,
 A simple pit he made.
 It shines upon his little sons;
 All clothed, they seem asleep;
 Why do they then afflict their sire
 With horror stark and deep?
 Why does he tremble like a thief
 Who steals, or hides, a treasure?
 Out of the streets of yonder town
 Comes uproar beyond measure,
 The shouting of the haydamaks—
 But these he does not hear
 While hollowing a resting-place
 For his two children dear.
 The task is done . . . He takes his boys;
 He does not watch them, rather
 Remembers as he lays them down:
 "We are not Poles, O father!"
 He lays them down; he then takes out
 A cloth of silken gloss;
 He kisses the dead children's eyes;
 He signs them with a cross;
 Above the Cossack children's heads
 The silken cloth he swept;
 Then pulled it off once more to gaze,
 And bitterly he wept:
 "O sons of mine, dear sons of mine!
 Look now on our Ukraine,

Ah, look at her! Both you and I
 Must die for her in pain.
 And who will bury me at last?
 In alien fields I'll be;
 And who will weep above my bones?
 Alas, my destiny,
 My miserable destiny,
 What means your fatal ire?
 Why have you given me these sons?
 And why not slain their sire?
 Then would my sons have buried me—
 Now I must bury them.”
 He kissed them, signed them with a cross—
 Clods made their requiem. . .
 —“Rest in your deep abode, my sons!
 Your mother did not spread,
 To soothe your bodies and your souls,
 A newer, better bed.
 Without sweet basil, without rue,
 Rest little sons, my own,
 And pray God that his punishment
 May fall on me alone
 For muddled plans and maddened sins
 That in this world I mix!
 Forgive me, sons, as I do you
 For being Catholics!”
 He smoothed the earth, replaced the turf,
 And no one could detect
 Where Gonta's Cossack children lay
 And show them disrespect.
 —“Rest, little sons, and wait for me.
 I soon to you shall come.
 For I have thus cut short your lives
 And swift will be my doom!
 I shall be slain . . . and soon, I trust!
 Who'll bury me, I pray?
 The haydamaks! . . . I'll join them now,
 And plunge into the fray!”
 Gonta was stooped; he stumbled much;
 And walked in manner wild;

Flames lit his path; he blankly looked;
 And horribly he smiled
 As back he gazed upon the steppe;
 With grief his throat did choke;
 He wiped his tears . . . Then through the dark
 He vanished in the smoke.

XII. EPILOGUE

Long years ago, when I was still a child,
 An orphan in coarse homespun, running wild,
 Coatless, unfed, I roamed through that Ukraine
 Where Zalizniak's and Gonta's swords had slain.
 Long years ago, along the roads whose heat
 The haydamaks had known, with tiny feet
 I walked and wept and begged the folk to give
 The simple things by which a lad might live.
 I have recalled those times, and for a space
 Felt that the curse had fallen from our race.
 O sorrows of our youth! Could you return,
 My present destiny my heart would spurn.
 I see that woe, those steppes so vast to view,
 My father and my ancient grandsire too . . .
 The old one is still hale;¹⁴⁰ but father's dead.
 Often on Sunday, when of saints they'd read,
 And with a neighbour sipped some brandy straight,
 My father would ask grandpa to relate
 The story of that time of slaughterous tolls
 When Zalizniak and Gonta paid the Poles . . .
 Those ancient eyes of his would shine like stars
 As word on word poured forth; we heard of wars
 In which the Poles were smitten; Smila burned;
 And neighbours were by fear to dumbness turned.
 I, as a little child, would weep to scan
 The torture-murder of the sacristan.
 None marked the child who in the corner wept.
 Thank you, grandfather, that so well you kept
 In that grey head of yours the Cossack glory:
 And now I've passed along the deathless story!

¹⁴⁰Grandfather Ivan, who fired young Taras' imagination with those accounts, may himself have taken part in the haydamak insurrection, although no records to that effect have as yet been discovered.

Forgive me, my good people,
 That I this Cossack fame
 Have told so much at random
 Nor rank a scholar's name.
 Thus once my grandsire told it—
 Long may his health prevail!—
 I followed him . . . He did not know
 That this same simple tale
 Would now be read by learned men.
 Grandfather, pray forgive,—
 Let them upbraid us if they will!
 Back to my narrative
 I shall return, and end my tale.
 Then shall I take a rest,
 And in my fancy roam Ukraine,
 The land I love the best,
 Those places where the haydamaks
 With blessèd blades would meet,
 The highways that I measured out
 With my own little feet.

The haydamaks bestirred themselves;
 Their fortunes were in flood;
 For yet another year they drenched
 Ukraine with gentry's blood
 And then subsided: to the full
 They'd notched each holy blade.
 Gonta is gone: no cross or mound
 For Gonta has been made.
 Pale ashes is that haydamak;
 Afar the tempests flail him;
 And there is none to pray for him
 And no one to bewail him!
 Only Maksim, fraternal soul,
 Remained of all the revel;
 And when he heard how horribly
 The children of the devil
 Had quartered Gonta at the last,
 Zalizniak burst out crying;
 His heart was broken; tears unstaunched;
 Because he now lay dying.

The loneliness had stifled him
 Far in a foreign state;
 They buried him in alien soil:
 Such was the warrior's fate!
 With sorrow then that iron man
 Was laid within the ground;
 Above his head the haydamaks
 Reared up a mighty mound;
 They mourned for him, then slipped away,
 Each on his own behalf.
 Only Yarema lingered still,
 And leaned upon his staff,
 And murmured: "Here, my father, rest!
 Here in this foreign land!
 At home there is no place for you,
 For freedom has been banned . . .
 Sleep, Cossack, blessed spirit sleep!
 Your love will bless my years."

As down the steppe he sadly went,
 He wiped away his tears.
 Ever he paused to look again
 And give a pensive groan.
 Then the black mound upon the steppe
 Remained at last alone.

The haydamaks had sown their rye¹⁴¹
 In their Ukrainian fields,
 And yet the harvest was not theirs:
 An alien takes the yields.
 The crop of justice is not ripe;
 And evil chokes the grain;
 The haydamaks must all disperse
 And separate with pain:
 Some to their homes, to forests some,
 A knife in every legging;
 Even today they have a name
 For slashing more than begging.

¹⁴¹Their deeds.

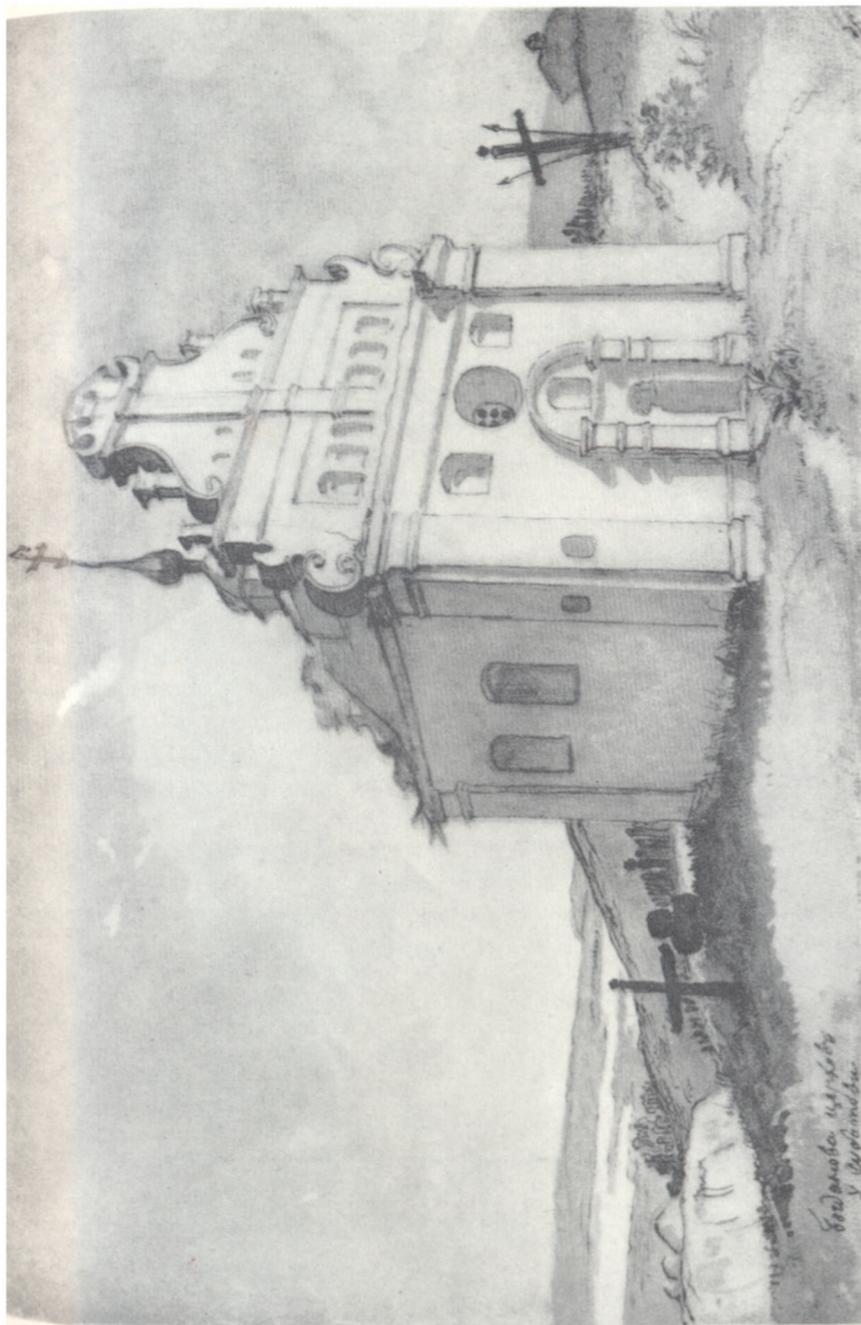
Meanwhile, the ancient Sitch was doomed;
 Some fled to the Kuban,¹⁴²
 And some across the Danube fled;
 All that was left to scan
 Was Dnieper's rapids 'mid the steppe
 That roar, as on they dart:
 "Our sons they've buried; now they seek
 To break us all apart!"
 On, on they roar—but men have failed
 Their memories to keep;
 And our Ukraine in slumber lies,
 Forever fall'n asleep.

Since those far days in our Ukraine
 The rye grows fresh and green;
 No weeping's heard; no cannon roar;
 Only the wind so keen
 Bends down the willows in the grove,
 The grasses on the plain.
 All has been silenced. So, be mute:
 For so must God ordain!
 Only at times, on Dnieper's banks,
 Through groves of early spring,
 Old haydamaks at evening pass
 And on their way they sing:
 "*Our famous captain, Halayda,*
 Dwells in a noble house!
Roar loud, O Sea! Good luck to you,
 And to your gentle spouse!"

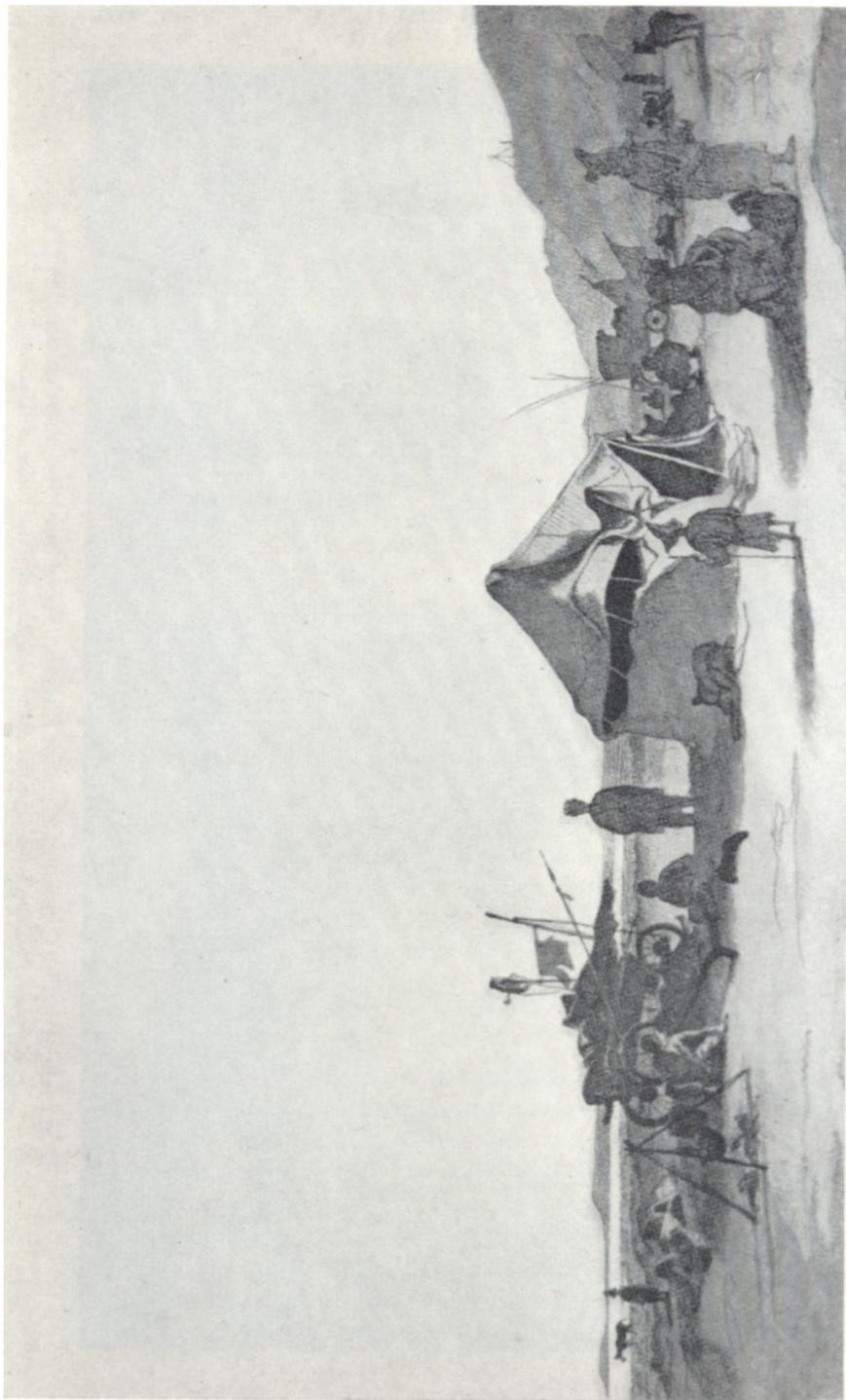
PREFACE

A preface *after* my story? I could easily do without it. But this is what I have in mind: everything that I have seen in print (I only saw it, and read very little of it) was preceded by a preface, and my tale is not. If I were not having my "Haydamaks" printed, a preface would not be necessary; but since I am now publishing it, I must do the job properly, so that people will not treat me as an ignoramus,

¹⁴²A former Cossack province extending from the Sea of Azov eastward and southward to the Caucasus Mountains.



T. Shevchenko, *The Church of Hetman Khlmelniysky in Subotiv* (water colour, 1845)
In his poem "Subotiv" Shevchenko called this church "the coffin of Ukraine."



T. Shevchenko, *Expedition in the Steppe* (water colour, 1848)
Shevchenko's participation in the various steppe expeditions gave him opportunities to draw and paint, which activities were otherwise forbidden to him.

saying: "What a strange fellow he is! Does he think that our predecessors were more ignorant than he, since they didn't publish even a primer without a preface?" Quite right, forgive me! A preface is necessary. But how am I to compose it so that there will be no offence, or even truth, in it, as is the case with all prefaces today? Even if you were to kill me, I wouldn't know how to do it. I would have to praise the whole book, but I am ashamed to do that; and yet I am loath to censure it.

Let us, then, begin our preface thus: It is a pleasant experience to see a blind old kobzar sitting with his boy-guide by the hedge, and pleasant to hear him sing a *duma* about things that happened long ago, about how the Poles fought with the Cossacks. It is pleasant, and yet one might say: "Thank God, all that is past!" The more so if we recall that we are children of the same mother, that we are all Slavs. Even if one's heart aches, the story must be told: let the children and the grandchildren see that their fathers were mistaken, let them again make friends with their enemies, and let the land of the Slavs, covered with wheat and rye as with gold, remain undivided from sea to sea forever!¹⁴³

What happened in our Ukraine in 1768 I relate just as I heard it from old people: I have not read anything that is in print about it, nor any criticism concerning it, for, it appears, nothing of the sort is available. Halayda is half-invented, but the death of the Vilshana sacristan is true, for there are people still living who knew him. Gonta and Zalizniak, the leaders of that bloody action, are not, perhaps, presented in my narrative as they actually were—I cannot vouch for that. My grandfather (may he enjoy good health!), whenever he begins to relate something that he himself did not see, but only heard, says at the very outset: "If the older people lie, I lie with them."

St. Petersburg, 1841

* * * *

Life's fearful for a beggar-lad,
 An orphan without kin;
 If he's no fool, he'll find a pool
 And tumble headlong in!

¹⁴³See fns. 126, 136, 213.

The wise young waif will drown himself
 And spurn life's tedious itch;
 It were less hard thus to discard
 Existence in a ditch.
 Another's fortune walks the fields
 And reaps him ears of wheat;
 Mine is a drone who loafs alone
 Where far-off breakers beat.
 Life's easy for the well-to-do:
 Men know and greet him kindly;
 But me, alas, they coldly pass
 And gaze upon me blindly.
 A maiden favours all the rich,
 Even the ugly toffs,
 But at my suit, quite destitute,
 She only laughs and scoffs.
 "But am I not a handsome lad,
 As fair in face as you?
 Did not my love most faithful prove
 And ever gently woo?
 Love as you wish, my sweetheart, then!
 Love at your own sweet will!
 But do not laugh and call me calf
 If you recall me still!
 Off to the world's far ends I go,
 Off to a foreign land;
 One there I'll woo more fair than you
 Or die upon the strand."

The Cossack rode away in grief,
 By no one missed at all;
 Good fortune's nod he sought abroad,
 But there in death did fall.
 And as he dies he turns his eyes
 To where the sun's rays pour . . .
 With drooping eye 'tis hard to die
 Far on a foreign shore!

St. Petersburg, end of 1841

MARIANA, THE NUN

*(A fragment of a poem)*TO OKSANA K . . . KO¹⁴⁴

IN MEMORY OF WHAT HAPPENED LONG AGO

The poplar and the willow-tree
 The tempest bends indeed,
 It breaks the oak and down the field
 It rolls the tumble-weed.
 And such is Fate: this one she breaks,
 This other merely bends,
 And me she rolls, and does not know
 Where all my travel ends!

In what land shall I find a grave? Where creep,
 Find shelter, and forever fall asleep?
 If one lacks luck and leaves no friends behind,
 No one will have him in remembrance kind,
 With gentle jesting: "Let him rest in peace!
 He was most lucky in his prompt decease!"
 Oksana, is it true, my long-lost beauty,
 That you will not remember, even in duty,
 The waif in homespun who was quick to bless
 Each time that he beheld your loveliness,
 To whom your grace unspoken taught the art
 Of converse with the eyes, the soul, the heart,
 With whom you smiled and shared your sorrowing,
 To whom of handsome Peter¹⁴⁵ you would sing?
 You'll not recall . . . Oksana, O my dear!
 Yet to this day I sorrow for you here.
 I shed the tears to Mariana due,
 And as I weep, I see you, pray for you.
 My long-lost beauty, for things long since done
 Adorn with primrose buds my pensive nun,
 Smile as you sing in handsome Peter's praise,
 Remembering in jest those far-off days.

¹⁴⁴The girl who befriended him in his childhood. See "To Oksana," p. 298; "I was some thirteen years of age," p. 319; "We once grew up together," p. 447.

¹⁴⁵Referring to a popular folksong *Oy ya liubliu Petrusia* (Oh, how I love my darling Peter).

On Sunday, on the village green
 Young women wander out
 To frolic with the village lads;
 There some sing songs about
 Late evening parties, how a dame
 Has thumped her daughter blue
 For tarrying with a lad too long . . .
 As maids are wont to do,
 Each sang about her own affairs.
 When suddenly a lame
 Old kobzar with a boy, his guide,
 Into the village came;
 His boots he carries in his hands;
 Down from his shoulders hangs
 A patched bag. And the little boy,
 A thing of pains and pangs,
 Dressed all in rags, can hardly drag
 His tiny feet along . . .
 The image of poor Katie's son!¹⁴⁶
 —"Look, girls!" cries out the throng.
 "The kobzar comes! The kobzar comes!"
 The young men they discard
 And run as quickly as they can
 To welcome the blind bard.
 "Hail, grandpa darling, precious one!
 Show us your ancient skill!
 We'll give you copecks, berries too,
 Or anything you will.
 Here in the meantime you shall rest
 While we go dancing near you.
 Play us a tune, O grandpa, do!"
 —"My darlings, well I hear you!
 Thank you, my lovely blossoms,
 For words so kindly meant!
 I'd gladly play but, as you see,
 I have no instrument.
 Just yesterday in a bazaar
 Great loss my work sustained,

¹⁴⁶Looking just like Katerina's illegitimate son Ivan, in the poem "Katerina," p. 14.

My kobza broke . . .”

—“And all the strings?”

—“Three only have remained.”

—“Then use those three for any tune!”

—“But three? My lovely lasses,

Once I could play on one. Perhaps

The task my skill surpasses.

But wait a space, my lovely ones;

Let me a moment lag . . .

Let us sit down, my boy!” They sat,

And he untied his bag,

Took out the kobza, several times

The battered chords he'd flail:

—“Come, shall I tell you of the nun

Fair Mariana's tale?

You've heard it?”

—“No, the tale is strange!”

—“Hark to my words of woe,

And heed me!”

I

“Once a mother good

Was living long ago;

There'd been a father, but he died:

A widow she was left,

Yes, left a widow, far from young,

Nor yet of goods bereft,

Oxen and waggons rich in store,

A little daughter too.

This daughter Mariana throve

And a young lady grew—

So black of brow, so beautiful,

A hetman might have wed her!

And so her mother sought some lord

With money to bestead her.

“Little her daughter recked of lords;

She would go out to meet—

Not some old lord, bewhiskered, fat,

But one to her most sweet,

Her darling Peter; in the grove
 Among the reeds they met,
 Each blessed evening, they would talk
 And she with him would pet;
 Embracing him, she swooned with joy;
 At times, she sadly smiled,
 Wept, and was mute. And Peter asked:
 —'Why do you weep, my child!'
 And she would glance at him and smile:
 —'I hardly know myself!
 —'Perhaps you think I'll go away?
 No, never, precious elf!
 For you I'll court and you I'll love
 Until the day I die.
 Do human annals know a case
 Where those whose love soared high
 As ours does now remained alive
 When they were sternly parted,
 Never to meet again?'

—'Ah, no,
 They perish broken-hearted!
 The opposite you hear in songs
 That kobzars' brains invent,
 For they are old and cannot see
 The course that true love went,
 That there are found in this our world
 Black brows and glances warm,
 And many a manly Cossack shape
 And many a maiden's form,
 That there are fine, long maidens' braids,
 Luxuriant Cossack hair,
 That when I hear my Peter's words
 In my dark coffin's lair,
 My corpse will smile and say to him:
 "My grey-winged eagle, dear,
 I love you in the other world
 As I have loved you here.
 Then, O my heart, let us embrace,
 And thus I fain would kiss!
 In one grave let them bury us!
 I'd die amid such bliss. . . ."

Thus they embraced, oblivious,
 As love each moment pearled;
 And thus it was their mutual wish
 To seek the other world.
 Things did not happen as they wished,
 Though every night they met;
 And still her mother did not know
 About love's sweet duet
 Till midnight in the orchard paths
 With happy dalliance rife.
 'My daughter, who is still a child,
 Knows not the facts of life . . .'
 Though partly right, the dame forgot
 How soon young hearts are laden
 With burdening love, that she herself
 Had also been a maiden.

"This much was true: that Mariana's gaze
 Was quite unwitting of the world's harsh ways;
 Loving, she thought that neither life nor death
 Would part from Peter; that the wanton breath
 Of blind old kobzars told of such a fate
 Because they could not see bright eyes' debate
 And only sought to frighten maidens fair . . .
 I, too, would daunt you, for I know this care—
 Would that no soul on earth my sorrow knew! . . .
 But, maidens, all is past that I must rue,
 Although my heart still wakes—I've not forgot
 Love like a mother's for my lass, God wot,
 And I shall sing of her until I die . . .
 Then, my dear maids, when in my grave I lie,
 Remember me, my Mariana too,
 And from the other world I'll smile to you. . . ."

At that he burst out weeping,
 As if by grief o'ertasked;
 No maiden asked him why he wept.
 And why should she have asked?
 "All that has passed away," they said,
 And thus their sympathy
 In kindly fashion brought relief
 And soothed his misery.

"Forgive me, dears, in my despite
 Still in my dreams I meet her . . .
 Now Mariana, as you see,
 And her unmoneyed Peter
 Met every evening to converse;
 Her mother knew it not,
 Although she wondered: 'What disease
 Has Mariana got?
 Is it the evil eye? She sews
 And works wrong stitches in;
 In such a mood, instead of "Hritz"¹⁴⁷
 She sings of "Peterkin",¹⁴⁸
 Her pillow in her sleep she'll kiss,
 While lips in words will run. . . .'
 At first her mother laughed at it,
 And thought it was in fun;
 But when she saw this was no jest,
 Her daughter she implored:
 'Your suitors' messengers you'll see,
 Some may be from a lord.
 You're quite grown up—and long enough
 You've lived in single bliss;
 I have been thinking . . . well, you see . . .
 ('Twas hard to talk of this.)
 It's time for you to marry now. . . .'
 —'Who shall the bridegroom be?'
 —'Choose whom you will, and I consent.'
 She sang with happy glee:
 'Then marry me, my mother dear,
 But let the groom be young,—
 Thus marry me, my dear mama,
 To youth my love is flung!
 But let an old man go his way,
 For money let him roam;
 A young one is in love with me,
 He'd gladly stay at home;

¹⁴⁷Referring to the folksong *Oy ne khodi, Hritsiu, ta na vechornitsi* (O Hritz [i.e., Gregory], do not attend evening parties), in which the hapless young man is poisoned by a young woman whom he abandoned for another.

¹⁴⁸See fn. 145.

He seeks no cash, he travels not
 Across far foreign plains;
 Oxen he has and waggons too;
 Among the other swains
 He blossoms like a poppy-flower
 For thus his grace avails him;
 He has his fields and freedom true—
 What if good fortune fails him!
 His fortune and his happiness
 In my dark brows he'll find,
 In my long lashes, hazel eyes,
 And in my words so kind.
 Yes, marry me, my mother dear,
 But old men I abhor;
 The groom for me quite young must be
 For youth I do adore!
 —'Nay, daughter, this will never do!
 To a rich man I'll marry you,
 An older one, with treasure great:
 I've Captain Ivan as your mate.'
 —'Dear mother, I'm as good as dead
 If Captain Ivan I must wed!
 —'You'll live, and like a lady be,
 With lots of children at your knee!
 —'I'll hire out as a scullion-maid
 Your Captain Ivan to evade!
 —'My mind is settled, daughter dear:
 You'll marry him this very year!
 Poor Mariana, desperate,
 Burst into tears, bewailed her fate:
 —'Marry an old, a wealthy groom?
 Shall Captain Ivan be my doom?'
 Thus querulous the maiden mused
 And her unwillingness excused:
 —'Not yet, my mother, am I grown,
 Nor have my maiden flowers been sown;
 You've never let me run pell-mell
 Each morning to the village well,
 Or reap the rye, or gather flax,
 Or at a sociable relax,

Where the young men and women gay
 Make merry as they sing away,
 And talk in secrecy of me
 And of my beauty which they see:
 "A wealthy father was her kin
 For she's of noble origin . . ."
 How hard it is for me to live!
 Why all my beauty did you give?
 Why did you paint my brows so black
 And give me eyes that sparkle back?
 All but good fortune have you given;
 Good fortune from my lot is riven.
 Why have you nurtured me in vain?
 Why have you brought me up for pain?
 Why did you fail to bury me
 Before I knew what care could be? . . .'
 Her mother paid no heed at all,
 But went to bed; and fears enthral
 Poor Mariana as she wept;
 Scarcely from out the room she crept.

II

"The wedding guests arrive in hordes,¹⁴⁹
 A tipsy, singing crew of lords;
 While through the hedge the maiden peeps
 At all the turmoil, and she weeps
 And falls half-fainting to the ground—
 So harsh a guerdon must be found
 For faithful love! . . . 'Tis hard, my lasses,
 When all alone one's life one passes,
 But harder still in love to engage
 Two mortals disparate in age!
 Just look at me: I've lost my eyes with crying;
 Their loss I do not mourn: this side of dying
 I've nothing left to gaze at. Her dear eyes,
 The happy source of whispering and sighs,
 Long since I saw. . . . Sad thoughts and grief, I trow,
 Were all my wealth; they're all my treasure now;

¹⁴⁹A highly colloquial song has been omitted.

And with such money it is hard to live:
 I sleep 'neath hedges, to the wind I give
 My converse, for the people lodge me not
 Nor bid the poor old cripple share their pot . . .
 Shorten the lives, O God, of those who prove
 No chance on earth to consummate their love!
 Better it were to lie in graveyard mould
 Then see another who is rich and old
 Kiss, by his cash, and marry whom he will . . .
 O God Almighty! Must a tide of ill
 Batter my spirit into fragments still!"

The kobzar broke out in lament;
 Tears flowed from eyes now blind.
 The maidens wondered at his grief:
 His death was close behind,
 Yet he, an old man, blind and hoar,
 Bewails the far-off years!
 Ah, marvel not, young maidens all,
 At those old Cossack tears.
 They are not like the dew at dawn
 That ergot fields possess;
 Thank God they are not like your own
 In floods of bitterness!
 He's wept his fill; and now again
 He strums three beaten strings:
 "The long day Mariana spent
 In tearful sorrowings;
 Then Peter met her in the grove;
 She told her story due:
 All that her mother had declared
 And everything she knew;
 She held back nothing: how the guests
 Prepared for Ivan's wedding;
 How loudly down the streets they sang
 The nuptials she was dreading.

—"But why (said he) are you not poor?
 And why am I not rich?
 Why are no crow-black horses mine?
 Your mother would not itch

To know the truth of where you roam
 And him with whom you tarry.
 You would be free to trust your heart
 And, as you will, could marry.
 Then would I hide you far away
 Where none could search us out;
 And none might see your place with me
 Our happiness to flout.
 O dearest girl, my happiness,
 High Heaven I invoke!
 Why are you not in homespun dressed?
 Or I in silken cloak?’

“While Mariana, like a child
 Without a mother, weeps,
 Her Peterkin beside her stands,
 No heed of aught he keeps
 Except poor Mariana’s tears,
 For tears of maiden bright
 Can cause unhappiness by day
 And agony by night.
 —‘Don’t weep, my heart,—I still have strength
 Though sorrows now beset;
 Love me, my precious, do not fail,—
 I’ll find my fortune yet
 Beyond high hills and mighty plains,
 Far in a foreign field;
 Through thick and thin my way I’ll win
 And rich will be the yield!
 Not homespun-clad, a captain bold
 I then shall gallop in;
 Not in the grass but in the church
 You’ll kiss your Peterkin!
 I’ll kiss you then, we’ll both embrace
 And let the people stare!
 But you will simply stand and blush . . .’
 —‘When comes that moment rare?’
 —‘Soon, very soon, my dearest lass!
 Just pray to God for me!
 Now hurry home and go to bed!
 And I in prayer shall be

Beside the road, amid the steppe;
 The bright-eyed stars I'll press
 While I'm away to keep you safe
 In your great loneliness;
 Go, and I'll rest upon the plain.'
 —'And do you leave tonight
 Right now?'
 —'Ah, no, I did but jest!
 No nation seeks to fight
 With our Ukraine—no Muscovites
 Nor Tartars need we fear.'
 —'I've heard the Poles are on their way . . .'
 —'That's balderdash, my dear! . . .'
 Now let us part, my own sweetheart,
 Before the dawn shall show!
 Why do you weep again, my love!
 —'I really do not know!'"

St. Petersburg, 1841

THE DROWNED MAIDEN

(*A ballad*)

Within the grove the wind's at rest;
 It does not stir the hedge;
 Only at times it barely breathes
 And gently asks the sedge:
 "Who is it, who, upon this bank,
 That combs her lovely hair?
 Who is it, who, across the stream,
 That tears her tresses there?
 Who is it, who?" it gently asks
 With breath but barely drawn;
 Then falls a-drowsing till the sky
 Grows rosy with the dawn.

"Who is it, who?" you, too, may ask,
 Inquisitive young maids.
 Upon this bank, a daughter sits;
 On that, her mother fades.

The whole thing happened long ago
In this Ukraine of mine.
A widow in a village lived,
Within a cottage fine.
White cheeks she had, and hazel eyes,
And a tall, slender shape.
She, richly dressed, a lady seemed,
Whichever way you'd gape.
And she was youthful, to be sure!
And to a maid so young,
And even more a widow fair,
Great hordes of Cossacks clung,
Pursuing her with Cossack love,
And soon the sequel came:
The widow brought a daughter forth
Without a hint of shame.
She gave her birth, and did not care!
She left the babe to others
To bring up in a nearby thorp,
This most unkind of mothers! . . .
Just wait and see what happens next!
While others reared her child,
The widow, on all working days
And Sundays running wild,
Just drank and had a merry time
With married men and single
Until her mirror gave her news
That made vexation tingle;
She had not been aware till now
That youth and grace were dead . . .
What pangs! The mother withers up,
The daughter blossoms red,
And grows up into maidenhood,
A beauty bright of eye,
Like some tall poplar in a field,
She slender grew, and high.
"Of Annie I am not afraid!"
Her mother used to sing,
As all the Cossacks like a vine
About the girl would cling.
More than the rest, a fisherman,
Though sturdy, young and canny,

Would pine and swoon whene'er he met
 The curly-headed Annie.
 The aging mother marked it all,
 And raved in agony:
 "Just think! That ugly, ragged thing!
 A barefoot bastard, she!
 Have you grown up to chase the lads
 And mock your mother's grace?
 Just wait, my dear, and very soon
 I'll put you in your place! . . ."
 Thus in a rage she gnashed her teeth.
 Such mothers can be found
 Who are not by a tender love
 Or true affection bound.
 What woe, dear maidens, it must be,
 What proof of hell's own art,
 To have a slender, stately shape
 And not a mother's heart!
 Your slender shape will soon be bent,
 Your beauty fades away
 Before you know that it has gone . . .
 And people laugh and say,
 Remembering your youthful years,
 "The good-for-nothing slut!"
 Then bitterly did Annie weep;
 Her soul was deeply cut;
 And yet she did not know the cause
 Why oaths on her were plastered,
 And why the mother without shame
 Would call her child a bastard.
 A bastard! . . . Monster that you are!
 Whom do you so torment?
 Why do you torture to the death
 Your child whom God once sent?

Her cruel tortures did not cease,
 Yet they were put to rout:
 A poppy in a garden-plot,
 Sweet Annie blossomed out;
 Like cranberry blossoms in the vale
 Impearled with morning dew,

Fair Annie's cheeks when washed with tears
 Waxed prettier to view.
 "Some magic guards her! Ah, but wait!"
 The savage mother hissed:
 "The old witch I shall go and see;
 On poison I'll insist!"
 She found the witch and got the draught,
 She mixed it with some water,
 And quickly, in the dark of night,
 She gave it to her daughter,—
 Who did not die.

The mother cursed

The hour and the day
 When she had brought into the world
 This child of her dismay.
 —"It's stifling hot. In yonder pond
 To bathe we'll seek with zest!"
 —"Mother, I come." Upon the bank
 Sweet Annie there undressed,
 Undressed and spread her white shift out;
 Upon the farther shore
 The curly-headed fisherman
 Knelt swooning to adore.
 (I, too, have once . . . but let's forget!
 The thought still makes me blush . . .)
 He sees the lass, like any child,
 Pat a cranberry bush,
 Then bend and spread her slender shape
 To warm it in the sun.
 Her raging mother at the sight
 By frenzy is undone,—
 Now blue, now yellow, shows her face;
 Dishevelled, barefoot, stout,
 She froths at mouth like one possessed
 And tears her tresses out.
 She rushed at Annie then, and sank
 Her fingers in her hair.
 "Ah, mother, mother! What's amiss?"
 The pond above the pair
 With seething groan its waters closed
 And covered up them both.

The curly-headed fisherman
 Dove headlong, nothing loath,
 Into the pond; with frantic stroke
 Through the blue waves he surged
 Until he reached the spot; plunged down
 And presently emerged,
 And brought drowned Annie to the shore,
 And laid her on the bank,
 And from her braids he pulled away
 Her mother's fingers dank.
 —"My sweetheart! O my dearest love!
 Open your lovely eyes!
 Look! Smile at me! Do you refuse?
 Can you no more arise?"
 He weeps, he falls beside her there,
 Her poor, dead eyes he opes
 And kisses them. "She hears me not!
 And dead are all my hopes!"

There on the gentle sand she lies,
 Her snow-white arms outspread;
 Behold beside her on the shore
 Her monstrous mother, dead,
 With eyes that from their sockets bulge;
 Into the yellow sands,
 As if in savage pain, she sinks
 Her crabbed, old, blue hands!

Long wept the fisher: "I've no kin,
 No fortune left to give!
 Together in the water here
 For ever let us live!"
 He raised her, kissed her in his arms;
 The water groaned, as pained,
 Then parted and enfolded them
 And not a trace remained.

And since that time the pond, once clear,
 Is overgrown with sedge;
 Young women there no longer bathe,
 They view from far its edge;

And when they glimpse it, cross themselves
 And say the place is haunted.
 An utter sadness shrouds the spot . . .
 At night, by time undaunted,
 The mother from the water comes,
 On the far shore she sits,
 Dishevelled, horrible, and blue;
 Close her wet garment fits;
 In silence to this side she looks
 And rends her straggled hair . . .
 And meanwhile the blue water parts
 And heaves up Annie fair;
 She shudders in her nakedness
 And sits upon the sand;
 Hither the fisher also swims
 With pondweed in each hand
 To make a shirt to cover her;
 He kisses both her eyes
 Then once more dives in modesty
 To see in such a guise
 The naked maiden's lovely form . . .
 And still no mortal knows
 Of wonders that take place at night;
 But as the darkness flows
 The wind is whispering to the sedge:
 "Who is it? Who is there?
 Who sits so sadly on the bank
 And combs her flowing hair?"
St. Petersburg, December 8, 1841

A BARK

The wind holds converse with the grove,
 It whispers to the sedge,—
 A lone bark down the Danube floats
 Far from the river's edge.
 The bark is floating water-logged—
 Nobody stays its course;
 No fisherman is nigh at hand
 Its stoppage to enforce;
 To this way and to that it rocks,
 One faints to mark its woe!

Without an oar it floats along
 Where wind and current go . . .
 Into the sea at last it drifts,
 And loud the sea complained . . .
 The dark waves sported with the craft
 Till not a shred remained!

Like the bark's journey to the sea,
 A waif's unwitting way
 To foreign countries is not long
 Till sorrows with him play.
 For of him, like the billows cold,
 The people will make sport
 Till of the jest they've had their fill
 And he's past every port;
 Then they will glance to see the waif
 Where dark despairs careen him;
 And, if you ask his whereabouts,
 Say: "No, we have not seen him!"
St. Petersburg, 1841

1842

HAMALIYA¹⁵⁰

*"Not a breath of air is felt, no wind or wave,¹⁵¹
 Comes from our dear Ukraine!
 Do men take counsel there to rout the Turk?—
 We listen here in vain.*

¹⁵⁰History does not record a Hamaliya who attacked Istanbul's Asian suburb of Scutari in order to liberate Cossack captives from its dungeon. This particular event is therefore Shevchenko's own product of fiction. However, it is a faithful depiction of Cossack raids against the Turkish coastal towns that actually occurred and in similar circumstances. The poem seems to be an elaboration of "Ivan Pidkova," p. 40. It is quite dramatic in its narrative and abounding in highly poetic personifications of natural sights and phenomena. It was written during Shevchenko's trip across the Baltic to Stockholm. See Introduction, p. xvii.

¹⁵¹These four quatrains express the lamentations of the Cossack captives who await their liberation in the Turkish dungeon.

*“Blow, blow, O wind, across the vast sea blow,
 Across the mighty Plain!¹⁵²
 Dry all our tears, drown out the fetters’ clank
 And put to flight our pain!*

*“Roar, roar, O azure sea, as on you roll
 Beneath those sturdy ships
 That each bright Cossack caps and warriors bears
 As towards our shore it dips!*

*“O Lord, our God! They may not reach us here,
 But bring them none the less:
 In their exploits we’ll hear the Cossack fame
 And die without distress!”*

O, thus in Scutari the Cossacks were singing,
 The wretched ones sang with their tears running down,
 And tears to their sorrow new torment were bringing.
 Old Bosphorus shook with a wondering frown,
 For new to his ears was the Cossack lamenting,
 He groaned like a grey ox and shook his broad hide;
 He roared and from rocky ribs fiercely commenting
 Sent waves far away to the sea’s farther side.
 And back roared the sea in the Bosphorus’ chanting
 And drove it along to the Liman’s¹⁵³ last reach,
 While Liman in turn, in its wave’s mournful ranting,
 Passed on to the Dnieper that sorrowful speech.

Our mighty oldster¹⁵⁴ bellowed out
 Till foam dripped from his whiskered snout:
 “O brother Meadow,¹⁵⁵ do you sleep?
 Sister Khortitsia,¹⁵⁶ hear and leap!”
 And back the Isle and Meadow roared:
 “We hear! We hear!” With one accord,

¹⁵²The Great Meadow, a vast swampy and reedy plain surrounding the Sitch encampment along the lower reaches of the Dnieper.

¹⁵³Dnieper’s estuary.

¹⁵⁴The Dnieper is here compared to a bewhiskered old man, just as previously the Bosphorus is pictured as a grey ox, both fine comparisons.

¹⁵⁵See fn. 152.

¹⁵⁶An island on the Dnieper, beyond its rapids, on which the first Cossack encampment was established, perhaps by Dmitro Bayda-Vishnevetsky who built a fortress there in 1552.

Bold barks upon the Dnieper throng
And Cossacks burst into a song:¹⁵⁷

*"In the land of the Turk, on the further side,
A rich house stands in its lordly pride.*

*Heigh-ho! Roar, O sea,
Roar and batter the cliffs for me!*

For we're off on a visiting spree!

*"In the land of the Turk we could surely find
Thalers and ducats to sate the mind.*

*Heigh-ho! But not for loot
We go, but to slash the infidel brute
And to free all our brothers to boot!*

*"In the land of the Turk there are guards that crouch
While the pasha sleeps on a silken couch.*

*Heigh-ho! At the paynim foe
With never a moment's pause we go,
And ours is the freedom and fame, we know!"*

While thus they sail, in song's assize,
The sea feels stormy winds arise.¹⁵⁸
But Hamaliya, at their head,¹⁵⁹
Directs his bark devoid of dread.

"Hamaliya! Our hearts grow faint!
The sea is wild!"—

"Feel no constraint!"

He cries, and in safety they sink and pass
Through the troughs of the mountainous sea's morass.

In its harem, its Eden, Byzantium drowns;
While Scutari slumbers, the Strait gurgles loud;
It howls in its fury to warn all the houses,
To rouse to its peril Byzantium proud.

"Come, wake it not, Bosphorus, or you will rue it!
I'll cover your white ribs with silt and with sand!

¹⁵⁷The sequence is very finely executed: The Bosphorus hears the Cossacks' lament, sends their longing on its rocky ribs to the Black Sea, which bears the message upon its waves to Liman, which transmits it to the Dnieper, which bellows it out to the Cossacks in the Great Meadow and on the Khortitsia, thus informing them of the plight of their fellow-countrymen.

¹⁵⁸The Cossacks invariably raided the Turkish coastal towns in stormy weather, for then they were least expected to do so, and thus could take the Turks by surprise.

¹⁵⁹At their head, because he is leading them. Compare their return (fn. 161).

(The blue sea roars out.) You're forbidden to do it—
 Great guests for the sultan I bring to your strand."
 And thus did the sea keep the narrows from leaping.
 (It loved the staunch Slavs with their forelocks so bold.)
 The Bosphorus paused and the Turks went on sleeping;
 The sultan the silks of his harem enfold.
 But deep in their dungeon the Cossacks were waking.
 What might they expect in the chains that they bore?
 And yet in their fashion a prayer they were making
 That passed on the waves to the far distant shore:

"Beloved God of far Ukraine,
 Let not free Cossacks thus remain
 To perish in a foreign land!
 What shame on earth for this our band
 And shame on Doomsday to arise
 And show our shackles in the skies
 When to thy Judgment-seat we come
 And bear the chains of earthly doom
 For all to see it!"—

"Slash and fell!
 Cut down the Muslim infidel!"—
 The cry is heard behind a wall.
 Who could have uttered such a call?

"Hamaliya! Our hearts grow faint!
 Scutari rages!"—

"Without restraint
 Slash and strike!" Hamaliya cries,
 And stands on the rampart before all eyes.

Scutari loud with its cannon roars;
 The angry foe from his barracks pours.
 The Cossacks press in a fierce attack
 And roll the janissaries back.

In Scutari Hamaliya rushes
 As if in a hell where fire gushes;
 The dungeon portal himself he rends
 And looses the chains of his captive friends.
 "Fly out, grey falcons, to the mart,
 And of the booty take your part!"

The Cossacks started in surprise,
 For Christian speech in such a guise

For many a year they had not heard.
 Night, too, was startled at that word,
 For the old mother ne'er had seen
 The Cossacks' fierce revenge, I ween.
 Be not affrighted, see at least
 The fervour of a Cossack feast!
 At midnight it was bright as day
 To watch the feast get under way!
 These are not sneak-thieves, wan and shaken,
 Who without mutton eat their bacon.

"Let's light the scene for all to see!"
 And to the clouds in ardour free
 The masted ships flame-torches raise
 And set all Scutari ablaze.
 Byzantium at last arouses
 And opes the eyes of all its houses;
 Gnashing its teeth, in rage arrayed,
 It swims across to offer aid.

Byzantium is full of ire.
 It seeks to grip the shore of fire
 But screams and rises up and dies
 As sharp blades silence all her cries.

Like hell, Scutari flaming goes;
 The market-place with bloodshed flows
 And swells the waters of the Strait.
 Like blackbirds in a grove irate,
 The daring Cossacks dart with clangour.
 No mortal may escape their anger!
 At flames the Cossack warriors scoff.
 They tear down walls and carry off
 Capfuls of silver and of gold
 To stow within their vessels' hold.
 Scutari burns; their task is done;
 Now gathers round each dauntless one
 To light his pipe at the burning fire;¹⁶⁰
 Then they mount their ships at their hearts' desire
 And cleave the waves as the seas roll higher.

¹⁶⁰It was the Cossack custom, when their work was done, to light their pipes with the fire of the conflagration they had set, as a flaunting gesture of their victory.

They sail with the greatest of nonchalance,
 As if on an outing of careless chance;
 And then, as the Zaporozhians do,
 Strike up a song for the gallant crew:

*"Hamaliya, our leader fine
 Is a dauntless leader across the brine;
 He gathered his boys and roamed the main
 The glory of Cossack arms to gain
 By setting our hapless brothers free
 Out of their Turkish captivity.
 When Hamaliya journeyed down
 To the very heart of Scutari town,
 He found the captives in foul pollution
 Waiting in chains for their execution.
 Oh, what a shout our leader raised:
 'Brothers, we'll live, may God be praised!
 In rich red wine our woes we'll drown
 And strike the janissaries down,
 And with costly rugs and satin shawls
 We'll cover our peasant cottage walls!
 On the field of battle the Cossacks strain,
 Out on the field to harvest the grain;
 The grain of battle they reaped and stooked,
 And cried together as round they looked:
 'Hamaliya, we give you glory!
 All of the world will prize your story,
 And all the fair Ukrainian land
 Because you saved our captive Band
 From dying on a foreign strand.'"*

They sail and sing to this bold idea;
 Behind them sails dauntless Hamaliya,¹⁶¹
 Like an eagle watching its brood with care.
 A wind from the Dardanelles follows there
 To warn if Byzantium tries pursuit—
 But she is afraid of the monk's¹⁶² repute

¹⁶¹He is now at the rear, to protect them from the enemy's pursuit. See fn. 158.

¹⁶²Hetman Petro Konashevich-Sahaydachny who likewise led raids against the Turkish coastal towns, among them Galata, another suburb of Istanbul, which he razed. It is supposed that he became a monk when his warring days were over. See also fn. 104.

Who set old Galata once ablaze,
 Or she fears lest Ivan Pidkova¹⁶³ raise
 His roistering comrades of other days.
 So on they sail. . . .

From behind the hills
 The sun on the waves its redness spills;
 Before them spreads the inviting sea,
 Gurgling and humming pleasantly.

Hamaliya! The wind is blowing! . . .
 Into the sea we are boldly rowing! . . .
 And they dipped and were hidden behind the waves,
 The rosy crests of the billowy caves.

St. Petersburg, 1842

1843.

THE EXCAVATED MOUND¹⁶⁴

O gentle region, fair Ukraine,
 Dear beyond every other!
 Why are you plundered and despoiled,
 Why do you perish, Mother?
 Have you not prayed, before the dawn,
 For fortune in the strife?
 Have you not taught your wavering sons
 To live a virtuous life?
 —“Indeed I prayed and took great care;
 Slept neither day nor night;
 Watched for my children, taught them well
 To do the thing that’s right.

¹⁶³See fn. 31.

¹⁶⁴Burial mounds were constantly being excavated by the government-appointed archaeological commissions for the purpose of seeking historical antiquities. To Shevchenko, this excavation of mounds was symbolic of Russia’s spoliation of Ukraine throughout the centuries. There was an aura of sacredness about those barrows, for they were virtually the only visible signs of the past glory of Ukraine, as in many of them lay the bones of the Cossacks who fought for the freedom of their land.

My children up to manhood grew,
 Unfolding like the flowers,—
 There was a day I knew delight . . .
 In this vast world of ours.
 My joy was great . . . But oh, Bohdan,
 You unwise son of mine!¹⁶⁵
 Look at your ancient mother now,
 Ukraine, of stock divine,
 Who as she cradled you, would sing
 And grieve she was not free;
 Who, as she sang, in sorrow wept
 And looked for liberty! . . .
 O dear Bohdan, if I had known
 That you would bring us doom,
 I would have choked you in your crib,
 Benumbed you in my womb!
 For now my steppes are meted out
 To Germans and to Jews;¹⁶⁶
 My sons now toil in alien lands¹⁶⁷
 Where foreign lords abuse;
 The Dnieper they are drying up;
 The loss will break my heart;
 And my dear mounds the Muscovite
 Is shattering apart.
 There let him ferret, let him dig;
 He takes, and is a thief . . .
 Meanwhile let renegades grow up
 To give our foes relief,
 To help the Muscovites to rule
 Ukraine's broad acres black,
 To strip their mother's last patched shirt
 From off her bleeding back!

¹⁶⁵Shevchenko could never forgive Hetman Bohdan Khmelnsky for signing the Treaty of Pereyaslav in 1654, by the terms of which Ukraine, instead of becoming Russia's ally (as Khmelnsky had intended) fell under her complete sway.

¹⁶⁶The German immigrants were being settled in Ukraine in Peter I's time, and particularly during Catherine II's reign, when they were most favoured, she being of German origin herself. The Jews, who were forbidden to live in Russia or establish themselves there commercially, were driven to Ukraine where in the nineteenth century they numbered about a million.

¹⁶⁷Many Ukrainians were compelled to leave their native land to do forced labour in Russia. Those conforming to the tsarist régime were given civil service positions. These and the wealthy Ukrainian landlords who were indifferent as to their national identity Shevchenko called "renegades," because they were completely lost to the cause of Ukraine's freedom.

Hasten, ye monsters all disloyal,
Your mother's frame to rack!"

Drawn, quartered, lies the tumulus;
The mangled mound expires . . .
What are they seeking? What was hid
Here by our ancient sires?
Alas, if one could only find
The thing they buried there,¹⁶⁸
My children would not weep, nor yet
Their mother know despair.

Berezan, October 9, 1843

1844

CHIHIRIN¹⁶⁹

TO M. S. SHCHEPKIN¹⁷⁰

Chihirín, O Chihirín!
All things to Time are prey;
Even your sacred glory
Like dust is borne away
By the cold winds and in the clouds
Must vanish overhead.
The years pass on; the Dnieper dries
Within its mighty bed;
The tumuli are crumbling down,
Those mounds of highest span
That are your glory—and of you,
O hoary, weak, old man,
None will recall a single word,
And none will even state
Where once you stood, and why you stood . . .
O site most desolate!
No one will ever more recall
Why with the Poles we fought,

¹⁶⁸i.e., freedom.

¹⁷⁰A Russian actor and Shevchenko's close friend. The poem "The Neophytes" was also dedicated to him.

¹⁶⁹See fn. 86.

Why from the Horde most bloodily
 A victory we sought,
 And why we harrowed with our spears
 The ribs of Muscovites . . .
 And sowed their bodies in our field
 In ancient days and nights,
 And watered it with ruddy blood
 And ploughed it with the sword.
 And what has grown upon that field?
 Rue, only rue abhorred,
 Plant poisonous to liberty.
 And I a foolish swain
 Upon your ruins sadly stand
 And waste my tears in vain.
 Ukraine, alas, has fall'n asleep,
 Is overgrown with weeds
 And covered deep with slimy mould;
 It fails from noble deeds.
 Its heart decays in filthy mire
 And vipers are allowed
 Into its hollows cool to creep;
 To children once so proud
 She has bequeathed a feeble hope
 Out on the steppe to stay—
 The wind has tossed it round the field,
 The rivers borne away.
 Then let the wind strew everything,
 Its wing the whole earth spurn!
 Then let my heart in sorrow pray
 That Justice may return!

Chihirín, O Chihirín!

My true friend! While you slept
 You've lost your steppes and forests broad
 And the whole land inept!
 Sleep on, by alien folk begirt,
 Until the sun shall rise
 Until our childish-minded chiefs
 Attain to wisdom's prize!
 I, after prayer, would fall asleep,
 But thought's accursèd art

Is striving to inflame my soul
 And break my simple heart.
 Ah, do not break it, nor inflame!
 Perhaps I shall regain
 My gentle speech where Justice ruled
 And soothed our mortal pain;
 Perhaps I yet shall forge from it
 To fit the ancient plough
 A ploughshare new, a coulter too,
 And then, with sweating brow,
 I yet may plough my fallow ground
 And in that fallow sow
 My faithful tears, my fervent tears,
 If aught from them might grow.
 From them may sprout two-edged blades
 That with a surgeon's art
 May open up my country's bad
 Decayed and bloated heart,
 And draining out its sugary stuff,
 Pour in a living tide
 Of ruddy, pulsing, Cossack blood,
 Sacred and purified.
 Perhaps, perhaps . . . among those blades
 The gentle rue may spread,
 And periwinkle buds may sprout,
 And there my words long dead—
 My gentle, timid, mournful speech—
 Revived, may live again,
 And there a maiden's timorous heart,
 Caught by my verses' strain,
 May startle like a frightened fish . . .
 This tribute she'll accord me . . .
 O words and tears of mine, what joy
 Your worth may yet afford me!

 Sleep, Chihirín! Let foemen's sons
 Down to defeat be hurled!
 O Hetman,¹⁷¹ sleep, till Justice rise
 To rule our sorry world!

Moscow, February 19, 1844

¹⁷¹Bohdan Khmel'nitsky (1593–1657).

THE OWL

In a green wooded valley
A mother bore a son;
She gave him eyes most beautiful,
Brows like a benison.
And all the saints the dame besought
That he with luck might live:
“May God’s own Mother grant all grace
That mothers cannot give!”
His bath at dead of night she drew
With periwinkles prim;
Till midnight he was cradled soft,
Till dawn she sang to him:
“Sweetest baby, rock-a-bye!
I bade the cuckoo prophesy;
The cuckoo spoke with words of sooth,
The cuckoo told this precious truth:
I am to live a hundred year,
To take good care of you, my dear;
I shall be wealthy, rich of gown,
And have a pleasant life in town.
You will grow up, the cuckoo swore,
In three brief years, or maybe four;
You will look like a prince’s child,
Like a tall ash-tree growing wild,
Slender and sturdy, firm of gait,
And happy in your noble fate;
And not alone will you remain,
A splendid bride I shall obtain—
Though I should seek beyond the water
A merchant’s or a captain’s daughter,
A fine young lady she’ll be seen,
In bright red shoes and mantle green,
Who’ll pace your parlour, proud and tall,
With gracious converse for you all.
Your home will be a paradise
While I, my son, by my device,
Will sit there in my cosy niche
And feast my eyes on costumes rich.

My dearest child, O son of mine,
 Is there on earth a son more fine,
 In all Ukraine? Good people, gaze,
 And sate your eyes in sweet amaze!
 There is none prettier! . . . Success
 Will surely come his life to bless! . . .”

O cuckoo, canting cuckoo,
 Why did you prophesy?
 Why promise her a hundred years—
 And manifestly lie?
 Can there be found in all the world
 A destiny so true
 That mothers could from distant lands
 Evoke the weal they woo,
 Could summon for their children
 Fortune and freedom fair?
 To what avail! . . . For sad mischance
 Can meet one anywhere—
 Wherever people gather.
 She gloried in her son
 As in a flower of the grove;
 Her joy was never done.

But then the father died, and she,
 A widow, still but young
 And with a child, now found her life
 By want and sorrow wrung.
 And so she sought the neighbours out
 Their counsel to bespeak . . .
 And they advised by one consent
 That she for work should seek.
 Wasted and faded, off she went
 And worked, hard times to evade.
 And day and night she slaved and toiled
 To get her head-tax paid . . .
 And with the little that she saved
 She bought her son a jacket:
 The widow's son must go to school
 And surely must not lack it.

Ah, what a heavy lot in life
 A widow must endure!
 Her fortune like a gypsy roves
 In ragged bands obscure.
 For a rich man the water flows
 Up to his house serene;
 While every poor man has to dig,
 Even in a ravine.
 The rich have many children fair,
 For willows they might pass;
 The widow has an only child,
 A lonely blade of grass.

At last the widow saw with joy
 Her son was fully grown:
 Could read and write, was fair of face,
 And like a flower full-blown!
 Behind God's door she seemed to live,
 So joyful was her mood,
 When the young women ogled him
 And stored up trousseaux good.
 A maiden rich would fall in love
 But somehow failed to woo him;
 She stitched a kerchief fine with silk—
 But did not give it to him.
 Then bad times from beyond the sea
 Crept to the widow's hut . . .
 Young men they now impress with chains,
 To army service put;¹⁷²
 They marched them to the muster-point;
 By beaten paths they came.
 The widow, weeping, hung about
 With many another dame.
 On conscripts, where they pass the night,
 A guard most strict they clamp;
 The widow had no chance at all
 To come into the camp.

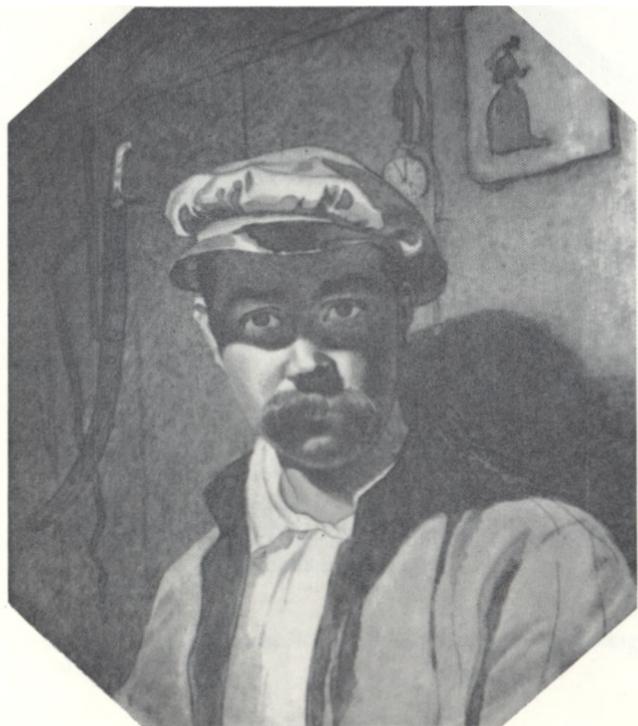
¹⁷²In those days military service was hard and long, often lasting as many ^{as} twelve years, at times more.



T. Shevchenko, *Self-Portrait* (pencil, 1845)
One of the poet's self-portraits, showing him at the height of his vital
and spiritual powers.



T. Shevchenko, *Shevchenko Drawing a Companion* (sepia, 1848–49)



T. Shevchenko, *Self-Portrait* (sepia, 1849–50)

They marched them to the muster-point
 To shave away their hair;
 And many small and puny lads
 And rich men's sons were there;
 One had a stutter, one was lame,
 One could not stand erect,
 One had a hump, and one was rich,
 Four from one home were checked.
 Something was wrong with all of them,
 Back home the draft was sent—
 Fortune has shown a mother's love
 In their predicament.
 Alas, the widow's only son
 Was just the army's kind,
 And so they took the lad away
 And she was left behind.
 Again the widow left her home—
 Such tasks her age abuse—
 And laboured for a crust of bread
 As menial to the Jews,—
 Since Christian folk would take her not:
 She's grown too old, they said,
 "Too weak to work. . . ." Although at times
 They'd give her scraps of bread
 For charity. . . .

 God grant that none
 Such hardship might endure,
 Where even water for a drink
 May be begrudged the poor!

Copeck by copeck she laid by
 Till sixty she had saved,
 Then sent a letter to her son
 Where with the troops he slaved.
 She felt relief. A year passed by,
 And then a second year;
 The fourth year and the tenth have gone
 And still she does not hear.
 No news at all. What could she do?
 A bag she must implore

And go the rounds, barked at by dogs,
 Begging from door to door.
 She took the bag; the village left,
 And sought the meadow flat
 And did not wander home again
 But day and night she sat
 Inert beside the village gate.
 Summer passed summer by.
 Her person in that wasted form
 No one could now descry,
 And who would care to recognize
 A crippled, poor, old dame
 Who sat and gazed along the road
 By which all travellers came.
 Again it dawns, again the dark
 Cloaks heaven's lofty dome
 And still the widow's soldier son
 Comes never, never home. . . .

Beside the pond, by evening light,
 The willows are a-sway;
 In vain the dame awaits her son,
 From supper still away.
 Above the pond, by evening light,
 The sedge is whispering low;
 In the dark grove a maid awaits
 Her Cossack, pale with woe.
 Across the pond, the breezes blow;
 The willows all are swayed;
 Lone in her hut the mother weeps,
 And in the grove the maid.
 The black-browed beauty wept her fill,
 And then began to sing;
 The aged mother wept her fill,
 Then wailings loud did fling.
 She prayed to Heaven, lamented loud,
 Cursed everything, God wot.
 How hard it is when mothers bear
 Their children's hapless lot!
 Her gnarled old hands she raised in prayer
 To God; her soul undone,

She sadly cursed her sorry fate
 And called out to her son;
 Then in a simple daze she falls,
 As griefs her brain corrode;
 And through her tears intently gazed
 Upon the nearby road.
 By day and night she looked at it
 And pled with passers-by:
 "Among the far-off Russian troops
 Did you a lad espy,
 My son? . . ." But none had heard of him
 And none had ever seen him.
 And so she sits, asks no one now,
 And does not weep to keen him.
 She has gone mad! . . . A piece of brick
 She tends, now scolding wild,
 Now calling it her little son;
 She feeds it like a child;
 Now in seclusion, shedding tears,
 She sings in accents mild:

*"The viper set the house on fire
 To cook some gruel; edging nigher,
 He wrinkled up his leggings gay . . .
 And then the Moskals¹⁷³ flew away,
 Like grey geese to a warmer clime
 By fours, by fours, in perfect time,
 They flew away with cackling sound!—
 The eagle sits upon a mound
 And in the middle of the night
 Pecks out the Cossack's eyes so bright,
 While in a grove a maiden stays
 Till he return from war's dark ways . . ."*

By day she prowled the refuse piles
 And gathered up the shards—
 A gift they were for her son's son,
 The little lad's rewards.
 And oft by night, dishevelled quite
 And bare of head she goes

¹⁷³Soldiers serving in the Russian army.

Through all the village, singing loud
 Or wailing out her woes.
 The people scolded her . . . you see,
 She kept them from their sleep,
 And all along their hedges prim
 She trampled grasses deep.
 By day, the children, armed with sticks,
 After the widow howl
 Along the street, and mockingly
 They call her—"Owl! Owl! Owl!"

St. Petersburg, May 6, 1844

THE MAIDEN'S NIGHTS

The maiden nights
 Bring beauty's blights . . .
 Mariana, The Nun

Unplaited braids of maiden's hair
 Down to her waist fall free;
 Her heaving breasts are now revealed
 Like waves amid the sea;
 Her hazel eyes are gleaming fair,
 Like stars at night they shine;
 Her snow-white arms are now outspread
 As longing to entwine
 A young man's form—her fingers tense,
 Sunk in her pillow cold,
 Grow numb and rigid there. She weeps;
 Her hands at last unfold:
 "What use is all my grace to me,
 My soft and dove-like eyes,
 My supple shape . . . If I have not
 A husband as my prize?
 If none I have whom I may love,
 With whom my soul may meet? . . .
 My heart, my heart, how hard it is
 For you alone to beat!
 With whom, alas, am I to live,
 O wicked world? Ah me,
 What use is reputation's fame
 And my virginity?"

I want to love, I want to live
 With heart and not with face!
 The wicked people round about
 Are envious of my grace!
 They call me proud, they call me vain,
 And they are not aware
 Of all the longing in my breast
 That life has hidden there . . .
 But let them call me what they will—
 The sin be theirs! But only,
 Dear God, pray shorten for my heart
 These nights so dark and lonely,
 So difficult for me to bear!
 By day I'm not alone:
 Out in the fields, I greet the fields
 And there forget my moan.
 But in the night . . .

Her voice was mute.

She drooped, a weeping willow,
 Stretched out her arms, and fiercely sank
 Her fingers in the pillow.

St. Petersburg, May 18, 1844

THE DREAM¹⁷⁴

Even the spirit of truth, which the
 world cannot receive because it seeth
 him not, neither knoweth him.

John xrv. 17

Each person has his destiny,
 His road beneath the sky:
 One builds with care, and one destroys,
 And one, with greedy eye,
 Peers past the limits of the world
 For more land to enslave
 And seize and take along with him
 Into his very grave;
 One man with aces robs his friend
 And pities not the clown;

¹⁷⁴See Introduction, p. xviii.

One whets his knife in secrecy
 To strike his brother down;
 And still another, sober, mild,
 All timorous and sedate,
 Creeps like a kitten, till a time
 For you unfortunate,
 And in your liver sinks his claws;
 Ask not that mercy spares:
 Your very wife and child won't gain
 Your safety by their prayers;
 That man, so generous and rich,
 Builds churches every year;
 He loves his Russian "fatherland"
 And holds it very dear;
 Meanwhile, like water, drains the blood
 From all the country's poor . . .
 And all the common folk are dumb
 And stare with eyes unsure
 Like silly lambs: "Let them!"—they say—
 "Perhaps it should be thus!"
 It should be? There's no God in heaven
 If this is virtuous!
 You bend your necks in yokes, and claim
 Some paradise for all
 In this our sorry world below
 There's none! There's none at all!
 Your efforts fail! Wake up at last:
 All people, man or madam,
 The beggars and the emperors,
 Are children all of Adam!
 This man . . . and that . . .

And what of me?

This is the course I set:
 On Sundays and on weekdays too
 I guzzle to forget;
 While you feel tedious and complain . . .
 I shall not match your mood.
 Don't bother shouting! For I drink
 My own, not others', blood.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵i.e., this is my own worry, not anybody else's.

Thus as I walked along the hedge
 From a carousing, drunk, one night,
 I meditated on my plight
 And tottered to the threshold's edge.
 No wailing children thronged the place,
 No wife was there to scold me,
 But peaceful joys enfold me
 For every nook held God's own grace:
 Both in the house and in my heart.
 And soon in sleep I lay as dead.
 A tipsy fellow snores a-bed:
 You fire a cannon at his head—
 He will not wince or flinch or start.

I

And what a wondrous dream did then unfold
 Before my eyes as there I lay asleep!
 A sober man in drink his soul would steep,
 A Jew would gladly give a piece of gold,
 To see such marvels as I saw that day!
 But no such luck, I'm sure, will come their way!
 I looked: and seemed to see an owl
 Above broad meadows, banks and wildernesses prowl;
 Over deep ravines he flew,
 Deep wooded valleys too
 And prairies vast in view.
 I follow; very close behind I fly;
 And as I soar, I bid the earth good-bye:
 "Farewell, O world! Farewell, O earth!
 Thou dismal, dreary land!
 I'll hide my torments, fierce and keen,
 Within a cloudbank bland.
 Then to thyself, my own Ukraine,
 A widow sad and weak,
 I shall come flying from the clouds
 And with thee shall I speak;
 From our communion, soft and low,
 My heart shall gain some cheer;
 At midnight shall my soul come down
 In dewdrops cool and clear.

We shall take counsel in our grief
 Until the dawn we see,
 And till thy children grow enough
 To rout the enemy.
 And so, farewell, my mother dear,
 Widow unfortunate!
 Remember, justice lives with God
 To make thy children great!"

I fly. . . . Then look and see the dawn
 That sets the heavens on fire;
 In shadowy groves the nightingale
 Salutes it in desire.
 The wind blows gently, and the steppes
 And meads are dimly seen;
 Between the rifts, above the ponds,
 The willow-trees are green;
 Luxuriant orchards lowly bend,
 The poplars here and there
 Stand out like guards across the fields
 And whisper debonair.
 And all of this, the entire land,
 In beauty's robes to view
 And verdant draperies of spring
 Is washed with early dew;
 And thus adorned and thus made clean,
 It meets the rising sun—
 Its rapture from no limit starts,
 Its grace is never done.
 That loveliness could find no charm
 To add or take away,
 All is so perfect . . .

But, my soul
 Why art thou sad this day?
 My soul, in anguish of distress,
 Why dost thou weep, forsooth?
 What is the cause of all thy grief?
 Dost thou not see the truth?

For canst thou not hear there the sound of men's cry?
 Then glance down, and look! For a while I will fly

High, high beyond clouds in the infinite blue:
 No gendarmes are there and no penalties due,
 No laughter is heard and no wail as men grieve.
 But see! In that Eden thou seekest to leave,
 Patched garments are torn from the backs of the lame
 Along with their hides,—sure the lord needs the same
 To shoe his young offspring. And see, farther back,
 A widow for head-tax is put to the rack,
 While the son of her love, her one hope for survival,
 Is pressed for the army, nor waits her arrival.
 The lord fears his spirit.¹⁷⁶ And there, by the hedge,
 A child with swoll'n belly its pangs to allege
 Is dying of hunger—its mother ignored
 Is doing forced labour in fields of the lord.

But yonder, see? O eyes, my eyes!
 Can you no other sights devise?
 Would you had dimmed, all view to dout,
 Or with my tears had trickled out!
 An unwed mother past the farms
 Walks with a bastard in her arms;
 Her parents both have cast her off.
 And everyone will only scoff.
 Even the churls . . . The lord's young son
 Forgets what he to her has done,
 And, with his twentieth woman, drinks
 The souls of serfs down, as he winks.
 Does God behind the clouds behold
 Our tears and anguish from of old?
 Perhaps He does, but helps our ills
 As little as those timeless hills
 That saw it all and marked the flood,
 Along their slopes, of human blood! . . .
 Alas, my soul, in dark distress
 How dreadful is thy hopelessness!
 After our fill of poisonous sights,
 Let us seek rest in icy nights,
 And send our ponderous thought to God
 To ask how long He stays his rod,

¹⁷⁶Landlords would often designate for army service those of their serfs whom they thought too outspoken against the prevailing social order.

And when the hangmen, black of hand,
 Will cease to lord it in our land.
 Then fly, my fierce thought, that my torment now doubles,
 And carry away all my ills and my troubles,
 Thy constant companions! With them thou has grown,
 And them thou wert fond of; their hard hands, well-known,
 Once swaddled thy childhood. Then take them and fly
 And spread all their hordes down the length of the sky!
 Let them blacken the welkin, and redden,
 And blow with their flames till they deaden!
 Let the fiery spew of the dragon
 Pour life-blood like wine from a flagon!
 And I in some spot shall keep hidden
 My heart, by thy warnings unhidden,—
 And seek, by the angels impeared
 A nest at the ends of the world.

II

Again above the earth I fly,
 Again I bid my land good-bye.
 'Tis hard one's mother to forsake,
 Left in a roofless shack,
 'Tis even worse to see her tears,
 The patches on her back . . .
 I fly, I fly, and still the north winds blow;
 Beneath me is the sparkle of the snow;
 Swamps and deep forests round about me press,
 And mists, unending mists, and wilderness . . .¹⁷⁷
 No sound of man is heard, no trace I view
 Of human feet in wretched enterprise . . .
 So, to my friends and to my enemies,
 Farewell! I shall not come to visit you.
 Intoxicate yourselves, make merry!
 No sound to reach me goes,—
 Alone, I find my sanctuary
 Forever 'mid these snows.
 And till at last it dawns on you
 A country there can be

¹⁷⁷He is now (in a dream) over Siberia.

Unwatered yet by tears and blood,
 I'll rest in liberty,
 I'll rest . . .

But suddenly I hear
 The evil clank of chains
 Beneath the ground. I closer look:
 O men of wicked brains!
 Whence have you come? What do you here?
 What, underneath the ground,
 Is now your search? Even aloft
 Perchance I shall be found
 By villains.

Why such torments yet,
 These tortures I endure?
 What have I done, to merit this,
 To those whose hands impure
 Have in my body chained my soul
 And burned my heart with throes
 And set my countless fancies free
 Like a thick cloud of crows?
 I know not why I'm tortured thus,
 So ruthlessly they rend!
 And when will my remission come?
 When shall I see the end?
 I don't foresee, I must aver.
 But now the wastes began to stir . . .
 As, out of narrow coffins¹⁷⁸ come,
 In silence on the Day of Doom
 The dead arise, for justice true.
 These are not dead whom now I view . . .
 These are not dead of whom I speak,
 Nor is it justice that they seek;
 No, they are men, are living men,
 In fetters too, I note,
 Who from deep burrows carry gold
 To glut the greedy throat
 Of tsardom. . . . These are convicts chained!
 And why? God only knows,

¹⁷⁸From the silver mines in Siberia, which were worked by criminal convicts and, often, by political prisoners.

The Lord Almighty, and perhaps
 No reason He'll disclose!
 See, yonder is a branded thief,
 His chains are rattling chill;
 And there a tortured murderer
 Whose teeth are gnashing still,
 Eager to finish off a mate
 Whom he had failed to kill.
 Among those hardened criminals
 See, dressed in fetters, stand
 A universal emperor¹⁷⁹
 Of freedom in our land,
 But like the rest, this emperor
 Now bears a convict's brand.¹⁸⁰
 In captive pain, he does not beg;
 His will is firm and bold . . .
 The heart that's once with goodness filled
 Is never weak and cold.

And where are now your thoughts, of rosy bloom,
 Well-tended children, cultivated, brave?
 To whom, my friend, are they transmitted, whom?
 Or have they in your heart perchance a grave?
 Do not conceal them, brother! Cast them wide!
 They'll sprout and grow, and some day bring forth fruit.
 Is there more torment yet to be applied?
 Enough, 'tis cold—the frosts my heart salute.

III

Again I fly. The earth is dark.
 My mind's a-drowse, my heart grows faint.
 Dwellings along the roads I mark—
 Towns with a church to every saint.
 Inside the town, like herons found,
 Unnumbered soldiers swarm around:
 Well-fed, well-shod, in costume thrilling,
 And all of them in chains are drilling.

¹⁷⁹Alexander Radishchev (1749–1802), a Russian writer of note, whose book *The Journey from Petersburg to Moscow* was a powerful indictment of serfdom and autocracy. The book was burned by the hangman in 1790, and its author exiled to Siberia.

¹⁸⁰i.e., branded with glory for his determined stand for freedom.

Further I look: As in a pit,
 A quagmire vale, there seems to sit
 A city¹⁸¹ underneath a cloud
 That cloaks it like a murky shroud.

Nearer I fly—it spreads immense.
 Have Turks or Germans built it hence?
 Perhaps the town is Muscovite!
 Churches and palaces stand bright,
 Here lords of noble port are found,
 With not one cottage seen around!
 'Twas getting dark. And brilliant lights
 Were shining all about,
 And frightened me. . . . "Hurrah! Hurrah!
 Hurrah!" they all cried out.
 —"Hush up, you fools! Be sensible!
 There is no cause for joy.
 Why do you shout?"

—"You silly clout!

See the parade deploy!
 A grand parade. The Tsar himself
 Inspecting it will wander."
 —"Where is that glorious puppet now?"
 —"There—see the palace yonder."
 I push my way, when suddenly
 A countryman of mine,¹⁸²
 Trimmed with zinc buttons, said to me:
 "How did you get in line?"
 —"I've come from our Ukraine," said I.
 —"Why can't you speak," said he,
 "Like us, in Russian?"

—"But I can.

I just don't like it. See?"
 —"You're a queer fellow! In this place
 I know my way around;
 I work here; if you wish, I'll try
 To get you, safe and sound,

¹⁸¹St. Petersburg.

¹⁸²Shevchenko refers contemptuously to one of those Ukrainians who, for the sake of miserable livelihood, abandoned Ukraine to serve as petty clerks in Russia.

In hope, perhaps, of being struck,
 Or shown, if bounty worsens,
 A fig, at least a little one,
 If to their snouts 'tis flung.
 They stand in rows in silent pose—
 You'd think they'd lost their tongue.
 Meanwhile the Tsar keeps jabbering;
 His wife, that paragon,
 A heron amongst other birds,
 Leaps gaily on and on.

Thus they long sauntered up and down,
 A pair of puffed-up owls,
 And murmured underneath their breath
 (I could not hear the fowls)
 Of the "belovèd fatherland"
 Or the new decorations
 Or those dull brutes, the new recruits;
 Then that Desire of Nations,
 The empress, sat upon a stool;
 Her husband, in his grace,
 Approached the greatest of the lords
 And smashed him in the face!
 The poor chap licked his chops; then turned
 And punched the next man's belly
 To the echo! . . . That one in his turn
 Smote the next courtier smelly;
 Who struck a lesser toady still,
 He, one still less in score,
 And he assailed the smaller fry
 Who stood outside the door,
 And these rushed madly to the streets
 And there began to pound
 The rest of all the Orthodox.¹⁸⁴
 These faithful raised a sound—
 Their screams and roars vociferate
 Their reverential awe:

¹⁸⁴Here the term is used somewhat derogatively, as denoting the common people who, in spite of this harsh chain-reaction, still acclaim, in fact, revere, the oppressive Tsar.

“Our Father’s having lots of fun!
Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!”

IV¹⁸⁵

I roared with laughter, you may guess!
But I, too, caught a sweep,
A solid punch. Before the dawn
All people fell asleep;
And as the faithful Orthodox
In sundry corners groaned,
They thanked God for their Emperor
In blessèd state enthroned.

Sight-seeing through the town I stray.
In it the night is like the day.
Nothing but palaces I see
Along the gentle stream’s levee,
Indeed the entire bank is shown
As lined with mighty towers of stone.
I marvel till my brains perspire
How such a swamp of utter mire¹⁸⁶
Was to this prodigy transformed.
With human blood the soil was warmed,
Even without the sword’s keen blade,
When all this miracle was made!
To face it stands a fortress tall,¹⁸⁷
A belfry rises like an awl,
So thin and sharp. Upon the tower
Great clocks ring out the changing hour.
I turn and am surprised to see
A horse come flying straight at me,
And strike a boulder with its strides.¹⁸⁸
Now on the bare-backed horse there rides
One in a cloak that is no cloak,
While on his brow are leaves of oak.

¹⁸⁵This section contains the most significant episode of the poem as far as the subjugation of the Ukrainian people by tsarist Russia is concerned.

¹⁸⁶St. Petersburg was built on a marshy terrain by forced labour of the Ukrainian Cossacks.

¹⁸⁷The Fortress of Peter and Paul, built on an island in the Neva River.

¹⁸⁸An equestrian statue of Peter I, who was fashioned as clad in a toga and with a laurel wreath around his head.

The horse rears up, and it would seem
 He yearns to leap across the stream;
 The horseman stretches out his hand
 As if to seize on every land.
 Who is it? And to make this known,
 I read the engraving on the stone:
 "The SECOND reared this to the FIRST"¹⁸⁹—
 A sight to all who view accurst.
 Ah, now the mystery is clear,
 The FIRST one racked my country dear;¹⁹⁰
 The SECOND gave the final blow¹⁹¹
 That brought my land to utter woe.
 Ah, hangmen both, voracious beasts!
 Upon our folk have been your feasts,
 To the last shred. What token fond
 Went with you to the world beyond?
 Such heaviness oppressed my head
 As if in those two words I read
 All history of our Ukraine.
 I stood there in a daze of pain;
 Then suddenly I seemed to hear
 A mournful plaint that caught my ear.¹⁹²

"From Hlukhiv, many a regiment
 With shovels and with spades was sent;

¹⁸⁹To be understood: The Second Catherine reared this statue to the First Peter. The exact inscription: *Pervomu Vtoraya*—To the First the Second. In these two Russian words Shevchenko pictures the entire history of Ukraine under the tsarist oppression.

¹⁹⁰After the Battle of Poltava in 1709, Peter I began, step by step, to destroy the freedom of Ukraine and to treat her population as his slaves. In the same year, but a few months before the battle, he destroyed the Zaporozhian Sitch, the last stronghold of Ukrainian liberty.

¹⁹¹Catherine II continued Peter's repressive measures in Ukraine until the last vestiges of Ukrainian autonomy disappeared. It was during her reign that serfdom was officially established in her Empire. In 1775 she finally annihilated the Zaporozhian Sitch, which had revived somewhat after Peter's death.

