

TARAS SHEVCHENKO: THE MAKING OF THE NATIONAL POET

George G. GRABOWICZ

Harvard University

Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures

The bicentennial of Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861) coincided with a remarkable political and social upheaval—a revolution and a national renewal that as of this writing is still ongoing and still under attack in Ukraine.¹ The core, and iconic, presence of Shevchenko in that process, and dramatically and symbolically on the Euromaidan itself, has often been noted and the revolutionary changes in which it was embedded will continue to draw the attention of political, sociological and cultural studies in the foreseeable future.² If only through those manifest optics, Shevchenko was at the center of things in Ukraine—now, as often before.

THE NATIONAL POET PARADIGM

In the Ukrainian cultural and literary frame Shevchenko's role as National Poet is, of course, canonic and the subject of much commentary. The actual path, however, and the stages, junctures and strategies through which this canonicity was achieved have been only scantily addressed—and not surprisingly so. On the one hand, the very nature of the “position” or “calling” of National Poet is affective and implicitly teleological, and in the Romantic poetics in which it is grounded *explicitly* focused on the end-product, the apotheosis itself, and not the process of attaining it. Obviously, the National Poet functions as an

1. The present essay draws in part on my recent and ongoing work on Shevchenko, especially the Ukrainian-language monograph *Шевченкові «Гайдамаки»: поема і критика*, Kyiv, Krytyka, 2013 and the English-language, Introduction to the exhibition catalogue, *Taras Shevchenko: Poet, Painter, Icon: 1814-1861*, New York, 2014. An early version of this essay was presented as the Twelfth Annual Stasiuk Lecture at Robinson College, University of Cambridge, Feb. 28, 2014.

2. Cf. especially Oles' Fedoruk's paper “Symbols and Images of Shevchenko on the Euromaidan” delivered at the Bicentennial Shevchenko Conference, Shevchenko Scientific Society, New York, N. Y., March 28, 2014.

essentialist or totalizing trope, and not as an occasion or locus of historical or, say, structuralist analysis. One might even argue that the more intense the belief in or projection of the National Poet in a given tradition—and the Ukrainian one is close to being paradigmatic here—the less likely or “required” would be the scholarly anatomization of his creation, his emergence. The case of Shevchenko, moreover, is hardly unique: a delayed or constricted self-reflectivity as to the creation of the National Poet is also evident in neighboring literary traditions, most obviously in the reception of Adam Mickiewicz in Polish literature and Alexander Pushkin in the Russian. But regardless of the timetable of the crystallization of these roles or the canon’s self-reflection on it, national poets, as these striking exemplars indicate, and implicitly all such canonic writers, even as they provide seemingly transcendent identity and empowerment for their collectives and come to serve as their symbolic and sublime representations, are still a *product* of a complex, but certainly knowable, process of reception; they are, in short, made, not born.³ But they also take part in that reception—in highly subtle, often indirect and symbolic ways.

A tension between the empirical and the transcendent is thus at the heart of the issue. It devolves on the essential way literature, and talking about literature, is positioned between the poles of the extrinsic and the intrinsic—and the problem of the national poet makes them more stark and apparent. For the making of the national poet which then becomes palpable and knowable through various receptive stages is also programmed by the writer himself: it is a dialectic in which the two poles are essentially united and interdependent.⁴ The case of Shevchenko is most instructive here.

THE SHEVCHENKO RECEPTION – THE EARLIEST PHASE

Shevchenko’s overall reception, from the first, public and published responses to his poetry to the present broadly ramified field of academic, para-academic and popular commentary has not yet been fully charted; the lay of the land is basically known—but only approximately so. Not unexpectedly, the least known is the earliest period, generally the period of Shevchenko’s lifetime, and more specifically the incredibly short period between the appearance of his first collection of poetry, the *Kobzar* of 1840 and then of the long poem *Haidamaky* in 1842, and a few years later (whether in 1843-1845 during his first two trips to Ukraine from St. Petersburg, or even a few years later still, in 1846-1847, when he was living in Kyiv) when by all indications virtually all who knew him—and

3. Cf. George G. Grabowicz, “National Poets and National Mystifications,” *Literární mystifikace, etnické mýty a jejich úloha při formování národního vědomí*, Sborník příspěvků y mezinárodní konference konané ve dnech 20-21.10.2001, Uherské Hradiště, 2001, p. 7-24.