¹⁹²The voice of the acting Hetman Pavlo Polubotok (1722–24) who attempted to restore to Ukraine the freedom which Peter I abolished. He was summoned to St. Petersburg and there, when he did not recant, was imprisoned in the Fortress of Peter and Paul, where he died. It is believed that Peter visited him there in order to come to some understanding with him, but Polubotok proved uncompromising and did not even take the Tsar's hand extended to him in pretended friendship. The Hetman maintained that God alone would reconcile them in the end by His righteous judgment.

And with the Cossacks did I go
 To seek that Capital of Woe
 As acting hetman of the troops.
 Merciful Lord, my spirit droops!
 O greedy and voracious Tsar!
 O wicked ruler that you are,
 O serpent that all earth should shun,
 What have you to my Cossacks done?
 For you have glutted all these swamps
 With noble bones!¹⁹³ To feed your pomps,
 You reared your shining capital
 On tortured corpses of them all,
 And in a gloomy dungeon cell,
 Me, their free hetman, by a hell
 Of utter hunger you have slain,
 A martyr to our sad Ukraine!
 Not even God, O Tsar, I vow,
 Can part my spirit from you now.
 Bound by my chains, we cannot sever
 In endless penalties forever.
 How difficult it is for me
 Above the Neva here to be!
 Perhaps my country is no more?
 And I would fain her place explore,
 And all the truth about her know,
 But God forbids me hence to go.
 Moscow, perhaps, without a shiver
 Has burned our towns and drained our river
 Into the blue sea's ancient bounds,
 Then dug away the lofty mounds,
 Our glorious past. O God adored,
 Take pity on her, loving Lord!"

The voice grew mute. Again I gazed:
 And saw a great, white cloudbank raised
 Across the sky; and from that cloud
 A wild beast's howling issued loud.

¹⁹³St. Petersburg was built chiefly by Ukrainian Cossacks who were pressed by Peter I into this and other forced labour, such as digging canals in the region of Lake Ladoga and in Russia's frozen north. Many thousands of them died as a result of the unbearable conditions.

No cloud it was, but birds¹⁹⁴ a-swarm
 Descending like a feathered storm;
 About that black, bronze Tsar they went
 And raised a frenzy of lament:

“We, too, your soul can ne’er forsake,
 Rapacious beast, accursèd snake!
 For when the Judgment Day shall rise,
 We’ll cover your ferocious eyes
 From seeing God, because with pain
 You drove us forth from our Ukraine.
 Naked and famished, we were banned
 To snowfields in a foreign land.
 You slaughtered us, stripped off our skins,
 From which you tailored, in your sins,
 A mantle scarlet with our blood.¹⁹⁵
 Your city shining in the mud
 Is your new garment. In its fold,
 Churches and palaces behold!
 Rejoice to see it! Slake your rages,
 Curs’d by all men and for all ages!”



The vision scattered and dispersed.
 The sun just then was rising;
 I stood and marvelled at it all,
 With fear in my surmising.
 Poor people now, untimely roused,
 To labour rush, unwilling;
 The soldiers, on the barrack-grounds,
 Must now commence their drilling.
 Sleepy young women now make haste
 Along the early street;
 Homewards, not outwards, do they go.
 That families may eat,

¹⁹⁴The souls of those who died slaving for Peter, as well as of those who were otherwise victimized by him.

¹⁹⁵Shevchenko here implies, that if Russia had not been helped by Ukraine in the forcible manner described, she would not have become as powerful as she did.

Their mothers send them out all night
 To labours far from sweet.¹⁹⁶
 And as I stood there, stooped in thought,
 In wonderment I said:
 "In what sad stress they acquiesce
 To earn their daily bread!"

Now petty clerks in masses seek
 The bureaux of the nation,
 To scribble and to fleece all men,
 Regardless of their station.
 Among the crew my countrymen¹⁹⁷
 Can here and there be seen;
 In Russian phrase they chat and laugh
 And curse, with venom keen,
 Their parents for not teaching them,
 When small, to talk and think
 In German or some other tongue—
 Now they must soak in ink! . . .
 Ah, leeches, leeches! For your sire
 His last cow may have sold
 Before he sent you off to learn
 The Russian tongue, for gold! . . .
 O my Ukraine, my lov'd Ukraine!
 These are your children dear,
 These are your blossoms, fair and young,
 Smothered in ink, I fear,
 And steeped in henbane Muscovite
 And trained by Germans deft.
 Weep, O Ukraine, unhappy land,
 A childless widow left!

But let us to the palace go,
 To see what there occurs:
 I have arrived—before me now
 Pot-bellied courtiers
 Stand in a row, all breathing hard,
 Puffed out like turkey-cocks;
 And look askance at all the doors
 As if they feared the locks.

¹⁹⁶These were perhaps the girls forced by penury to street-walking.

¹⁹⁷See fn. 182.

The doors are suddenly thrown wide;
 As from a lair's retreat,
 The bear¹⁹⁸ crawled out. It seemed that he
 Could hardly drag his feet;
 His bloated face was turned to blue:
 The wreck of last night's fun.
 Then he gave out a sudden shout
 At each pot-bellied one—
 And all the nobles, to a man,
 Sank down into the floor.
 His eyes were bulging from his head;
 The others—there were more—
 Began to tremble. As if mad
 He hailed these lesser fry
 And they, too, vanished underground
 At his insensate cry;
 He moved on his domestics then—
 They likewise disappeared;
 The soldiers and the Muscovites,
 With groanings as he neared,
 Sank in the earth.

A miracle
 Had happened in the world!
 I watched to see what further fate
 Would at my bear be hurled.
 There the poor fellow stands alone,
 His head downcast in woe.
 Where has his ursine nature gone?
 Where did his greatness go?
 He seemed a kitten now—so strange!¹⁹⁹ . . .
 I bellowed at the joke!
 He heard me, and let out a yell!
 It scared me, and I woke.

Thus in my vision I beheld
 A wonder past all rules!
 A queer one, certainly! Such things
 Are only dreamed by fools

¹⁹⁸Nicholas I.

¹⁹⁹Meaning: without the people supporting or condoning his bearlike, autocratic power, the tsar would be as helpless as a kitten.

And drunkards. Do not marvel, friends,
 For in my verse unkempt
 I have not told you what I saw
 But only what I dreamt.²⁰⁰

St. Petersburg, July 8, 1844

THE KERCHIEF

Even on Sundays she would bake and milk
 To earn some money for a cloth of silk;
 The kerchief with embroidery she wrought,
 And, as she worked, she sang aloud her thought:

*"Broidered one, O kerchief mine,
 Laced with threads so fair and fine,
 I have made you for his bliss;
 He will pay me with a kiss . . .*

Kerchief mine

With colours fine!

*While my tresses I unplait,
 I shall saunter with my mate . . .*

O what joy

Without alloy!

In the morning, folk will stare

At a waif with kerchief rare

That's so well laced

And fine in taste."

And as she sang, and thus embroidered it,
 She by the window-ledge would watchful sit,
 To hear the far-off oxen's lowing cavils,
 To see the chumak²⁰¹ coming from his travels.
 From past Liman²⁰² he brings the herds that bellow,
 The merchandise that's not his own, poor fellow;
 These oxen not his own he prods along,
 And as he prods them, sings a doleful song:

*"Fortune mine, O fortune mine,
 Why are you not fair and fine*

²⁰⁰Shevchenko lamely, but purposely, pretends to play the innocent by saying that he witnessed all that in a dream and did not relate it as a reality.

²⁰¹Chumaks were carters who took salt and other goods to distant trading centres (such as Odessa and the Crimea) to be sold there or bartered for other merchandise.

²⁰²Dnieper's estuary.

*As in someone else's house?
 Do I tipple or carouse?
 Do I not have ample strength?
 Don't I know the way at length
 On the steppe to your caress?
 Don't I offer, for success,
 All the gifts that I possess?
 As a gift to offer you,
 I've a face that's fair to view,
 But the strength my youth once tasted,
 By the wealthy has been wasted;
 It may be that, while I tarry,
 She I love is forced to marry . . .
 Teach me, O my destiny,
 With my lot, content to be!"*

In tears the wretched fellow walked
 Along the prairie vast . . .
 With mournful hoots the screech-owl perched
 On grave-mounds as he passed;
 The chumak's comrades spoke with grief,
 In heavy sorrow cast:
 "Grant, otaman²⁰³ your leave to stop
 At the next thorp this eve,
 For we must bear our comrade there
 Communion to receive!"

Shriven, he took the final rites;
 Even a witch they sought,—
 In vain! . . . They started out once more
 With the sick man they'd brought.
 Was it the weight of heavy toil
 That checked his vital heat?
 Was it the stress of ceaseless grief
 That swept him off his feet?
 Or had it been the evil eye
 That vexed the youth so sore
 That from the Don they drove him on,
 Stretched on a waggon-floor?
 He'd prayed to God his love to see,
 His native town again—

²⁰³Leader, captain.

With none to mourn, they buried him,
 For all his prayers were vain . . .
 Those who interred him reared a cross
 Where on the steppe he lay;
 A blade of grass, a fallen leaf
 Borne by the stream away,
 The Cossack left this fleeting life
 And naught of his did stay . . .

And where is now that kerchief fair,
 With bright embroidery laden?
 Where, with her happy, childlike faith,
 Is now that loving maiden?
 The kerchief on a fresh-made cross
 Flutters in wind and sun;
 The maiden now unplaits her braids
 And will become a nun . . .

St. Petersburg, October 18, 1844

* * * *

Why do I feel so heavy? Why so weary?
 Why does my soul in wailing grief lament
 Like a starved child? Ah, heart oppressed and dreary,
 What do you wish? What is your discontent?
 Are you for food, or drink, or sleep aspirant?
 Sleep, then, my soul! Forever sleep apart,
 Shattered, uncovered. . . . Let the senseless tyrant
 Rage ever on. . . . Close, close your eyes, my heart!

St. Petersburg, November 13, 1844

EMPTINESS

TO M. S. SHCHEPKIN²⁰⁴

Tell me my fortune, Sorcerer,
 My hoary-whiskered friend!
 Your own fate you've already sealed;
 Of mine I fear the end . . .

²⁰⁴See fn. 170.

I'm still afraid to bring to naught
 My dwelling scorched with fire;
 My heart I'm fearful to inter
 With all its warm desire! . . .
 Perhaps my hope will yet return
 With the life-giving flood—
 The bracing water of my tears
 Upon the sullen mud;
 Perhaps the winter will pervade
 My roofless emptiness,
 With pleasant coverings of snow
 My fire-scorched hut to bless;
 Will sweep it, bring it tidiness,
 And radiant light will find;
 Perhaps it will restore again
 The children of my mind;
 Perhaps once more I'll shed my tears
 And wipe my children's eyes;
 Perhaps I'll see, as in a dream,
 The sun of justice rise!
 Rise, brother, rise to humour me!
 Tell me, beyond a doubt,
 If I should pray, or weep today,
 Or bash my poor brains out!
St. Petersburg, December 13, 1844

TO N. V. HOHOL²⁰⁵

Thought follows thought, off in a swarm each flits:
 One mauls the soul, one tears it all to bits,
 A third weeps gently, softly, deep concealed:
 Perhaps to God Himself it's not revealed.

To whom shall I unfold it?
 By whom will it be heard—
 This speech of mine, who will divine
 The import of my Word?

²⁰⁵In Russian, Nikolai Gogol (1809–52), a famous Russian-Ukrainian writer whose first stories, written in Russian, and in a humorous vein, dealt with the Ukrainian locale and the manners and customs of his countrymen.

All deaf and all indifferent,
 In chains our people bend! . . .
 You laugh full deep while I must weep,
 My great and mighty friend!
 What harvest yields my weeping?
 Weeds it perchance may be!
 No cannon roar now in Ukraine
 With voice of Liberty;
 Nor will the father slay his son,
 His own dear child, with pain,
 For honour, glory, brotherhood,
 The freedom of Ukraine.
 He'll rather rear him up to sell
 To Moscow's slaughterhouse. . . .
 This is our tribute to "the throne"
 (Our honour though they dowse),
 Our offering to "the fatherland,"
 A gift that Germans reap . . .
 So let it be, my friend, while we
 Still fiercely laugh and weep.

St. Petersburg, December 30, 1844

1845

* * * *

Do not be envious of the rich: the wealthy man enjoys
 Nor love nor friendship—these he buys, and hired pleasure cloy.
 And envy not the powerful, whose strength is all bespoken;
 Nor yet the man of shining fame: he knows, by sorrow broken,
 It is his glory, not himself, that all the people love;
 This he pours out with tears and blood, their antics to approve.
 Young men convene in perfect peace, as if in paradise;
 But closer look—you'll surely mark how dark misfortunes rise . . .
 Be envious then of none at all. Just cast your glance about:
 There is no paradise on earth, and heaven itself's in doubt!

Mirhorod, October 4, 1845

* * * *

A wealthy woman do not wed:
 She'll drive you from your hall.
 Don't take a barefoot bride to bed:
 You'll get no sleep at all.
 But wed yourself to Liberty,
 A Cossack's truest destiny.
 Accept that lot for what it is—
 Naked and all undowered!
 No one will poach upon your bliss
 Or leave your hopes deflowered.
 No one will trouble you to ask
 The cause or source of all your care.
 When two men share in weeping's task
 They say it's easier to bear.
 'Tis false! For he who weeps alone
 Finds sorrow's burden lighter grown.

Mirhorod, October 4, 1845

THE HERETIC or JOHN HUSS²⁰⁶

AN EPISTLE TO THE GREAT P.I. ŠAFAŘÍK²⁰⁷

A certain man's fine dwelling-house
 Was grossly set on fire
 By wicked neighbours. At the blaze
 Made warm, these folk conspire
 To sleep and quite forget to dout
 The embers on the plain.
 There in the field the ashes lie
 And smouldering sparks remain;
 A mighty conflagration's seed,
 It never wholly dies

²⁰⁶A Czech religious lay reformer who, at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries, under the influence of Wycliffe, rebelled against the papal abuses of temporal power and spiritual authority.

²⁰⁷Pavel Šafařík (1795–1861), one of the leaders of the Pan-Slavic Revival. His work for the rebirth of the Czechoslovakian national consciousness through the study of the folklore and ethnography was so great that the movement spread to embrace all the Slavic peoples of Eastern and Southern Europe.

But still awaits the flaming hour
 When vengeance shall arise.
 The smouldering spark glows silently,
 To time a lingering prey,
 And at the crossroads of the world
 Begins to fade away.

Thus did the German litter²⁰⁸ set ablaze
 Our own great dwelling, and our family,
 The Slavic stock, confused us to a daze,
 And slyly gave to our divided ways
 The fiery serpent of discordancy.
 Then streams of blood began to flow
 And quench the ardent fire;
 The alien brood the ruins shared,
 Divided them in ire.
 The Slavic children, year by year,
 Grew up in shackles there,
 And quite forgot, the sorry slaves,
 What stock they really were.
 Where once the flames had raged, still glowed
 The spark of Brotherhood²⁰⁹—
 For sturdy hands to fan the blaze
 Its faith still boldly stood.
 And now that day has come at last,
 You could through ashes pry
 To reach that spark with dauntless heart
 And eagle's piercing eye;
 And you have lit once more, O sage,
 The torch of truth on earth
 And the great family of Slavs
 In slavery and dearth
 You have recorded, to a man,²¹⁰—
 Alas, the count you keep
 Gives corpses,²¹¹ and not living Slavs;
 Yet on that funeral heap

²⁰⁸The Germans, as is implied here, by subjugating the Western Slavs, were the chief cause of Slavic disunity and of the wars between the Eastern and Western Slavic elements.

²⁰⁹i.e., Slavic Brotherhood of Nations.

²¹⁰Šafařík published a map of the Slavic world, in which the territories of all the Slavic peoples (including Ukrainians) were delineated.

²¹¹Because as yet they were not conscious of their power, or even identity, being under foreign domination.

At the world's crossroads, as of old,
 Ezekiel,²¹² you arise.
 A miracle! The corpses stood
 And opened wide their eyes;
 Brother embraced with brother there
 And joyful were their cries.
 Fraternal words of deathless love
 Thus voice their faithful dreams.
 Into a single Slavic sea
 Flow all the Slavic streams.²¹³

Glory to you, O noble sage,
 Wise Czech and faithful Slav,
 Who from the bottomless abyss²¹⁴
 Saved all the Truth we have!
 And presently your ocean fair,
 This vast new Slavic sea,
 Will flow full-tide; on it will float
 A bark of liberty,
 With rigging of wide-billowing sails,
 A rudder strong and sure,
 And on the boundless waves of life
 Its voyage will endure.
 Great Šafařík, may fame be yours,
 Now and forevermore,
 For having joined all Slavic streams
 Within one ocean's shore.

And in your glory welcome then
 My verse, this trifling speck—

²¹²Shevchenko compares Šafařík to Ezekiel, in that he, through his work of enlightenment, roused the Slavic peoples to assert themselves in Europe. The reference here is to Ezekiel, the beginning of chapter 37—"The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones. . . . And He said unto me. . . . Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord. . . . Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live. . . ."

²¹³Shevchenko longed for unity among all the Slavic peoples, but on a basis of independence for each one. See Introduction (pp. xx, xxii, xxiii) in connection with the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius.

²¹⁴Abyss of foreign domination: Czechs and Slovenians under Austria; Slovaks and Croats under Magyars; Serbs and Bulgarians under Turks; Ukraine under Poland and Russia; Poland under Russia, Prussia, and Austria.

The stammering poem I have penned
 About the saintly Czech,
 That mighty martyr of his time,
 The memorable Huss!
 Accept it, sire! I'll softly pray
 That God may grant to us
 That all the Slavs may brothers be
 Who in their love admix,
 Fair planets of the sun of Truth
 And deathless heretics
 Like him of Constance²¹⁵ long ago—
 For if they do, their story
 Will bring the world through endless time
 Undying peace and glory!

I

The stone which the builders had rejected,
 the same became the cornerstone;
 it was the gift of the Lord
 and it was marvellous in our sight.

Psalm cxvii. 22-23

“Under injustice and its yoke
 All silent are the trampled folk,
 While on the apostolic throne
 A fatted monk now reigns alone,
 Who barter human blood for pelf
 And farms out paradise itself.
 O God! Thy judgment seems in vain,
 And futile all Thy heavenly reign!
 Robbers and cannibals, forsooth,
 Have overcome Thy blessed truth,
 Have turned Thy glory to offence,
 Thy will and Thine omnipotence!
 Men groan in shackles, pained, afraid,
 And there is none to give them aid
 In throwing off their evil fetters
 And rising up, the bold abettors
 Of Truth's evangel, to support
 All people of the humble sort.

²¹⁵Where Huss was formally pronounced a heretic.

Is there no one? O God, my God,
 Will none appear, to bring Thy rod,
 In that great hour, by Heaven sent
 To bring its condign punishment?
 Will no one smash the triple crowns
 With which the proud tiara²¹⁶ frowns?
 We'll break it! Let Thy blessing come,
 Not in revenge for martyrdom
 But on my hands let it alight,
 My hands unhardened in the fight!
 And likewise bless my gentle word!
 When will my voice by men be heard? . . ."

Thus did John Huss, that righteous man,
 Within his cell evolve a plan
 The people's fetters to annul
 And show a holy miracle
 To sightless eyes.—"The course I'll run!
 God's on my side! His will be done!"
 And faithful Huss sought out that day
 Bethlehem Chapel,²¹⁷ there to pray.

II. THE PAPAL BULL²¹⁸

"In the blest name of Christ who died
 And on a cross was crucified
 And of the Apostles, one and all,
 Peter in special, joined with Paul,
 This holy bull remission wins
 For all the censurable sins
 Of her who walked with wanton feet
 Through Prague by many a lane and street,
 Who barged along, with boozing damp,
 From inn to inn, from camp to camp,
 And on through cloisters lurched as well
 In drunkenness from cell to cell.

²¹⁶Papal triple crown; i.e., the Pope himself.

²¹⁷The name of the church in which Huss prayed and preached.

²¹⁸This section deals with the papal dispensation of indulgences by mere certificates (and not Bulls, which were documents of greater significance). Besides being mistaken in this, Shevchenko likewise exaggerates the matter by wording it in a somewhat ludicrous and cynical manner.

That woman, who had earned as whore
 Of tainted coins sufficient store
 To buy this bull²¹⁸—she's now a saint! . . ."
 —"Almighty God, hear my complaint!
 From glory, look upon Thy folk!
 Rest in Thy heaven, and lift their yoke!
 Why do they perish? Why dost Thou
 Punish Thy humble children now?
 Why hast Thou made their bright eyes blind
 And fettered the free-ranging mind
 In chains of such a wicked night?
 Awake, ye Czechs—the day is bright!
 Wash off the cataract again,
 Spread out your arms—and stand as men
 And not a laughing-stock for friars!
 Robbers and fierce tiara'd liars, rogues,
 Have drowned or stolen all you see,
 Like Tartars once from Muscovy.
 Only their dogmas we acquire
 To bless our blindness. Blood and fire,
 All the world's evils, wars and feuds,
 Torments in endless multitudes,
 And bastards filling Rome with blame—
 Such are their dogmas and their fame!
 That fame all see! . . . And now 'tis passed
 By Holy Council, unaghost,
 That he who dies without this bull
 Goes straight to hell! The dutiful
 Who double for the bull shall pay,
 Though he his brother darkly slay—
 Unless it be some monk or pope—
 For heaven at death may surely hope!
 Thus thieves from thieves usurp the loot
 And do it in the church, to boot!
 Ah, vipers! Are you sated yet
 With human blood? My mind's beset
 By ignorance, and lack of skill,
 Great God, to judge Thy holy will,—
 For evil deeds in evil season
 Afflict Thy folk without a reason!"

In bitterness, as thus he prayed,
 Huss wept; while, silent and afraid,
 The people gaped at his demands:
 Against whom does he lift his hands?
 —“Look, people! See the bull outspread
 That, straight from Rome, I now have read!”
 They gazed; all shuddered at the view,
 To see him tear the bull in two!²¹⁹

III

Bethlehem Chapel sent that sound
 With mighty echoes that resound
 Right to the world's great capital;²²⁰
 Monks hide themselves; the sounds appal
 The conclave²²¹ proud; their echoes clear
 Make the tiara²²² bow in fear.
 Avignon's²²³ voice comes whispering home
 To counsel with the monks at Rome;
 Then whisper, too, the antipopes
 That deep in fear their faction gropes.
 The cardinals amid these toils
 Insinuate their serpent coils
 Round the tiara; secretly
 They gnaw each other, but their plea
 Is how to catch the warlike mouse.
 That is the theme of all their house.
 All bear the same sleek serpent-hide
 As in fat, heaving heaps they slide!
 The very walls in horror vague
 Tremble to hear that far in Prague

²¹⁹A certificate of indulgences was burned by Huss's friends. Shevchenko here imparts to Huss a gesture similar to that of Martin Luther in the next century.

²²⁰Rome.

²²¹Strictly speaking, not a conclave, but an assembly or a council.

²²²The Pope himself, as one wearing the tiara.

²²³A town in southern France, where the popes, supported by the French kings, established their See in 1309. The Roman cardinals, irked by the prolonged absence of the papacy from Rome, elected an Italian pontiff in 1378. Since no decision could be reached as to which of the two popes was valid, another fraction of the cardinals met at Pisa in 1409, deposed both and elected a third. Each of the three considered the others antipopes, but all were united in their condemnation of Huss.

The geese²²⁴ begin to gabble loud
 For battle with the eagles²²⁵ proud. . . .

The conclave²²⁶ turns to dark debate
 And there decides, in pious hate,
 That against Huss a stand be taken
 And that all monkish crows awaken
 And fly to Constance,²²⁷ full of care
 To hem John Huss within a snare,
 In concert with the emperor
 And common folk outside the door,
 Lest the great bird, their guile revealed,
 Should fly back to the Slavic field.

As numerous as migrant crows²²⁸
 The monkish flocks with zeal enclose
 Old Constance; all the roads and lands
 Are covered, as by locust-bands,
 With archdukes, counts, and barons bold,
 Petty officials, young and old,
 And heralds, tavern-keepers fat,
 Troubadours, minstrels, and all that;
 Likewise came troops—like snakes they twined
 Along the roads, not far behind
 The archduchesses and foreign gawks:
 Some on their arms bore hunting-hawks—
 They came on foot, on horse or ass,
 An eager, seething, motley mass!
 Keen for the chase, they rushed betimes
 Like vipers seeking warmer climes.
 Great Czech! Your mighty courage don!
 See what a multitude rolls on:

²²⁴Huss's adherents. A play on words, for in Czech "hus" means "goose."

²²⁵The popes and the prelates.

²²⁶Actually, council.

²²⁷In 1414 Emperor Sigismund summoned to Constance a general council to settle the schism in the Roman Catholic church. There the three popes were deposed and Martin V was elected to rule from Rome. It was to that council that Huss appealed for a hearing, and for that purpose was given a safe-conduct by the Czech King. However, the council refused to discuss his grievances and demanded of him an outright recantation of his errors. This Huss refused to do and as a result was condemned to the pyre.

²²⁸It must be noted that throughout this poem Shevchenko's attitude is quite ironical and, at times, frivolous.

As if on Saracens²²⁹ they'd run
 Or on great Attila, the Hun!²³⁰
 Prague lifts its voice on his behalf:
 The Emperor and Viacheslav²³¹
 And all the thousand-headed Diet
 Are scolded by a people's riot:
 The folk protest with clamorous woe
 That Huss to Constance must not go.
 —"My God's alive! My soul's immortal!
 I do not tremble on death's portal!
 Brethren, I'll prove those vipers wrong!
 I'll break their sting before the throng!"
 The Czechs, as children might their sire,
 Sped John Huss with their hearts' desire. . . .

IV

In Constance all the morning bells
 Ring loud a summons that compels;
 Then cardinals the assembly seek,
 In crimson robes all fat and sleek
 Like model bulls who throng a pen;
 With them came other prelates then,
 The three popes,²³² troops of barons great,
 And all the crownèd heads of state—
 All with the heart of Judas come
 To execute a wicked doom
 On Christ. In bickerings combining
 Are bursts of howling and of whining,
 Like hordes in camp when hopes befog
 Or Hebrews in a synagogue . . .
 All suddenly their tongues restrain . . .
 There, like a cedar on the plain
 Near Lebanon, in shackles rude
 The dauntless one before them stood,

²²⁹The Turks against whom the Crusaders fought to regain the Holy Land.

²³⁰The fierce leader of the Huns who in the fifth century A.D. invaded the Roman Empire.

²³¹The Czech King, brother of Sigismund who was the Holy Roman Emperor.

²³²Only John XXIII, one of the then "reigning" popes, took part in the council.

And cast his eagle eye most bright
 Upon the wicked in their might.
 They shuddered; paled; their silent eye
 Gazed on this man they doomed to die.
 —“Why am I summoned? In what suit?
 Is it your dogmas to dispute?
 Why do you thus my limbs bedeck
 With chains?”—“Be silent, haughty Czech! . . .”
 Like serpents all the conclave²³³ hissed,
 Or roared like beasts that he desist.
 —“A heretic! A heretic!
 You rend the Faith and make it sick;
 Dissensions you have spread abroad,
 Not bowing to the holy rod
 Of Peter! . . . And your wicked leaven
 Has been accurs'd by God in heaven!
 A heretic! A heretic!”
 The prelates bellowed loud and quick.
 —“You, in a word, foul discord sow
 And stand condemned by all below! . . .”
 Huss on the popes his keen eyes cast,
 And quickly from the palace passed! . . .
 —“We've vanquished him! We've vanquished him!”
 They shouted in a frenzy grim.
 —“Auto-da-fé!²³⁴ Auto-da-fé! . . .”
 With one fierce voice they roared away.

▼

Then all night long the monks and barons
 Feasted and drank with great fanfarons
 And cursed Huss in their drinking bout
 Until the matin bells rang out
 And Morning came. . . . To pray for Huss
 The monks proceed, all bibulous.
 Red shows the sun as if it sought
 To see the deed that sinners wrought.

²³³Council.

²³⁴Of Spanish origin: an “Act of Faith,” by which the Spanish Inquisition condemned heretics to death.

The bells rang fit to wake the dead,
 And mid their uproar Huss was led
 To his Golgotha, fast in chains...
 No hint of shudder touched his veins...
 He faced the fire, stepped boldly in,
 And prayed to God about their sin:
 —“Merciful Lord, what have I done
 To these Thy folk beneath the sun?
 Why do they venture to convict me?
 Why have a martyr’s fires licked me?
 Ah men, good men and innocent,
 Pray, lest a similar event
 O’ertake you! Many a savage beast
 Has come in sheep’s white clothing fleeced;
 They spread their claws; no walls or hills
 Will save you from their wicked wills!
 Red seas of blood will overflow—
 Your children’s blood—Alas, what woe!
 Behold them in bright vestments there...
 See their fierce eyes upon me glare...”
 —“Ah, burn him, burn!” the prelates shriek.
 —“My blood, and yours, their greed will seek!...”
 The smoke now hid the blessed man;
 For the last time his words they scan:
 “Lord, to these men Thy grace begin!
 Save, for they do not know their sin!”
 Thereafter, Huss was heard no more!
 Like dogs, where still the flames upsoar
 The monks are standing round about
 For fear the martyr should crawl out
 In serpent guise from out the embers
 And with the power of his members
 Nestle upon the Emperor’s crown
 Or from the Pope’s hang dangling down.²³⁵

VI

The fire went out; a strong wind blew
 And far and wide the ashes flew:

²³⁵i.e., lest he might by his influence dethrone both the pope and the emperor.

And many common people said
That they had seen a serpent red
On the tiara.

Monks departed
To sing *Te Deum*,²³⁶ merry-hearted;
Then in their dining-halls they feast
By day and night, like any beast.
Meanwhile some Czechs, a faithful few,
Had gathered; privily they drew
Some earth from where the pyre had burned;
And, with it, back to Prague returned.

Thus did the monks John Huss condemn
And burn . . . God's word eluded them . . .
They could not burn it, nor foresee
From clouds of dark futurity
An avenging eagle²³⁷ swoop amain
And cleave the papal crown in twain.
They were indifferent. Like crows
They scattered from that bloody close.
Barons and monks mere feastings sought
And gave to future days no thought:
Thus they carouse and chant betimes
A bold *Te Deum* for their crimes.
They've settled everything, it seems.
But wait,—above their careless dreams
Old Žizka²³⁸ stirs from Tabor's place
And on to battle waves his mace.

Mariyinske, October 10, 1845

THE BLIND MAN

A POEM

Thoughts of my youth, my children fair
But pale and sad of brow,
You, too, have now forsaken me! . . .
And there is no one now

²³⁶*Te Deum Laudamus*, a Catholic hymn of praise and thanksgiving.

²³⁷Apparently, Martin Luther.

²³⁸A Czech military commander who from his stronghold at Tabor began the Hussite Wars which lasted some fifteen years.

To warm my empty dwelling-place . . .
 One only does not cease—
 You still remain, O youthful one,
 My paradise, my peace,
 My morning star,²³⁹ my only hope,
 My refuge from despair,
 O faultless one! You linger on
 As once a goddess fair
 Lingered with Numa²⁴⁰ long ago;
 Likewise may you, my star,
 Shine smilingly above my head,
 I'll hear you, where you are.
 Then I look up; naught do I see;
 I wake—my heart is weeping;
 Thank you, dear star, I say with tears,
 For the kind watch you're keeping!

My gloomy day then passes by;
 Again the sky grows dark;
 And the strange mower above my head
 Again emerges stark,
 Bearing his dull, old scythe along . . .
 Soon silently he'll mow me—
 Winds will erase my slightest trace,
 With nothing left to show me.
 Thus all things pass! . . . O youthful one,
 Perhaps you still recall
 My verses, watered with my tears,
 And in your soft, sweet drawl
 May say: "I loved him in this life;
 Though now he's lost in night,
 I'll love him even among the dead!"
 Thus, O my soft delight,
 My evening star, by you I'll stay
 And all my time employ
 The blessed Lord above to pray
 That he may give you joy! . . .

²³⁹It is not known whether Shevchenko had any particular woman in mind here.

²⁴⁰Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome, who flourished in the seventh century B.C. It is said that under the influence of the nymph Egeria he gave Romans their laws.

I

One man may roam beyond the seas,
 Traverse the entire earth,
 Seeking his precious fortune there,
 Yet nothing find but dearth.
 Another strives with all his power
 For fortune rich and brave . . .
 He almost reaches it and—thump!
 He tumbles in his grave!
 And still another, sorry wight,
 Has neither hut nor field—
 Only a beggar's bag, from which
 Good fortune, half-concealed,
 Peeps like a child; he curses it,
 Upbraids and trades away
 Just for a pint of brandy straight—
 And still his luck will stay!
 Like some stout burr good fortune clings
 To his patched garment's flaps,
 And gathers ears of grain for him
 From fields of other chaps;
 The wretch seemed rich in corn and hay,
 In palaces as well
 In which he lorded it as if
 He there did truly dwell.
 Such are the ways of Fortune then—
 You might as well not seek her!
 He whom she loves, she'll surely find:
 A cradle can bespeak her.

Once on a time, upon Ukraine's broad lea,
 The villages stood happy, proud and free;
 In one of them there lived in blessedness
 A Cossack with two children to caress.
 Long, long ago my story is sustained,
 In that far epoch when the hetmans reigned.

There on a Sunday and at noon, in fact
 On Pentecost if one must be exact,
 Beside his house and in a white shirt clad,
 Holding an old bandura²⁴¹ that he had,

²⁴¹A Ukrainian many-stringed musical instrument with a rounded bottom. It was of Turkish origin.

The old man sat.

“Should I, or should I not?

(Debate within his mind was running hot.)

It must be done, and yet I surely rue it!

It can't be helped; two or three years will do it—

Thus let him roam the world²⁴² with ardent mind

And his own fortune try, himself, to find,

As I once did. . . —Yarina!” then he cried,

“Where is Stepan?”—“There, by the hedge,” she sighed.

“Standing as still as if he were a post!”

—“I hadn't marked him, I was so engrossed!

But both of you, my children, hasten here . . .

Let's see you dance this ballad for my cheer!”

He starts a lively tune to please the ear.

The old man plays, his children both

Dance out the measure sweet;

The old man plays, he sings along

And keeps time with his feet.

—“Come now,” he scolds, “let me do this!”

And so the old man rose;

With arms akimbo, singing loud,

Into a whirl he goes!

—“No, it's no use,” he said, fatigued,

“My former strength is gone.

I'm all puffed out. It was you two

Who lured the old man on.

You are to blame! And age, of course!

I can no longer trip it . . .

My dancing days are done! But go,

A lunch will help me skip it;

You must eat bread, it's often said,

If you would hope to dance.

Go, daughter!—And to you, my son,

I'll tell some circumstance.

Sit down!

Your father Ivan died

In Poland long ago,

²⁴²It was the custom among Cossack families to send their sons to the Zaporozhian Sitch, as to a school, to acquire there practical education and a knowledge of the ways of life. Having served in the Cossack forces and endured the hard campaigns they waged, such “students” would return home wiser, more disciplined, and often fairly literate.

When you, Stepan, were but a babe,
 Hardly begun to grow,
 Not crawling yet!"—"I'm not your son?
 Your own true son?" he cried.
 —"Oh, you're my son! But listen now!
 Then your mother died;
 And to my wife I straightway said—
 To my Marina mild,
 Who now is dead—"What do you think?
 Shall we adopt the child?
 It's you I meant, son. . . . 'Very well,'
 My late Marina said,
 'Let's take him.' And indeed we did.
 That you some day should wed
 Our own Yarina was our thought . . .
 This sequel I'd secure—
 At least I hope: You are of age,
 Yarina is mature:
 Betrothal now is my concern,
 A wish most dear to me.
 What do you say?"

—"I do not know . . .

Because I thought that she . . ."
 —"Was your own sister? Well, the facts,
 It seems, are different.
 It's simple now: just fall in love,
 Your purpose clearly meant,
 And if God wills it, you shall wed!
 Before that happens, though,
 You need a glimpse of other lands
 And you abroad must go,
 To see how other people live,
 Whether like us they plough
 Or sow their seed on land untilled
 And reap it anyhow.²⁴³
 'Tis right that you should know all that,
 And so, my friend, you see
 You'll go away a year or two,
 With other people be,
 And work for them a little space:
 The sequel must be good,

²⁴³A manner of saying: you will learn the practical things of life.

For he who does not know the way
 To earn his livelihood
 Can scarcely live a useful life.
 What do you think my lad? . . .
 Don't stop to think! And if you'd learn
 To cope with misery sad,
 Seek out the Sitch.²⁴⁴ With God's good help,
 You'll eat all kinds of bread;
 That's where I got experience
 That stood me in good stead.
 A longing fills me for those times
 When I afar did roam!
 All of the wealth that you may gain
 You'll bring back proudly home;
 If naught you win, inheritance
 Of all that's mine is yours!
 And Cossack customs you will learn,
 And how the world endures.
 The kind of training you will get
 You could not find in college;
 A solid education laid
 In fundamental knowledge
 Among the Cossack brotherhood
 You'll find in manly pose;
 And you will learn to pray to God,
 Not mumbling in your nose
 In monkish fashion. So, my son,
 Tomorrow we shall pray,
 Then saddle up the grey-brown horse
 And speed you on your way!
 Let us go in and have our meal.
 Yarina, have you done
 With the preparing of our food?
 And that is that, my son! . . ."
 "It's ready, Father!" from the house
 Yarina's soft words run.

II

He cannot eat or drink; his heart-beat's dumb;
 His eyes see nothing and his head is numb,

²⁴⁴See fn. 40.

As he were not himself, indeed as dead—
 He reaches for a cup, when seeking bread.
 Yarina looks at him with quiet blink:
 “What can be wrong? He does not eat or drink,
 Or care for aught! Perhaps he’s ill, I vow.
 Stepan, my brother dear, what ails you now?”
 To all of this, the old man pays no heed,
 As if his ears could to no sound accede.
 “Whether we reap or not, we still must sow!”
 Thus, as to his own heart, he whispered low.
 “Now, let us rise, and I shall trudge along
 To seek the village church for evensong.
 Stepan, you must to bed. Because, of course,
 Tomorrow morning you’ll be off by horse.”

—“Stepan, my darling, tell me true,
 Why do you weep tonight?
 Smile, look at me! For don’t you see
 My eyes with tears are bright.
 Stepan is angry at me now,
 Stung by some unknown care;
 He doesn’t even want to talk.
 I’ll run away, I swear,
 And in the grasses hide myself . . .
 Stepan, I’m listening yet:
 Perhaps you’ve really fallen ill?
 Then healing herbs I’ll get,
 Or to the sorceress I’ll run . . .
 Is this the evil eye?”

—Ah, no, Yarina, dearest heart,
 Sweet blossom, do not cry! . . .
 Your own true brother I am not!
 Tomorrow I must part
 From you and father—far abroad
 Death will destroy my heart;
 And you will not remember me;
 You will forget me then,
 Forget your brother!”

—“Come, be sane!
 That evil eye again!
 I’m not your sister? Who am I?
 Dear Lord, what troubles brew!

Father's away, the boy is ill,
 And what am I to do?
 Sure he may die, and what is more;
 No care he now will con,
 But seems to laugh. Stepan, my dear,
 Be sure, if you were gone,
 That without you and father dear
 I just would not live on."
 —"Yarina, I'll not go from you
 Forever in my pain.
 A little space . . . and in a year
 I shall rush home again
 With wedding messengers to seek
 Embroidered towels from you.
 You'll give them, won't you?"

—"Stop this farce

Of messengers who'll woo!
 You must be jesting! . . ."

—"Nay, I'm not!

Yarina, pray believe me,
 I do not joke!"

—"Then is it true

You must tomorrow leave me
 And father too? You do not jest?
 Tell me the truth, Stepan!
 Am I indeed no kin of yours?"

—"On marriage there's no ban,
 No sister you!"

—"Dear God above!

Why had the knowledge missed me?
 I had not loved you, dear, so much,
 Nor would you so have kissed me . . .
 Ah, what a shame! Now go away!
 Stop holding me! I see
 You were not honest! Let me go,
 Or I'll weep bitterly . . ."

Yarina like a little child

Wept loudly in her woe,
 And through her tears her voice uprears:

"Alas, he'll go! he'll go!"
 Like maple trees above a stream
 Stepan in grief inclined;

His honest, open Cossack thoughts
 Are boiling in his mind
 Like oil in hell. Yarina pleads,
 Then curses her sad lot,
 Then mutely gazes up at him
 And wails in anguish hot.
 They did not mark the darkness fall;
 And when the father came,
 He found them in each other's arms
 As tears their love proclaim.

When came the dawn, Yarina wept;
 She cannot sleep perforce.
 Stepan already sought the well
 To water his good horse.
 And she with buckets hurried out
 As to draw water too;
 Meanwhile from out of storeroom depths
 The old man brought to view
 His ancient Zaporozhian²⁴⁵ arms;
 He gazes on the gear;
 And as he tries it on himself,
 Seems younger, many a year . . .
 Weeping, he cried: "O armour mine,
 My armour rich in gold!
 O years of youth and youthful strength,
 How has your tale been told!
 Then give good service, weapons good,
 To one who is young;
 Serve him as well as you served me
 In lands and years far-flung!"

The youngsters from the well returned;
 A saddle they bespoke
 To fit his horse, his comrade dear;
 Stepan then dons a cloak.
 Yarina handed him the gear
 As at the door she stood;
 He put the armour on himself;
 Both wept, as well they would.

²⁴⁵Cossack's (from beyond the Dnieper's rapids).

The mighty sword is like a snake;
The spear is vast and long;
A seven-foot rifle's on his back
Suspended by a thong.
The girl grew faint to see him armed;
The old man fell to tears
To see this stalwart, mounted youth
Go riding without fears.

Yarina by the halter leads
The horse, and softly cries;
The father walks beside them there
And gives the son advice:
How to behave himself in arms,
Show officers respect,
Revere the Cossack brotherhood
And meet the foe erect.
"May God protect you!" Thus the sire,
Spoke at the village gate—
And as all three together stood,
They wept at human fate.

Then, with a shout, Stepan set out;
Dust rose above the road.
"Don't be too long, dear son! Come back
Soon to your own abode!"
The old man spoke. Yarina stood,
A fir-tree dark and numb
That in a silent valley stooped:
Yarina too stood dumb,
And mutely wiped her tears away,
And watched the road in pain;
Above the dust saw something dark
That disappeared again;
A cap seemed rolling down the field,
A fly it seemed, a gnat
She scarce descried as miles divide—
At last, not even that.

A long, long time Yarina stood
And still she lingered near,

Waiting to see if that black gnat
 Perhaps would reappear
 From the dust cloud. But nothing came;
 Afar her love must roam.
 Again she let her tears flow down
 As she turned sadly home.

III

Days pass, and summer; yellowed leaves
 Of autumn likewise come.
 The old man by the cottage sits,
 As in a stupor dumb.
 His only daughter now is ill;
 Yarina wants to leave;
 And who will share his hoary years
 And help his age to grieve?
 He called to memory young Stepan,
 Recalled his happy years;
 And as he did, the lonely man
 Let fall his bitter tears:
 "All things on earth are in Thy hands
 And by Thy will must be!
 Let everything be as Thou wilt—
 Such is my destiny!"
 Thus with low voice the ancient man
 With God above did talk;
 Then to the garden he withdrew
 To take a quiet walk.
 With rue and periwinkle fair
 And primroses, the Spring
 Adorns the earth like some sweet maid
 Through green groves wandering;
 Amid high heaven the glowing sun
 All glorious might abide,
 To gaze in ardour at the earth,
 A bridegroom at his bride.
 Yarina from the cottage came
 To view God's radiant world—
 Slowly she faltered; yet she smiled
 To see Spring's leaves unfurled;

So pleasant was it, full of peace,
 She felt that she might claim
 She had been born but yesterday . . .
 But fierce misfortune came
 To stir the anguish in her heart,
 In flame the world around,
 And like a sickled blade of grass
 She drooped, sank to the ground;
 Like dewdrops from a morning flower,
 Her tears began to flow.
 The father, who beside her stood,
 Stooped, like an oak-tree, low.

Yarina's health at last returned.
 Then she with pilgrims went
 To Kiev and Pochaiv too
 With suppliant's intent.
 In the great city of Kiev,
 She sought all saints' advice;
 Within the church at Mezhihirsk,²⁴⁶
 She took Communion thrice;
 And at Pochaiv's²⁴⁷ holy shrines
 All tearfully she prayed
 That she might have her dear Stepan,
 At least in dreams, surveyed.
 To no avail! And home she came.
 Then the white covering
 Of Winter settled; then it passed;
 Then came God's verdant Spring.
 Now from the cottage she emerged
 To gaze at earth's green plain,
 But this time did not pray to God
 For pity in her pain;
 Instead, she sought a sorceress,
 To ask about her swain.

The sorceress then uttered spells
 Against the evil eye;

²⁴⁶The Cossack church of the Blessed Saviour in that locality whose literal meaning is "between the hills (mountains)."

²⁴⁷Another place of pilgrimage in Ukraine. Its church possessed what was believed to be a miraculous image (icon) of the Virgin the Protectress.

And, pouring wax on water, said
 A wedding she could spy.
 —“There, do you see? A Cossack’s horse,
 All saddled, has appeared;
 And yonder walks an ancient man
 Who wears a knee-long beard.
 That will mean money! To be sure,
 The Cossack must decide
 To scare the old man. . . . There, he does! . . .
 And see the fellow hide
 Behind the mound to count the cash . . .
 And there the Cossack goes,
 Clad like a beggar—out of fear,
 In case he meets with foes,
 With Poles or Tartars who might take
 His fatted purse away.”
 And homeward turns Yarina then,
 Her heart serene and gay.

IV

A third year and a fourth year passed,
 A fifth is dragging on—
 An endless, lingering space of time . . .
 And still Stepan is gone!
 Across the valley and the hill,
 The way she once would pass
 With anxious and impatient feet
 Is overgrown with grass.
 No sign of him! The hapless maid
 Plans to become a nun,
 And to that end unplaits her braids.
 “Let one more year be done,”
 Her father begs upon his knees,
 “Pray wait till Peter’s Day,²⁴⁸
 Or wait at least till Pentecost . . .
 And now with green array
 They deck their home at Pentecost,
 And clad in garments white

²⁴⁸The Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, on July 12.

They sit down by the cottage there
 Like orphans in their plight.
 Thus they surrender to their grief
 When suddenly they hear
 Out in the street a kobzar play
 And sing in accents clear:

DUMA²⁴⁹

*"On Sunday morning, just at dawn,
 Loud roared the deep blue sea:
 The Cossack brotherhood convened
 And made their chief a plea:
 'Now give us leave, O Otaman,²⁵⁰
 To launch our baydaks²⁵¹ straight,
 And roam awhile past Tender's Isle²⁵²
 To give the Turk debate.'*

*Their vessels, launched upon the wave,
 With cannon they equipped;
 And by the hour of pitch-black night
 From the vast gorge of Dnieper's bight
 To open sea they shipped.*

*Beyond the Isle of Tender
 They dipped among the waves;
 Now out of sight a bark would go,
 One rises up and one dips low
 As each the tempest braves.*

*And to their brother Cossacks
 In yonder vessel's breast,
 Those on the peak of billows proud
 Would wave their hands and shout aloud:
 'God speed you in your quest!'*

²⁴⁹A historical song dealing with Cossacks' exploits. These songs flourished in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, and may be considered as epics of the Hetman period. In this one, Shevchenko successfully imitated the mood and manner in which they were written.

²⁵⁰Captain.

²⁵¹Cossack deep boats.

²⁵²An island on the Black Sea.

Ship after ship, as down they dip,
 Sinks in the billows' rut . . .
 But three stout barks (may God be praised!),
 Those of the otaman amazed,
 The waif Stepan, all young and dazed,
 The sea did not englut.

He to the paynim land was borne,
 His rudder swept away;
 There the poor derelict Stepan,
 Sworn Cossack and young otaman,
 The Turkish janissaries scan
 And take in sudden fray.

Amid the booming of their guns,
 They fetter him with chains
 And place him in captivity . . .
 O Saviour, God, I pray to Thee,
 Preserve our fiercest enemy
 From suffering those pains!

There ball and chain weigh three puds,²⁵³
 Such are these Cossacks' clogs . . .
 The light of day no more is known;
 Deep underground they break the stone;
 No shrift consoles their dying moan—
 They perish like the dogs.

They disappear forever there;
 And poor Stepan is left
 To dream of his far-off Ukraine,
 His crow-black steed upon the plain,
 His father who so long did feign,
 Yarina, too, bereft . . .

He weeps, he wails, he prays to God,
 He breaks his chains asunder,
 He seeks the steppe-land, vast and free,
 Far, far away, when suddenly
 Upon his fleeting liberty
 The Turks break in like thunder.

²⁵³About 120 pounds.

*They tied the poor lad to a post
 And burned his eyeballs out;
 A red-hot rod burned out his eyes;
 Fettered with heavy chains he lies;
 Deep in a dungeon-cell's assize
 They walled him all about. . . ."*

▼

Thus on the street, beside the hedge,
 The kobzar stood, still young;
 About a sorry captive's fate
 His song he thus had sung.
 Yarina from behind the hedge
 Rushed out in grief and joy;
 Before the song could reach its end
 She clasped the sightless boy:
 "O my Stepan, Stepan my dear!"
 With many a sob she shook.
 "Why have you stayed away so long?
 O father, come and look!"
 The old man came, and closely gazed,
 But could not recognize
 His own Stepan—so great a change
 Captivity supplies!
 —"Alas, my son, my hapless son!
 Alas, my dearest child!
 Where in the world have you been maimed
 With cruelty so wild?"

The old man sorrows and laments;
 And likewise blind Stepan
 Sheds tears of joy as if with sight
 Their faces he could scan.
 They take him by the wasted arms;
 Into the house they go;
 Yarina with a sister's care
 A welcome warm did show.
 She washed his head; she washed his feet;
 She brought, this maiden able,
 A thin white shirt to put on him;
 She placed him at the table;

She gave him food; she gave him drink;
 She put the lad to bed;
 Then, with her father, from the room
 She went with quiet tread.

After a week, no escorts by,
 The old man would betroth
 His daughter fair to young Stepan—
 And she was nothing loath.
 But from Stepan remonstrance came:
 "I cannot hope to wed.
 Take heed, you two! This will not do!
 I'm just as good as dead!
 Why should you waste your youthful years
 On one who has no sight? . . .
 Yarina! . . . Folk will scoff at you;
 Life will have no delight.
 And even God will punish you
 And, to misfortune sealed,
 This happy home will see good luck
 Fly to an alien field.
 Yarina, no! God will not leave you,
 But help you find another mate;
 And I shall go to Zaporozhe²⁵⁴—
 They'll tend me in my sorry state."
 —"Why no, Stepan, my dearest lad!
 Your Maker will desert you
 If you should ever go from us.
 Here nothing ill can hurt you!
 If you don't want to marry me,
 Together we shall live,
 Brother and sister with their sire.
 This blessing you must give.
 Darling Stepan, don't go away,
 Don't let our souls be pained!
 You will not go? . . ."
 —"Yarina, no!"
 And so Stepan remained.

²⁵⁴Zaporozhian Cossack encampment.

The old man, joyful as a child,
 Took up his kobza bright;
 He then was fain a whirling dance
 To play with all his might,
 But he desisted . . .

By their cot
 The three of them sat down.
 —“Tell us the story, dear Stepan,
 How fortune still did frown;
 For I, too, suffered long ago
 As captive of the Turk.”
 —“It happened that, already blind,
 I ceased from dungeon work;
 With all my comrades free I went.
 They headed for the Sitch;
 Their sightless friend they did not leave
 To perish in a ditch.
 Across the Balkan heights we took
 The short road to Ukraine.
 Our legs were free, they felt no more
 The torment of the chain.
 Upon the placid Danube's bank
 We Zaporozhians found
 Who taught our feet to find the Sitch
 Pitched on its new camp-ground²⁵⁵. . .
 And tearfully they told the fate
 Of the Sitch's ancient perch,
 And how the Muscovites despoiled
 Our own Pokrova's²⁵⁶ church
 Of silver, gold, and altar-lights,
 And how by night we fled
 And set up on the Danube's bank
 A new retreat instead;
 The Empress with her friend bewigged²⁵⁷
 Passed through Kiev divine,²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵After the annihilation of the Zaporozhian Sitch by Catherine II, the Cossacks established a new encampment on the Danube River (near the present Rumanian city of Dobrudja), where they lived under the Turks.

²⁵⁶The Cossack church of the Virgin the Protectress.

²⁵⁷Prince Potemkin, Catherine's favourite, who wore a wig.

²⁵⁸Catherine's triumphal passage down the Dnieper in a palatial galley.

In Mezhihirsk²⁵⁹ at dead of night
 They fired the Saviour's shrine,
 Then slowly down the Dnieper stream
 Sailed in her golden galley;
 And as they gaze upon that blaze
 She smiles most cynically;²⁶⁰
 Then on the Zaporozhian steppes
 She shares the boundless turf
 Amongst her bastards and her rakes²⁶¹—
 Each native now a serf;²⁶²
 Kirilo²⁶³ and his sycophants
 Put powder on their hair
 And daily licked the Empress' shoes
 Like the poor dogs they were.
 Thus was it, father. Fortunate
 Am I to have no eyes
 To see and know the fearful woe
 That on our country lies . . .
 First came the Pole—our goods he stole
 And tapped our dearest veins;
 But Muscovites, still greater blights,
 Have put the world in chains."²⁶⁴
 —“And so it was! One's lot is hard,
 Here in one's native land,
 To beg the ugly infidel
 For space upon his strand!
 In Slobodiya²⁶⁵ now, they say,
 Our remnants gather round
 Bold Holowáty²⁶⁶ who exhorts
 A stand on Kuban ground . . .

²⁵⁹See fn. 246.

²⁶⁰Catherine may have ordered the church to be burned.

²⁶¹Catherine divided the Cossack lands among her favourites and had them settled with German immigrants.

²⁶²Serfdom was officially established in Ukraine in 1783.

²⁶³Kirilo Rozumovsky, the last hetman of Ukraine (1750–64), who neglected his duties there and lived mostly at Catherine's court.

²⁶⁴Apparently, in Shevchenko's estimation, the Russian rule in Ukraine proved more oppressive than that of the Poles.

²⁶⁵Some of the Cossacks who escaped the final destruction of the Sitch established themselves in Slobodiya, in the province of Kherson, then under the Turkish rule.

²⁶⁶The leader of those Cossacks who, at Potemkin's instigation, were organized by him in 1787 to help Russia in her war with Turkey, on the promise that some

God help him in that brave attempt!
 But will no guile betray?
 God only knows! We soon shall hear
 What all the people say."

Thus every single day they sit—
 One answers as one asks,
 Till midnight, while Yarina goes
 About her household tasks,
 And prays to all the saints for help . . .
 Those prayers to heaven were carried:
 The Sunday after Meatless Week²⁶⁷
 Was fair Yarina married
 To her blind man . . .

And that is what
 Once happened in this world,
 My dearest maidens, rosy blooms
 With morning dew impearled!
 That is what happened after all,
 My two young folks were wed.
 Perhaps it should not happen so;
 Yet nothing have I said
 But what in fact has taken place.
 A year has passed since then;
 Another starts; and with her man
 Yarina walks again
 About the yard. Her ancient sire
 Sits with a happy smile
 And has a grandson, small and plump,
 Salute in Cossack style. . . .

EPILOGUE

And that is my entire tale . . .
 Let not amazement spurn!
 That which has been is now no more
 And never will return!

of the lands they conquered from the Turks would be given to them. Instead, they were sent to the province of Kuban (east of the Sea of Azov) where they formed the nucleus of the Russian Kuban forces, with Holowaty as their chief.

²⁶⁷The week after Lent, Easter Week.

My tears already have been shed;
 My lacerated heart
 No longer sorrows, and my eyes
 See not, by any art,
 The tranquil cottage in that land
 That history has forgot,
 The peaceful valley and the grove's
 Serene and shadowy spot,
 Nor yet the young maid of my tale
 Nor yet her tiny son,
 Whose life will none too happy prove:
 All weeps, and all is done!
 I'd like to hide myself away,
 But where?—I've not decided.
 Where'er I turn, injustice reigns
 And justice is derided.
 My spirit withers and dries up,
 My tears are chilled and freeze . . .
 Along the highway, still alone,
 I faint in agonies.
 Ay, so it is! Pray marvel not
 That like a crow I croak:
 A cloud has overcast the sun
 And still its light must cloak.
 Barely at midnight can my heart
 Through darkness penetrate
 And send my feeble *duma* forth
 Into the world so great—
 That it may find a healing stream,
 Water that life endows;
 It finds it, too, and brings it back
 To sprinkle on my house;
 It lights it up with purest flame;
 To sad and quiet ears
 It starts with talk of happy things
 But soon it turns to tears. . . .

Now inspiration fain would help
 To end the tale of woe
 About the poor, blind derelict,
 But this it does not know.

For never since the dawn of time
 Could it example find
 Of a young woman's happiness,
 Her husband being blind!
 Yet this amazing thing took place!
 A second year goes by
 Since they were wed; again they walk
 Under a sunny sky
 About the yard. Her ancient sire
 Helps with a happy smile
 A second grandson, small and plump,
 Salute in Cossack style.

Mariyinske, October 16, 1845

THE GREAT MOUND

A MYSTERY PLAY²⁶⁸

Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbours,
 a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us.
 Thou makest us a byword among the heathen,
 a shaking of the head among the people.

Psalm xlv. 13-14

I. THE THREE SPIRITS

As white as snow, three tiny birds went flying
 Across Subotiv-town²⁶⁹ and perched aloft
 On a bent cross above an ancient church.
 "God will forgive our roosting here," they said.
 "For we are but bird-spirits, and not people!
 Moreover, from this spot we'll see more clearly
 The excavation of the mighty Mound.
 Would they open it without delay!
 Then will God let us into Paradise;
 For He told Peter: 'We shall let them in

²⁶⁸In this poem-drama Shevchenko seeks to imitate the mediaeval West European plays which dealt particularly with the mysteries of Christ's birth, passion, death, and resurrection. Here the content is analogous, for in it the poet treats of the sorry state of Ukraine in the past and the possibility of her salvation in the future if his admonition is heeded.

²⁶⁹Subotiv, near Chihirin, in whose church Bohdan Khmelnitsky was buried.

Only when Muscovites have pillaged everything,
When they have dug inside the great Grave-Mound!"

(*First Spirit*) When, long ago, I was a human being,
My name was Prisia; here was I born,
And here I grew in time to maidenhood.
Here, in the churchyard, I would often play
With children; with Yuras,²⁷⁰ the hetman's son,
It was my joy to play at blind man's buff.
And sometimes, too, the hetman's wife came out
And to the hetman's palace called us in,
There to the place where once the storehouse stood:
Plenty of figs and raisins would she give me,
All kinds of dainties, too, and carry me,
With warm affection, in her ample arms.
Whenever guests would come from Chihirin
To see the hetman, they would send for me;
And they would dress me up and shoe me fine;
And then the hetman took me in his arms
And carried me around and kissed me kindly.
Thus, in Subotiv, into maidenhood
I grew up like a flower, loved by all
And fondled; I to none did any harm
Nor did I ever speak a wicked word.
Yes, I was beautiful, black-browed as well!
Young men began to woo me; many sought me;
And for my dowry I was broidering towels.
Indeed, I was about to offer them
When a malign misfortune overtook me.

Early one morning, in pre-Christmas Lent—
Yes, on a Sunday morn, to be precise—
I ran to fetch some water from the well
(That well is now caved in and all dried up,
And still I fly about!), and from that spot
I saw the hetman riding with his staff . . .
I filled my buckets up; I crossed his path,
And thereby wished him luck. I did not know
That he was riding to Pereyaslav
To swear allegiance to black Muscovy.²⁷¹

²⁷⁰Bohdan Khmel'nitsky's son, who later was hetman of Ukraine for a brief period.

²⁷¹A superstition in which the common folk believed—to cross a person's path while carrying buckets full of water meant to wish him good fortune. Thus it

Ah, hardly, hardly, had my hands the strength
 To carry that dread water to the house.
 Why did I fail to shatter both those buckets
 When they were full? Or why could I not first
 Have poisoned father, mother, self, and brother
 With that curs'd water! Yes, that is the cause
 Why I am being punished, little sisters,
 And why I may not enter Paradise!

(*Second Spirit*) And I, dear sisters, may not enter in
 Because I once gave water to the horse
 Of Muscovy's dread Tsar, out in Baturin,
 The time he rode to Moscow from Poltava.²⁷²
 I was then still a maid, when Muscovites
 Burned glorious Baturin to the ground
 During the hours of night; slaughtered old Chechel;²⁷³
 And in Seym's waters drowned both young and old.
 I crawled among the corpses in the palace
 Of our Mazeppa. Near me, murdered, lay
 My sister and my mother, still embraced
 In one another's arms. I clasped them both,
 And thence, perforce, the Russians dragged me off.
 I begged the captain of the Muscovites
 To kill me too! Alas, instead of that,
 He gave me to his soldiers, as a plaything.
 After that hell, I hid myself away
 Among the burning ruins! One sole house
 Remained in all Baturin, and in that
 The Tsar was given lodging for the night,
 While he was now returning from Poltava.
 As I was carrying buckets past the house,

happened that this spirit, while it was yet embodied as a young woman, did exactly that to Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky when he was on his way to Pereyaslav in 1654 to sign a treaty with Russia by which Ukraine lost her freedom. She did it in sheer ignorance and in all innocence, but none the less did harm to her country. Even such an involuntary sin Shevchenko considered a grave one if it affected the liberty of Ukraine.

²⁷²The second involuntary sin, but grievous in its consequences, was committed by a still younger maiden who, without knowing what she was doing, watered Peter I's horse when he was on his way to Russia after he had defeated Hetman Ivan Mazeppa, who was in alliance with Charles XII of Sweden. In so doing, regardless of her ignorance of the evil deed, she served the enemy of Ukraine.

²⁷³One of Mazeppa's lieutenants who was left by the Hetman to defend Baturin, his capital. Peter razed it to the ground and cast the slaughtered bodies of its defenders and inhabitants into the river Seym.

He waved his hand to me and ordered me
 His horse to water. And I watered it.
 I knew not at that time how grievously,
 Most grievously, my simple soul had sinned.
 And then, no sooner did I reach the house
 Than down upon the threshold I fell dead . . .
 The Tsar went journeying on to Muscovy
 And I was buried by an agèd woman
 Who in that horrid maze of smouldering ruins
 Alone was left—and she had welcomed me
 Into her roofless hut. But the next day
 She also died, and rotted in her hut,
 For in Baturin there was no one left
 To give her burial. Her shattered hut
 Has been long since demolished and torn down;
 Even the beam inscribed with sacred verses²⁷⁴
 Has been burned up as kindling. Meanwhile I,
 Above ravines, across the Cossack steppes,
 Continue flying to this very day.
 And why I am so punished through the years
 I really do not know! Perhaps it is
 That I was always willing to give service
 And help to anyone, and so had watered
 The warhorse of the Tsar of Muscovy.

(*Third Spirit*) In Kániv²⁷⁵ was I born; my baby tongue
 Could not yet talk when, in my swaddling clothes,
 My simple mother took me, in her arms,
 To see the Empress Catherine go sailing
 To Kániv on the Dnieper.²⁷⁶ There we sat,
 I and my mother, on a little hillock
 Within a leafy grove. I took to crying:
 In truth I do not know if I was hungry
 Or if some other pang was bothering
 My little body. Then my mother sought
 To amuse me, and, in gazing at the Dnieper,

²⁷⁴It was a custom among Ukrainian peasants to inscribe on the roof beams of their houses informative data as to when the house was built, by whom, the dates of the birth and death of the people who lived in them, as well as their favourite quotations from the Bible.

²⁷⁵A town just south of Kiev.

²⁷⁶See fn. 258.

Showed me the golden galley, vast in size
 Like a huge building; and within the galley
 Were princes and all high officialdom
 And governors. Among them sat the Empress.
 I glanced at her; and smiled;²⁷⁷ and gasped my last!
 My mother also died! Within one grave
 We both were buried. That is why, dear sisters,
 I now am being punished; that is why
 My soul is still forbid its trial season!²⁷⁸
 But how was I, still in my swaddling clothes,
 To recognize that Empress as a foe
 To our Ukraine, a ravenous she-wolf?
 The day is getting dark; so let us fly
 To pass the night in yonder Chuta forest:²⁷⁹
 If anything should happen to the Mound
 During the night, we'll hear it even there!
 The three white spirits darted up, and flew
 Into the forest. On an oak-tree branch
 They took their perch and settled for the night.

II. THE THREE RAVENS

(Ukrainian, Polish, Russian)

(First) Caw! Caw! Caw! The day Bohdan once pilfered
 His country's goods, he took them to Kiev,
 And there he sold to thieves the things he stole.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷Even an infant's smile at the autocratic Empress, who destroyed the remnants of Ukrainian freedom, is exaggerated by Shevchenko into the most grievous, death-dealing transgression. Ignorance is no excuse, for it only assists the enemy to oppress the people the more. In Shevchenko's estimation, the greater the ignorance, the greater the sin.

²⁷⁸According to folk belief, the soul, released after the death of the body, remains on earth for forty days during which time the celestial and infernal powers contend for its possession. After that period its fate is decided. The symbolic spirits brought out in this section are not even allowed to be contended for, and must bide their time till the completion of the excavation of the Great Mound in which Ukrainian freedom lies buried. Only when that freedom is regained will the sinning spirits be released from their aimless wanderings. In the meantime they must do penance on earth for their evil deeds.

²⁷⁹Near the Zaporozhian Sitch.

²⁸⁰The first raven (Ukrainian) means that whatever Khmel'nitsky regained by force from Poland he gave away to Russia by signing the Treaty of Pereyaslav.

(*Second*) I lived in Paris—spent three *zloty* there
In drinking with Radziwill and Potocki.²⁸¹

(*Third*) Upon the bridge, the devil now is crossing
The goat walks on the water: Trouble's brewing!²⁸²

Thus screamed the ravens as from three directions
They came in flight and perched upon a beacon,
A huge pile on a hill amid a forest,
All three of them; their feathers were puffed out
As if they suffered from the bitter cold;
And at each other still these ravens looked,
Like three old sisters, spinsters for so long
That all their skin was overgrown with down.
(*First*) This morsel is for you, and this for you!
You see, I fluttered to Siberia,
And there, from a Decembrist,²⁸³ stole some gall.
There's plenty for us all to break our fast!
Well now, and is there in your Muscovy
Enough oppression to rejoice our hearts?
Or has the devil filched it all away?

(*Third*) There's plenty of oppression, my dear sisters!
I have just scribbled out three new ukases,
And only for a single road of mine.

(*First*) What road do you mean? The one with rails of
steel?²⁸⁴
But what good did it do?

(*Third*) Why, in one verst²⁸⁵
It smothered me a good six thousand souls.

²⁸¹The second raven (Polish) refers to the Polish nobility who neglected their people after the rebellion of 1831 and spent their time carousing in Paris.

²⁸²The third raven (Russian), speaking mysteriously, presages evil times. All three, being wicked, are glad at what is happening, and are vying with each other in boasting of how much evil they had done and plan to do.

²⁸³Decembrists were those who participated in the uprising that took place in St. Petersburg in December 1825. They demanded a new constitution for Russia. The rebellion was quelled, several of its leaders were hanged, and about a hundred of its supporters (among them F. Dostoevsky) were exiled to Siberia. The ravens feed on gall in order to become fiercer.

²⁸⁴The reference is to the railroad then being built to link St. Petersburg with Moscow. Since the Tsar wanted a straight road, regardless of marshy grounds and natural hindrances in many localities along the way, much wastage of money, effort and human life resulted. The ukases (tsarist direct orders) caused the road to be built straight at all costs.

²⁸⁵About 3,500 feet.

(*First*) Don't lie! I think the count was only five,
 And that with the assistance of Von Korff!²⁸⁶
 And yet you boast of something that was done
 By someone else . . . You mouldy hunk of cabbage!
 (*To the Second Raven*) And you, my gracious lady, do you still
 Carouse in Paris with those libertines
 Who shed a paltry stream of Polish blood²⁸⁷
 And sent their gentry to Siberia?
 And now your bilious boasting knows no end!
 What a proud one you are!

(*Second and Third*) What did
 you do?

(*First*) That's now none of your damned business! Both of you
 Were still unborn when I enjoyed my heyday
 And poured out blood in rivers.²⁸⁸ Just imagine!
 You must have read Karamzin²⁸⁹ to suppose
 That you're the only ones to have a past!
 Hush up, you simpletons! For even yet
 You're not full-fledged, you poor, pin-feathered mollies!

(*Second*) My, what a touchy one you are! But praise
 Is not for one who did harm long ago
 But for the one who killed more than the others,
 So much as to be weary of it all.

(*First*) But you could not have done it without me,
 Even with all your Jesuits to help!
 The devil you could! For surely it was I
 Who brought your Poland down, with all her kings.
 Had it been just your job, you jabberer,
 Poland would still be standing, straight and strong! . . .
 I've other exploits, too. Just think what I
 Inflicted on free Cossacks! For to whom
 Have I not hired them out²⁹⁰ and sold their strength?

²⁸⁶The cruel chief of the St. Petersburg police force.

²⁸⁷During the Polish insurrection in 1831.

²⁸⁸Shevchenko presents the Ukrainian raven as the fiercest, for it (the Ukrainian landlords and the élite) in his estimation caused more harm to Ukraine than her external enemies.

²⁸⁹Nikolai Karamzin (1765–1826) wrote a glorified and highly biased history of Russia in which he contended that all of Ukraine was an integral part of Russia.

²⁹⁰Cossacks, compelled by circumstances, were often forced to serve the Russians, the Poles, and even the Turks.

And yet I could not kill the rascals off!
 Together with Bohdan, I once imagined
 That I had buried them. But I was wrong:
 The villains soon arose in an alliance
 With the invading Swede.²⁹¹ What marvellous days!
 I puff with pride when I recall those times:
 I burned Baturin;²⁹² and at Romni-town
 I filled the Sula River deep with Cossacks,²⁹³
 Officers only; with their rank and file,
 The common rabble, I sowed all of Finland;
 I piled them up in heaps along the Orel;
 To Ladoga I drove them on in throngs
 And made them fill the swamps up for the T'sar.²⁹⁴
 And it was I who in a prison cell
 Smothered to death famous Polubotok.²⁹⁵
 Those were my festive days! While hell itself
 Shuddered in horror at my fearful deeds,
 The Virgin-icon out at Irzhavetz²⁹⁶
 All through the night shed tears of holy pity!

(*Third*) I, too, was capable of things like that.
 I made my people groan beneath the Tartars,
 Took to carousing with the Terrible,²⁹⁷
 Had a most merry time with darling Peter,
 And then, with Catherine, sold out to the Germans.

(*First*) Doubtless you did quite nicely: For so well
 You shackled all your poor goat-bearded Russians
 In German bonds that they could do no more
 Than lie about and promptly fall asleep!
 But where I come from, folk are still awake,
 Expecting hell knows whom. I've packed away
 As many as I can in dungeon cells,
 Have put a horde of turncoats without number
 Into the uniforms of civil servants²⁹⁸
 Who breed like lice, illustrious bastards all!

²⁹¹A reference to Mazeppa's alliance with Charles XII of Sweden.

²⁹²See fn. 273.

²⁹³Peter I's revenge on all those who helped Mazeppa.

²⁹⁴See fn. 193. ²⁹⁵See fn. 192. ²⁹⁶See fn. 403. ²⁹⁷Ivan IV (1547-84).

²⁹⁸Those Ukrainians who could have helped their country were, at the instigation of the Ukrainian raven (evil spirit), bribed by Russian authorities or given ranks in the Imperial civil service.

The old encampment of their devilish Sith
 Is overgrown with Germans; Muscovites
 Have shown a touch of genius in Ukraine
 In squeezing all the life-blood from the people.
 Fierce as I am, I never could have managed
 The torments that the Muscovites inflict
 Upon the Cossacks! At their every whim
 They print a ukase: "By the grace of God,
 Yourselves are ours, and everything is ours,
 Whether or not you think so!" And behold,
 They now have even set about to seek
 "Antiquities" within our mounds, because
 There's nothing left to pilfer in our dwellings—
 They've picked us clean! But the devil only knows
 Why they are in such haste to open up
 That ugly Mound. If they would only wait,
 Subotiv's church²⁹⁹ would shortly crumble down
 And they would have the looter's double pleasure
 Of digging up two ruins at one time.

(*Second and Third*) Why did you call us then, if just to gaze
 Intently at the old sepulchral Mound?

(*First*) Precisely so to gaze! But in addition,
 Two other wonders are about to break:
 Twins will be born tonight in our Ukraine.
 One will, like Gonta,³⁰⁰ slay the torturers;
 The other (this one's ours) will help the hangmen,—
 He is already snapping in the womb . . .
 And I have somewhere read that when at last
 This newest Gonta will to manhood grow
 Our work will go for naught! For he will ruin
 All of the murderous good that we have done;
 Not even his own brother will he spare;
 Freedom and justice will he then let loose
 Throughout Ukraine. And so you see, dear sisters,
 What is now brewing: chains are being forged
 To bind the hangmen and defeat our good!³⁰¹

(*Third*) With molten gold I'll fill up both his eyes!³⁰² . . .

²⁹⁹The church which Khmel'nitsky built and in which he was buried.

³⁰⁰See fn. 135.

³⁰¹Actually, evil.

³⁰²i.e., with bribes, decorations, orders, and ranks, as further noted.

(*First*) A miscreant, he will surely scorn your gold!
 (*Third*) I'll twist his hands with civil service posts
 And lordly decorations from the tsar! . . .
 (*Second*) And I shall gather from across the world
 All sorts of ills and tortures to restrain him!
 (*First*) Alas, dear sisters, that's no way to do it!
 As long as all the common folk are blind,³⁰³
 This fellow must be buried, or we're lost.
 Look over there: how above Chihirin
 A comet sweeps the sky; above the Dnieper,
 Above Tiasmin,³⁰⁴ the very earth is trembling.
 Do you hear? Past Chihirin, the mountain groaned . . .
 All of Ukraine is laughing and lamenting!
 The twins have just been born; their frenzied mother
 Is bellowing with laughter at the fact
 That both will be named Ivan. Thither fly! . . .
 (And so they flew, and in their flight they sang:)
 (*First*) Good Ivan will go sailing down the Dnieper,
 Down to Liman; and I shall be his crony!³⁰⁵
 (*Second*) And this fierce cur³⁰⁶ will rush to warmer climes
 To feed upon the snakes—with me to guide him.
 (*Third*) I'll seize on him, and like an arrow rush
 To cast the bastard into hell itself!

III. THE THREE LYRE PLAYERS

One blind, one crippled, with a hunch-backed third,³⁰⁷
 The three of them were walking to Subotiv
 To sing about Bohdan to common folk.
 (*First*) What's that out there? Three ravens perching high
 Upon the beacon's top? The birds behave
 Precisely as if Muscovites had made
 That lofty pile to be a ravens' roost!

³⁰³The first raven's greatest weapon against the Ukrainian people—to keep them in ignorance. See the next episode for an elaboration of this.

³⁰⁴Just as at the birth of Christ a new star appeared in the sky, so at the birth of a new Gonta (Ukraine's saviour) a comet appears above Chihirin, once a Cossack capital. The Tiasmin River flows through that town.

³⁰⁵i.e., she will try to bribe him.

³⁰⁶To Poland, Gonta will be a fierce dog. That is why the Polish raven plans to poison him.

³⁰⁷These are the representatives of the idle common class of Ukrainian people, abandoned by their lords to their stupidity. Shevchenko purposely makes them talk gibberish to show to what degree of inanity they have fallen.

(*Second*) For whom, then, is it? Certainly no man
Would climb that pyramid to count the stars . . .

(*First*) Don't be a fool! Perhaps they'll put up there
A surly German or a Muscovite;
For Muscovites or Germans even there
Would find some dainty tidbit for themselves.

(*Third*) Of what on earth are you two babbling now?
Of Muscovites, and ravens, and a roost?
Now, as I live, I think in that high nest
Eggs will be laid to hatch more Muscovites.
For rumour has it that the tsar desires
To send his troops to seize the entire world.

(*Second*) It may be so! But in the devil's name
Why pile those things so high upon a hill?
So huge those beacons are that if you climbed,
You, from the top, could touch the very clouds.

(*Third*) Well this is what I think! A mighty flood
Will soon be on the earth. The lords will climb
Up to the very summit to enjoy
The sight of all the mouzhiks being drowned.

(*First*) You think you're brainy, but you're just a dunce!
All of these beacons have been raised as watch-towers,
So folk will not steal water from the river
Or plough in secret all that sandy tract
Extending endlessly beyond Tiasmin.

(*Second*) The devil only knows the thing you jabber!
And if you lack the knack, don't try to lie!
It will not do us any harm if we
Just sit down here beneath this shady elm
And rest awhile. I still have got some bread,
A hunk or two, here in my begging bag;
So let us eat our breakfast at our leisure
Before the sun shall rise. (And down they sit.)
Who, lads, will sing about Bohdan today?

(*Third*) Of Yassy³⁰⁸ will I sing, and Zhovti Vody,³⁰⁹
And likewise of the town of Berestéčko.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸The capital of Moldavia which was conquered by B. Khmel'nitsky's son Timish. He then married the Moldavian king's daughter.

³⁰⁹The place where B. Khmel'nitsky inflicted a shattering defeat on the Poles.

³¹⁰Where the Tartar khan treacherously abandoned Khmel'nitsky's troops fighting the Poles. As a result, some 40,000 Cossacks and peasants perished.

(*Second*) We'll gain much profit from our songs today:
 For near the Mound a mighty crowd has gathered,
 And quite a number of the gentry too.
 On such a spot we'll certainly make hay!³¹¹
 Come, let us sing a while, to practise up!
 (*First*) The devil take the practice! Let's lie down
 And have a blessed snooze! The day is long
 And we shall have sufficient time to sing.
 (*Third*) That's what I say. Let's pray, and go to sleep.

The beggars fell asleep beneath an elm,
 The sun still slumbered and the birds were silent,
 But near the Mound the people were astir
 And started in to dig. They dug all day;
 A second day they dug, and on the third,
 With grievous toil, they came to masonry
 And rested for a while, with guards all round.
 The supervisor begs them earnestly
 Not to let anyone approach the place;
 He meanwhile sends off word to Chihirin
 And summons all officialdom to come.

And so they came, the chubby-cheeked officials,
 Inspected everything and said at last:
 "You must use force to open up the vault!
 There's nothing else to do!" They broke it open,
 And when they did, stood frozen in their fear:
 For in the vault lay only skeletons,
 That seemed to grin to see the lovely sun.³¹²

Such was the treasure of Bohdan: Just skulls,
 A mouldering pit of skeletons in shackles.
 And if the chains were such as now are used,
 They would be fine and useful even yet!
 All roared with laughter. . . . But the overseer
 Almost went mad with rage, because, you see,
 Nothing of value had been found to take.

³¹¹These minstrels sing their heroic songs to the people not out of any idealism for the national cause, but merely for monetary gain. Otherwise, they prefer to remain idle and spend their time in sleeping.

³¹²The Muscovite expedition expected to find in it treasures of antiquity, and even gold. Not even the shackles and manacles found on the Cossacks' skeletons could be used by the Russians now, because they were of a different make.

Painstakingly he'd toiled, by day and night,
 And in the end was left to hold the bag,
 Unhappy fool! If he had got his hands
 On old Bohdan himself that luckless day,
 The worthy Hetman would have been impressed
 Into the Russian army on the spot,
 To teach him not to cheat the government!
 He shouts; he rushes round like one possessed;
 He whacks poor Yaremenko³¹³ on the mouth;
 Curses, in Russian, all the company;
 Then finds the lyre-players:

—“Dirty vagrants,

What are you doing here?”

—“Well sir, you see,

We came to sing a lay about Bohdan!”

—“I'll give you lads Bohdan! You idlers, thieves!

To think you even have composed a song
 About a good-for-nothing like yourselves!”

—“But we were taught to sing it, sir!”

—“I'll teach you!

Give them the whip!”

Men laid them out and flogged them—

And the poor wretches had to sweat it out

As in a bath-house cooler, Moscow style.

Such hay they made from songs about Bohdan!

In such a manner, then, the small grave-mound

The Muscovites dug open in Subotiv;

But that Great Mound where our true treasure³¹⁴ lies

They have not found, nor shall they ever find.

Mirhorod, October 21, 1845

SUBOTIV³¹⁵

In the village of Subotiv,

Upon a lofty hill

There stands the coffin³¹⁶ of Ukraine—

A crypt both wide and still:

³¹³An old Cossack who lived near the Mound.

³¹⁴The Mound from which Ukraine's freedom will finally issue.

³¹⁵This short poem appears to be a sequel to “The Great Mound.”

³¹⁶The church in Subotiv, the coffin of Ukraine because it was the burial place of Bohdan Khmel'nitsky, who, Shevchenko insisted, sold Ukraine's freedom to Russia by his Treaty of Pereyaslav.

It is the church of great Bohdan,
 Where once he used to pray
 That Muscovite and Cossack might
 Share good and ill always.
 May peace be to your soul, Bohdan!
 Their gain has been our loss:
 The Muscovites have snatched away
 All that they came across;
 And now they rend the burial mounds
 In search of further loot;
 Their hand assaults your hidden vaults;
 They curse your soul to boot
 Because they've nothing for their pains...
 That's how it is, Bohdan!
 You've ruined derelict Ukraine
 By your most friendly plan!
 And this must be the gratitude
 Now falling to your share...
 The church that once had confined you
 No neighbour will repair!
 That same Ukraine where long ago
 You broke the Polish threat
 The bastards of Great Catherine
 Like locusts have beset.
 And thus it is, Zenobius,³¹⁷
 Alexey's³¹⁸ faithful friend,
 You gave them all; but gratefulness
 Is plainly at an end!
 They say, you know, that all Ukraine
 Was always really theirs,
 And that we only farmed it out
 To all the Tartars' heirs
 And to the Poles. . . . Appears it so?
 Suppose it is the truth!
 But on that score the neighbours' tongues
 Deride us without ruth . . .
 Yet do not laugh, ye foreign folk!
 That church beneath the skies

³¹⁷Another baptismal name of Bohdan Khmelnytsky.

³¹⁸Tsar Alexey (1645–76), with whom Khmelnytsky signed the Treaty of Pereyaslav.

May crumble down, but from its vaults
 A new Ukraine will rise
 To end the night of slavery;
 Injustice will be gone;
 Our serf-born sons' glad orisons
 Will greet sweet Freedom's dawn!

Mirhorod, October 21, 1845

THE HIRED GIRL

PROLOGUE

Early one Sunday morning
 The field in mist was blind;
 Within the mist upon a mound
 A mournful maiden's form was found,
 In poplar grace inclined.
 She bundled something to her breast,
 And thus her voice the mist addressed:
 "O fog! O thickly cloaking fog!
 My fate is all in shadows!
 Why don't you hide me always here
 Amid the misty meadows?
 Why don't you smother me to death,
 Enfold me in the earth?
 Why don't you foil my evil fate
 And end existence' dearth?
 Nay, do not smother me, O mist!
 Just hidden let me be,
 That none may know about my woe
 And see my misery!
 My mother and my father live,
 Though they are far from here,
 And I still have, O gentle mist,
 A love—alas too dear—
 And I've a child . . . Alas, my son,
 My still unchristened boy!
 I may not have your head baptized
 To life so void of joy.
 Others will tend your christening—
 I might not even know

The name you'll bear . . . Ah, what despair!
 Wealth I could once bestow . . .
 Reproach me not! You'll have my prayers
 Sent down from heaven so blue;
 And with my tears I'll bless your years,
 A legacy to you!"

Across the field amid the mist
 Bewailing thus she went,
 And through her tears she softly sang
 The widow's sad lament
 Who to the Danube's waters gave
 Her children innocent:
 "Out in the field a mound lies low;
 And there the widow used to go,—
 She used to go and roam about
 To seek the deadly blossoms out.
 The deadly blooms she could not find
 But bore two sons, in fate unkind.
 She wrapped them soft in silken cloth,
 And to the Danube brought them both:
 'O gentle stream that softly runs,
 Amuse henceforth my little sons!
 And you, fine yellow sand so fair,
 Feed both my tiny ones with care,
 Swaddle and bathe each little elf,
 And cover them at last yourself!'"

I

Once on a time, in days of old, there dwelt
 A man and wife, who passing years now felt,
 In a fine manor by a grove-side pond,
 And, childlike, of each other passing fond.
 When they were children, both had pastured lambs;
 At last they married, and their bulls and rams
 Brought coins to buy a farmstead, then a mill;
 A garden in the grove extended still
 Their little realm, by honey-bees made glad;
 They were content in everything they had.
 But they had not a single child, alack,—
 Death with its scythe was close behind their back.

Who will attend them in their feebleness
 And be a loving child their age to bless?
 Who will lament and bury them, as heirs?
 Who will remember both their souls in prayers?
 To whom would all their wealth by will be writ,
 In just succession? Who would gain by it
 And hence remember them with gratitude
 And fond affection as one's children would?
 It is most hard to bring one's children up
 In a roofless hut; but harder still to sup
 Alone and aging, in a farm-house white,
 And die at last and pass to endless night,
 While strangers make your heritage their prey,
 And scoff at you, and squander it away!

II

And so on Sunday the old couple sat
 Together on the porch in quiet chat,
 Clad in clean linen garments, fine and white.
 Up in the sky the sun was shining bright;
 No cloud was seen, and quiet hours entice,
 So pleasant that it seemed a paradise.
 Yet all their trouble in their hearts lay scowling,
 Like some fierce creature in the forest prowling.

Living in such a paradise as this,
 Why should these aged people not know bliss?
 Was it some ancient trouble that revived?
 Was it some recent care, again contrived?
 Or did some grief but now begin to bud,
 Yet with a bane to curdle in the blood?

I know not what it was or for what reason
 The old folk were so sad at such a season.
 Perhaps they felt, their Maker soon they'd meet,
 And so they wondered who, with willing feet,
 Would harness up the horses perilous
 For that long trip.

—"Nastia, who'll bury us
 When we shall die?"

—"Alas, I do not know!
 I, too, just thought of that, and quaked with woe!"

We have grown old, and still we are alone . . .
 For whom is all this property we own?"
 —"Wait, listen! Do you hear? Something is crying—
 You'd think a baby by our gate was lying!
 Let's hurry! Do you see? A child is sent.
 Of this I had a soft presentiment!"

Both rose in haste and sought the gate;
 They hurried with a rush;
 But when beside the gate they came
 They halted in a hush:
 Right at the passage through the hedge
 They saw a swaddled child,
 Wrapped loosely in a garment new
 Which its own mother mild
 Could in that summer weather spare
 To wrap the little mite!
 In awe the old folks looked at it
 And prayed in their delight.
 Meanwhile the piteous infant seemed
 To issue soft demands;
 Freed its small arms from swaddling-clothes;
 Held out those tiny hands . . .
 Then it grew still; it did not cry,
 But only whimpered low.
 —"See, Nastia, there the baby is!
 And think, I told you so!
 Good luck and fortune have come back!
 Now we are not alone!
 Pray, take the child and bring it up,—
 As fair as if our own!
 Take it indoors, while I, by horse,
 To Horodishche hie
 To get godparents!"

Things most strange

Our daily lives supply!
 One man will curse his true-born son
 And drive him out with scandal;
 Another earns, by sweat of brow,
 The cash to buy a candle;
 Lights it with tears and places it
 Before the icons high:

But gets no children! . . . Things most strange
Our daily lives supply!

III

Then to the invitation glad
Some six godparents hark;
That night the baby was baptized
And given the name of Mark.
And so, Mark grows. The aged pair
Attend his every whim;
And naught they spare in tender care
To make life good to him.
A year goes by. Mark grows apace;
Be sure the good milch cow
Must live a life of luxury.
A maiden black of brow
And fair of face arrived one day
And at the door inquired
If in that God-blest manor-house
She might as maid be hired.
—"Well, Nastia, shall we take her on?"
—"Trokhim, let's take her, yes!
For we are ailing and our age
Brings further feebleness;
Although the child is bigger now,
He still needs someone's care
In all the round of daily life."

—"It is most true, I swear,
For I have now outlived my span—
Thank God for health so great!—
But now grow feeble. Well, dear lass,
Could you your wages state?
By the year, or how?. . ."

—"That's as you will . . ."

—"Nay, but the rate we'd know,—
We must, dear daughter, settle well
What for your hire we'll owe;
They say the man who takes no care
Has nothing in the end;
You don't know me; we don't know you;
This might be best, my friend,

That you should live with us a while
 And see what's to be done,
 We, too, shall see what you are worth
 And let your wages run.
 Are you content?"

—"Uncle, I am!"

—"Your service is begun!"

So they agreed. The fair young maid
 Joyed in her new task's tillage
 As if, in marrying a lord,
 She'd bought up many a village.
 She worked indoors; she worked outdoors;
 She tended all the cattle,
 From break of dawn till late at night;
 She watched the baby's prattle
 As closely as a mother might!
 His head she washed each day;
 And put on him a clean, white shirt
 Each morning, bright and gay.
 She played with him, she sang to him,
 She made him toys and charms;
 And in the peace of holy days
 Would hold him in her arms.
 The wondering old folk pray to God
 In fervent gratitude.
 Meanwhile the never-sleeping maid
 Each night, in wretched mood,
 Curses the irony of fate
 And sheds her bitter tears,
 But no one sees or knows of it
 And no one ever hears,
 Save little Mark. And in his youth
 He little thought is keeping
 Why she, the simple hired girl,
 Should wash him with her weeping.
 Mark does not know the reason why
 Her love so warm is shed,
 With little care for food and drink
 So long as he is fed.
 Nor does Mark know the reason why,
 When in the night he stirs

In sudden wakefulness, she comes,
 A coverlet confers,
 And signs the cross above his head
 And lulls him back to sleep;
 Of the child's breathing, from her room,
 Account she still would keep.
 His tiny arms were stretched to her
 When at the dawn he rose;
 He calls her "mamma", her, this maid
 Of ever-wakeful pose;
 Nor does Mark dream of anything
 As he to manhood grows.

IV

Now many years have rolled along the road;
 Much water underneath the bridge has flowed;
 Misfortune to the manor-house returned
 And brought it many tears and hearts that yearned.
 Old granny Nastia died; was laid to rest;
 And old Trokhim, with overburdened breast,
 Scarce rallied from the shock.

Misfortune deep

At last, however, passed and fell asleep;
 And to the manor-house the pleasant grace
 From the dark grove returned to take its place
 And rest in benediction on the home.

Mark is a bold chumak,³¹⁹ and skilled to roam.
 Moreover, he is restless in the fall:
 Inside or out, he does not sleep at all.
 In short, he's old enough to take a bride.
 "Who should it be?" The old man seeks a guide
 And asks the hired girl for her advice,
 While she was all too willing in a trice
 To send out wedding messengers to catch
 Even a princess as her darling's match.

"But let us ask young Mark himself.
 The task he'll not be dreading."

—"Well thought on, daughter! let us ask,
 And then bring on the wedding."

³¹⁹See fn. 201.

Out of their counsels comes a choice
 And soon for his avowals
 Mark went, and with his mates returned
 Bearing embroidered towels³²⁰
 And an exchange of blessed bread.
 A fine young bride he'd claimed
 And fair of face: to marry her
 No hetman were ashamed.
 It seemed almost a miracle
 That such a match was found!
 —"Thank you!" the old man tells the maid,
 "And now, of course, we're bound
 To bring the happy wedding on,
 Decide the when and where
 And plan the day! Yes, one thing more:
 Who'll be his mother there?
 My Nastia cannot see that day . . ."
 His face with tears was wet.
 The hired girl beside the door
 Her hands upon it set
 To keep from swooning where she stood.
 Each silent as the other
 They stood, but still she whispered low:
 "O mother . . . mother . . . mother! . . ."

v

Within a week young housewives baked
 The manor's wedding bread.
 The father old with all his might
 Would match their busy tread,
 And as he tidies up the yard,
 Invites all those who roam
 By foot or horse along the road
 To enter his fine home.
 Brandy to drink he gives them all,
 And wedding invitations;
 He rushes round, although his legs
 Now totter in their stations.

³²⁰A custom among Ukrainian people: if the young woman accepted her suitor's proposal of marriage she tied embroidered towels around the waists (or across the torsos) of the men he sent to her to plead for him.

Laughter and hubbub fill the place,
 Inside the house and out;
From the new store-room of the farm
 The troughs were borne about.
They cook, they bake, they sweep, they wash;
 The uproar drives one deaf . . .
But where, then, was the hired girl?
 A pilgrim to Kiev
Hanna had gone. The old man pled,
 Mark begged with tears, that she
Should act as mother when he wed.
 —"Nay, it's not right for me.
Where you are marrying with wealth,
 Some deference is due:
Since I am but a servant girl,
 People would laugh at you.
May God bring blessings on you both!
 Now I shall go to pray
To all the saints in great Kiev
 And then return to stay
Here in your home, if that's your wish.
 As long as I have strength
I'll work for you!" With a clean heart
 She blessed the lad at length
And bursting into silent tears
 Out through the gateway steals.
The wedding started lustily:
 Musicians and folks' heels
Were fast at work. Now overflows
 Brandy on every table;
While Hanna to the city plods
 As fast as she is able.
Yet even there she did not rest
 But sought with glances sunny
For service as a hired girl
 Because she had no money
To pay a priest for litanies.
 She toiled from dawn to dark
Until she'd laid by coins enough
 To buy for fine young Mark

A blessèd cap, sold at the Caves,³²¹
 The minster of Saint John,
 So that no headache might afflict
 Whene'er he had it on;
 At Barbara's shrine she bought a ring
 To keep the bride from harm;
 And having worshipped all the saints,
 She started for the farm.

So she returns. Fair Kate and Mark
 Rush to the gate to meet her,
 And bring her straight within the house,
 And at the table seat her;
 And there they give her food and drink,
 And on her trip confer;
 Then Katie in a separate room
 Prepares a bed for her.

—"Why do they love me as they do?
 And why respect me so?
 Tell me, O Lord most merciful,
 Do they already know?
 It may be they have grasped the truth? . . .
 Ah, no, they could not guess.
 They are but kind. . . ."

The hired girl
 Wept in her bitterness.

VI

Thrice was the river clothed in ice;
 Thrice did the thaws assuage;
 Thrice Katie saw the hired girl
 Off on a pilgrimage,
 Like her own mother. Now again
 She took the supplicant
 Across the fields and past the mound
 And prayed that God might grant
 A speedy and a safe return:
 Without her, sadness crossed

³²¹The famous Monastery of the Caves (*Pecherska Lavra*) in Kiev.

Their home as if a mother's love
Had been forever lost.

After the Feast of the Immaculate³²²
The first, that is—Trokhim, now bald of pate,
Sat on the porch, in his white shirt arrayed
And wearing his best hat. Before him played
His grandson with a dog beside the door;
Meanwhile, his small granddaughter gaily wore
Her mother's skirt, pretending she had come
To call upon her grandpa, sage and grum.
The old man laughed and gave her glad response
As if she were a housewife for the nonce.
—"But what about some flat-cakes with your call?
Did someone in the forest steal them all?
Or did you, just today, forget to take them?
In fact, perhaps you didn't even bake them?
Ah, what a shame! How like your darling mother
So to forget!"

But suddenly another,
His Hanna, neared the gate with movements slack.
He and the children rushed to greet her back.
—"Is Mark still absent on a trip?"
She asked the good old man.
—"The lad is still upon the road,"
Trokhim's brief answer ran.
—"I thought I'd never reach your house.
Fatigue my life endangers.
I did not want to die alone
Far distant, among strangers!
If I could but see Mark again! . . .
I faint beneath life's yoke . . ."
Then from her bundle she brought out
Gifts for the little folk:
Some tiny crosses, gilded toys,
A string of corals spread
For small Orina, of some saint
A picture glazed in red,

³²²The first of the three feasts of the Virgin Mary celebrated in the latter part of the year, this one being that of her Dormition, on August 28.

For the boy a toy, a nightingale,
 A pair of horsies fine
 And a fourth ring that she must bring
 From Barbara's great shrine
 For Katerina; for Trokhim
 Three candles did she bear
 Of holy wax; but for herself
 And Mark no gift was there,
 Because she could not purchase more,
 Of cash she was bereft,
 Nor had she strength the coins to earn.
 —"And this is all that's left—
 Just half a bun!"
 To feed each child
 This piece in two was cleft.

VII

Old Hanna went into the house.
 There Katie washed her feet
 And at the table gave her food
 But Hanna could not eat.
 —"When will next Sunday come?" she cried.
 "That day I fain would greet."
 —"Two days hence."
 —"We must ask the priest
 To make a supplication
 To Nicholas, and to the church
 Must make a due donation
 Since Mark is somewhat overdue . . .
 He may have fallen ill
 Upon his trip, which God forbid!"
 And tears began to fill
 Her wasted eyes. She scarce could rise
 From table where she bent.
 "Ah, Katerina, I am done!
 My strength is fully spent.
 That I am now too weak to stand
 My useless legs give proof.
 O Katie, it is hard to die
 Beneath another's roof!"

Soon the poor woman fell more ill.
 Communion she received;
 Anointing with the holy oil
 No whit her soul relieved!
 Trokhim is pacing round the yard—
 The old man's in a daze;
 While Katie gives the dying maid
 Attention past all praise,—
 Both night and day she nurses her;
 Meanwhile misfortune dread
 Is foretold by the screeching owls
 Who perch upon the shed.
 And every day and every hour
 In accents far from clear
 The ailing woman feebly asks:
 —“Katie, my daughter dear!
 Has Mark not yet returned to us?
 Ah, if I only knew
 That I should see him once again,
 My waiting would be through!”

VIII

Together with his bold chumáks,
 Mark sings on homeward ways;
 But in no haste to reach the house
 He lets his oxen graze.
 For Katerina Mark brings back
 Rich woollen stuff for dresses;
 A broidered sash to give his dad,
 As gay as silken tresses;
 And for the servant-girl he brings
 Gold-sewn brocade to grace
 Her head-dress and a kerchief red
 Bordered with fine white lace;
 And for the children, raisins, figs,
 Shoes for each little elf,
 And for them all some fine red wine
 From Istanbul itself,
 Three bucketfuls in one stout barrel,
 And caviar from the Don—

All this he brings, but does not know
 How things at home have gone!
 Without a care he comes at last
 In a contented mood;
 Unbars the gate, and offers up
 A prayer of gratitude.
 —“D’you hear him, Katie? That is he!
 Run out, run out to meet him!
 At last he’s come! Make haste, I pray,
 That I may quickly greet him!
 Thank you, O Saviour! I had feared
 I’d die ere he alighted!”
 And softly, softly, as in sleep,
 The Lord’s Prayer she recited.

Trokhim unyokes the oxen now,
 Puts the carved pegs away,
 While Katerina, overjoyed,
 Her husband did survey.
 —“And where is Hanna, Katie dear?
 I’d half forgot that friend!
 She is not dead?”
 —“No, she’s alive,
 But very near the end.
 While father gets the beasts unyoked,
 Let us together go
 Within, to see her. On her bed
 She’s waited for you so.”
 To her small chamber Mark now came,
 And on the threshold trod . . .
 Awed by the sight. Her whisper came:
 “Now, glory be to God!
 Come here, my boy, don’t be afraid!
 Kate, leave him here a spell!
 Mark, I have something now to ask,
 And something now to tell.”

Then Katerina left the room
 And Mark in grief bent low
 Above the hired girl’s grey head.
 —“Mark, look before I go!

Behold how wasted I've become.
 'Hanna' befits me ill,
 For I am not your servant-maid!
 I'm . . ."

And her voice was still.
 Mark wept and wondered what she meant.
 She raised her eyes again
 And looked at him most earnestly
 And wept once more in pain.
 —"Forgive me! For in life-long grief
 I've served you as another . . .
 Forgive me now, my own dear son,
 For I . . . I am . . . your mother!"
 She ceased to speak . . .

And in a faint
 Mark tumbled to the floor.
 When he revived and sought her face,
 She slept to wake no more!

Pereyaslav, November 13, 1845

THE CAUCASUS³²³

TO YAKIV DE BALMEN³²⁴

Oh that my head were waters,
 and mine eyes a fountain of tears,
 that I might weep day and night
 for those who were slain.

Jeremiah ix. 1

Mountains on endless mountains rise, clouds veil their peaks,
 A mighty highland cloaked in woe, with blood it reeks;
 And there Prometheus,³²⁵ for no human crime,
 An eagle tortures since the dawn of time;

³²³See Introduction, pp. xx, xxii.

³²⁴Of French origin, but Ukrainianized, Y. Balmen (or Balmain) was a great friend of Shevchenko's. He died in one of the battles during the Russian conquest of the Caucasus.

³²⁵In Greek mythology, one of the giant-gods who stole fire (enlightenment) from Zeus and gave it to human beings. For doing so, he was punished by the latter by being chained to a Caucasian rock and exposed to a vulture which each day clove his breast and pecked at his viscera. However, every night the deep wound healed, and the man-loving god was thus continually made whole for the ravenous

Day after day, its black beak tears his breast;
 Day after day, his torn heart knows no rest.
 Torn it may be, but never shall its blood
 Be wholly drained away in fatal flood.
 For, ever and anon, it stirs again
 And feels new gladness in its mortal pain.
 So likewise shall our spirit never die
 Nor our dear freedom wholly vanquished lie.
 Sooner may foemen hope to plough with glee
 A meadow at the bottom of the sea
 As chain the living soul with force uncouth
 Or choke to death the vital word of Truth.
 The glory of our God may not be rent,
 The glory of the Lord Omnipotent.³²⁶

'Tis not for us to rise and strive with Thee,
 Nor judge Thy doings through eternity:
 It is our lot to weep, and weep, and weep;
 To knead our daily bread; our vigil keep
 With agonizing tears and bloody sweat.
 Our torturers abuse us harshly yet
 While Justice slumbers in a drunken trance!

When will it rouse, perchance?
 When wilt Thou, weary God,
 Rest and lay down Thy rod
 And grant our spirits peace?
 Our faith can never cease
 In Thy strong, living Word:
 Justice and Liberty
 Will rise, and unto Thee
 All tribes on earth shall bend
 For ages without end.
 But in the meantime rivers flow,
 Rivers of blood no ceasing know!

Mountains on endless mountains rise, clouds veil their peaks,
 A mighty highland cloaked in woe, with blood it reeks;

bird to feed on him endlessly. Prometheus is the symbol of Ukraine which was equally being shattered by its enemies, but revived after every defeat and destruction to a renewed life.

³²⁶Truth and Justice will never die, because they are essential parts of God.

And We,³²⁷ Our Gracious Highness, there have found
 This wretched thing called freedom running round,
 And in its nakedness and famished state
 Have set our dogs upon it . . .³²⁸

Many a fate
 Has left a soldier's bones upon those hills.
 And what of tears and blood? Their brimming rills
 Would drown all emperors and all their sons
 And all grandchildren, such a torrent runs
 From eyes of widows, and of maidens bright
 Shed silently across the dead of night.
 And what of burning tears by mothers shed,
 And streams by tears of aged fathers fed?
 Not rivers but a sea of them would flow
 To form a fiery deep! . . .

Let glory go
 To hounds and harriers and those who train them,
 And our beloved tsars, may glory stain them!³²⁹

Glory likewise to you, ye mountains blue,
 Couched in your snow and ice beyond our view;
 And you, ye mighty warriors of the sword,
 Still unforgotten by the eternal Lord!
 Struggle, and ye shall overcome the foe:
 For God shall succour you in battle's throe;
 His strength is on your side, and freedom stands
 With justice on the threshold of your lands!

A hovel and oatmeal³³⁰—all this is yours³³¹—
 Not asked for and not given, this endures—
 No one will seek to take away this lot
 Or fetter you for owning such a cot.
 Then have no fear amid your bitter pain . . .
 We have not read the Word of God in vain;

³²⁷The imperial "We" of the tsars.

³²⁸i.e., "We" have unleashed our dogs of war (soldiers) to conquer the liberty of the weaker peoples of the Caucasus.

³²⁹Expressed with bitter irony.

³³⁰The Caucasian people possessed only the bare necessities of life, but they had liberty, which the Russian people lacked.

³³¹Beginning with this line almost to the end of the poem, Shevchenko's irony and sarcasm grow in volume as he lashes the hypocrisy only too evident in Russia's imperialistic designs.

From the deep dungeon to the lofty throne,
 All of us shine with gold and have not known
 That we are naked in our slavery.³³²
 Turn to us then for guidance. Such as we,
 Who have the banners of the earth unfurled,
 Can teach the ways and manners of the world . . .
 We are not heathens (comes that Russian voice)—
 We are the genuine Christians: we rejoice
 In temples and in icons without number—
 Yes, God Himself among us loves to slumber!
 Only your highland sheiling plagues our view:
 Why does it stand, not doled by us to you?
 And all your oatmeal we would wish to own
 And cast it to you, as to dogs a bone.
 And why, we wonder, are you not compelled
 To pay us for all sunshine you've beheld!
 And that is all! So little would we ask!
 And in return we'd crave the holy task
 Of granting you the joy our friendship brings,
 And we would teach you much, of many things:
 Thus, we have boundless space! As you may guess,
 Siberia itself is limitless!³³³
 We teem with tribes and prisons, past all counting,
 Moldavia and the Finnish lakes surmounting—
 And each, in his own language, holds his tongue,³³⁴
 Since our benevolence his speech has wrung.
 With us, some holy monk his Bible reads
 And teaches how some tsar, of evil deeds,
 A former swineherd,³³⁵ fond of ways inhuman,
 Took for his own foul use a married woman,
 And killed his friend, her husband³³⁶—for that sin,
 He dwells in heaven! Now you can begin

³³²Russia pharisaically pleads with the people whom she is about to conquer to submit to her yoke and enjoy the "benefits" of her Christianity and scientific knowledge which she is only too willing to share with others. The boast of her superiority, however, is an empty one, for although outwardly she sparkles with gold, her own people are naked, being deprived of those very liberties which the tsars incongruously promise to those whose freedom they are bent on annihilating.

³³³A cynical utterance, with a powerful tragic impact.

³³⁴Another powerful expression, meaning that all the races and nations conquered by Russia are reduced to silence in the face of the absolute tyranny of the tsars.

³³⁵King David of the Jews.

³³⁶Uriah.

To see what sort of folk by us are sent
 To live aloft! This you perhaps resent,
 No fine, enlightened point of dogma clasping!
 Come, learn from us; for we believe in grasping,—
 Extorting is our sport beneath all skies
 And it is thus we gain our paradise,
 Even if all your kin should have to go!
 Here, among us, there's nothing we don't know:
 We'll count the stars, sow buckwheat in a trench,
 Play greasy politics to trick the French,³³⁷
 Sell human souls or stake them at our euchre—
 Not negroes, but true men, we treat as lucre,
 The Christian souls that common serfdom gave us.
 We are not Spaniards, no! And may God save us
 From buying men from some grim pirate's paw,
 Like infidels: we live within the law.³³⁸ . . .

Do you, by the Apostles' law,
 Love your neighbour, in God's awe?
 Hypocrites, impostors vile,
 Curs'd by God for all your guile!
 'Tis your neighbour's hide you love,
 Not his soul, which soars above;
 Hence, you may flay this human goat
 To give your daughter a fur coat,
 A wedding present for your bastard,
 And shoes your wife may wear beplastered,
 While you yourself may buy some vice
 Too foul to tell in words precise!
 For whom hast Thou been crucified,
 Christ, Son of God, who long since died?
 For all bad Christians, or perchance
 To make the word of Truth advance?
 Or that we might make mock of Thee
 As we have done, men must agree?
 We offer, in a holy joke,
 Our candles and our incense-smoke
 And to Thy icons make oblations
 With lots of tireless prostrations,

³³⁷Russians prided themselves on their advances in science, agriculture, and politics.

³³⁸Here Shevchenko breaks out in wrathful denunciation of Russia's guile in her pretended benevolence towards the people she is about to conquer.

Praying for help in theft and war
 And shedding brothers' blood, yea more,
 We bring Thee from some foray's smother,
 An altar-cloth we stole from others . . .

Thus do the years our spirits brighten
 And we would other men enlighten
 And show the sun of Truth most pure
 To lesser peoples, to be sure.
 All this to you we shall reveal
 If you to us as slaves will kneel:
 We'll teach you how to fashion gaoles,
 To forge your fetters and your flails,
 How to wear chains your limbs about
 And how to twist the knotted knout—
 We'll teach you everything, I say,
 But let us take your hills away—
 Your last domain. Already we
 Have stolen all your plains and sea!

You also had been driven there, my dearest friend,
 Beloved Yakiv! For Ukraine was not your end
 But for her executioner your fortunes shed
 Your sound, unsullied blood; it was your fate most dread
 To taste the Russian poison from the Russian cup.
 Your memory, my true friend, shall ne'er be given up!
 Still let your soul stay hovering above Ukraine
 With Cossacks' souls that soar above its shore and plain;
 Watch over, weep above each excavated mound—
 When I at last soar free, you'll meet me, I'll be bound!

And in the meantime, I shall sow
 The verses of my burning woe:
 Here let them spring up, unchagrined,
 And hold their converse with the wind . . .
 And gentle breezes from Ukraine,
 Dewy, will carry their refrain
 To you, my friend of other years;
 You'll welcome them with friendly tears,
 Mounds, steppe, and mountains then you'll see,
 And then you will remember me.

TO THE DEAD, TO THE LIVING, AND TO THOSE YET
UNBORN, MY COUNTRYMEN ALL
WHO LIVE IN UKRAINE AND OUTSIDE UKRAINE,
MY FRIENDLY EPISTLE³³⁹

If a man say, I love God, and
hate his brother, he is a liar.

1 John iv. 20

Day dawns, then comes the twilight grey,
The limit of the live-long day;
For weary people sleep seems best
And all God's creatures go to rest.
I, only, grieve like one accursed,
Through all the hours, both last and first,
Sad at the crossroads, day and night,
With no one there to see my plight;
No one can see me, no one knows me;
All men are deaf, no ears disclose me;
Men stand and trade their mutual chains
And barter truth for filthy gains,
Committing shame against the Lord
By harnessing for black reward
People in yokes and sowing evil
In fields commissioned by the Devil . . .
And what will sprout? You soon will see
What kind of harvest there will be!
Come to your senses, ruthless ones,
O stupid children, Folly's sons!
And bring that peaceful paradise,
Your own Ukraine, before your eyes;
Then let your heart, in love sincere,
Embrace her mighty ruin here!
Break then your chains, in love unite,
Nor seek in foreign lands the sight
Of things not even found above,
Still less in lands that strangers love . . .

³³⁹See Introduction (pp. xvii, xxi) in reference to this poem and to Shevchenko's impressions of the conditions prevailing in Ukraine during his first and second visits there after his emancipation. The poem is a merciless indictment of the indifferent and oppressive Ukrainian landlords, as well as of the élite. The long title may be taken literally; but by extension, "the dead" could be applied to those who have lost their national consciousness; "the living" to those who are still alive to it; "those yet unborn" to those who in due course will become aware of it.

Then in your own house you will see
True justice, strength, and liberty!³⁴⁰

There is no other such Ukraine,
No other Dnieper on the plain;
And yet you throng to foreign lands
To seek the Highest Good that stands—
True Liberty, that sacred Good
In fair fraternal Brotherhood³⁴¹ . . .
And you have found it as you roam!
From foreign fields you bring it home,
A heap of words that sound most great
And naught else . . . You vociferate
That God created you to be
His Justice's epitome,
Yet you still bend your backs today
To aliens, and are prompt to flay
The hide off lowly peasant brothers;
Then, seeking "Truth" beyond all others,
You scurry off to German³⁴² strands
And to the lore of other lands.
If you could in your baggage bind
The misery you leave behind,
Or carry off beyond appeal
Those gains our forbears had to steal,³⁴³
There would be left, to mourn our ills,
Lone Dnieper with its holy hills.

For this great boon my spirits yearn—
That from abroad you'd not return,

³⁴⁰Shevchenko's advice to the Ukrainian landlords and intellectuals to seek to create in their own midst conditions that would make for social justice and political strength.

³⁴¹While visiting Western Europe and studying there, the Ukrainian intellectuals imbibed the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, and upon their return, seemingly "enlightened," waxed loquacious about them; but they neglected to put those ideals into practice in order to better the lot of their own people. As a result, their grandiose talk about them remained mere ineffective verbosity.

³⁴²"German" is not always to be taken literally. It may at times, as here, apply to any western part of Europe.

³⁴³Whatever Ukraine acquired in the past had to be practically "stolen," taken by force from her enemies. Yet even of that she was being stripped by her external and internal despoilers who reduced her to utter misery. If the precious little that remained were to be taken from her by her own lords and intellectuals and moved abroad, only the Dnieper and the hills would remain as witnesses of her past glory.

That there you'd die, where you did learn!
 For children then in our Ukraine
 No more would weep in futile pain,
 Nor would your motherland lament
 Or God declare you insolent;
 The sun would not a task perform
 Your stinking carcasses to warm
 Upon a land, pure, free, and vast
 And people would not know at last
 What birds you are, how greedy, dread,
 And at you shake a hopeless head. . . .

Come to your senses! Human be,³⁴⁴
 Or you will rue it bitterly:
 The time is near when on our plains
 A shackled folk will burst its chains.
 The Day of Judgment is at hand!
 Dnieper will speak across the land;
 Hundreds of streams will surge in flood
 To bear along your children's blood
 To the blue sea . . . Nor man nor whelp
 Will offer you the slightest help:
 Brother will turn from brother wild,
 The mother will forsake her child;
 Thick clouds of smoke at noonday bright
 Will hide the sunshine from your sight;
 And your own sons, for all your crime,
 Will curse you to the end of time.
 Make yourselves clean! God's image clear
 In man should not be sullied here!
 Don't breed your children up in scorn
 To think that they were proudly born
 To lord it over humble folk—
 The peasant's untaught eye will poke
 And peer into their very souls
 Unsnared by specious aureoles . . .
 Soon will the wretched creatures find
 Your hides are of a kindred kind,³⁴⁵—
 Then will the meek in judgment sit,
 All your fine wisdom to outwit.

³⁴⁴Shevchenko here is truly prophetic in tone.

³⁴⁵Meaning: you too were once of the common stock.

II

If you would train yourselves alone,
 You'd have some wisdom of your own;
 But you must prattle from the sky:
 "We are not we, and I not I!"³⁴⁶
 All have I seen; I'm now all-wise;
 There is no hell, no paradise,
 Not even God; but I exist
 And this smart German atheist
 And nothing else . . ."—"Brother, go slow!
 Who are you then?"—"I do not know—
 We'll let the Germans³⁴⁷ speak to that,
 For they have all the answers pat!"

In such a fashion then you train
 Yourselves in foreigners' domain!
 A German pundit says, "You're Mongols."
 And you reply: "Of course, we're Mongols,
 The naked seed upon this plain
 Sowed by the golden Tamerlane!"³⁴⁸
 Or if some German says: "You're Slavs,"
 You'll echo back: "Of course, we're Slavs,
 The ugly, graceless progeny
 Of our great ancestors, you see!"
 Perhaps you even read old Kollar,³⁴⁹
 Enthusiastic for that scholar,
 And Hanka³⁴⁹ too, and Šafařík³⁴⁹
 And strive with zeal most politic

³⁴⁶i.e., your wisdom is not inborn or self-acquired, but is something of foreign origin, which you seek to imitate without adequately understanding what you are doing or saying. The allusion here is to the German Idealist philosophy which, among other things, posed the theory that objects exist only ideally and are realized only by one's senses. From too much knowledge and too little wisdom came such gibberish as "We are not we, and I not I," and the various agnostic and negative views on life. The resulting confusion was such that the "enlightened" classes of Ukrainian society did not even know who they exactly were.

³⁴⁷With bitter sarcasm Shevchenko accuses the Ukrainian intellectual class of lacking innate wisdom, of depending inordinately on foreigners, particularly the Germans, to solve Ukraine's problems, and of believing them blindly, even to their own national detriment.

³⁴⁸The Tartar Khan and the commander of the Golden Horde. Ukraine was ravaged by the Turks and Tartars for several centuries between the fall of the Principality of Kiev and the emergence of the Cossack State.

³⁴⁹Jan Kollar (1793–1852), Viacheslav Hanka (1791–1861), Pavel Šafařík (1795–1861), leaders of the Czech Slavophil Movement of Enlightenment which



T. Shevchenko, *Singich-Agach* (water colour, 1848)

The name means "sacred tree." Shevchenko described it in his poem: "An axe was lying behind God's door."



T. Shevchenko, *Kazakh Boy Playing with a Cat* (sepia, 1856–57)
The poet depicted himself in the background as an observer of this scene.

To rank among the Slavophils
 And demonstrate linguistic skills
 In all Slav tongues except your own.
 "Some day we'll have the time," you groan,
 "To speak our native language well
 If some smart foreigner will tell
 Its principles; if he'll relate
 Our history as well, then straight
 We'll study at a furious rate!"

How you have sought with ardent suction
 To soak up foreigners' instruction!
 You talk in such a mongrel speech
 That even Germans, wise to teach,
 Gape at it as a senseless joke—
 Still more, of course, the common folk.
 And such a noise! What row you raise:
 "What harmony beyond all praise!³⁵⁰
 Our tongue is music from the skies!
 Our history? Behold it rise,
 A freeborn people's lofty poem . . .
 Rome seems to this a paltry proem!
 Horatius, Brutus,³⁵¹ whom they will,
 Let Romans praise! We've greater still,
 More famous, ne'er forgotten too . . .
 It was with us that Freedom grew,
 Lay stretched in Dnieper's mighty bed
 And on our mountains couched her head
 And made our steppe her counterpane!"
 No, you are wrong! In this Ukraine

in the first half of the nineteenth century spread through Eastern Europe. With regard to Šafařík, see fn. 207. The implication here is that while the Ukrainian lords and "educated" society are imbued with Slavophilism, they are not true Ukrainophils, for (as is mentioned further in the poem) while they praise the melodiousness of the Ukrainian speech and extol Ukraine's historical past, they neglect their native tongue and the people who speak it, and are indifferent to the sorry social conditions of the Ukrainian population.

³⁵⁰In reference to the Ukrainian speech.

³⁵¹Heroes of ancient Rome: Horatius Cocles who in the sixth century B.C. defended with two comrades a vital bridge against an overwhelming force of the enemy; Lucius Junius Brutus who, also in the same century, drove the last of the oppressive Tarquin kings from Rome; and Marcus Brutus who was the chief of the conspirators who assassinated the autocratic Julius Caesar in 44 B.C.

Our history was bathed in blood
 And slept on corpses in the mud,
 On Cossack corpses, no more free
 But here despoiled of liberty! . . .

Look well into our history's store
 And read it closely, o'er and o'er;
 That glorious tale you may have heard,—
 But take it slowly, word by word;
 No punctuation mark omit,
 For even commas lend their bit;
 Examine everything you see;
 Then ask yourselves: Now, who are we?
 Whose children? Of what fathers born?
 By whom enslaved in utter scorn?
 Then only will you understand
 The Brutuses of this your land:³⁵²
 Slaves, grovellers of Muscovy
 And Warsaw's refuse, such will be
 The illustrious hetmans³⁵³ you applaud!
 And have you something then to laud,
 Sons of Ukraine, where misery chokes?
 Perhaps that you walk well in yokes,
 More nobly than your fathers walked?
 Don't boast that you have bravely stalked:
 Your hides are being tanned, though callow,
 But they were often boiled for tallow!

Perhaps you base your boast on this:
 The Cossack Brotherhood with bliss
 Defended and preserved our faith?
 That in Sinope's³⁵⁴ flaming wraith

³⁵²While Shevchenko himself glorified and idealized the historical past of Ukraine, here he considers the seamy side of it as he unmercifully castigates his more privileged countrymen of the past and the present who were to a high degree instrumental in causing their country's misery by working for the good of Russia and Poland rather than for the welfare of their own people. The lines that follow contain the harshest accusation a prophetically inspired poet ever made against those guilty of the misdeeds through which an entire people suffers.

³⁵³The hetmanate as a whole Shevchenko always held in great respect. It was only certain hetmans, who favoured foreign rule or made it possible in Ukraine, that he had here in mind.

³⁵⁴Turkish coastal towns which the roving Cossacks occasionally raided or razed.

And Trebizond's,³⁵⁴ they cooked their cake?
 They did, but you've the belly-ache;³⁵⁵
 For in the Sitch the German sage
 Now plants potatoes; without rage,
 You buy his produce with your wealth
 And eat it gladly for your health,
 And glorify the Cossacks' fame.
 But whose rich blood, O men of shame,
 Has saturated all the soil
 That yields potatoes which you boil?
 You do not care; you merely know
 It's good to make the garden grow!
 And yet you boast that with our frown
 We once sent Poland toppling down! . . .
 You are quite right: for Poland fell;
 And in the wreck crushed us as well.³⁵⁶
 And that is how our sires, now dead,
 For Muscovy and Warsaw bled,
 And left their sons, as legacy,
 Their shackles and their infamy!

III

Thus, in her struggle, our Ukraine³⁵⁷
 Reached the last climax of pure pain:
 Worse than the Poles, or any other,
 The children crucify their mother;
 As it were beer, they tap with zest
 The pure blood from her sacred breast,—
 They would enlighten, they surmise,
 Their ancient mother's³⁵⁸ rheumy eyes

³⁵⁵Meaning: The Cossacks profited by it, but you did not, because you allowed foreigners to settle the Cossacks' southern territories and turn them into potato plantations; the irony of it is that you support those new settlers by buying their produce; even if you are irritated by this situation, you must bear it, for nothing can be done about it now.

³⁵⁶Once Ukraine fell under Russian domination, Russia became strong enough to topple Poland and, consequently, could deal more summarily with Ukraine's freedom.

³⁵⁷In this section Shevchenko's rage subsides, and he turns paternally to his compatriots, counselling them as to what they must do in order to revive their statehood.

³⁵⁸Ukraine's.

With clear, contemporary light,
 And lead her, in her dumb despite,
 A blind wretch, out upon the stage
 Into the spirit of our age.³⁵⁹
 Good! Show her! Lead her in the way!
 Let the old mother learn today
 How to take care, as Wisdom runs,
 Of you, her new enlightened sons!
 Show her! But do not raise a ruction
 About the price of that instruction!
 Well will your mother pay you back:
 The wall-eyed cataract will crack
 Upon your own dull, greedy eyes
 And you will see her glory rise,
 The living glory of your sires,
 To shame your fathers' black desires! . . .

Gain knowledge, brothers! Think and read,
 And to your neighbours' gifts pay heed,—
 Yet do not thus neglect your own:
 For he who is forgetful shown
 Of his own mother, graceless elf,
 Is punished by our God Himself.
 Strangers will turn from such as he
 And grudge him hospitality—
 Nay, his own children grow estranged;
 Though one so evil may have ranged
 The whole wide earth, he shall not find
 A home to give him peace of mind.

Sadly I weep when I recall
 The unforgotten deeds of all
 Our ancestors: their toilsome deeds!
 Could I forget their pangs and needs,
 I, as my price, would then suppress
 Half of my own life's happiness. . . .

Such is our glory, sad and plain,
 The glory of our own Ukraine!

³⁵⁹The pretension of some Ukrainian leaders was to allow enough foreign influence into Ukraine to bring her up to Western standards. Shevchenko had nothing against that, provided that it was done in all sincerity and altruistically, for the good of the people as a whole.

I would advise you so to read
 That you may see, in very deed,
 No dream but all the wrongs of old
 That burial mounds might here unfold
 Before your eyes in martyred hosts,
 That you might ask those grisly ghosts:
 Who were the tortured ones, in fact,
 And why, and when, were they so racked? . . .

Then, O my brothers, as a start,
 Come, clasp your brothers to your heart,—
 So let your mother smile with joy
 And dry her tears without annoy!
 Blest be your children in these lands
 By touch of your toil-hardened hands,
 And, duly washed, kissed let them be
 With lips that speak of liberty!
 Then all the shame of days of old,
 Forgotten, shall no more be told;
 Then shall our day of hope arrive,
 Ukrainian glory shall revive,
 No twilight but the dawn shall render
 And break forth into novel splendour. . . .
 Brother, embrace! Your hopes possess,
 I beg you in all earnestness!

Viunishcha, December 14, 1845

KHOLODNIY YAR³⁶⁰

(The Cold Ravine)

To every man misfortune comes;
 I, too, misfortune share;
 This borrowed pain is not my own,
 Yet heavy is its care.
 Why then should I recall a grief
 That ancient annals keep?
 Why rouse up from the dateless past
 A day that well might sleep! . . .
 Take that Ravine! To its dark depths
 No smallest path remains;

³⁶⁰This poem is a sequel to "My Friendly Epistle."

From walking that untrodden way
 The human foot refrains;
 And yet old history recalls
 A highway once was seen
 From Saint Motrona's convent down
 Into that dread Ravine.
 In that deep hollow, haydamaks
 Encamped in far-off years,
 Oiled their long muskets for the fray
 And whittled sharp their spears.
 To that Ravine had there come down,
 As from a holy cross,
 Brother and brother, son and sire,
 Ready to face all loss,
 Against a cunning enemy,
 The cruel Pole, I ween.

Where have you vanished, beaten path,
 That led to the Ravine?
 Have you been covered with a grove,
 With shadowy forest sown
 By new oppressors, to prevent
 New faith from making known
 In counsel there what new campaign
 May save our captive souls
 From those fine lords and torturers,
 Successors to the Poles?
 Ghosts see the path: above the Gulch
 Zalizniak ranges near,
 And casts his glances at Uman
 For Gonta to appear.³⁶¹

Do not conceal or seek to crush
 True Justice' sacred right,
 Nor bring upon the righteous ones
 A cruel Nero's³⁶² might!
 Do not applaud the Emperor
 And all his holy wars;

³⁶¹Shevchenko harks back to the period of the haydamak activity and defends it against its detractors. As appears later in the poem, even Gonta's deeds, however harsh, are not condemned by Shevchenko, because, after all, that implacable haydamak fought to rid Ukraine of her oppressors.

³⁶²Nicholas I's.

You do not know what hellish deeds
 Are done by those dear tsars
 While you in noisy sacrifice
 Sell soul and body cheap
 For "fatherland"!³⁶³ By God above,
 You are a brainless sheep!
 A cheerful fool sticks out his neck,
 With nothing understood;
 A worthless good-for-nothing cries
 That Gonta was no good:
 "No soldiers were the haydamaks—
 'Twas good these thieves should die,
 A stain upon our annals, they!"
 My people's bane, you lie!
 No thief for sacred justice' sake
 The foes of freedom tackles;
 Nor will he rise to free his folk,
 Chained in your heavy shackles;
 No thief his true-born son will slay
 For liberty through pain;
 He will not break his living heart
 In service to Ukraine!
 The greedy robbers are yourselves,³⁶⁴
 You hungry ravens all!
 According to what holy law
 And to what righteous call
 Have you been bartering away
 The land that all should own,
 Not least the poor? Calamity
 Will shortly make you moan.
 Deceive your children, if you will;
 Your friend, that simple clod;
 Deceive yourselves and foreign folk;
 You cannot cozen God!³⁶⁵
 For judgment, in your day of joy,
 Will suddenly be seen,
 And Freedom's fires will flame anew
 Out of the Cold Ravine!

Viunishcha, December 17, 1845

³⁶³Ironically, Russia.

³⁶⁴Ukrainians who calumniate the memory of the haydamaks.

³⁶⁵One cannot deceive God, who is the source of Truth and Justice.

THE PSALMS OF DAVID³⁶⁶

I

Blessed is he who does not join
 The assembly of the evil,
 Who does not walk on sin's dark path
 Or consort with the Devil;
 But in God's law his heart and will
 Have found a glorious shield;
 Serenely will his spirit stand
 As, in a fertile field,
 A tree upon a river bank
 With branches green and fair,
 Covered with fruit; so shall that man
 Mature in goodness there.
 Of wicked and ungodly men
 All trace shall disappear,—
 Like ashes scattered o'er the earth
 When stormy winds are drear.
 And the unrighteous shall not rise
 With just men from the tomb;
 For good men by their deeds shall live,
 The bad meet endless doom.

XII

Why, my dear Lord, hast Thou indeed
 Forgotten me forever?
 Why dost Thou turn Thy face away
 And come back to me never?
 How long will anguish tear my soul
 And lacerate my heart?
 How long will my fierce enemy
 His glance upon me dart
 And scorn me? Lord, preserve my soul,
 Have mercy upon me,
 Lest my dread foe should say in pride:
 "Mine is the victory"!

³⁶⁶These are imitations of the Biblical psalms. Shevchenko carefully chose those whose import might apply to Ukraine herself.

That all the wicked may not mock
 At me in evil hands,
 My enemy's. O save me, Lord,
 From torment's fierce demands!
 Then shall I pray to Thee in peace,
 And sing again in calm
 Thy mercies from a heart sincere,
 A new and gentle psalm.

XLIII

With our own ears, Almighty God,
 Thy glory have we heard,
 And grandsires tell us of the past
 (And faithful is their word)
 About the bloody years of old
 When with Thy mighty hand
 Thou hast set free our arms from chains
 And buried in the land
 Our foemen's corpses; thus Thy power
 Was faithfully extolled
 By all Thy people who in peace
 Find rest within Thy fold,
 Praising the Lord. But now, alas,
 It doth Thy spirit please
 To cast Thy people into shame
 And raise new enemies
 Who spoil and feed on us like sheep;
 Without reward or price
 To dread foes hast Thou given us,
 A living sacrifice;
 A laughing-stock to every race,
 The scorn of all our neighbours,
 Thou hast abandoned us, and lo,
 Unfruitful are our labours.
 And scornfully they shake their heads
 Upon us as they jeer;
 And every day we see our shame
 Above us bold and clear.
 Despoiled, tormented, full of grief,
 We perish in our chains,

And lift no prayer to alien gods—
 No God but Thee remains.
 Assist us, liberate us, Lord,
 From this our foemen's scorn!
 Thou hast redeemed our fathers' lot,
 Redeem us, all forlorn
 In fiercer trouble. Rise, O God,
 Why is Thy hand forborne?

LII

Only the fool will to his heart
 Declare there is no God
 As he grows foul in lawlessness
 And walks in evil shod;
 While God debates: Are any left
 Who still seek after me?
 Nay, not one man is doing good,
 Not one from sin is free!
 Ah, when will those who walk astray
 Know sanity again?
 They know not God: instead of bread
 Their souls devour men.
 They are afraid, yet of their fear
 There lurks no certain cause:
 Thus sinners their own terrors make
 By sin's infernal laws.
 Who then will send salvation down
 And give us good once more?
 God will cut off our slavery
 And freedom will restore.
 Then we shall all extol Thee, Lord,
 With many a psalm of praise;
 Then Israel will sing with joy
 And Jacob bless his days.

LIII

God, save me, justify me now
 According to Thy will.
 I pray, Lord, make them understand
 The words I utter still!

For up against my soul have risen
 Strong aliens hitherto,
 Who see no God above them stand
 And know not what they do.
 Jehovah with His certain aid
 Protects me all my days,
 And with the justice of His hand
 Their evil deeds repays.
 So from my lonely heart to God
 A thankful prayer shall rise,
 And on the wicked I shall glance
 With not unkindly eyes.³⁶⁷

LXXXI

All kings and judges numberless
 Assembled without mirth
 And there the Lord of Heaven began
 To judge the lords of earth.
 "How long will you despoil and rob
 And shed the guiltless blood
 Of all the poor, yet help the rich
 In wicked hardihood?
 The beggared widow you should help,
 The orphan's name uphold,
 And out of hardship bring with care
 The meek to freedom's fold!"
 Alas, they will not see the day
 Nor shatter serfdom's night—
 In vain, has God proclaimed His word,
 In vain, earth weeps her plight.
 Equal as children, tsars and slaves
 Before the Lord shall stand!
 And all shall die—both lofty prince
 And slave with fettered hand.
 Rise then, O God, and judge the earth
 And judges prone to ill!
 Throughout the world Thy Truth shall reign,
 Thy glory and Thy Will!

³⁶⁷Here, Shevchenko brings out the ideal of forgiveness to one's enemies, as he does later in "The Neophytes," sec. v. See fn. 609.

XCIII

The Lord God judges wicked men—
 Such hopes my grief beguile.
 Rise, then, O God, because Thy name
 The arrogant revile!
 Ascend in power above the earth,
 Incomparably high,
 And dazzle with Thy Glory's light
 The purblind, haughty eye.
 How long, O Lord, will wicked men
 Of their injustice boast?
 Shackled in slavery and night
 Thy people now lie lost;
 Thy Goodness men have drowned in blood,
 The passer-by is slain,
 The widow has been done to death,
 While they in proud disdain
 Say: "Surely God beholds it not,
 Our deed He cannot know."
 Come to your senses, foolish ones!
 The Lord of all below
 Is privy also to your thoughts,
 He knows your heart's black story.
 Your eye should tremble at His deeds
 And His eternal glory!
 Blest are the faithful whom the Lord
 Corrects with judgment fit—
 While for the wicked man his sins
 Shall hollow out a pit.
 The Lord has loved his people still;
 His love will not forsake,
 But waits the day when Justice' dawn
 Upon the world shall break.
 Who saves me from the wicked man
 And such as turn to sin?
 Had God not helped, my living soul
 Had surely entered in
 The darkness of eternal night,
 My name been nothing worth;
 But Thou, O Lord, hast helped my foot
 To walk upon the earth;

My soul Thou makest to rejoice;
 My heart is healed from pain;
 Thy will shall evermore prevail,
 Nor shall Thy acts be vain:
 Even if men should seize the good
 And slay the innocent,
 The Lord to me a stay will be,
 I stand in Him content.
 He will repay them for their sins,
 Their bloody deeds of shame;
 He will destroy them, and will lay
 A curse upon their name.

CXXXII

What could be worthier in the world
 Than living side by side
 With one's good neighbour and all wealth
 To share, and not divide?
 Such concord is like sacred myrrh
 Upon the blessed head
 And beard of Aaron flowing down,
 Its redolence to shed;
 Upon his garment's brodered skirts
 The holy fragrance spills;
 Such concord is like Hermon's dews
 Or Zion's holy hills;
 Such dews come down and bless with good
 All things that live on earth;
 And so His pious people, God
 Will not destroy with dearth.
 He will begin His reign, and send
 Their peaceful habitation
 Good things for their vast family
 In endless approbation.

CXXXVII

On the banks of Babylon's rivers
 Under a willow-tree,
 In meadows sat we down and wept
 In our captivity.

And on the willow-boughs we hung
 Our harps that could not sing;
 And there the wicked Edomites
 Began their bickering:
 "Come, let us hear your song; perhaps
 'Twill make us weep with you;
 Or sing a song of Babylon
 As captive slaves must do!"
 What sort of song are we to sing
 In alien fields, we pray?
 A happy song we cannot sing
 In exile far away.
 If ever I forget thy walls,
 O fair Jerusalem,
 Let me be lost, forgotten quite,
 A slave whom all condemn!
 And let my tongue be withered up
 And speech no more employ
 If I should not remember thee,
 My glory and my joy!
 But God shall still remember you,
 Children of Edom stern,
 For shouting: "Wreck Jerusalem!
 Destroy, destroy and burn!"
 Daughter of Babylon accurst,
 Most blessed shall he be
 Who shall requite thee for the chains
 Of our captivity!
 Twice blessed be an evil fate
 By which thou art o'erthrown,
 That beats thy children's brains to bits
 Against an icy stone!

CXLIX

A new and glorious psalm we'll raise
 To God in exultation;
 With guileless spirit shall we sing
 In a blest congregation!
 With psaltery and timbrel's voice
 Shall praise to God be made,

Who checks the ways of wicked men
 And gives the righteous aid.
 The blessed in their glory lie
 On couches without fear,
 And to the holy name of God
 Their tribute they uprear.
 He in their hands will place a sword
 To strike injustice down,
 To stun the pagan race in fight
 And scorn the gentile frown.
 In iron shackles they shall chain
 The tsars' rapacious hands;
 In fetters all the great shall be
 At Israel's glad commands.
 Then shall the wicked by our Lord
 In judgment be withstood;
 And for eternity shall God
 Give glory to the good!³⁶⁸

Viunishcha, December 19, 1845

TO LITTLE MARIANA

Grow, grow, my little birdie fair,
 My poppy blossom, grow,
 Keep on unfolding while your heart
 Is still uncrushed by woe,
 While people are still unaware
 Of your secluded valley . . .
 They'll find you, mock you, wither you
 By their malicious sally.
 For neither years of youthful joy
 Enveloped in sweet grace,
 Nor yet your sparkling hazel eyes
 And tear-besprinkled face,
 Nor yet your gentle, maiden heart,
 In which all kindness lies,
 Will serve to cover from your sight
 Their fierce, infernal eyes—

³⁶⁸Another version of this psalm is given in "The Neophytes," sec. x, p. 495.

The wicked folk will find you out,
 Despoil you, and still worse
 Will cast you down to hell itself
 And God your tongue will curse.
 Do not unfold your bloom, my flower,
 My fresh unfolded bud!
 Die softly, ere your heart shall lie
 All shattered in the mud!

Viunishcha, December 20, 1845

* * * *

The days pass by, nights flit away,
 The summer's gone, pale leaves a-heap
 Are rustling; dreams my eyelids sway;
 My thoughts and heart are both asleep.
 All things around me sleep—I know not
 Whether I live or drowse the while.
 By any plan, my hours flow not,
 No longer do I weep or smile. . . .
 Where art thou, Destiny, ah where?
 My soul is stirred by none!
 If Thou begrudgest me fair fate,
 Lord, send a ruthless one!

Let me not sleep when I should wake;
 Do not permit my heart to lie
 A rotten log that men forsake
 And leave in fetid infamy;
 But on me let fierce fervour fall
 To love all people all my days,
 Or let me cast a curse on all
 And set the torpid world ablaze!

Dreadful it is to lie in chains
 And die in slavery at last,
 Yet worse it is when sleep retains
 The free man's spirit overcast,
 For all eternity to slumber
 And leave behind no sign or trace,
 As if his days had borne no number
 And there was nothing to efface . . .

Where art thou, Destiny, ah where?
 My soul is stirred by none!
 If Thou begrudgest me fair fate,
 Lord, send a ruthless one!

Viunishcha, December 21, 1845

THREE YEARS³⁶⁹

A day drags endless to its close;
 While years like arrows flown
 Pass fleeting by and snatch away
 All values that we own;
 They strip us of our lofty thoughts
 With ruthless hand, and then
 On a cold stone they smash our heart
 And loudly sing "Amen"—
 "Amen" to all that's filled with joy,
 Returning now, ah never:
 A blind and crippled man I'm left
 In crossroads dust forever.
 These three short years of one short life
 Have passed to no avail,
 And yet they cause great misery
 Within my spirit frail:
 They have laid waste my humble heart
 In all its gentleness;
 They have consumed all hope of good,
 Inflamed my dark distress,
 And with their sooty smoke have dried
 Those blessed tears so free
 I shed with Katie's as she walked
 The road to Muscovy,
 Those tears I mixed with Cossacks' prayers,
 Slaves of a Turkish war,
 Or daily for Oksana shed,
 My life's abiding star,

³⁶⁹The poem that was to begin the collection of Shevchenko's verses written in the years 1843, 1844, and 1845, if that collection (entitled "The Three Years") had been published at the time. It was to end with the poem "My Legacy" which here follows.

My precious joy—till evil years,
 Came like some loathesome rat,
 Crept up on me, and suddenly
 Have snatched away all that.
 What grief it is to bury thus
 All memories and dreams—
 Mother and sire, a faithful wife,
 How baseless now it seems!
 How hard it is to nurture up
 My babes in penury shut,
 My brain's own children, still unwashed,
 In an unheated hut!
 Yet equal suffering has a fool
 Who falls in love and weds
 And finds too late his darling wife
 Slips off to others' beds
 And sells herself for three small coins
 And laughs at him to boot.
 This is a grief to break the heart
 In anguish absolute!

A like misfortune to that man's
 Has also come to me
 I fell in love with humankind
 And prized men's company,
 And they gave welcome to my love
 With praise that quite endears . . .
 While still the years crept stealthily
 And dried away my tears,
 Those tears of candid love . . . and I
 Began to see the light . . .
 I closer looked . . . would I could keep
 From telling the sad sight!
 Around me everywhere I saw
 Not men, but snakes, in sooth . . .
 And so all tears were dried away,
 The sympathies of youth.
 And now the healing of my soul
 Through venom I would reach—
 No longer do I weep or sing;
 Nay, like an owl I screech.

And so it is! Do what you will
 For better or for worse!
 Insult my work with loud abuse
 Or softly praise my verse—
 Your mood is all the same to me,
 For never will return
 The joyful accents of my youth,
 The years for which I yearn! . . .
 My heart cannot go back to you
 The road that once it took;
 And yet I know not where to go
 Nor where to find my nook,
 Nor with what man I may converse,
 Nor whom I may console,
 Nor to what heart I may confess
 The thoughts that crowd my scroll.
 Alas, my Muse, my poesy
 Of three distressful years!
 Where will you turn for sympathy,
 My children, in your tears?
 Seek no one out; remain at home;
 Lie down and take your rest;
 And I into a new, fourth year
 Will enter on my quest.

Greetings to you, my Newest Year,
 Swaddled in last year's rags!
 What do you carry to Ukraine,
 Stuffed in your patched-up bags?
 Is it prosperity enwrapped
 In a brand-new ukase?³⁷⁰
 Farewell, and don't forget to greet
 The wretched in that place!

Viunishcha, December 22, 1845

MY LEGACY³⁷¹

When I shall die, pray let my bones
 High on a mound remain

³⁷⁰Expressed ironically, for tsarist ukases hardly brought people any prosperity.

³⁷¹See Introduction, p. xxii.

Amid the steppeland's vast expanse
 In my belov'd Ukraine;
 That I may gaze on mighty fields,
 On Dnieper and his shore,
 And echoed by his craggy banks
 May hear the Great One roar!

When from Ukraine that stream will bear
 Over the sea's blue sills
 Our foemen's blood, at last shall I
 Forsake the fields and hills
 And soar up to commune with God
 In His eternal hall.
 But till that day of Liberty—
 I know no God at all!³⁷²

Bury me thus—and then arise!
 From fetters set you free!
 And with your foes' unholy blood
 Baptize your liberty!
 And when in freedom, 'mid your kin,
 From battle you ungird,
 Forget not to remember me
 With a warm, gentle word!

Pereyaslav, December 25, 1845

1846

THE LILY

—“Ah, why did people, as I grew,
 Not love me for my truth?
 Why did they turn, as I grew up,
 And slay me in my youth?
 Why then do they now welcome me
 Within their palaces,

³⁷²Not to be taken as a sacrilegious utterance. When Shevchenko spoke of God, he often meant Truth, Justice.

And call me princess, marvelling
At all my loveliness?
Why do they gaze upon me still
And seek to honour me?
Tell me the reason, brother dear,
Blossom of royal degree!"
—"I do not know, my sister fair!"
The royal blossom bent
Its glorious, crimson-petalled head
Down to its full extent
To touch the white and drooping cheek
Of the sweet lily's worth,
While God stooped down, and in them both
Blessed the whole, sinful earth . . .
In such an hour the lily burst
Into bright tears of dew
And weeping said: "My brother dear,
For years I've loved but you
And you but me, yet from your ears
I ever have obscured
What happened in my human life,
What tortures I endured . . .
My poor, dear mother some dark cause
To her own counsels kept
Why upon me, her child, she gazed
And, ever gazing, wept.
I do not know, my only friend,
My brother sweet and mild,
Who that man was who did her harm . . .
For I was but a child . . .
And while I played in innocence,
She wasted quite away,
And cursed at last that wicked lord
Who'd loved, and let her pay.
And so she died. That evil lord
Took me, while still quite small,
To bring me up. And I was reared
In his white palace-hall,
Nor did I know my bastard state
And that he had begot me.

At length he left me, went away,
And presently forgot me.
The people cast a curse on him
And burned his palace down,
And me . . . with worse than murderous hands
And mystifying frown
They took, they sheared my maiden braids
As if I were a brat;
They dressed the shorn lass up in rags
And laughed like mad at that;
Even the unbelieving Jews
Upon my bosom spat.
With such misfortunes, brother dear,
My girlhood years were rife;
The people would not suffer me
To live out my young life . . .
In winter, underneath a hedge,
I died in evil hour;
And in the spring I blossomed forth
Into a lovely flower;
With my white blossom, white as snow,
I made the grove rejoice.
Folk who in winter let me freeze,
Spurned by their raucous voice,
In springtime marvelled as they gazed
And hailed me as their choice.
"Snow-petalled lily" was I named;
"Maids pinned me on their dress;
In grove and greenhouse did I bloom
In unmatched comeliness;
My beauty even crowned the grace
Of gleaming palaces . . .
Tell me the reason, brother dear,
Blossom of royal degree,
What God has placed me as a flower
'Mid man's iniquity?
That those who sent my mother dear
And me to death abhorred
I should make glad? . . . O merciful,
O dear and blessed Lord! . . ."

And as the lily wept again,
 Her royal brother bent
 His glorious, crimson-petalled head
 Down to its full extent
 To touch the white and drooping cheek
 The precious lily leant.

Kiev, July 25, 1846

THE MERMAID

My mother bore me in high halls,
 Yet made my hopes her slaves;
 She bathed me at the dead of night
 In Dnieper's flowing waves.
 And as she bathed me, thus she spoke
 In words of evil dream:
 "Float on, float on, my daughter dear,
 Float down the Dnieper's stream.
 Tomorrow, at the midnight hour,
 You'll breathe with mermaid's breath,
 Then, when I come and walk with him,
 You'll tickle him to death.
 To end his scornful mockery,
 You, precious one, shall kill
 The man who stole my maiden years;
 Yes, let him have his fill
 Not only of my bleeding tears
 But of blue Dnieper's water;
 Enjoy himself in weedy depths
 With his ill-gotten daughter!
 Float on, my dear and only child!
 And you, ye lovely waves,
 Welcome a mermaid, new and fair,
 Within your oozy caves!"

She wailed and rushed away. "And I
 Sank with the current there
 Until I met my sister nymphs
 And joined them in their lair.

For seven days I swim and grow
 And with my sisters gambol;
 And wait to see my father come
 Upon a midnight ramble . . .
 It may be that the lord has gained
 Once more her ardent whim,
 That in her sins she now begins
 Again to romp with him."

The little mermaid ceased; her form
 Plunged in the Dnieper vast
 Like a small roach; the willowy reeds
 Swayed softly as she passed.
 The mother, sleepless, from the hall
 Came out to take a walk,
 For Master Jan was not at home
 And none was left to talk.
 And when she reached the river bank,
 She thought upon her daughter,
 Of how she bathed her in the stream
 And of the words she taught her,—
 But felt indifferent! She sought
 Her palace-bed for sleep . . .
 But did not reach it: she was doomed
 A river-tryst to keep.
 Out of the stream the mermaids leaped
 With laughter and with stir,
 They rushed upon her, held her tight
 And madly tickled her!
 "She is my mother! Sisters, stop!"
 Came the small nymph's demur.
 But they in wild enjoyment raged
 With tickle and with squeal,
 Until at last with merry laugh
 They thrust her in a creel . . .
 Only one little mermaid's heart
 No such delight did feel.

Kiev, August 9, 1846

1847

THE WITCH

(An Aspen)

Let death descend upon them,
and let them go alive to hell,
for their sins are in their dwellings
and in their midst.

Psalm lv. 15

I pray, and find my hopes again,
And shed once more hot tears of pain
As to mute walls my lips rehearse
Low strains of heavy-laden verse.
Speak out, ye dumb! Bewail with me
The pangs of human misery,
With dark injustice from our birth
And wicked fate that blights our earth!
Speak out! And after you perchance,
By some benigner circumstance,
Adversity that never rests
Will smile upon our sad behests
And reconcile us to our lot
And to mankind—and, like as not,
Will thank us kindly, say its prayers,
And gently rest from its affairs.
And I, thus reconciled, shall dream
Of love, and people's warm esteem,
And all that's good. When morn is met,
I'll rise up happy and forget
My misery: in slavery's guise
I shall discover paradise
As love and freedom wipe my eyes.

I

Out in the plain, upon a mound,
An aspen-tree bewitched is found;

A witch had once been buried there—
 Maids, cross yourselves, and take due care!
 Take care, and grant no soft accord
 For parley with a cunning lord;
 For you will die in ruination
 And gain an evil reputation
 That in this world as doom will serve you,
 And in the next! . . . May God preserve you!
 In sins so grievous and so grave,
 Not even God your soul can save.
 Though still these haughty lords abuse us
 And as their beasts in barter use us
 And even use our bleeding tears
 To toast old Satan as he sneers—
 For he their souls long since did win,
 And they have lost all sense of sin;
 Do you, my dears, in love beware
 Of such as these; love whom you dare,
 Give hired men your love's award,
 But never, never love a lord.

St. Nicholas's Feast³⁷³ drew nigh,
 And all in tatters, bare of thigh,
 At night along the Bendery road³⁷⁴
 A gypsy troupe in freedom strode,
 And sang, as free men often do;
 They walked and walked; at last the crew
 Stopped, pitched a tent beside the route,
 Soon had a cozy blaze upshoot
 Inside it, and they sat about it—
 Some lads with mutton, some without it;
 No matter—they at least were free
 As all our Cossacks used to be.
 As thus they sat and dozed, outside
 The tent, across the steppe so wide
 They heard a young wife's voice that cried
 In song as if, a drunken beast,
 She lurched home from a wedding feast:

³⁷³On December 19.

³⁷⁴The road leading to the Bessarabian town of Bendery.

*"In the new house, when they were wed,
The whole shebang had gone to bed;
And what a dream the sweet bride had:
Her husband's mother went stark mad,
Her father-in-law a new wife found,
And her own mother soon was drowned.
Hoo-hool!"*

The gypsies laughed and listened: "Whence
Could such a singer's road commence?
The Dniester sends this demirep,
For forward lies the endless steppe . . .
A ghost! A ghost!" The gypsies cried
And leaped up startled, staring-eyed—
The thing that sang its entrance made
And they felt sorry and afraid!
In a patched garment shivering,
Some human being stood to sing:
Blood from her feet and hands like mould
Was oozing with the bitter cold;
Her filthy skin seemed one vast scar,
And countless burdocks served to mar
Her long braids that in elf-locks hung
And tapped her garment as they swung.
Thus for a while the creature stands,
Then sits her down and warms her hands
Beside the fire. "And that is so!
The wretch got married, don't you know!"
She whispered to herself and smiled
Most piteously, with gestures wild . . .
What is it?—This is not a ghost
But a poor soul in grief engrossed,
A sister whom the world has broken—
This is the witch of whom I've spoken.

GYPSEY

Where are you walking from, my lass?

WITCH

Who? I? (*She sings.*)

*When I as young could pass
Men kissed my cheeks as bold as brass;*

*Now that I'm old and years appal,
It's lovely to be kissed at all.*

GYPSY

She surely is the singing type!
If I could get one of her stripe,
Likewise a bear, and lead them out . . .

WITCH

*Whether I sit or move about,
I always sing, I always sing—
To talk is a forgotten thing,
Though once I chattered all the day.*

GYPSY

How did you come to lose your way?

WITCH

Who? I? Or you? (*She whispers.*) But hush! D'you see
Yonder the lord who lies with me?
The fire is out; the full moon blazes;
In the ravine a werewolf grazes. . . . (*She smiles.*)
I sought a wedding, got me drunk,
In the lord's eyes, the bride had sunk . . .
What those accursèd lords will do
To poor young women when they woo! . . .
To my son's marriage I must go.
Without me, they won't even know
How they should place him on his bier.
(*She starts to leave.*)

GYPSY

Don't go, poor woman—linger here!
For life with us is good, I'm sure.

WITCH

But have you children to endure?

GYPSY

We have no children, none indeed.

WITCH

Then whom on earth have you to feed?
Whom do you tuck in bed so tight?
Whom do you rock to sleep at night?

When you awake with morning's suns,
 Whom do you pray for? Little ones!
 Always the children at your side!
 From them I don't know where to hide;
 Where'er I go, they make their way!
 They will devour me some day! . . .

GYPSY

Don't weep, poor woman! Do not fret!
 Children we gypsies don't beget.

WITCH

I'd dive in from some hilltop yet . . .

The witch began to wail her blunder.
 The gypsies sat in silent wonder,
 Until they slept where'er they fell.
 She did not sleep; as in a spell
 She sat, her feet in ashes warm.
 Up rose the full moon's pockmarked form;
 From near a tumulus he went
 And seemed to gaze upon the tent
 Till in the clouds his face was pent.
 Why can't a rich man, old and sleek,
 Slumber by night with peaceful cheek?
 Why can't the poor man, seedy tramp,
 Sleep by the full moon's golden lamp?
 The former thinks of how he might
 Add acres to his mansion bright;
 The latter ponders how he shall
 Find money for his funeral.
 The one old man takes his last rest
 In a fine coffin, of the best;
 The other oldster's privilege
 Is dying underneath a hedge;
 Both men will sleep without a care—
 Upbraided or forgotten there.

II

Beside the fire, a gypsy, rousing,
 Sits, pipe in mouth, and in his drowsing

Keeps glancing at the female tramp;
No thoughts of death his spirit cramp.

GYPSY

Why not lie down and rest awhile?
The dawn appears—just see it smile!

WITCH

I've seen it—do you watch its state!

GYPSY

Early we'll rise and set out straight:
We'll leave you if you're sleeping late.

WITCH

I'll never have sufficient sleep—
Never, while still through life I creep! . . .
And I shall perish anywhere,
Among the weeds, and none will care . . .
(*She sings softly.*)

*O grove, O grove, my darksome grove,
O gentle Danube stream!
Ah me, I'll wander through the grove
And bathe as in a dream;
Deep in the weeds of Danube's pools
I'll rest in slumber mild,
And there perhaps will bring to birth
At least a crippled child.*

If it can walk like any other
And knows the way to curse its mother,
What matter! . . . Yonder, do you see,
A kitten flashed its eyes at me!
Come to me, kitty, fierce and glum!
The cursèd devil will not come . . .
If you would come, I should not shrink
To give you from my well a drink . . .
(*She intones.*)

*For wheaten honeyed gruel I strove;
The children are behind the stove;
I've given birth to quite a few,
But with them know not what to do.*

*Now, shall I drown them where they lie?
Or strangle them before they cry?
I'll sell them to a Jew, I think,
And spend the money all on drink.*

Well, do our people treat you bad?
Come, sit beside me here, my lad! . . .
That's it! Now would you give assent
That through Wallachia³⁷⁵ I went?
I'll tell you how my tale begins:
In Bendery I gave birth to twins;
I cradled them in Yassi³⁷⁶ bright;
The Danube laved each little mite;
I swaddled them on Turkey's loam;
And then at last I brought them home—
Right to Kiev: Beneath some dome,
Without the incense Faith enjoins
I had them christened for three coins
And spent the other three on drink . . .
Got drunk? I still am drunk, I think.

Never again will sleep suffice:
I fear not God in Paradise,
And before men I feel no shame.
If but those children I could claim
Somewhere! Does it escape your skill
If there's a war in Turkey still?

GYPSEY

That war you need no longer dread:
Their general, it seems, is dead.

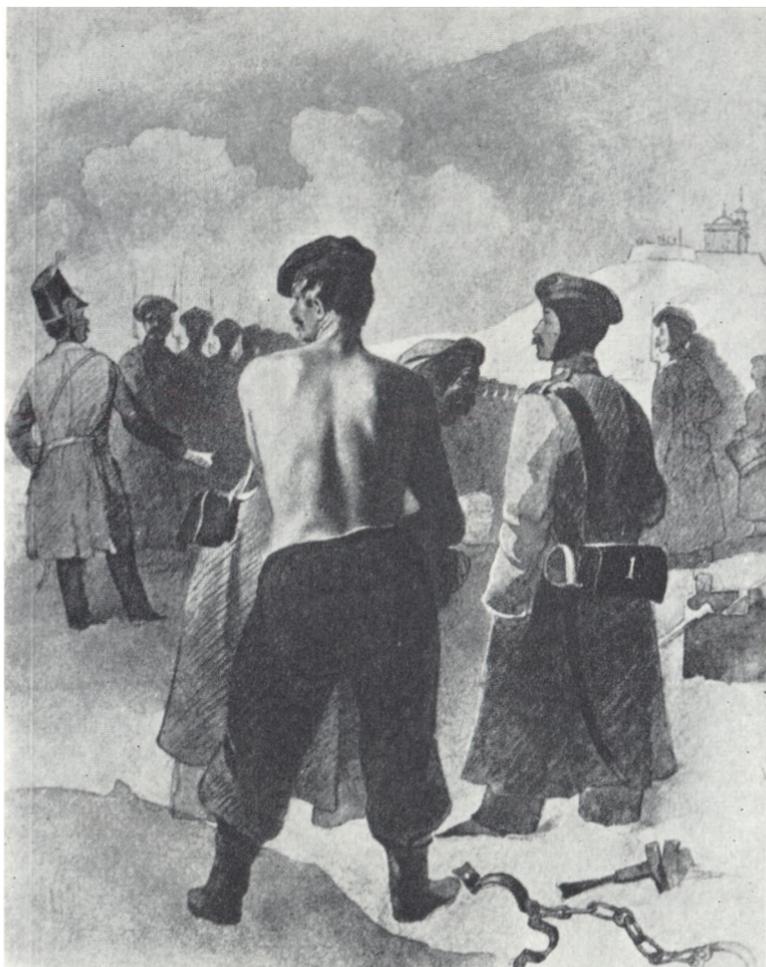
WITCH

And here I thought it still was on,
And now you say it's done and gone . . .
But listen! And I'll tell you more
About the folk I'm looking for.
It's my Natalka that I seek,
And my son Ivan, fair of cheek . . .
I'm also looking for the lord,
That wicked Herod, fiend abhorr'd . . .

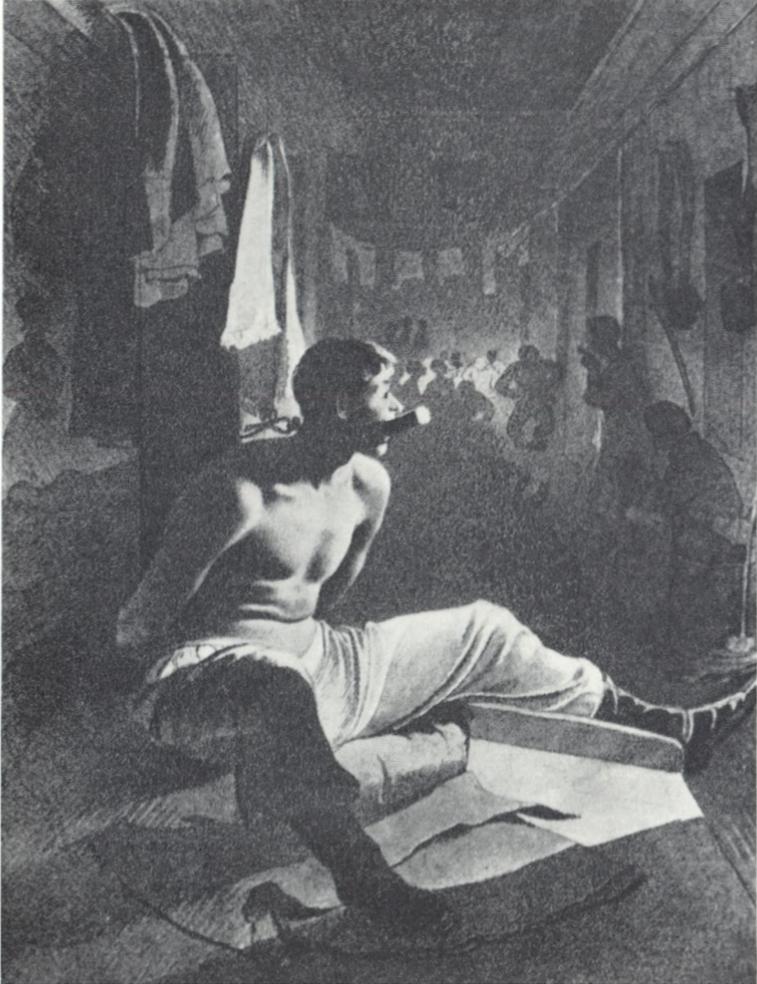
³⁷⁵A province now in Rumania, then under the Turks.

³⁷⁶The chief city in Moldavia.

But wait! New memories have clung—
 Long, long ago when I was young,
 Quite innocent of everything,
 I walked a garden path in spring
 And proudly decked myself with flowers;
 In that most terrible of hours
 He spied me! I was unaware
 That I was his bondwoman there,
 And it far better would betide me
 Had I been drowned. . . . And so he spied me,
 Took me to bed to sate his joy
 And clipped my hair off like a boy.
 Then on campaigning military
 He took me too. Thus to Bendéry
 We came; with Russian regiments
 We had our quarters; an offence
 Was planned in sanguinary work
 Across the stream against the Turk.
 And there my birthpangs God released
 With twins, before our Saviour's Feast.
 There he abandoned me, the louse!
 He did not even seek the house,
 Or even give his babes a glance—
 That devil of all arrogance!
 Off with the troops to war he rode
 While I, with bastard babes, abode;
 At length I turned back to Ukraine
 Across the thorny steppes with pain.
 My head was shorn; I did not care . . .
 At village doorsteps, here and there,
 I asked where Kiev's road might be . . .
 And how the people mocked at me!
 I could have drowned myself, while grieving,
 But that I could not think of leaving
 My children. So through thick and thin
 I trudge on till at last I win
 My dear Ukraine; and there I rest;
 To wait till evening seemed the best;
 The village then I sought. You see,
 I shunned the eyes of mockery.
 At last I sought along the hedge
 Our cottage at the village edge. . . .



T. Shevchenko, *Running the Gauntlet* (sepia, 1856–57)
From his cycle "The Parable of the Prodigal Son."



T. Shevchenko, *Punishment by the Gag* (sepia, 1856–57)
In his cycle "The Parable of the Prodigal Son" Shevchenko painted scenes from Russian prisons which he knew only too well.

The hut was dark amid the gloam:
 Perhaps my father was not home
 Or had already gone to bed.
 Softly upon the ground I tread,
 Enter, and hear a ghastly groan
 As if some person died alone.
 It was my dad . . . with none to love him,
 Or sign the holy cross above him,
 Or fold his hands as death grew blind . . .
 Ah, wicked children of mankind,
 What pangs in life your deeds provide!
 I, to be sure, was terrified . . .
 All smelled of mouldy emptiness.
 I hid my twins in my distress.
 Into the house I almost fall;
 My father hardly breathes at all.
 I rushed to him: "Father, alack!
 O my dear father, I am back!"
 I seized his hands. "It's me," I said.—
 And back he whispered from his bed:
 "I have forgiven you, my dear!"—
 And that was all that I could hear.
 It seems that to the ground I fainted
 And fell into a slumber tainted . . .
 Why could I not forever choke!
 Alas, at midnight I awoke:
 The house a dark pit seemed to stand;
 My father's fingers gripped my hand.—
 Wildly I called upon him twice,
 But there he lay, as cold as ice . . .
 With pain I pulled my hand away
 From under him . . . Now, tell me, pray,
 If you had such a bitch as daughter,
 Would you have pitched her in the water?

GYPSY

By God, your question makes me sweat.

WITCH

Be quiet, now, or I'll forget—
 And later on it's harder yet.

I fed my children ere the morn,
 And hid them in a bin of corn.
 Then at the dawn I made a hood
 And padded it with oakum good,
 To cover up my close-cropped head,
 Then walked about with sober tread,
 While folk outside with noisy pother
 Prepared a coffin for my father.
 They nailed him down with hammers grim—
 Then took him out and buried him.
 And all alone did I remain—
 A blade of grass upon the plain . . .
 I had my babes to dote upon—
 But now my children, too, have gone!
 (*She weeps and sings.*)
 "Across a dark ravine I went
 To fetch a pail of water;
 I kneaded up the wedding bread
 And married off my daughter;
 I helped my son to get a wife . . .
 "Hoo-hoo" was what he taught her!"