4. Writing that same year (in an article with which I became acquainted only later) A. Reitblat postulates the various empirical steps for this process in the case of Pushkin, cf. his *Как Пушкин вышел в гении*, Moscow, 2001, p. 51-69.

this includes the secret police conducting his political trial in April-May, 1847—saw him as *the* leading Ukrainian poet; for all practical purposes – the national poet. Upon his return from exile in 1857-1858 (he arrived in St. Petersburg only in late March, 1858) Shevchenko was welcomed back not only as a returning hero and martyr, but also—for his Ukrainian compatriots—as a “prophet.” A remarkable foreshadowing and highlighting of this occurs on his return journey from exile (on Aug. 20, 1857, in Astrakhan, in an entry that is inscribed into Shevchenko’s *Diary*—the author was occasionally also using it as a scrapbook) when a Polish admirer addresses him as “Święty narodowy wieszczu-męczenniku Małejrosii” [sainted national prophet-bard and martyr of Little Russia]—and by using the Romantic Polish topos of *wieszcz* implicitly places him in a category reserved only for such sublime national poets as Mickiewicz.⁵ The sense of Shevchenko’s unique prominence in Ukrainian literature as well as his status of martyr of official repression was by all indications broadly shared by progressive all-Russian society; the numinous role of “prophet,” however, was all but exclusively confined to Ukrainian society. Upon Shevchenko’s death in March, 1861, and especially after the catharsis of his interment first in St. Petersburg and two months later in Kaniv, Ukraine, this specifically Ukrainian perception of him became, predictably, canonic and the succeeding years and decades served only to confirm and amplify it.

At the very beginning no such teleology existed. Shevchenko was unknown, and had been freed from serfdom only two years before the publication of his first book of poetry. And yet the appearance of his *Kobzar*, which officially was released by the censor on April 18, 1840, elicited an unprecedented interest in the literary journals of the capital: within a few weeks his work was reviewed in almost all the leading St. Petersburg periodicals and journals.⁶ All of them stressed the quality of the writing and the poetic promise of the author, but for some (Polevoi, Senkovskii and Bulgarin) the use of Ukrainian, a non-standard, “provincial” language or indeed “dialect,” made the whole effort questionable, if not altogether misplaced. Others, particularly Korsakov, saw in the use of Ukrainian the essential value of this poetry, its expression of the Ukrainian “national spirit ... full of feeling, authentic grace, and simplicity.”⁷ What also

5. Cf. the entry by Tomasz Zbrożek, *Diary* [Shchodennyk], *Тарас Шевченко*, Зібрання творів у шести томах [ZTShT], vol. 5, p. 85.

6. In effect, there were six reviews, in virtually all the prominent journals: *Сын отечества* written most likely by the editor, Nikolai Polevoi, *Библиотека для чтения*, most likely by Osip Senkovskii, *Литературная газета* (possibly by Vasilii Mezhevich), *Северная пчела*, most likely by the editor and owner, Fadei Bulgarin), *Отечественные записки* (author unknown, but clearly not Visarion Belinsky, as was long, and against all evidence, assumed in Soviet practice), a short notice in *Современник* (by Piotr Pletniov), and another review in *Маяк* by Piotr Korsakov, the censor of the *Kobzar*.

7. Piotr Korsakov, *The Kobzar* by T. Shevchenko, *The Lighthouse* [Maiak], 1840, No. VI, Chap. IV, p. 94-95; Taras Shevchenko, *The Critical Reception*, vol. I, *The Contemporary Reception (1839-1861)*, Krytyka, Kyiv, 2013, p. 10. Cf. also George G. Grabowicz, Introduction to the exhibition catalogue, *Taras Shevchenko: Poet, Painter, Icon: 1814-1861*, New York, 2014.

accompanied these diverging opinions—and this is still not adequately seen and stressed in the critical literature—is a shared and extraordinary *presumption of quality* occasioned by the fact that Shevchenko was known to be a star pupil of Karl Briullov then the most popular painter in Russia and widely regarded as a genius. Korsakov puts this directly:

As we have heard, the author of the *Kobzar*, Mr. Shevchenko, possesses not only a talent for writing Ukrainian verse, he is an artist in the full sense of the word. The author of the most sublime poem of our age, “The Last Day of Pompeii,” K. P. Briullov, is a genius – and the teacher of Mr. Shevchenko; one can learn much from such a teacher! The successes of the young artist-painter have not yet been exhibited before the public, but we can now enjoy his fresh gift of poetry in our native verse. These poems would do honor to any name in any literature.⁸

The absence of published Ukrainian reviews of the first *Kobzar* reflects the narrow institutional base, especially as regards journals and reviewers, in the emerging Ukrainian literature. In one real sense—i.e. in terms of confidence, self-worth and ambition—this literature was starting from Shevchenko and not his “Little Russian” precursors, Korliarevs’kyi, Kvitka, Hulak-Artemovs’kyi and others writing in the mode of *kotliarevshchyna*,⁹ and it was he who was postulating a separate path and “essence” for it. At this earliest stage his reception was recorded primarily in epistolary and memoiristic accounts, and by all indications was highly enthusiastic. This was soon to expand, however: in 1843 Mykola Kostomarov, who along with Shevchenko and Panteleimon Kulish was to become one of the founding fathers of the new Ukrainian literature, publishes in Russian the first literary-historical overview of the new Ukrainian literature, i.e., his “Obzor sochinenij pisannykh na malorosijskom jazyke,” and prominently focuses on the pathbreaking role of Shevchenko.¹⁰

The response to Shevchenko’s second major work, the poem *Haidamaky*, which was submitted to the censor in 1841 and published in April, 1842, was considerably broader and marked by sharp, and sharply polarized attention from Russian as well as Polish and Ukrainian critics. As I have argued elsewhere, by focusing on the recent traumatic past—the last of the bloody peasant uprisings of the 18th century, the *koliivshchyna* of 1768, which signaled the end of Ukraine’s Cossack period and the dissolution of her limited autonomy, and also foreshadowed the first of Poland’s partitions—Shevchenko was addressing fundamental issues, not just of the loss of freedom, but of the loss of memory, and all but explicitly positioning himself as a voice chosen by fate to reassert continuity and

8. Ibid.

9. I.e., the burlesque “style of Kotljarevs’kyi.”

10. Cf. Taras Shevchenko, *The Critical Reception*, vol. I, *The Contemporary Reception (1839-1861)*, p. 116-132; cf. esp. p. 128-129.

hope for a new beginning.¹¹ *Haidamaky* clearly solidified and expanded Shevchenko's prominence, especially among his Ukrainian readers. Discussions and polemics around the poem, especially by Polish and in time even more so by Ukrainian critics, continued well into the 20th century and ultimately marked out the canonic Ukrainian perspective on Shevchenko: in effect, *Haidamaky* became his best known, most often cited and defining work, that which made Shevchenko Shevchenko. In the process, however, the subtleties and deeper meaning of the poem were largely obscured by populist patriotism. The traditional reading of the poem, in both academic and popularizing commentary, saw it as a "historical" or even "historiosophic" work, and by reason of a putatively "scientific" perspective (in fact it was utilitarian or "ideological" and implicitly insensitive to the poem's deeper symbolic levels), ignored its manifest concern with the ability and sacred need to remember and the central experiential fact that the poem works to actualize collective memory and this becomes its key topos, and the poem itself—a central *lieu de memoire*.¹² Similarly, and consistent with the traditional instrumentalization of Shevchenko, seeing him, as Drahomanov observed as early as in 1879, as a surrogate of or emblem for various sectarian political views or ideologies, the basic archetypical and mythical code of his poetry, and in *Haidamaky* specifically the roles of expiation and sacrifice, were largely ignored.¹³

The long history of misreading the poem was to come later, however. The immediate irony and aporia was that in Shevchenko's lifetime *Haidamaky* was for all practical purposes the last major work to elicit not only a broad response, but, in effect, any considerable response at all. For the massive breakthrough that came with the poetry written in 1843-1845, called by Shevchenko, and the exegetic tradition, *Try lita* [Three years], was at the time known only to a handful of friends and close collaborators. The content of the poetry was such that it could never be submitted to the censor: from the perspective of the authorities (as was soon officially confirmed), it was sheer subversion.