III

GYPSY

Stop whining, or you'll wake them all.

WITCH

D'you call it whining when I bawl?

GYPSY

All right, all right! What happened then?
 Pick up your sorry tale again.

WITCH

What will you give me if I do?
 Some cornmeal mush to make a stew?
 I'll bring some corn, if you will plough.
 Ah, yes, I can remember now!
 He made his daughter, his and mine,
 A second bondmaid-concubine,

And, just to whet his lust's delight,
His son must be his catamite . . .
A crowd of neighbours made me pack
From my old father's little shack;
I rouse the watch-dogs as I stagger
From door to door, a starving beggar,
Bastards on back, about I stray
And teach them how to beg their way.
But suddenly the lord returned—
How at the villagers he spurned!
He made them dance, without a doubt,
Since from my home they'd turned me out!
Me and the twins he takes to live
In his great mansion; I forgive
And watch with joy my precious twins
Grow up like little cherubins.
That savage serpent and his lust
I gave once more a woman's trust,
Love absolute! Ere he was done,
He'd made a lackey of my son
And with the daughter he had sown . . .
Do you hear me?—With his very own . . .
Now, by your lights, is that a sin?
At such a practice do you grin?
To me he gave a piece of gold
And sent to Kiev, duly told
To pray to God on his behalf.
I prayed in vain. Nay, gypsy, laugh!
Have you a god whose wrath you'd shun?
Alas, we wretched folk have none:
The lords have packed him on their shelves,
Hidden away to serve themselves.

Returned from Kiev, I was shocked
To find the lord's apartment locked.
My daughter he had borne away,
My own Nataika . . . Listen, pray!
And the damned wretch had shorn the head
Of his own child, to serve his bed.
I hastened then to seek him out,
Went up and down and round about,

And still I seek him as I fly
 Like some dark owl through passes high;
 I seek my daughter as I soar!
 Nay, it's the lord I'm looking for!
 I'll strangle him! . . .

Take me along,
 O gypsies, with your little throng!
 For I will lead your dancing bear,
 And when I find my torturer,
 I'll let it loose upon the rake
 And he his path to hell shall take . . .
 Nay, I'll not loose it! I instead
 Shall gnaw his neck until he's dead.

How now, old sweetheart, let's get married!
 By wedding bonds I'm still unharried;
 I've found my son a marriage mate;
 My daughter shall not change her state! . . .
 Along the hedges will she creep
 Till she lies dead, in endless sleep.
 Look! And you'll tell me from his phiz
 How pretty my son Ivan is!—
 Do you know what? Lend me some cash:
 I'll buy some pearls and cut a dash,
 And with a string of them I'll hang you,
 And then go home while men harangue you . . .

Look! There's a mouse, both mad and deaf,
 Bearing its litter to Kiev.
 You will not get them there; you'll drown them;
 Somewhere, the lord will come and down them.
 Where are my babes? In vain I scout them.
 And am I doomed to die without them?

She hushed, as if she'd fall'n asleep.
 The gypsies rose, in silence deep,
 Folded their tent to take the road
 And out across the steppe they strode.
 Then the poor creature, even she,
 The hapless one, rose silently,
 And, at low breath, with gestures odd,
 Appeared to say her prayers to God;

Then trudged behind the gypsy gang
And as she walked, she softly sang:

*"Though people talk of Judgment Day;
That Day will never come:
Already in this human world
I'm judged by human scum!"*

IV

Past Dniester then, the gypsy train
Sought out Volynia and Ukraine.
They passed through village after village
And many a market knew their tillage,
While like a ghost the vagrant woman
Went with them, seeming scarcely human.
She sang and danced from street to street;
She did not drink, she did not eat;
And with the gypsies as her guide,
Like death she roamed the countryside.
Then suddenly, she learned to think
With reason; took to food and drink;
And there, behind the tent so rude,
Would pray to God in gratitude.
Old Mariula, wise and kind,
Had managed to restore her mind,
Finding some drink of potent sway
That made her trouble pass away.

Then slowly she began to teach her
The way to heal each living creature:
What herbs what illnesses could cure
And where to find them on the moor,
How to concoct them, how to dry them,
And in what manner to apply them.
All this she learned, as on they trod;
And every day she prayed to God.

The summer passed, another went,
And when a third was nearly spent,
They were already in Ukraine . . .
Then for her home she yearned in pain.

She bowed at Mariula's feet
And thanked her for instruction sweet,
Bade her good gypsy friends farewell
And thanked her God for what befell;
Then trudged away, poor creature lorn,
To seek the place where she was born.
Happy and overjoyed she went
Like a small child, in deep content.
In all the villages she met,
She sought out those whom ills beset
And gave them healing herbs to drink
And drew them back from misery's brink.
Reaching the home of her desire,
In the bare hut she made a fire,
Whitewashed its walls and tidied it
And from her toil relaxed a bit
As if a paradise she had.
She drowned all memories, good and bad;
Forgiving all and loving all,
She seemed to soar at evenfall
A blessed angel, soft to heal,
So light of spirit did she feel!
In her own cottage, quick to give,
As in a palace did she live.
No neighbour now in hate abhorred her,
For all the villagers adored her,
Since she would go by day and night
To seek the sick and cure their plight;
She healed them all of aches and banes
And yet took nothing for her pains;
Or if she did, it went at once
To help some cripple for the nonce;
Or, Sundays, she would candles buy
To light before an icon high
For sinners' sakes; to help herself
She would not save a scrap of pelf.
"Why do I need it?" she would say,
"No food need I for bairns purvey."
Then she would weep. And thus did she,
Without a child to oversee,
Live out her life, a devotee.

Young women often made a stir
To pass their days and nights with her,
To tidy up her cottage small,
Whitewash it and adorn it all
And cook her meals; they did not ask
That fortune-telling be her task;
To help her was their daily diet:
The cottage was as clean and quiet
And bright as any paradise!
Her creaking door incessant cries,
For none passed by, her cottage scorning:
Some merely called to say Good morning,
Some asked for herbs to heal an ache,
And some would bring a loaf or cake . . .
She did not lack for anything,
Simply to share with her they'd bring
The good things that their hands employ.
And thus at home she lived with joy,
Both amply clothed and amply fed;
Good will through all the hamlet spread
And each man gave her all he could.
And yet, although her name was good,
Some called her an unmarried mother
And named her "witch" to one another.

v

With gout, and pillows for his pain,
And three fat doctors in his train,
From a far country, coaches bring
The truant lord back home one spring.
His children—where might they be found?
He'd swapped his daughter for a hound,
And made his son a stake at cards
And lost him. (Of such slight regards
Our life is full, and what's to do?)
The doctors tried to pull him through;
Three at a time, they set about it,
And did their best—no one can doubt it.
His sinful life seemed almost done,
And yet he craved another one!

And she forgave him! As concocter
 Of better drugs than any doctor,
 With healing herbs and mercy free
 She went to cure her enemy
 In his sad palace, pled the notion
 That she might give the lord her potion;
 She gave her oath that he would live!
 No entrance would the doctors give;
 They drove her out and sought to flay.
 She took her pot and went away;
 Bewailed her children but deplored

The fact she might not help the lord!
 Spring drives out winter from her bed;
 Green carpets on the earth are spread.
 From warmer lands the cranes now fly
 In wedge formations in the sky;
 Across the steppes, the roads upon,
 Chumaks³⁷⁷ are marching to the Don.
 Both on the earth and in the skies
 Nature is breathing paradise:
 I cannot see how God could grant
 An Eden more exuberant!

But meanwhile, having vainly striven,
 The lord is dying unforgiven;
 To that bad man with good intent
 Priests give the blessed Sacrament;
 Men lay him on the straw-spread floor—
 The roof off, so his soul might soar—
 He cannot die.—Because of sin,
 Ev'n doctors cannot do him in! . . .

A little better then felt he:
 "Go, bid Lukiya come to me!"
 He whispered low in shuddering thought.
 So to his hall my witch is brought.
 The doctors now her help implored
 In comforting the stricken lord . . .
 At the bed's foot she came and stood
 And at low breath, in mercy good,

³⁷⁷See fn. 201.

The Paternoster she began
To soothe the sinful, dying man.
At that the lord appeared to rouse;
He glanced about him in his drowse
And saw her . . . and his terror grew:
"No, no! I have no need of you!
Depart! . . . But rather wait a while . . .
Have you forgotten all the vile . . .
Forgive me! Ah, forgive me, pray!"
In his long life, now first the play
Of tears from his sad eyes told woe.
—"Why, I forgave you long ago! . . ."
She placed a candle in his hand,
And signed the cross where she did stand.
Thus in her presence, grave and mild,
Her enemy, like a little child,
Died gently, leaving her to pray
For his dark soul for many a day.

The fortieth day beyond his death
She had a priest with holy breath
Perform for him a requiem mass;
Then she on pilgrimage did pass
To pray to God for the repose
Of the dead lord, her worst of foes.

At last, in autumn, she came back
To spend the winter in her shack.
The young maids' greetings almost smother
Her heart, as if she were their mother;
And once again they came to call,
For evening parties best of all,
And sought to treat her with a love
That their own mothers might approve.
And she in turn would gladly slave
To teach them how they should behave,
And would relate to them with tears
How she had lived her maiden years,
How she had by a lord been mastered,
Had borne him twins, and each a bastard,
How she had roamed with close-cropped head,
Had roved with gypsies, freedom-bred,

And how old Mariula taught her
 The healing art of herbs and water;
 All of her life, both soon and late,
 Yes, every scrap would she relate
 And make the maidens weep to hear
 And cross themselves for very fear
 As if the lord were in the house . . .
 Then would she wheedle, plead, and grouse
 And conjure them with one accord
 Never to love or trust a lord,
 Or God will give their soul remorse
 Or else (she added) "You perforce
 Must roam about the world like me
 And bring your parents misery;
 Your children likewise will be born
 For all the world to laugh to scorn,
 As once with me . . . as once with me . . .
 Alas, my children, prudent be!"

Thus she advised those gentle elves,
 And all the maidens crossed themselves
 And wept; and often in the night
 Would dream of lords of evil spite
 Who came with fiendish tails and horns,
 Who bit them, covered them with scorns,
 And swapped them off, bareheaded maids,
 For hunting-dogs in wanton trades,
 Poured tar upon them, head to feet,
 And pushed them out into the street
 And asked the people to blaspheme . . .
 Of such things did the maidens dream!
 And yet they did not cease to roam
 To evening parties in her home.

Once more green spring in beauty goes;
 And up my agèd woman rose
 In search of herbs 'mid grass and fern,
 But from her walk did not return.
 In vain at noon young maidens get
 Her dinner; then her supper set;
 And still they did not know that ill
 Had come this mother dear to kill.

At last some shepherds came and told
 That near the burial mound of old,
 Deep in a quaggy marsh, the devils
 Had drowned the old witch in their revels.
 Men found her; gathered, most and least,
 And buried her without a priest,
 High on the mound, and there, to boot,
 Planted a living aspen shoot.
 Then all the weeping maids adorned
 Her grave with flowers as they mourned,
 And every spring, throughout the years,
 Watered the aspen with their tears.

An aspen tall, bewitched, then grew
 Upon the mound to human view.
 A witch is buried in its shades:
 There cross yourselves, ye dainty maids!
 Yes, cross yourselves and make no haste
 With wicked lords to be unchaste,
 Or you will perish, scorned in shame,
 And lose your virtue's precious name.

Sedniv, March 7, 1847

Revised March 6, 1858

* * * *

Alone am I, yes, all alone,³⁷⁸
 A blade of grass forlorn,
 For neither happiness nor luck
 God gave when I was born;
 He gave me only sparkling eyes
 In beauty fair and good,
 But even these I've wept away
 In lonely maidenhood.
 No brother and no sister dear
 Have been my strength and stay;
 Up among strangers was I reared,
 Among them waste away . . .

³⁷⁸This and the next twelve poems were written in the citadel of St. Petersburg, where Shevchenko was imprisoned to await his trial.

Where may I find a helpmate true?
 Where gentle friends uprouse?
 They can't be found . . . I am alone . . .
 I'll never find a spouse! . . .

St. Petersburg (citadel), 1847

* * * *

Endless ravines are spread around,
 Beyond them are the steppe, the mound,
 And from the mound my thought espies
 A stooped and hoary Cossack rise;
 Alone across the night he walks;
 Enters the steppe; and, as he stalks,
 He sings a low and mournful lay:
 "They reared the earth; they went away;
 And no one now can ever tell
 That here three hundred of us fell.
 Men sought by burial to relieve us
 But still the earth will not receive us.
 Long since, a hetman sold his folk,
 All Christians,³⁷⁹ to a Turkish yoke,³⁸⁰
 He sent us out to drive them there:
 Across our own land, broad and fair,
 We freely shed our people's blood
 And dammed their freedom where they stood;
 On brothers' blood our souls grew drunk;
 Now in this tumulus we're sunk;
 In this accursèd mound we've slunk . . ."
 The Cossack ceased, in musings drear;
 He leaned upon his ghostly spear;
 High on the mound's dark top he stood
 And gazed upon the Dnieper's flood,
 And wept so loud at his sad tale
 The very waves returned his wail.

³⁷⁹Ukrainian.

³⁸⁰While it is true that Hetman Petro Doroshenko (1665–76) allied himself with the Turks, it is not likely that Shevchenko had him in mind, for he considered him highly as a statesman and military leader. Neither is it certain that Hetman Yuriy Khmelnytsky (1659–63), Bohdan's son, is meant, although he, too, had for a time formed a like alliance.

Beyond the stream, where hamlets rove,
 The sobbings echoed through the grove.
 Then at the cock-crow's cheery sound
 The Cossack sank into the ground;
 The valleys gave a shuddering moan,
 The grave-mound answered with a groan.

St. Petersburg (citadel), May 1847

* * * *

It is all one to me indeed, if I
 Live in Ukraine or live there not at all,
 Whether or not men let my memory die;
 Here in an alien land, mid snows piled high,
 It will not matter that such things befall.

In serfdom, among strangers was I reared,
 And unlamented wholly by my own
 In exile I shall die, in grief uncheered
 And to my nameless grave shall pass alone.
 No trace of me, alas, will then remain
 To see in all our glorious Ukraine,
 In all that land of ours that is not ours.
 No father will commend me to his son,
 That prayers for me to God he might confide:
 "Pray then, my boy! For us his course was run.
 For our Ukraine he suffered and he died."

It is all one to me indeed, I say,
 Whether or not that son for me should pray . . .
 But while I live I cannot bear to see
 A wicked people come with crafty threat,
 To lull Ukraine, yet strip her ruthlessly
 And waken her amid the flames they set³⁸¹—
 By God, these wrongs are not all one to me!

St. Petersburg (citadel), May 1847

³⁸¹As thieves sometimes do: they rob a house, then in order to avert attention from themselves, set it on fire, and, after summoning the neighbours, help in putting out the flames. To Ukrainians, this poem is one of Shevchenko's most powerful utterances.

TO OKSANA³⁸²

"Don't leave your mother's side!" they said.
 Alas, you left her, and you fled.
 Your mother sought, but could not find you;
 And since she knew not what inclined you,
 She died of grief. And old things fade:
 No sound is heard where once you played;
 Your dog has wandered off somewhere;
 Smashed is the cottage window square;
 Where once a pretty garden lay,
 The lambs now graze throughout the day;
 By night the owls their chorus keep,
 And will not let the neighbours sleep.
 The periwinkle bed you grew
 Is filled with haggard hemlock too;
 The clear, small pond where once you bathed
 Grows dry and all in weeds enswathed;
 The grove is grieving, bending low;
 Among its trees no songbirds go—
 Here, since you left, no birds have been;
 The valley's well has sunken in;
 The willow's withered and is bent,
 And the smooth path where once you went
 Is overgrown with prickly thorns.
 Where have you soared (my heart still mourns!)?
 Where have you flown from this our land?
 In an alien home, on alien strand
 Whom do you cheer? To whom in spring
 Do your soft arms rejoicing cling?
 I dream that in a mansion there
 You live in luxury, nor care
 For that small cottage that you left . . .
 My prayer is that your heart, unleft
 By sorrow, may be free from doubt,
 That grief may never find you out,
 To make you damn your fate on earth
 And curse your mother for your birth!

St. Petersburg (citadel), May 1847

³⁸²See fn. 144.

THE CRANBERRY

“Why do you always wander to that mound?”
 The anxious mother asked, and asking, frowned.
 “Why do you always weep as there you go?
 Why don’t you sleep at night, and cease from woe,
 My precious, grey-winged dove?” With soft intent
 She answered: “It is nothing!” . . . But she went
 Once more to seek the mound. With deep concern
 Her mother wept, and waited her return.

It is not an anemone
 That blooms in evening’s hush;
 It’s rather a betrothèd maid
 Who plants a cranberry bush,
 And sprinkles it with floods of tears
 And prays the Lord in pain
 To send it plenteous drops of dew,
 To send it midnight rain,
 So that the bush may take good root
 And spread its branches fair:
 “Perhaps my sweetheart like a bird
 Will fly from heaven there;
 And there I’ll weave a cosy nest;
 There I myself will fly;
 We’ll warble on the cranberry bush,
 My lover sweet and I;
 And we shall praise the Lord in song,
 In gentle talk we’ll sit,
 And at the coming of the dawn
 To heaven we shall flit.”

The cranberry bush took solid root
 And spread its branches round;
 For three long summers did the maid
 Keep coming to the mound.
 The fourth . . . it’s no anemone
 That blooms in evening’s hush
 It is the maid who speaks in tears
 To the cranberry bush:
 “O my cranberry, broad and tall,
 And watered before dawn

THE CRANBERRY

Not with rain only but my tears,
 From eyes of sorrow drawn—
 Cold people have besmirched my love
 With wicked calumny;
 Even the girls who should be friends
 Speak evil things to me
 And scorn my red cranberry bush.
 Let my poor head be done—
 Wash it with dew, and with your boughs
 Protect me from the sun!
 They'll find me early in the morn
 And mock my maiden vows,
 While little boys will tear away
 Your widely spreading boughs."

At early dawning, on that bush,
 The birds sweet warblings make;
 Beneath the bush the maiden slept,
 She slept and did not wake:
 And thus the lass, worn out by grief,
 Died for her dead love's sake.

Up from behind the mound the great sun rose
 And brought men sweet rejoicing after woes;
 Meanwhile the mother still her vigil kept,
 Felt for her missing daughter nameless throes,
 And, as she waited, bitterly she wept.

St. Petersburg (citadel), May 1847

THE THREE ROADS

Three broad roads ran in endless length
 To crossroads in Ukraine;
 By each a brother started out
 A foreign land to attain;
 They all forsook their mother dear;
 One left a wife behind;
 A sister, one; the youngest left
 A maiden young and kind.
 The aged mother planted then
 Three ash-trees in the field;

The daughter-in-law a poplar shoot
 Into the meadow heeled;
 Three maple-shoots the sister's hands
 Set in with gentle push;
 And the lorn maiden planted there
 A red cranberry bush.

The ash-trees three did not take root,
 The poplar withered soon,
 The maples wasted quite away,
 The cranberry died by noon.
 The brothers three do not return,—
 The mother beats her brows,
 The wife and children are in tears
 In an unheated house,
 The sister weeps and seeks the lost
 Their absence to upbraid,
 And the forlorn betrothèd lass
 Is in her coffin laid . . .

The brothers three do not return,
 Each roves past far-off bournes;
 The three broad roads by which they went
 Are overgrown with thorns.

St. Petersburg (citadel), May 1847

TO N. I. KOSTOMARIV³⁸³

The joyful sun passed in and out
 Of vernal clouds that danced about;
 The prisoners were served, like me,
 With thin, distasteful mugs of tea;
 While all around the trampling ranged
 Of blue-clad warders being changed.
 To the great door, the key's shrill jars,
 And to the heavy window-bars

³⁸³See Introduction, pp. xxii, xxiv, xxv. This poem was written shortly after Shevchenko saw, through the grated window of his cell, Kostomariv's mother approaching the gate of the citadel to visit her imprisoned son.

I had grown used, and felt no more
 Deep anguish for the days of yore,
 The buried and forgotten years
 And all the torment of my tears.
 Them in abundance have I shed
 Upon this desert, waste and dead,
 Where not a plant salutes the view,
 Not even one dry stalk of rue.
 My native thorp I called to mind:
 But who were those I'd left behind?
 My parents both lay buried deep . . .
 And rankling griefs my senses sweep
 That no one there remembers me.
 Your mother then, dear friend, I see,
 Who, black as earth, walks weak with loss
 As if she just had left her cross . . .
 My thanks to God were boundless then
 As the most fortunate of men
 In having no one thus to share
 My shackles and my gaol's despair.
St. Petersburg (citadel), May 19, 1847

AN EVENING³⁸⁴TO A. AL. LAZAREVSKA³⁸⁵

A cherry grove beside the cottage stands,
 The beetles hum above the cherry-trees,
 The ploughmen homeward plod in spent unease,
 Young women likewise come in singing bands,
 And mothers wait them all, with food to please.

The family beside the cottage eats;
 The evening star is rising in the sky;
 The daughter helps the supper tasks to ply;
 Words of advice the mother's mouth repeats
 But songs of nightingales her words outvie.

³⁸⁴Considered Shevchenko's most "pictorial" poem. Almost each line evokes a vivid picture.

³⁸⁵Mother of Theodore and Michael, two great friends of Shevchenko's, both of whom helped him to the best of their abilities during his exile, the latter being partly instrumental in having him freed. The poem was written in remembrance of Shevchenko's visit in Madame Lazarevska's home.

Her little folks beside the cottage small
 The mother puts to rest in slumber deep,
 And she herself beside them falls asleep.
 Peace now prevails. But the young women all
 And the sweet nightingale no silence keep.

St. Petersburg (citadel), May 1847

* * * *

I could not sleep. The night was like a sea . . .
 The weather had been gentle but, alas,
 I lay in prison in the citadel,
 And to those dungeon walls I could not speak
 Either of grief or of my youthful dreams.
 I tossed about, and waited for the dawn;
 Outside my door, two prison-guards conversed
 About the ugliness of soldiering:

THE FIRST

The saucy wench was so unprincipled,
 She placed a pretty price upon herself;
 And her lord-husband was a puny thing!
 At last he spied me with her, as you know,
 And had me taken to Kaluga³⁸⁶ barracks
 As a recruit. That's how I joined the army!

THE SECOND

And I—it's all too dreadful to recall!—
 I joined the Russian army on my own.
 I came to know a girl in our home village;
 I visited her often; fell in love;
 And got her widowed mother's full consent;
 But the damned landlord would not let me have her:
 "She's far too young," he said, "best wait a while."
 And so I still went on to court my Annie.
 Next year I tried again; and with me came
 Her mother when I begged the lord's consent.
 "You waste your time," said he. "Don't bother asking!
 But for five hundred rubles you can have her,

³⁸⁶A town in Russia.

Why, any time you like." What could I do?
I was dumbfounded. Could I borrow money?
But who on earth would lend me such a sum?
And so, my friend, I started out to earn it.
Two years to break the back and break the heart
With grinding toil I spent in sundry jobs
In the Black Sea region and along the Don
And finally I earned that blessed money.
That autumn I came home, and brought with me
Cash for the lord and quite expensive gifts.
And so that night I sought my girl, but found
Only her mother in the ingle-nook,
And she at point of death within a house
That darkly gaped, all empty and decayed.
I strike fire from the flint and turn to her—
But the old dame already smells of earth
And does not even seem to recognize me.
I sought the priest, a neighbour. Brought the priest,
But found her dead already. Not a trace
Of my dear Annie. So I asked the neighbour.
—"Why, don't you know? She's in Siberia,
Sentenced for murder. For she used to visit
Our gay young lord, until at last she bore
A child to him and drowned it in a well."
I felt as if my heart were set ablaze . . .
I left that ghastly cottage with an effort . . .
It was still dark. To the lord's house I went,
Armed with a knife, and hardly felt the ground
Beneath me as I walked. There I discovered
The young lord had already left to go
To college in Kiev. And that, my friend,
Is how it was! My father and my mother
Stayed in the village, and I joined the army.
I wanted to set fire to the mansion,
Or kill myself, but God restrained my hand.
And do you know, he's been transferred to us
And joined our local unit in the guards
From army service, or wherever he was?

THE FIRST

Now is your chance to settle the account!

THE SECOND

Nay, let him be!³⁸⁷ Perhaps the Lord will grant
That my heart will forget it all some day.

Thus they went talking on for quite a while.
Before the dawn, my spirit became drowsy;
But when I chanced to dream of gay young lords,
The ugly bastards would not let me sleep.

St. Petersburg (citadel), May 1847

A DESERTED COTTAGE

Up in the morning early the recruits
Were marching from the village. A young maid
Went following after them. Her poor old mother
Trudged hard to catch her daughter in the plain.
She overtook her, brought the culprit back,
And scolded her, and buried her betimes,
And she herself became a vagrant beggar.

The years went by, and still the little village
Changed not at all, except that at its edge
One side of her old hut had sunken in.
Beside the hut, supported on a crutch,
A soldier hobbles, gazing at the garden
And peering at the cobwebbed emptiness
Within the hut. It's useless, my good friend!
The black-browed beauty will peep out no more;
Her aged mother will not ask you in
For supper in the hut. Long, long ago,
There once had been a day when nuptial towels
Were being embroidered,³⁸⁸ and a kerchief stitched
With silk, and he had hoped to live and love
And praise God for the boon; but loneliness
Was destined as his fate, without a spouse.

³⁸⁷Christian forgiveness which Shevchenko also enunciates in his version of Psalm LIII and in "The Neophytes," sec. v. See fns. 367 and 609 respectively.

³⁸⁸See fn. 320.

By the deserted house he sits alone;
 The darkness deepens; and a lurking owl
 Peers from the window like a sorceress.

St. Petersburg (citadel), May 1847

* * * *

It's hard to be an exile . . . though in truth
 I've never been a free man all my life;
 Yet somehow managed to live openly
 And in a foreign land. . . . But now it seems
 I'm fated to await my destiny
 As simple souls await God's visitation.
 And I do wait for it, and look for it,
 And meanwhile sadly curse my stupid brain
 For having let myself be duped by fools,
 Since thus I've drowned my freedom in a gutter.³⁸⁹
 My heart grows chill as winter when I think
 That I shall not be buried in Ukraine,
 And shall not even live in my Ukraine,
 Not in it love my people and my God.

St. Petersburg (citadel), May 1847

* * * *

Friends, fellow exiles, shall we meet again?
 Or must we part forever? Do we bear
 Our words of love and justice far away
 Into the empty hovels of the steppes?
 Let it be so! Exile is not our mother.
 Yet we are surely fated to respect her!
 Such is the will of God! . . . Be reconciled,
 Humble yourselves, pray gratefully to God,
 Remember one another, love Ukraine.
 Love her . . . and in these, her direst times,
 In this, her last and most distressful moment,
 Lift your hands up to God in fervent prayer.

St. Petersburg (citadel), May 1847

³⁸⁹Shevchenko here voices his grief at the fate that awaits him for his outspokenness.

THE MOWER

Across the fields he goes,
 Not in mere swaths he mows them down,
 Not in mere swaths but in dark mountains:
 The earth is groaning and the sea is groaning,
 Groaning and roaring.

At night the mower
 Is met by screech-owls;
 The mower keeps on cutting ceaselessly,
 He has no pity upon anyone;
 No begging will avail.

I pray you, do not beg; do not beseech;
 He does not even pause to whet his scythe;
 Whether it be a suburb or a city,
 The hoary fellow shaves as with a razor
 Without discrimination, everyone:

The moujik, the taverner,
 The lonely kobzar;
 The oldster as he mows intones a song
 And lays his swaths of corpses mountain-high,
 He does not even miss a tsar.

Me too he will not miss,
 He'll mow me down in a far, foreign land,
 Behind barred windows he will strangle me . . .
 No one will plant a cross above my grave
 And no one will remember me!

St. Petersburg (citadel), May 30, 1847

* * * *

Ah, my heavy-laden verses,
 Darlings of my art,
 Do not you, at least, forsake me
 And my stricken heart!
 Fly to me, O blue of pinion,
 Precious doves of mine,

From beyond the mighty Dnieper
 Join my ways malign
 Here among the Khirghiz paupers,
 Naked to the knees,
 Who can still enjoy their freedom,
 Pray to God in peace.
 Fly to me, my lovely pigeons,
 And with words most true
 I shall greet you as my children
 And shall weep with you.

Fortress of Orsk, 1847

THE PRINCESS

O my beauteous star of evening,
 Rise above the hill,
 And with you, from prison windows,
 I shall parley still.
 Tell me how, beyond the mountain,
 Now the sun is setting;
 How a nymph from out the Dnieper
 Water will be getting;
 How the broad and gloomy poplar
 Spreads its branches grave,
 How the willow-tree is bending
 Just above the wave,—
 Bending low till in the water
 Branches dip disguised,
 And on them are gaily swinging
 Children unbaptized;
 How a werewolf on the grave-mound
 Taries lone and late;
 How an owl, from roof or forest,
 Foretells evil fate;
 How anemones are blooming
 In the vale by night;
 As for men—a curse upon them!
 Well I know their spite!
 Well I know, my star of comfort,
 Comrade dear and true,

What in our Ukraine these villains
 Perpetrate anew! . . .
 I shall tell you all my story
 Ere to sleep I nod;
 Early in the morn you'll tell it,
 In your turn, to God.

I

The heart grows warm to see it plain,
 A village in our own Ukraine—
 As gay as any Easter egg:
 Bright groves of green its borders peg;
 The orchards bloom, the cots are white,
 The landlord's halls the hills delight,
 A house of wonder; all around
 The broad-leaved poplar-trees are found;
 Then endless fields and woods o'erspread
 Blue hills beyond the Dnieper's bed . . .
 God hovers here—one might have said.

What cheerful cottages adorn our lands!
 On yonder hill a cheerful mansion stands . . .
 Would you were wholly overgrown with thorns!
 That none could even find you in their scorns
 Or even trace the spot where once you stood!
 Into that blessed village, fair and good,
 And lying in our glorious Ukraine,
 A prince once brought a bride to share his reign.
 Both prince and princess still had youth and health;
 At first they lived alone in splendid wealth:
 Their palace stood in pride upon a hill;
 A large pond in the valley served a mill;
 Along the slopes a leafy orchard throve;
 Willows and poplars formed a shady grove;
 Windmills bedecked the plain; in lowlands dank
 A village stretched along the river's bank.

The palace once was a most happy place!
 In winter or in summer, music's grace
 Made glad the spot; wine filled with potent zests
 The gullets of insatiable guests;

The prince, all blue with drinking, strolled about,
 Filling the cups of those who stood in doubt,
 And as he did, would shout: "Long life to all!"
 Thus prince, and guests, made merry in his hall,—
 Until they fell down drunk upon the floor.
 Morning, however, would their souls restore,
 And to the liquorous round they turned anon;
 Thus day by drunken day went gaily on.
 Meanwhile the tortured serfs can only squeal;
 Judges to God for guidance vainly kneel,
 While all the tipsy guests vociferate:
 "Long live our noble prince, renowned and great!
 He is a patriot, the poor man's friend!"
 Meanwhile, in wicked deeds that never end,
 This poor man's friend and princely patriot
 Robs all the peasants of the best they've got—
 Daughters and calves—God does not hear their groans,
 Or, if He does, His silence still condones!

II

The princess stays immured by padlocks stout.
 The poor man's friend does not allow her out,
 Even in the hallway. What was she to do?
 She had eloped to wed him. It is true
 Her parents with her love would not comply
 But kept on warning her: "Don't aim so high!"
 But no—a prince she'd have! A prince you've got!
 Now pride yourself, O princess, on your lot!
 For you will die, my dear; of horrid blight
 Like some frail primrose in the April night
 You'll wither, unfamiliar with life's ways:
 Nor know how people turn to God in praise,
 Nor how they live and love. And yet, poor wife,
 How you have longed to live an ample life!
 How you have yearned to love, at least a year;
 For one brief hour to hold the world as dear!
 This could not be—and yet you once had all,
 Your mother's gift in your ancestral hall;
 She also gave you beauty, whose constraint
 Could make men worship as before a saint . . .

Alas, my dear, what misery's in store!
 You might have lived, let praise to God upsoar,
 Done good to others, with your loveliness
 Brought grace to people's hearts in their distress!
 But this was not to be! Your youthful eyes
 Must lose their lustre as you agonize
 In solitude. . . . Perhaps God wills it so?
 Lord, Lord! How canst Thou liberty bestow
 And reason to Thy creatures, beauty too
 And pure hearts, yet our lives have much to rue!
 Thou makest it so difficult to enjoy
 Thy paradise in full, without alloy,
 To taste Thy vast creation everywhere
 And offer up one's heart in grateful prayer
 Before one goes to one's eternal sleep!
 There is no joy in life, despair lies deep
 If there is no one whom one's heart can love.
 Thus does my own dear princess sadly prove,
 Who, though still young, is destined day by day
 To see her heart and beauty fade away
 And end her useless life in solitude—
 How terrible! And how God's throne she sued,
 Beseeching Him to grant her happiness!
 For someone soon would come, her love to bless:
 She feels that motherhood will soon be hers,
 Her heart leaps up, and love within her stirs
 For this her unborn child. And God allowed her
 To have this glowing wonder to enshroud her:
 That she should see and kiss her only child
 And hear its first low cry with pity mild . . .
 Ah, children, children, children, fair of face,
 You are our loving Maker's crowning grace!

III

Her tears were dried and disappeared; the sun
 Shone forth; the mother of the little one
 Was now transformed, and seemed to be reborn
 As, full of joy, she played with it each morn,
 And tiny tunics for the babe she weaves
 And sews embroidery on those tiny sleeves

With finest silk; she cradled it to rest
 And fed the baby from her own sweet breast.
 While other princesses their children bear,
 They know not how to feed or give them care;
 And later, with a sigh, they'll say: "My Paul³⁹⁰
 Or my Theophilact³⁹⁰ is past my call!"
 Have you, for his remembrance, proved your worth,
 When all you ever did was give him birth?
 But this my princess let her care enfold it,
 And did not let the drunken prince behold it.

Like a fair apple on an orchard bough
 The little princess grew with radiant brow,
 And in due time essayed our human speech:
 Her princess mother was alert to teach
 The name of "mamma" only, and not "dad" . . .
 From Rómen sundry picture-books she had;
 She played and talked with her; she taught her prayers;
 And from the pretty picture-books she shares
 The lore of alphabet; each single day
 Bathes her and in her bed would safely lay
 The child at eve; no speck of dust might fall
 Upon the little princess there at all;
 Then all night long she watched above her bed
 And hardly slept herself; she gazed instead
 With gentle eyes and happy vigil kept
 Above her little princess as she slept . . .
 Then, with her heart's affection as a tutor,
 She even started dreaming of a suitor
 To wed her daughter as her love persuades.
 And then she would unplait the girl's long braids,
 And often tears her sorrow would evince
 For the ill treatment of her drunken prince.
 Although she would not give her grievings vent,
 Her child seemed saying in presentiment:
 "Mother, don't cry! And leave my braids alone!
 For shame may some day on my head be strown." . . .

³⁹⁰In the original these names are indicated as French. It was a custom among the nobility and gentry to give their children foreign names at baptism, or to Frenchify their Slavic ones.

The beauty of the daughter daily gives
 The happy mother rapture that she lives;
 She grows up like a poplar, straight and slender,
 And all the world its tribute well might render.
 She grows, but not for long will she bring joy
 To her dear mother. Fate must soon destroy
 That gentle life. And people wonder why
 In this sad life it is the good who die
 While still the evil live and multiply. . . .

Dread illness smote the princess—then the prince
 At this calamity was seen to wince
 And round about the village streets to bustle
 And bring old sorceresses in a hustle.
 Though many came and sought to work a cure
 Upon the hapless woman, all unsure
 Their efforts were unskilled to heal or save
 And laid her very shortly in her grave.

IV

The princess being dead, the dulcimers
 Renew their music for the banqueters;
 Her only child lives in the village now
 Like some pale apple broken from its bough:
 Ill-fed, ill-shod or wrapped in many a clout,
 Wearing her tunic till she wore it out;
 The sorry creature bakes in broiling suns;
 Eats plant-stalks; where the miry streamlet runs,
 Plays with the other children, all a-smear . . .
 From this dark mud, pray wash yourself, my dear!
 Or else your mother, looking from the sky,
 Will fail to recognize you where you cry
 And so will deem you dead. . . . Be not defiled!
 Then she will mark her own and only child
 And bless the good Lord for your happy fate.
 She washed herself. Kind people do not wait
 To clothe her and at Kiev's Institute
 Send her to study. To her tale's pursuit
 We soon shall turn.

Meanwhile, the music plays;
 The prince and guests make merry all their days;
 The palace floor beneath their dancing moans,
 While in the village streets pale famine groans! . . .
 It groans, the Lord's grey scourge, throughout Ukraine;
 Thousands of famished peasants in its train
 Die starving. And the stacks of grain decay
 And yet the lords sell even chaff away
 To Jews, and at the famine they rejoice
 And pray for higher prices, with once voice—
 For then in far-off Paris, all a-glow,
 Lords of the manor will put on a show! . . .
 Is God aware of this?—It would be queer
 If He should see, and not bring judgment near!
 Or is He patient with the wicked here?

The years pass by. The people keep on dying:
 The famine on Ukraine is darkly lying,
 Through every village of our lord's domain.
 Decay had fouled the prince's stores of grain—
 But he cares not; right merrily he drinks;
 To sell the entire crop the rascal thinks.
 But still no Jew appears. . . . The crops mature,
 And folks give thanks to God for harvest sure. . . .
 Then, past all hope, behold the princess came
 From Kiev. . . . And the sun's consoling flame
 Dawned on the rifled village and its shame.

▼

She was a black-browed beauty, bright of eye,
 Just like her mother in the days gone by,
 But somewhat sad and melancholy too . . .
 And why so? Was her nature sad of hue?
 Or was the fair young maid perhaps in love?
 No, not at all. . . . Indeed she well might prove
 To have a happy spirit in her breast;
 But like a watchful weasel from its nest
 She'd gazed upon the world's corruption raw
 And grown surpassing sad at what she saw.
 About the village like a pretty dove
 She called on everyone with words of love;

And some she fed and some she comforted;
 Each day she made her rounds, her help to spread.
 Orphans to her apartment brought each other
 And joined in calling her their blessèd mother;
 The village prayed for her in gratitude.
 Meanwhile with money came the dealers rude.
 The prince is glad; sells them both grain and chaff;
 And drives the half-dead people, with a laugh,
 To thresh the grain. How promptly did they work!
 And at the winnowing none dared to shirk . . .
 Nor did the prince relax: he called each mate
 This headlong sale with drink to celebrate
 Out in the grove, for in his princely hall
 Sweet slumber holds his daughter's soul in thrall.
 Noise, hubbub, drunken clamour upward streams;
 And obscene songs are heard, and women's screams;
 And still the master howls: "We'll revel keep
 As long as my fair daughter stays asleep!"

VI

Meanwhile the daughter in seclusion stays
 In her sad room; she watched the moon ablaze
 Emerge from clouds and rise above the hill,—
 In its bright light, new charms the mountain thrill;
 The oak-trees, as by miracle, withdraw
 Their shadows to the plain in solemn awe;
 The horned owl hoots—from underneath the thatch
 It flits across the fields its prey to catch;
 The frogs are clamorous. Look, clear young eyes,
 At how the stars of God in millions rise;
 Gaze at the moon and stars, their glories number,
 As long as starlight will not let you slumber!

She rests her youthful head upon her hand
 And sadly looks till midnight o'er the land . . .
 She gazed; she wept; perhaps some sense of fate
 Was whispered to her heart in dark debate? . . .
 No matter! Having somewhat wept, she smiled;
 Then said her bedside prayers with accents mild,
 And fell asleep as softly as a child.

VII

Out in the grove lay everything pell-mell—
 Bottles and guests, each lying where he fell.
 The prince, however, does not mean to stop—
 Draining the final bottle's final drop,
 He rises with a laugh of lecherous doom
 And moves in darkness towards his daughter's room . . .
 Ah, hideous viper! Whither would you crawl?
 Come, sober up! He sobers not at all:
 Takes out a key; draws near; unlocks the door;
 And creeps to seize his daughter . . .

"Wake once more!

Awake, poor innocent! From slumber fling you,
 And kill the serpent that has come to sting you! . . .
 Kill him—God will not chide, but praise you rather—
 As Beatrice³⁹¹ Cenci slew her father,
 The cardinal,³⁹² nor feared that Heaven would con.
 Alas, she does not wake, she slumbers on;
 While God in silence takes no part therein,
 And, though He sees, He thus condones the sin. . . .
 Nothing is heard . . . Some moments pass . . . Then rise
 Appalling screams and agonizing cries,
 Heard only by the owls . . . Then once again
 Foul silence fell . . . But at her shrieks of pain
 The grain stacks and the barn had burst in flames
 And the stars vanished . . . Yet no word proclaims
 A deed that should have roused the thunderer.
 Even the drunken gentry did not stir,
 Although the villagers all rushed to watch
 The smoke that smeared the heavens with its blotch. . . .

Early next morning, when the guests were roused
 And found that trouble with their host was housed,
 Softly and imperceptibly they left
 A prince who soon was of all friends bereft . . .
 And we, too, shall forsake him—as will God.
 You only, hapless princess, from the rod

³⁹¹Pronounced as in Italian.

³⁹²Her father was not a cardinal.

Of cruel destiny can ne'er escape,
 My blossom blighted by infernal rape!
 You will still suffer for your father's sins.
 Ah, ruthless fate, let your dark disciplines
 Leave her at least in peace in her old age
 In utter loneliness! At least assuage
 Her life in foreign lands without a friend!
 But no, you will go with her to the end—
 And when death's hour shall come at last to save,
 Will bury her yourself within the grave . . .

Out in the village, no one heard or saw
 Where she had disappeared. Some thought with awe
 That the poor woman of their admiration
 Had perished in the midnight conflagration.

VIII

Sadly the village stands. Upon the hill
 The palace looms a shadowy form of ill.
 The prince is ailing; is too weak to rise;
 But no one comes to help him or advise;
 No one will call to visit the sick devil
 In his dark palace, from their fear of evil.
 But people, as their minds grew clear, would yearn
 And pray God that the princess might return.

She did not come, she did not come at all,
 The saintly damsel is beyond recall. . . .
 Where is she? In Kiev she took the veil.
 She had been born for living, sound and hale,
 And loving far beyond the call of duty,
 For shining with the grace of heavenly beauty,
 To hover like a saint above mankind,
 With charity to all, in heart and mind;
 And what occurred? Within a nunnery chaste
 All of that loving life has gone to waste. . . .

I roamed about Ukraine from inn to inn
 And chanced one day to come to Chihirin
 And to that women's convent in the swamp,
 Beyond the sand dunes, where the reeds are damp.

There an old nun told me a story strange
 Of how to this poor convent there did range,
 Only a year before, as in a dream,
 A princess from beyond the Dnieper's stream.
 There she had rested from the road she trod,
 And there she yielded up her soul to God. . . .
 "She was still young, and wondrous beautiful;
 One day the sun beat hot upon her skull
 And she fell ill; three weeks she lay in bed;
 To Sister Xenia and me she said
 The story of her life, and did confide
 The smallest detail of it ere she died.
 At many holy shrines she had been blest
 And here with us, poor soul, she found her rest! . . .
 Here is her blessed grave amid the moss! . . .
 We've had no time as yet to rear a cross. . . ."

Fortress of Orsk, 1847

TO MY FELLOW-PRISONERS

Remember, brothers (how I yearn
 That this dark fate may ne'er return!),
 How you and I, in humble doubt,
 Between a window's bars peered out
 And thought, perhaps: "Alas, and when
 On this bleak earth shall we again
 In gentle fellowship convene
 For converse on the years between?"
 Never, my brothers, nevermore!
 We shall not drink on Dnieper's shore,
 But shall disperse, and as we go,
 Bear to the woods and steppes our woe;
 We shall believe in liberty
 For yet a while and then must be
 At home with men who are not free . . .

Before that fate arrives to smother,
 I pray you, brethren, love each other,
 Love your Ukraine, and pray to God
 For her beneath despair's dark rod!

As for the Tsar, whom fate begot,
 Forget him, friends, and curse him not;
 And in my fierce captivity
 I beg you, friends, remember me! . . .

Fortress of Orsk, 1847

* * * *

The sun is setting and the hills grow dim,
 All bird-song ceases, and the fields are quiet,
 And man is glad because rest comes for him.
 But I look wakeful round; my spirit's fiat
 Sets me to fly to orchards of Ukraine;
 On, on I flit, deep in the gulfs of thought
 And thus my heart can find relief from pain.
 Fields, groves, and hills are now in darkness caught
 And in the deep, blue sky a star appears.
 "O evening star," I question it in tears,
 "Have you now risen also in Ukraine?
 Are hazel eyes now seeking you tonight
 In the blue sky? Have they forgotten quite?"
 If they have lost all memory of me,
 Then let them sleep, nor know my destiny!

Fortress of Orsk, 1847

* * * *

I was some thirteen years of age
 And pastured lambs without a wage.
 Whether the bright sun shone to win me
 Or some deep impulse stirred within me,
 In such amazing joy I trod
 As if in truth I walked with God. . . .
 I let the lunch-time summons pass
 And lingered in the tall, soft grass,
 Praying to God; I know not how
 My little heart o'erflowed, I vow,
 As in my orisons I knelt.
 The sky and thorp my rapture felt;

The lambs, it seemed, rejoiced in turn;
 The sun was warm and did not burn.
 But not for long that blessing stayed,
 And not for long I knelt and prayed.
 The savage sun, in reddening shine,
 Burned up that paradise of mine.
 As if from sleep I woke, and lo,
 The village had grown dark with woe;
 The dove-blue softness of the sky
 Grew suddenly all grey and dry.
 Upon the lambs I cast a glance—
 They were not mine, by any chance.
 Upon the crofts my gaze was thrown—
 No dwelling could I call my own.
 God gave me nothing, south or north!
 And so my bitter tears gushed forth.
 A maiden³⁹³ by the highway-side
 Near where my dream of rapture died
 Was reaping hemp; she heard me weep
 And came to lull my pangs to sleep;
 She wiped my tears to comfort me,
 And kissed my forehead tenderly.
 Once more the sun appeared to shine
 And everything on earth seemed mine,
 The meadows, groves, and orchards green;
 And merrily, with hearts serene,
 We drove to water, 'mid the flowers,
 The little lambs that were not ours.

How foolish! Still as I recall
 That hour, my heart bewails it all:
 Why could not God have let suffice
 My brief life in that paradise?
 Ploughing that field I could have died
 Quite ignorant of worldly pride,
 And would not now be deemed a clod,
 Nor had I cursed both man and God.

Fortress of Orsk, 1847

* * * *

This land is alien and the sun is cold.
 At home it scorched me savagely of old;
 My heart was full of bitterness and pain
 Even in that, our glorious Ukraine:
 No one at all was there to greet or love me,
 And little care had I for those above me;
 I merely roamed about, and prayed to God,
 And cursed the wicked lords whose fields I trod,
 And to those evil years my thoughts I cast,
 Those ugly epochs of the far-off past,
 The times when Jesus Christ was crucified . . .
 Today, kind Mary's Son would still have died!
 Nowhere did happiness console my mind,
 And happiness, it seems, I'll never find.
 No doubt fine people live in our Ukraine—
 Their sort befoul this foreign land's domain!
 How I would wish in my Ukraine to die—
 That troopers Muscovite would not supply
 A coffin for me made of alien planks;
 And that the blessed winds from Dnieper's banks
 Would bring me, after life's unceasing toil,
 At least a tiny lump of native soil . . .
 And nothing else! That, men, would be my wish . . .
 But even such a thought is gibberish!
 Why should I trouble God, with much ado,
 If what I pray for never will come true!

Fortress of Orsk, 1847

A DREAM

O ye my lofty hills, and still more lovely
 Than lofty as you stand in clear blue sky
 Afar from old Pereyaslav and from
 The mound of Vibla that is even older
 Than those cloudbanks that hang immovable
 Past Dnieper! . . . At a gentle pace I walk
 And gently gaze, when suddenly before me
 They rise, like miracles: Out of the clouds

Softly emerge the beetling precipices,
 The grove, the valley deep; the cottages,
 Pure-white, like children in white tunics, peer
 And play at blind-man's-buff in the ravine;
 And meanwhile in the lowlands our grey Cossack,
 The Dnieper, loudly roars along the meadows;
 And yonder, yonder, past the Dnieper's course,
 Upon a hillock, like a tiny chapel,—
 A little Cossack church is prominent
 With an inclining cross upon its spire.

Long has it stood there, patiently expecting
 The Zaporozhian from the Mighty Meadow;³⁹⁴
 And meanwhile with the Dnieper it converses
 And thus relieves its brooding melancholy;
 With its old, filmy window-panes it peers—
 A corpse with dull green eyes from out its coffin—
 Upon the world. You seek a restoration?
 Do not expect new glory as you gaze!
 Your people are despoiled, and of what use
 Is Cossacks' great renown to wicked lords?

And Trakhtemiriv,³⁹⁵ in its evil fate,
 Has strewn decrepit huts along the hill
 Just as a drunken beggar drops his satchels.
 There stands the site of the old Monastery—
 Where once of old a Cossack village stood.
 Surely the aspect of the place has changed
 Since all became the plaything of the tsars:
 The Zaporozhian³⁹⁶ region, and the village,
 The holy convent where our treasure lies—
 The cruel ones have smashed them all to pieces
 And you,—and you, O hills, permitted it. . . .
 Would I had never had to look upon you,
 Accursèd ones! . . . But no, you are not curs'd,
 But those who sowed dissension in our land,
 The venal hetmans³⁹⁷ and the wicked Poles. . . .

³⁹⁴See fn. 152.

³⁹⁵A Cossack town on the Dnieper, near Pereyaslav.

³⁹⁶Beyond the Dnieper's rapids.

³⁹⁷Only those who served the foreigners.

Forgive my violence, O lofty ones,
 O blue and lofty ones, most beautiful
 In all the world and holy past all others!
 Forgive me! For my indigent Ukraine
 I'll pray to God, because I love her so
 That I would cast a slur on God himself
 For her dear sake, and lose my soul for her!

High above Trakhtemiriv, on a cliff,
 Like some sad orphan who has come to leap
 Into the mighty Dnieper's depths, there stands
 A cottage set in utter solitude.
 From it, in all directions, all Ukraine
 And all the Hetman region can be seen;
 And close at hand a hoary man is sitting . . .
 He sits, and gazes, and his tears run down
 In melancholy thought. "Heigh-ho!" says he,
 "Ignorant fools who brought about the ruin
 Of this fair paradise! You, hetmans, you! . . ."
 His pensive brow grows dark. Some grievous thing
 He might have uttered but he holds his tongue . . .
 "Throughout the world I've wandered not a little,
 And worn both homespun drab and silken cloaks.
 Why talk about Kirghizian miseries
 Beyond the Urals—if their way of life
 Is easier than ours, in this Ukraine!
 And could the reason be that Kirghiz folk
 Are not yet Christians? . . . For alas, O Christ,
 What trouble you have caused! And how transformed
 The very spirit of God's human creatures!
 Our Cossack heads have fallen in the dust,
 Our foolish heads for 'Justice' and 'The Faith';
 And we have drunk our own and strangers' blood . . .
 And are we any better for it? No!
 We have become still worse! They've chained the people,
 Without the knife and dread *auto-da-fé*,³⁹⁸
 And tortured them to death. . . . Alas, ye lords,
 Ye Christian lords, who so belie the name!"

³⁹⁸See fn. 234.

My hoary one grew silent. Crushed with grief,
 He let his burly head fall drooping down.
 Over the grove, the Dnieper and the fields
 The evening sun has drawn a sheath of gold;
 The Cathedral of Mazeppa³⁹⁹ sparkles white,
 The mound of Old Bohdan⁴⁰⁰ is looming yonder;
 Along the Kiev road the bending poplars
 Are overshadowing the ancient mounds
 That house our triune⁴⁰¹ race; among the sedge
 The Alta⁴⁰² River and Trubaylo⁴⁰² meet
 As friendly as a brother and a sister,—
 All this makes glad the eyes, although the heart
 Weeps and refuses to survey the scene!

To the black earth the bright sun bids farewell;
 Now the round moon comes forth, and with him walks
 The evening star, his sister; as they come
 The clouds that hid them are suffused with joy;
 And as the old man gazes on their beauty
 The thankful tears go rolling down his cheeks:
 “To Thee, dear God, I pray, great Lord of Heaven,
 And give Thee thanks because, O heavenly Master,
 Thou hast not let me perish, but hast granted
 The goodly strength to overcome my sorrow
 And brought an old man to these holy hills,
 Here to live out my life in loneliness,
 To render grateful praise to Thee, to make
 My heart rejoice at Beauty in Thy world,
 To bury deep my soul, torn by men’s sins,
 Amid these lofty hills, and brood above them!”

He wiped away his tears, which were not cold
 In spite of age, and called to mind the years
 Of long ago and their departed bliss:
 “Ah, where and how was it? And what took place?
 What really happened, what was only dreamed?”

³⁹⁹The Cathedral of the Ascension in Pereyaslav, built by Hetman Mazeppa.

⁴⁰⁰What mound of Bohdan Khmelnytsky’s Shevchenko speaks of here is not clear, for his remains were buried in the church which the Hetman built in Subotiv.

⁴⁰¹Those of the Ukrainians, Poles, and Russians.

⁴⁰²Rivers near Pereyaslav, both the tributaries to the Dnieper.

Across what oceans did my journeys lie?
 The shadowy grove with all its greenery,
 The youthful, dark-browed beauty, the bright moon
 That shone amid its regiments of stars,
 The nightingale upon the cranberry bush
 Whose song would hush and then burst forth again,
 Praising the Lord of Heaven—all of that,
 Yes, all of that has happened in Ukraine!"
 And then the greybeard smiled, for, truth to tell,
 He once had been in love, engaged to marry,
 But parting came, and they were not united:
 He had been left to lead a lonely life
 And end existence in a little cottage.
 Again my ancient man grew melancholy;
 He walked around the cottage for a time,
 Then said his prayers and went inside to sleep;
 And once again the moon was lost in clouds.

Such was the dream that in this foreign land
 My spirit knew! My freedom seemed restored,
 As if I were reborn in this sad world.
 Grant me, O God, that at some future day,
 At least in my old age, I yet may stand
 Upon these hills despoiled of liberty,
 That I may live there in a little cottage,
 And that, although my heart is bruised and torn
 By sorrow, I may gladly bring it here
 To lie at rest upon the Dnieper's hills!

Fortress of Orsk, 1847

IRZHAVETZ⁴⁰³

Long years ago the Swedes made quite a stir,
 Then in defeat fled headlong with Mazeppa
 After Poltava's battle to Bendery;⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³A village in the region of Poltava in whose Cossack church was located the miraculous image of the Virgin Mary.

⁴⁰⁴Bendery, a town in Bessarabia, then under the Turkish rule. The Battle of Poltava was fought in 1709, shortly after Peter I ordered the Zaporozhian Sich to be destroyed.

And Hordienko,⁴⁰⁵ captain from the Sitch,
 Led his surviving troopers in their train,
 Weeping as he escorted their retreat—
 He wept because his Mother, our Ukraine,
 Would give no counsel how to reap the wheat⁴⁰⁶
 And win Poltava back. How great the harvest
 Could then have been, had all as one man stood
 And had the bold commander of Khvastiv⁴⁰⁷
 Joined with the Hetman! For in such a case
 No Cossack spears would have been shown as trophies
 Decking the roof-thatch of our crony⁴⁰⁸ Peter,
 Nor had our doughty wretches fled away
 Out of Khortitsia;⁴⁰⁹ nay, the wicked chief
 Of Prilutsk would have never held them back;⁴¹⁰
 Nor had the Virgin's icon in Crimea⁴¹¹
 Shed tears of holy sorrow for Ukraine.
 The Zaporozhians wandered day and night,
 Left the Great Meadow⁴¹² and their Mother Sitch,⁴¹³
 And with them took the icon of God's Mother,
 And naught beside, as to the Khan's domain,
 In the Crimea wandering, they bore
 The Zaporozhian camp—for further doom.

A cloud of blackness covered up the white,⁴¹⁴—
 The ugly Tartars burked the Zaporozhians.
 Although the Khan permitted them to settle

⁴⁰⁵Kost (Constantine) Holovko Hordienko who was one of the few Cossack leaders who did not go to the Tsar's side but remained loyal to Mazeppa.

⁴⁰⁶i.e., how to go about gathering the harvest of victory.

⁴⁰⁷Semen Paliy, a Cossack commander whose activity centred around the town of Khvastiv. Although hostile to Peter, he was not united with Mazeppa in the latter's struggle with Russia. Having a vast Cossack following, Paliy might have turned the scales at Poltava. See also fn. 426.

⁴⁰⁸Expressed sarcastically. "Spears in the roofthatch" is taken from a folksong.

⁴⁰⁹An island on the Dnieper, where the first Cossack encampment (the Sitch) was established.

⁴¹⁰The wicked chief of Prilutsk was Ivan Nis. Together with the traitor I. Halahan (who, before the Battle of Poltava, betrayed the Cossack Sitch to the Tsar), Nis sought to stop the Cossacks from fleeing after Mazeppa's defeat, assuring them that the Tsar would be merciful to them. However, those who heeded him were put to death after undergoing inhuman tortures.

⁴¹¹Where the icon was taken by the Cossacks.

⁴¹²See fn. 152.

⁴¹³See fn. 40.

⁴¹⁴White cloud, the Cossacks; black cloud, the Tartars.

A new encampment on a sandy tract,
 He would not let them build a Christian church;
 They placed the icon of the Most Blessed One
 Within a tent and prayed to her by stealth. . . .

Ah, may God pity you, my lovely country,
 Rich and luxuriant! Who has not marred you?
 If anyone could tell the authentic story
 About a single Polish magnate's deeds,
 One would fright hell itself! Old Dante, too,
 Would gape at what one single petty lordling
 Has perpetrated on Ukrainian soil!
 And yet they say all evil comes from God!
 Does He take pleasure then in torturing us?
 Why must my hapless country suffer so?
 How does she merit this? Why does she perish?
 Why are her children sitting mute in chains?

The bards have told us of our wars and quarrels,
 The years of bitter misery, the tortures fierce
 Inflicted on us by the Polish rack.
 But at the sequel to the Swedish rout,
 When Moscow's fury crucified our land,
 The Poles themselves would have been horrified,
 Struck dumb with utter fright, the drunken wretches,
 So have the army's leaders, Peter's dogs,
 Torn her apart and gnawed her bloody bones. . . .
 In their far camp, the Zaporozhian Cossacks
 Heard bells in Hlukhiv⁴¹⁵ sound and cannon roar
 As their poor brothers were to swamplands driven
 To build a capital; they heard them weep
 As hungry children mourn a father's death
 While they to Orel went to dig canals
 And perished in the snows of arctic Finland.
 The Zaporozhians in far-off Crimea
 Heard clearly all the Hetman land's perdition,
 Its undeserved demise; the wretches heard it;
 They listened, but were mute of tongue, for there
 The mirzas⁴¹⁶ pressed them hard; in misery

⁴¹⁵A town near the Russian border where Peter I ordered the Hetman capital to be moved in order to keep a close watch on the movements of the Cossacks.

⁴¹⁶Tartar military commanders (or overseers).

They suffered fearful torment, and they wept—
 And God's own Mother by their side gave vent
 To her most blessed tears; she burst out weeping,
 She, the Most Merciful, as when a mother
 Bewails her son; and God himself looked down
 Upon those tears and on our racked Ukraine:
 To mark those Cossack tears as well as those
 Shed by the Immaculate, he struck at Peter,
 And smote the oppressor dead in sudden judgment.
 The Zaporozhians to their homes returned
 And carried with them to the Hetman land
 The Virgin's icon all-miraculous
 And placed it in shrine at Irzhavetz,
 A church of stone; there to this day she weeps
 Over the evil fate of Cossack folk.

Fortress of Orsk, 1847

N. N.⁴¹⁷

My heavy-laden verse! My fatal⁴¹⁸ fame!
 It is through you that in a foreign land
 I live in torment . . . yet I don't regret it!
 For like a true and faithful spouse I love
 My pitiful Ukraine! And you, O Fame,
 Do what you will with my benighted self,
 But leave me not! I'll trudge with you to hell. . . .
 You welcomed Nero, Sardanapalus,⁴¹⁹
 Herod, Cain, Christ, and Socrates alike.⁴²⁰
 O Unpredictable! Caesar, the oppressor,
 And the kind Greek you loved in equal measure—
 For both men paid you tribute. As for me,
 What can I offer from my indigence?
 For what will you reward me with a kiss?
 Perhaps a single lay: "Ah, grove, my grove"⁴²¹

⁴¹⁷Undetermined title. Preserved here to identify the poem.

⁴¹⁸Because it was on account of his outspoken verses that he is now suffering in exile.

⁴¹⁹An Assyrian king who, in 606 B.C., together with his concubines, perished on a self-imposed pyre when he could not suppress a rebellion against his cruel and corrupt reign.

⁴²⁰Fame favours both the good and the bad, both Socrates and Nero.

⁴²¹A popular folksong—*Oy hayu, miy hayu*.

Poets more apt than I have sung in vain!
 Disgusting and bizarre it seems to think
 How many boisterous heads have vainly fallen
 To gain renown. . . . For brother gnaws on brother
 Like a brute cur and will not cease from sin . . .
 And yet that gift of fame, so loved by all,
 A mother out of wedlock may secure,
 Bought in a tavern from the other toppers.⁴²²

Fortress of Orsk, 1847

TO THE POLES

DEDICATED TO BRONISLAW ZALESKI⁴²³

When we were Cossacks yet, and when the Union⁴²⁴
 Was still unheard of, we knew happiness!
 With the free Poles we freely fraternized
 And gloried in our vast, expansive steppes;
 There in the gardens of our homes were raised,
 And blossomed, girls like lilies; mothers then
 Would glory in their sons, their free-born sons. . . .
 The sons grew up and filled with happiness
 Their mother's painful years of deepening age . . .
 Until disastrously in Christ's own name
 The Jesuits came, setting the torch of death
 To all our gentle paradise, and spilled
 A wide-expanding sea of tears and blood;
 Then hapless orphans in the name of Christ

⁴²²An obscure place in the original. According to Professor Vassil Simovich, those who praise others for their evil deeds, do so as if they were bribed with money or liquor in a tavern.

⁴²³Bronislaw Zaleski, a Pole who took part in the Polish rebellion against Russia in 1831. He was exiled to the Fortress of Orsk where he met Shevchenko and established warm friendship with him, as did many other Polish exiles there.

⁴²⁴Union of Berest in 1596, by which a certain part of the Ukrainian Orthodox population accepted the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic church. The Polish Jesuits, under the protection of the Polish authorities who then held sway over the Ukrainian territories west of the Dnieper, sought to expand this Union to include all Ukrainians. That was one of the reasons of the continual insurrections of the Orthodox element against the Poles. The attitude of the former is clearly revealed in the poems "The Night of Taras," p. 34, and *The Haydamaks*, p. 59. Shevchenko longed for peaceful relations between Ukraine and Poland, such as had existed before 1596.

Were tortured to the death and crucified . . .
 Then Cossack heads fell down like trampled grass;
 Ukraine is weeping, groaningly she weeps
 As to the dust head follows after head,
 And the oppressor rages without ceasing;
 Meanwhile the Polish priest with rabid tongue
 Vociferates: *Te Deum!*⁴²⁵ *Hallelujah!*

And thus it was, O Pole, my dearest friend,
 That greedy priests with greedy magnates joined
 To set us all at variance and divide us;
 And otherwise, we'd live today as friends.
 Link then your right hand with a Cossack's hand
 And offer him your true and candid heart!
 And once again, in the dear name of Christ,
 We shall renew our gentle paradise.

Fortress of Orsk, 1847

THE MONK⁴²⁶

TO P. A. KULISH⁴²⁷

In Kiev, in the region of Podilia,⁴²⁸
 Great happenings took place, and nevermore
 Will they occur again; though men expect them,
 They never will recur. . . . But I, my friend,

⁴²⁵*Te Deum Laudamus*, the Catholic hymn of praise and thanksgiving.

⁴²⁶Semen Paliy (actual surname—Hurko) who led a colourful life as a military leader, enjoying great popularity among the Cossacks and the civil population in general. Betrayed into the hands of the Russians by Mazeppa (who accused him of being an ally of the Poles), he was exiled in 1704 to the Yenisei region of Siberia. When Peter I needed military assistance from the Cossacks in his war against Mazeppa and Charles XII of Sweden, he had Paliy brought back to Ukraine in 1708, and it may be that this doughty warrior did fight against Mazeppa at Poltava, although this is not at all certain. Neither is it certain, as Shevchenko here implies, that Paliy became a monk when he retired from the Cossack forces. There were, however, many Cossack leaders who ended their days in a monastery.

⁴²⁷Panteleimon Kulish (1819–97), one of the greater Ukrainian writers, considered in his time as second only to Shevchenko in influence. He was a poet, novelist, dramatist, historian, and ethnographer. As to his relations with Shevchenko and his part in the Saints Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood, see Introduction, pp. xvii, xxiii, xxiv.

⁴²⁸Part of Kiev where important religious and educational institutions were located, from which issued the calls of freedom, equality, and fraternity, and where was advocated a social system without any higher or lower classes.

Will still expect them, eagerly await them,
And by that expectation rend my heart.

In Kiev, in the region of Podilia,
Our own fraternal freedom, without lord
Or downtrod peasant, independent-minded,
Clad in rich cloaks, sprawls out in happiness,
Makes fine the highroads with its silks and satins,
And will not turn aside for any man.

In Kiev, in the region of Podilia,
Cossacks are making merry: out of tubs
And buckets they are splashing wine like water;
The cellars, taverns with their counter-wenches,
And all their sparkling store of wines and meads
The Zaporozhians have seized upon
And quaff the liquor out of mugs of bark!
Meanwhile the music roaringly resounds
And makes folk merry; but the *bursa*⁴²⁹ students
Peer out in silence from their starveling college
That will allow them no such liberties
Lest they should sniff the breeze and run away. . . .

But whom are all the folk surrounding now
Together with the minstrels? In red trousers
Of velvet, whose low cuff-edge sweeps the street,
A Cossack walks. Alas, you years, you years!
What do you do to one? And to forget it,
The old man struck his heels against the ground⁴³⁰
So hard he raised a dust. Yes, even so!
And this same Cossack sings a song to boot:
 *"A crab, a crab crawls down the road;
 Let all be as our fate may bode!
 If I could find young wives of zest,
 I'd sow wild poppies with the best!
 I'll surely put my heels to work,
 And never let them pause or shirk,*

⁴²⁹A boarding college where usually poor students were sent to gain whatever education was available there. It bore a strict seminarian character. This institution is not to be confused with the Kiev Academy established in 1632 by the Metropolitan Petro Mohila.

⁴³⁰The old Cossack is having his last "fling" before becoming a monk.

*And yet leave plenty for my soles!
My heels outdo the brain's controls;
They bear the brunt beyond all doubt,
Yet I shall gladly work them out
Until they weary at the spell,
And then I'll use my soles as well!"*

Up to the Saviour's Church at Mezhihirsk⁴³¹
The hoary man went dancing on his way;
Thither behind him came his brotherhood
And all of holy Kiev's population.
He danced along up to the very gates;
Then raised the Cossack cry: "Poo-hoo! Poo-hoo!
Come, blessed monks, and welcome to your halls
An ageing comrade from the Mighty Meadow!"⁴³²
The holy gate then let the Cossack in
But closed again behind his back forever.
Who was this man who bade the world farewell?—
Semén Paliy, the Zaporozhian chief,
Whom wicked fortune could not finish off.

High, very high, mounts up the morning sun;
Low, very low, it sets when day is over,—
And in his cassock long the ancient monk
Goes pacing up and down his holy cell.
Next, to Vishhorod⁴³³ does he make his way,
To look down on Kiev, then seeks a hillock
To rest awhile and give his sorrow reign.
And then to Dzvinka's well in the deep valley
He goes to slake his thirst and to recall
How hard life is in this uncertain world!
Back to his cell he comes, within mute walls,
And calls to mind his youth's forgotten years;
Into his hands he takes the Holy Scriptures
Reads them aloud and in his dreaming thoughts
The ancient monk soars very far away . . .
The words of God grow mute; and in his cell,
As in the Sitch, the brotherhood revives,
And the grey Hetman,⁴³⁴ like an anxious owl,
Peers with exasperation in his eyes.

⁴³¹See fn. 246.

⁴³²See fn. 152.

⁴³³A village near Mezhihirsk.

⁴³⁴Mazepa.

Music . . . and dancing . . . and Berdichiv-town . . .⁴³⁵
 The shackles clash . . . he looks on Muscovy . . .
 Pine forests, snowy tracts . . . the Yenisei . . .
 And tears went rolling down upon his cassock . . .
 "Prostrate yourself—subdue your hard, old flesh,
 Read Holy Writ—read, listen to the bell,
 Indulge no more the yearnings of your heart:
 It gave you exile in Siberia,
 All through your life it has been duping you;
 Lull it to sleep, abandoning all thoughts
 About your Borzna⁴³⁵ and your Khvastiv⁴³⁵ deeds:
 For all will perish, you yourself will die,
 And no one will remember you hereafter. . . ."

Then the old man burst into bitter tears,
 Left off the reading of the Holy Scriptures,
 Paced restlessly about his cold, grey cell,
 And then sat down, plunged in still deeper thought:
 "Why was I ever born in such a world?
 Why have I loved so much my own Ukraine?"

The big bell from the steeple roared for matins.
 My monk arose, put on his cowl, took staff,
 Crossed himself briefly, gathered up his beads . . .
 And hobbled off to pray for his Ukraine.

Fortress of Orsk, 1847

* * * *

We ask each other on this earth:
 Why did our mothers give us birth?
 Was it in truth for good or ill?
 Why do we live? What is our will?
 Why do we die with wistful mind
 And leave unfinished deeds behind?

What deeds will stand in stern array
 Against me on the Judgment Day?

⁴³⁵Localities of Paliy's exploits. He was born in Borzna.

Perhaps those children who were born
 In servitude and died forlorn
 And never grew to manhood's stations
 To shame Thee with their accusations!

Fortress of Orsk, 1847

* * * *

I am distracted. Where am I to go?
 What shall I do, and how begin my woe?
 To curse my destiny and men, by God,
 Beggars the effort! How am I to plod
 In loneliness upon this foreign soil?
 In this seclusion, what shall be my toil?
 If I could hope to gnaw my fetters through,
 I'd gnaw them gladly without more ado . . .
 But experts to their steel such strength bequeath
 That they defy all gnashings of our teeth . . .
 Woe to us waifs and convicts as we shiver
 On this vast steppe beyond the Ural River!

Fortress of Orsk, 1847

* * * *

Three nights long now, row on row,
 I embroider and I sew;
 Lace and brodered threads I serry—
 But on Sunday I'll make merry!
 Ah, hempen cloth dyed deep with red!
 Admire it, maids, in beauty spread!
 Admire it, lads of handsome poise,
 My Zaporozhian Cossack boys!
 Admire our work, invoke love's spells,
 And wed perhaps with someone else
 Who offers nuptial towels⁴³⁶ to you . . .
 As Cossack lads are wont to do!

Fortress of Orsk, 1847

⁴³⁶Embroidered towels offered by the young woman to the messengers of her suitor, in token of her consent to marry him.

A KERCHIEF

Was it the will of God that made it so?
 Or just her fate? In servitude she grew
 And with a luckless orphan fell in love;
 The poor lad, like a dove, sits with his maid
 From evening twilight to the morning star
 At the kind widow's hut—they sit and chat,
 Waiting the Feast of the Immaculate,⁴³⁷
 When they should wed. And finally it came . . .
 From Chihirin throughout the whole fair land
 The great bells tolled their summons to the lads
 To saddle horses, sharpen swords and sabres,
 And to assemble to war's wedding feast,
 A joyful festival and bloody courting.

On Sunday, very early in the morning,
 The bugles and the trumpets sounded loudly;
 Out on the road the famous armed companions
 Started ere sunrise on their mighty march.
 A widow to her son, her only child,
 Would say farewell; a sister to her brother;
 And to a lonely lad an orphan maid.
 For she, too, saw him off: watered his horse
 Ere sunrise at the well, brought out his weapons,
 The golden sabre and the flintlock musket.
 For many miles, through many fields, she went
 Beside him for a final sad farewell
 Deep in the valley, and she gave him there
 A handkerchief embroidered bright with silk
 As a remembrance in a foreign land.
 O kerchief, precious kerchief, laced and broidered!
 Upon the saddle of the gallant youth,
 You will bear witness to his Cossack courage!

In sorrow she returned, and sadly watched
 The beaten path for him, adorned herself
 With flowers and fine garments, as each day

⁴³⁷One of the feasts of the Virgin Mary (her Dormition), falling on August 29. Not to be confused with the Roman and Greek Catholic feast of the Immaculate Conception.

She watched for his return. When Sundays came,
 She would ascend the mound to look for him.
 A summer passed; another sped away;
 And in the third the famous armed companions
 Came flying back at last to their Ukraine.
 A regiment appears, a second comes,
 And following a third, as yet unseen—
 Ah, hapless woman, do not gaze at it,
 For they are bringing you a dark misfortune:
 An oaken coffin, cloaked with silken cloth,
 And there behind it, with his officers,
 The company's commander, clad in black,
 The Wizard⁴³⁸ from the Sitch, walks slowly on;
 After him move the chieftains; as they stride,
 They weep; and bear along the Cossack armour—
 The well-forged cuirass, hacked in many places,
 The golden sabre, three great heavy muskets
 And pistols three. Upon the battered armour
 The Cossack's blood shows dry and dark of hue;
 They lead his jet-black steed, whose hooves are shattered;
 And on his heaving back a saddle sits
 That carries an embroidered handkerchief.

Fortress of Orsk, 1847

TO A. Y. KOZACHKOVSKY⁴³⁹

It happened long ago, when still at school,
 I'd make my cantor-teacher seem a fool
 By my neat theft of a five-copeck piece
 (I was half-naked in my beggaries),
 And then a sheet of paper I would buy;
 A little book its folds would then supply
 Whose borders I would deck with crosses fine
 And bold vignettes of flowery design,

⁴³⁸One of the leaders whom the Cossacks respected for his seeming occult powers which he used against the enemy. There were many among the Cossack troops who enjoyed such a reputation.

⁴³⁹Andriy Kozachkovsky, a physician who treated Shevchenko during his serious illness in Pereyaslav in 1845.

And with a blend of ecstasy and awe
 Would copy sayings of Skovorodá,⁴⁴⁰
 Perhaps a canticle from Advent-time,
 And mid tall grass, in solitary grime
 Where none could see or hear me, I would sing
 And weep betimes in bitter reckoning . . .

And later on, in years of manly health,
 It was my fate to write my verse by stealth,⁴⁴¹
 Again to embellish booklets⁴⁴² slight and cheap
 And in tall grasses softly sing and weep—
 Yes, bitterly! I know not God's intent—
 Why I have had so harsh a punishment . . .
 Schooled as a child, I suffered as I grew;
 Schooled as a man, I now grow grey of hue;
 Schooled as a fool, I'll find a grave's release;
 All for the sake of that five-copeck piece
 That, as a child, I from the cantor stole,
 Does God pour down His judgment on my soul. . . .

Then hark to me, my friend so good,
 My Cossack of the eagle's brood,
 Learn how to doom I have been hurled,
 How I am weary of the world!
 Brother, mid all that prudence shuns,
 I pray you, teach your little ones
 Not to write poetry at all⁴⁴³
 In hapless days when they are small.
 If one of them should thus mis-spend
 His days, let him be secret, friend;
 Let him seek some secluded nook
 And there, with weeping, ply his book

⁴⁴⁰Hrihoriy Skovoroda (1722–94), a Ukrainian philosopher who wandered from place to place throughout Ukraine, preaching to all and sundry the Christian virtues of brotherhood and tolerance and particularly the precept "Know thyself." For that reason he became known as a Ukrainian Socrates. Skovoroda was also a poet and a writer of fables to which he imparted the moralistic bent of his teachings. He was one of the first Ukrainian men of influence to condemn serfdom as an evil institution.

⁴⁴¹Shevchenko was forbidden to write and to paint or draw during his exile.

⁴⁴²Writing by stealth, Shevchenko hid his poems in the leggings of his boots. Thus he saved four such "bootleg" booklets.

⁴⁴³It was Shevchenko's poetry ("The Dream," "The Caucasus") that in the main brought upon him the sentence of exile.

So quietly God shall not hear
 Nor his own father see his tear;
 So that it may not be his fate
 To know the woes I execrate,
 The tortures under which I smother
 In this captivity, my brother! . . .

Along the ramparts like a thief I strain
 Stealthy, on Sunday morning, to the plain;
 Across the sand-dunes, Ural's bank I see
 And then the steppe, as vast as liberty;
 And then my bruised and aching heart
 To leap in sudden joy will start
 As from the stream a salmon leaps;
 In secrecy a smile it keeps
 And flies up like a happy dove
 To soar the alien fields above,—
 At such a time I feel the grace
 Of freedom in the open space . . .
 Up to the hilltop then I prance
 To gaze across the vast expanse
 And there to think of my Ukraine—
 And yet I brood on it with pain . . .
 Though steppes to either land are lent,
 Yet they, alas, are different.
 Here they are ruddy-red to view,
 While there⁴⁴⁴ they lie, a heavenly blue,
 And blessed green the steppe-land yields
 As if embroidered bright with fields,
 High barrows of the ancient dead
 And shadowy meadows softly spread.
 But weeds are here and wastes of sand;
 No tiniest mounds our thoughts command
 To call to mind the tribes of yore—
 No one, it seems, lived here before!
 From time's past record to this day
 This wilderness was hid away,
 And yet we found it in the end;
 Forts we have built, this to defend,
 And soon, no doubt, will barrows spread
 To bury deep a host of dead!⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴⁴In Ukraine.

⁴⁴⁵Expressed with bitter irony.

O hapless destiny! O native land!
 When shall I ever leave this barren strand?
 Mayhap (though God forbid!), here ends my track
 And as I die these red fields will grow black?⁴⁴⁶

"Back to your barracks! To your cell again!"
 A sudden voice cries out to give me pain,
 And I awake. Around the hillock's flank,
 I slip in stealth along the Ural's bank,
 Behind the walls. And so I celebrate
 My holy Sunday in this place of hate!
 And Monday? My dear friend! With black intent
 The night invades the stinking tenement;
 Dark thoughts besiege me and would storm my heart,
 To countless fragments blast my hopes apart;
 And all the faith I labour to express
 They scatter far in dusty worthlessness;
 They halt the night: the hours like year-spans, nay
 Like ages, slowly ooze themselves away,
 And many a time with tears of bitter blight
 I've wet my pillow through the endless night.

My soul's debility is not the cause
 Of nightly weeping in this exile's claws;
 It is my grievous sins that seek release—
 From which I fain would win my final peace.
 Alas, they will not stay their dark control
 Or loose their livid torment from my soul . . .
 How horrible it is, my dearest friend,
 To wait in silence for my fatal end! . . .
 To the last drop my days and years are proved:
 Where, when, what persons have I ever loved?
 To whom have I done good, by any art?
 No one in all the world has held my heart . . .
 I've wandered in a wooded wilderness,
 And yet I once was free, with power to bless!
 But serfdom wasted all my spirit's store,
 And freedom seemed a fleeting visitor
 Who knew zest in his brief intoxication
 But lost himself amid the steppe's stagnation,

⁴⁴⁶i.e., in his grave.

And finally decided in his pain
That he would never taste of joy again.

Nothing will now avail me, Lord!
As people often say:
"There will be punishment in life
But sin's effects will stay. . . ."

I pray to God to make the dawn appear,
As if it were my freedom shining clear.
The cricket ceases; the Reveillé sounds;
And then I pray that night may make its rounds!
For they will take this old fool out to drill
And of his folly⁴⁴⁷ make a mockery still,
To teach him how to value freedom's ways
And know that fools are beaten to a daze.

And so my days and weeks pass on
And thus, perhaps, will soon be gone
The last years of this life of stress!
But as for God, I do confess
I suffer here for justice sake
And at my lot no cavil make!
I only can beseech the Lord:
"Let me not here, in wastes abhorred
Die exiled, by all men ignored!"

My youthful years are passing on;
Gone is my freedom, starkly gone;
And hope resumes its wicked task
Of mocking me in all I ask,
And adding sorrow to my soul:
But if I shall outlive this dole
And drink again on Dnieper's shore,
And see you too, my friend, once more,
Perhaps within your peaceful dwelling
I'll sit with you, old torment telling.
Can this come true? Alas, I fear
Even to dream of such good cheer.
Can I return to those I love?
Or must I but from Heaven above

⁴⁴⁷Apparently his folly in writing incriminating verses.

Look down upon my fair Ukraine
 And gaze at you, my friend, again?
 But there are seasons that I dread
 When not a tear is left to shed;
 At such times I would pray to die
 Did not Ukraine with dove-blue sky
 And Dnieper with high, grassy bank
 And you my precious friend so frank
 Forbid me with my failing breath
 To pray to God to send me death.

Fortress of Orsk, 1847

THE MUSCOVITE SOLDIER'S WELL⁴⁴⁸

TO Y. KUKHARENKO⁴⁴⁹

"Our life's not worth the living, I declare! . . ."
 —"Then go and drown yourself. . . ."—"But in that case,
 What would my hapless wife and children do?"
 —"So there you are! Tell truth, then, just sit down
 And write this story as it really happened;
 And then perhaps you'll sing a different tune!
 Begin like this: 'A village once there was . . . !'
 And lest you crawl into a foreign land,
 Write also: 'in Ukraine. And in that village
 A widow lived; this widow had a daughter
 And a young son whose age was seven years. . . .
 Now children are a blessing when you're wealthy—
 Then all you have to do is give God thanks.
 But the poor widow had no cause to thank him,
 Because their sufferings became so painful
 She almost died. She dreamt of turning nun
 Or seeking death by drowning; but felt sorry
 For her small children and stayed on to help them,
 Just as a mother would, and that is that!
 As years went by she dreamed of sons-in-law,
 For her Katrusia was now growing up. . . ."

⁴⁴⁸The first version of the poem. Another appears on p. 473.

⁴⁴⁹Y. Kukharenko, who died in 1862, was the commander of the Black Sea forces. He wrote a play dealing with the manners and customs among his troops. During Shevchenko's exile, Kukharenko helped him in whatever he could.

What normal girl would want to stay a spinster
 And let her maiden beauty fade away?
 No, Katie would not be that kind of girl!

In that same village, a hard-working orphan
 Grew as a hireling. Usually they say
 A waif like that amounts to nothing good;
 But this young lad seemed full of honest breeding
 As if a father good had reared him up!
 Somehow or other, he saved up some money,
 Bought himself clothes, a cloak of splendid cloth,
 And seemingly, from nothing at the start,
 He got enough of hard-earned cash together
 To buy a little garden and a cottage.
 He thanked his masters for their bread and salt
 And all good people for their kind advice,
 And straightway hurried to the widow's daughter
 To ask her right away for wedding towels!⁴⁵⁰
 His marriage-brokers⁴⁵¹ did not haggle much
 About a dowry (as the gentry do),
 Nor did the priest demand a heavy price
 But, to the wonder of the village folk,
 For a karbovanetz⁴⁵² or so agreed
 To wed the couple on a week-day morning!

The widow's eyes were wet no more with tears.
 And in this manner, friend, you ought to live
 And you will find that life is kind enough.
 Life is well worth the living, if a man
 Has someone he can love. But people say:
 "Just love yourself, and God will surely help you!
 But what will happen when you come to die?
 Can you take money with you? No, poor chap!
 But love is God's own grace! So then, my friend,
 Love wife and children, give the poor your gains,
 And only then will you find gains increase!"
 Let's rest and have a chat. . . . What do you think:
 Has the spring wheat begun its sprouting yet?

⁴⁵⁰See fn. 436.

⁴⁵¹Those whom the suitor sends to his prospective bride to plead for him and to receive her consent (or refusal).

⁴⁵²A gold piece.

THE SECOND

Spring wheat? How in the world is that your theme?
 I still must plough before I sow my rye.
 Is that all, uncle, that you have to think on?
 Have you no interest, have you not heard—
 Perhaps you did, but simply have forgotten—
 That a new magazine has just been published?

THE FIRST

Is that so?

THE SECOND

But the strangest thing about it—
 Polish it's not, nor Russian, like "The Farmer,"—
 You'd be surprised—they call it a review,
 With some such title as "La Mode"—last year
 I bought a copy in Rómen for my Pasha . . .

THE FIRST (*under his breath*)

And people fancy that you're one of ours!
 (*Aloud*) No, as I live, I haven't heard of it!

THE SECOND

And in that journal my dear Pasha read
 Of how the Germans seeded grass, which later
 They harvested with sickles! All of this
 Was written out in verses, not the sort
 That our own poets have been writing, either . . .

THE FIRST

You have the headpiece of a swineherd, man . . .
 Forgive my saying so!

THE SECOND (*pretending he has not heard*)

Ah, what a life!

(*He walks about, whistles, and then sings.*)

Ah, what a life, young fellow!

Your eyes some heart might wreck!

But you need a wife about as much

As a stone around your neck!

THE FIRST

Enough of singing. Call a halt to it!

THE SECOND

Why are you eager to complete your tale?
I, to be frank, had thought perhaps a drink . . .

THE FIRST

But I think differently. If we should drink,
We would get drowsy and would surely fail
To understand the yarn. Sit down, my fellow,
And, with God's help, let's finish off the story!

So the poor dears were married, and the folk
Would wonder how these orphans got to live.
A year passed, then another, and again
They marvelled how those erstwhile hapless waifs
Could so increase their wealth indoors and out,
In storehouse, yard, and barn, and in the fields.
Their children bloomed like flowers, dark-browed and
lovely,

And often would ask beggars in to dine;
The rich, moreover, did not even wait
To get an invitation; yes, the rich,
Greedy and selfish, did not pass them by,
And never ceased to grieve that beggar folk
Were always treated to such splendid meals!
"If they have food to waste, they ought to sell it!
They've children of their own who should be cared
for! . . ."

Now hark what envious hearts can perpetrate,
As well as boundless greed! The rich kept calling,
Until one night, from malice at that bounty,
They set the house on fire. . . . Had they been lords
Of rank and education such an act
Could have been comprehended, could it not?
But those who did the fiendish deed I tell of
Were folk who wore coarse homepun day by day. . . .
It's difficult, my friend, to understand
Mankind as one grows older, and yet worse
To nourish up a viper in one's youth:
It will bewitch you with its green snake eyes . . .
The devil take you! Fool, have you forgotten
That Death himself is breathing down your neck?

They burned down everything, to the last straw,
And all the children perished in the fire,
While neighbours, rich and poor, were glad at heart.
The rich rejoiced, because they gained thereby;
The poor, because the fire's unhappy victims
Were levelled with themselves. They all assembled
To comfort them—and make their sorrows worse:
“Ah, what a pity! If you had but known,
You had not wasted money on the poor
And would not feel the loss so badly now. . . .
So what do you intend to do now, Maksim?
(For that's the name by which all people called him.)
Sell all your cattle! Come and work for us!
And then we'll see how everything will go!
Cart salt again, get on your feet once more. . . .”
Then Maksim thanked them all for their advice.
—“I must consider what I'll have to do.
If I can't make ends meet, I'll look for work . . .
But where's my Katerina, black-browed beauty? . . .
She in the past has always counselled well
And will advise me in my present straits! . . .”

Alas, that counsel proved of no avail . . .
Your oxen and your cows died all at once . . .
While your Katrusia has gone wandering off,
The doxy of some lustful Moscow troopers.

This is the truth that must be written down:
Maksim took thought awhile, and grieved awhile,
Then offered up a gentle prayer to God:
“Lord, Lord!” he whispered twice, and that was all.

A ukase from the Empress next arrived
To draft young men for service in the army.
—“I have not let the widow drown herself,
Nor shall I let her be a beggar now!”
Maksim declared, and left her all his land,
Because the widow's son was in the draft
And had been taken to the mustering post.
Even such deeds of darkness stealthily
Take place on earth! And you, ye literate,
Ought to be whipped for seeking sympathy

And crying out to Allah for His mercy
 When any trifling evil touches you! . . .
 You don't hear simple people cry for pity! . . .

THE SECOND

What, in their dull existence, can they know
 Of what you call the grace and love of God? . . .

THE FIRST

What's that? I cannot hear you very well!

THE SECOND

They're numb clear through, I tell you, or they grow
 Like cabbages in any garden plot.

THE FIRST

You mean, you say so. . . . But enough of that!
 Suppose they vegetate, and I will tell you
 The simple reason, if you'd like to know:
 You will not let them live like human beings
 Because you only live to please yourselves
 And shut to them your fine, enlightened eyes.⁴⁵³

THE SECOND

If we keep writing in this sketchy style,
 We'll never finish till the cows come home.
 Well, where is that unhappy son-in-law?

THE FIRST

The widow's son came home; and in his place
 The son-in-law took service in the army.
 No one felt sorry for him; in the village
 They even laughed at him! Nor do I know
 If Katerina ever came back home
 Or disappeared forever. Rumour had it
 That out in Uman⁴⁵⁴ people shaved her head

⁴⁵³In this and in the previous aside, it seems that Shevchenko makes fun of those Ukrainians who, while ignorant, appear to rise above their element and assume airs of importance. This applies more to the second speaker whose arrogant attitude towards the common folk Shevchenko exposes as naively ludicrous.

⁴⁵⁴A town in the southeastern part of the province of Kiev.

And she was led in shame about the streets
 For stealing, and she forthwith drowned herself.
 But all that, as you know, may be invented,
 For people can do all things—drown or strangle;
 Perhaps as much truth lay in the report
 As that pears grow upon a willow-tree.
 All that I know is that there was a song
 Made up about her; I have heard it sung
 At evening parties by some gay young women:
 "A rustle passes through the oak-tree's leaves;
 The young lads, in their rush, have lost their caps;
 Only one hireling hung on to his
 As he was sweet upon the widow's daughter. . . ."
 It was an obscene song . . . let's go no further!
 Thus imperceptibly the years passed by
 (Write thus)—and as a punishment for sin
 God smote the Poles; beyond the Ural River
 Pugachev⁴⁵⁵ hooted in rebellious anger.
 The poetasters in their odes extolled
 The Empress and the war—and only we
 Sat quietly at home,⁴⁵⁶ thanks be to God!

After that awful winter,⁴⁵⁷ home again
 Maksim returned, and, lo, one leg was missing:
 He'd lost that leg in battle, he explained,
 But gained a silver cross as recompense!
 Why did he hobble back? He had no home,
 No brother, sister, anyone at all.
 Why, then, come dragging back? Alas, who knows?
 You know the saying—it is easier
 To die in ashes in one's native land
 Than in a foreign palace! Have you heard it? . . .

⁴⁵⁵Emilian Pugachev, who incited a rebellion against the Russian landlords and Catherine II herself in 1773. Resembling Peter II, Catherine's husband (of whom she, it is said, disposed violently), he united under his banner not only the serfs but certain Tartar tribes and, by rapine and wanton murder, caused the imperial government much difficulty before the rebellion was finally suppressed in 1775 and Pugachev himself captured and beheaded.

⁴⁵⁶Ukrainians did nothing in their own behalf.

⁴⁵⁷In 1787, when the snow remained on the ground till June.

THE SECOND

Come, uncle! Let us quickly write the end,
For both of us already nod towards sleep . . .

THE FIRST

The crippled soldier grieved: What could he do?
The widow's son was recently conscripted
Into the Cuirassiers, while she herself
Had sadly passed into the other world.
Where should he turn? How pass the winter months?
It was now autumn; winter soon would follow.
No luck had he in the entire world,
Into the boundless plain it fled away. . . .
To the church cantor then he made petition
To let him pass the winter in the schoolhouse,
Since in the Russian army they had taught him
To read and write; he also wore a wig,
For even Moscow's troopers at that time
Wore grey wigs made with curls, yes, every man—
And sprinkled them with powder, God knows why . . .
And so Maksim—who was now literate—
Would often help the cantor in the choir,
And sang the psalms to speed departed souls,
And sometimes, with the schoolboys, he would carry
The victual-payment to the requiem priest
And in the season of pre-Christmas Lent
The poor chap even begged, for Christ's dear sake.
(Just write down what I tell you: truth comes first
And it is evil to deceive the people.)
But not a single wicked word from him
Would any hear. "Both good and evil fate,
Everything comes from God!" he would declare.
Nor would he weep or sigh; like some meek child
He always seemed. Not even dogs would snap
At good Maksim, the trooper Muscovite.
Further, on Sundays and on holy days
He groomed himself somewhat and trudged along
To where the widow's burned-out cottage stood.
There in the garden he would sit, and think
About the widow, and recite the psalms
To give her soul repose. For the salvation

Of his lost spouse he next would softly pray.
 Then, wiping off his tears, he would remark
 "All things must come from God!" and feel relieved.
 During the Lent before St. Peter's feast.⁴⁵⁸
 Or our dear Saviour's he would not remain
 Hived in the schoolhouse, but took pick and shovel
 And trudged afar into the open fields.
 There, where the highway through the valley ran—
 What do you think he did? He dug a well!
 At last he reached the water. And that summer,
 Upon the feast of good Saint Makoviy⁴⁵⁹
 The well was bless'd. An oak-tree, too, was planted
 To be a marker for the passers-by.
 And the next summer, children found the trooper
 Dead in the valley just beside his well:
 He had gone out, poor chap, for a last look
 At this, his well, and all men saw him buried
 In that same valley; and thereafter called
 Both well and valley gladly after him;
 And on our Saviour's feast,⁴⁶⁰ or Makoviy's,
 The priests still bless the water in that spot,
 And there the oak-tree still is growing green.
 Whoever walks that way will pause a while
 Beside the green oak-tree and in its shadow
 Will sit and rest and as he tastes the water,
 Cool and refreshing, he recalls Maksim. . . .

Live as he did, you half-brained sons of earth,
 And you will not be weary of this life!

Fortress of Orsk, 1847

* * * *

As they say, once a dog gets used
 to running after a waggon, it will
 also run after a sleigh.

—a popular saying

So, too, do I write now: And yet I feel
 That I am only wasting ink and paper . . .

⁴⁵⁸On July 12.

⁴⁶⁰The Feast of the Transfiguration, on August 19.

⁴⁵⁹On August 1.

However, once (I swear I do not lie!),
 When I would notice or remember something,
 I'd write so well about it that I'd weep
 And in so doing seemed to flutter back,
 At least for one short hour, to Ukraine;
 And at my country I would gaze and gaze
 And then my heart would feel as sweet relief
 As after doing someone a good deed.
 Today, I cannot say I do not love her,
 That I have quite forgotten my Ukraine,
 Or that I curse those wicked reprobates
 On whose account I suffer as I do,—
 I swear, my friends, that I forgive them all⁴⁶¹
 And that I pray to the All-Merciful
 That you may not recall me with ill-will;
 For I have never done you any harm;
 Yes, I have lived among you for some time
 And hope some good thing that I may have done
 May still remain to bless you where you are.⁴⁶²
Fortress of Orsk, 1847

1848

* * * *

Come, let us turn again to versifying!
 (In secrecy, of course!) Let us again,
 While things upon the work-bench still are new,
 Turn the old garment inside out, reline it,⁴⁶³
 In other words—how can I tell you this
 Without confusing you?—Let us again

⁴⁶¹The Christian ideal of forgiveness, which Shevchenko voices so often in his works.

⁴⁶²With this poem ends the first "bootleg" book, which included the thirteen poems he wrote in the St. Petersburg citadel. The next poem begins the second booklet.

⁴⁶³i.e., let us use the old material, say the same things, but make them appear like new.

Cast imprecations upon men and fate!
 Let me curse men—that they may be aware
 That I exist, and so pay me some heed;⁴⁶⁴
 Let me curse fate—so that she may not sleep,
 That she may come and give me better care.
 For as it is, just see what she has done:
 She has forsaken my poor, sorry self,
 And left it⁴⁶⁵ with indifference at the crossroads . . .
 And it, poor creature, young but hoary-whiskered,
 Is like a humble child that trudges softly
 Past alien hedges and beyond the Ural.
 It found itself in a vast wilderness,
 And in captivity . . . O evil fate,
 How could I help but curse you? Yet I'll spare you
 My maledictions, O my destiny,
 As I continue to conceal myself
 Behind the ramparts and with careful stealth
 Resume my versifying and indeed,
 As I grow tired of life, shall still expect
 A visit from you in my exile here.
 Come, from beyond the Dnieper's broad expanse,
 You, O my fortune, who may still be fair!
Fortress of Orsk, 1848

* * * *

Behind the door in God's own dwelling-place,
 An axe lay. (God at that time walked the earth
 With Holy Peter, working miracles.)
 And a Kirghizian, to his misfortune
 (And what a great misfortune!), stealthily,
 Without attracting notice, stole that axe
 And to the green oak-forest straightway went
 To get some kindling wood. He chose a tree,
 He gave it quite a chop, and, as he did,
 Out of his hands the axe then tore itself
 And went about the forest mowing trees!

⁴⁶⁴In exile, Shevchenko was abandoned by his friends in Ukraine and received letters only from a few close ones.

⁴⁶⁵Shevchenko feels so sorry for himself that he speaks of himself in the neuter, as of a helpless child.

It was a horrible and fearful sight:
 The oaks and every other kind of tree,
 However ancient, were cut down like grass
 And laid in swaths; while out of the ravine
 Arose a conflagration; clouds of smoke
 Covered the blessed sun, and darkness followed.
 From Ural to Tinghiz, up to the Aral,
 The water in the lakes was boiling over.
 Villages, towns, and cities were ablaze,
 People lamented, wild beasts howled and hid
 Beyond Tobol,⁴⁶⁶ far in Siberian snows.
 For seven years the axe of God continued
 To mow the woods, the conflagration raged,
 And God's bright world grew murky in the smoke. . . .

In the eighth summer, on a Sunday morning,
 Like a child's doll in a white tunic dressed,
 The blessed sun arose. The wilderness
 Still looked as black and ugly as a gypsy:
 Wherever once a town or village stood,
 No brand was left to smoulder, and the ashes
 Were scattered by the wind; no blade of grass
 Was left, and but a single tree stood green,—
 All, all alone, in the vast steppe it swayed.

Throughout the wilderness the ruddy clay
 And the baked shards showed red, the prickly grasses
 And weeds and random feather-grass with sedge
 Blackened in a ravine beneath a mountain;
 And sometimes came a wild Kirghizian
 On his decrepit camel up the slope.
 Mysterious things then happen there: it seems
 As if the very steppeland spoke to God,
 The camel weeps, the nomad droops his head
 And at Kara-Butak⁴⁶⁷ and the steppe he gazes.
 Singich-ahach⁴⁶⁸ the Kaizak then recalls,
 Then slowly down the mountain slope he comes
 To vanish in that wilderness of clay.

⁴⁶⁶A river in far eastern Siberia.

⁴⁶⁷A river in the Kaizak steppes.

⁴⁶⁸The lone tree which Shevchenko saw on his way to exile, between Orenburg and the Fortress of Orsk.

All, all alone in that forgotten valley
 Amid the flatland, by a highway bare,
 Stands that tall tree, abandoned there by God;
 Untouched by axe or flames, it whispers low
 And tells the valley of that fatal hour.
 And the Kirghizians will never pass
 That hallowed tree, but down into the valley
 They come to marvel at the miracle;
 Then to the tree they pray, and offer gifts,
 Beseeching it to spread its branches wide
 Above the desolation of their land.

Fortress of Orsk, 1848

THE BRANDED CONVICT

Wandering aimless in a foreign land,
 Along the Elek,⁴⁶⁹ an old man I met,
 A very ancient one, who was, moreover,
 A countryman of ours, a branded convict
 Who once had suffered torture nigh to death.
 It was a Sunday when we chanced to meet
 Out on the plain and soon began to chat.
 The old man called to mind Volynia,⁴⁷⁰
 That blessed realm, the freedom and good fortune
 That in his far-off youth he had enjoyed,
 And all the circumstances of his life.
 In the tall grass we sat, behind the rampart,
 And there conversed, in mutual confidence.
 —“A long life I have lived!” the old man said.
 “Everything comes from God, ay, all from God!
 For foolish man can do naught by himself!
 Thus I myself, as you can plainly see,
 Have wasted my own life and ruined it.
 I blame no man for that; nor have I begged,
 In all my life, from any man at all.
 And so, my son, my dear and only friend,

⁴⁶⁹A tributary to the Ural River.

⁴⁷⁰A western province of Ukraine.

Thus will I end my days in this strange land
In exile."

And the branded prisoner
Broke into silent tears.

My old grey friend!
As long as hope still dwells within the heart,
There let it live, and drive it not away!
Let it at times warm up your empty nook
And make your aged eyes shed youthful tears;
Then, laved with tears, your heart will find relief
And from the foreign land will boldly fly
To seek its native region far away!

—"A good deal that I knew is past and gone,"
The old man said. "Quite an amount of water
Has flowed from Ikva River⁴⁷¹ to the sea.
Upon the Ikva's bank there was a village;
And in that village, to my great misfortune,
Nay, my disaster, I grew up to manhood . . .
For what a savage destiny was mine!
Our manor's lady had young lordling sons—
About my age. And she would often take me
To her apartment for her sons to mock at.
They grew and grew, those lordlings, till at last
They were full grown, and bit, like rowdy pups,
When they were young, at many a one like me.

So they began to teach these lordling lads
To read and write; and to my great confusion
I, too, was taught with them. In blood and tears
Was my instruction bathed! For such as I,
Who were held cheaper than the lord's fat hounds,
To learn to read and write! Let serfs be taught
To stumble on behind a wooden plough,
And pray to God, and nothing else at all!
Such is their destiny! . . . Nevertheless,
I had my schooling and grew sadly up.
I asked her for my freedom; she refused—
The cursed woman would not give consent

⁴⁷¹A river in Volynia.

Even for my enlistment in the army.
 What was I then to do? Well, back I went
 To my old wooden plough; her lordling sons
 Got their commissions in the Emperor's Guards.

Hard times ensued, and years of difficulty! . . .
 And still I kept on toiling at the plough.
 I still was very poor. A worthy neighbour
 Possessed a girl who grew up as his servant.
 And I—what fate was mine! Ah, Lord! Dear Lord!
 She then was but a child, she . . . nay, great God,
 'Tis not for us to judge your deeds at all!
 And so, to my disaster, she grew up.
 I scarce had time for a good look at her,
 And was already planning for our wedding
 And settling down to days of happiness
 And praising men and God for such a boon.
 And this is what occurred. . . .

All kinds of things

Were purchased for the wedding, beer was brewed—
 But it was not our luck to drink of it.
 For that grey libertine, the paramour
 Of the old lady, robbed me of it all,
 Spilled out that beer and carried off the bride
 And left her raped and pregnant. . . . It's too late
 To grieve about it now! It's past and gone! . . .
 It's even useless to remember it!
 It's gone, it's gone! . . . And nothing now remains! . . .
 I left the field, the plough, cottage and garden—
 Abandoned everything. I think the devil
 Advised me—for I sought employment out,
 A job of clerking in the village office.

A year passed somehow by, while I kept books,
 Made friends and chose fine lads as my companions.
 A second year had gone; in the third summer
 The young lords swaggered home for their espousals.
 They feasted high, made merry in the palace,
 Gambled at cards, and waited for their wedding.
 Meanwhile like lecherous bulls they spent their lust
 On chaste young maidens from our village homes

As young lords like to do! But we were waiting,
We, too, were waiting for that marriage feast. . . .

And so, on Pentecost, they both were married
In their own private chapel. They were Poles.
Never had God seen anything more fair
On this vast earth of ours than those young brides . . .
And now the music broke out merrily
As from the chapel they were being led
To their apartments that had just been furnished . . .
But on the way we met and slew them all—
Princelings and lordlings and the wedded pairs.
With ruddy blood the wedding day was laved!
No Catholic escaped us—all lay dead
Like slaughtered piglets in a stinking mire.
Then having finished off our bloody job,
We went to seek another dwelling-place;
In a dark grove we found a green abode
And ample room. Upon broad meadows, too,
And on vast plains, in steep-banked deep ravines
We found our home! For there was space enough
In which to range and find unthreatened rest.

They chose me as their chief; my following
Increased each passing day and almost reached
A hundred strong. Blood flowed like blood of pigs!
I slaughtered everybody known as lord—
I had no mercy, and no malice either—
I killed them simply to get rid of them . . .
I was not certain what I really sought.
So for three years I roamed about the land
With bloody knife-blades, like a drunken butcher.
To tears, to blood, to horrid conflagrations,
I had become inured. It often happened
That on a spear-point I would roast a child,
Just like a frog, above a blazing fire;
Or strip a fair young noblewoman naked
And tie her on her horse and drive it off
With her upon it to the wilderness . . .
Many such things occurred, until at last
I wearied of it all. I was demented.
It was so difficult to live in caverns;

I sometimes thought of cutting my own throat,
 Thus getting rid of all my weariness.
 And so I should have done . . . had not a strange,
 A very strange thing happened to me there,
 To my inhuman self. The day was dawning
 When, with a dagger in my bootleg tucked,
 Out of the woods of Brovari⁴⁷² I went
 To kill myself; when suddenly I noticed
 An image of our great and holy Kiev
 Hanging before me in the morning sky!
 There God's own temples shone, a hallowed marvel;
 It seemed to me they talked with God himself.
 I gazed at it; a faintness held my heart;
 Softly the church-bells sounded as from heaven . . .
 O my dear Lord, how wonderful Thou art! . . .
 I wept, till noon I wept . . . what joy I knew!
 And not a trace remained of weariness;
 It seemed to me my spirit was reborn . . .
 I glanced around, and having crossed myself,
 I went in quiet to Kiev to pray
 To all the saints and beg my fellow-men
 For judgment, human judgment, on my sins."
Fortress of Orsk, 1848

* * * *

Ah, let me glance and gaze awhile
 Upon that steppe and plain:
 Perhaps an old man may from God
 Some freedom yet obtain.
 To my Ukraine I would return,
 My native land to ken:
 There I am certain, men were glad
 To welcome me again.
 There I would rest at least a while
 And give God praises fit,
 And would . . . but why anticipate?
 Nothing will come of it! . . .

⁴⁷²A village near Kiev.

How can a captive, without hope,
 Live severed from his kind?
 Oh, tell me how, good people all,
 Or I shall lose my mind!

Fortress of Orsk, 1848

* * * *

Lord, leave no man, like me today,
 In years of aging pain
 To perish in captivity
 And live his life in vain.
 Down the steppe-meadows would I stray
 My sorrow to alloy!
 —“Don’t go!” they say. “Out of this place
 No man may seek for joy!

Fortress of Orsk, 1848

TSARS

(*Kings*)

O venerable sister of Apollo!⁴⁷³
 If for one hour you could hobble down
 To visit us and, as in olden days,
 Lift high your voice divine to summon up
 A proud and ornate ode within my brain,
 Then we should both of us be well prepared
 To praise the kings, or people of that kidney!
 Because, to tell the truth, I have grown weary
 Of harping on those peasants, petty lordlings
 And mothers out of wedlock; how much rather
 I’d vent my anger on the crownèd heads
 Whom God’s own dispensation has anointed.
 And yet! I’m at a loss! But if you help me
 And demonstrate to me how birds like these

⁴⁷³In Greek mythology, god of the Arts, each of which was represented by one of the nine Muses, his sisters. Here, as Shevchenko invokes the Muse of Poetry, his tone is somewhat frivolous and ironical, and remains so through most of the poem.

Are to be plucked and gutted, then perhaps
 We might, for a brief space, lay hands upon
 Those bushy heads of hair that oil has hallowed.
 Leave, then, your blessed summit of Parnassus⁴⁷⁴
 And trudge on down to me, at least one hour,
 And raise your voice divine, however shaky,
 My dear old auntie! Thus in harmony,
 And good old rhyme and rhythm, one brief hour,
 We shall expose that bright-crowned company
 From front and back to all the ignorant.
 We'll do it in good time, my counsellor!

I

The streets are empty in Jerusalem;
 The gates are bolted, as if pestilence
 In the God-guarded capital of David
 Ruled in the temple squares. But there's no plague!
 A fiercer and more terrible distress
 Broods over Israel: the king's own war!
 His princely sons and all his potentates,
 The courtiers and the entire people
 Had locked the sacred ark within the city
 And then marched out, exhausted, to the field,
 To fight and make their little children orphans;
 Meanwhile, within the city, the young widows,
 Those lovely creatures, in their drawing-rooms
 Have shut themselves away and weep in gazing
 Upon their children. And they curse their prophet,
 Their master David, king insatiable.
 He, arms akimbo, clad in scarlet garments,
 Paces upon his cedar palace roof
 And like a tomcat peers in lecherous glee
 At an enticing morsel in a garden
 Belonging to a neighbour named Uriah.
 Now in that garden, in her glad abode,
 Bathsheba bathed, like Eve in paradise;
 She was Uriah's wife, the king's bondwoman;

⁴⁷⁴A mountain in Greece, the reputed abode of Apollo and the Muses.

Most peacefully she bathed, without a thought,
 Washing her snow-white bosom, till at last
 She bowled the holy king completely over. . . .

Outside, the twilight had already deepened.
 Shrouded in darkness, old Jerusalem
 Dozes in sadness. In his cedar halls,
 Pacing like one possessed—O greedy king!—
 Great David mutters: “I—we shall command! . . .
 I am the king and rule God’s holy people,
 I am a god myself in this my land,
 Yes, I am everything! . . .”

A little later

The slaves brought in his supper and a bucket
 Of heavy cider; and he bade the slaves
 To bring him that bondwoman for dessert,
 Even Bathsheba. . . . And indeed she came
 To greet the great king-prophet of her God . . .
 She ate, and drank the heady cider down
 In company with him, and after supper
 She went to rest a little with her king.
 Meanwhile Uriah slept; the poor dear fellow
 Never suspected what was happening
 In secret in his household—that the king
 Had stolen from his home, not gold or silver
 But the more precious treasure of his wife.
 And that the husband might not know his loss,
 The king just had him killed, and there’s an end! . . .
 Then the king shed a few mendacious tears
 Before the people, wrote a brand-new psalm
 To pull the wool over old Nathan’s⁴⁷⁵ eyes,
 And happy once again, and drunk again,
 He lavished his attentions on the lady.

Thus do the holiest of monarchs live!
 What of the common sort? I do not know;
 And I advise you not to seek to know
 Or question anyone, lest you, ere long,
 Should suffer for your curiosity.

⁴⁷⁵The Hebrew prophet who upbraided David for his lechery.

II

David, a holy prophet and a king,
 Was not devout unduly. He'd a daughter
 Whose name was Tamar and a son named Amnon.
 This was not strange, for even saints have children,
 Though not the sort that common people have.
 Fortunate Amnon—handsome, first-born son—
 For some strange cause is lying ill in bed.
 His father groans and wails; he tears apart
 His scarlet cloak; casts ashes on his head:
 "Without you, O my son, my best loved child,
 I'm sure I shall not live a single day!
 I should not care to look upon the sun,
 Yea, without you, alas, I'll die, I'll die!"
 Lamenting thus, he hastens to his son,
 His bare old feet a-pattering as he hurries.
 But Amnon, healthy as a rampant bull,
 Is lying stretched out in his cedar chamber
 And mocks the poor old dotard with his groaning;
 Loudly he cries and weeps and begs his father
 To send his sister Tamar to his aid:
 "O my dear father and my king, I pray
 Bid Sister Tamar bake some biscuits for me
 And bring them here herself. I'm confident
 A couple of those biscuits would restore me
 And raise me from my bed. . . ."

Early next morning

Fair Tamar baked the biscuits and she brought them
 To Amnon. By the arm he seizes her
 And drags her to his bedroom's shadowy lair
 And throws the weeping sister on his bed;
 And Tamar wrings her hands, laments, and struggles,
 And cries out to her brother: "Oh, be sane!
 Amnon, my brother, my most wicked brother!
 I . . . I . . . am your own sister! What, alas,
 Will be my future? How will I live down
 My sin and shame? And you yourself will be
 Accurst by God and men!" But naught availed
 To save the sister from his wicked will! . . .

Such is the conduct of the sons of kings
 In all their wicked outrage in this world.
 Just look at them, ye children of mankind!

III

And David in this world lived many years.
 The old man grew decrepit, and they sought
 To cover him with many a vestment rich,
 Yet failed to keep the body-heat within
 That lecherous old tomcat. So his servants
 Hit on a plan to keep their monarch warm
 (For all too well they knew his wolfish nature);
 And as a means to keep him warm enough
 They gathered virgins, fairer than a queen,
 And brought them to the old man, that the heat
 Of their young flesh might keep him warm in bed.
 The servants then departed, having closed
 The door behind them. . . . The old tomcat licked
 His lecherous old chops and slobbering
 Stretched out his eager paws to seize upon
 The Shunammitish maid; to her misfortune
 She was most beautiful among those girls—
 A lily in a valley full of flowers.
 And it was she who with her body warmed
 Her monarch, while the other fair young maids
 Played naked in the room for his delight.
 I do not know the way in which she warmed him;
 I only know the king's old flesh kept cozy
 Against her body. . . . "And he knew her not."

IV

Out in his courtyard paces Rohvolod,⁴⁷⁶
 Ancient but cheerful; round him shine in gold
 His courtiers, his servants, and his people.
 The Prince prepares to celebrate a feast:
 From Lithuania a suitor comes
 To seek the nuptial towels⁴⁷⁷ from Rohnida.

⁴⁷⁶Prince of Polotsk, father of Rohnida.

⁴⁷⁷See fn. 436.

Before the blessed icons of her gods,
 Lado and Lel,⁴⁷⁸ Rohnida lit a fire,
 Poured precious oil upon it, and the flames
 She sprinkled deep with incense. Like Valkyries⁴⁷⁹
 The young maids play and dance about her feet
 And sing a chorus in accompaniment:

*"Hoya, hoyo, hoyo-ho!
 Come, with flowers let us go,
 That the chambers may be dressed
 In expectation of our guest!"*

Beyond Polotsk, in darkness like a cloud
 The dust arises. Then the young retainers
 And the old boyars rush alike to welcome
 The Prince from Lithuania; the Princess
 Herself went gaily forth with Rohvolod,
 And all her maidens and the entire folk.

But not from Lithuania comes the Prince,
 As yet unmet but fervently expected,
 But from Kiev, like a fierce aurochs bull
 Or a wild boar, with his Kievan host
 Vladimir came to seek Rohnida out.

They came, they hemmed the town on every side
 And put it to the torch. The Prince Vladimir
 Cut down old Rohvolod before them all,
 Slaughtered the people, took the Princess captive,
 And then retired to his own domains!
 With uproar he withdrew; and raped the Princess,
 Raped young Rohnida, and then drove her out.
 And now the Princess roves the earth alone—
 What can she do against her enemy?
 Behold the holiness that kings exhibit!

v

Would that the headsman's axe might cut them down,
 Those kings, the hangmen of the human race!

⁴⁷⁸In Ukrainian mythology, Lado was goddess of Spring and happy marriage. Lel was her son.

⁴⁷⁹In old Germanic mythology, the women-warriors who escorted fallen heroes to Valhalla.

May Hades gulp them down, for all I care!
 But like a fool you dance attendance on them,
 Not even knowing what to do to please them!
 But with those ugly beasts what can I do?
 Tell me, O loveliest sister of Apollo!
 Teach me, my dear! And show me how to crawl
 Just for a little while about the throne!
 A string of corals as an Easter gift
 I'll buy you if I earn sufficient money.
 We'll take a turn at serving as their lackeys
 And carefully, in our new liveries,
 We'll make a try at loving lordly kings.
 It's not worth while to waste my pencil's lead,
 For nothing good is ever found among them.
 Why should we therefore seek to dupe ourselves?
 Let us go rather to the village homes:
 People are there! And where the people are
 There goodness will unfailingly be found;
 There we shall live, and love our fellow men,
 And praise our own dear Lord who loves us all!

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

Blessed is he who has a house to boast of,
 And in that house a sister and a mother!
 So manifold a blessing, it is true,
 Never in all my life have I enjoyed,
 And yet I managed somehow to survive. . . .
 But once it was my lot, on distant shores,
 To weep because I never had possessed
 That refuge sure, a home to call my own. . . .

Having been lost awhile upon a sea,
 To Daria⁴⁸⁰ we came and there cast anchor;
 Then mail was brought in from the "clearing-point"
 And all in silence settled down to read—
 All, but myself and one among my comrades
 Who idly lay and talked to pass the time.

⁴⁸⁰The Syr-Daria River which flows into the Aral Sea.

I thought: how could I ever gain that grace—
 A letter from a mother or a friend?
 —“And have you anyone?”—“A wife and children,
 A mother and a sister and a home,
 And yet I have no letter,” he replied.

Kos-Aral, 1848

THE SEXTON'S DAUGHTER

It happened long ago, when bands of rowdies
 Wandered from town to town, deceived young women,
 Mocked at the citizens, abused young men,
 And over many a village lorded it
 Like billeted hussars. All this took place
 Back when the blessed hetmanate⁴⁸¹ prevailed.
 One Sunday in the village in a tavern
 Upon a table minstrels sat and played
 And took a paltry coin for every dance.
 A cloud of dust was rising all around:
 Young women danced, and with them danced the lads.
 —“That's all, the end! Let's have another now!”
 —“That was a good one too!” And once again
 The instruments roared out and once again
 The girls like frisky magpies whirled about
 And lusty lads, their brawny arms akimbo,
 Went gaily circling in a squatting dance. . . .

The handsomest young man, Mikita,⁴⁸² stands
 Upon a bench in plain grey homespun clad,
 The handsomest among them, but a bastard,
 A bastard and in poverty to boot.
 Second to none he stands there, past compare . . .
 He seems to hold the ceiling on his shoulders
 And gazes, as his melting heart grows faint,
 At the sexton's daughter. She, bedecked with flowers,
 Stands all alone, as pretty as a picture;
 And at Mikita seems to cast a glance.

⁴⁸¹During the times of the hetmans.

⁴⁸²Colloquial for Nicetas.

The young man simply burns, he's all aflame,
 This bold Mikita in his plain grey homespun!
 A coin he pulls out, and for that last piece
 Engages the musicians; then he asks
 The sexton's daughter, though so much above him,
 To join him in the treading of a dance.
 —“Leave me alone, you tramp!” the sexton's daughter
 Cried out in laughter. “Are there not enough
 Of servant wenches here to serve your purpose?”
 The sexton's daughter made a laughing-stock
 Of poor Mikita and before them all
 She mocked at him for wearing homespun clothes.
 You will regret this moment, sexton's daughter!
 For this harsh laughter you will pay with tears!

Where is Mikita? On a distant journey
 He slipped away. Nothing is heard of him.
 And since that day a curious thing has happened
 To this same sexton's daughter. . . .

Home in tears

She wandered, and, still weeping, went to bed
 Without her supper! . . . But she could not sleep:
 She rose next day in the same state of mind
 As when she had retired. She seemed distraught.
 And what was she to do? She did not know.
 Mikita, like an owl, in plain grey homespun,
 Still stands before her vision like a ghost!
 O sexton's daughter, in an evil moment
 You mocked at one you did not deem your equal!
 Then you felt pity for him . . . grief and sorrow
 Joined with deep shame, beleaguering your heart,
 And so you wept. And why? Because, forsooth,
 You're fallen deep in love with poor Mikita!

Strange things can happen in that heart of ours:
 Though in the evening it disowns a lover,
 Yet in the morning it will yearn for him,
 Ay, it will yearn with such consuming passion
 That it would gladly go to earth's far bounds
 To seek him out. So now the sexton's daughter
 Is quite beside herself. She'd even leap
 Into the stream if she could be with him! . . .
 Take care, young women, and be slow to mock

A man whom you disdain as not your equal,
 Lest you be blighted by the same affliction
 As smote that sexton's daughter! She began
 To wither like a blade of sun-parched grass;
 Meanwhile her parents worried at her state;
 They took her as a pilgrim to Kiev,
 Dosed her with holy potions, yet discovered
 That it was all in vain. She wore a path
 Across the meadow to the funeral mound,
 For there she often went to watch for him;
 But soon that path began to overgrow,
 For she was now too ill to leave her bed.
 Such was the plight to which her mirth had brought her!

And he had vanished utterly, as if
 He lay beneath the ground; folk had forgotten
 That such as he existed. Year by year
 The time slid by, and three of them were gone.
 At last, in the fourth year, upon a Sunday,
 On a broad table in the village tavern
 Blind minstrels sat and, paid in paltry coins,
 They played the same old music as before.
 Young women, too, were dancing just as fleetly
 As in past years, when suddenly a Cossack,
 Wearing a blue cap and an ample cloak
 And trousers flaming red as any cranberry,
 Burst in decisively among them all
 And danced a squatting dance and sang to boot:

"Thanks to the sire

And thanks to the dam

Who brought us into life's merry jam!

When I as a baby

First saw the light,

They scattered the rye on the stove at night! . . ."

—*"Let's have some brandy! Mead! Where is the chief,
 The reeve, the crowd? You miserable lubbers,
 Young, ugly, lousy and effeminate!
 Come out and fight, come out and wrestle me!
 For I am now a wrestler. . . ."*

Not for one week,

Or two or three or four, they treated him
 As tenderly as if he were a boil;

Yes, the whole town. Yet he was full of whims
 As if he were a lordling. In what fashion
 Did such a weakling grow to strength like this?
 The entire village had not food enough
 To sate his appetite; he drank and reveled,
 And caused frustration in the younger set
 By cornering their maids. All the young women
 Were simply swooning in their love of him,
 He was so nobly handsome and so rich!
 No longer did he fight with anyone:
 He merely carried on with his enjoyment
 And in the evening he would seek the garden
 Behind the sexton's home. The sexton's daughter
 Would meet him there and sing most happily
 And gaily say: "Is this the same Mikita
 Who wears a jacket now with flaring sleeves?"

It is the same, the very same Mikita
 Whom once you mocked at in the village inn;
 And you yourself will now go out to meet him
 And in the garden cater to the bastard
 As if he were the scion of a lord.
 Not one day, and not two, the sexton's daughter
 Went out to meet him in the little garden;
 Not one day, and not two, as to a lordling
 She did her utter best to please Mikita,
 Submitted to his pleasure to the limit
 And seemed quite unaware of what she gave him.
 Meanwhile the days, and then the months, pass on;
 A summer passes, autumn goes its way;
 The seventh month arrives, and then the eighth,
 The ninth remorseless month begins already—
 The sentence of your sorrow is at hand!

Deep in the sexton's little garden-plot
 Under a willow lies an open well.
 Thither the sexton's daughter goes perforce
 But not to drink its water; nay, she weeps
 And wonders pensively what evil fate
 Will overtake her maidenhood at last
 And where she might conceal herself from shame. . . .

Later, one evening in the winter time,
Barefoot and in a single tunic dressed
The sexton's daughter walks and brings her child.
Now she draws near the well, now backs away . . .
While from behind a cold cranberry bush
The bastard, like a serpent, lurks and peers.

At last upon the border of the well
She softly placed her son and ran away.
Through the cranberry bushes crawled Mikita
And down into the well he threw the child
As if it were a puppy. Then he went,
Singing right merrily, to ask the chief
Of the police to call the town together
And search the unhallowed waters for the child.

Early one Sunday morning they assembled,
And drained the well, and sought to find the child.
And they discovered it, they found your son,
O sexton's daughter, in the water-weeds!
They seized the hapless woman, fettered her,
Sealed her with shrift and sacramental oil
And with a public curse upon her parents
Convicted her and nailed her down alive
Within a coffin with her baby son
And covered them with earth. Above the spot
They built a lofty pillar as a warning
To parents to instruct their children better
And to young maids to learn by this example
If parents failed to teach them as they ought.

And then the roisterer vanished from the village;
But people on a trip to Poland met
A certain dandy there who questioned them
Whether the sexton's daughter were alive
And if she still mocked men below her station.
Yes, it was he! But God has punished him
For his most mortal sin—but not with death:
He will live on and like a fiendish werewolf
Will wander earth forever and a day
And ever dupe your hearts, my pretty maids.

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

Well, it would seem, mere words this discourse spells!
 Mere words and vocables—and nothing else!
 And yet the heart beats faster and revives
 To hear them. To be sure, from God derives
 The utterance of language by whose sound
 Communication spreads the world around.
 I'd said my prayers. Not seeking thoughts abhorred
 But merely to relax, I stood on board
 And gazed in concentration at the sea
 As if at Judas. Through the mist to me
 Diana⁴⁸³ peered with features bold and red.
 I had already planned to go to bed,
 But stopped to gaze upon that round-faced wench . . .
 Or, pardon me, young maid . . . my eyes to quench.
 The sailor whose strict task the watch entailed
 (My countryman, who from Ostrivna⁴⁸⁴ hailed)
 Stood deep in thought, by some unknown resource,
 And then began to sing—softly, of course,
 So that the captain would not hear, and ban—
 He was a terror, though Ukrainian.
 And so he sang, like that old Cossack bard
 Whose young years by his hired toil were marred
 Who then, with Moscow's troops, must stand on guard.

Long, long ago, beneath a willow tree
 I heard a young maid chaunt her gentle plea;
 And even as a child I felt regret
 For all the woes that vagabonds beset:
 "Perhaps the poor old waif was tired out:
 He leaned against a hedge to rest, no doubt,
 And from the people's prattling gossip shrunk
 Till he avoided it by getting drunk."
 Then into tears I burst, such grief I felt
 For woes that to that waif his fate had dealt. . . .

Why do you now once more give vent to tears?
 What do you now, in these your later years,
 Feel sorry for in this captivity?
 That all your life is but a blasted tree?

⁴⁸³In Greek mythology, the goddess of the Moon, and of chastity.

⁴⁸⁴A town in the vicinity of Orenburg, inhabited at that time by many Ukrainians.

That you for Moscow's army have been used?
 That all your heart is shattered and contused?
 That all it knew as lovely has been killed
 And all it deemed as precious has been spilled?
 That thus your life is ruined in the press?
 Is this the reason why, dear fellow? . . . Yes! . . .

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

As if a painful soul-tax to demand
 I am beleaguered in this foreign land
 By tedium and autumn. My dear God!
 Where can I go for refuge from this rod?
 What shall I do? I roam, an eremite,
 This Aral region, and I even write;
 I ply my verse in secret; thus I sin;
 God knows what memories of what has been
 I sift within my soul and set them down—
 So that my torment will not thrust its frown
 Into my lonely soul in Russian fashion . . .
 But the fierce thief assails me with his passion! . . .

Kos-Aral, 1848

P. S.⁴⁸⁵

I'll not regret a lord who's plainly evil:
 His wretched reputation stands on guard
 And points him out as such; but I regret
 A hypocrite who seems to pass as kind
 And makes his honour a deceptive gloss.

Disgust assails me still when I recall
 The Gothic manor with its outdoor clock
 While round about it lies a village slum
 Where cowering peasants doff their ragged caps
 Whenever they behold a flag declare

⁴⁸⁵Petro Skoropadsky, a descendant of Hetman Skoropadsky (1708–22), who served Russia more than he did Ukraine, and whom Shevchenko terms a “weak-minded” hetman. Here the poet reveals the stupidity and hypocrisy of certain Ukrainian landlords.

The lord within his palace is carousing
 With boon-companions. Why, that fatted boar,
 That good-for-nothing idler, is the *pan*,⁴⁸⁶
 Esteemed as kind and generous, the offspring
 Of that weak-minded hetman long ago,
 A sturdy patriot, and a Christian too!
 And every year he journeys out to Kiev;
 Dressed in a peasant's shirt on pilgrimage
 He walks among the lords and drinks down brandy
 With moujiks, waxes liberal in a tavern:
 Here in a word you have him—why not print him!⁴⁸⁷
 And in addition, in his village there,
 He has his pick of all the fair, young maids
 And every year holds openly for christening
 About a dozen of his bastard babies;
 And that's not all! . . . He is a thorough scoundrel!
 Why is he then not called his proper name?
 And why not spat upon? Trod under foot?
 Men! Men! If you were asked to sacrifice
 Your mother for a hunk of tainted sausage,
 You'd hand her over to his sweaty bed. . . .
 I am not grieved at him, that drunken Peter,
 But I am grieved at people such as you,
 You foolish, purblind children that you are! . . .

Kos-Aral, 1848

TO H. Z.⁴⁸⁸

There is no greater sorrow than recalling
 In dread captivity one's former freedom⁴⁸⁹ . . .
 And yet I do indeed remember you,
 My precious liberty. Never before
 Have you appeared to me so fresh and youthful,
 So wonderfully lovely, as today

⁴⁸⁶Master, lord, sir.

⁴⁸⁷i.e., praise him in print.

⁴⁸⁸These initials cannot be identified. They may be applied to a number of Shevchenko's friends in Ukraine whose surnames began with the letter "z," such as Zakrevsky and Zabala.

⁴⁸⁹This is a paraphrase of Dante's famous lines: "Nessun maggior dolore / Che ricordarsi del tempo felice / Ne la miseria" (*Inferno*, Canto V).

Here in this alien land, in exile too . . .
 Alas, my fate! O freedom that I squandered
 In singing songs! Gaze down upon me here
 From beyond Dnieper, grant at least a smile. . . .

And you my love,⁴⁹⁰ my one and only love,
 Rise from the sea, come to me from the mists,
 Obedient rosy star! Bring in your train
 My youth's lost years—let there rise up before me
 Like a sea's magic the broad villages
 With cherry orchards and with happy people. . . .
 Those people must appear, that friendly village
 Where once I found a welcome like a brother.
 The Matron likewise! Ah, my dear old Matron!⁴⁹¹
 May happy guests be gathering even now
 To know delight at the old lady's house,
 Just to make merry in old-fashioned ways
 From dusk to dawn? And you, my youthful ones,
 My dark-haired children, cheerful little maids,
 Are you still glad to go to dancing parties
 At the granny's house? And you in chief, my love,
 My peaceful haven and my beauteous feast,
 Do you still move among the company
 Gently and proudly? With those eyes of yours
 That sparkle with dark-blue, do you bewitch
 The souls of men? Do people to this day
 Marvel to no avail at your slim waist?
 My feast, my sumptuous feast! Whenever now
 You are surrounded, love, by pretty maids
 And they begin their twitterings exquisite—
 Perhaps those pretty children, by some chance,
 May then remember me, yes, one at least
 May make some passing mention of my name.
 Smile, then, my heart, in secrecy and softly,
 So that no eye of man may mark your joy,
 And that is all. . . . While I, my dearest love,
 Will offer up an exile's prayer to God.

Kos-Aral, 1848

⁴⁹⁰It is difficult to determine which lady Shevchenko had in mind here and in the poem that follows. Perhaps it was Princess Repnin.

⁴⁹¹The lady chaperone at evening parties.

* * * *

If by some chance we ever met again,
 Would you, or would you not, be frightened at me?
 What gentle word to me would you pronounce?
 None! For you would not recognize me now!
 Later, perhaps, you might remember me,
 And murmur: Like a fool I dreamed of him . . .
 But I, my marvel and my black-browed love,
 Would overflow with joy if once again
 I gazed upon your face and called to mind
 My youthful passions and my youthful grief.
 Then would I break into a harsh lament
 And pray for help, because our blessedness,
 Once marvellous, was destined not to blossom
 Into reality; instead of that,
 It was a tissue of deceitful dreams
 That flowing tears were doomed to wash away.

Kos-Aral, 1848

MARINA

Like a dark nail deep-driven in my heart
 I've carried this Marina in remembrance.
 I should have written long ago about her,
 This lunatic; but what's the use of it?
 People would say I lie: because, forsooth,
 I'm angry at the lords and always write
 About their currish ways to vent my spleen.
 People would simply say: the silly fool
 Upbraids the lords because he is a serf,
 An unschooled simpleton. It is not true!
 By God, I do not pillory their sins
 Through envy that I'm not a lord myself,
 But from my bitter grief to see the crimes
 These educated Christians perpetrate.
 Even a wild beast would not dream of doing
 What you, as you bow deeply before God,
 Do to your brothers. Sure, the laws were written
 By hangmen in your infamous defence,

And so you care not! When the weather's good,
Each year you go on pilgrimage to Kiev
And to a monk, of course, confess your sins!
And one thing more: In such a case as this,
Why do I vex myself? No good or evil
Will ever touch my exiled ears again.
If, as I say, a man no longer hears it,
He should in time become indifferent.
Fly down to me, then, from my own Ukraine,
My dear and only friend throughout the years,
My inspiration most immaculate,
My faithful consort-muse; tell me, my star,
Of that Marina, how and why she suffered
Through the contrivance of the cruel lord—
But tell me all in secret, so that none
May hear or learn of our intended verses;
Otherwise they might say that on the highroads
We are committing violence again;
Then they might send us deeper into exile
And both of us would perish, past a doubt!

I

It happened in Ukraine not long ago.
A wedding train was passing through a village,
And meanwhile from the church the lord was driving—
Perhaps it was a steward, not a lord?
Amid the dancing of the wedding guests,
Amid the hubbub and the noisy laughter,
Nobody marked that lazy Polish steward
As he passed by; but he beheld them all
Quite clearly, and especially the bride.
Why, to be sure, does God in Heaven preserve
Such wicked creatures as this evil steward?
It was two years ago he settled here,
Bringing his German ploughs, all indigent
In this distressful corner of our land—
And since that time how many unwed mothers
He has set wandering with bastard children!
And God withheld His hand! Yet he was married
And had two little children, fair as angels.

Imagine how things happened! The young wife,
 Fair as a queen, with her two little ones,
 Went for a walk; presently from his coach
 The lord crawls out and has the bridegroom summoned;
 And soon he greets his children once again
 And gives three kisses to his fair young wife,
 That sorry woman. Then they turn to go
 To their apartments, pleasantly conversing.
 The bridegroom soon was brought. And on the morrow
 They took him to the town and had him forced
 Into the army of the Muscovites.

We have grown so accustomed to such things
 That we know all too well the fate that comes
 To such unwitting innocents as he!
 And what about the bride? Possibly God
 Decreed in Heaven that she, without a mate,
 Should waste away her beauty and her youth.
 Her happiness went crumbling into dust,
 Was washed away as if evil magic, . . .
 And she was forced to hire herself again
 To work for others. But her ways were changed
 For she must now become a chambermaid
 And bear the name Marysia,⁴⁹² not Marina.
 But, worst of all, they did not let her weep,
 Though she would hide at times and shed her tears.
 Oh, foolish woman! She bewailed the peasant
 And sorrowed for his blessed poverty.
 Just see how wonderful it is about you:
 No finer paradise could one desire!
 If you want anything—just ask for it:
 You will be given all, and more besides.
 “No,” you reply, “I only want my cottage!”
 You might as well stop begging for such things!
 Because . . . you know the reason perfectly . . .
 See how the lord himself, a lustful stallion,
 Is circling round you, coming ever closer.
 For good or ill, you’ll have to yield to him
 Unless you hang yourself to ward him off. . . .
 Her mother knew, and came to beg the lord

⁴⁹²Polish for Marina.

To let her daughter go; but he gave orders
 That no one should admit her to his halls;
 And they should beat her if she still persisted.
 What could she do? She went back to her cottage
 And loudly wept: this was her only child,
 And now this only child was lost indeed. . . .

II

As a dark raven in its flight foretells
 A storm to men, so do I write of tears
 And storms of sorrow and those useless bastards
 About whose fate no person cares a whit.
 I tell of them, and weep. For I feel pity
 For such as they. . . . Dear God, grant to my words
 The blessed power to pierce the human heart
 And instigate the flow of human tears;
 That pity may envelop all their souls
 And gentle sorrow stoop upon their eyes
 That they may feel true mercy for my maids
 And learn to walk the paths of righteousness,
 Loving their blessed Lord, with charity
 For all their human kinfolk. . . .

With an effort
 She reached her home. She glanced about its walls—
 Flowers are tucked behind the holy icons,
 Flowers are also on the window sill;
 Crosses upon the walls in many colours
 Are painted as within a pretty picture.
 All this was fashioned by Marina's hand;
 All was Marina's work, and no one else's . . .
 Only Marina is no longer here . . .
 And hardly had she strength to leave the house.
 Up to the hill she went, to gaze upon
 The cursed palace; then she closer sought
 The hall itself. Beneath the hedge she sat
 And there she stayed in tears the whole night through.
 The herdsmen at the dawn already drove
 Their cattle from the village; still she wailed.
 Then the sun rose. At last, it set again
 And darkness came once more—still the poor woman

Does not go home but sits beneath the hedge.
They tried to drive her off, set dogs upon her,
But still she does not stir, no, not at all . . .

Meanwhile Marina, in her long white dress,
Like a white nun, invokes her God and weeps,
Locked in her bedroom. No one but the lord
Has leave to enter. He himself brings food,
Begs and beseeches her to look at him
And dry her tears—she will not even glance,
Will take no food. The wicked Pole's distracted,
Not knowing what to do; while she grows pale
And in the gleaming palace wastes away.
Summer has gone, winter is at the door;
And still Marina sits, no longer speaking,
No longer weeping. And in such a fashion
Was the poor woman under torment set
By that most evil steward. Yet his will,
Even if he should chop her into pieces,
Could not avail to breach her constancy,
So stubborn was the nature of her soul!

One evening in the winter she was gazing
At the dark forest; from beyond its shadows
A red moon was arising, round and full
And swollen like the bread-dough in a bucket.
—"I too, was young," she whispered; then she fell
To pensiveness; and then began to sing:
*"The house is standing on a wooden floor,
And all the guests have gathered; now my braids
Were being quite undone; ribands removed;
Meanwhile the lord was asking for salt pork;
The devil begged for food. Geese, my white geese,
Have sought the south; the grey ones seek the sea."*

III

The hounds outside the house began to bay;
Their keepers roared with laughter, while the lord,
All blazing red of face, drunk as a loon,
Goes marching fiercely to Marina's chamber.

Out in the cold, as if in her own house,
 The poor old mother sits beside the hedge:
 It would appear that she has lost her mind.
 The frost is bitter, crunching underfoot;
 Light from the windows pales and disappears;
 The watchman on his rounds shouts timidly,
 Lest he perchance should wake the wicked lord.
 When suddenly, behold, the palace burst
 Into fierce flames. The cry of "Fire" arose! . . .
 And whence did all this sudden crowd appear!
 As if they just had sprouted from the ground
 And grew full-size at once, they rushed in waves
 To marvel at the mighty conflagration.

And what an untoward sight did they behold!
 Marina danced in utter nakedness
 Before the building by her mother's side,
 And—horrible—she bore a bloody knife
 And sang a curdled carol as she danced:

*"And was it not my crony dear who decked
 Her hair with flowers? When I was a mistress,
 Dressed in rich, new cloak, the lordlings came,
 Made love to me, and kissed my lily hand.
 (To her mother)*

And have you from the other world come down
 To see my wedding? Yes, my braids already
 Have been unplaited, and the lord has come.
 Cluck, cluck! Are those the geese? No, they are lords!
 Look—they have flown away for winter-time . . .
 Hoo-hoo! Cluck, cluck! Satan is at the door,
 The devil has come to call! . . . Do you hear? Do you
 hear?

All of the bells are ringing in Kiev.
 Do you see? The fire there is burning bright,
 And there the lord is lying as he reads,
 And asks me for a drink. . . . And do you know
 That I have cut his throat and murdered him?
 Look where he stands, like a fierce fire-brand
 Upon the chimney . . . Wherefore do you look
 At her like that? I tell you, she's my mother!
 Don't look—or you'll devour her. That's for you!

(*She gestures to him obscenely, and sings.*)
*She's fallen in love with a Muscovite soldier,
 And yet bares her teeth in a grin!
 The Muscovite troopers have brought enough aprons;
 And young lords throw ducats therein,
 And many a necklace of beads from the city
 The sons of the priests have brought in.
 Strike, bell, strike!
 Break the cloudy dike!
 Let the clouds burst
 Upon the Tartars curst,
 And let the sun shine down
 On Christians all alike!
 Strike, bell, strike!"*

MOTHER

Marina, darling! Let us go to bed!

MARINA

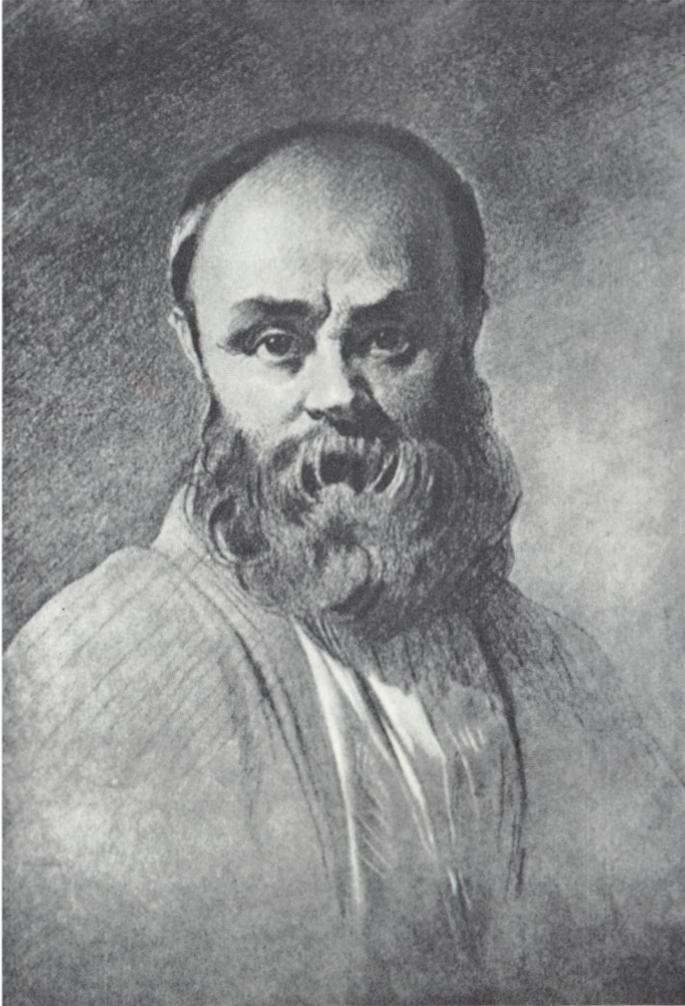
Let's go to bed! Early tomorrow morning
 We must to church. Look at the hideous man!
 He's crawling up to kiss me. . . . Ah, take that!

MOTHER

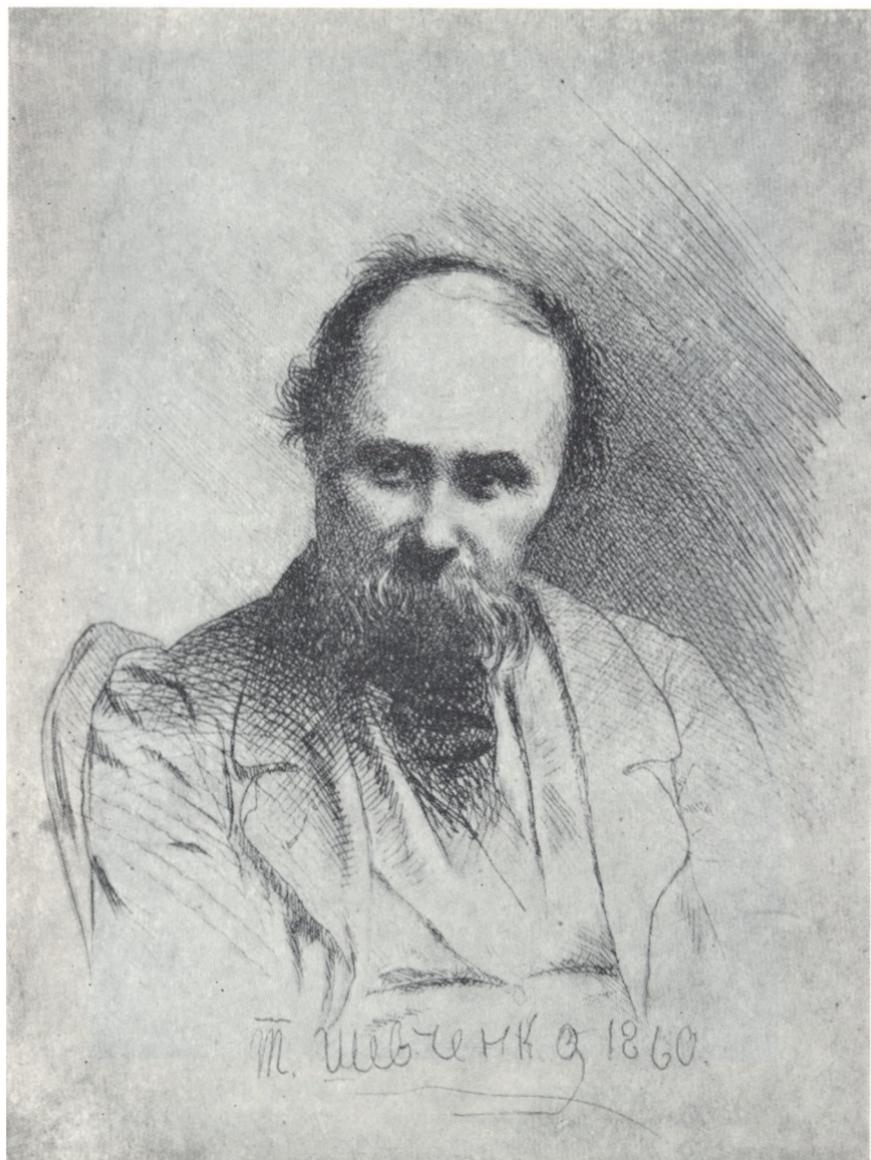
Let's go to bed! (*To the people*) For Christ's sake, my
 good people,
 I pray you, come and help me with my daughter!

MARINA

Take me! Take me and tie me! Take me then
 To the lord's room! And will you come to look
 At how Marina is a lady now,
 Sitting beneath the lord's own lock and key?
 She's growing thin, she withers, perishes
 Most horribly, even your own dear child,
 Your beautiful Marina perishes. (*She sings.*)
*Gabble-gabble, grey geese!
 To the Danube off you clack!
 Wasted is my life today,
 I must rue my fate, alack!*



T. Shevchenko, *Self-Portrait* (pencil, 1858)
This portrait is especially dramatic when compared with other self-portraits, both earlier and from the first years of exile.



T. Shevchenko, *Self-Portrait* (eau-forte, 1860)

The poet returned from exile in broken health, but a more hardened and experienced fighter against tyranny and slavery.

The birds have freedom—in the open field
 The merry birds rejoice in flying free,
 While I, a prisoner, must waste away. (*She weeps.*)
 If I had only got a string of beads,
 I would have hanged myself . . . I'm sorry now! . . .
 Nothing is left me but to drown myself!
 Why do you weep, my mother? Do not cry!
 Just look, my dear: it's me, your fair Marina!
 See: a black serpent crawls along the snow . . .
 I'll run away! To warmer lands I'll fly!
 Because I'm now a cuckoo, don't you see . . .
 And has he ever come to visit you?
 He surely must have perished in the war . . .
 And, do you know, I dreamed about the moon—
 And in the broad daylight it seemed to rise,
 And on the seashore we were having fun,
 My man and I. I looked and saw the stars
 Falling, it seemed, into the water there,
 And only one, a single one, remained.
 Then I, like one demented, sought to find
 A fording place across the Danube stream
 And went to ford it with my bastard child.
 The people mocked me, called me harlot, mad;
 And you yourself were laughing, while I wept.
 Nay, I'll not weep! I'll bellow out with laughter,
 Because I'm now an owl. . . ."

She waves her hands

As if she flew with wings. Across the yard
 She leaped into the meadows like a beast.
 The poor, old mother hobbled after her
 And sought to catch up with her child Marina.
 Meanwhile the lords were roasted to a crisp,
 Yes, every one of them, like fatted piglets;
 The fair, white palace was reduced to ashes,
 And all the people quietly dispersed.
 Marina and her mother simply vanished . . .
 But in the spring, when folk began to plough,
 They found two sorry corpses in the field
 And buried them together on a mound.

Kos-Aral, 1848

THE PROPHET

TO N. V. TARNOVSKA⁴⁹³

Loving His people well, the Lord
 For righteous children planned reward
 And sent a prophet down to earth
 To tell His love's surpassing worth,
 And teach them well in wisdom's ways
 Through all the course of earthly days.
 As broad as Dnieper's flood, his words
 Flowed freely forth; like singing birds
 They penetrated every breast;
 Like fire they stirred to warm unrest
 Cold souls of men. The people took
 The prophet to their hearts and shook
 In tearful prayers of gratitude.
 And then? . . . O wretched race and rude!
 The sacred glory of the Lord
 They mocked. . . . To foreign gods abhorred
 They sacrificed as scoundrels can
 And then, alas, that holy man
 They stoned to death amid the corn
 And laughed his piety to scorn,
 With joy in shedding holy blood.
 Then God's just wrath burst forth in flood—
 He bade that fetters should be forged
 To chain you, fierce and overgorged,
 And dungeons built to be your place!—
 And—O deceptive, cruel race!—
 The prophet's rod outweighing far,
 He called on you to choose a tsar!

Kos-Aral, 1848

⁴⁹³An oldish lady friend of Shevchenko's, to whom he also wrote the poem "N. T.," p. 557.

THE OWLS⁴⁹⁴

Down on the field, into the rye, by night,
 In a broad valley's cultivated plain,
 Some owls came flying for a pleasant chat;
 They sought, moreover, to deliberate
 How to protect the sorry little birds
 And bring the eagle's kingdom to an end,
 Burn it completely, hang the eagle chief
 High on a branch, and, having reached that hour,
 Establish a republic. Was that all
 That was afoot that night? Ah, no indeed!
 Lest they should trample on the growing grain,
 Someone had set foul snares across the field.
 It was the ragged peasant who himself
 Had neatly set those snares and went to sleep
 Among the haystacks. When the morning came,
 He didn't even wait to wash his face
 But hurried to inspect his captive guests.
 How ugly and how hideous were those owls,
 Yes, each and every one! What should he do?
 They were too lean a lot to fry or boil.
 So, not to carry home the nasty load,
 He killed off some and clipped the others' wings
 And gave them to the ravens for their sport;
 And uttered not a word to anyone.

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

Among the rocks along the Dniester's bank
 There walks by night as furtive as a thief
 A Cossack and keeps looking, as he goes,
 At the dark, turbid water fixedly

⁴⁹⁴Quite an obscure poem to interpret. The main idea, however, is that Shevchenko resented the negative attitude of certain peasants towards the revolutionaries (owls) who rebelled against the "eagle's kingdom" (the tsar) and sought to cast off the landlords' yoke. Feeling that it would be best to leave bad enough alone and not invite a worse evil, they even betrayed the insurrectionists to the authorities (ravens) by snaring them. Why Shevchenko called the rebels owls is not clear. Perhaps, as Simovich suggests, it was because they worked stealthily by night.

As in his foeman's eyes, and fain would say:
 "O Dniester, turbid water, set me free:
 Or if not, let me sink, if that's my fate!"
 He stripped himself upon the rocky bank
 And leaped into the stream. So hard he swam
 That the blue billows groaned and, in their groaning,
 Cast the poor Cossack on the farther shore.
 And there the lad regains his self-command:
 Naked he was and barefoot but at least
 He had his freedom; for no other gift
 Does he ask God. But wait a while, my friend,
 Perhaps hereafter, on a foreign field,
 You'll ask Him to vouchsafe the further gift
 Of how to live, a little luck as well. . . .
 And on he journeyed through a shadowy grove
 And warbled as he went, to fill the hours:
*"From the foot of the hill and the foot of the cliff
 The carter's waggons trailed;
 Behind them the dark-haired woman went;
 And as she walked, she wailed."*

Do as you please: upbraid me, if you will;
 Don't even read me; and I shall not care!
 I beg no longer for your favour, friends.
 Just for myself I'll jot the story down
 And waste again my pencil's grubby lead.
 If God will grant me the relief of tears,
 I shall be satisfied. . . . Now to my subject!

He left his mother and his little house;
 Forsook his wife—a pity and a shame!
 It was to Bessarabia he went,
 For misery had driven him abroad
 To drink the sea's salt water. As they say,
 As long as there's a whip in hand, a peasant
 Can easily be forced to drag a plough
 In daily harness like a hungry ox.
 That, to be sure, had almost been his lot.
 While still a child, this Cossack roamed about,
 Bearing a satchel, begging with his mother.
 Thus he grew up a waif, and worked for others.

In brief, he was a tattered indigent
And therefore, when he married, took to wife
An impecunious lass, though fair of face,
A servant-maid, of course. And then, the lord . . .
(Our good and ill, they say, comes all from God.)
The wicked lord with his unerring eyes
Observed her, and began to send her gifts.
She would not take his presents and refused
To love the rich seducer in return.
What would his next step be?—Assail the husband,
Cut short his life. . . . The wife might then be willing.
And just that almost happened! My poor Cossack
Was soon exhausted to extremity
In working for the lord in cursed serfdom.
And yet he'd once owned land. . . .

He loved his wife,
And—O dear Lord!—as to a precious lady
Or a dear child, he catered to her love,
Adorning her with pretty things of corals.
But the poor fellow neared the breaking-point,
Prepared to sell his house and go in service!
To such a dread pass had that damned lord brought him.
Meanwhile his lovely wife shammed ignorance
And, decked in strings of corals, took her ease
Out in her little garden, like a queen.
“What's to be done?” the poor lad wonders now;
“If I should leave them and should run away,
Who will support them and take care of them?
For one of them is old, and scarce can rise;
The other one is young, and lives for fun.
What shall I do? How shall I go about it?
Oh, what a sad predicament is mine!”

He took a satchel, went beyond the sea,
And sought his fortune, thinking later on
To come again and take at least his wife,
While the old mother in the little house
Would still live out her last declining years.
Alas, in life things simply do not happen
As we may wish! He'd hoped to live at ease
And praise God for His bounty; but it happened

That in the foreign land his lot was tears
 And little more. He hungered for his home
 On alien soil. By hard work he gained much,
 But did not gain good luck, that blessed fate . . .
 God's bright world grew a burden to his soul
 And all his life in exile sickened him;
 Even the goods he garnered pleased him not.
 He longed to see again the pleasant realm
 Where he was born, the broad steppes, the high mounds,
 The little garden and his pretty wife,
 That hazel-eyed young beauty; and he swam
 Across the Dniester to this nearer side,
 A vagrant who left liberty behind.
 Dear Lord! I see my plains, my own dear plains,
 As broad and vast as liberty itself! . . .

He reached his house at night. He found his mother
 Alone and groaning near a cold clay stove;
 His wife was sleeping in the store-room yonder
 (Because the lord was ill). His wife got up
 And clung upon his bosom like a leech
 And rinsed his forehead with her flowing tears.
 (Among our human kind it sometimes happens
 That one may bare a knife to pierce your heart
 Even while he kisses you.) My pretty housewife
 Seemed well again now; but in Heaven's name,
 Whence did those dainties at her bedside come?
 But she herself, as if inanimate,
 Hung on his neck. She gave him food and drink
 And in the store-room lodged him, glad at heart.
 There the poor fellow lay; and thought and planned
 How both of them may journey far away;
 And then he fell adrowsing. His young wife
 Rushed to the lord and told him everything.
 Softly they came, without an hour's delay,
 Seized the poor wretch and took this roving vagrant
 Straight from his house to the recruiting-post.

But even in that plight his luck held good:
 He rose to higher ranks, and later on,
 After discharge, he came back to his village.
 While he was gone, his mother had been buried;

The lord has likewise died; while his dear spouse
 Was wandering like a Muscovite soldier's wife
 In search of work and shelter from both Jews
 And lords alike, in barefoot misery.
 He found her, gazed on her disfigured face,
 And, grey-haired as he was, raised his scarred hands
 To thank the blessed Lord, wept like a child,
 And from his heart forgave⁴⁹⁵ the wretched woman.
 And so, good folk, I pray you, take a lesson
 To grant forgiveness to your enemies
 Just as this simple man so freely did!
 But where shall we, poor sinners that we are,
 Acquire such integrity of heart?

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

The sky is all unwashed; the waves are drowsing;
 The sedge along the coast, far in the distance,
 Sways without wind, as if intoxicated. . . .
 How long, dear Lord, in this unpadlocked prison
 Along the margin of this piddling sea,
 Shall I live out my life? The yellowed grass
 Along the steppe begrudges all reply;
 Bending as if alive, it holds its tongue
 And will not tell me what I wish to know . . .
 And I have no one else whom I may ask.

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

In alien realms my youth was told;⁴⁹⁶
 In alien realms I now grow old;
 So in my loneliness I dreamed
 That naught on earth more lovely seemed,
 Under God's rule, than Dnieper's strand
 And vistas of our famous land.

⁴⁹⁵The Christian virtue of forgiveness.

⁴⁹⁶A reminiscence of the painful impression at witnessing the sorry state of his people during his first visit to Ukraine.

Yet truth then dawned: things are but good
Where we are not.

I lately stood
In evil season, full of pain,
On visit in our sad Ukraine,
In that fair village where, when wee,
My mother used to swaddle me,
And toiled with fervour half the night
To earn a holy candle's light;
Then bowing, as the priest had taught her,
To the Immaculate, besought her
To be her child's strong citadel.
Alas, my mother, it is well
That early in your life you died
Or you had cursed God who supplied
My destiny.

The place is foul,
This village where dark sorrows prowl:
For blacker than the grim, black earth
Are those who roam the place in dearth;⁴⁹⁷
The orchards, once so green, have shrunk;
The dwellings have decayed and sunk;
The ponds are overgrown with weeds,
And ruin in the village breeds,—
Its very people witless grow
As dumbly to the fields they go
To do forced labour for their lord,
Babies at back, a hungry horde. . . .
I mourned their lot with heart that yearned;
Then to my alien home returned.

For not this village plot alone
But all Ukraine is moved to groan
Since wicked lords have forced the folk
To an intolerable yoke.
Sons of brave warriors waste away
While hideous gentry day by day
Sell to the Jews as trifling boons,
Their last remaining pantaloons. . . .

⁴⁹⁷Two powerful lines pithily comparing the peasant serfs black with toil to the black earth itself on which they labour.

It is most dreadful in distress
 To perish in this wilderness,
 But still more dreadful in Ukraine
 To hold one's tongue in bitter pain.
 But if, perchance, you do not view
 That misery, it seems to you
 That all is fair, in peace's spell;
 That in Ukraine all goes right well;
 That Dnieper between mountains mild
 Luxuriates like a merry child,
 Bathing in milk, and finds no pain
 In gazing over all Ukraine,
 While high above him, all in green,
 Vast, happy villages are seen;
 And in those towns with glory clad
 The people also must be glad.
 Perhaps that marvel might take place
 If there were purged without a trace,
 In our Ukraine, the landlord race! . . .

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

Not for the folk or their acclaim
 I ply these verses of my fame—
 Curly and laced, as child by mother:
 I do it for myself, dear brother!
 In exile I have found relief
 My gentle art in plying;
 From far-off Dnieper, it would seem,
 The words to me come flying;
 They spread themselves on paper then,
 They sorrow and cajole
 Like children, and they make rejoice
 My solitary soul
 In indigence. For pleasure's mine,
 Such joy in them is found
 As might a wealthy father know
 With little children round.

So, on my joy and happiness,
 I raise my prayer to God
 To keep my little ones from sleep
 Upon this far-off sod.
 Then let these airy children fly
 To their far country sweet
 And tell how difficult it is
 Life's fortune to entreat! . . .
 There in the happy family
 My children's voice will move them;
 The aged father will incline
 His grey head to approve them;
 Mother will say: "It had been well
 If they had not been born!"
 But a young maiden will reflect:
 "'Tis love I feel, not scorn!"

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

Beside a grove, out in the open field
 And by the very mound, two lofty poplars
 Bow to each other. Even without a wind
 They sway as if they wrestled on the plain.
 Those poplars are two sisters—sorceresses.

Both of them fell in love with one young man,
 Ivan by name; but Ivan, like a lad
 Who knows his business well, had no complaint
 To lay to the account of either sister,
 And made love now to one, now to the other,
 As nicely as you please—until one evening
 Out in the gully, under a green oak,
 The three folk came together at one time.
 —"And is it thus, you cruel miscreant,
 You make these sisters suffer?"

Off they went
 To look for evil herbs to poison Ivan.
 They found the deadly plants, they dug them up;

And hastened home to brew a foul decoction;
 They wept, they mourned, but could not help themselves:
 A deep compulsion drove them to prepare it!
 And so they did; and so they poisoned Ivan;
 And in the open field they buried him,
 Upon a grassy mound, beside the grove.
 Did they no longer care? Of course they did:
 For every single day the sisters went
 Quite early at the dawn to mourn for him
 Until at last they perished by imbibing
 The herbal venom that had murdered him.

And God, to warn the people, set them out
 As undulating poplars on the plain;
 There above Ivan on the mound they stand
 And ever of themselves they shake and sway,
 Whether there is a wind or none at all.

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

Shoes in visions shine entrancing . . .
 With them I would go a-dancing.
 Bad luck must I borrow!
 For no shoes have I today,
 And the musicians play and play,
 Adding to my sorrow!
 Barefoot by the fields I walk;
 Seeking happiness I stalk.
 Ah me! What a life!
 Look at me, a dark-browed lass!
 But in grief my days must pass,
 Fate with pain is rife!
 All the maids have fine red shoes
 That at parties they may use;
 Griefs my life despoil.
 Without pleasure, without love,
 Only waste my charms will prove,
 Fade in scullery toil.

Kos-Aral, 1848

I AM RICH AS WINE

* * * *

I am rich as wine,
 Beautiful and fine,
 But I have not found a mate,
 Ah, what woe is mine!

Hard it is to live
 With no one to love,
 And in all those satin dresses
 Loneliness to prove!

Let love come to me!
 I would wedded be
 To a handsome, swarthy orphan,
 But I am not free!

Wakeful parents stand
 Guard on either hand,
 Will not let me go alone
 For the fun I planned!

When they let me go
 'Tis with him, I know—
 Agèd, ugly, wealthy, hateful—
 My determined foe!

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

Love was all my whim
 And I married him,
 Wed a handsome, luckless orphan
 And my fate grew dim!

Proud and wicked men
 Severed us, and then
 Took him to the army station,
 The recruiting pen!

I remain alone,
 A trooper's wife, I own,
 Growing old in alien quarters—
 Such the fate I moan!

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

My mother bore me in a lofty hall
 And swaddled me in silks; admired of all,
 In velvet clad and gold, in grace I grew
 Like a protected flower to bless the view,
 Dark-browed, and hazel-eyed, and fair and gay.
 To a poor boy I gave my heart away,
 But Mother would not let me wed my lad,—
 And in our halls I stayed, alone and sad,
 My whole, long life in spinsterhood to pass.
 My pangs are dreadful! Like a blade of grass
 In a bare valley, in sheer loneliness
 I now grow old; in all of my distress
 I gaze not at a world that is not fine
 Nor to a living soul do I incline,
 And—pray, forgive me, Mother, as I cry—
 I'll curse you every day until I die!

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

Oh yes, upon a journey far
 I sent my husband out,
 While I to all the taverns here
 Would make my way about.
 Then to my crony did I go
 Some millet-seed to borrow,
 My little children thus to feed
 In cold rooms, full of sorrow.
 I fed them; put them all to bed;
 Then went with footsteps light
 To borrow money from the *diak*
 And with him spent the night.
 My husband from Crimea came
 Back upon dragging feet;
 The oxen died, the carts⁴⁹⁸ broke down,
 Disaster was complete.

⁴⁹⁸The waggons of the chumaks or salt carters.

He came into our house, and smote
 His thigh in his despair—
 Round the dead stove his children crawled,
 All hungry and all bare.
 “Where is your mother, children dear?”
 He asks, upon them glancing.
 “O Father! Mother is not here:
 She’s in the tavern, dancing.”