The tradition of reading the poetry of *Try lita* as political and revolutionary goes back to the 19th century, especially the Ukrainian writer and critic Ivan Franko (1856-1916), and it was the centerpiece of the Soviet approach to Shevchenko. In essence, the core of this was true: the poetry excoriated the system, governance, value and ethos of the Russian Empire, precisely as a slave-owning Empire that had destroyed Ukraine and its freedoms even while mouthing Christian pieties. At the same time this poetry is much more than merely political. It is a moral indictment of tyranny, oppression and duplicity, *and* of the hypocrisy and cravenness of those Ukrainians that bow to it and collaborate with it and

11. Cf. Шевченкові «Гайдамаки»: поема і критика.

12. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 19-121.

13. Cf. М. Драгоманов, Шевченко, українофіли й соціалізм; cf. also my Шевченкові «Гайдамаки»: поема і критика, p. 270-306.

its pathos is cast precisely in the spirit of the biblical prophets called by God to awaken their people from moral turpitude. This prophetic voice, so clear and dominant in several key poems of the cycle, especially the Epistle “To my Living, Dead, and Still Unborn Countrymen, Both in Ukraine and Beyond” (1845) is itself a subset of a much broader modality and voice which Shevchenko had assumed at that time and which he would maintain to the end of his days, that which Michel Foucault has called *parrhesia*, speaking boldly, speaking truth to power—especially when it entails actual risk.¹⁴ To this we shall return.

The arrest of Shevchenko in April, 1847 in the suppression of the Brotherhood of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, and then the decision of the authorities that even while his membership in this secret society was not proven he was more than guilty by reason of his subversive poetry (which was never published, but which was discovered in his possession—i.e., the same *Try lita* collection), and then his subsequent ten year exile as a line private in the furthest, arid outposts of the Empire—with an additional prohibition to write and paint, attached by the Tsar himself, made him effectively a non-person;¹⁵ in the Russian Empire, for the duration of this sentence, Shevchenko’s poetry could neither be published or publicly discussed—especially in print.¹⁶ In a very real sense this entire period—both the ten years of exile, 1847-1857 and the years preceding it, of *Try lita* (1843-45) and the following two years when there was no public discussion of his new, subversive poetry—is forcefully removed from the reception process. And yet Shevchenko returns to freedom, as we have seen, an acknowledged national poet, martyr and prophet. The last three years of his life mark a further crystalization of his stature, but do not change it in any substantial way. The public fact of his return to freedom, unbowed and unrepentant, continually “dissident” (as a later locution would have it) must have surely impacted his image and status. But that does not change the proportions of the larger picture. The very brevity of his initial, lifetime reception, its minimalist cast—especially when juxtaposed to Shevchenko’s rapid and wide-ranging impact, the immediate “national” consensus as to his central role—suggests that the process was in a fundamental way also being molded by internal, intrinsic forces, by the poetry itself, by the poet’s own programming of his reception.

14. Michel Foucault, *Discourse and Truth: the Problematicization of Parrhesia*, 6 lectures given by Michel Foucault at the University of California at Berkeley, October-November, 1983. <http://foucault.info/documents/parrhesia/>

15. Cf. Кирило-мефодіївське товариство в трьох томах, Київ, 1990.

16. Cf. Тарас Шевченко в критиці, Київ, 2013.

PROGRAMMING THE RECEPTION: THE GENERAL CAST

In the most fundamental sense, and probably universally, a programming of the poet's reception comes from the poetry itself. (The notion of "programming" is intended here not in a mechanistic or deterministic way, but as a kind of insight, even "enlightenment" that once experienced cannot be forgotten and fundamentally colors subsequent experiences, especially with the poetry.) In Shevchenko's case it was conveyed by a general sense, shared by both his first positive Russian reviewers and his enthusiastic Ukrainian admirers, that in an unprecedented way his poetry drew on the direct, simple and authentic voice of the people, the *narod*. As Kostomarov was to put it later, this was the poetry that the *narod* would speak if it could speak like Shevchenko; it was the voice of the *narod*, but issuing from the lips of the poet.¹⁷ Behind the metaphor of speaking with the voice of the people, the *narod*, was the fact that *from the first*, from the earliest, extant, works that we have (the poem *Prychynna*, 1837) Shevchenko exhibited an unprecedented control of the language that is his medium. And thus the first impression of simplicity and directness was immediately matched with a sense of depth and of limitless potential. If, as many hold, the true locus of genius is in language, then this was the surest locus of the genius that was intuited and ever more frequently ascribed to him. The sense that no one knew the Ukrainian language like Shevchenko was present from the beginning and was articulated in such or another fashion by virtually everyone. Suddenly a new standard had emerged.