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

My comrade-dagger I shall sharpen well
 And stick it in my bootleg for a spell;
 In search of justice then I’ll wander out,
 And seek the glory that men talk about.
 I shall not go across the meadows wide,
 Nor yet by lanes along the river-side,
 Nor down the highroads, but by paths obscure,
 And there some money-lender I may lure,
 Some wicked noble with a filthy cloak,
 All these with greetings bold I shall invoke—
 Even a monk, if one I chance to meet—
 And tell them all from pleasure to retreat,
 To read the holy Scriptures with due care
 And to instruct the people everywhere
 Not to despoil or slaughter one another
 Or part the widow’s son from his dear mother
 To send him by strong force and evil sleights
 To join the army of the Muscovites.

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

The wind is blowing down the street
 And drives the snow in drifts;
 A widow in the belfry’s shade
 Pale, pleading hands uplifts
 To beg for alms from wealthy folk
 Who two long years ago

To Muscovite recruitment sent
 Her son, and brought her woe. . . .
 How she had wished to live! At least
 When old with her son's wife
 To live in peace and quietness. . . .
 But such was not her life! . . .
 Yet by her begging she prevailed
 A paltry coin to gain—
 A candle for her vanished son
 Burns at the Virgin's fane.

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

I shall sit down beside my cottage small
 And on the street my wistful gaze will fall,
 To see fair girls in criss-cross games at play
 Without my dear Hanusia this fine day.
 And yet their playfulness is somewhat sad,
 The song of those sweet girls is not so glad . . .
 For in another's home my dove must yearn:
 With mournful coos, she looks for my return.

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

A cuckoo in a verdant grove
 Sang sadly of her fate;
 A maiden in the greenwood wept
 Because she had no mate.
 All of her young and happy years,
 That once seemed all uncrossed,
 Float like a flower down a stream,
 Soon to be wholly lost.
 For if her parents had been rich
 A dowry to confer,
 Some suitor would have surely come
 To love and marry her.

But she was destitute, and so
 She'll perish presently
 In spinster dearth beneath a hedge
 And so no more will be.

Kos-Aral, 1848

SHVACHKA⁴⁹⁹

“You say there’s no more brandy to be drunk,
 And that there will be no more mead to have;
 No longer will you serve them in your taverns,
 You cursèd ones! Beer may no more be drunk,
 But I shall have my fill and shall prevent
 The fiendish Poles from living in Ukraine.
 Come then with me, my fellow-otamans,
 To Khvastiv this next Sunday; there we’ll pull
 A fine white shirt upon the fiendish Poles—
 No white one, but a bloody, let it be! . . .
 Come, let us have our fun, and, as we do,
 Perchance we shall recall our ancient chieftain,
 Renowned Semén,⁵⁰⁰ colonel of Khvastiv-town.
 Come along, friends! With me you will not perish.”

In Perepiat the band of haydamaks
 Quietly passed the night; before the dawn
 The lads in Khvastiv-town were making merry.
 O famed Paliy, come down from Mezhihirsk
 And gaze upon the deeds our Shvachka does
 In Khvastiv! For the man performs them well! . . .
 Yes, in this famous town of Khvastiv here
 Not hundreds, one or two, but thousands died.
 Along the market squares the blood flowed red,
 And Catholic churches, and the taverns too,
 Burned down like candles. In the citadel
 Only a tiny, holy church was spared,—
 There Shvachka sings exultant Hallelujahs.

⁴⁹⁹Yakiv Shvachka, one of the most cruel haydamak leaders during the insurrection against the Poles in 1768. His centre of activity was the town of Khvastiv.

⁵⁰⁰Semen Paliy. See fns. 407, 426.

In joy he praises God; then gives command
 To have his crow-black horse for travel saddled,
 For he has yet to keep a rendezvous
 Yonder in Bykhiv, in that famous town,
 That with Levchenko⁵⁰¹ he may trample on
 The corpses of his country's enemies.

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

He'll drink no more the beer and mead,
 To no well turn aside—
 Misfortune fell on a chumak,⁵⁰²
 Out in the steppe so wide:
 A grievous aching smote his head;
 Pangs on his belly prey;
 He fell beside his waggon down
 And where he fell, he lay.
 From famed Odessa he had brought
 The plague along with him;
 His comrades in their terror fled—
 And his distress was grim.
 His oxen by the waggon there
 With downcast visage stand;
 Out of the steppe a flock of rooks
 Fly near across the land.
 "Oh rooks, feed not upon my flesh,
 Here on the lonely lea,
 For having had your fill, you'll die
 In pain along with me.
 Fly rather, rooks, my grey-winged ones,
 Seek my dear father's face,
 And bid him have a requiem sung
 To yield my soul that grace;
 And let him for my sinful soul
 Have psalms intoned, and then
 Pray go and tell my sweetheart young
 I shall not come again."

Kos-Aral, 1848

⁵⁰¹Another haydamak leader.

⁵⁰²See fn. 201.

* * * *

Life out upon the street is very sad;
 Inside the house, my father scolds like mad;
 Mother won't let me seek the widow's place
 For all-night parties that my dreams embrace.
 What can I do? What action can I prove?
 Shall I with someone else now fall in love,
 Or go and drown myself? Thus I decide:
 I'll put my ear-rings on, decked out with pride
 In my fine strings of beads, and next week go
 To the town fair, and tell him, firm and slow:
 "Marry me now, or leave me quite alone!
 For with the kind of love I now bemoan
 By which my mother keeps me on the shelf,
 I'll certainly prefer to drown myself."

Kos-Aral, 1848

PRETTY KATIE

A BALLAD

To pretty Katerina's house,
 That stands so rich and stately,
 From all the Zaporozhian realm⁵⁰³
 Three wooers came but lately.

And one was Semen Bossiy⁵⁰⁴ named;
 The second, Ivan Holiy:⁵⁰⁴
 Young Ivan Yaroshenko, third,
 Was a Cossack far from lowly.

"We've been through all of Poland's towns
 (They said) and all Ukraine,
 But no such beauty have we seen
 As Katie, we maintain!"

The first one said: "If I were rich,
 My brothers, I aver,

⁵⁰³From the Cossack region beyond the Dnieper's rapids.

⁵⁰⁴Both are Cossack surnames, or rather nicknames, Bossiy meaning the Bare-footed, and Holiy meaning the Bare.

I'd give the whole of all my gold
For one brief hour with her."

The second said: "If I were strong,
My comrades, I aver,
I'd give at length my utter strength
For one brief hour with her."

The third man said: "No thing on earth,
My fellows, I aver,
Would I eschew to give or do
For one brief hour with her."

Thoughtful grew Katerina then,
And to the third says she:
"An only brother do I mourn
In dread captivity.

"In far Crimea he must lie.
Who brings him to my house,
That man, O Zaporozhians brave,
Will then become my spouse!"

They all rose up together straight
And saddled their three steeds
And rode in haste to liberate
Her brother by their deeds.

And one the Dnieper's flood did drown,
The Poles impaled another,
But one from Bakchisaray-town⁵⁰⁵
Brought back the captive brother.

Full early at the lordly house,
Knocks at the door entreat:
"Wake up, wake up, my maiden fair,
Your brother come to greet!"

Then Katie glanced upon the pair,
And Katie smiled and cried:
"This is no brother, but my love—
My sweetheart—for I lied."

⁵⁰⁵The Tartar capital in Crimea.

“You lied to me!” His sabre flashed,
 And Katie’s pretty head
 Fell down and rolled upon the floor.
 Then to his mate he said:

“Out of this wicked house, my friend,
 Let us make haste to go!”
 The Zaporozhians rode off
 Swift as the winds that blow.

The black-browed Katerina’s corpse
 Men buried on the plain;
 And on the steppe the Cossack lads
 Were reconciled again.

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

Behind the grove the sun mounts up,
 It sets there in the gloaming,
 At evening, in the valley’s shade,
 A Cossack sad is roaming.
 An hour he roams, another yet,
 And yet his black-browed beauty
 From the dark meadow does not come
 And thus reward his duty.
 The treacherous one does not appear. . . .
 Out of the gloom abhorred,
 With kennel-keepers and with hounds
 Now comes the rakish lord.
 The dogs are set upon the lad;
 His hands with ropes are tied;
 The fiercest tortures for his flesh
 His captors then provide;
 Into a dungeon he is cast;
 The lord now locks him there;
 Then rapes the girl and turns her out
 To wander in despair. . . .

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

Alas! I went to fetch a pail of water
 Down in the valley; there I saw my sweetheart,
 Who sported wantonly with someone else.
 And she who brought this cruel separation
 To part my love and me—she is my neighbour,
 A wealthy widow, who is young and charming.
 It was but yesterday that I with her,
 That viper, reaped the hempstalks in the field
 And told her everything: of how he loved me
 And soon would marry me; that vicious bitch
 I even gave a wedding invitation.
 Ivan, my Ivan, my beloved friend!
 May God but strike you dead, and make an end!

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

My care is not so much my enemies
 As seeming friends who'll strip you of your ease,
 And even while of love they'll make ado
 And weep above you, they will slander you.
 Into their homes as guest they'll bid you come
 And greet you amiably and seek to plumb
 Your inmost secrets, so that they may grin,
 And mock you afterwards, and do you in.
 In this life it is possible to live
 Without an enemy; but friends will give
 Pain everywhere—die, and without a doubt
 I vow these kindly souls will sniff you out!

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

Oh hush-a-bye, Oh hush-a-bye, my baby,
 I lull you day and night. . . .
 Then you will roam, my son, about your country,
 And curse us for your plight.

O son, my son! You must not curse your father,
 To him no guilt assign!
 I am the wicked one: 'tis I—your mother—
 You must in truth malign! . . .
 And when I die, go not among the people
 But seek the forest out;
 The forest will not ask you who you are—
 There you may roam about!
 There you will find that fair cranberry bush;
 Kind looks upon it cast! . . .
 I loved it once, my child, with deep affection,
 Once in the far-off past.
 If in the towns you go, and in their houses,
 No care need you surprise;
 But if you see a mother and her children,
 Pray, turn away your eyes! . . .

Kos-Aral, 1848

THE FIELD OF BERESTECHKO⁵⁰⁶

Why are you touched with somberness,
 O field, a verdant sea?
 I have been darkened with the blood
 Poured out for liberty.

Here by old Berestechko-town,
 For four wide miles outspread,
 The famous Zaporozhian host
 Once strewed me with its dead;

Settling upon me from the north,
 The human ravens⁵⁰⁷ thresh;
 They pluck away the Cossacks' eyes
 But will not touch their flesh. . . .

My greenery is marred with gloom
 For your dear freedom's sake,
 Yet some day I'll grow green again,
 While you will not awake

⁵⁰⁶See fn. 310.

⁵⁰⁷The Muscovites who took advantage of the sorry situation to despoil Ukraine of what was the best, leaving only the paltry remnants.

To freedom but in dogged pain
 Will plough my ancient lea,
 And, as you plough in silent grief,
 Will curse your destiny. . . .

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

Fine wisps of mist across the valley spread—
 A pleasant life with parents can be led,
 But greater pleasure still it is to house
 Beyond the hilltop with a fine young spouse.
 Ah, I will walk along a darksome grove
 And seek to find myself a mate to love.
 “Where are you? Where? Reply, and end my smart!
 Come, let me cuddle you against my heart!
 Come now, my darling, let the courting end,
 Let us get married, for to that we tend,
 But lest my serious parents should affright us,
 Let them not know the priest will soon unite us.”
 And so I married, and concealed myself. . . .
 Would I had stayed upon a spinster’s shelf!
 It had been easier to live alone
 Than round the world with you to make my moan.

Kos-Aral, 1848

ELECTION OF A HETMAN⁵⁰⁸

Upon a Sunday, blessed holy day,
 And in the early watches of the morning,
 In the most famous town of Chihirin⁵⁰⁹
 All of the bells began to clang aloud,
 All of the cannon mouths began to speak,
 As the Cossacks’ most illustrious company
 Was summoned to assemble on the spot.
 With holy banners and with sacred icons,

⁵⁰⁸Historically, this poem is incorrect, but it is a good presentation of the Cossack manners and customs relating to this particular instance.

⁵⁰⁹Later, the hetman capital.

The people with the priests from all the churches
 Press upwards to the summit of the hill,
 All humming like the honey-bees of God.
 Out of the holy monastery gates,
 Shining with gold, chanting the acathistus,
 Emerges now the archimandrite chief
 And makes his deep prostrations to the ground.
 Solemnly, softly, at that early hour,
 Upon that lofty hill the colonels gathered.
 And troops extended, vast as any sea,
 With banners and with bunchuks⁵¹⁰ marching up
 Out of the meadow, sounding trumpets loudly,
 And finally all stopped upon the hill.

The cannon ceased to roar, the bells grew mute,
 And to the ground the whole assembly bowed.
 Standing upon the hill, the archimandrite
 Conducts the service of their supplication,
 Begging the blessed Lord with fervent praises
 To grant the wisdom of experience
 So that a proper hetman might be chosen.
 And then the concourse, with a single voice,
 Elected as their hetman that renowned
 Old warrior Loboda,⁵¹¹ brother-in-arms
 Of highest worth. Again the trumpets blared,
 The bells rang out, the cannon boomed once more,
 And now they hem their chosen hetman round
 With banners and with bunchuks where he stood.
 But the old hetman weeps in bitterness,
 Raises his hands to God and deeply bows
 Thrice to the ground before the vast assembly,
 And, with a voice sonorous as a bell,
 Speaks out: "I thank you all, my doughty comrades,
 Famed Zaporozhians, for the mighty glory,
 Respect and honour you have paid to me!
 Yet you would do much better at this time
 If, in an old man's place, you were to choose
 A young one, and, to wit, that brave young warrior,

⁵¹⁰See fn. 55.

⁵¹¹Hrihoriy (Hritz) Loboda (1593–96), not Ivan, as Shevchenko mistakenly calls him.

That most renowned of Zaporozhian chiefs,
 Pavlo Kravchenko-Nalivayko's self.⁵¹²
 I am a grey old man, and hardly able
 To rise upon my feet; yet I shall give him
 The best of counsel like a patient father
 And teach him how to stand against the Poles.
 Fierce times prevail now in our fair Ukraine!
 It cannot be for me, my brothers dear,
 To lead your serried ranks against the Poles,
 Nor is it right for me, an aged man,
 To bear the mace of office. Nalivayko
 Would better bear it, to the Cossacks' glory,
 That even in their far-off town of Warsaw
 The infernal Poles may all be terrified!"

Like bagpipe drones the assembly roared approval:
 The bells rang out again, the cannon bellowed,
 And with the bunchuks gay they covered deep
 That most renowned of Zaporozhian chiefs,
 Pavlo Kravchenko-Nalivayko himself.

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

Down to the thicket I made my way
 To gather nuts at leisure,
 But I fell in love with a miller gay
 To suit my own sweet pleasure.
 The miller grinds and sifts the flour—
 Then turns to kiss me by the hour
 To suit our own sweet pleasure.

Down to the thicket I made my way
 The mushroom beds among,
 But I fell in love with a saddler gay,
 Although I am so young.
 The saddler stitches the harness pad
 And then he cuddles me like mad—
 Although I am so young.

⁵¹²He was never a hetman. See fn. 22.

Down to the thicket I made my way
 To gather kindling wood,
 But I fell in love with a saddler gay,
 As any beauty could.
 The cooper hammers the bucket's rim,
 And he hugs me and I hug him,
 As any beauty could.

And if, dear mother, you'd like to know
 What man may soon apply
 To be your son-in-law, I trow,
 And mate with such as I,
 All of them, mother, you may call
 On Sunday, for I've loved them all,
 And all can qualify!

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

Early on Sunday, ere the night was spent,
 I, a young maid, out on the highway went,
 Down the broad road in sorrow; in the vale
 I walked in shadow, so that, by my trail,
 My mother could not see, to disapprove,
 That darling young chumak⁵¹³ who is my love.

Alas, behind the reed-beds, on my beat,
 Only the drover's waggons did I meet:
 His yellowish-grey oxen pace along,
 They pace and chew the cud; my darling strong,
 My young chumak is not beside them there.
 Ah, me! Beside the road, in meadows bare,
 They dug his grave with yoke-pins; wept aloud;
 Then wrapped him in a rush-mat as a shroud
 And into that deep hole, high on a mound,
 They dropped my Ivan in the steppe-land ground.
 O God most merciful, who pitiest woe,
 Remember me, because I loved him so!

Kos-Aral, 1848

⁵¹³See fn. 201.

* * * *

It is not the tall poplar tree
 The wind now bends, irate,
 But a young maid in loneliness
 Who thus upbraids her fate:
 "I would, my fate, that in the sea
 You presently might fall
 For not allowing me so long
 To fall in love at all!
 I do not know how maidens kiss,
 Or how they are embraced;
 Of their emotions when it's done,
 I've never had a taste. . .
 Nor, mother, shall I ever know!
 How dread to live alone,
 To pass one's life in spinsterhood
 And not love anyone!" . . .

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

A narrow pathway I have worn
 Across the valley deep,
 To seek the market square, my love,
 Across a hillside steep;
 There I sold buns to Cossack troops,
 And thus have earned, my love,
 Five copecks by my diligence,
 My own delight to prove.
 Two of those copecks, only two,
 Have been my liquor's fee,
 And one I've to a piper given
 To pipe a tune for me:
 Play for me then, my piper bold,
 Pipe up upon your reed,
 Till all my grief has been forgot
 And I am glad indeed.
 That is the sort of lass I am;
 This life I can endure!
 Propose to me, my darling lad,—
 I'll marry you for sure!

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

That mighty valley I shall not forget,
 That evening hour, the high mound where we met,
 And what was dreamed and spoken by us twain.
 What does it matter? For we left again,
 Parted like strangers, in two different spheres.
 And in the meantime all the precious years
 When we were young have vainly passed us by.
 Thus both of us, as sorrows multiply,
 Have wasted into nothing, bad or good:
 I—in my exile, you—in widowhood;
 We do not live, but wander at a distance,
 Remembering those years of true existence.

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

Down in the garden by the ford
 No periwinkles sprout;
 The young maid does not seek the ford
 To draw her water out.

In the enclosure by the hedge
 The green hop-vines grow sere;
 Out to the village from the house
 No maiden does appear.

Down in the garden by the ford
 Willows are bending low;
 The dark-browed maid is plunged in thought,
 Her heart is dark with woe.

She weeps, she weeps and struggles hard,
 A fish that fate is gaffing. . . .
 Above her and her blighted youth
 A wicked man is laughing.

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

O mother, if I only had a string
 Of corals, I in town would take my fling;
 For in the town, my mother, joy's intense—
 Three fine musicians play their instruments
 And gay young women with their lads make love . . .
 Ah, mother, what misfortunes I must prove!

Oh, I will go and offer up a prayer
 To God in Heaven, and then go debonair
 To serve as housemaid, and a pair of shoes
 Buy for myself and hire for my use
 The orchestra with its three instruments—
 People will gaze upon my competence
 And gape to see me dance so merrily . . .
 Ah, mother, how delighted I shall be!

Let me not pass my life in spinsterhood
 And ever braid my hair in lonely mood
 And waste my beauty in vain fantasies
 And live a lonely life in sad unease!
 But even while slow earnings count their tale,
 My dark-browed beauty grows more wan and pale . . .
 And still no gay young man draws near to love . . .
 Ah, mother, what misfortunes I must prove!

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

“I would not be a married man,
 I do not want to love;
 I would not help rear children up
 Somewhere behind a stove;
 I do not want, my mother dear,
 To walk behind the plough,
 And wear my velvet garments out
 By toil in field and slough.

But I will go and wed myself
 To comradeship's campaign,
 The famous Zaporozhian realm
 And the Great Cossack Plain.⁵¹⁴
 Khortitsia's Isle will mother me,
 My life will there be fine,
 For there I'll dress in velvet clothes
 And quaff my mead and wine!"

The foolish Cossack went away;
 Towards glory would he press—
 And left a mother, old and grey,
 To live in loneliness.
 On Sundays at her humble meals
 She'd think of him and sigh:
 "Ivan, my son, has gone away;
 No news of him have I."
 Not after two, three, four long years
 But when far more were spanned,
 Our Zaporozhian returned
 Almost too weak to stand;
 Patched and bedraggled he came back,
 And destitute and lame.
 His Cossack life was over now,
 And he must face his dame!
 And greeting him was no one else,
 No one to share his grief!
 He should have wed when he was young
 And gained a true relief!
 But years of youth have passed away,
 All benefits depart,
 No one is left in all the world
 To warm his age-cold heart;
 No one was left to welcome home
 The cripple from war's slaughter;
 No one was there to offer him
 Even a glass of water!

Kos-Aral, 1848

⁵¹⁴See fn. 152.

THE PLAGUE⁵¹⁵

The plague, with spade in hand was wandering
About the land and kept on digging pits
And filling them with corpses upon corpses
Without intoning a funereal chant.
Whether in towns or villages she walks,
She sweeps them into graves as with a broom.
The spring comes. And the gardens bloom again,
Appearing as if cloaked in tapestry
And washed all sparkling white in God's own dew.
The earth rejoices: yes, it blossoms forth,
Proud of its flowers, its umbrageous gardens
And spreading meadows; in the villages,
The hapless people cower like frightened lambs,
Locked in their cottages, and there they perish.
Out in the streets, the oxen low in hunger;
While in the garden-walks the horses graze—
Nobody comes to drive them to their stalls
And feed them; it would seem past peradventure
As if the folk had fallen fast asleep—
And many of them slumber now in death!
They have forgotten about blessed Sunday,
For it is long since church-bells have been heard;
The chimneys choke in mourning without smoke;
While past the gardens and behind the hedges
The sombre grave-mounds swiftly multiply.
Beside the cottages, among the orchards,
The sextons drag with chains the rotting corpses,
Covered with tar and sewn in leather sacks,
Beyond the village gates and, coffin-less,
Cover them up with earth. Days, months pass by.
The village has grown silent for all time
And overgrown with beds of prickly nettles.
Even the diggers of the graves roamed round
Till they, too, fell in death beside the houses.
And no one came outdoors the morning after
To bury the poor fellows where they lay,
And so beside the huts they simply rotted.

⁵¹⁵An epidemic of cholera raged in Russia in 1848 and 1849.

Like an oasis in the open plain
 The village stands out green. None enters it,
 Except the wind that blows the yellow leaves
 And scatters them about the yellow fields.
 Long had it stood there green until the people
 Out in the plain sent grass-fires coursing towards it
 And burned that verdant village to the ground.
 It was consumed; it smouldered into ashes;
 And these the wind dispersed without a trace.
 Such was the fearful misery that plague
 Brought to a village in our native land.

Kos-Aral, 1848

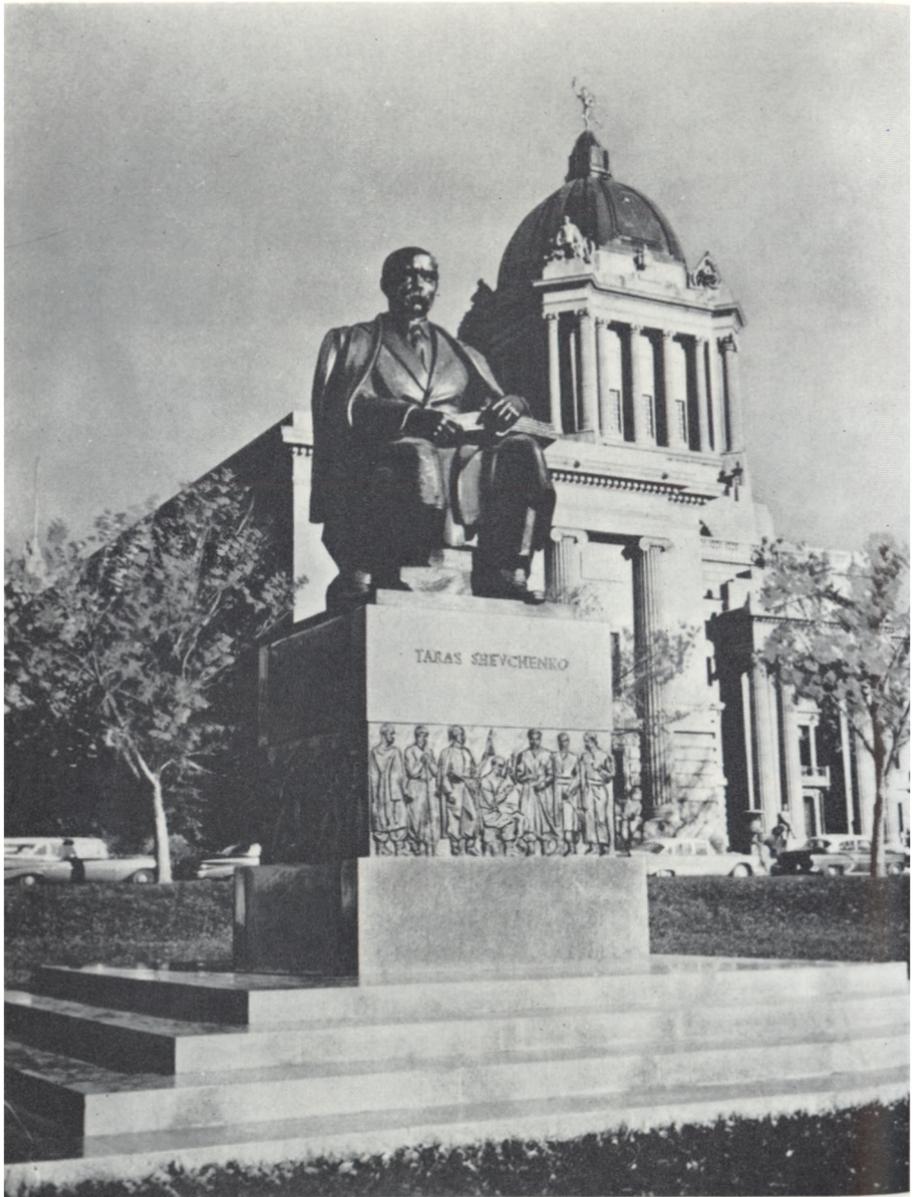
* * * *

The post-chaise brings its mail again
 With nothing for me from Ukraine!
 It must be that for evil deeds
 An angry God my spirit bleeds
 In this waste land. 'Tis not for me
 To know how pangs like these can be;
 Nor do I want to know the cause! . . .
 And yet I weep whene'er I pause
 Those far occasions to recall,
 Beneath a melancholy pall,
 That all too speedily have sped
 In my Ukraine above my head.
 Those were the days when people swore
 That they the closest friendship bore . . .
 So was it till the time we parted
 Without a tear-drop, stony-hearted.
 And so it comes to pass that I
 As I grow old, their love deny . . .
 No, they are dead of pestilence—
 Else they had sent a message thence
 To greet me in my impotence. . . .

Alas, not to enhance my grief and sorrow
 By looking on while others read their letters,
 I'll turn to roam, to stray along the coast,



A general view of Taras Shevchenko's grave-mound in Kaniv, as it now appears.
Sculptor M. H. Manizer.



A monument to Taras Shevchenko erected in 1961 by the Ukrainian Canadian Committee on the grounds of the Manitoba Legislative Buildings, Winnipeg, to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the poet's death.
Sculptor Andrew Daragan.

Where I'll conciliate my misery,
 Recall Ukraine and sing a soothing song.
 Men will denounce me and betray my trust,—
 But the kind Muse will always counsel me,—
 Bring me both counsel and deep consolation
 And tell me candid truth to stay my heart.

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

None is there in my exiled loneliness
 With whom I may my heart's true love express;
 And so I seek for anyone at all
 With whom to join in converse mutual.
 One seeks for God—and lights on something else
 Of which my shamefaced spirit never tells.
 This is what passing years and my despair
 Have done to me! And what is more, I swear,
 The summer of my soul's maturity
 Has ended in dark autumn clouds for me,
 Until no sole occasion can I find
 When ordered sentiments possess my mind.
 One seeks to fashion fancies to console
 One's orphaned heart with words of gentle dole—
 But into my dazed brain no comfort creeps,
 And with no soul my own its trysting keeps!
 And yet one's spirit must be comforted!
 It yearns and in such piteous style has pled
 For one kind word. . . . I listen still in vain!
 It seems as if in wind and snow has lain
 My tepid corpse upon the wintry plain.

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

Alas, my grey-haired father died
 And then my dear, old mother,
 So now there is no person left
 To help me lest I smother:

An orphan all alone in life—
 What path can I perceive?
 Shall I among the people go
 Or stay at home and grieve?
 Ah, to the green grove shall I go,
 And there shall plant the rue,
 And if the rue in beauty sprouts
 I know what I shall do.
 Perhaps my love will hail my house
 And be the master there;
 But if he does not come, I'll go
 To seek my fate elsewhere.
 The rue has sprouted, and appears
 Green in the forest grass,
 But still the orphan wastes away,
 A drudging servant lass!

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

The Muscovite hussar has not returned
 From his campaigning. Why has my heart burned
 In pity for him, and in longing too?
 Because he wore a tunic, fine and new,
 And had a dark moustache, that friendly chap
 Who used to call me Molly? No such slap
 Of fate afflicts me. It is that I see
 My beauty fade till none would marry me;
 And girls along the street give jeers inhuman
 And cursèd ones cry out: "Ah, trooper's woman!" . . .

Kos-Aral, 1848

* * * *

It happened in the celebrated town
 Of Vilna⁵¹⁶ not so very long ago—
 At that time there still stood (I'm at a loss

⁵¹⁶The capital of Lithuania, then under Poland. The incident related here may have happened during the brief period Shevchenko sojourned in that city as still a serf and in the suite of his lord, Engelhardt.

To find the right word for this chancy metre)
 A mighty edifice,⁵¹⁷ a very huge one,
 Made over later as a hospital
 After the college lads had been expelled
 Because they had refused to bare their heads
 When by the Ostra Brama they would go. . . .
 A fool, they say, can be identified
 By his own way of walking; but, I swear,
 I cannot name the student, and that's that!

He was a Lithuanian, the son
 Of a proud countess: rich and handsome too,
 An only child. He did not shirk his studies,
 Like other lordlings, nor remove his cap
 When he was passing through the Gothic Gate.
 He was a good boy, but misfortune met him:
 The poor lad (he was but an adolescent)
 Had fallen deep in love with a young Jewess
 And to be sure, without his mother's knowledge,
 Was thinking he would marry her, no less—
 He could not help himself, so fair was she,
 The dear young infidel! Sweet as a picture
 She sat till nightfall at her father's window
 And wiped her tearful eyes—she loved him, too,
 Loved him terrifically. But if she
 Should ever walk along the boulevard,
 Or go to service at the synagogue,
 Her father followed in her company
 So that she had no chance to see her lover.
 Then it so happened that a man from Lubsk,
 Some banker, sued the father for her hand.
 What was the boy to do? He'd seek the Zakret⁵¹⁸
 To drown himself, because this sorry student
 Could not endure to live without the Jewess.
 The old Jew seemed to sense the whole affair—
 He'd lock his only daughter in the house
 Each morning early when he sought his shop;

⁵¹⁷Perhaps the university which was turned into a hospital when its students proved rebellious to the degree of not, as required, doffing their caps when passing the statue of the Virgin Mary set upon the Gothic city gates (Ostra Brama).

⁵¹⁸Vilna's suburb through which the Viliya River flows.

Besides, he even hired a guard, old Rukhlia.⁵¹⁹
 No, my dear fellow, Rukhlia will not help you!
 Where was it that the young maid read the novel
 That told the story of the silken ladder?
 Not even Rukhlia knew about the scheme;
 Perhaps it was the girl who thought of it
 And plaited for herself just such a ladder,
 Lowering herself by night upon its strands
 Down to the street to meet her precious student.
 And then, instead of running far away,
 They (just like children) started in to kiss
 And hug each other by her father's gate.
 Meanwhile the Hebrew, in a mighty rage,
 Rushed from the yard and bore with him an axe.
 Horror! Ah, horror! Woe to you, old mother!
 Your son is dead: he wallows in his blood
 Upon the street, fresh murdered by the Jew.
 Woe to you, mother! But the wild young Jewess . . .
 (Where did the child gain suddenly such strength?!)
 Wrenched from his murderous hands the bloody axe
 And drove it deep into her father's chest,
 Up to the very handle! Terrible
 Was this occurrence in that famous town,
 Renowned old Vilna. For a space of time
 People kept wondering where the girl had hid,
 That viperous Jewess who had slain her father.
 But she that very night had drowned herself
 Deep in the Viliya;⁵²⁰ for later on
 They found her in the Zakret, on whose bank
 They buried her. The Countess thus was left
 Without a child, that solitary woman.
 A rumour had it that she went to Rome,
 Lived there awhile, and later, so they said,
 Was married to an impecunious marquis.
 Perhaps the people lie, as is their nature;
 Their evil tongues will not forget to sting
 Even a sorry widow in her woe.

Kos-Aral, 1848

⁵¹⁹Colloquial for Rachel.

⁵²⁰The stream flowing through the city.

HETMAN DOROSHENKO⁵²¹

The black cloud has obscured the cloud of white:⁵²²
 From past Liman⁵²³ the Tartars with the Turks
 Emerged in force; the Polish gentry creep
 In from Polisia; while the foolish hetman,
 The priest's son, Samiylovich, presses forward
 From beyond Dnieper's shores with Romodan.⁵²⁴
 They cover all Ukraine like greedy jackdaws
 And peck at it as freely as they wish.
 And you, O Chihirin and Doroshenko,
 Comrades-in-arms, old Zaporozhian friends,
 Are you still ailing, or are you afraid
 To make a stand against the enemy?
 —“My spirit feels no fear, O otamans,⁵²⁵
 But I am loath to damage our Ukraine!”
 And Doroshenko, like a little child,
 Burst into tears.—“Never shall we disperse
 The hostile powers, nor shall I rise again!
 Take all the seals that mark my hetmanate
 And the insignia of my office, sirs,
 And bear them humbly to the Muscovites:
 Let Moscow know that Hetman Doroshenko
 Has left this world. My Zaporozhian brothers,
 I now shall don the habit of a monk
 And go to Mezhihir⁵²⁶ to make prostrations

⁵²¹Petro Doroshenko, hetman of Ukraine (1665–76) whom Shevchenko greatly admired for statesmanship and military leadership. He united all the Ukrainian territories under his mace in 1668, but Muscovy and Poland instigated other Cossack leaders against him and divided Ukraine between themselves, each occupant appointing its own man to rule over their respective territories as hetmans. Under the circumstances, Doroshenko had no choice but to seek an alliance with the Turks against the two northern enemies. The period that followed is known in Ukrainian history as that of the “Great Ruin,” for the country was ravaged by the Muscovites from the north, the Poles from the west, and the Turks from the south. The Turkish raids, although in support of Doroshenko, nevertheless created havoc in the land. Finally, seeing that his attempts to unite Ukraine had been shattered, Doroshenko decided to resign his office of hetman in favour of the Moscow-designated Ivan Samiylovich. He was taken under Russian surveillance and, after three years of detention, sent to the town of Viatka where he was made a military commander.

⁵²²White cloud, Ukraine; black cloud, her enemies.

⁵²³The Dnieper's estuary.

⁵²⁴Russian general, Grigoriy Romodanovsky.

⁵²⁵Captains.

⁵²⁶A locality where the famous Cossack church and monastery of the Blessed Saviour stood.

Before our Saviour in His holy Church.”
 All bells began to toll, the cannon boomed;
 In two files, stretched a mile, the Cossacks stood
 From beyond Dnieper with the Muscovites.
 Between the files the insignia were borne.
 Never again, O Peter, will you drink
 The waters from Tiasmin!⁵²⁷ Before the feet
 Of the priest's son⁵²⁸ they set the insignia—
 Now, Peter, you may go to Mezhihir
 To pass your days in piety and prayer!
 But foes did not let Doroshenko go,—
 They recognized him in his monkish cassock,⁵²⁹
 Put him in chains and sent him to Sosnitsia,⁵³⁰
 And thence to Yaropolche,⁵³¹ where he died.
 This was the final fate that overtook you,
 Our Zaporozhian friend and fellow-soldier!

The sun came peering from behind the clouds
 Upon old Chihirin: Into their towns
 The Tartars and the Turks at last withdrew.
 The Poles with their Czarniecki—wicked Stephen—
 Set fire to the holy church of God
 And burned to ashes the great bones of Bohdan
 And those of Timish⁵³² too, in Subotiv,⁵³³
 And straightway they withdrew their troops to Poland
 As if they had achieved a worthy deed.
 Meanwhile the Muscovites with Romodan
 Early on Sunday morning marched along
 With the priest's son the road called “Romodan's.”

Like some great eagle with its pinions clipped,
 Deprived at last of wings and liberty,
 The famous Doroshenko sickened now
 In his far exile and he died of grief.
 Too weary had he grown to drag his chains
 Even a little further. In Ukraine

⁵²⁷The river flowing through Doroshenko's capital, Chihirin.

⁵²⁸Samiylovich.

⁵²⁹Doroshenko never became a monk.

⁵³⁰A town near Chihirin.

⁵³¹A town near Moscow.

⁵³²Bohdan Khmelnitsky's son who, for a short time, was also a hetman.

⁵³³One of Khmelnitsky's capitals, where he built a church in which he was buried.

The people soon forgot their glorious hetman.
 You only, O Rostovsky, Saint Dimitriy,⁵³⁴
 In your dark cell remembered your great friend
 And had a chapel raised above his tomb
 And had prayers said for the departed hetman,
 Memorial masses chanted there for Peter.
 Right to our day, as every year brings round
 The anniversary of his sad death,
 Priests go to hold a service for the dead
 Above our hetman's grave in Yaropolche.

Kos-Aral, 1848

AT CHRISTMAS

TO KHVEDIR M. LAZAREVSKY⁵³⁵

As you return at night, and yet not homewards,
 From the apartment where your mistress lies,
 And as you go to bed, but not to sleep,
 Remember me, my brother! And when tedium
 Shall visit you and seek to pass the night,
 At such a time as that, my dear, old friend,
 Evoke me to console you! At such times,
 Call to remembrance your once happy friend
 Who lives now in the far-off wilderness
 Beyond the sea. Consider how he struggles
 To overcome his grief; how, having hid
 From others all his flights of poesy
 And his own naked heart, he roams about
 And prays to God, remembering Ukraine
 And you in his requests, my precious friend.
 And there are times when he grows melancholy . . .
 Yet not from sheer despair; it merely means
 He cannot help it. For outside, behold,
 The Christmas Feast is drawing very near. . . .
 How difficult it is, dear friend and brother,

⁵³⁴St. Dimitriy Rostovsky, the metropolitan of Rostov (near Moscow), who was of Ukrainian origin and noted as a writer.

⁵³⁵One of the Lazarevsky brothers who befriended Shevchenko during his exile. This one (Theodore) served in a military capacity at Orenburg.

To celebrate its coming all alone
 In this vast wilderness. . . . Tomorrow morning
 The belfries will resound throughout Ukraine;
 Tomorrow morning, folk will go to church
 To give God praises. And tomorrow morning
 In this bleak wilderness the hungry wolf
 Will start to howl and a cold hurricane
 Will blow most fiercely and will heap in drifts
 The sand and snow to cover up my barracks—
 My present home. And this will be the way
 That I shall celebrate this blessed Feast!

What can I do? Misfortune surely comes
 But to be wrestled with. And you, dear friend,
 If you, perhaps, would fain be melancholy,
 Just read this note from me, and realize
 That life is only harsh in desert places
 And exile. . . . While out yonder, where you stay,
 The people have a chance to live, though badly. . . .
 What can I do? Well, one could die, of course—
 But hope, my friend, can never wholly die.

Kos-Aral, 1848

1849

* * * *

As the salt-merchants on the boundless steppe⁵³⁶
 In autumn pass by milepost after milepost,
 So do my years pass by me, one by one;
 And yet I am indifferent: these booklets
 I deck and fill with nothing except verses,
 For thus I would console my foolish head
 And run the risk of forging my own shackles
 If ever these fine officers find out. . . .

⁵³⁶This poem begins the third "bootleg" booklet.

But even if they were to crucify me,
 I cannot help but fabricate my verses:
 For two long years I have embroidered them,
 And start the third betimes with craftsmanship.

Kos-Aral, 1849

* * * *

Rather than grieve my fellow men
 And trouble folks at all,
 I'll follow where my eyes may lead,
 And let what will, befall!
 If I have luck, I'll take a wife;
 If not, I'll drown myself;
 But will not rent my services,
 Or sell myself for pelf.
 And so I went where eyes might lead,
 But luck eluded me,
 And good folk would not strike a deal
 That gave me liberty;
 They haggled not but cast me out
 To exile far away—
 A weed so poisonous they scorned
 To have among their hay. . . .

Kos-Aral, 1849

THE CAPTAIN

I

This was in Ohlav.⁵³⁷ . . . Have you heard, perhaps,
 Of pretty Ohlav, white with cottages?
 Not much! Then I must tell you of the village,
 So that its sorrow may not turn to laughter.
 Not far from Borispol⁵³⁷—and like in size—
 It lies today and by it nicely stands
 A row of poplars on the village common;

⁵³⁷Towns near Kiev.

They look as if they were the village maids
 Who had come out to seek a herd of cows
 And there had waited.

A long time ago—
 Here, from behind a hedge, the beanstalks twined
 Around supports; a window bright with panes
 Would open in the summer on a garden;
 And a house, too, stood there behind the hedge,
 The dwelling of a captain, who was rich
 And therefore could afford the charity
 And rearing, as his own, the bastard daughter
 Of someone else; or could it be an orphan
 The captain had adopted as his child?
 He thus was tending in that silent nook
 The daughter of another, like a flower.
 His son, moreover (for he had been married
 But lost his wife), his son he'd sent away
 To boarding school in Kiev for his training;
 And he himself was waiting for Nastusia,
 His ward, to grow from girlhood, that in time
 He might be linked with her in closer fashion:
 Not that he thought his son might marry her
 But that the old man took it in his head
 To play the fool and marry her himself.
 Lest anyone at all should know of this,
 He sought no one's advice but kept his counsel.
 Meanwhile the housewives—for the devil knows
 How they could sense it—softly mocked at him.
 They have a nose to sniff such matters out.

II

The captain sits; he leans against the porch,
 Deep in his thoughts; Nastusia in the garden
 Is flitting here and there like any bird;
 Now she would come and seat herself beside him
 And kiss his hand respectfully, and now
 She'd play in mischief with his long grey whiskers,
 And fondle the old fellow like a child.
 But the old man has little taste for that;
 He longs for something else, his old flesh yearns

For wanton fondling. With his subtle fingers
 He now would seek to plait her girlish braids,
 As long and thick as snakes, and presently
 Undid them all again and wound their strands
 Three times with pleasure round her pretty neck.
 She meanwhile, a sweet dove of innocence,
 Knows not his thought and, like a kitten, plays
 With the old tomcat in the ingle-nook.

THE CAPTAIN (*playfully*)

Be off, you foolish girl! Just look at you:
 You have undone your braids and stand dishevelled
 Just like a mermaid. Don't you tuck them in
 With the fine ribbons that your auntie brought you?

NASTIA⁵³⁸

If you would give me leave to go and dance,
 I'd tuck away my braids with ribbons fine,
 Put on my yellow shoes and nice red skirt
 And put some periwinkle in my hair . . .

THE CAPTAIN

Now, just hold on a minute, if you please,
 You little bare-head fool! Where would you get
 The periwinkle to adorn yourself?

NASTIA

Right by the hedge. . . . It grows there in abundance,
 So green, cross-shaped and blue—sky-blue it blossoms . . .

THE CAPTAIN

You'll not remain a maiden too much longer!

NASTIA

Why, do you think I'll die?

THE CAPTAIN

No, not at all!

I had a notion when the autumn came—
 When we were grafting shoots upon the trees—
 That if they catch . . . yes, that is what I dreamed . . .
 That if they catch, you'll marry in the fall.

⁵³⁸Colloquial for Anastasia; Nastusia is the diminutive.

NASTIA

What is this nonsense you are talking of?
I'd rather break those grafts from off the trees!

THE CAPTAIN

And when the periwinkle starts to bloom . . .

NASTIA

I'll pull out all the periwinkle, too!

THE CAPTAIN

You'll not escape your destiny of marriage!

NASTIA

I will! I'll run away. You've made me cry! (*She weeps.*)

THE CAPTAIN

Nastia, I see, you're just a foolish girl:
You cannot even take a little joke!
Didn't you see that I was only jesting?
Go in the house and bring me out my fiddle;
And while I play, you'll dance a jig for me.

NASTIA

Father, I shall! (*Overjoyed, she leaps into the house.*)

THE CAPTAIN

No, I must tarry longer!
I'd rather not, but what is to be done?
Years wait for no one, years go flying by;
And yet this cursed notion, like a ghost,
Clings to my heart.

—Ah, you have brought the fiddle!
Now then, what tune shall I strike up for you?

NASTIA

No, wait! Don't play yet! For I will not dance
Until I go and pick some periwinkle
To deck myself. I shall not be a minute.
(*She walks away a short distance, decks herself
with blossoms, and sings. The captain is busy tuning
the fiddle.*)

THE CAPTAIN

One string upon it is already broken;
Another, I am sure, is soon to break!

NASTIA

(She returns, decked with blossoms, singing.)

"If only I had falcon's wings,
Those wings so strong and straight,
I'd fly to seek my sweetheart out,
I'd fly to find my mate.
Through deep, green forests would I fly
As in a happy dream;
A black-browed beauty I would flit
Past Danube's gentle stream!"

III

(While she is singing, a young man enters the garden; he is wearing a straw hat, a short blue jacket and green pantaloons; a satchel hangs on his back, and in his hand there is a whip.)

PETER

Whate'er the day, God make us prosperous!

NASTIA

O father, father! Peter's back from college!⁵³⁹

THE CAPTAIN

My, my! . . . I can't believe my eyes and ears!
Is it your own free will that you return,
Or have you been expelled as punishment?

PETER

It is my own free will that brings me home.
Besides, dear father, I'm a graduate.

THE CAPTAIN

Indeed?

NASTIA

A graduate? How frightening!

⁵³⁹See fn. 429.

THE CAPTAIN

What can you be afraid of, foolish girl?
(He approaches his son and makes the sign of the cross over him.)

God bless you now, my child! Nastusia dear,
 Take Peter to the living room and give him
 Something to eat. He must be nearly famished.

PETER

I surely am. *(He goes to the living room with Nastusia.)*

THE CAPTAIN

How wonderful a child,
 How fine a son my God has granted me!
 And now a seminary graduate. . . .
 It's quite a thing! He is a brainy one! *(He stops to think.)*
 Why do I think of that? I'll see to it
 That he becomes a priest! If he demurs,
 I'll send him to the Sitch⁵⁴⁰ for his career—
 My lively offspring will not perish there.
 Now I must go inside. There's one thing more:
 I must make sure the seminarian
 Does not consume his time in idleness;
 As he relaxes, he must teach Nastusia
 The Ten Commandments, lest I have to hire
 The cantor as I did for my late wife.⁵⁴¹
 It is a fact that if she does not know them,
 The parish priest won't wed us. . . . I must go
 And tell him to do that, ere I forget. *(He goes inside.)*

IV

Surely a man has opportunity
 To live well (and to praise the Lord for it)
 And to take honest pleasure in his children—
 But no—he simply has to dupe himself
 And, ancient as he is, is bound to marry
 Such a young girl! Come to your senses, man!

⁵⁴⁰See fns. 40, 242.

⁵⁴¹Before the priest married a couple, he examined them in their knowledge of the catechism.

Don't marry her, or she will surely perish
 And you yourself will be a laughing-stock
 In your own house. As long as you may live,
 You'll curse that wedding day! Yes, you will weep,
 And there will be no one to wipe those tears
 Out of your rheumy eyes! Don't marry her—
 It's quite beyond all question! For, behold,
 There is a paradise around you now;
 Your children are as beautiful as flowers;
 Why would you blast them in their tender youth?
 No, my old fellow grooms himself with zeal—
 It is disgusting to behold his antics.
 Nastusia, with her seminarian,
 Is meanwhile mastering her catechism.
 Just look: into the garden they have gone
 For their amusement, and just stroll about
 Like loving doves. The old man's not at home,
 And they have their occasion to enjoy
 As much fun as they like. Behold them now:
 There, by the poplar tree, they stop and look,
 Each at the other; as two blessed angels
 Gaze in blest rapture at the face of God,
 They view each other's face. And Peter asks:

PETER

Nastusia, why on earth will you not read?

NASTUSIA

Why should I? Have I turned a girl at school
 Or something? I don't want to! That is why!

PETER

Do try to learn, this very day, at least
 One small commandment. Say, at least the fifth.

NASTIA

Neither the fifth nor sixth—I won't learn any!

PETER

The priest won't marry you if you don't learn them.

NASTIA

I don't care if he doesn't marry me!

PETER

But what if it were I, you were to marry?

NASTIA

Not even you. . . . But no! I've changed my mind.
I'd like the priest to marry me to you!

PETER

Then read, or else . . .

NASTIA

Or else . . . what will you do?

PETER

I'll kiss you, little puss, that's what I'll do!

NASTIA

Kiss if you like . . . but still I will not read!

PETER

(He kisses her and says as he does so)

This kiss is once, this twice . . .

(The Captain peers through the hedge and goes into the house, pretending he has not noticed anything.)

NASTIA *(struggling)*

Enough of that!

Father will soon be here—I must start reading.

PETER

And now at last you will consent to read!

THE CAPTAIN *(comes out of the house)*

Children! Enough of studying! Time for supper!

(Peter and Nastia go silently into the house, while the captain soliloquizes.)

She certainly has learned a precious lot!

That, for a child, is something! No, Nastusia!

I'll deal with you in quite another fashion,

My darling swan! So that's the way of it!

Unless he kisses her a hundred times,

She will not read! And he a college man! . . .

You've a fine taste all right, you dirty dog!

Just wait, I'll train you better than they did
 In yonder seminary. Out you go!
 Let not one breath of you be left with us.
 The world is vast—you will not perish in it.
 Just fancy, what a scurvy snout he has!
 And what a college man he proved to be!
 He steals from his own father! Very well,
 My precious fellow, men have grown much worse
 Than ever I imagined they could be!
 But what is happening inside the house?
 I'm sure my young ones are again engaged
 In reading. I must separate the pair.

V

To think there are such fathers in the world!
 How can they be of profit to their children?
 They only cause them shame before the Lord!
 And yet to children comes the old commandment
 To honour and respect him. Since your father
 Is old and grey, he must, it seems be wise.
 At times the lot of orphans can be happier,
 For, with no fathers, they've no cause to sin!

NASTIA

(She rushes, tearful, out of the house.)
 He will not even let him finish supper,
 But drives him to Kiev! O gracious Lord,
 What can I do? I'll journey with him too.
(She looks inside the house and grows faint.)
 But, ugh! How cross he is! Yet dares not beat him . . .
 Whatever happens, I shall go with Peter
 And journey to Kiev. I'm not afraid,
 Even at midnight I shall venture out! . . .
 What if a witch should try to frighten me?
 But no, she will not do it. *(She peers inside again.)*
 The poor dear!
 He's packing all his books into his bag,
 And takes his hat. Farewell, my precious love,
 My dear heart! . . . In the evening shall it be?
 Beyond the village gate? I shall be there,
 I shall be there much sooner if you like!

Here, catch it! (*She throws a flower over the hedge.*)
 Do you hear? And wait for me?
 (*The Captain appears.*)

NASTIA (*sings*)

"Don't come, don't weary me, I pray.
 Your love I'll not permit!
 Don't court me, for I shall not wed.
 Don't even think of it!"

THE CAPTAIN

She does not seem to care, as if, perhaps,
 She does not know! She frolics like a magpie.
 Nastia, why don't you cry, since Peter's gone?

NASTIA

As if his loss could cause me any grief!
 If you are sorry for him, weep yourself!

THE CAPTAIN

I don't care.

NASTIA

I still less. He is not mine.
 And I already know the Ten Commandments,
 Yes, every single one!

THE CAPTAIN

What, all of them?

NASTIA

Yes, Father Thomas, your good parish priest,
 Can shrive me any time that you desire.

THE CAPTAIN

And shall we choose next Sunday for our marriage?

NASTIA

Of course not! For we haven't fasted yet;
 After our fasting will be soon enough.

THE CAPTAIN (*kisses her*)

Ah, you, my grey-winged dove, my pretty berry!
 (*He dances and sings.*)

*Down on all fours
In the patch of peas
I crawled about at night,
And lost my necklace
As I crawled,
The beads of my delight.*

NASTIA

Stop all this silly stuff about the necklace!
It would be better if you went at once
To the good Father and arranged for things.

THE CAPTAIN

That's true, that's very true, my precious flower!
I'll go at once, while you, my sweetheart gay,
Enjoy yourself. Deck yourself out with flowers!
But do not wait for me, for I perhaps
Shall have to stay for vespers at the church.
(*He kisses her and leaves.*)

NASTIA

Of course, of course! I shall not wait at all.
I'll put my jacket on, adorn myself
With strings of beads, and then I'll quickly run
To catch up with my Peter. We'll embrace,
Shall kiss, and take each other by the hand,
And both of us will journey to Kiev.
And then I'll have to deck myself with flowers,
My last unmarried rite. Because he told me
That we shall soon be wed in Brovari.⁵⁴²
(*She decks herself with flowers and sings:*)
*Oh, I shall walk along the meadow path,
Along the river bank, and there I'll meet
The friend who was not meant for me to marry.
How do you fare today, my luckless suitor?
With mighty passion we have loved each other;
We yearned to join our lives, but did not marry,
And all that now remains is heartfelt sorrow.*
But what a song I've picked! It's hideous,
Enough of it! Indeed, I must make haste.

⁵⁴²A town near Kiev.

Farewell, my lofty poplars, and farewell,
My knotted patch of periwinkle flowers! (*She leaves.*)

VI

Later that very night, the drunken Captain
Came staggering home and as he reeled along
He talked in merry fashion to himself:
"Let the whole world be told the joyful news!
Even if I am old and stooped and grey,
I am . . . ha-ha . . . I am . . . as good as married!"
He crawled in with an effort through the door
And tiptoed very quietly to bed
Lest Nastia should awaken and perceive
The very sorry state that he was in.

Next morning as the bells rang out to mark
The last chant of the Mass, the folk went home
But no trace of Nastusia was among them.
They woke the Captain with a mighty effort
And told him what his pretty ward had done.
The poor chap crossed himself, saddled his horse
And galloped to Kiev. In Brovari
He found his young Nastusia duly married
And very glad to make the most of it.
And so my sorry Captain came back home.
Three days and nights he did not leave his bed,
And uttered not a word to anyone,
Nor did he voice a single sad complaint.

A man will go on, piling wealth on wealth,
And still be unaware that in old age
He will grow stupid and neglect it all.
That is what happened to my doltish Captain:
He drove his children out. Though wealth remained,
He had no heirs to husband his estate.
And so at last he simply scattered it
And wasted it away in stupid deeds
And did not help a solitary soul,
Not by the giving of a single coin.
He ended by becoming an example
To all good people, as he lay and sighed
In his cold house, under a sheepskin cover.

For in that house there was no person left
 To make a fire or sweep the filthy floors;
 He was reduced to wandering about
 In loneliness among the garbage heaps
 Until the day will come when screech-owls hoot
 In through the window from beneath the eaves,
 A callous maid will cover his cold corpse
 With an old sheepskin coat, and from his belt
 Will filch the keys that open up his cupboards. . . .

Such were the woes that overtook the Captain!
 A full year had not gone since Nastia vanished;
 Already nothing blossomed in the garden,
 Where pigs and calves went wandering aimlessly;
 The criss-cross periwinkle by the hedge
 Was trampled and had withered quite away.
 Meanwhile the Captain, in his sheepskin coat,
 Bloated with liquor and deformed of feature,
 Paces along his barn. Stacks are not covered,
 The rooms have not been whitewashed, beams not dusted,
 There are no servants busy in the house,
 No cattle in the byre; the slattern house-maid,
 Even she, browbeats the hoary reprobate.
 It served him right: you never should have driven
 Your children out, you old, grey-headed fool!

Not too much longer did the old man live
 On what he now could earn. Another summer
 Passed round the world, and in the fall the Captain
 Was killed upon the street, or it may be
 The poor wretch died returning from a tavern—
 Nobody cared to question how he died!
 The people round about despoiled him then
 To the last rags and buried his old body
 Among the poplar-trees upon the meadow
 But did not put the smallest cross above him.
 It was a pity, for he had been rich,
 Had relatives and children, but at death
 No one remained to plant a simple cross!
 The Captain died; his manor sank and rotted;
 All went to waste and perished utterly.

Only the poplars on the village common
 Remained, and seemed to stand there like young women
 Who had come hither from Ohlav of old
 And waited for the cattle from the fields.

Kos-Aral, 1849

* * * *

A cloud is floating, following the sun;
 It spreads its scarlet coat-flaps in the sky
 And calls upon the sun to settle down
 On the blue sea and there be covered up
 As, with red quilts, a mother might her child.
 One's eyes rejoice to see it. . . . One brief hour,
 One's heart relaxes and communes with God. . . .
 Meanwhile the fogbank, like an enemy,
 Covers the sea and all the rosy cloud—
 The thick grey mist spreads darkness in its wake,
 And in that darkness it enshrouds one's soul
 So that one cannot know where one should go.
 One awaits dawn as children do their mother.

Kos-Aral, 1849

* * * *

Why should I get married, Mother?
 Wherefore take a wife?
 Cossack lads will laugh and mock me,
 Early in my life.
 "He has married," they will mutter,
 "Without livelihood;
 Stupidly has lost his freedom,
 Squandered it for good!"
 It's quite true. . . . What shall I do then?
 Good folk, end my doubt!
 Would it be more fitting for me
 If I hired out?
 No, I will not pasture cattle,
 Tend another's ox;

No wife's mother will I flatter,
 While at me she mocks.
 Rather shall I strut in honour
 In a light-blue cloak;
 On a crow-black horse I'll gallop
 Before Cossack folk,
 I shall find a black-browed beauty
 Yonder on the plain;
 I shall mount a mound's high summit
 In our fair Ukraine.
 On my wedding day the Cossacks
 Will draw near and shout,
 Bring along their merry muskets,
 Roll the cannon out.
 When they bring their happy comrade
 To his fine new house,
 Muskets will give glad approval,
 Guns will hail his spouse.
 When they place the brave young Cossack
 In his home to sleep,
 Cannon with their mighty voices
 Lullabies will keep;
 Not one hour will it bellow
 In its loud refrain,
 Spreading my abiding glory
 Throughout all Ukraine.

Kos-Aral, 1849

THE WIDOW

Oh, what a hubbub the grey geese raised
 As round the valley and the pond they grazed;
 All across the village did the gossip spread—
 Words about the widow that could smite her dead.
 Not a mere rumour her name attacked,
 But lively gossip about the fact
 That a Cossack bold from the Sitch's base
 Had paid a call at the widow's place.
 They both had supped in the living room
 And drank the mead with its honeyed fume,

And in the bedroom they soon undressed
 And they both lay down for a pleasant rest.
 Rumour yammered in warm disdain,
 And rumour's charge was not laid in vain,
 For nine months later, when Lent was done,
 The widow gave birth to a lively son.
 She cared for the little one, reared him well,
 Sent him to school for a good long spell,
 And when he had finished the school-room's course
 She bought the fellow a fine black horse;
 She bought the horse, and she was not moidered,
 But she herself with her hands embroidered
 A saddle-cover that silks enfold
 And couched the leather with finest gold;
 She clothed her son in a costly cloak
 Red in the eyes of the village folk,
 And mounted her lad on that noble steed
 And said to the people: "Behold indeed,
 My enemies all!" And she led him straight
 Clear through the village in gallant state,
 And brought her son to the Cossack camp,
 Enrolling him there as a merry scamp.
 Then she herself called the story done:
 And she finished it off by becoming a nun.

Kos-Aral, 1849

* * * *

If you had ever happened to sojourn
 Among us, you would surely know, dear fellow,
 By what name to describe those sad, young mothers
 Without a husband in their utter shame.
 But as it is, you prattle hell knows what
 And think forsooth: that only such as we
 Reveal these hapless maids to humankind
 And teach those ugly lordlings how to act!
 A useless task! While villages endure
 And in those villages the lords exist,
 A troop of unwed mothers will be straying
 From tavern on to tavern merrily
 With Moscow's troopers. Don't waste time, my friend!

Let all be as it will. Yet I shall give you
 The case of yet another who refused
 Surrender to this wanton tyranny! . . .
 Listen, young lords, and hear my sorry tale!

On a well-watered meadow girls raked hay,
 The young men stacked it up, glanced at the sun,
 And prattled on in every kind of nonsense,
 As lads are wont to do. Meanwhile the girls,
 Chattering like magpies, often sought the well
 And moments of delight in the ravine.
 The prettiest of them all had tarried long
 There in the valley with her water-jug;
 The foreman did not even look for her,
 And took no notice. For he was not new,
 This cunning fellow, but a sly old dog
 Who knew in every detail what was what.
 There rose a sudden shrieking from the dell
 And thither rushed the lads to offer help.
 And there, behold, an adolescent lordling,
 As if in frenzy, perpetrates a rape
 On a poor struggling maid; the girl is screaming;
 The lads arrive, but offer her no help:
 They feared the lord. But one of them, the youngest,
 After a glance about him, thrust his pitchfork
 Through the lord's body, skewered like a frog.
 The ugly villain groaned, gave up the ghost.
 Then they took thought, and sent word to the town.
 The judges came, surveyed the situation,
 And then got good and drunk. The brave young lad
 Was put in chains and hustled into prison,
 And that was all. . . .

Upon the turnpike road

Out in the plain a pleasant tavern stands
 Under a willow in the moist, cool shade;
 Beside the inn, the convicts sit in shackles—
 For the poor fellows were permitted thus
 To rest here and refresh themselves with water.
 And there they sit—whimpering, brooding, chatting. . . .
 Meanwhile a wedding party on the road
 Comes from behind a hill in three troikas

And, as the custom is, stopped at the tavern
 To let the horses rest. Down stepped the bridesmaids;
 Everyone stopped; so did the bride herself.
 She took a quart of brandy from the tavern
 To treat the wretched convicts and their guards. . . .
 But suddenly she noticed—my dear Lord!—
 That very one, her hapless young avenger,
 Trudging in fetters to Siberia. . . .
 And will you now remain here in Ukraine,
 Living in luxury, nor be aware
 That he is weeping daily for your sake?
 She did not give a drink to her avenger,
 She did not even greet that blessed one—
 She only glanced at him . . . and that was all!

The wedding party started out again,
 And after them the convicts clanked their shackles
 And they went trudging sadly down the road—
 And no one could be seen around the tavern
 And no one heard. It seemed to stand alone
 Beside the tapster-dame who kept the inn.
 Around it clouds of dust arose like smoke
 Out on the plain. . . . It presently grew dark.
 (Even a lifetime's short—and what's a day!)
 Music and dancing revelled in the manor
 Till midnight. Then the wedding-guests prepared
 To deck a nuptial bedroom; but the bride
 Had softly left the house and disappeared.
 They sought her everywhere till break of dawn,
 But did not find her. . . . Whither had she strayed?
 Following her starveling convict had she gone
 A far Siberian road . . . where else indeed?

Kos-Aral, 1849

* * * *

The roads that lead to my Ukraine
 Are overgrown with thorns profane—
 It may be I have left her shore
 Forever and forever more!

Perhaps I shall not live to see
The home that was so dear to me;
Here I may stay, unwept, unknown,
And read these verses all alone.
Merciful God, how punitive
And bitter is the life I live!
A vast heart beats within my breast,
But none have I to share my quest.
Thou hast not granted me one favour,
One unspoiled hour of youthful savour;
Nay, never hast Thou yielded me
One holy hour of ecstasy,
Never a young heart, rapture-laden,
To share in love with some dear maiden.
My evil days and evil nights
Have slipped away without delights;
Untouched by joy and youthful zest,
They pass in dullness manifest
In exile. No one can I find
To sympathize with me in mind;
I suffer thus the lack, you see,
Of all congenial company.
How hard it is for me, dear Lord,
To carry in my heart the hoard
Of these my verses, still unshared
And lost in silence, undeclared,
To speak to none their sacred word,
Enriching with joys yet unheard
Impoverished souls with holy spell
Or put to shame some son of hell
And die in silence. . . . O my God,
Before I lie beneath the sod,
Let me my humble people see
In my Ukraine, so dear to me!
Let me not perish here, I pray,
On alien soil so far away!

Kos-Aral, 1849

* * * *

There blossomed in a valley long ago
 A red cranberry bush, as innocent
 As if a maiden smiled in her delight.
 A bird was gladdened and began to chirp . . .
 A maiden heard it and in smock of white
 Came from her whitewashed cottage to have joy,
 There in the forest in the valley low.

Out of the green grove there emerged to meet her
 A fine young Cossack: and he greets the maiden,
 He kisses her and holds her gentle hands.
 Along the valley then they softly walk
 And, like two children, sing in simple pleasure;
 To that cranberry bush they come at last,
 And there sit down . . . and kiss, and kiss, and kiss . . .

What better Heaven shall we ask from God?
 Sure, Paradise is pressing all around us,
 While we crawl off to church with eyes shut tight:
 That is the limit of our dull desire!
 I'd like to tell the whole truth for a change,
 And yet it would not be the slightest use!
 Me it would harm; while all the priests and people
 Would gain no merit from my Decalogue.

Kos-Aral, 1849

TO A MOTHER

In all our earthly paradise
 No sight more wondrous greets the eyes
 Than a young mother who is blest
 With a small baby at her breast.
 Sometimes at such a one I gaze
 In a deep spirit of amaze
 And sorrow shrouds my soul to see
 Her pitiable majesty;
 To her I fain would say a prayer
 As to a holy icon there
 Of that blest Mother, grace-impearled,
 Who bore our God into the world.

Merely to live is now a joy:
 For she will rise to view her boy
 At dead of night, like some great treasure,
 And for the dawn will wait with pleasure
 To gloat upon each lineament
 And prattle to her heart's content:
 "Mine is it, mine!" Her voice will lift
 In praise to God for such a gift;
 And then she goes to walk the streets,
 Proud as a queen to all she meets,
 And shows with radiance manifold
 Her precious baby: "Just behold!
 Let mine as prettiest be extolled!"
 And if approving eyes should bless,
 Unbounded is her happiness!
 Homeward she bears her small Ivan:
 It seemed that all had sought to scan
 Her babe all day as in a spell,—
 He was the only miracle
 That happened there, and naught beside . . .
 What raptures through your spirit glide! . . .

But years pass by, your children grow,
 And soon into the world they go
 To seek for work or serve the throne.
 While you, poor woman, sit alone,
 And not a single one is left
 At home with you. You are bereft
 Of clothes to hide your nakedness
 And fuel for the winter's stress;
 Too weak to rise, alas, you prove,
 To light a fire in the stove
 And in a freezing hut you pray
 For your dear children, far away. . . .

And may I hail you too, my dear,
 Who suffer so from ache and sneer?
 You shun the villages at night
 And weep, and as you cross in flight
 The fields, your little son you shroud—
 Even a bird might chirp aloud:

"There bears a mother, in disgrace,
 Her bastard to the market-place!"
 O luckless one! No more endures
 That maiden loveliness of yours
 That once all people would adore.
 It is destroyed and is no more! . . .
 The child your charms has put to rout
 And caused you to be driven out;
 As at the village gate you cried,
 You looked a corpse just crucified.
 Beggars avoid you, pass you by
 As if a leper's face they spy;
 Your babe, moreover, is so small—
 It cannot yet begin to crawl;
 But when at last the child will walk
 And romp about and learn to talk,
 That blest word "Mama" will be heard—
 That mighty and most lovely word!
 You will be gladdened and will tell
 Your child the truth, fresh coined in hell,
 About the treacherous young lord,—
 Ease to your heart it will afford . . .
 But not for long; for scarce will grow
 Your babe a boy ere he must go
 To guide a sightless beggar's feet
 And leave you lonely on the street,
 A woman with a tottering leg
 Whom dogs will bark at as you beg;
 And at you will his curses flow
 Because you bore him long ago
 And since your love and gentle breath
 Preserved him from desired death . . .
 And towards him will your yearning lie,
 Poor woman, till at last you die,
 Among the dogs, at hunger's edge,
 Out in the cold beneath a hedge!

Thus I lament her sad estate,
 This mother so unfortunate,
 Who loves her child, with heart a-brim,
 And cheerfully would die for him,

For that bad son who's gone astray
 From love and virtue far away,
 And for his sake would spend, in sooth,
 The treasures of her years of youth.
 And he, as often comes to pass,
 Will grow to nothing good, alas,
 Or be a monster, fierce and fine,
 With the foul nature of a swine.
 Thus from her offspring's bastard clays
 The mother cannot hope to raise
 A good child by her efforts rough,
 Even if she were rich enough.

The lords, for certain, have it easy:
 They pass through life, uncaring, breezy!
 These nobles do not even know
 How children in their mansions grow,
 Where mothers give no babe the breast
 But have a wet-nurse tend the nest.

Kos-Aral, 1849

* * * *

On Easter Day among the straw
 Out in the sun the children played
 With Easter eggs in colours braw
 And each of them loud boasting made
 Of gifts received. One, for the feast,
 Was given a shirt with sleeves of white;
 One with a ribbon had been pleased;
 One with a garment, laced and tight;
 This boy was given a lambskin cap,
 That one a pair of horsehide boots,
 And one a jacket to unwrap.
 Only one child among their bruits,
 An orphan, has no gift of bliss;
 Her hands are hidden in her sleeves.
 She hears: "My mother bought me this . . .
 My father got me that." (She grieves.)

“My good godmother made a blouse
 Embroidered gay with dainty thread.”
 At last the little orphan said:
 “The priest has fed me at his house.”

Kos-Aral, 1849

* * * *

Whether I work, relax, or pray to God,
 I always think of him and, for some reason,
 Feel deep anxiety. In my young days
 I was a fool and ever waited for him
 To send his grooms to seek my nuptial towels.⁵⁴³—
 And still I never dreamed his perfidy
 Was seeking to deceive my sorry heart.
 Still my breast ached, as if in true foreboding,
 And yet it could not plainly prophesy.
 If it had warned me, I should not have loved him,
 Nor gone perhaps to meet him at the well
 Out in the grove. But as things came to pass,
 Both at the morning and the evening hour
 I daily used to go to romp with him
 Until I passed my tether's very end. . . .
 Then I remained alone; for all my days
 He left me to my shameful spinsterhood.
 How difficult I find my hapless fate:
 Still to grow older in my mother's house,
 Never to have a home that is my own.
 Yet even now, whether I work or rest,
 My thoughts continually turn to him;
 Nor can I fancy why I used to go
 To meet him in that grove, and why I loved him
 So long and with such passion of the heart.

Kos-Aral, 1849

* * * *

It sometimes happens that a poor old man,
 Although he knows not why, is filled with joy,

⁵⁴³See fn. 436.

Seems to grow young again and starts to sing
 As bravely as he can; before his eyes
 Hope, like a blessed angel, has appeared
 And the bright star that was his far-off youth
 Hovers in cheerfulness above his head!
 What really has come over the old fellow?
 Why does he feel so overcharged with joy?
 Because, you see, the old man has decided
 To do some wholesome good to other men.
 What if he really does so? Life is pleasant
 To him whose soulful thoughts have learned to love
 The way of goodness; for it often happens
 That such a man feels pleasure as intense
 As if a bed of flowering periwinkle
 Covered all life, as if the blessed sun
 Were peering down into a shadowy pit
 And in that dark pit, unexpectedly,
 A carpet of green grass spread all about.

Kos-Aral, 1849

* * * *

I wonder if I should attempt to write
 A long epistle to myself,⁵⁴⁴ and in it
 Tell everything, tell simply everything,
 Both the important and the unimportant!
 Or else I'll never live to see the day
 When blessed tidings or consoling words
 Will reach me in this spot from anyone.
 But no one lives from whom I might expect it,
 For otherwise a message would have come.
 It is, forsooth, the tenth long year since I
 Presented my own *Kobzar* to the people,
 And now it seems as if their lips were sealed:
 For no one even barks or snarls at me—
 You might assume I never had existed.

⁵⁴⁴Failing to receive any letters while in Kos-Aral, Shevchenko seriously thought of writing a letter to himself in which he would relate all his sorrows and misery in exile and thus somewhat relieve his depression.

It is not praise from you, my countrymen,
 That I expect—I can well do without it—
 I long for words of comfort, consolation;
 But far more likely into some dark pit
 I'll disappear, after black Moscow's torment,
 Than have a letter from the least of you . . .
 And how I longed, and how my heart has yearned,—
 Dear Lord! how ardently my soul desired
 To hear from someone, anyone, at least
 A word of comfort so that I might know
 For whom I write, and wherefore I should write,
 And why it is I love my own Ukraine.
 Can she be worthy of my sacred flame?
 For, though I'll soon be old, it seems I still
 Am ignorant of what I do, or why.
 But I do write, and merely not to waste
 These blessed hours, somehow to keep them filled;
 And sometimes, as I do, an agèd Cossack,
 Bent and bewhiskered, rides across my fancies,
 Poor sinner that I am, and seems to bring me
 The news of freedom on his crow-black horse.
 I know no more than this of liberty
 Although in this far region I now perish
 For her dear sake. . . . Can it be Fate itself
 That has reduced me to so foul a pass?
 Did my dear mother fail to pray to God
 When she conceived me, that I now lie here
 Like a fierce serpent, which, though crushed, is waiting
 For sunset on the plain until it die?
 Thus do I suffer now, awaiting death
 To come to my relief across the steppe . . .
 And why? I swear to God I do not know!
 And yet I love her so, my vast Ukraine,
 Though I have roamed on her in loneliness
 (For no dear helpmeet have I ever found)
 Until today I've reached perdition's brink.

No matter, O my soul! Grieve not at all!
 But couch yourself in tempered steel of patience,
 Offer to God your prayer's integrity,—
 As for that rabble of my would-be friends,

Spit on them, torpid as a head of cabbage!
 But stay! Do as you wish, good brother mine.
 You are no fool—so act accordingly!⁵⁴⁵

Kos-Aral, 1849

* * * *

No matter now how precious and how golden
 My youthful fortune was, if you must know,
 I am not sorry that those years are gone.
 And yet at times such grief enshrouds my soul
 That I must weep perforce! And even more
 When I behold a small boy in a village,—
 A lad who seems fresh-severed from a branch,
 Who sits quite, quite alone beneath a hedge,
 Clad in coarse linen, worn to very rags . . .
 It seems that it is I, my very youth.
 And in my heart I feel that he will never,
 Never again, see freedom, blessed freedom!
 That, vainly wasted, these his finest years
 Will flit away; that he will never know
 What to accomplish in this vast, free world;
 Will pine away in toil enforced by others,
 And, it may be, one day, just to ensure
 He does not weep or grieve or somehow manage
 To find a restful nook to soothe his soul,—
 He will be sent to serve in Moscow's army.

Kos-Aral, 1849

* * * *

We once grew up together, side by side,⁵⁴⁶
 And loved each other too, as children will,
 While our two mothers, gazing there upon us,
 Said they would see us married. . . . They were wrong!

⁵⁴⁵Shevchenko here is talking to himself.

⁵⁴⁶Young Taras and Oksana. See fn. 144.

For early in our lives our parents died
 While we, in tender years, were separated,
 Never to meet again. I roamed about
 All quarters of the country, willy-nilly,
 Until I happened, in maturer years,
 To come home from my wanderings perforce.
 The village that long since had been so happy
 Seemed, in my later years, both dark and mute
 And older in all matters, even as I.
 And it appeared that in that sorry village
 (To me it so appeared) nothing had grown,
 Nothing decayed, all things were as before:
 The poplars, and the gully, and the fields;
 A willow-tree that bent above the well
 Like stooping grief in far-off, lonely exile;
 The dam, the little pond, the windmill's wings
 That still went flapping on behind the grove;
 The green oak, like a Cossack, that appeared,
 Emerging from the grove, to march along
 At the hill's foot; and there upon the slope
 A melancholy garden,⁵⁴⁷ in whose shadows,
 As in a paradise, my parents sleep. —
 Somewhat the oaken crosses have inclined
 And rains have wholly washed their words away. . . .
 But not by rains alone, nor words alone,
 Does Saturn⁵⁴⁸ work his smooth obliteration! . . .
 Let my old parents slumber with the saints
 In peace! . . .

—“Is she alive?” I softly ask
 My foster brother. “Does Oksana live?”
 —“Which one?” —“The curly-headed little girl
 Who was our constant playmate long ago. . . .”
 —“Why have you grown so sad, good brother mine?”
 —“I am not sad. . . .” —“Oh, well! She wandered off,
 Your dear Oksana, after Moscow's troopers
 When they were marching off on a campaign;

⁵⁴⁷Actually, the cemetery.

⁵⁴⁸In Roman mythology, a god of agriculture, later identified with the Greek Cronus. Still later, by confusion with “chronos” (time), he became Time itself in the astrology of imperial Rome.

And so she disappeared. Oh yes, it's true
 After a year or so she came back home,
 But what of it! She brought a bastard child
 And her bright ringlets had been cropped in shame.
 At night, she used to sit beneath a hedge
 And call out like a cuckoo, or would shout
 Or softly sing; sometimes she made pretence
 That she was loosening her vanished braids.
 And presently she went away again
 And people are uncertain of her fate.
 She fell on evil days and lost her mind.
 How beautiful she was—just like a queen!
 Nor was she poor, but God denied good luck. . . .
 Perhaps He gave her luck, but someone stole it
 And so deceived the blessed Lord Himself. . . .”

Kos-Aral, 1849

* * * *

All ready now! The sails have been unfurled;
 On the blue waves we moved across the world,
 Seeking Syr-Daria⁵⁴⁹ 'mid sea-weeds rough;
 The dories and the ship were large enough.
 Farewell, you bleak and barren Kos-Aral!
 Now for two years you've tried to soften all
 My cursed boredom on your sandy coast.
 Thank you, my friend! Indeed you now may boast
 That men have even you at last found out
 And know your usefulness without a doubt.
 Farewell again, my friend! For neither praise
 Nor blame against your wilderness I raise;
 Elsewhere, I know not where, I may recall
 My former tedium on your littoral. . . .

Kos-Aral, 1849

⁵⁴⁹The river which flows into the Aral Sea.

* * * *

Somewhat, it seems, in autumn we resemble
 God's image—yet, of course, not all of us,
 But only some. . . .

The steep ravine now seems
 A swarthy, naked gypsy lying dead
 Or sleeping in the woods; across the valley,
 Just like a ruddy lamb, a tumbleweed
 Goes gambolling in haste along the steppe
 As if it sought a plashing rivulet;
 And there the sturdy streamlet seized upon it
 And to the mighty Dnieper bore it off,
 And Dnieper took it in his turn to sea;
 Then the sea carried off the tiny plant
 And cast it on a far-off, foreign shore.

And one feels sorry for the tiny plant.
 As one goes walking in one's melancholy
 Amid the forest on the valley floor, —
 The forest whispers and the reeds bend down
 In the deep gully by the highway's edge;
 Then heavy thoughts besiege the soul, the tears
 Go trickling down, one longs to purge one's breast,
 Unswaddle all the errors from one's heart;
 And how one longs—dear Lord!—to live, and love
 Thy Justice and embrace the entire world! . . .

Blessed are you, my friend, if you possess
 A house to call your own, and in that house
 Some person to commune with, day by day;
 Even if it should be a speechless child—
 For even it will guess your joyful thoughts . . .
 God Himself speaks with those unsullied lips.

And you, my one and only precious friend,⁵⁵⁰
 Woe to your spirit in an alien region
 And in your loneliness! Who'll speak to you,
 Who'll greet you there and glance in friendly fashion?
 Around you like a lifeless corpse extends
 The wasted wilderness, by God forsaken. . . .

On the road to Orenburg, 1849

⁵⁵⁰Shevchenko himself.

1850

* * * *

I count my exiled nights and days⁵⁵¹
 And lose the tally in amaze.
 O Lord! How languidly and wan
 These heavy days creep on and on!
 The years flow after them in flight
 And stream in silence down the night,
 Bearing with them in traffic still
 Their endless freight of good and ill.
 All things they bear, and bear for ever;
 Nothing returns—they come back never.
 To pray to God were fruitless cost
 For all petitions will be lost.

By muddy roads of darkened time
 And weedy tracts of age and slime
 Three years of mine have passed away;
 Much have they taken, day by day,
 From my dark storehouse as debris
 And borne it, silent, to the sea;
 And silently those waves now hold
 No whit of silver and of gold
 But years of youth, my greatest good,
 As well as griefs and pains withstood,
 Those tablets in the hearts of men
 Inscribed on by no mortal pen.

And now the fourth sad year is going,
 Softly it passes, slowly flowing—
 In a fourth booklet I begin
 Exile's embroidery to win,
 Embroidering it across the years
 With trembling threads of blood and tears,
 For never can the path I've run
 In pain be told to anyone

⁵⁵¹This poem begins the fourth "bootleg" booklet.

With words alone; ah, never, never
In all the world can man's endeavour
Find words to match my exile's fate
For words, and tears, and all I wait.
Yes, even God Almighty's grace
Is sought in vain in such a place!
Things worth my sight in vain I seek;
No one is here with whom to speak!
Life that is past all bearing dreary
One must endure, however weary!
Why must I then? Why keep control?
Is it that I must save my soul?
My soul I find not worth the care!
The reason why I must forbear
And live my life out here and grope
My way in fetters is the hope
That days may come when once again
I may behold my own Ukraine,—
Days when once more I yet shall stand
With teardrops in my fatherland
And share my words with groves of green
And shadowy meadows in between.
No kindred have I left at all
Who might come smiling at my call
And yet Ukrainian folk are not
The same as those in this far plot.
Along the Dnieper would I roam
Through cheery villages of home—
A strain I'd sing that there belongs:
My gentle, melancholy songs.
Oh, let me see the day, good Lord
When I may look on fields adored,
On verdant meadows, softly spread,
And on those barrows of the dead!
And if thou wilt not grant my prayer,
Yet send, O God, my teardrops there
To fall upon the land I cherish—
It is for her that here I perish!
In some far grave it yet may be
I shall lie down more peacefully

If in Ukraine, among my kind,
 My songs shall still be called to mind!
 Let them, dear Lord, yet reach Ukraine
 Or grant this hope amid my pain
 That some day they may go! For naught
 Comes gladly in my witless thought
 To help me face a world of ill.
 And thus my heart grows sad and chill
 When in my mind the black thoughts creep
 That I may here be buried deep
 In alien soil, and all my verse
 Be buried with me, under curse,
 And in Ukraine, as I foresee,
 No person will remember me!
 And yet perhaps, with gliding years,
 My poetry, adorned with tears,
 May some day reach Ukraine and fall
 Like blessed dew upon them all,
 Descending with its melting art
 Upon some gentle, youthful heart.
 That youth will bow his head in sorrow
 And from my grief new grief will borrow,
 And may perchance remember me,
 Dear Lord in his approach to thee!

 But let things happen as they will,
 I'll swim through life or ford it still!
 Even if I were crucified,
 I would continue till I died
 To shape the verses of my pride.

Orenburg, 1850

* * * *

We sang together, and we separated
 Without a teardrop and without a word.
 Ah, shall we ever meet again? Again
 Blend our sad voices in a single song?
 Perhaps if . . . nay, not so! For with what words
 And with what song shall we hereafter sing?

Assuredly not here, nor with these words.
 If we shall sing, it will be different!
 Here, too, our songs have all been melancholy,
 Because here, too, our lives are very sad;
 Yet somehow we have managed to survive.
 We have at least shared one another's griefs
 As we recalled that distant, happy land
 And mighty Dnieper with his battlements
 And all the sorrows that our far-off youth
 Knew in that young and sinful paradise.

Orenburg, 1850

A COTTAGE

Perhaps my mother prayerless trod
 Nor knelt on my behalf to God,
 But brought me up to what I am
 As naturally as a lamb,
 Just murmuring: "Let him grow at length
 To manhood, full of health and strength!"
 I have, thank God, grown up indeed,
 But little value can I plead.
 'Twere better I had not been born,
 Or had been drowned, a thing of scorn,
 That I should not, 'mid alien nations,
 Offend God with my imprecations.

And it was little, not too much
 I begged of God: a little hutch,
 A tiny cottage in a grove
 With two tall poplars branched above;
 And by me that unhappy maid
 My own Oksana,⁵⁵² sweet and staid,
 That we from hilltops might look down
 On the broad Dnieper, gullies brown,
 And on the fields of golden wheat
 And the high mounds of old defeat,—
 To gaze on them, and muse, and sigh:
 "When were those barrows reared so high?"

⁵⁵²See fn. 144.

And who lies buried there so long?
 Together we would start a song,
 A mournful, ancient elegy
 About that hetman, brave and free,
 Whom Poles once roasted in a fire.⁵⁵³
 Then from the hill we would retire
 And in a grove beside the stream
 Would wander till the day's last gleam,
 Till all God's creatures slumber soon,
 Till both the evening star and moon
 Above the hilltop co-exist
 And o'er the meadows drive the mist.
 Upon that sight we'd gaze with prayer
 And cheerfully conversing there
 Turn to the food our cot affords.⁵⁵⁴

O God, Thou givest to our lords
 Rich orchards in Thy paradise
 And palaces to please their eyes,
 But in the greed their hearts uplift
 They spit upon Thy gracious gift
 And would compel my soul to grovel
 If I should watch them from my hovel.

A cottage in that paradise
 Was all I begged, and still would prize,
 And near the Dnieper's bank to rest
 On one low hill without a crest.

Orenburg, 1850

PETER

A POEM

In a poor manor lived a gentle couple,
 A lordling and his wife who were not wealthy;
 They had a daughter who had burgeoned sweetly
 And, by this time, was grown up and mature.
 And now a general began to court her,—

⁵⁵³A heroic song about the exploits of the early Cossack leader Nalivayko. See fn. 22.

⁵⁵⁴Compare a similar longing in his last poem, p. 558.

For she was beautiful beyond description
 And he, the general, was more than rich.
 Such was the fortune that the good Lord sent
 To this poor manor. . . . All their prayers to Heaven
 Were not in vain! And so they took their daughter
 And dressed her for the occasion prettily
 And on a Sunday gave the girl in marriage,
 And as a general's wife she reached Kiev
 In a coach harnessed to four prancing horses.

At home there was an ugly little bastard
 Who herded swine and bore the name of Peter;
 He, as a part of his young mistress' dowry,
 Was sent to sojourn in the general's village—
 And keep on herding swine, the unlucky lad!

At her new mansion, ball would follow ball,
 And quite a crowd of lords and lordlings came
 To dance attendance on the general's wife;
 Yet she by night would weep in quiet grief:
 "My mother has brought ruin to my life
 For in this palace here my youth and beauty
 Will waste away and be of no avail!"
 —"Why are you crying, darling?"—"Crying? I?
 No, I'm not crying. . . ."—"Mania, do you know
 Armenian merchants have arrived in town?
 Go, Mania dear, and buy yourself a shawl!"
 —"No, I don't need a shawl!"—"Don't cause me grief—
 Go, dearest, buy it! Do not pain my heart!
 And in the spring we two will go to Paris—
 Or merely to the village, as you please! . . ."
 Winter was passing softly, softly on;
 Misfortune crept up towards the general's wife
 And settled with decision in her heart.
 In springtime to the village they returned
 And there the merry banquets were resumed. . . .
 But still the general's lady kept on weeping.
 The general himself perceived it not,—
 But it was plain to all the villagers.

II

Out of sheer weariness and deep in thought,
 One day she left the manor for a walk

Out in the open country; as she paced
 Still on and on, she passed the village gate;
 To her surprise, she saw there a small boy
 Pasturing lambs amid the dusty stubble.
 —“Alas, how miserable is my heart!
 What in this living world am I to do? . . .
 Is that you, little Peter?”—“Why, of course.”
 —“Come along then and we shall live together
 As once we lived in our old manor-house,
 And had good times.” As she bent down to him,
 She did not take her eyes away, but looked
 And looked at little Peter. All alone
 She'd grown from childhood into maidenhood
 And then her parents married her, nay sold her,
 To an old general, and both of them
 Had spent the purchase price on heavy drinking . . .
 And bitterly she burst out into tears.
 —“Come, darling little Peter, let's have fun!
 Come quickly to the garden, to the palace!”
 —“And who will do my chores? Who'll feed my lambs?”
 —“Leave them (quoth she) to anyone at all!”
 She took him to the palace; in the palace
 She groomed him, clothed him, sent him off to school—
 And she felt pleased. Let her indeed rejoice,
 As long as gentle hopes can warm the heart,
 As long as tender seedlings sprout and grow
 To wheat, or tares. For we can never know
 The fate that in God's mind is taking shape. . . .
 And He . . . although He knows . . . will not reveal it.
 For if her mother could have only known
 What misery was brewing for her daughter,
 Would she have wed her to a general,
 Her one and only child? Nay, she would not.
 And yet, I cannot tell; because there are
 Too many kinds of mothers in this world!

The days pass slowly by; and little Peter
 Attends his school; now to and fro he walks
 With learned books, and as he walks he grows;
 And daily she seems younger in his eyes.
 The general is likewise satisfied
 And glad because his fair young wife and he

Have done, you see, so excellent a deed.
 They liberated Peter from his serfdom,
 And in the winter took him to Kiev;
 There they enrolled him as a college student
 And there he prospered greatly in his studies.
 Back from Kiev came Peterkin at last
 As full grown Peter, a most gallant lad
 With curly locks that came down to his shoulders,
 A fine moustache and . . . But the rest can wait,—
 Some other time we'll tell what Peter dreamed of;
 And what the general's dear, black-browed wife
 Was dreaming of, we'll presently relate. . . .

III

Before the icon of the Immaculate
 A lonely lampadary flames at night.
 And as she made prostrations there, she struggled
 And wept, and shed impure and scalding tears.
 She prayed to the Most Blessed One to save her,
 The Virgin she besought to keep her mind
 From going mad. Alas, it was in vain!
 No prayer could help her: she, the hapless woman,
 Did lose her mind, for she, the sorry creature,
 Fell hopelessly in love with little Peter.
 Hard was it for her innocent young spirit,
 But what was she to do? She had no strength—
 The poor soul lost her senses altogether.
 How could she live her years of blessed youth
 In utter loneliness? They'll not return! . . .
 For your own good, they say, you must o'erleap
 Misfortune or its hands will strangle you.
 The general's wife recoiled from such a leap,
 Because she yearned for youthful happiness!
 The urge was strong, though, as the proverb has it,
 "The gruel is thick, but was not cooked for us;
 Ours is the tasteless cornmeal without salt,
 Which you are free to eat or free to leave!"

—“O Peter, dear, my precious friend and sweetheart!
 My dear child! Help, I pray! Mother of God,
 Deliver my sad spirit from these chains!”

And she lamented, cursed her father, mother,
 And everything on earth. While simple Peter,
 Her dear, adopted child, all innocent,
 Just took his pleasure in the palace garden
 And softly hummed himself some aria.
 He was oblivious to everything;
 While the poor woman, in extremity,
 Was baffled how to end her misery—
 Whether to drown herself beneath the water
 Or end it all by dashing out her brains
 Against the wall.

—“I’ll journey to Kiev:
 Perhaps a prayer will drive away the demon . . .
 My Peter! Even prayers will fail to save me . . .
 I’ll find relief by drowning in the Dnieper!”

Pray to the Lord, young maids! Pray to the Lord
 That your dear mothers won’t impose upon you
 An aged general and palaces,
 And sell you to your fate in such a fashion.
 But fall in love, dear children, in your spring! . . .
 For in this world are many you may love
 Without the lure of mercenary gain;
 And that pure love will live on youthfully,
 In all its purity and sacredness,
 Even in a lowly hovel, and will guard
 Your peace of spirit even to the grave.

But what will happen to the illustrious lady?
 What will you do in your predicament
 With your sad soul and all your heavenly beauty?
 Who’ll guard the peace that Peterkin has stolen?
 Perhaps your guardian angel? Even he
 Cannot preserve you now! I fear, I fear
 Even to tell the future that awaits you.

IV

She went to make petition at Kiev,
 She even went as pilgrim to Pochaiv;⁵⁵⁵
 But the miraculous image did not help

⁵⁵⁵A famous place of pilgrimage in the Dnieper region of Ukraine.

Nor did the blessed power of saints assist her.
 And you wept ceaselessly, and agonized,
 And finally abandoned all entreaties.
 Homeward you bore a serpent in your heart
 And carried deadly poison in a phial.

For three days on returning from her journey
 She neither ate nor drank; for three long nights
 She did not sleep; her hazel eyes sank in,
 Her lips dried up, and in the pitchy darkness
 She whispered devilish laughter as she roamed.
 Thus for about a week she pined away;
 And then she mixed some poison in the drink
 Of the old general, and gave it to him,
 And having done her chores, she went to bed.
 —“Now I shall bury this old man of mine,
 And welcome in the young one, and shall live
 A happy life, loving my darling Peter. . . .”
 Such were her thoughts or whispers on her pillow.
 She wished to fall asleep, but could not sleep;
 She waited for the dawn, and yet she feared
 To see the sunlight of another day.

Early that morrow morn the bells tolled out
 To mourn for the departed general;
 And all who went to pay their last respects
 Began to murmur about something ugly.
 From everywhere the sombre throng increases;
 Something is being whispered about poison,
 And it appears an inquest will be held.
 The judges came, and din ceased for a while.
 With knives they open up the general
 And promptly find the poison in his stomach.
 Now the community is being sworn
 For the inquiry. The presiding judge
 Asks of them all: “Now tell us, Christian folk,
 Who poisoned him?”—And the reply resounds
 Like a deep bell:—“The lady, yes, the lady!”
 And once again they babble in their clamour.

Then on the palace porch Peter appears
 And to the whole community declares:

"I am the one who did it! I, who poisoned
The general! You have not said the truth!"
Forthwith the court officials seized young Peter
And took him to the nearest town in chains.

He was not tortured long in gaol and court,
And in due course they chained him well in shackles
And sheared his pretty curls off for good measure.
When thus accoutred, Peter crossed himself
And dragged his chains to far Siberia. . . .

Orenburg, 1850

* * * *

Where'er we roam, whatever we may do,
We men are proud and foolish, through and through!
We boast that we, each human son or daughter,
Whether we live on earth or on the water,
In shining palaces or dungeons dark,
Are monarchs all, are despots true and stark
Above ourselves—real masters we must be,
Whether on thrones or in captivity.
And that conception issues from our will,
And through our reason must keep flaming still
Like a bright beacon on a sea of ill—
To wit, the sea of life. Thus it has come
That in the lighthouse of our cranium
The fiery pharos of our reason flares
Which further oil of knowledge oft repairs;
And so we hymn, with thoughts ill understood,
Man's destiny, if it be ill or good.

Eagles you are, high-soaring, blue of wing,
Until you stumble on some little thing,
Some brief impediment that mars the day!
And then you seek to hide yourselves away
In a cool spot beneath a tavern bench:
Likewise the heavenly fire you quickly quench,
And to that bony cage the swine resort
As to a mire, and there they grunt and snort.

And they do well who forge them strong steel bands
 And put no mugs of liquor in their hands
 Nor yet a knife, or else, with maudlin snicker,
 These cowering ones would drown their cares in liquor,
 Or, out of grief, break forth in lamentation,
 And on their nurturing parents heap damnation
 And the godparents of their dawning life.
 For finally they'd seize upon a knife . . .
 And swinish blood might flow like molten tar
 Out of your hoggish liver slashed ajar.⁵⁵⁶ . . .

Orenburg, 1850

* * * *

I somehow think, but cannot ratify,
 That men at point of death don't really die
 But, still alive, go crawling into swine
 Or to some kindred beast their souls assign;
 Then in a slough their wallowing begins,
 As formerly they wallowed in their sins.
 It must be really so! My care outstretches
 The ordinary run of common wretches
 For God Himself forgets the likes of them—
 Why should they stir my bother or my phlegm?
 What of the rest? Have they to sties been taken
 Where some oaf fattens them, to feast on bacon?
 It may be so! They ought to feed his dearth,
 For precious little good they did on earth:
 Rivers of blood they caused to overflow
 And fill with gore the seas to which they go . . .
 The swineherd ought to know the souls he tends.
 What do you say: was it for glory's ends

⁵⁵⁶A philosophic poem, like the one that follows. It may be interpreted in a variety of manners. One of them is: Man, who considers himself the lord of all things, and master of himself, is really the slave of circumstances which, if negative or untoward, can shatter his ego and reduce him to a desperate, often swinish state of mind, or bring him to such a pass that he becomes dangerous to his fellow-men and has to be forcibly restrained by the very ones ("godparents") who fostered the belief of grandeur in him.

That they with blood filled seas nefarious
 Or their own gain? Indeed, it was for us,
 Poor wretches, that they set the world aflame
 Until to stinking sties their spirits came.
 If it were not for glory's gleaming yields,
 The swineherd would have starved them in the fields.
 Ye damned ones, where's your glory? In mere words!
 Where are your palaces, your golden hoards?
 Where is your power? In subterranean vaults,
 Where torturers have whitewashed all your faults—
 For such as they, were you! You lived the scum
 Of ravenous beasts and swine you have become.⁵⁵⁷ . . .

But where, then, can you be, long-suffering saint,
 God's prophet?⁵⁵⁸ In our midst without complaint
 You linger and above us everywhere
 You hover like an angel in the air.
 Speak softly, my dear friend, your mercy prove,
 And whisper very gently about love;
 Of human grief, and God's pray speak to me,
 Of the imperious surges of the sea,
 Or of the endless blood the torturer drains
 In useless eagerness from human veins;
 And speaking thus you will give vent to tears
 While equal bitterness our eyes besmears. . . .
 The poet's blessed soul his words enhance;
 He lives on in that holy utterance;
 And as we read his pages we revive
 And feel that God in heaven is still alive.

My thanks to you, my friend in poverty!⁵⁵⁹
 I know right well that you have shared with me

⁵⁵⁷Meaning: the self-glorified man has lapsed into a brute and his nature has become swinish. Shevchenko's cynicism in these two poems no doubt derives from his pessimistic and depressive frame of mind as a result of his harsh exile.

⁵⁵⁸It is difficult to establish whom Shevchenko had in mind here. It may have been the Russian writer Rilejev, the Romantic poet Lermontov, or, as some suggest, Shakespeare himself. At that time Shevchenko was reading the works of the three of them. It was these and other readings from the poets that saved Shevchenko's mind from becoming completely submerged in the bleakness of his surroundings.

⁵⁵⁹The one who sent him the works of the particular poet Shevchenko had in mind.

Your only mite—and by that healing touch
 You, before God, my brother, have earned much!
 To my captivity you sent the art
 Of this a poet after my own heart—
 And opened thus a door to liberty.
 Thank you, my friend! I'll read him and be free
 A little, at my leisure, and shall find
 Hope in my heart and vigour in my mind;
 And in my gentle song will be adored
 The God of heaven as my own true Lord!⁵⁶⁰

Orenburg, 1850

* * * *

If you but knew, young gentlemen,⁵⁶¹
 The heartbreak of that sorry den,
 You would not paint an idyll there
 And make a mock of our despair,
 Singing God's praises all in vain.
 I cannot understand, in pain,
 Why such a hut, in fiction's guise,
 They call a peaceful paradise.
 Once in that cot I writhed in dread
 And there my bitter tears were shed,
 My first sad tears! I do not know
 A fiercer evil here below
 Than in that sordid cottage lies—
 And yet men call it paradise!

No sort of paradise I call
 In that dark grove that cottage small
 Beside the village's clear pond:
 There I can see my mother fond
 Who swaddled me and sang a tune
 That utter sorrow would commune

⁵⁶⁰Two great lines in Shevchenko, in which he declares that poetry reconciled him with God.

⁵⁶¹Addressed to young Ukrainian writers who in their works idealized the outward appearance of the Ukrainian village, but failed to see what a veritable hell of poverty and misery prevailed among the people who lived in its cottages.

With her sad child, and in that grove,
 That paradisaal cot, I'd prove
 The depths of hell; bondage was there
 And toil that gave no time for prayer.
 There my kind mother, young but wan,
 Exhausted to her grave had gone,
 Worn out with penury and stress;
 And there my father's hopelessness
 With us, his naked little waifs,
 In vain at bitter fortune chafes;
 He died a slave; and we, fate-cursed,
 Were now in other homes dispersed
 Like tiny mice. I went to school,
 A flunkey under rich boy's rule;
 While all my brothers bore the yoke
 Of serfdom to the "gentlefolk,"
 Until, by army service pressed,
 Their heads were shaved with all the rest.
 As for my sisters—you alas,
 My precious doves, to sorrow pass!
 Who cares if you exist on earth?
 In serfdom you are lost in dearth;
 In serfdom will your braids turn grey;
 In serfdom you will end your day.

It smells with horror, I allege,
 That cottage at the village edge—
 Such deeds, O Lord, in foul assize
 We practise in our paradise,
 On this fair earth you love so well!
 In this our Eden all is hell,
 And so we beg you for another
 Where we may bless each human brother;
 Yet fields we plough with men as steers,
 And water crops with human tears.
 And yet perhaps . . . I do not know . . .
 God, you yourself (It seems but so!)
 To all our pangs must give assent
 Or else we would not thus lament!
 Perhaps, dear Father, on your throne
 You mock us as on earth we moan;

It may be with the lords you plan
 On how to rule the world of man!
 See, yonder, a fair grove of green
 And through its leaves a pond is seen
 Like a fair table-cloth beyond,
 While willows lean above the pond
 And bathe their branches with soft sighs . . .
 Is not the scene a paradise?
 But just look closely, ask forsooth
 What happens in that Vale of Youth!
 For which abuses, praise from me
 Is owing to your Deity,
 The Author of all wondrous deeds? . . .
 What's that? No praise the record needs?
 Before you, blood and teardrops fall,
 And blasphemy breaks forth from all!
 Nay, in our spiritual dearth
 Naught sacred has been left on earth!
 It seems to me that men have cast
 Their curse upon you, too, at last!⁵⁶²

Orenburg, 1850

* * * *

It often happens that in exile here
 I can remember things that long ago
 Occurred to me; I search and search for something
 To make me boast that I too once have lived
 And have had reason to praise God for it;
 I search and search. . . . What yearning, Lord, I feel
 To call back anything in memory!
 But suddenly I struck on a remembrance
 So ugly that I tumbled off to sleep
 And did not say my prayers. Then came a dream
 (If one goes bedward like a pig, of course

⁵⁶²Such an imprecation could have issued only from the soul of a poet whose despair had brought him to a pass where his patience with the Creator reached almost the breaking point. Compare the poem beginning with the line "Is it my grief and my captivity," p. 471.

One may have dreams like that); in it I seemed
 To be a little child who pastured lambs
 Beside a mound. I look; the mound yawns open
 And from it comes a fellow like a Cossack,
 A grey-bewhiskered wretch, already old,
 And he draws near . . . and I crouched down in terror,
 Just like a puppy underneath a hedge.
 He seemed to take me gently in his arms,
 He bore me through the portal of the barrow
 And the black burial-hill gaped wider yet.
 I gaze about—the mound is filled with Cossacks:
 Some of them headless, some bereft of hands,
 And some of them shorn off below the knees;
 The lads lay there as in a cosy hut.
 —“Look, child, all these are Cossacks!” he declared.
 —“Throughout the entire Ukraine such lofty mounds
 Are plentiful. Look, child, all are the same,
 And all of them are stuffed with noble bodies,
 Filled to the brim. This is where freedom sleeps,
 Here it lay down in glory long ago,
 Lay down with us, the Cossacks. See it lie,
 As if in swaddling clothes! . . . There’s no lord here:
 We all of us lived equally in freedom,
 And equally laid down our lives for freedom,
 And so we all shall rise—but only God
 Knows when that day will be. Look, then, my child,
 Look well indeed! And I will tell you why
 Ukraine was doomed to perish, and why I
 Am lying among Cossacks in this mound.
 And you, my son, when you grow up, will tell it.
 Listen to me, my child! . . .

And then I dreamed

The lambs were in the rye; up runs the foreman,
 And clouts me hard, and seems, the cursèd man,
 To tear my jacket off. . . . I still feel pain
 When I recall this dream! And when in it
 I recollect the Cossack in the mound,
 I still don’t know if it all really happened
 Or merely was a fancy of some kind;
 But this is what that Cossack told to me:

“I do not know how the Poles live today
 With their free brothers of Ukrainian stock;
 But we kept fraternizing with the Poles
 Until the third Sigismund⁵⁶³ severed us
 With his damned priests. And what appalling woes
 Came tumbling on our people after that!

“The Poles brought war to us in the dear name
 Of Christ our Lord and of his blessed Mother;
 The rabid priests defiled our holy places;
 The Cossacks’ fields, my son, were bathed in blood,
 Mound after mound grew up across the plains
 To house our dead. A manor was my home . . .
 I was then old and feeble. I had sent
 A drove of horses to the Cossack camp,
 A cannon, two great waggons full of muskets,
 Millet and wheat and what my farm could spare;
 All of my precious little I had given
 To that poor creature, my belov’d Ukraine!
 My three sons also. For I thought, poor sinner,
 That in the sight of God this petty portion
 Might in my stead be sent, thus to defend
 Our land, our people, and our holy Church
 While I remained at home to offer prayers.
 I was too weak, my son, even to rise
 Or raise a hand against the enemy.

“But listen! there remained behind but I,
 My orderly, Danilo, and my daughter,
 My little Prisia. She was growing up,
 And was just filling out like a sweet cherry.
 But for my sins, my great and grievous sins,
 The blessed Sovereign Lord did not allow
 My agèd eyes to have their fill of feasting
 Upon my little child.

⁵⁶³Polish king Sigismund (1618–32), a Swedish Vasa. He allowed the Polish Jesuits forcibly to convert the Ukrainian Orthodox to Catholicism. That action aroused the population to armed reaction, especially when they were deprived of the use of their churches, which were being turned over to those who had accepted the Union with Rome.

The Polish priests

Scorned to go walking through our villages
 And had our people pull their carriages.
 And listen to what happened where we lived!
 The damned ones had alighted late one night
 There at my manor; with them were their servants
 And the dragoons. At any time at all
 Grant me, dear Lord, to issue from my mound
 Into the world—and all the Polish gentry
 I'll fry on a slow fire as they deserve!
 They, they—don't be afraid, my son!—those men,
 The Polish priests, took my sweet daughter with them
 Into the house, locked themselves in with her,
 All drunk and bestial . . . and I saw it all . . .
 Their servants, likewise drunk, went to the barn
 To sleep with the dragoons upon the straw.
 I and Danilo then brought piles of straw
 And stacked them round the porch and fired them.
 The barn we set on fire just as it was.
 All those damned devils will not rise again
 To torture Cossack children. Every one
 Was burned to death, and my poor Prisia, too,
 Died with those damned ones in the conflagration.
 Then I and good Danilo placed a cross
 Upon the burned-down site, and prayed, and wept
 And then repaired on horseback to the camp.
 There my three sons were found, but in due course
 All of them have been laid here in the mound. . . .

“And how we fought and died! Why did we perish
 And pillow here our heads within these barrows?
 If you should live, some day perhaps, dear boy,
 You will know why! For glory echoes loudly
 The reason why we offered up our lives . . .
 But possibly, about us and our mounds
 A truthful lay, with melancholy fraught,
 Together with the beggar-bards who sing it,
 Already roams the hamlets of our land. . . .”

Orenburg, 1850

* * * *

Both with your supple form and with your beauty
 That is so innocently young and sweet
 I feast my waning eyes, and as I gaze
 Intent upon you, in a fashion strange
 I pray before you as before a saint.
 In my advancing years, pity begins
 For this your heavenly beauty. What hereafter
 Will be its fate in life? Who will become
 Your blessed guardian-angel in this world?
 Who will protect you? Who will keep you safe
 From human evil in your times of trial?
 Who'll warm your chaste heart with the flame of love?
 Who will it be? You are an orphan now,
 With none to succour but the blessed Lord. . . .
 Pray, then, dear heart! I, too, shall pray with you.
 Something prophetic wakens in my eyes—
 And now no longer do I pray to God,
 No longer do I gaze upon your beauty.
 I had a dream: you have become a mother;
 But not in velvets, in a lordly palace,
 Your baby hungers. . . . And you waste away. . . .
 While days fly past, and carry off all good,
 With them the substance of your hope has gone,—
 You stay on earth in utter solitude;
 With you your only treasure has remained,
 Your little child, during its fledgeling years . . .
 But when its pinions have been fully feathered,
 You're left alone in feebleness and age.
 Then people, hostile people, you entreat
 And in Christ's name hold out your gnarled, old hands
 Before the close-locked portals of their homes.

And so at times, dear heart, I feast upon you
 My waning eyes, and gaze betimes intent
 Upon your supple form and offer up
 A gentle prayer to God on your behalf.
 Pray likewise, for your good and evil fortune
 Still stands uncertain in the court of heaven
 And has not brought you its imperious will.

Orenburg, 1850

* * * *

The torches flame, the music plays
 In poignancy and tender phrase!
 Like precious diamonds divine
 The eyes of youth exultant shine
 In joy and hope. What pure delight
 Is in those glancès, gay and bright!
 All brim with laughter, all are smiling,
 In jocund dance the hour beguiling.
 I only weep their joy to see—
 I weep in bitter secrecy . . .
 Why do I weep? Perhaps in pain
 That without passion's glowing reign,
 As on a long, cold, drizzling day,
 My loveless youth has passed away.

Orenburg, 1850

* * * *

Is it my grief and my captivity
 Or just the fleeting years have wrecked for me
 My sacred soul? Or have I never shared
 My daily life with her? Being ensnared
 With folk in filth, do I likewise besmirch
 My pure soul? . . . Sinners on their mocking perch
 Are wont to call her young, immaculate,
 Celestial, and the like. . . . My foes in hate!
 Fierce, most fierce enemies! "I was you who stole
 And trampled down into a miry hole
 My precious diamond, serene and pure,
 My erstwhile blessed soul, in deep manure,
 And now you scoff! Ugly, unchristian men,
 Was it not of your sty a denizen
 That I became like you defiled so well
 That it is now impossible to tell
 If I was pure at any time before?
 Down from the blessed skies I knew of yore
 You've dragged my heart to share your evil curses,
 And even taught me to write ugly verses!

A heavy boulder on my path you've placed
 And my poor, puny heart you have defaced,
 Shattered upon that rock, defying God,
 Although I once was blest beneath his nod.
 And now without a compass I proceed,
 Without a beaten path. . . . You stare indeed,
 Wondering why I stumble, curse my fate
 And you, weep bitterly, and in that strait
 My own impoverished, sad soul disdain,
 My heavy soul, laden with sin and pain! . . .

Orenburg, 1850

* * * *

The devil only knows why I should waste
 My paper, quills, and days in sad distaste!
 I even burst out weeping as I write,
 Inordinately! . . . It is not the sight
 Of the dark world and all its grim events;
 But a grey-headed man weeps and laments
 Because at times he had with grief been drunk
 And now so deeply in the world has sunk
 That he has no friend left to whom to turn;
 He is an orphan and must vainly yearn.

Orenburg, 1850

* * * *

I dream about it still: beneath a slope,
 Among the willows on a river's bank
 Stands a white cottage; even now, it seems,
 Beside that cottage sits a grey old man
 And prattles with his pretty, curly-haired
 Small grandchild. Even now I dream of it:
 Out of the cottage now emerges smiling
 The happy mother; and she kisses thrice
 The child and the grandfather in her joy;

Then takes the child up in her arms and feeds it
 And carries it to bed. The old man sits,
 And smiles, and murmurs underneath his breath:
 "Where's that misfortune people talk about?
 Where are those foes, our sorrows and afflictions?"
 And having crossed himself, the old man whispers
 A brief recital of the Pater Noster.
 The setting sun shines warmly through the willows,
 Then softly wanes. . . . The day at last is spent—
 And all have gone to rest. The grey-beard too
 Stands slowly and retires to his sleep.

Orenburg, 1850

1857

THE TROOPER'S WELL⁵⁶⁴

A POEM

TO THE COSSACK CHIEF, Y. KUKHARENKO, FOR REMEMBRANCE,
 APRIL 7, 1857⁵⁶⁵

Not in Ukraine but very far away
 Beyond the Ural, on the Elek's banks,⁵⁶⁶
 An old survivor there, a branded captive,
 Told me the following tale about a well
 That had been dug by one of Moscow's troopers;
 And I, in mournfulness, recorded it
 And added just a touch of rhythm to it;
 And hence this cheap and trifling little poem
 (Written, of course, in deepest secrecy)
 Have I composed as a remembrance piece
 For you, my dear and estimable friend!

⁵⁶⁴A second version of the poem which appears on p. 341.

⁵⁶⁵On that Easter Day Shevchenko was particularly elated at having received a letter and some money from Kukhareno (see fn. 449) and a letter from M. Lazarevsky from Moscow who offered him some hope of liberation from exile.

⁵⁶⁶A river near Orenburg, a tributary to the Ural.

I

After that most extraordinary winter
 That happened in the reign of Catherine,
 A Moscow soldier dug that blessed well;
 And how he came to dig it, in good time
 I shall reveal—and you are to record it!
 It is worth while to jot down things like that,
 Because it is no fable but the truth—
 An episode that actually took place.

And so write this: that there was once a well . . .
 No, not a well to start with, but a village—
 Write!—long ago, 'mid gardens in the valley,
 In our Ukraine that blessed village stood.
 And in that village then a widow lived;
 She had a growing daughter, and a son
 Still under age. It's all right for the rich
 To have their children and praise God for them,
 For luxury is able to afford them;
 But the poor widow was not so equipped—
 Life was so hard for her, she almost perished.
 She had some thought of entering a convent,
 Or ending life by hanging or by drowning,
 But she felt sorry for her helpless children
 (As mothers fain would do, and that is that!);
 She even may have hoped a son-in-law
 Would wed Katrusia, who was growing up
 (Katrusia was the name her daughter bore)—
 Should she live out her maidenhood in vain
 And let her beauty waste unclaimed away
 And that, in faith, because she was an orphan?
 Dear God, how exquisite her beauty was!
 Hard-working, smart, and diligent was she,
 And meek besides! An orphan, it is true,
 But a true marvel to the village folk.
 At times she would look gently from the hut,
 Just like a pretty flower from the dew
 Or like the warm sun from behind the clouds—
 And I would stand there watching, motionless,
 And all my heart grew faint, to see her face . . .

And neither punishment, nor chains, nor tortures,
Nor yet the passing of the years, my son,
Have weakened that celestial influence,
And in its shadow I shall surely die.
For look you: I'm already close to death,
And yet I weep here like a little child
Whenever I recall sweet Katerina. . . .
Listen, my son, my dear and worthy friend!
Listen intent and set the story down,
And if God ever leads you back again
To our Ukraine, tell there to everyone
That you have seen the devil in the flesh! . . .

II

And so, you see, that fine girl kept on growing;
And not far off, a bustling orphan boy
Grew up a hireling (though everyone
Is prone to say that orphans all are idle)
As if a careful father brought him up.
And so it happened that that orphan boy,—
A hireling, poor fellow—somehow saved
A tidy sum of money by his toil,
Bought himself decent clothes, a splendid cloak,
And—past the expectation of the village—
Purchased a little garden and a hut,
Thanked his good masters for their bread and salt
And for their useful practical instruction,
And straightway rushed to ask the widow's daughter
If she would grant to him her nuptial towels!⁵⁶⁷
The brokers did not bicker about dowry,
As often is the case among the rich,
Nor did the parish priest exact too much,
Because, to the amazement of them all
He wed them very simply on a week-day,
Without the flourishes, for four gold pieces. . . .
And at this very point, my worthy friend,
The prelude of the tragedy began.

⁵⁶⁷See fn. 436.

III

After Pokrova's feast⁵⁶⁸ it must have been
 That I returned from travel to the Don
 And once again (My nuptial messengers⁵⁶⁹
 I had sent twice to seek the maiden's towels)
 I thought once more to send and make petition—
 And just on Sunday, with my fellow-chumaks⁵⁷⁰
 And all our oxen I came trudging in
 And saw the widow's daughter being wedded.
 So all was lost! All of the good I'd dreamed
 Had vanished and no shred of it remained! . . .
 I, too, was lost,—and yet not in a tavern,
 But on a rack. . . . All people in their lives
 Experience some foul misfortune, son;
 But such a one as this, my dearest friend,
 So fierce a blow, no one from near or far
 Had ever met as I did, in my sins. . . .
 Meanwhile the widow's eyes had dried at last:
 As if behind the door of God's own house
 The old dame lives at ease with her own boy
 And with her son-in-law, and only gazes
 At Katerina dear, her precious child.
 Then in the tavern, with a drunkard crew,
 I drank away my soul—in fact I sold it,
 Sold soul and body to the fiend himself!
 Ah, my dear God! How one would love to live
 In this our world! And yet, a man must learn,
 From childhood up, how to behave in life,
 Or else you will be beaten, with a vengeance! . . .
 I do not know, my friend, if it was Satan
 Who framed this sin, or if my mind was sick,
 Or evil fate had brought me to this pass—
 Even today I still don't understand
 In any measure how the whole thing happened;
 I only know I was completely sober

⁵⁶⁸The feast of the Virgin Mary the Protectress, on October 14.

⁵⁶⁹Those whom the suitor sends to his prospective bride to ask her formally on his behalf for her hand.

⁵⁷⁰Salt-carters. See fn. 201.

(For neither wines, nor meads, nor heady liquors
 Were any more for me to drink, my son!)
 And this is how the tragedy took place.
 My parents now were dead; and perfect strangers
 Had buried them, while I, like one accurst,
 Like Judas spurned by all, by men and God,
 Would lurk in hiding. And I reached the point
 That in the night, by stealth, I set on fire
 Maksim's own house (Maksim had been the name
 Of that good son-in-law). The house burned down . . .
 But my accursed soul did not burn out . . .
 My soul, O friend and brother, did not burn
 But kept on smouldering; even today
 It smoulders yet. . . . When will it smoulder out? . . .
 When will it find its rest? God only knows. . . .

IV

Now Katerina died of utter fright;
 And there Maksim stood looking at the ashes
 Where once his house had stood. What could he do?
 The cold wind whistled in the chimney flue . . .
 And how could such as he begin again?
 He pondered for a while, and crossed himself,
 And went again to labour as a hireling
 And thus to feed his hungry misery.
 The widow still remained, but not alone,
 For with her was her son, a young man now;
 She planned to have him married in the fall—
 When suddenly from our dear Mother Empress,
 Right from the capital a ukase came
 That men must be conscripted for the army.
 It was the first time that this sort of order
 Had come to us from Moscow; in Ukraine
 Our men would join the Cossack cavalry
 At their free will, and even pike battalions
 Were only being staffed with volunteers.
 And now the village gathered in assembly
 To choose the conscripts for the Russian army.

After deliberation the assembly
 Chose, amongst others, for the wooden shackles
 That useless wretch, the widow's worthless son,
 And sent him packing to the mustering post.
 Even such things can happen in this world—
 There is no justice to be had from people! . . .
 Even today such justice in Ukraine
 Still darkly reigns; but what can be expected
 Among a people who themselves are slaves?

v

"No, my good people, no! This will not do!"
 Maksim exclaims. "And this is your solution:
 For what can I, a sorry hireling,
 Amount to? I shall gladly go and serve.
 Let not the widow's son be sadly measured
 As a recruit! I'll go and take his place."
 From the recruiting-post the son came back,
 Home to his mother; from that mustering-point
 Maksim was duly drafted for the army,
 After he'd offered up a prayer to God.

I felt relieved—but why on earth did I
 Feel that relief? Because my foe was gone? . . .
 What kind of enemy was he to me,
 My God in heaven? And my infernal soul,
 Of what was it afraid? Of this Maksim?
 No, not Maksim indeed, but someone else
 Gave my damned soul its fear: For it served Satan
 And of dread Satan it was terrified.

vi

Just a year after all these things had happened,
 The fearful winter⁵⁷¹ came; till Pentecost
 The drifts of snow were white in all the gullies.
 That was the season that the Muscovites

⁵⁷¹See fn. 457.

Took Ochakiv,⁵⁷² but first of all they razed
 The Zaporozhian camp.⁵⁷³ Our brotherhood
 Was scattered to the winds . . . and what brave people
 Those Zaporozhians were! We shall not see
 Their noble like again!

To Ochakiv

Maksim was marched for service in the battle
 And there it was that he was sorely wounded,
 And thence it was that with a full discharge
 He came back to Ukraine. His leg, you see—
 The right or left—was shattered by a shot . . .
 Then I felt ill at ease! Again the viper
 Clung tightly to my heart and wound itself
 Three times around it like a very demon.
 What could I do? I could not help myself.
 From it, of course, the cripple took no harm;
 He hobbled cheerfully upon his crutch
 And gave my hate no thought; on blessed Sundays
 He would put on his service uniform
 Pin on his medal and his cross of valour,
 Plait up his braided wig and sprinkle it
 With flour as well. I still don't understand
 Why Moscow's troopers want to plait those wigs
 Like girls and why they waste good wheaten flour.
 For sport, I think. Yes, just for fun, it seems!
 And so Maksim, in all his dignity,
 Like some proud general, would groom himself
 On Sundays and would trudge along to church;
 There in the choir he would take his place
 And with the cantor, or alone, would chant
 The Acts of the Apostles in the church
 (For in the army he had learned to read.)
 He was a strange man, this Maksim, my friend,
 But diligent, hard-working, meek as well,
 And kindly too; he never gave offence
 To anyone, not with the least ill deed
 Or an unseemly word of any kind.

⁵⁷²A town in the Kherson region, near the Dnieper's estuary, captured by the Russians from the Turks in 1788.

⁵⁷³Destruction of the Cossack Sitch by Catherine II in 1775.

“Everything, good or evil, comes from God,”
The man would say, “even our blessed Lord,
The God Omnipotent and no one else.”

The mildest man in all the world, my son,
Was that Maksim; and I, and I, alas,—
I cannot utter it, my dearest child!—
I—murdered him! . . . Stop for a moment, pray,
And let me rest awhile, and then I'll speak. . . .

VII

And do you say you saw the Trooper's Well?
That water, even today, is drawn from it?
And the Lord's cross, you say, is standing out
Beside the highroad in the open valley? . . .
And did the people yonder not relate
More yet to you? They all have passed away,
Those upright folk who were my witnesses;
While I still suffer and shall go on suffering
Even in the world to come. . . .

Hearken to me,—

And learn where Satan leads the soul of man:
For if it won't repent and turn to God,
The fiend will sink his claws deep in our heart.
Then listen, O my son, to the account
Of that good saint Maksim! He never rested,
Not even on a Sunday, it would seem,
Or any holy feast-day, but would take
The sacred Psalter in his hands and go
To read it in the garden (for you know—
Within a shady corner of that garden
His long-lost Katerina had been buried).
Thus in that garden for her soul's repose
He would recite the psalms; and would intone
With accents soft: “Now may the righteous rest
In innocent communion with the saints!”
At this he wept, and then he would remember
The widow and her son in these his prayers,

And then he would feel glad. "All comes from God,"
 He'd murmur to himself, "One has to live
 One's life out somehow!" Such a righteous man
 He proved himself in life. And then on week-days
 He scorned to sit there idly in the house
 And bustled busily about the yard:
 "A man must work!" was still his utterance
 Delivered in the dialect of Moscow.
 "For if you loaf indoors, you'll soon be bloated."
 One day he started out with pick and shovel
 And went into the fields to dig a well.
 "For it may be," said he, "that some day people
 Will drink refreshing water from that well
 And pray to God for my unworthy soul."
 He sought the fields, some distance from the road,
 Descended the deep vale and at its bottom
 Dug a deep well. (Not by himself alone:
 Other good people came to share his toil
 And help him with the digging of the cistern.)
 He curbed it round with logs and by the road
 Out in the plain set up a mighty cross.
 From the entire, vast valley one could see it.
 He put it there, you see, for men to know
 That near the highway he had built a well,
 And folk might turn aside to drink its water
 And offer up a prayer for him who dug it.

VIII

Do you not see now what the end will be?
 It was my firm resolve to do away
 With the good saint, Maksim. . . . That's right! And why?
 For the same reason that unrighteous Cain
 Murdered his upright brother back in Eden.
 Once on a Sunday or some other feast day
 (Listen, my son, and see how cursèd Satan
 Prods on his victims to their evil works!)
 I told Maksim: "Come now, Ulasovich,⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷⁴His patronymic—son of Ulas.

Let's go down to your well and take a look!"
 —"Fine," he replied, "let us indeed go down
 And have a drink of its refreshing water."
 Down we both went, and took along with us
 A little bucket and the pulley-ropes.
 So to the well we came. . . . I first of all
 Inspected it, to see if it was deep.
 And then I said: "Ulasovich, my friend,
 Would you yourself be good enough to draw
 The water? For I don't know how to do it."
 Over the curb he leaned, let down the bucket,
 And I . . . I seized him promptly by the legs
 And plunged that holy trooper down the well. . . .

Such was the crime that I committed, son . . .
 And such a deed had never yet been done
 In our Ukraine, and never will be done
 In the entire world, my worthy friend! . . .
 People are spread through all the earth, and I
 Am all alone—a devil and accurst!

IX

Within a week the people pulled Maksim
 Out of the well and sadly buried him
 In that deep valley. They erected there
 A fair-sized chapel and they called the place,
 To honour him, "the Moscow Trooper's well. . . ."

That's the true story of that trooper's well,
 Inhuman, if you wish, but true enough!
 And I . . . I went to join the haydamaks
 Till finally I landed, for my sins,
 Here in Siberia. (For to this place
 Convicts not long ago were sent in exile.)
 And here I perish like a dog, like Judas . . .
 But pray to God on my behalf, my son,
 In yonder glorious Ukraine of ours,
 That demi-paradise, that happy land . . .
 And if you do, I may feel some relief. . . .

Fortress of Novopetrovsk, May 16, 1857

THE NEOPHYTES⁵⁷⁵TO M. S. SHCHEPKIN, FOR REMEMBRANCE, DECEMBER 24, 1857⁵⁷⁶

Thus said the Lord, keep ye
 judgment and do justice; for my
 salvation is near to come, and my
 righteousness to be revealed.

Isaiah lvi. 1

DEDICATION

Belov'd of every Muse and Grace,
 I wait you, weeping, in my place;
 And echoes of my mournful fit⁵⁷⁷
 Into your soul I would transmit.
 With all the kindness of your nature
 Welcome my offspring, lonely creature,
 O you, our mighty thaumaturge⁵⁷⁸
 And dearest friend, I humbly urge!
 For if you welcome thus my thought,
 Poor, timid thing, with you it ought
 To cross the Lethe⁵⁷⁹ of the years
 And some day fall like burning tears
 Upon the earth, nay, shall become
 A parable to devildom—
 To every hangman, blood's aspirant,
 And every future savage tyrant.

⁵⁷⁵From Greek, meaning the newly converted (in this case, to Christianity). To Shevchenko, Christianity meant Truth, Justice, Brotherhood. This title may also apply to the Ukrainians who had been converted to the consciousness of their national identity. This poem was written in a matter of about a week during Shevchenko's enforced stay in Nizhni Novgorod, where he was stopped by the authorities while on his way from exile to St. Petersburg. See Introduction, p. xxxviii.

⁵⁷⁶The date refers to Shchepkin's journey to Nizhni Novgorod, specially to celebrate Christmas with Shevchenko. While in that city, the famous Russian actor played leading roles in several dramas, including Kotliarevsky's *Moskal-Charivnik* (Moskal the Wizard), which was staged by Shevchenko himself.

⁵⁷⁷Song, or story.

⁵⁷⁸This particular word does not appear in the original, but does render exactly Shevchenko's "worker of miracles" (i.e., on the stage).

⁵⁷⁹In Greek mythology, one of the underworld's rivers, this one—the stream of forgetfulness. Extended meaning: all the past misery and torment will be forgotten and immortality will be attained.

PROLOGUE

For some time now, a prisoner⁵⁸⁰ I stay
 Like some dark thief in exile hid away;
 At highroad and at fields my glance I toss
 And at a raven perched upon a cross
 In a graveyard,—nothing else enranked
 Shows from my prison window; God be thanked
 For what I see! 'Tis certain to my eye
 That fellow-Christians live and pray and die
 As once they did.

A lofty crucifix
 Stands in the graveyard and an artist's tricks
 Have painted it bright gold. (One may surmise
 No humble person underneath it lies! . . .)
 Depicted on it is the Son of God
 Who for our sins the road to Calvary trod.
 We should be grateful to the wealthy waifs
 Whose pride this splendour to our gaze vouchsafes.
 While I, amid the sorrow of my days,
 Just sit and from my prison window gaze
 Unceasing on that cross so tall and bright. . . .
 I stare, and stare, and pray both morn and night,
 And as I pray, my pangs of bitter dread,
 Like some small child whose hunger has been fed,
 Some respite feels; this place where I must rest
 Seems to grow less confined; my throbbing breast
 Both sings and weeps; in strength it seems to bask
 In rising to Thy throne, O Lord, to ask
 Thee and Thy blessed saints, what has He done,
 That righteous Nazarene,⁵⁸¹ that only Son
 Of God-appointed Mary? By what plan
 Has He been dealing with the sons of man?
 And why did they the Holy One torment,—
 In fetters binding Him with foul assent?
 Why did they crown His blessed head with thorns
 And lead him out with thieves and human scorns

⁵⁸⁰In Nizhni Novgorod, Shevchenko was not actually a prisoner, but under police surveillance. Otherwise, his freedom of movement within the city was not hampered. The window of the room in which he lived looked out on a cemetery.

⁵⁸¹Jesus of Nazareth.

Upon the summit of Golgotha's hill
 And hang him with them on that peak of ill?
 Why? But no answer does our ears salute:
 Even our High Creator still is mute;
 Confessors, too, and saints forbear to speak,
 Those dumb *castrati*⁵⁸² from an age antique.
 Can this be so because in our own times
 (I ask myself) we punish kindred crimes⁵⁸³
 By gaoling men for sins as salutary
 As those committed by the Son of Mary?
 Of course, we may no longer crucify—
 Like those fierce Pharisees in days gone by—
 A living, righteous man; we pray, you know,⁵⁸⁴
 To God, and high upon His churches show
 His blessed cross in effigies of gold;
 We supplicate Him in due adoration
 And offer Him our diligent prostration.
 Ferocious pharaohs were those men of old,
 Caesars, barbarians of hellish cast,
 Fierce, godless pagans with presumptions vast,
 In short, draconic beasts! Yet have we seen
 That men like these the gentle Nazarene
 Addressed as His own brothers—That is why
 They nailed Him to a cross and had Him die
 Like the worst criminal. . . .

I cannot know

Why we, in truth, upon this world below,
 Should read His holy edicts and should drink
 His sacred blood and of it no more think
 Than of a glass of mead in a tavern revel. . . .
 O hypocrites, ye children of the Devil,
 Not for the Jews but for us reprobates
 And for our wicked children there awaits
 The judgment of that Blood! Ye sons of night,
 Insensate dogs, deprived in truth of sight,
 You cannot see at all! Flat on the ground
 Your greasy, praying carcasses are found;

⁵⁸²Those spiritual leaders who showed no physical energy to fight for justice for the people entrusted to their care.

⁵⁸³The opposite is meant—virtues.

⁵⁸⁴What follows is ironically expressed.

Behind a cross from devils you would hide,
 And then beneath your breath a prayer of pride
 Asks God to send the worst adversity
 And every kind of plague in high degree
 Upon your fellow-Christians, deemed your foes—
 May God appoint your condign overthrows,
 All you new pharaohs with your hearts of clay,
 Rapacious Caesars of this later day!

I will transport myself to that far time
 When Rome⁵⁸⁵ obscene, with Nero⁵⁸⁶ in his prime,
 In filthy orgies neared its sorry end,
 And a new day already did ascend
 Out of bleak misery and its light let fall
 On Colosseum⁵⁸⁷ and on Capitol,⁵⁸⁸
 And fiery-tongued⁵⁸⁹ apostles wandered forth
 From land to land, to east, west, south, and north;
 Already they had spread the sacred word,
 And sons of arrogance, when these they heard,
 Found new humility as earth seemed loss
 Before the glory of His holy cross.
 Turn, O my soul, to seek that long ago
 And the grim groaning of its bells of woe;
 Then with a trumpet's utterance thunder out
 From a dark dungeon's walls your theme devout!

O blessed amongst women past all others,
 Most holy and most virtuous of Mothers,
 We hail thee by thy holy Son on earth!
 Let us not die in slavery and dearth,
 Let us not waste our fleeting years in vain,
 O joy of the afflicted! Pray, ordain
 And send to me a sacred word of thine;
 The new voice of the holy Truth divine;

⁵⁸⁵Russian Tsarist Empire.

⁵⁸⁶Roman Emperor (A.D. 54–68), a fierce persecutor of the Christians. In this poem Nero represents Nicholas I.

⁵⁸⁷A huge circus in Rome where the emperors and wealthy patricians arranged games for the populace, and where the first Christians were exposed to wild beasts.

⁵⁸⁸Capitolium, one of the seven hills of Rome. It was the administrative, commercial and religious centre of ancient Rome. The chief temple to Jupiter was located there.

⁵⁸⁹Reference to the Holy Spirit, who on the first Pentecost descended upon the Apostles in the form of fiery tongues.

Revive, illuminate the Word, that I
 May sense its blessed wisdom from on high.
 Then shall I show the world a mother's woe⁵⁹⁰
 That in a river of sad tears did go
 A veritable sea of bitter tears,
 Like thine of old, and how, across the years,
 Into her living soul she caught the light
 That from thy Son, the Crucified, shines bright.
 Mother of God on earth, whose heart has bled,
 A human mother's tears thyself hast shed
 To the last drop. Out of my depths I cry,
 And crying, pray: Send help to such as I;
 Into my meagre soul the power inspire
 To speak with tongues of purifying fire,
 So that the Word may blaze with holy arts
 To warm men's souls and melt their stubborn hearts,
 To spread across Ukraine a healing tide
 And in Ukrainian fields be sanctified;
 Yea, let that Word breathe praise to God again,
 The incense of all Truth! Amen, amen!

I

Not in our country, which God loves from far,
 Nor in the days of hetman and of tsar
 But in the idol-loving land of Rome
 The lawlessness I tell of made its home.
 Perhaps it was in Decius' bloody reign,
 Perhaps when Emperor Nero ruled profane—
 I cannot tell for certain; let us say
 That this my tale took place in Nero's day!⁵⁹¹
 At that time Russia had not come to be
 When in the pleasant land of Italy
 A little girl grew up in peace demure
 And holy beauty like a lily pure.
 Her mother gazed upon her and in sooth
 Beheld in her the charm of her own youth;

⁵⁹⁰Mother of Alcides.

⁵⁹¹Shevchenko makes a pretense that he is writing about ancient Rome, while making it quite clear that it is the Russian Empire he is dealing with. Decius, a Roman Emperor (A.D. 249–251), who also persecuted Christians.

Then sought out suitors for her lovely daughter
 And found a bridegroom whose fine bearing caught her,
 And, having prayed to Hymen,⁵⁹² was her guide
 To other pleasant chambers as a bride.⁵⁹³
 Now presently that lovely maiden bore
 A man-child; and did gratefully adore
 Her own Penates⁵⁹⁴ and at heavy price
 Made on the Capitol her sacrifice,
 Nay, there prevailed upon the priests to bless
 Her child at pagan altars—for largesse.
 Then day and night before her household gods
 The sacred fire burns. In joy she nods
 To see her son a young Alcides⁵⁹⁵ grow.
 For his young love, the gay hetaerae⁵⁹⁶ glow,
 While to an idol where fair Venus⁵⁹⁷ yearns
 A golden censer daily smokes and burns.

II

That was the time when over Bethlehem
 A star was rising like a diadem,
 The Word of holy Truth and Love arisen,
 The universal star that to earth's prison
 Brought peace and joy to all. But Pharisees
 And all Judea's loathsome perfidies
 Began to stir and hiss as loud in hate
 As snakes that in a swamp vituperate.
 The incarnate Son of God their malice leaves
 Hanged on Golgotha's hill between two thieves.
 And then the murderers in deep slumber fell,
 Drunken with blood and draughts of hate from hell.
 They drank Thy blood! Thou from the grave didst rise,
 Thy Word of Truth had mounted to the skies,
 And through the captive world was swiftly borne
 By Thy Apostles, to Thy Godhead sworn.

⁵⁹²Hymeneus, in ancient mythology, the god of marriage.

⁵⁹³i.e., married her off.

⁵⁹⁴The household gods who protected the familial hearth and happiness.

⁵⁹⁵Her son was given the name of Alcides, which was one of the appellatives of Hercules. The meaning: her son increased in physical and spiritual strength.

⁵⁹⁶Courtesans.

⁵⁹⁷In ancient mythology, goddess of love and, at times, of luxury and passion.

III

One day her brave young son, with wanton plans,
 In company with some young courtesans
 And a Silenus-oldster,⁵⁹⁸ drunk as they,
 Walked tipsily along the Appian Way.⁵⁹⁹
 There in a grove they stripped to fornicate
 And drank themselves into a merrier state
 To worship mad Priapus.⁶⁰⁰ Suddenly
 They saw Saint Peter drawing near their spree,
 Marching to Rome to tell the gospel story.
 He sought the grove to wet his throttle hoary
 With a cooling drink. "Peace be to you!" he said,
 That tired Apostle with the sad, grey head.
 He blessed the wanton revellers, all and each,
 And in a gentle, kind, and gracious speech
 He told them of the pure new Word he bore,
 Of Love and Justice, Goodness in large store,
 And, as the greatest grace in all the world,
 The brotherhood of men. The oily-curled
 Old drunk and naked Faun⁶⁰¹ in awe bowed low,
 Your son Alcides and the girls, I trow,
 All, all fell humbly down upon the ground
 Before the Saint, then led the man they'd found,
 The great Apostle whom his words reveal,
 Back to their thermae⁶⁰² for an evening meal.

IV

Men in the thermae, too, their orgies hold.
 The chambers blaze with purple and with gold,
 Smoke rises from the amphorae: young wenches
 Stand almost naked by the marble benches
 Before the Cyprian goddess;⁶⁰³ with one voice
 They sing a hymn of love. And all rejoice

⁵⁹⁸One of the revellers, who represented Silenus, the chief satyr (or faun), half-beast, shaggy-skinned, with horns, a tail, and cloven-hooved, often intoxicated.

⁵⁹⁹An important Roman road leading southward and eastward to the Adriatic.

⁶⁰⁰In Roman mythology, a god of fertility, often of sex.

⁶⁰¹One representing a satyr.

⁶⁰²Roman warm baths, which were sumptuous places for social gatherings.

⁶⁰³Venus, who was first venerated on the island of Cyprus.

Because the feast is ready and the guests
 Lie on their couches, with the roar of jests!
 Another guest the young hetaerae bring,
 Grey-bearded he . . . and at the words that spring
 In sweet communion from the Apostle's lips,
 That like a precious ointment's fragrance drips,
 The orgy ceased. The priestess of that fane
 Of Cyprian Venus, queen of passion's reign,
 Bowed down her joyful head before his feet,
 And rose, and all uprose, and through the street,
 Past all the pillared shrines and massy domes,
 Followed Saint Peter to the catacombs.
 Your son Alcides felt the same constraint
 And walked a follower of the holy Saint,
 That great new Teacher of the Christian way.
 You⁶⁰⁴ meanwhile gladly from your dwelling stray
 Along the highroad waiting for that swain,
 Your own Alcides. . . . But alas, in vain!
 The darkness falls, at last the dawn draws near,
 But still the missing son does not appear.
 Nor will he ever come! And you alone
 Your prayers to your Penates will intone;
 Alone you will sit down at home to sup,
 Nay, not to eat but to drink sorrows up,
 And, cursing both yourself and evil fate,
 Grow old in imprecations. Desolate,
 You'll die at last in utter loneliness,
 Like a curst leper whom no hand may bless.

v

Head down, upon a cross, Saint Peter died;⁶⁰⁵
 He, like his Lord before, hung crucified.
 The Neophytes to Syracuse⁶⁰⁶ were taken
 In chains to the grim dungeons, God-forsaken,

⁶⁰⁴From time to time Shevchenko turns away from his narrative to address the mother of Alcides.

⁶⁰⁵According to tradition, the Apostle Peter died in Rome, crucified head downward (at his own request because he felt unworthy to die in the same position as his Lord).

⁶⁰⁶A city in Sicily near which slaves were sent to work in the silver mines. Syracuse here stands for Siberia and the northern regions of Russia.

Dark, subterranean. And there your son,
 Alcides, your own child, your dearest one,
 Is rotting now in slavery and chains.
 For you, O suffering one, no news remains
 Of where he languishes and pines away!
 You seek him in Siberia, nay, pardon,
 I should say Scythia,⁶⁰⁷ that barren garden.
 And is your plight unique? Mother of God,
 Preserve us all from strokes of such a rod!
 There's not a home or family but knows
 Like loss, for every brother has these woes,
 Each sister's in like lamentable state;
 For captives pale in savage dungeons wait;
 In hapless misery they sit or stand,
 Or do forced labour in a distant land,
 Or serve in British or in Gallic legions⁶⁰⁸ . . .
 O ruthless Nero! From those darkened regions
 God's sudden, righteous judgment will surprise you
 And on the open highway agonize you. . . .
 From every clime there'll answer to the call
 The holy martyrs, children, one and all,
 Of sacred liberty. They'll sail, they'll fly,
 And round your dirty deathbed as you die
 They will appear in chains and . . . will forgive you:⁶⁰⁹
 For they are Christian brothers who outlive you,
 While you're a vicious cur, a ravening beast,
 A raving despot at the human feast!

VI

The slaves in Syracuse swarm ever thicker
 In vaults and dungeons, while, made dull with liquor,

⁶⁰⁷Again Shevchenko pretends to have made a slip of tongue and seemingly corrects himself. Scythia once comprised the vast region north of the Black Sea, and was inhabited by the distant ancestors of the Ukrainians. To that region Greek and Roman tyrants used to send their slaves and political prisoners, as the tsars sent theirs to Siberia.

⁶⁰⁸Analogous to the distant regions that the tsars had in store for those who opposed their autocratic rule.

⁶⁰⁹Here Shevchenko enunciates the Christian ideal of forgiving even one's fiercest enemies, once Truth and Justice have been established.

Medusa⁶¹⁰ sleeps with beggars at an inn.
 At any moment now she may begin
 To revel once again in blood and sweat.
 The mother sought her son in patience yet,
 She sailed to Syracuse and, it befell,
 Found him in fetters in a dungeon-cell.
 Even to visit him she was forbidden;
 So she sat patiently where he was hidden
 Within a fortress vast, and there would wait
 To see if heaven's grace would delegate
 Her son in chains to sweep the boulevards.
 Meanwhile in Rome the populace regards
 The preparations for a mighty feast.
 The governors march in from West and East;
 Pretorians⁶¹¹ and priests and senators
 And lictors⁶¹² stand around Jove's mighty doors
 And sing their hymns in chorus as each offers
 The smoke of incense from his richest coffers.
 Surrounded by his council, Caesar comes;
 Before him, to the tune of flutes and drums,
 A statue cast in bronze is proudly borne,
 Great Caesar's image that bright flowers adorn.

VII

And now a most unusual celebration
 Was dreamed up by the nobles of the nation
 And by the sapient senate and its knights.
 For all had praised great Caesar to such heights
 In every way, that they at heart grew tired
 Of having such a lout so much admired,
 And so, to roll all plaudits into one,
 In council was a deed of frenzy done:

⁶¹⁰In ancient mythology, a ferocious goddess with snakes for hair, whose aspect was so horrifying that anyone but glancing at her was frozen with terror. Simovich suggests that here she, collectively, represents the wretched state of the Ukrainian slaves whom the despotic tsars reduced to such a state of misery that if one looked at them with sober, not drunken eyes, the sight would be deadly to the beholder.

⁶¹¹Caesar's personal bodyguard.

⁶¹²Magistrates in ancient Rome, who were at times also criminal judges. Their insignia were the axe enveloped with rods (fasces).

A title for great Caesar they defend
 As Jupiter himself—and there an end!
 And so to all the governors they wrote
 Throughout the empire: As an oat's an oat,
 Caesar's a god, more than a god is he.
 And so they hired a sculptor for a fee,
 To cast this god in bronze; 'mid orders many,
 They added as a sort of *nota bene*
 That this bronze Caesar, in response to prayer,
 Would grant requests. And wretched folk repair,
 Like birds to warmer climes, in coveys flew
 On pilgrimage to Rome. This woman, too,
 Hapless set sail from Syracuse by sea
 To pray to Caesar, this new deity.
 Was she the only one? Good Lord! In bands,
 Thousands arrived like her from distant lands.
 But woe to you! Whom do you now entreat?
 You bring your tears, but to what creature's feet?
 You bring your hopes, but woe to you blind slaves!
 Is he, O humble ones, a god that saves?
 Can marble grant you mercy? Pray alone
 To God and Truth! Deaf are the ears of stone.
 Bow down to none but God, whom Heaven adores!
 All else are false, both priests and emperors!

VIII

Before the throne of Nero, that new Jove,
 The senators prayed yesterday, and throve;
 Likewise did all patricians—their reward
 From this god's grace was in profusion poured.
 Some with official rank or cash were warmed;
 And some had Palestine for taxing farmed;
 Another gained, for merit still more great,
 The god's own concubine to be his mate,
 Somewhat the worse for wear, if truth were said—
 The point was that she came from Caesar's bed.
 From one he kindly deigned to take a sister
 Into his harem—but of course none missed her.
 Such intercourse is what a god is for!
 And we in turn must serve the emperor

Not only with our sisters but ourselves,
For nothing stays exempt upon our shelves.

Then the pretorians invoke his grace
And for his guard he issued a ukase:
They on the city's folk might take their fling,
And we must still forgive them everything.
And you plebeians all, a wretched crew,
Offered the god your prayers, but such as you
Have gained no favour nor redress for hurts—
No one is conscious that you have deserts.

IX

On the third day, folk reach the palace garden
To pray the god to grant the Christians pardon.
You, too, poor woman, came with all the rest;
And the kind idol, at your meek request,
Ordered the Christians to be brought to Rome
In chains from Syracuse across the foam.
In pleasure and in joy, again you pray;
But that new Jupiter has naught to say.
Just wait and see what feast he will provide
In the Colosseum! As the time you bide,
Go forth to meet your son, but check your joy,
Poor woman, at the coming of your boy:
As yet you do not know the horrid art
Your god of mercy carries in his heart.

X

And so, together with a host of mothers,
She of Alcides, joyful like the others,
Went forth to welcome him and all the saints
Upon the Tiber bank. No more complaints
But joy you utter, verging upon song
In praises that to Caesar-god belong:
"O what a Jupiter at last is ours!
O Jupiter indeed! What wasted powers
I spent on travel far beyond my ken
To pray to Jove. . . . How foolish I have been!"
So silently she offered prayer devout
To Caesar deified; then ventured out

Upon the muddy bank and there gazed down
 Upon the Tiber. With a puzzled frown
 You see a mighty galley swiftly run
 And on the galley there you see your son
 Like all the Neophytes in chains held fast
 And even double-chained against the mast.
 No longer a mere neophyte is he
 But an apostle in the first degree
 Of Christ's own Living Word. Behold him now!
 Can you not hear the triumph of his vow?
 Your martyr sings in fetters unabhorred:
 "A new psalm we shall utter to our Lord"⁶¹³
 And a new glory chant in exultation
 With guileless heart in a blest congregation!
 With psaltery and timbrel we shall praise
 The goodness of our God, who checks the ways
 Of wicked men and gives the righteous aid.
 The blessed in their glory unafraid
 And on soft couches shall rejoice and nod
 Their praises to the holy name of God.
 For two-edged swords He in their hands will place
 To avenge the injustice of the pagan race
 And stun the gentile nations in their wars.
 Then they shall fetter all the greedy tsars
 With iron shackles, and the great one's hands
 Shall be in manacles at their commands.
 Then shall the wicked feel our Lord's constraints
 Beneath the righteous judgment of the saints;
 And for eternity shall God make known
 The blessed glory of the good alone!"

XI

While on the bank you stood, in dark assent,
 You neither listened nor made loud lament
 But like the other mothers raised sonorous
 Your Hallelujahs to the Christian chorus.
 Upon the Neophytes the chains resound
 With notes like tinkling bells; and at that sound,

⁶¹³Another version of Psalm CXLIX (see p. 266).

Your only son, the apostle, did rejoice,
 And crossed himself and lifted up his voice:
 "Pray, brothers, pray, for Caesar fierce and grim!
 In all your prayers to Heaven remember him;⁶¹⁴
 But do not bow your heads in adoration
 Before his pride! For we are God's creation
 And pray to Him alone! Let Caesar rage
 Through all the nations in this present age;
 To slay the prophets let his anger fall,
 Yea, let him scream and crucify us all!
 The twins already are conceived we know,
 Who into manhood will hereafter grow:
 Not as avengers—be that thought sufficed—
 But as the holy champions of Christ!
 Then without fire or sword or flaming skies
 These warriors of the Saviour will arise,
 And countless pagans through a vast expanse
 Will flee before their brotherly advance!
 Pray, brothers, pray!"

And there before the cross
 The fettered Neophytes forgot all loss
 And prayed with joy. O blessed be your story,
 Young warriors of God in ages hoary!
 For ever and for ever be your glory!

XII

To Rome the galley came. A week passed by.
 The drunken Caesar, with a boozey eye,
 Had himself tonsured⁶¹⁵ to a sort of Zeus
 And planned a revel for that colleague's use.
 All Rome rejoices. For the idol's skin,
 Incense and myrrh are brought by cartloads in.
 Into the Colosseum now they herd
 Great hordes of Christians to be massacred. . . .
 As in a slaughter-house their life-blood flows,
 And Rome rejoices, and the torment grows.

⁶¹⁴Ideal of forgiveness. See fn. 609.

⁶¹⁵An anachronism, of course, but implying consecration. The shaving of the crown of the head is one of the features in the ordination of a monk.

The gladiator and patrician both
 Are drunk with blood and smoke; and, nothing loath,
 Rome drinks away the ruins of her fame
 And eats a wake-feast in the Scipio name.⁶¹⁶
 Fierce, loathsome grandam, wrought of greedy fiber,
 Come, revel in thy harems by the Tiber!
 For, from beyond the sea, a holy Star⁶¹⁷
 Rises in radiance in the skies afar.
 Not with a just and sacred thunderbolt
 Shalt thou be slain; but dull blades of revolt
 Shall butcher thee or, as for some foul dog,
 A club shall batter thee an epilogue!⁶¹⁸

XIII

Now, for the second day, the arena roars.
 On golden Lydian sands deep purple pours,
 Kneaded in violence to a bloody mire.
 But still no Syracusan saints expire
 In that vast carnage for the Roman lords.
 On the third day, the guards, with naked swords,
 Brought them in throngs, the gentlest of all men
 And fettered, to that mighty slaughter-pen.
 The arena roared out like a beast of prey
 As forth your son stepped, with a psalm, that day;
 And drunken Caesar, as in sudden rage,
 Bellowed in laughter at that reeking stage.
 Then from the underground a leopard sprang,
 Paced forth, and cast a glance at him who sang.
 The sacred blood from the torn body flows. . . .
 Throughout the Colosseum there arose
 A thunderous roar, that died away again. . . .
 Where were you, wretched woman, hidden then?

⁶¹⁶As at a funeral feast, Rome, by its revelries and orgies, is "celebrating" the passing of its glory acquired, among others, by the martial family of the Scipios, particularly by the two "jewels" of Cornelia.

⁶¹⁷The Star of Bethlehem.

⁶¹⁸Rome will not die a sudden merciful death, but will agonize for centuries before its demise, and will finally be put out of its misery ignobly by the blunt club of the barbarian, not by the sword.

Why did you not, ere grief thus grew complete,
 Cast yourself down at Caesar's holy feet?
 Because your Zeus was under heavy guard:
 Three rows of lictors every passage barred,
 And beyond that your meek approach was blocked
 By iron portals, closed and double-locked.
 Thus you remained alone, alone outside.
 What could you do when your Alcides died?—
 "O fierce, intolerable destiny!
 Without my son, what can my future be?
 To whom shall I incline?" she wailing said.
 Then on the dark stone wall she struck her head
 And like a heavy corpse fell desolate
 Before the very threshold of the gate.

XIV

At evening, from the spectacle returning
 Came holy Caesar, all the people spurning
 And in the *thermae*, with his lictors, hid.
 Over the Colosseum twilight slid;
 By all abandoned, it appeared to weep;
 And croaking ravens there a watch did keep.
 High, like a mountain from the plain, it rose,
 A mass of black above the Town's repose.
 From beyond Tiber and the Alban Hills⁶¹⁹
 A gentle wind its requiem instills.
 Above the Colosseum's dark design,
 As from a smoky mist, new beams now shine,
 The full-faced moon sails forth in radiance bright
 And earth now rests upon the lap of night.
 We only, Adam, your poor, sinful sons,
 Rest not until the grave our soul outruns;
 Like dogs we bicker for some cause unknown
 Or bite each other for a rotten bone,
 And blame you for all ills and all disgrace,
 O far, ignoble Forebear of our race!

⁶¹⁹Alban Hills, ancient volcanic hills about fifteen miles southeast of Rome.

XV

The mother lay unconscious for a while
 Till the night air her brain could reconcile
 To face the world again. Then up she stood,
 And as she passed the portal, from her hood
 She whispered something in that place of shame.
 Was it a curse at holy Caesar's name?
 Perhaps . . . then softly to the gates she stole,
 And listened, smiled, and once again her soul
 Breathed in a whisper forth. . . . Then still as dew
 She sat down by the gate and pensive grew.
 Soon the great portals opened. Forth there came
 Waggon and chariots from that pit of shame,
 Carting the holy bodies to the river
 That corpses of the saints they might deliver
 As food to fatten fish for Caesar's table.
 The mother then arose, though scarcely able,
 Glanced all around, while with her hands she pressed
 Her battered head, and softly she addressed
 Her steps to follow like a shadowy ghost
 The carts that rumbled to the Tiber coast.
 The grey-eyed Scythian drivers, slaves of slaves,
 Thought she was kin to demons from the graves
 Or some dark deity from Hades come
 To lead the Romans to a hellish home.
 Then into Tiber's pools they pitched the dead
 And with their carts drove back to barn, and bed.

You only stayed there gazing on the bank
 At the wide circles on the waters dank
 Above the body of your blessèd son;
 You saw those ripples lessen, one by one,
 Till not a trace was left for you to see;
 And only then did you smile bitterly
 And in fierce lamentations loudly cried,
 And Him who for our sakes was crucified
 For the first time you sought in earnest prayer.
 And Mary's suffering Son redeemed you there;
 His gospel touched your soul to heal and bless;
 And to the public squares and palaces

Bearing the Word of Truth, the streets you trod
To praise the veritable, living God!⁶²⁰

Nizhni Novgorod, December 8, 1857

"THE IDIOT"⁶²¹

Back in the epoch of our sergeant-tsar,⁶²²
The corporal, Gavrilovich Bezrukiy,⁶²³
And his drunk underling and deputy,
Foul Dolgorukiy,⁶²⁴ ruled in our Ukraine.
A precious lot of good they did to us,
And many were the people whom they fleeced,
These satraps of their master officer,—
Especially that closely cropped Gavrilich⁶²⁵
Who with his corporal, ill-tempered, lively
And brutal with extreme ferocity,
Would drill the people with so hard a hand
That in the sergeant there was roused amazement
At the sheer violence of their régime;
And for that reason he was well-disposed
And always liked his under-officers.
Meanwhile, we saw their deeds and held our peace
And scratched our pates in silence—dumb, base slaves,
You servile tsarist footstools, spineless lackeys⁶²⁶
Of the drunk corporal! You were not fit,
Clad in laced liveries, toads, pharisees,
You were not fit to rise in the defence
Of justice and our sacred liberty!
You have been taught to torture your own brothers,
And not to love them! Ah, you miserable

⁶²⁰The mother continues the mission of salvation begun by her martyred son. Cf. Christ's Mother doing the same in the poem "Mary," p. 514.

⁶²¹Here used in the sense of "God's Fool," or "Simpleton for Christ's sake."

⁶²²Nicholas II, the drill-master of the peoples forming the Russian Empire.

⁶²³Dimitri Gavrilovich Bibikov (called Bezrukiy, One without an Arm) was the Russian-appointed governor of Kiev, a "corporal" under the "sergeant" tsar.

⁶²⁴Literally, the Long-Handed One, the chief of the gendarmerie in Kiev, whom Shevchenko, in the original, terms as a petty "under-officer."

⁶²⁵Shorter for Gavrilovich.

⁶²⁶Addressed to those Ukrainian servile underlings who dared not rebel against the hard political régime to which they were subjected.

And cursed crew, when will you breathe your last?
 When shall we get ourselves a Washington⁶²⁷
 To promulgate his new and righteous law?
 But some day we shall surely find the man!

Not in your hundreds but in moaning millions
 Did that Gavrilich bend you to his purpose—
 Polians, Dulibs, and Derevlans⁶²⁸ as well;
 And you, my blessed people of Kiev,
 Although the satrap-corporal handed over
 Your buxom women to his drunken gaolers
 As maids to serve their lust—you did not care.
 Yet one queer person was among you found,
 Some fine madcap original, who punched
 The corporal on the snout, did it in church,
 But could not stir the coward up to fight—
 To beat a cur would bring no more response.⁶²⁹

But so it was! Out of a million swineherds
 At least one man of courage could be found
 Who simply put the entire realm to shame:
 He pasted the foul satrap in the face,
 And you, you idiots, in the interval
 While in the doctor's care the corporal lay,
 Pronounced that blessed and courageous knight
 To be an idiot! And your old sergeant,
 That Sardanapalus,⁶³⁰ sent to the galleys
 That blessed man, while to the battered satrap
 He showed his great goodwill for ever after.
 Nothing else came of it; that stark event
 Sank in a devious and shady manner
 Into a refuse heap of stinking gossip.
 And I . . . O my bright star! . . . You lead me now
 Out of my prison cell and far-off exile
 Right to the refuse heap⁶³¹ of Nicholas;
 Above its rubbish you now shine and blaze
 With unseen, sacred, and life-giving fire;

⁶²⁷A Washington to free the people from foreign domination. These two lines are one of the highlights of Shevchenko's literary creation, and are frequently quoted.

⁶²⁸The names of the ancient Ukrainian tribes, whose distant descendants Gavrilich oppressed.

⁶²⁹This incident actually happened.

⁶³⁰See fn. 419.

⁶³¹St. Petersburg.

And like a pillar from that dung-heap rise
 His impious deeds. . . . Oh, godless, evil tsar,
 Most brutal persecutor of the just!
 What evils you have wrought upon the earth!

And you, All-seeing Eye,⁶³² have you looked down
 Out of high heaven upon blessed slaves,
 Fettered by hundreds in their chains and driven
 To far Siberia, or racked, or hanged?
 Had you no knowledge of their bloody fate?
 Did you look down on them, and were not blinded?
 O Eye, Eye, Eye! It seems you do not peer
 Too carefully at man! It seems you sleep
 In the ciborium, and let the tsars . . .
 But may the devil take those ugly tsars!
 Let them see nightmare-shackles in their sleep,
 While I shall fly off to Siberia,
 Even beyond the Baikal;⁶³³ there I'll peep
 Into the mountains, all their murky caves
 And their abysmal pits, and gaze at you,
 My fellow-champions of liberty—
 To show you forth, in darkness, stench, and exile,
 Before the tsars and their unseeing people;
 And I shall lead you out to pass before them
 In endless columns and in clanking chains. . . .

Nizhni Novgorod, 1857

1858

DESTINY

Never have you proved false my path to tend
 For like a brother, sister, or a friend
 You've succoured my poor self; when I was young
 My little hand to your strong fingers clung—

⁶³²A bold and terrifying accusation cast by the poet-prophet against the Creator who allows such injustice to be perpetrated.

⁶³³A lake in far eastern Siberia, around which were located gold mines worked by convicted criminals and by those who rebelled against tsarist despotism.

You've taken me to school and did beseech me,
There where a drunken sexton was to teach me:

"Study and learn, my dear," you said. "Some day
We will amount to something if we stay."
And I took heed and studied, hard and long,
And learned indeed. But you, alas, were wrong!
For what do we amount to? . . . But enough!
We two have never left our pathway rough,
Have gone straight forward, and no man can find
One grain of falsehood that we've left behind. . . .
Let us then still go on, my destiny,
Most humble, unpretentious friend to me;
Let us proceed: for there the glory lies,
And glory is my all-consuming prize.

Nizhni Novgorod, February 9, 1858

THE MUSE

Young sister of Apollo, goddess pure,
You took me in my swaddling vestiture
And far into the fields your way you found,
And there amid the plain, upon a mound,
Like Freedom where expanses broad subsist,
You wrapped me in a cloak of greyish mist;
You sang to me a soothing lullaby
And wrought consummate sorcery . . . and I . . .
O my bewitching charmer, saw your aid
My sorry life in every act pervade:
You watched above me everywhere, and on
Each day, my star, immaculately shone.
Even the steppe, that place of desolation,
In my far exile knew your approbation;
Yes, even there, your beauty was revealed
Like some unfading flower in a field.
Out of the filthy barrack-room you flitted
Like an unsullied bird, for heaven fitted,
And high above my head you sang and soared,
O golden-winged young angel, and restored,

As with life-giving water that baptized,
My soul with heavenly grace immortalized.

And so I live, and high above my head
Your light, my pretty star, is softly shed.
Hover above me still, my cherub fair,
My golden-winged sweet seraph of the air!
O holy counsellor, my youth's true treasure,
Do not abandon me in dark displeasure!
By night, by day, at twilight and at dawn,
Hover and teach me, to my service drawn;
Teach me to tell the truth with lips untainted
By falsehood's poison! Teach me, creature sainted,
To make my life a prayer to the end;
And when I die, my holy one, my friend
And precious Mother—place your lifeless son
Within a coffin since his work is done,
And show above the bier on which he lies
At least a tear in your immortal eyes!

Nizhni Novgorod, February 9, 1858

FAME

Aha, you slattern of a tavern-maid,
You drunken huckstress of an evil trade!
Where in the devil all these latter days
Have you been tarrying with your bright rays?
Have you been spreading them at gay Versailles
Above a thief on credit's⁶³⁴ fairy-tales?
Have you been frolicking with someone else
From tedium or to break your tipsy spells?
Come, cling to me, and, to console my woe,
Into a quiet snuggle we will go,
Pleasantly have some fun in lovers' bliss,
Peck at each other with a frequent kiss,

⁶³⁴Reference to the French Emperor Napoleon III (1852–70) who, according to Shevchenko, pilfered his fame by depriving the French of their liberty. For that reason Shevchenko believed that Napoleon would be “credited” by fame only for a brief period and would be given short shrift by the people of France.

And marry finally, my painted queen,
 For up until this morning I have been
 Beating about the bush to flush you out.
 Although with drunken Caesars past all doubt
 You have been sporting in imperious play
 And supped with them in taverns every day
 And possibly have wantoned most of all
 With Nicholas at dread Sebastopol,⁶³⁵
 Yet I don't care. . . . Let me, my precious one,
 Nestle against you when the day is done,
 And snug beneath your wing, my fortune made,
 Turn me to slumber in refreshing shade!

Nizhni Novgorod, February 9, 1858

A DREAM

TO M. A. MARKOVICH⁶³⁶

Toiling in serfdom, she was reaping wheat;
 Then she grew tired; but among the sheaves
 She did not go to rest—instead, she trudged
 On weary feet to feed her little son.
 He, her Ivan, lay swaddled and was crying
 In a small patch of shade behind a sheaf.
 Unswaddling him, she fed and fondled him,
 And as she sat beside him drowsily,
 She drifted into sleep and dreamed a dream:
 That son of hers is handsome now, and rich,
 He is betrothed already, even married
 And to a fine freewoman, it appears—
 For he himself no longer serves the *pan*,⁶³⁷

⁶³⁵During the Crimean War, Russians were defeated at Sebastopol in 1855. It is surmised that this defeat caused Nicholas' sudden death.