The second feature, which, however, became apparent only in time, was the formal complexity of Shevchenko's poetry, which both drew on Romantic conventions and was ever ready to transcend them and to anticipate later, even modernist innovations. Characteristically, this formal and aesthetic sophistication would speak particularly strongly to succeeding generations of poets and critics—and not only Ukrainian ones.¹⁸ In general, Shevchenko introduces various innovations in pacing and structure and especially in narrative and the use of voice, and in both shorter works and longer ones (particularly in *Haidamaky*), he would frame the narrative through different voices. While often drawing on intertexts (his first, seemingly altogether "folkloric" poem *Prychynna* begins with a subtly reworked passage from a work by the contemporary Ukrainian poet L. Borovykovs'kyj) he quickly expands this to include digressive irony and satiric polemics with critics (in the spirit of a Byron or a Słowacki) and further still to a specific focus on the very process of creating poetry (again, most prominently in *Haidamaky*, but in later poetry as well). In doing so he frequently

17. Cf. my "Insight and Blindness in the Reception of Ševčenko: The Case of Kostomarov." *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 17, no. 3/4, p. 279-340.

18. Among his many admirers in the 20th century, for example, was the eminent Russian poet Osip Mandelstam.

blurs two seemingly incommensurate and incompatible modes—the oral and the written. Throughout, Shevchenko writes his poetry in variants, resisting the notion of a fixed text: the poem is thus both a text and an oral performance (as of a folk minstrel, a *kobzar*), and above all an experience. Concurrently, as if stressing immediacy, he totally avoids canonic forms (sonnets, and so on) and is continually adapting and transgressing against various conventions (which his contemporary admirers and exegetes, like Kulish, and especially Drahomanov, are prone to consider a lack of discipline or “bohemian carelessness”). In all, a sense of poetic mastery, of the confidence of a strong poet, is evident from the beginning, from the very earliest, published poetry.

What was also more than evident to his contemporaries was his readiness to confront national history. Arguably, this readiness to address the collective experience, and to speak for the nation, is a kind of unwritten prerequisite in the discourse of the national poet, and in the case of Pushkin is apparent in various works, beginning with *Volnost' [Oda]*, 1818, where while still a youth, the poet speaks to and for the nation and its fate, and then the drama *Boris Godunov* (1831); for Mickiewicz it is expressed in such different works as *Konrad Wallenrod* (1828) where the poet-hero appears in a medieval mask, *Dziady* (especially pt. III; 1832), where his identification with the nation could not be more direct, as he says: “I and the fatherland are one./ I am called Million—because for millions/ I love and suffer torments,” and in *Pan Tadesz* (1834), where the poet is seemingly elided from the picture (which in the end he himself calls attention to with what appears like false modesty), but where the collective experience is totally thematized and indeed totalizing. For Shevchenko, a broadly articulated engagement with the collective past and collective memory appears already in *Haidamaky*, and the mythical cast and transcendent claim to speak for the nation beyond the confines of time and space is quintessentially evident in the very title of his Epistle, “To my Living, Dead and Still Unborn Countrymen, Both in Ukraine and Beyond it,” and continues to develop in later works.

What from our perspective are now the defining features of Shevchenko’s poetry—a radical emphasis on the psychological, and especially on the fraught psychic process of making poetry, of constructing the text out of suffering and as healing on the one hand, and on the other the encoding of it in the language of archetypes and myth—were exceedingly slow in formulation in the course of Shevchenko studies and still make up its mainstream. In fact, they were consistently ignored by the populist and then the ideological (Soviet and nationalist) perspectives that dominated Shevchenko studies and still are not the mainstream. But two other moments were noticed—they could not but be. One was Shevchenko’s unmistakable focus on his autobiography, his overriding concern with his fate and his life’s vicissitudes. No sensitive reader of his work could avoid seeing the centrality of this theme—which is not confined, moreover, to his poetry, but extends to the prose and to the painting as well. We can

now formulate it not just as a theme, but as a defining trope of symbolic autobiography, whereby the fate of the poet and the fate of the nation are ineluctably bound together, whereby his ordeal and redemption recapitulate those of the collective. In Shevchenko's early, pre-exile work this is expressed most clearly and programmatically in the long Russian-language poem *Trizna* (1843) which directly addresses the question of prophetic calling, of a search for the sacred (!) Word. In his later exilic and post-exilic work the question of the poet's mission becomes more diffuse and more ambient: in a sense it infuses all of his later poetry. If one looks more strictly for symbolic coding by way of narrative, it is most evident in the two versions of the long poem *Moskaleva krynytsia* (1847 and 1857) as well as in such long poems as *Neofity* (1857) and *Maria* (1859).

The other moment that could not be ignored or brushed aside was Shevchenko's powerful focus on Ukraine, her experiences, especially her trauma, her subjugation and destruction in the past and especially in the present. In itself, of course, this was a profoundly revolutionary act: his Ukrainian readers, and especially his contemporaries—the first to be exposed to his poetry—were not only aware of this, but overwhelmed by it. The question for many was not whether his prophetic and in many respects apocalyptic message was perceived or felt to be true; the question was how to process it. This would become a constant issue for the Shevchenko reception.

“MICROPROGRAMMING” THE RECEPTION
THE ROLE OF *Haidamaky* AND *TRY LITA*

As noted, the poem *Haidamaky*, which at its writing is basically coterminous with the *Kobzar* of 1840, already at this very early stage projects in highly developed form the author/poet's involvement with and preliminary program for the broad collective, in effect, the nation. While depicting in augmented apocalyptic tones the bloody uprising, the destruction that brought on not just the end of Cossack Ukraine, but of Poland as well, he repeatedly stresses his central message: as bloody and terrible as the uprising was, no one now remembers its causes, its suffering, its protagonists; it is as if it never happened. And in that forgetting, that indifference to the past one loses—the collective loses—its very sense of identity.¹⁹ Cossacks are turned into peasants, ensnared in an endless, cyclical routine of plowing and reaping, with no memory even of the power that they once had of determining their own fate.²⁰ It is a karma or curse that for Shevchenko is quintessentially Ukrainian: grand, heroic efforts, as with the

19. Cf. Шевченкові «Гайдамаки»: поема і критика, p. 211-239 and passim.

20. Cf. lines 1189-1224; cf. also *ibid.*, p. 222-239.

Khmelnyc'kyj uprising of the mid-17th century, that witness brief glory and then again revert to defeat, decline and ultimately enslavement. In this morose picture the author has a sublime and overarching task: to restore memory and with it a sense of identity and will. This is not only repeatedly stressed in the numerous digressions and various depictions in the poem, it is also strategically thematized. In what is perhaps the earliest instance of Shevchenko's construction of symbolic autobiography, he inserts himself at the very end of the poem into the narrative as the young child who heard his grandfather's tales of the *koliivshchyna* and is now passing on that hallowed message to his audience—implicitly the nation as such.²¹ That message is revisited and reconfigured in a direct address to the reader in the prose section, ironically called the “Foreword” (*Peredmova*), that closes the poem. Here, speaking primarily in the voice of the poet (but with clear echoes, too, of the *kobzar*-minstrel, a man of the people), the narrator enjoins the former enemies, Poles and Ukrainian, to again be brothers, and does so specifically in response to the question that perhaps such dark moments in the past are better forgotten: “The heart aches, but one must tell the story: let the sons and grandsons see that their fathers were wrong, let them again be brothers with their enemies.”²²

The apocalyptic cathexis that was accumulated in *Haidamaky*, and especially the poem's final dark and ritualized sacrifice, where the *haidamak* leader Gonta kills his sons because they were Catholics and thus Poles (cf. the last section “Gonta in Uman”) and with this sacrifice echoes not so much Gogol's *Taras Bul'ba*, but the much more fundamental and archetypal (near) sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham—because it was God's will—cannot but spill over into later works. The overall message here, couched in the archetype of child sacrifice and the promise of resurrection that it essentially contains,²³ could not be merely set aside and disposed as a mere literary theme or topos to be replaced by another mere theme or topos. That is not the code of Shevchenko's poetry, and in keeping with that higher coding the afterlife of *Haidamaky*, and its apocalyptic and eschatological features, and especially the moment of sacrifice and self-sacrifice—specifically for the cause that is Ukraine—become pronounced and thoroughly impact the following mature poetry of *Try lita* and beyond.