⁶³⁶Maria Markovich (1834–1907), one of the greatest Ukrainian writers of long short stories, in which she presented the social life, manners, and customs of the Ukrainian people of the lower (peasant) and upper (intellectual) classes. Her writings are, above all, noted for the purity of their Ukrainian idiom. She is generally known under her pseudonym Marko Vovchok. Shevchenko rated her most highly as a writer and a humanitarian and only second to himself (by inference in the poem on p. 508).

⁶³⁷Landlord, master.

He's a free man, and on their happy field
 They both are reaping wheat; behold, their children
 Bring them their lunch. . . . And the poor woman smiled.
 But suddenly she woke—nothing had happened! . . .
 She glanced at her Ivas,⁶³⁸ took up the babe,
 Swaddled him once again with soothing hands
 And hurried off to reap her sixty sheaves
 Before the overseer should find her out.

St. Petersburg, July 13, 1858

* * * *

I don't feel well,—I hope it's nothing serious—
 And yet my eye foresees, my heart expects,
 Some bane of body. . . . Something makes me ache;
 My body aches and weeps and does not sleep,
 Just like an unfed child. Do you await,
 Perhaps some dark, distressful hour to come?
 Look not for pleasant times; do not await
 Your longed-for freedom—it has fallen asleep:
 Tsar Nicholas has lulled it off to slumber.
 To stir that marvellous dream of liberty,
 One must rouse up the world, and all of us,
 As one man, must temper well the heavy axe,
 Sharpen its keen edge well, and only then
 Make our combined attempt to waken freedom.
 For otherwise, I'm sure, the sorry creature
 Will keep on sleeping till the Final Judgment!
 Meanwhile the gentry will be lulling her,
 Erecting still more palaces and churches,
 Loving their brand-new tsar, and still extolling
 Byzantine-style servility at court,
 And nothing else, it seems, and nothing else!⁶³⁹

St. Petersburg, November 22, 1858

⁶³⁸Diminutive of Ivan.

⁶³⁹Shevchenko's thoughts regarding Ukraine's freedom have now become quite revolutionary.

1859

IMITATION OF PSALM XI

Dear Lord! How few the righteous are
That in the world remain!
Each heart would for its brother forge
Captivity's dark chain;
With honeyed phrases on their lips,
Each seeks to kiss the other;
And yet he grimly waits a time
For burying his brother.
But you, my precious Lord, will seal
The lips that foul would be
And that high-sounding tongue that says:
"We are not vanity!
For all to marvel, we'll extol
Our wisdom and our speech . . .
Where is that lord who would forbid
Our souls to think and teach?"
—"I shall arise!" our Lord shall cry:—
"I shall arise this day
For humble folk in servile chains
Who sadly waste away . . .
I shall extol those small, dumb slaves
And set my Word on guard. . . ."
Like trampled grass your thoughts will droop,
Your words he will discard.
Like new-forged silver, beaten well
And seven times transfused
In cauldrons on the finer's fire—
Such words our Lord has used!
Then let those holy words be sown
Throughout the entire land!
And your poor children will believe
The wonders of your hand.

St. Petersburg, February 12, 1859

TO MARKO VOVCHOK⁶⁴⁰

FOR REMEMBRANCE, JANUARY 24, 1859

Not long ago, beyond the Ural River
 I wandered restlessly, entreating God
 Not to allow our justice to expire
 Nor let our language die. My prayer was heard:
 The Lord has sent us you, a gentle prophet
 And a revealer of the insatiable
 Fierce souls of cruel men. My light you are,
 My holy star! And in you I espy
 A glorious evidence of youthful force!
 Shine on upon me then, warm and restore
 My lacerated and impoverished heart,
 Naked and famished! And I shall revive
 And shall call forth my liberated verse
 To freedom from the coffin where it lies;
 And all my liberated poesy,
 My love, our prophet, and my darling daughter,
 I shall proclaim in spirit as your own!
St. Petersburg, February 15, 1859

IMITATION OF ISAIAH

CHAPTER XXXV

Rejoice, unwatered field of grain!⁶⁴¹
 Rejoice, as yet unplanted plain,
 With flowery herbs! Be flooded now,
 With crimson roses on thy brow!
 For thou shalt blossom and grow green
 Like Jordan's holy banks serene,
 Its verdant meadows and the side
 Of Carmel⁶⁴² in its lofty pride.
 The glory of high Lebanon⁶⁴²
 Shall cover thee with robes anon,

⁶⁴⁰See fn. 636. The date refers to their first meeting.

⁶⁴¹The unwatered fields of Ukraine, which will soon blossom forth, causing the entire land to be filled with the joy of freedom.

⁶⁴²Two mountains in northern Palestine which witnessed the Hebrews' fight for freedom.

Woven and sewn with gold most free
 And lined with truth and liberty.
 And humble folk, with one accord,
 Shall see the wonders of the Lord.

The weariness of captive hands
 Shall find their labour past,
 And knees enveloped long in chains
 Shall earn a rest at last.
 Rejoice, then, all ye meek in heart,
 Fear not his benisons!
 For God himself, the Judge on high,
 Sets free the suffering ones,
 Prompts all the destitute to bless
 And curse the sons of wickedness.

For when, O Lord, the Truth, our friend,
 Upon the nations shall descend,
 To tarry for at least a while—
 Then shall the blind man see, and smile,
 The lame shall leap forth like a hart,
 Words from the dumb man's lips shall start,
 Like gushing water from his tongue;
 So shall in desert tracts be sung
 The song of healing streams that flow
 And happy rivers. Lakes shall grow;
 The woodland that their waters girds
 Shall echo with the song of birds.

The steppes and pools shall all revive
 And sacred roads be trod,
 Not marked with mileposts on their course
 But holy, free, and broad.
 These highways spreading south and north
 From masters shall be hidden,
 While slaves unvexed by hue and cry
 Shall walk the roads unchidden;
 The captives shall assemble here
 In merriment and rest,
 And happy hamlets everywhere
 Shall make the desert blest.

St. Petersburg, March 25, 1859

N. N.⁶⁴³

Once, long ago, a lily⁶⁴⁴ such as you
 Brought forth its blossom on the Jordan's bank
 And bore in incarnation on the earth
 The Holy Word. If you could do the same,
 O flower of the Dniester. . . Ah, but no!
 May God preserve you! They would crucify him,
 Or send him to Siberia in chains;
 As for yourself, my unprotected blossom—
 I cannot utter what your fate would be. . . .
 Send her, O Lord, a happy paradise,
 Vouchsafe it to her! Grant her in this life
 Good fortune, and no hint of aught besides!
 But do not take her from us in her spring
 Into your heavenly paradise; don't take her,
 But let her marvel to her heart's content
 At all the beauty you have given earth!

St. Petersburg, April 19, 1859

A SONG

TO F. I. CHERNENKO,⁶⁴⁵ FOR REMEMBRANCE, OCTOBER 23, 1959

Along a hillside, camomile is blooming;
 Down in the vale below a Cossack walks
 And sadly asks: Where does good fortune bloom
 Beneath the sky in all its loveliness?

Does fortune sport in taverns with the rich?
 Or wander with chumaks,⁶⁴⁶ across the plains?
 Or does she blow at random with the wind
 Upon the broad expanses of the steppe?

Not there, not there, dear friend! Good fortune dwells
 Beside a maiden, in an alien house,

⁶⁴³The identity of the young lady is unknown.

⁶⁴⁴Mother of Christ.

⁶⁴⁵Khvedir Chernenko, a close friend of Shevchenko's in St. Petersburg. The poem was written to mark the occasion of their first meeting after Shevchenko returned from exile.

⁶⁴⁶Salt-carters. See fn. 201.

Hid in a nuptial towel⁶⁴⁷ and in a kerchief
 In a new hope-chest gently laid away.⁶⁴⁸
Lykhvin (Kharkiv district), June 7, 1859

* * * *

Alas, I have, I have two lovely eyes—
 But no one, mother dear, their light to prize,
 No one at all, my dear, their light to prize!

Alas, I have, I have two pretty arms—
 But no one to enfold within their charms,
 No one, my dear, to hold within their charms!

Alas, I have, I have two dainty feet
 But none to share with them in dancing sweet,
 No one, dear mother, whom their step can meet!
Piryatin, June 10, 1859

TO MY SISTER⁶⁴⁹

As I passed by the seedy villages
 That sadly spread along the Dnieper's bank,
 I vaguely wondered: "Where shall I incline?
 And where shall I locate a place to settle?"
 And then I dreamed a dream: I looked and saw
 In a small garden, all bedecked with flowers,
 A humble hut that stands upon a hillock
 Like a young maid. The Dnieper rolls afar—
 The Old Man shines and blazes to the sky.
 I contemplate the spot: in a dark garden
 Beneath a cherry tree, in the cool shade
 The only sister I have left alive,
 A saintly woman who has suffered much,
 Rests as in paradise and waits, poor woman,
 For me to come to her from over Dnieper.

⁶⁴⁷See fn. 436.

⁶⁴⁸Both Chernenko and Shevchenko were bachelors and often discussed the pros and cons of matrimony.

⁶⁴⁹Shevchenko's sister Yarina, whom he visited in her village in 1859.

She seems to see a bark that from the waves
 Rises aloft and then sinks down again. . . .
 —“My dearest brother! Ah, my only hope! . . .”
 And we awoke: you in the field of serfdom
 And I in prison!⁶⁵⁰ . . . For we have been fated
 From childhood up to tread a thorny field!
 Then pray, my sister! If we stay alive,
 Our God will help us reach the other side.

Cherkasy, July 20, 1859

* * * *

I once thought foolishly: What woe is mine!
 How shall I ever manage to exist
 And praise both men and God? How horrible
 To wallow like a rotten log in mire,
 Grow old, decay, and die—and leave no trace
 In all our ravaged land! . . . What grief is mine!
 Where on this earth shall I find out a refuge?
 Each day new Pilates crucify our souls
 And make us feel the pangs of ice and fire. . . .

Cherkasy, July 21, 1859

* * * *

If, drunk Bohdan,⁶⁵¹ you now could take a glance
 At Pereyaslav and your ruined castle,
 You would get good and drunk, completely liquored!

Fie on you . . . over-praised old potentate
 Among the Cossacks! Even in the filth
 Of a Jew's hut you'd drink to end up tipsy
 Or dive into a slough of swinishness. . . .

Amen to you, O peerless paragon,
 Famous, majestic, but not overmuch! . . .

⁶⁵⁰During his last visit to Ukraine, Shevchenko was under continual police surveillance on account of his outspokenness against the ruling classes. See Introduction, pp. xl, xli.

⁶⁵¹Bohdan Khmelnytsky, in connection with the Treaty of Pereyaslav. See fn. 165.

For if indeed you never had been born,
 Or in the cradle drunk yourself to death,
 I would not bathe you in a gutter now,
 You, the renowned old potentate . . . Amen!⁶⁵²

Pereyaslav, August 18, 1859

* * * *

Back in Judea, in those far-off days
 When Herod reigned, on Zion and around it
 The drunken Roman legions lived in vice.
 And in the king's own house, the home of Herod,
 Outside the portals and within the door
 The lictors⁶⁵³ stood. And there that autocrat,
 The king himself, would lick the lictors' boots
 In the vague hope that they, for this or that,
 Would lend him at the least a half a dinar;
 And thereupon a lictor checks his pockets,
 Pulls out the cash and, without counting it,
 Gives it to Herod as to some poor beggar;
 And the drunk king resumes his mad carousal!
 Then unexpectedly—but not, it seems,
 In Nazareth itself but in some cave,
 Sweet Mary bore a child and with the babe
 Journeyed to Bethlehem. A postman soon
 Rushes from Bethlehem, and says: "O King,
 Such and such things have happened; tares and thistles
 And even gorse sprouts up among the wheat!
 The cursed race of David sends up shoots—
 It should be cut off, lest it grow apace!"
 —"Well, then," said Herod in his drunkenness,
 "Let all small children throughout all my realm
 Be slaughtered, lest those ugly things should thrive
 And fail to let us end our reign in peace!"
 The postman, to be sure, was very tipsy
 And passed a muddled order to the senate

⁶⁵²This poem illustrates Shevchenko's increasing state of irritation that began to undermine his already precarious health.

⁶⁵³See fn. 612.

That little children should be slain alone
In Bethlehem.

O blessed, mighty Child,
Protect us from the drunken king, our ruler!
Yet from a greater danger were you saved
By your most blessed Mother, when she fled!

Where shall we get a Mother of that kind?
For we, in heart are destitute and bare!
We are but slaves with cockades on our caps;
Lackeys in golden finery are we,
Foot-clouts and sorry refuse from the sweepings
Of the Tsar's Majesty! . . . And nothing else!

St. Petersburg, October 24, 1859

MARY⁶⁵⁴

A POEM

Rejoice, for thou hast restored those
who were conceived in shame.

Acathistus, to the Most Pure Mother of God, ikos 10

O my resplendent Paradise, I place
My hope in you and in your tender grace,—
And rest in you my yearnings and my plaints,
O holy Sustenance of all the saints,
Mother most blessed, most immaculate!
I pray, I weep, I cry in sorry state:
Look down, Most Pure One, on these blinded slaves
Benighted and despoiled by evil knaves;
Vouchsafe to them your martyred Son's own strength
To bear their crosses and their chains at length
To the extremity of pain and death!
O worthily extolled by my poor breath
As Queen of Heaven and Earth, I pray thee send
Upon their anguished sighs a peaceful end!
O Most Benevolent, I then shall sing
My gentle gratitude for everything

⁶⁵⁴The reader must be prepared for quite an unconventional treatment of the subject. At times Shevchenko radically departs from the Biblical versions.

When the poor villages bloom forth in calm,
 And I shall chant a soft and cheerful psalm
 In honour of your holy fate. But now—
 As a poor, humble soul's most humble vow—
 I pour you out my tears with ardour true,
 The last poor mite my life can offer you.

I

In Joseph's house, a simple servant-maid,
 Mary grew up. (Her holy master's trade
 Was that of carpenter or cooper good.)
 She budded into comely maidenhood,
 And soon became mature in vital power
 And blossomed sweetly like a crimson flower
 In a poor dwelling that was not her own
 But to a peaceful paradise had grown.
 The carpenter would often leave his plane
 And chisel, and to gaze in joy was fain
 Upon the maid as if she were his child.
 An hour would pass: her beauty still beguiled
 His dreaming eyes; he watched her, sweet and small,
 And thought: "She has no relatives at all,
 No parents with a cottage of their own;
 In this world she is utterly alone! . . .
 I wonder if her heart affection feels . . .
 Surely my death is not yet at my heels!"

Meanwhile behind the hedge she sat recluse,
 Spinning the white wool for a warm burnoose
 For him to wear with joy on holy days;
 Or she would take her goat and kid to graze
 And, though the way was far, to take a drink
 At broad Tiberias's peaceful brink.
 Such was her joy, she could but laugh with glee;
 And Joseph, as he sat in vacancy
 And silence, did not check, for mercy's sake
 Her happy plan of going to the lake.
 She walks and laughs; and still he sits in vain,
 The sorry man, forgetful of his plane.
 The goat would drink its fill, then graze awhile
 While the girl stood there fixed, without a smile,

Beside the grove, and gazed with sad accord
 Across that mighty Basin of the Lord.
 "Tiberias," she said, "broad King of Lakes,
 Tell me the destiny that overtakes
 My future with old Joseph. Tell me, pray!"
 Like poplars in the wind, her form would sway.
 "I'll gladly be a daughter to his age
 And with my strong young shoulders will engage
 The burdens that his years too great have found."
 Then so intent she cast her glance around
 Her eyes shed sparks and her patched chiton fell
 From her fine shoulders: sure no tongue could tell
 The heavenly beauty that had been concealed
 And by the falling garment was revealed! . . .
 Harsh fate, however, in a prickly thorn,
 Assailed her beauty and her flesh was torn.
 Ah, what a woe was hers! . . .

She softly trod

Along the water's edge and on the sod
 She found a burdock plant. . . Its broad, green leaf
 She plucked; like a rimmed hat it gave relief
 Upon her pretty, melancholy head,
 Lovely and blessed; then with silent tread
 She disappeared within the shady grove.

O never-setting Sun of human love!
 Most pure of women! Fragrant lily blossom!
 Within what groves, in what dark valley's bosom
 And in what unknown caves will you aspire
 To hide yourself from that intensest fire
 Which without flame will melt your heart in woe
 And without floods will sweep it down below
 And drown its precious musings one by one!
 Where will you find a refuge? There is none!
 The fire is lit, it cannot be put out!
 Redhot it rages, and its flames to dout
 Your dauntless strength will prove of no avail;
 That fierce and quenchless wildfire will assail
 Your blood and bones; you will be stricken hard
 And following your Son with love's regard
 You will be forced to pass through fires of hell.
 The future of your spirit knows right well

Your fate and in your eyes foreboding peers.
 But do not look! Dry your prophetic tears,
 Bedeck your maiden brow with lily blooms
 And clustering red poppies' richest glooms,
 And fall asleep beneath a maple's shade
 Before the account of anguish must be paid!

II

Evening comes on, and like a vesper star
 Mary emerges from the grove afar,
 Bedecked with flowers. Remote Mount Tabor shines,
 As if with gold and silver in its pines,
 Dazzling the eyes with rapture in the height;
 Mary lifts holy eyes in meek delight
 At that resplendent mountain; with a smile
 She sought the woodland's margin to beguile
 The goat and kid the homeward path along;
 And as they walked, she broke into a song:

"O paradise, my grove's dark paradise!
 Shall I in youth, dear God, to Heaven arise
 And savour its delights before your eyes?"

She ceased, and sadly glanced about her there;
 Into her arms picked up the kid with care;
 And cheerfully sought out the cooper's dwelling.
 The poor girl as she walked, with grace compelling,
 Played with the kid as with a child in arms
 And swayed and rocked it with her gentle charms
 And kissed its face and lulled it to her breast.
 It, quiet as a kitten, lay at rest:
 It did not frisk, or bleat, but nestled soft
 And gently played. Some two miles to the croft
 She carried it, half-dancing in delight—
 Nor was she wearied in the gathering night.

The old man, pensive at the hedge, awaited
 The child for a long time. As she belated
 Arrived, he greeted her and gently said:
 "Where, in God's name, have you so long been led?
 Let us go in, my dear, and take our rest
 At supper with a young and cheerful guest.

Come, my dear daughter!"—"Tell me, who is he?"
 —"He comes from Nazareth, and stops with me
 Over this night. He tells me that God's grace
 Descended yesterday upon that place,
 On old Elizabeth; she's borne a son;
 It seems old Zacharias calls him John!
 And that's the news. . . ."

Upon their eyes did lighten,
 Out of the hut, dressed in a snowy chiton,
 Their guest, unshod and washed, and seemed to shine
 As with bright hues angelic or divine.
 Majestic at the threshold was his greeting;
 He gently bowed to Mary at their meeting. . . .
 The guileless girl felt something strange inside,
 As the guest shone there in seraphic pride.
 Startled, she glanced at him in panic mild
 And clung to Joseph like a frightened child.
 Then in a spirit of meek courtesy
 She bade the young guest welcome, and made plea
 With gentle glances that he come within.
 Then water from the well she went to win,
 Cool and refreshing; and to give them ease
 She served them for their supper milk and cheese;
 While she herself, of food and drink a scorners,
 Just humbly sat in silence in a corner,
 And looked, and heard, with wonder on her cheek,
 That rare young visitor enchanting speak.
 His holy words fell upon Mary's heart
 Where tremors hot and cold alike did start.

"Never in all Judea," he began,
 "Has that occurred which all today shall scan.
 Of a great Rabbi now the words are sown
 On a new field,—we'll reap them as our own
 And in the barn shall store the holy grain.
 I go forthwith to make my message plain
 Before the people's face." And Mary there
 Inclined before the messenger in prayer.
 A lamp's light in a sconce is softly blinking
 While blessed Joseph sits in pious thinking. . . .

The twilight of the dawn its radiance shows;
 Sweet Mary with a pitcher then arose
 And to the well prepared to make a sally.
 After her went the guest. In the small valley
 He overtook her.⁶⁵⁵ . . .

Down the shady path,
 Before the sun had poured its golden bath,
 On to the lake she followed, unaghost,
 The Herald of Glad Tidings as he passed—
 And finally, as up the path she clomb,
 In mighty gladness she came wandering home.⁶⁵⁶

III

Then Mary for that youth her vigil keeps,
 And as she waits for him, she sadly weeps;
 Her girlish cheeks, her eyes and lips grow pale.
 —“How you have changed! Your youthful beauties fail,
 Mary, my precious lily!” Joseph sighed.
 “A change has come upon you, deep and wide!
 Come, Mary, let us marry, I entreat
 (He could say: Lest they stone you in the street,
 Yes, slaughter you without a single qualm.)
 And we shall keep our small oasis’ calm.”
 Then as she for the trip prepared in haste,
 Mary wept bitterly. Onward they paced;
 He bore upon his back, whence none would pluck it,
 His satchel, with a newly coopered bucket;
 This latter he would sell, to buy his bride
 A fine new kerchief and to earn beside
 Such money as would meet the nuptial case.

O blessed ancient, rich in peace and grace!
 And not from Zion was this mercy shown,
 But from your humble hut, to fame unknown.
 For if you had not succoured the Most Pure,
 We to this day, poor slaves, would still endure

⁶⁵⁵Shevchenko’s naturalistic treatment of the episode of the Annunciation.

⁶⁵⁶The poem bears Shevchenko’s own “apocryphal” stamp. Mary’s life is depicted from a physical point of view, and she is placed in the same category as Katerina, the hired girl Hanna, and others, only in a sphere more sublime.

In lingering bondage to the pangs of sin.
 Ah, torment! What deep sorrow man is in!
 It is not you, poor wretches, blind and sore
 And meek in spirit, I am sorry for,—
 But those who clearly see in their domains
 The axe and hammer and yet forge new chains.
 You will be slain, ye murderers of men's souls,
 And where your welling blood its scarlet rolls
 The dogs will slake their thirst.

Where now may rest

The person of that strange, elusive guest?
 He might at least have come to view with us
 These nuptials worthy and most glorious,
 Involuntary too! But naught is heard
 Of him or the Messiah of his Word,
 While people seem to wait and look intent
 For some unique, miraculous event. . . .
 But Mary! Hapless one! What heavenly nod
 Are you awaiting from Almighty God
 And from His people? Nothing will you see.
 Even that messenger has ceased to be.
 See, a poor carpenter, his heart unshut,
 Leads you in marriage to his humble hut.
 Pray, and be thankful that this worthy man
 Has not abandoned you to Moses' plan,
 And does not to the crossroads drive you out,
 Where zealots would destroy you, past a doubt,
 With brickbats, had not Joseph with affection
 Afforded you his succour and protection!
 The people whispered in Jerusalem
 That in Tiberias, cold men of phlegm
 Had crucified or butchered in black bias
 The herald of the prophesied Messias.
 "Him?!" Mary uttered. And with joyful breath
 She walked the homeward road to Nazareth.
 And Joseph's holy spirits likewise soar
 Because his maiden in her womb now bore
 The blessed soul of that celestial youth
 Who had been crucified for heaven's truth.
 And thus they homeward walk in mutual gladness,
 Yet live in marriage with a certain sadness.

Upon the porch, the carpenter is making
 A sturdy cradle; while, her spirit aching,
 Mary the most immaculate still sits
 Beside the window and intently knits
 Upon a tiny shirt, though gazes stray
 To see if someone walks along the way. . . .

IV

“Ho, is the master home?” (They hear a shout.)
 “An edict is by Caesar given out
 That you, this very day and hour, must go
 To Bethlehem. The census wills it so!”
 The heavy voice moved on, and did not dally;
 Only its echo lingered down the valley.
 And straightway Mary undertook to bake
 A batch of flat-cakes; as the need bespoke
 She gently in a satchel loaded them
 And followed the old man to Bethlehem.
 “Save me, O holy Power, gracious Lord!”
 Was all she uttered. As in sad accord
 They walked along such poverty them smote
 That they must drive with them their kid and goat,—
 No one at home remained with whom to leave them,
 And on the journey there might come to grieve them
 The baby’s birth, and the poor mother’s thirst
 With milk to drink must then be interspersed.
 The animals, betimes, some pasture find;
 The father and the mother walk behind.
 Softly and gently they began to talk.
 —“The high-priest, Simeon,” amid their walk
 Spoke Joseph, “has advised me recently
 This prophecy of things that are to be:
 ‘The sacred law of Abraham and Moses
 In the Essenes⁶⁵⁷ its second birth reposes’;

⁶⁵⁷A Hebrew religious sect, to which, it is thought, Jesus Christ belonged. Its members formed a congregation apart from the hypocritical Pharisees and the formal Sadducees, and preached brotherhood and equality among men. Their lives were based strictly on the Holy Scriptures, which they investigated thoroughly and whose moral precepts they followed scrupulously.

And he declared,—‘I surely shall not die
 Until the blest Messiah meets my eye!’
 Child, do you hear? Messiah is to come!
 Nor shall we find his gospel burdensome.”
 —“He has already come,” sweet Mary said.
 “And we have seen him, as he visited.”

Then Joseph found a flat-cake in the basket
 For her: “Your strength, you must not overtask it.
 Take, eat, my child, lest you of hunger clem!
 For it is still quite far to Bethlehem.
 I, too, shall rest here from my weariness!”
 Down by the road they sat, thus to address
 Their noon-day meal. And as they ate and drank
 The blessed sun to westward swiftly sank
 And vanished, and night’s darkness filled the fields.
 Lo, what a miracle the zenith yields!—
 Unknown was such a wonder of the night!
 The carpenter was startled at the sight—
 A comet from the east in flames arose;
 Past Bethlehem its trail obliquely goes,
 Flooding with light the meadows and the hills.
 But Mary does not rise—for she fulfils
 The accomplished time and bears a little Son,
 That precious and incomparable One
 Who saving us from slavery was sent
 And who, most holy and most innocent,
 Was crucified to save us all from sin.
 Not far off from the road that they were in,
 Some herders who to pasture drove their kine
 Observed them, and took up the babe Divine
 And his poor mother, and their lives to save
 Carried them tenderly to their own cave;
 And the poor shepherds, as the thing befell,
 Named the dear little one Emmanuel.

Up very early, ere the sun was seen
 At Bethlehem, upon the village green,
 The people all assembled, whispering
 That some transcendent and celestial thing
 Would come to Judah’s folk; their clamours rise
 And then subside.—“Ho, men!” some shepherd cries

As in he hastes. "The words of Jeremy
 And of Isaiah have now come to be!
 For among us poor shepherds, us, I say,
 Messias has been born but yesterday! . . .
 Cheers on the common rose, all unrehearsed . . .
 "Messias! Jesus!" And the crowd dispersed.

▼

After some time, a ukase and a legion
 Came from Jerusalem to greet the region
 From Herod; and an outrage then occurred
 Such as no age before had seen or heard:
 All tiny babes lay swaddled and asleep,
 Warm water for their baths their mothers keep—
 But vainly! . . . For the legion did not come
 To bathe a little child in every home.
 Instead, the ruthless soldiers rinsed their knives
 In blessed blood that flowed from children's lives!
 Such is the carnage that this morning brings!
 Look well, O mothers, to the deeds of kings!

But Mary did not seek to hide from view
 With her dear child. Great glory be to you,
 To you poor people, shepherds of that day,
 Who welcomed them, and hid them safe away,
 And saved our Saviour when King Herod smote!
 They gave them meat and drink, a sheepskin coat,
 Warm garments for the journey and its shifts,
 And the poor fellows added to these gifts
 A milch she-ass, of disposition mild,
 And on it placed the mother and her child
 And by a secret pathway led them down
 By night to meet the road to Memphis-town.
 Meanwhile the comet, that celestial fire,
 Shone like the sun before them to admire;
 It marked that Egypt-road the ass must run
 With gentle Mary and her new-born Son.
 If ever in this world, on any track,
 An empress rode upon an ass's back,
 The empress' world-wide fame would likewise pass
 To rest upon the gentle mother-ass.

But this one, as the Memphis-road she trod,
 Once bore the living, veritable God!
 And yet, sad, long-eared wretch, a poor Copt sought
 To purchase you from Joseph; ere he bought,
 You died, however: and perhaps it's true,
 The long, hard journey was too much for you!

On the Nile's banks, having been duly bathed,
 The Child is sleeping, peaceful and well swathed,
 Under a willow on the fertile ground.
 The blessed mother in the reeds around
 A cradle out of osiers is weaving;
 And as she fashions it, her heart is grieving.
 Joseph now builds a hut of wattles light
 To serve them as a shelter from the night.
 Beyond the Nile, the sphinxes sit like owls
 Whose horrible dead eyes in marble scowls
 Look down upon it all; behind them stand,
 Across the vast expanse of naked sand,
 The pyramids, arrayed in single file
 Like Pharaoh's guards along the ancient Nile,
 And seem to those oppressors to make known
 That God's new justice rises for his own,
 That it has dawned already on the earth—
 Let them take heed of that new age's birth!

Mary now works for wages with a Copt
 In spinning wool; by like employment propped,
 Saint Joseph in a pasture works as herd;
 To earn enough to buy a goat he stirred,
 So that the Child might have his milk to drink.
 A year passed by. And by the river's brink,
 Under a thatched roof-cover near the shack,
 That blessed holy cooper bent his back—
 Without a thought, industriously he joins
 The barrel staves to hoops about their loins,
 Humming at work. Poor mother, what of you?
 You do not weep or sing; your thoughts pursue
 The painful problem how to train your Son
 That he the path of righteousness may run
 With holy feet. You'd save him from the strife
 And all the hardships and the storms of life. . . .

Another year went by. Beside the cot
A goat is grazing, and the Child a-squat
Plays with a little kid upon the porch;
Meanwhile the mother, in the suns that scorch,
Sits on the step beside the cottage door
And at a loom spins wool to fill her store.
Meanwhile the old man comes, bearing a flail
Silently past the hedge; he'd borne for sale
A stack of little barrels to the town
And from the selling price he's now brought down
The boy a honey cake, for his dear wife
A simple kerchief for her daily life,
And for himself good leather, fit in style
To cobble boots. He rested for a while,
And said: "Dear daughter, Herod is no more!
Worry no longer. For the night before
He gorged himself so much on victuals fried
That on the morrow he took fits and died.
This tale they tell me. Let us now return
To that small paradise for which we yearn,
Let us go home, my child!"—"Let us indeed!"
She said, and to the river went with speed
To wash her Son's small shirts before the trip.
The goat and kid played on the dooryard strip,
And Joseph, on the porch, amused his Son
Until the washing of the shirts was done.
Then in the hut he suppled up the leather
Before the journey. In benignant weather
They rose before the sunrise; each one bore
A satchel on his shoulder from their store;
While slung between them, in the cradle sitting,
The Child they carried in their second flitting.

VI

Somehow they reached their home, in misery.
Would that no person ever had to see
What they beheld! Their tiny grove's sweet grace,
That once was their delight and dwelling-place—
They could not recognize where once they toiled:
It, and the cottage, all had been despoiled.

Within its ruins they must pass the night.
 To the deep vale rushed Mary for a sight
 Of that old well where, in a day more blest,
 She had beheld the bright, angelic guest. . . .
 Gross weeds, the nettle and the prickly thorn,
 Around the well had grown in sullen scorn.
 Mary, what woe is yours! Pray, darling, pray!
 Harden your strength with suffering this day,
 Temper your fortitude with bleeding tears!
 The poor soul, in that well, as down she peers,
 Is almost drowned. What dread calamity
 We slaves who through her Son redeemed might be
 Would have sustained! Because that little Child
 Would have grown up, unmothered and defiled,
 And we hereafter never would have known
 Justice in life and freedom as our own.
 But she revived; she smiled in bitterness;
 And then let fall the tears of her distress.
 Down on the well-curb flowed that blessed grief;
 And there they dried; the woman felt relief.

The aged widow, good Elizabeth,
 Lived with her little son in Nazareth,
 That little son whom we have named before;
 Some relative she was from days of yore.
 Early one day the hapless Mary fed
 Her child, and dressed him, and with Joseph sped
 To Nazareth: a visit must be paid
 Upon the widow, who might need a maid,
 A servant-girl to live and work with her.
 To this new home the Child they now transfer,
 And there he throve and there he used to play
 With little orphaned John the livelong day,
 Till he grew quite a child. Once on the street
 When with two little rods they chanced to meet,
 They took them home, as children oft desire,
 To serve their mothers for the kitchen fire.
 Homeward they walk, so cheerful and so hale,
 It was a joy to watch them down the trail.
 The small Boy took the other rod from John
 (Who'd sought to ride a hobby-horse thereon),

And made a cross of them and carried it
 Homeward, you see, to show he too was fit
 For carpentry. But Mary at the gate,
 Meeting the Child and prescient of fate,
 Fell swooning to the ground, appalled by loss,
 When she beheld that little gibbet-cross:
 "A bad and evil man, a cruel one,
 Taught you to make a thing like that, my Son.
 Don't do it any more!" He, a mere child
 And innocent, checked by his mother mild,
 Threw the small gibbet quite away, and wept;
 For the first time her breast did intercept
 His child-tears. Then her courage seemed to harden.
 She took the Child; she led him to the garden;
 And there among tall grasses in the shade,
 Kissed him, gave him a cookie she had made,
 While he, close-cuddled, played a little while
 Till in her lap he slumbered with a smile,
 A tiny cherub lulled in paradise.
 Then on her only Son she casts her eyes
 And softly mourns: an angel is asleep,
 And lest he waken she all care must keep!
 By accident she loosed a scalding tear
 That like a glowing spark went tumbling sheer
 Upon the boy's cool face, and he awoke.
 Quickly she dried her tears and sought to joke
 So that he would not notice, but alas
 That ruse of her affection failed to pass
 Her small Son's scrutiny; he gazed at her
 And burst out weeping, for he could not err.

She either earned or borrowed (somewhat grimmer)
 A silver coin to buy a little primer.
 She would herself have taught him how to read,
 But did not know her letters. So, indeed,
 She took the boy to school with the Essenes;
 But for his life's behaviour, she found means
 Herself to teach him justice, grace, and truth.
 Now John, the widow's son, like him in youth,
 Would copy him and both attended school,
 Bending together to their master's rule.

Never with other children did he play
 Or bustle round; all by himself he'd stay
 Alone in the tall grasses near the town
 And whittle a rough peg to smooth it down:
 In tasks like this, avoiding passion's moil,
 He helped his saintly father in his toil.

VII

Once, when the boy was seven, it befell
 (By that time he could carpenter quite well)
 That the old man, while resting in his nook,
 Wondered for what career his son might look,
 What sort of master he would prove to be
 And whether life would grant him equity.
 Taking some buckets and some porringers,
 Father and mother and this Son of hers
 Went to the fair, in great Jerusalem.
 Though it was far, a better price for them
 Could there be sought. They came; spread out their wares.
 Father and mother, at this best of fairs,
 Sit there in hope and try to sell their stuff.
 But where's the Child? He seems to have run off . . .
 His mother seeks him, weeping—not a trace
 Can she detect of him in any place!
 Then to the synagogue she went to pray
 The Lord most merciful to help that day
 To find her Son; then, sudden chance permitting,
 She sees a Child among the rabbis sitting,
 Her own small Boy, all innocent and pure,
 Who teaches them a good life to assure,
 To love mankind, defend the truth, and die
 For justice, which denied brings misery!

—“Woe to you, teachers and high-priestly tribes! . . .”
 And all the Pharisees and all the scribes
 Gaped at his words, while Mother Mary's joy
 Welled up ineffable to hear her Boy!
 Messiah, God on earth, her eyes had seen. . . .

His parents sold their wares and breathed serene
 In temple courts a prayer of thanks to God
 And joyfully in the cool night they trod

Their homeward path. The holy children grew,
 And side by side their school-room lore they knew;
 Meanwhile their blessed mothers gazed with pride
 Upon their sons. When school was laid aside,
 Both down a thorny path their way explored:
 Each, as a fearless herald of the Lord,
 The sacred Truth on earth would prophesy
 And each for Freedom's sake was doomed to die! . . .

John went to witness in the wilderness;
 While your dear Son, O Mary, would profess
 His message among men; you also went
 And followed after, for his cherishment.
 Joseph, your blessed spouse, you had forsaken
 In an old hut, by alien breezes shaken;
 And along hedges wandered on in awe
 Until at last you came to Golgotha. . . .

VIII

For everywhere the holy Mother walked,
 Saw her Son's deeds and heard him as he talked;
 And trembling silently, felt overdone
 By joy profound as she beheld her Son.
 Oft on the Mount of Olives he would rest;
 While proud Jerusalem, in marble dressed,
 Lay spread before him, Israel's high-priest,
 In crimson-gold brocaded robes—at least
 It seemed such, but it ranked, by all report,
 A gross plebeian of the Roman sort!
 An hour, even two, would pass him by,
 But still he would not rise, nor turn an eye
 To where his Mother sat; at times he wept
 In gazing where Judea's city slept.
 She, too, would weep; but sometimes sought a well
 Deep in the valley where cool waters dwell
 And softly brought an urn, in noonday heat,
 With which to wash his weary, blessed feet.
 Or she would offer him a drink, to lighten
 His thirst, or shake the dust from cloak or chiton,
 Sew up a hole, and quietly return
 To sit beneath a fig-tree; her concern—

Most blessèd Mother—constantly discloses
 Her thought of how her mournful Son reposes.
 But suddenly the children all come running
 Out of the city: without guile or cunning,
 They loved him well, and after him would go
 Along the city streets, and were not slow
 Upon the nearby Mount to seek him out.
 So now they came. Said he: "O happy rout
 Of babes most holy and most innocent!"
 Rising to meet them, he above them bent
 And kissed and blessed them all; and like a child
 Played with the little ones, serene and mild;
 Then put on his burnoose, and so was fain,
 With all the little children in his train,
 To seek Jerusalem and there declare
 The tidings of his Truth beyond compare.
 To the unjust he spoke with holy breath:
 They heeded not that Word, but wrought his death! . . .

And as they led him to be crucified,
 You, with those children, at the highway's side,
 Stood openly. (Although those mouzhiks⁶⁵⁸ dear,
 His brothers and disciples, fled in fear.)
 "Follow him not, lest with him you must go!"
 She warned the little children. In her woe,
 She fell down on the highway as if dead.

And so your only Son, the babe you fed,
 Was crucified. And after you had rested
 Beneath a hedgerow, of all fear divested,
 You sought the road to Nazareth once more.
 The widow had been buried, years before,
 By kindly strangers, in a pauper's grave;
 John lay beheaded in a dungeon-cave;
 Joseph no longer lived; in your distress
 You thus remained in utter loneliness.
 Such, wretched woman, was your tattered fate!
 His brothers and disciples weakly wait;
 Saved from the hangmen's tortures, they converse,
 And hide themselves away, and then disperse . . .

⁶⁵⁸Low peasants (*lit.*, little men).

And you were forced to gather them together. . . .
 Thus did it happen when, in sodden weather,
 They came, one night, to mourn about your feet,
 You, greatest among women, from your seat
 Scattered like chaff their sorrows grown absurd
 In the pure power of your flaming word;
 In their poor souls you thus instilled the merit
 And mighty motion of your holy spirit. . . .
 Glory to you, O Mary, and great praise!
 Those men rose up in holiness; their ways
 Dispersed to every corner of the earth,
 And in the name of Him you brought to birth,
 Of your afflicted Son, to every land
 They carried Truth and Justice, hand in hand;⁶⁵⁹
 While you, beneath a hedge, in tears again,
 Soon died of hunger in the grass. Amen.

St. Petersburg, October 24 to November 11, 1859

AN IMITATION

TO ANTONI SOWA⁶⁶⁰

To give my wife remembrance due,
 Beside my cot I'll plant
 An apple and a pear tree too,
 In memory vigilant!
 With God's help they will grow . . . my wife
 Will sit her down to rest
 Beneath the shadow of those trees,
 With little children blest.
 I'll pluck the pears, to every child
 Such bounty to disburse,

⁶⁵⁹While Alcides' Mother in "The Neophytes," after a life of suffering and anxiety, is converted as a result of her Son's martyrdom, following which she continues his mission, Mary, the Mother of Christ, helps him out materially to fulfil his destiny throughout his earthly life, and after his death inspires his downhearted disciples to preach love and brotherhood to all mankind.

⁶⁶⁰Antoni Sowa, the pseudonym of the Polish writer Edward Zeligowski, whom Shevchenko met with other Polish political exiles in the Fortress of Orsk. This is an imitation of a lyric by another Polish poet Czeczota, and like "A Song" dedicated to K. Chernenko, p. 510, reveals Shevchenko's preoccupation with the idea of marriage.

And softly with my precious wife
 I'll cheerfully converse:
 —“Dear, it was on our wedding day
 I made this orchard new . . .
 How glad I am!”—“And I, dear friend,
 Have happiness in you!”

St. Petersburg, November 19, 1859

IMITATION OF EZEKIEL

CHAPTER XIX

Raise your lament, O prophet, son of God,—
 Speak out concerning princes, lords, and kings:
 Why did that bitch, you whelps, who was your mother,
 Consent to copulate with rampant lions?
 Why did she spawn you with such savage hearts
 And multiply your cursed progeny?
 For later on, you, sharp-fanged whelps, became
 Fierce lions in your pride. And you devour
 People and children in their innocence;
 And as a kite will snatch up in tall grass
 A hapless chick and tear it up alive
 So, raging ones, you rend the innocent,
 While people, though they see it, hold their peace.

Likewise that whelp, so savage and so fierce,
 Had been detected, caught and fettered well
 With iron chains and sent to slavery
 In Egypt. And the mother . . . yes, the mother
 Bore yet another whelp, a rabid beast,
 But this time of a horror so gigantic
 That it devoured towns and villages.
 Earth shook and trembled at that lion's roar.
 This one, as well, the people put in chains;
 Into his mouth they set a bit of iron,
 And in a dungeon down in Babylon
 They buried him so deep that on the surface
 The roarings of that autocratic ruler,
 That tsar insatiable, could not be heard. . . .

Those days will pass—those days of lawlessness
 And dark iniquity—already now
 They slowly pass. But still the growing whelps
 Are not aware of it—they grow like reeds
 Upon a shady meadow, though their hopes
 Are in their roots, which are already rotten,
 Eaten with worms, cut short, debilitated.
 A wind will blow upon them; and your wantonness
 Will wallow in the bloodbath of its death.
 People will hear their lusty lamentations
 Instead of lions' roars; they'll hear that weeping—
 Plaintive, prolonged, and ugly beyond measure—
 That puny autocrat's vociferation
 That will become a parable to others.⁶⁶¹

St. Petersburg, December 6, 1859

HOSEA, CHAPTER XIV

AN IMITATION

You will be wrecked and perish, O Ukraine!
 No trace of you will tarry on the earth!
 Once you took pride in your prosperity
 And luxury! Dear land and innocent!
 Why does the Lord afflict you, why so harshly
 Lay punishment upon you? For Bohdan⁶⁶²
 And rabid Peter⁶⁶³ and those wicked lords
 He is intent to devastate your fields
 And punish you till not a trace remains . . .
 But in his righteousness! Throughout long years
 He has looked down upon your sinful womb
 In his long-suffering. He said in wrath:
 "I shall destroy your grace, your ornament;
 You will be moved to crucify yourself!
 Your full-fledged sons in wickedness will slay you;
 And those who were conceived in sinfulness
 Will perish in your womb and will be lost

⁶⁶¹Cf. Nicholas I's debility at the close of the poem "The Dream," p. 177.

⁶⁶²Bohdan Khmelnytsky.

⁶⁶³Tsar Peter I.

Like chicks that never warmed enough to hatch;
 And I shall fill the cities and the fields
 With lamentation and the sobs of mothers,
 That all the devastated land may know
 I am the Omnipotent and see all things!"

Be resurrected, Mother! And return
 To your bright habitation, there to rest!
 You have o'ertoiled yourself in carrying
 The terrible transgressions of your sons.
 Then, having rested, O afflicted one,
 Speak forth and to your children prophesy
 That they will perish in their evil-doing,
 That all their shame and treachery and sin
 Have been incised with fire on human souls,
 Yea, with a bloody sword of living flame;
 That punishment will shout relentlessly;
 That their kind tsar, their meek and drunken master,
 Will never save them from the hand of God!
 The tsar will not supply their meat and drink;
 He will not grant a steed, that you may flee
 On its bare back, for you will not escape
 Nor hide yourselves! Justice and pure revenge
 Will find you out, wherever you may be;
 People will spy you out, and seize you too,
 And without any hint of legal trial
 Will chain you fast and bring you to a village
 To be a spectacle; upon a rack,
 Without a hangman and without a tsar,
 The people in their rage will quarter you,
 Tear you apart and nail you to the cross,
 And with your flowing blood, you evil curs,
 Will slake the thirsty muzzles of their hounds! . . .

And add this word, this bitter word for them,
 Without a parable; express it well:
 You have prepared your hope with filthy hands,
 And you declare the tsar is now your God,
 The tsar your hope, and that he'll feed and warm
 Your widows and your orphans. . . . No, not that!
 But tell them this: Those gods of theirs are lying,
 Those idols in an alien's sumptuous chambers!

Tell them that Truth and Justice will revive,
 Will summon, will inspire, will conjure up
 Not the dull, ancient Word that has decayed
 But a new Word, and this, with mighty clamour,
 It will bring bravely in the midst of us
 And save our people, stripped and destitute,
 From the unseemly favours of the tsar. . . .

St. Petersburg, December 25, 1859

1860

* * * *

A little girl, lovely and black of brow,
 Was lugging liquor from the cellar now;
 And as I watch her at her tavern-tasks,
 I totter and my pitying spirit asks:
 Who will consume the beer that claims her care?
 Why are her little feet so cold and bare?
 Most mighty God, you are omnipotent;
 That you are just, this sight gives dark dissent.

St. Petersburg, January 15, 1860

* * * *

Groves of oak and leafy woods,
 You are being clad
 Thrice a year. . . . A father rich
 Sure you must have had!

Once he clothes you, thick and lush,
 In a cloak of green,
 Marvels at the oak-tree grove
 That so fine is seen.

Glad he is, so fair a maid
 Gazing to behold;
 Then he goes and covers her
 With a gown of gold.

Then he dresses her in lace,
 Fashioned white and fair;
 Finally he goes to sleep,
 Wearied by such care.

St. Petersburg, January 15, 1860

IMITATION OF A SERBIAN LYRIC

Nuptial messengers⁶⁶⁴ have come;
 With them is the groom.
 Straightway to the house they go,
 Seek the father's room.
 From that swarthy, handsome man
 I receive his horse,
 Take him gladly to the well,
 For a drink, of course.
 Wearied is the horse; its hooves
 Shattered show no shoe;
 While the well-wrought saddle-bow
 Is all battered too.
 —“Tell me, horse, to whom you came
 In such headlong flight?”
 —“To a certain beauty fair
 We rode hard all night.”
 —“Will you, horse, accept a drink
 From our well-head here?
 Will that beauty, dark of brow,
 Be a bride this year?”

St. Petersburg, May 4, 1860

PRAYERS

I

Send to those boundless traffickers in blood,
 The tsars of earth, their ducats and their dollars
 And shackles aptly forged!

⁶⁶⁴See fn. 451.

Send to the heads and hands that toil amain
 Upon this earth, so looted and despoiled,
 The impulse of your strength!

Vouchsafe to me, O God, upon this earth,
 The gift of love, that pleasant paradise,
 And nothing else beside!

St. Petersburg, May 24, 1860

II

Fetter the tsars, those bloody taverners,
 In well-forged shackles and immure them deep
 In some forgotten vault!

To toiling people, O Most Merciful,
 Who labour in their devastated land,
 Send your enduring strength!

And place your guardian angels at the side
 Of all those mortals who are pure of heart
 And save their innocence!

Vouchsafe to me, O God, that on this earth
 I may love Truth and Justice to the last;
 Grant me a loyal friend.

St. Petersburg, May 25, 1860

III

Those who would enter on an evil course,
 Stay them, and do not fetter them in chains,
 Do not immure them in the depth of vaults!

Assist those hands that edify the good,
 Teach them to prosper in their holy task,
 Send down upon them your celestial power!

And for the pure of heart—beside them place
 A phalanx of your angels who may guard
 Their spirits and preserve their innocence!

Vouchsafe to all of us who dwell on earth
 That we may live in harmony together:
 Send us the gracious boon of brotherhood!

St. Petersburg, May 27, 1860

IV

To earthly gods and tsars
 And all their greedy eyes—
 Send ploughs and laden ships
 And all the goods of earth
 And psalms to greet their pride—
 This to those petty gods!

To eager, toiling hands,
 To ardent, toiling brains—
 Send tilth of fallow fields,
 Thinking and speedy sowing
 And reaping of things sown—
 Send to the toiling hands.

To kindly, humble creatures,
 To Peace's saintly lovers—
 Send, Lord of earth and heaven,
 Long years of mortal living
 And paradise hereafter—
 Grant to the poor in spirit!

The wealth of earth evades us;
 All is for gods and monarchs:
 The ploughs and laden vessels
 And all earth's golden chattels—
 My dear, our only portion
 Is love among poor mortals!

St. Petersburg, May 31, 1860

* * * *

Once on a time and very long ago,
 Numa Pompilius,⁶⁶⁵ the Roman king,
 That meek and gentle master, growing weary
 From writing down his laws, took time for sport
 And quiet rest, and, as he thus relaxed,
 Planned to forge further fetters for the Romans.
 He took a supple, year-old osier reed
 And undertook the plaiting of a noose—

⁶⁶⁵See fn. 240. Shevchenko considered Numa's laws as being harsh and oppressive.

For someone's neck perhaps. But suddenly
 He glanced, and saw, beneath a plane-tree's shade,
 A young maid sleeping, garlanded with flowers.
 Even the dryads⁶⁶⁶ could not hold a torch
 To one so fair, a goddess exquisite:—
 But in due time, Egeria⁶⁶⁷ herself,
 There in that grove, cursing her destiny,
 Would hang herself. And the wise Numa marvels,
 Both at the beauteous maid and at her flowers,
 And ponders on new chains he yet may weave!

St. Petersburg, May 28, 1860

YAROSLAVNA'S LAMENTATION⁶⁶⁸

Up in Putivl⁶⁶⁹-town, at dawning's hour,
 Sweet Yaroslavna⁶⁷⁰ sings a tearful song,
 Mourns like a cuckoo,
 Increasing sorrow with her tuneful words:

"I'll fly," she warbles, "like a cuckoo bird,
 A sea-mew's widowed mate,
 Along the Don I'll fly
 And wet my wristband, trimmed with beaver fur,
 In the Kayala stream; and from the body,
 The Prince's white, emaciated body,
 I'll wash away the dark, encrusted blood
 And dry his wounds, so grievous and so deep."

And Yaroslavna weeps upon the ramparts,
 Up in Putivl-town, at dawning's hour:
 "O wind, my precious wind,
 Light god with silent pinions,
 Why have you on your wings so powerful

⁶⁶⁶Forest nymphs.

⁶⁶⁷See fn. 240.

⁶⁶⁸An episode taken from *The Tale of Ihor's Campaign*, the greatest epic in Ukrainian literature. That heroic poem deals with Prince Ihor Sviatoslavovich's raid against the Polovtsian tribes and the battle (1185) in which he was defeated. Although the subject is borrowed, Shevchenko's treatment of it makes the poem quite original.

⁶⁶⁹A town in the province of Kursk.

⁶⁷⁰Ihor Sviatoslavovich's wife Evfrosina, daughter of Yaroslav the Eight-Sensed One, the Prince of Halich. Here she is lamenting her husband's defeat and captivity.

Against my precious warriors,
 Against my dear sweet love, against my Prince,
 Cast the Khan's⁶⁷¹ arrows?
 Do you lack scope across the sky and earth
 And the blue, open sea?
 Yonder the heavy-freighted ships are rocking!
 But you, fierce one—to my great misery!—
 Have stolen away my joy,
 And scattered it upon the grassy steppe!”

And Yaroslavna sorrows, wails, and weeps,
 Up in Putivl-town, at dawning's hour:
 “O broad and mighty Dnieper,
 Ancient and powerful among all rivers,
 The high cliffs you have pierced
 As on you coursed to the Polovtsian land;
 In deep barks you have borne
 The doughty retinue of Sviatoslav
 Against the Polovtsians and the Kobiak folk.
 O my Slovuta,⁶⁷² mighty and renowned!
 Bring back my love to me
 So that I may, in joy, prepare his bed
 And not send tear-drops flowing to the sea—
 For with my tears I cannot fill the sea!”

And Yaroslavna weeps unceasingly
 Up in Putivl-town upon the ramparts
 Over the gate; and now the blessed sun
 Already has arisen, and she says:
 “Ah, hallowed luminary, to the earth
 You have brought joy to man and to his fields—
 But you have not dissolved my grievous sorrow.
 O holy god of fire!
 The meadows and the plains your beams have scorched;
 You've scorched to death my Prince and retinue;
 Pray, scorch me also, in my loneliness!
 Or,—do not shine or send the earth your heat. . . .
 My love has perished—let me perish too!”

St. Petersburg, April 4, 1860

⁶⁷¹Kobiak, the Polovtsian ruler and military commander.

⁶⁷²An appellative of the Dnieper. In Slavic mythology the Dnieper was known as the son of the god Slovuta (the glorious one).

II

From before dawn till night,
 From evening until dawn
 The tempered arrows fly,
 The sabres clash on helmets,
 The seasoned lances shatter
 Out on the open steppe,
 Far upon plains unknown
 In the Polovtsian land.
 The black earth has been ploughed
 With hooves and harrowed deep;
 The land is sown with bones
 And watered with men's blood.
 And grievous sorrow on that plain
 Has risen for the land of Rus.

What mighty clamour sounds at dawn?
 Ihor it is, turns back his troops
 To give that boisterous aurochs⁶⁷³ aid,—
 Vsevolod.⁶⁷⁴ They fought one day,
 They fought a second, and near noon
 Upon the third day of the fight
 The banners of Prince Ihor drooped.
 And now upon Kayala's banks⁶⁷⁵
 The brothers separated, for at last
 The wine of blood had all run out!
 And thus the doughty sons of Rus⁶⁷⁶
 Had finished off their battle-feast,
 They caused their kinsmen to be drunk,
 While they themselves upon the ground
 Lay silent for the land of Rus.
 The grasses swayed, they spread out wide
 And wept; and down the tall trees stooped,
 All bending to the ground in grief. . . .

St. Petersburg, August 6, 1860

⁶⁷³Rus chieftains were often called aurochs (bison) for their determination and intrepidity in battle.

⁶⁷⁴Ihor's brother.

⁶⁷⁵The river near which the battle took place.

⁶⁷⁶The ancient name of Ukraine.

III

Early one morning, at Putivl-town,
 Fair Yaroslavna rains her teardrops down
 And sorrows: "Like a cuckoo shall I fly
 Along the Danube! I shall there untie
 My beaver sleeve and wet it in the flood
 Of the Kayala, to wash off the blood
 Encrusted on my Prince's weary frame,
 And dry the wounds he took in battle's shame."

Again she weeps, fair Yaroslavna weeps;
 Up in Putivl-town her watch she keeps:
 "O wind, O boisterous wind, great god of air!
 Why do you blow, and on your pinions bear
 The arrows of the Khan against my love,
 Raining those shafts his warriors above?"

St. Petersburg, September 14, 1860

ON THE DEATH OF GRIGORIY,⁶⁷⁷ METROPOLITAN
 OF ST. PETERSBURG

The great man in the haircloth shirt is dead!
 Widows and orphans, let no tears be shed,
 But you, Askochensky, your dirges raise
 In heavy, sullen tones of morning praise.
 And you, O Khomiakov, whose zeal has planned
 Greatness for Moscow and the fatherland,
 Make loud your weeping for the peploclast!
 And you, O "Russkaya Beseda," blast
 Your sins in single-voiced confession deep,
 Repent you of your sins—and weep, and weep. . . .

St. Petersburg, June 17, 1860

⁶⁷⁷This ecclesiastic led an ascetic life and in religious and lay matters was a conservative of the most backward type, repressing all progressive thought. The same is to be said about Askochensky, a professor in the Kiev Seminary (in Shevchenko's time) and the editor of the journal *Russkaya Beseda* (Russian Discourse). Alexey Khomiakov, Shevchenko's older contemporary, was a Russian writer and an inveterate Slavophil who even favoured Russia's return to the conditions prevailing before Peter I's time. Grigoriy was derogatively called "peploclast" because he made much ado in protesting the sale of material for women's skirts with small crosses imprinted on it. Needless to say, Shevchenko's tone here is ironical.

THE NUNS' HYMN

Strike, thunder, strike upon this house today,
 This holy mansion where we waste away,
 Where we offend Thee, Lord, in worshipping,
 And sensing our offense, contritely sing
 Hallelujah!

If it were not for Thee, we'd fall in love
 And all the joys of marriage we would prove,
 Would bear fine children for their christening,
 Would bravely rear them up and gladly sing
 Hallelujah!

Thou hast deceived us in our wretchedness;
 And we, abducted wretches in distress,
 Have also cozened Thee and vexed Thy pride
 When in devotions whiningly we cried
 Hallelujah!

Though Thou hast tonsured us and made us nuns,
 Fine wenches are we all, yea, lusty ones,
 Who dance and sing in sport around Thy throne;
 And as we gambol, cheerfully intone
 Hallelujah!⁶⁷⁸

St. Petersburg, June 20, 1860

* * * *

By Dnieper's bank along the sands
 Amid the reeds a maple stands,
 Amid the reeds beside a fir
 Where cranberry bushes' branches stir.
 The Dnieper with its waterchutes
 Has undermined the maple's roots;
 Over the stream the tree is heaving
 Like some old Cossack who is grieving,
 Who without fortune, without kin,
 Without a wife his heart to win,
 Without the hopes that still elude,
 Grows hoary in his solitude!

⁶⁷⁸Towards the end of his life Shevchenko became somewhat cynical.

The maple says: "I shall incline
 And bathe me in the Dnieper fine."
 The Cossack says: "I now shall roam
 To seek a sweetheart and a home."
 The cranberry bush, the gracious fir
 And supple reeds are all a-stir;
 Like maidens from a grove they rise
 And raise a carol to the skies.
 Finely attired and flower-bedecked,
 Good luck from heaven they expect;
 No heavy sorrows to them cling
 As in the dance they twist and sing. . . .

St. Petersburg, June 24, 1860

* * * *

They two grew up together; they matured;
 Then for a time they ceased to laugh and play . . .
 As if their separation was complete.
 Once more they came together, and were married;
 And gently, happily they passed their days
 In innocence of heart and peace of soul
 Until they reached the grave . . . despite the fact
 That they among mankind had spent their lives!
 Grant to us all, O Lord most generous,
 That we may blossom and may grow like this,
 Thus marry and proceed without a quarrel
 Down life's hard path and even so pass on
 Contented to that other, gentler world!
 There may we find no weeping, and no wailing,
 Nor gnashing of the teeth—but love eternal
 That prospers in that quiet world beyond!

St. Petersburg, June 25, 1860

* * * *

O gentle light, light fair to see,
 O holy light, undimmed and free!
 Dear brother-light, the dark dispelling,
 Why have they in your own warm dwelling

Deceived you in a brutal joke,
 Covered you up with incense smoke,
 With scarlet raiment played you tricks
 And clubbed you with a crucifix? . . .

Clubbed, but not killed! Your beams arouse
 And shine more bright about our brows!
 Shine brighter! . . . We shall yet, my friend,
 With scarlet robes our foot-clouts mend,
 Light pipes from out the incense pot,
 With icons make our ovens hot,
 And with the sprinkling-brush, I ween,
 Will sweep our own new dwelling clean.⁶⁷⁹

St. Petersburg, June 27, 1860

TO LYKERA⁶⁸⁰

FOR REMEMBRANCE, AUGUST 5, 1860⁶⁸¹

My dear love and fine friend! They'll not believe
 Our honesty without a cross to bless it,
 They will not deem us pure without a priest—
 These slaves and sickly bondsmen of convention!
 Like swine in swamp-muck they will sleep and wallow
 In their own prejudice.⁶⁸² But you, dear friend,
 My own beloved, do not cross yourself,
 Do not protest your faith nor make petition
 To anyone on earth.

Folk are deceitful;
 And the Byzantine Sabaoth as well
 Will cozen you. But God will not deceive you—
 Nor will he punish us nor show us favour:
 For we are not his slaves—but human beings!

⁶⁷⁹Shevchenko's cynicism here is even more pronounced than in "The Nuns' Hymn," p. 543. It was for similar views with regard to religious practices that he got in trouble with the authorities during his last visit to Ukraine in 1859.

⁶⁸⁰Lykera Polusmak, a twenty-year-old serf-maid whom Shevchenko in his forty-seventh year was eager to marry.

⁶⁸¹The reference is to the occasion when Lykera was asked by Shevchenko to accompany him to a nearby town, but was not allowed to do so by her mistress on the pretext that it would not be proper because they were not yet married.

⁶⁸²See fn. 678.

My dear one, smile! And grant, my friend, to me
 The guerdon of your blest, untrammelled soul
 And your free hand! For even God himself
 Will help us bear our harsh lot to the end,
 And end these hardships of our separation
 Tomorrow in a peaceful, happy home.

Strilna, August 5, 1860

TO N. Y. MAKARIV⁶⁸³

FOR REMEMBRANCE, SEPTEMBER 14, 1860

The periwinkle budded, bloomed,
 And spread out far and wide,
 But frost into the garden stole
 Before night's shadows died;
 It trod those cheerful blossoms down;
 They in the cold were lost. . . .
 I for the periwinkle weep
 And for the pre-dawn frost!

St. Petersburg, September 14, 1860

* * * *

Old Archimedes⁶⁸⁴ drank no wine
 And Galileo⁶⁸⁵ lean did dine;
 While holy oil⁶⁸⁶ from monkish jaw
 Went gurgling down the monkish maw.
 You, holy harbingers, have gone
 Throughout the world and handed on

⁶⁸³A Ukrainian landlord whose brother was the owner of Lykera. The lyric expresses Shevchenko's despair at his final break with her.

⁶⁸⁴Greek mathematician and physicist who lived in Sicily (287–212 B.C.).

⁶⁸⁵Italian scientist (1564–1642) who invented (or improved) the telescope and maintained that the earth revolves around the sun, for which view he was brought before an ecclesiastical tribunal and forced to recant.

⁶⁸⁶Holy oil, the balm for men's physical and spiritual ills (symbolizing the spirit of man's progress) was taken over by the enemies of enlightenment, used for their selfish benefit and against the underprivileged. Even the Word of God ("soiled crust of the Gospel bread⁷⁹") was employed by the tyrants further to oppress the common people.

To the benighted tsars instead
 The soiled crust of the Gospel's bread.
 The tsars' rye will be trampled down,
 And men will come into their own.
 New tsars will die still unconceived
 And in our land, by faith retrieved,
 No foemen shall be brought to birth,
 Mothers and sons shall show their worth
 And love shall reign throughout the earth.

St. Petersburg, September 24, 1860

L.⁰⁸⁷

Now I shall build myself a one-roomed house
 And plant a cheerful garden all around,
 And in those tiny heavenly surroundings
 I'll wander at my ease and take my rest;
 And in my utter solitude I'll sleep
 There in that garden. I shall surely dream
 Of little children and their happy mother,
 And a bright dream I had long, long ago
 Will come again . . . and you! No, I'll not sleep,
 For you will also come into my dream!
 Into my tiny Eden you will steal
 On quiet feet; make havoc of my peace;
 And set aflame my lonely paradise.

St. Petersburg, September 27, 1860

* * * *

Of God in Heaven I make no moan,
 In fact I raise complaint of none:
 Fool that I am, I dupe my heart
 Even with a song. I plough apart
 My fallow land, my meagre field,
 And sow my words: some day they'll yield

⁰⁸⁷Lykera. This lyric was written after all hope of marriage with her was shattered. The poet now wanted to forget her by all means and not see her even in his dreams.

Good harvest. Thus I cheat with dreams
Myself, and no one else, it seems.⁶⁸⁸

Be ploughed in lowlands and in heights,
O field so dear to me;
Be sown, my field so dark and rich,
With sparkling liberty!
Be ploughed and stretch your boundaries wide,
Spread your broad meadows out,
Sown with good rye and watered well
From your good fortune's spout!
Let your dimensions far and near
A tithe abundant yield!
Be planted, not with words alone
But wisdom, O my field!
People will come to reap the rye,
The harvest will be great! . . .
Spread out, I pray, unfold yourself,
My field of low estate!

Do I deceive myself again
With words so gentle and so vain?
I do! But self-deception's ways
Are better than a foeman's praise
To trust as truth, and then, down-trod,
Make impotent complaints to God!

St. Petersburg, October 5, 1860

SAUL

In ever-sleeping China, in dark Egypt,
Along the Indus and the broad Euphrates,
And in our land, a herdsman long ago
Would feed his lambs and calves in perfect freedom
On his free meadows, as in paradise,
Untroubled by all thoughts of polity.
His livestock he would pasture, milk, and shear,
And sing with joy. But suddenly a devil
Brings on a king with laws and swords and hangmen,

⁶⁸⁸After his unsuccessful attempt at marriage, Shevchenko tried to plunge into new activity and continue to cultivate the "fallow field" of Ukraine with his verses.

With princes and with poor benighted slaves.
 At night, by stealth, they came; they seized the herds
 And flocks from off the fields; the shepherds too,
 Their tents and wretched hovels, sorry wealth.
 Their little children, sisters, wives, and all—
 All these they snatched, despoiled and violated,
 And those they had so outraged, weak of heart
 And helpless, they impressed as galley-slaves.
 Day after day went by. The slaves were silent;
 New kings were being born, and still they grew
 And built their Babylons. The magi, bonzes,
 And other priests (just like our reverend sirs)
 Were fattened in their temples and pagodas
 Like swine to make the king's salt pork and sausage.
 And now the kings built temples for themselves,
 Altars and fanes galore to please their idols,
 And there the silent slaves must bend the knee.

The poor Jews looked at this and burned with envy:
 They hadn't even had a paltry king,
 Not even a brick altar. So they went
 And asked old Samuel⁶⁸⁹ to do his best
 To scrounge them up a king, from anywhere
 His heart might wish. And so the sapient seer,
 Having considered matters, took some oil,
 Deprived some goats and swine of their attendant,
 The burly fellow, Saul, and, as they'd wished,
 Anointed him as king of Israel!

Not being quite a fool, the royal Saul
 Collected a great harem for himself
 And started in to rule in deadly earnest.
 The other shepherds looked at him and marvelled
 To see the vigour of the new recruit
 And vowed that they themselves were far from fools:
 "Just look at what a perfect autocrat
 We've wangled from our God!" And meanwhile Saul
 Seizes their towns and hamlets, and their daughters,
 Seizes their ewes, builds cedar palaces,
 Rears altars of forged gold, dispenses favours

⁶⁸⁹The Hebrew Prophet.

To his most naked and submissive subjects.
 Clad in long, scarlet robes, he paced his chambers
 So much that finally this low-browed fellow,
 Saul, the poor hulking wretch, amid his harem
 Went sullenly, indubitably mad.

And presently a council was assembled:
 "Good gentlemen! Illustrious gathering!
 What shall we do? Our sage king and our master,
 Our autocrat, poor lad, has lost his mind!
 Gentlemen, should we cure him? Should we try,
 Instead, to get ourselves a healthier king?"
 After wise speeches and deliberations,
 The mournful shepherds moved that they adjourn.

In his new cedar palace, lo, the king
 Sleeps not; he neither eats nor drinks nor speaks;
 But on the floor, in silence, the great king
 Has torn his purple raiment into rags,
 Seems to be wrinkling leather to make boots,
 Then plaits bast shoes and straightway puts them on,
 And there, within his court's new cedar walls,
 Asks for the youngest she-ass of his father.
 Then he takes up his sceptre, playing on it
 As on a reed-pipe. Saul, the former herd-boy,
 Thus sits and sings; but suddenly commands
 That all should bow to do him reverence,
 And this reminds him of old Samuel.

Then the nobility and all the herdsmen
 Who traced their origin to Benjamin
 To Saul's retainers gave a golden bribe
 That they might be allowed to come and sing
 Upon the royal porch. And the grey-bearded
 Pot-bellied, shaggy kinsmen of King Saul
 Raised quite a roar; moreover, with them came
 A shepherd, by the name of David known.
 —"And lo, King Saul came out," this shepherd sang,
 "And went to war! . . ."

This cleared Saul's mind a bit,
 And like a boorish Muscovite he started
 To thrash his shaggy kinfolk, near and far;

Promiscuously he belted one and all,
And almost killed that zither-player, David. . . .

If he had known what evil would ensue
From that same wicked David, like a snake
He would have crushed him, and his viperish venom
He would have rubbed out with a ruthless foot!
And now, not even with our shares and coulter
Can people plough that cursed field of kings,
So overgrown with thorns. . . . Woe, and alas!
The people of the earth grow small as dust,
While kings increase in might and arrogance!

St. Petersburg, October 13, 1860

* * * *

My years of youth have passed away . . .
And from the West, where hope should stay,
I feel a cold and wintry blast!
In your cold dwelling sit at last
With not a soul for conversation
And not a shred of consolation
For which in loneliness to grope!
Sit thus alone until faint hope,
Poor fool, will mock at you once more
And couch your eyes with frost-ice hoar
And scatter all your visions airy
Like snowflakes down the empty prairie. . . .
In your dark corner sit alone
And nevermore for springtime moan!
It will not come again for you
To bless your orchard with its dew
And bless the hopes for which you yearn,
Yes, nevermore will it return
To free your thoughts. Sit, past recall,
And look for naught, for naught at all!⁶⁹⁰ . . .

St. Petersburg, October 18, 1860

⁶⁹⁰This poem more than any other illustrates to what depths of despair Shevchenko fell in the final months of his life.

* * * *

The sexton's daughter of Nemíriv
 Sews at a kerchief white,
 And rocks to sleep a little babe,
 Son of a Muscovite.

The sexton's daughter of Nemíriv
 Good suitors scorned to see;
 A vagrant, soldiering Muscovite
 She welcomed secretly.

The sexton's daughter of Nemíriv
 Is strict of stock and training,
 Yet she awaits her trooper tramp
 To come back from campaigning.

St. Petersburg, October 19, 1860

* * * *

Although one should not castigate the dead,
 A wicked soul will not be left in peace. . . .
 Thus you, O bitch,⁶⁹¹ we'll curse, yes, we ourselves,
 Our own grandchildren and the entire nation. . . .
 Nay, we'll not curse, but only spit in hate
 Upon the weaned pups that the bitch has littered.
 O grief, my grief! My sorrow and affliction!
 Will you depart some day? Or will the tsars,
 With slavish ministers, their slobbering hounds,
 Course you to earth, O fierce one? They will not!
 But people softly, without much ado,
 Will lead the savage monarch to the gallows!

St. Petersburg, October 20, 1860

* * * *

Both here and everywhere, the state is rotten!
 The poor soul got up early, spun a little,
 And then went back to bed, the sorry wretch.

⁶⁹¹Catherine II.

Meanwhile, fair Freedom watched above the soul.
 "Wake up," she said, "and weep, unlucky wight!
 The sunrise will not come. Darkness prevails,
 And there is no more justice on the earth!"
 Indolent Freedom duped the puny soul:
 The sun approaches, with the light of day.
 Already now those tsars, stiff-necked and proud,
 Begin to stir in cold anxiety . . .
 For justice will prevail upon the earth! . . .

St. Petersburg, October 30, 1860

* * * *

O people, wretched people! Of what use
 Are tsars to you, and all those kennel-keepers?
 For you are human beings, and not dogs!

At night comes ice, and mist, and frost and snow.
 And now the Neva quietly goes bearing
 Somewhere beneath the bridge the thin ice-crust.
 And I, on such a night, just walk along,
 And cough as on I go. I look and see
 Those tattered girls drift like a flock of sheep,
 And an old man, a wretched invalid,
 Is following at their heels, bent, trudgingly,
 And seems to drive them like a stranger's cattle
 Into a pen. . . .

Where can the light be found?
 And where is justice? Woe unspeakable!
 See these poor girls, unfed and dressed in rags,
 Are being driven like a herd of beasts,
 Driven to pay in prayers their last respects,
 Like bastards driven, to their foster mother!⁶⁹²

⁶⁹²Alexandra, the wife of Nicholas I. She had died recently, and the girls of the orphan asylum which she had founded were being driven like cattle by an old invalid (their overseer) apparently to church to pray for their benefactress. The sight roused anger in Shevchenko who remembered her as being the prime cause of his sufferings in exile.

Will there be judgment? And a penalty
 For tsars and princes in this life on earth?
 Will there be justice among men at last? . . .
 There must be, or the sun will rise in wrath
 And scorch this earth defiled by tyranny.

St. Petersburg, November 3, 1860

* * * *

If only I had someone by whose side
 I might sit down to eat a simple meal,
 With whom I might exchange a word or two,
 I would be able, somehow, to exist
 Upon this earth in tolerable fashion.
 But no! I am alone! The world is vast,
 Innumerable people tread the earth,
 And yet I would seem fated, all alone,
 Beneath a hedge or in a freezing house,
 Whose sills are sinking, to stretch out and die! . . .
 Or . . . no, I must get married, though the bride
 Should prove to be the devil's own dear sister!
 For I shall soon go mad in loneliness. . . .
 The wheat, the rye, were sown on fertile ground,
 And people will hereafter reap the harvest,
 And say: "The sower somewhere met his end,
 Poor fellow, in a foreign land perhaps. . . ."
 Ah, what a grief is mine beyond all measure!

St. Petersburg, November 4, 1860

* * * *

The day goes passing by, likewise the night . . .
 And, pressing your dull head between your hands,
 You wonder why the Lord of Truth and Light
 Sends no Apostle to these darkened lands!

St. Petersburg, November 5, 1860

* * * *

Down past a maple to a dell,
 The brook goes babbling loudly,
 And there a red cranberry bush
 Above the stream stands proudly;
 The maple tree renews its youth,
 The cranberry stands serene,
 And round about them willows grow
 And reeds are fresh and green.

The water slips beyond the grove,
 And at the hillside's edge
 The tiny ducklings splash about
 Among the oozy sedge.
 The duck, close followed by the drake,
 Swims out to see them all;
 She snatches duckweed in her bill
 And greets her children small.

The water near a garden flows,
 It spreads to form a pond;
 A maiden comes to fill her pail
 And sings a carol fond.
 Her father and her mother seek
 The garden for a walk;
 The naming of a son-in-law
 Begets their quiet talk.

St. Petersburg, November 7, 1860

* * * *

One night, as I was walking by the Neva,
 Upon my way I wondered in my musing:
 "If only slaves had scorned to bend their backs,"
 Thought I, "then all these filthy palaces
 Would not be standing by the Neva's banks
 And men would live as brothers and as sisters;
 But as it is . . . no sort of right prevails—
 No God or even demi-God's in charge:
 The kennel-keepers lord it over all,

While we—their politic assistant trainers—
Just feed their hounds and mourn our sorry fate! . . .”

Thus, as I walked by night along the Neva,
I mused, and, deep in thought, I did not notice
That from the side, as from a misty pit,
Two catlike eyes were staring at my own:
They were two lighted lamp-posts by the gates
Of the Apostles' fortress.⁶⁹³ I was startled,
And crossed myself to ward the devil off,
And spat three times. Then I resumed my thinking
About the things I'd mused on just before.

St. Petersburg, November 13, 1860

* * * *

There once were wars and military feuds,
Kisils and Halahans were in their prime
And Kochubey-Nohays⁶⁹⁴—of such a breed
Our country then was cursed with quite a few!
But all that passed and vanished. There remain
Only the worms who gnaw, devour, and rot
The poor old oak.⁶⁹⁵ Yet from the root new stems
Are growing up; gently and soft they grow.
When they attain full growth, without an axe
And with great din, the Cossack, now unhoused,
Will swoop exultant down, shatter the throne,
Tear purple robes to tatters, and will crush
Your idol into bits, ye human worms—
Nay, nursemaids, cronies, of an alien throne!
When once your sacred idol is no more,
You, too, will disappear! Nettles and weeds,
And nothing else, will grow above your corpses!

⁶⁹³The Fortress of Peter and Paul on an island on the Neva.

⁶⁹⁴Traitors to Ukraine's cause: Adam Kisil who would not join Khmelnitsky against the Poles, and in fact served them against him; Halahan who betrayed the Cossacks by directing the Muscovite troops to the Sitch which was destroyed shortly before the battle of Poltava; Vassil Kochubey (nicknamed Nohay) who kept Peter I informed as to the secret negotiations between Mazeppa and Charles XII of Sweden.

⁶⁹⁵Decrepit Ukraine.

Pile heaped on carrion pile, you will decay
 To stench and foul manure—and then to dust
 That gradually the wind will blow away.

And those of us who are not rich or poor
 Will raise a prayer of gratitude to God.

St. Petersburg, November 26, 1860

N. T.⁶⁹⁶

O you long-suffering and dear old crony,
 You are so feeble-minded and so daft!
 You have been reared up in a paradise,
 Have blossomed as a lovely, crimson flower,
 And yet you never saw, or even guessed,
 The wonders of that earthly paradise—
 For at the golden day you would not glance,
 At the resplendent and life-giving light!
 Your eyes were blind and sightless, and your heart
 As heavy as a log; you slept by day,
 You slept by night as well; and all around you
 So many things most wonderful shot up,
 Unfolded their green leaves, and blossomed forth,
 And skyward sent their praise to the Creator;
 While you, my dear old crony, slept and slept,
 Prided yourself upon your maidenhood
 And patiently awaited the right suitor.
 You kept your virgin chastity intact
 And feared the sin of dark adultery.
 But Saturn's⁶⁹⁷ leaden power proceeds apace
 And plaits the blessed fault of chastity
 Into your greying tresses. You, the while,
 Seem not to notice this; you stay a spinster,
 And pray and sleep and sin against God's Mother
 With wicked meekness. Waken up, dear crony!

⁶⁹⁶Nadiya Tarnovska, Shevchenko's oldish lady friend whom he treated as a crony. She visited him often when he was bedridden with his final illness. As she was a spinster, he occasionally taunted her about her solitary life. In this poem he does so cynically.

⁶⁹⁷Of Cronos, god of Time, see fn. 548.

Be roused, and glance around you while you may!
 Spurn all that maiden coyness you affect,
 And, with a heart sincere and innocent,
 At least for once, my darling, go astray!

St. Petersburg, December 2, 1860

* * * *

We met and married, with a bond to bless;
 Our youth renewed, we grew in happiness.
 Around our cottage we set out a grove,
 An orchard, and in all our joy and love
 Were proud as princes. There our children played,
 And grew up happy in the fruit-tree shade. . . .
 Our girls to Moscow's troopers have been lost,
 Our boys have been impressed in Moscow's host. . . .
 And thus our lives are to destruction harried
 As if we'd never met and never married.

St. Petersburg, December 5, 1860

1861

* * * *

My humble neighbour, comrade dear,⁶⁹⁸
 Should we not now abandon here
 The framing of these trifling verses
 And set about to deck our hearses,
 Our waggons for that trip ahead
 That every soul must take when dead?
 For to the other world, my friend,
 We'll ramble off and make an end. . . .
 Though we are tired, of vigour drained,
 Some worldly wisdom we have gained:

⁶⁹⁸Shevchenko's last poem in which he informs his Muse to prepare for their last journey. Its tone is mock-serious.

Let that suffice! Let's go to bed,
 Into our narrow hut we'll tread,
 A cheerful cot, when all is said!
 Nay, let us not retire yet,—
 Too soon it is to pay that debt!
 Here let us stroll or sit together
 And watch this world where man must tether.
 My good friend, let us view it still,
 How vast it is, from hill to hill,
 How radiant and how profound!
 Then let us roam these fields around,
 Ascend this hillock to its crest
 And on its summit pause to rest. . . .
 Meanwhile across the gulf of night
 The stars, your sisters, shed their light;
 Eternal in the firmament
 They float and shine with bright intent. . . .
 O Muse, my precious advocate
 And sister, let us therefore wait,
 And with unsullied lips of prayer
 Petitions due to God prepare;
 Then in good time we shall set out
 On our long trip in mood devout.
 On turbid Lethe's weedy bank⁶⁹⁹
 And unplumbed depths, obscure and dank,
 Impart to me the blessing, friend,
 Of sacred fame without an end!

 But while we await that happy day,
 Let us directly make our way
 To ask old Aesculapius⁷⁰⁰
 To outwit Charon's⁷⁰¹ ire for us
 And Fate the Spinner.⁷⁰² Then while he
 Wisely devised a plan for me,

⁶⁹⁹In Greek mythology, one of the rivers of the underworld: Lethe, the river of forgetfulness. Later, two others are mentioned: the Phlegethon, the river of flowing flames, and the Styx, the principal one which encircles the nether world seven times.

⁷⁰⁰Mythical god of medicine and healing.

⁷⁰¹In Greek mythology, the dread boatman who transported the shades of the dead across the Styx and into the underworld.

⁷⁰²One of the three Parcae who spun men's lives; here the one who snapped the threads of life.

We would recline and bring to birth
 An epic high above the earth,
 Weaving hexameters unending
 That we would presently be rending
 In garrets for the mice to eat. . . .
 This we would then in prose repeat,
 Yet sing them, too, I must aver,
 My saintly fellow-traveller!
 Nay, ere the fires of fancy fall,
 Let us on Charon pay a call!

O'er turbid Lethe's unplumbed deep
 Our uncomplaining course we'll keep;
 And sailing, bear within our boat
 Death's bright and hallowed antidote,
 My everlasting, youthful fame . . .
 Or else, may the deuce take that same!
 I well can do without renown.
 And if with vigour I go down,
 Along the banks of Phlegethon
 Or by the Styx, in heaven anon,
 As if by Dnieper's shore sublime
 In groves of immemorial time
 I'll build a hut⁷⁰³ and plant around it
 A belt of orchard-trees to bound it,
 To whose cool shade you'll fly unseen
 And I shall crown you as my queen;
 We'll talk of Dnieper and Ukraine
 And the glad thorps that dot her plain,
 And grassy mounds in endless spring,
 And then a merry song we'll sing. . . .

St. Petersburg, February 14–25, 1861

⁷⁰³Even on his death-bed Shevchenko dreamed of a cottage overlooking a river; now not on the Dnieper's bank, but in a different region, with his Muse as his mate. Compare "The Cottage," p. 454.

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