Echoes of *Haidamaky*, occur in various later poetic works, but especially in the poetry of *Try lita*, and their nuances mark a new trajectory of Shevchenko's sense of the purpose of his poetry and of his calling as a poet. An early significant echo occurs in the short poem *Hoholju* (1844) which begins as a meditation-lament on human indifference and passivity in the face of injustice (“All are

21. Cf. lines 2389-2417; cf. also *ibid.*, p. 211-239.

22. Cf. PZTVShT, Vol. 1, pg. 512.

23. Jon D. Levenson's, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, New Haven, 1993, which figures prominently in my discussion of child sacrifice in “Haidamaky.”

deaf, and bowed in chains...”), their unwillingness to hear his word, which then turns to the differing responses of the two writers: Gogol’s satiric laughter and Shevchenko’s tears. The latter half of the poem (lines 15-28) presents a darkly ironic negation: no, the old days when a father would kill a son for treason (an echo of *Taras Bul’ba* and implicitly *Haidamaky*) are gone; now he will lovingly, and for the glory of the state, sell him to be killed in the muscovite slaughter house (which is the whole machine of Empire, but which may well allude to the war in the Caucasus where his friend Iakiv de Balmen was in fact killed a few months later). While contrasting the laughter and tears of respectively Gogol and Shevchenko, the poem also establishes parity between them by repeatedly referring to the older and already canonic writer as the poet’s brother; in fact it is part of Shevchenko’s strategy of self-assertion and inscription into the canon (cf. also his earlier *Na vichnu pam’jat’ Koltjarevs’komu* [In memory of Kotljarevs’kyj] and *Do Osnov’janenka* [To Osnov’janenko]).

Echoes of *Haidamaky* are no less pronounced in the poem *Kholodnyj jar* [The Cold Ravine; 1845], which refers to the place where in 1768 the *haidamak* uprising actually began and which invokes the names of the uprising’s leaders, Zaliznjak and Gonta, but more importantly expands on the notion of an apocalyptic, divinely sanctioned reckoning. What begins again as a meditation on the past and the fact that nothing is learned from it (the paths of the Cold Ravine have long been totally overgrown) turns into a direct address and warning—to the new masters, the new exploiters who have replaced the Polish gentry of the old regime:

*Стережіться ж,
Бо лихо вам буде,
Тяжке лихо!.. Дурить дітей
І брата сліпого,
Дурить себе, чужих людей,
Та не дурить Бога.
Бо в день радості над вами
Розпадеться кара.
І повіє огонь новий
З Холодного Яру.
(lines 75-84)*

Be warned,
For woe will be your lot,
A heavy lot. Go fool your children
And your blind brother,
Go fool yourselves, and strangers.
But don’t fool God.
For in your reveling his wrath
Will strike you down.
And new flames will burst
From the Cold Ravine.

The vision of Biblical punishment, the *herem*, which was so central to *Haidamaky*, is now projected onto the present, and the poet’s high calling is to express it on behalf of the entire oppressed collective—as a warning to the oppressors. In the “realist” and ideological mode, and especially in Soviet discourse, this has long been cast as evidence for Shevchenko’s revolutionism. Taken without its affective and symbolic context, however, relying only on the nominal surface of what is presented, this argument becomes reductive, distortive, and grist for the mill for grossly extra-literary and extra-scholarly purposes.

The postulate of “revolutionism” certainly cannot answer why in his later articulations of punishment and renewal (for example, already in *Neofity* [The Neophytes, 1857] and then in *Molytva* [A Prayer; 1860]) Shevchenko introduces as a still higher quality the moment of forgiveness—other than to ascribe it to a “faltering” of his vision or to mere “error.” For its part, in the poetry of *Try lita* the impending apocalyptic judgement is intrinsically tied to the crystallization of the role of the poet-prophet as the one who will articulate and frame that judgement. Thus in *Chyhryne, Chyhryne*, which is written almost two years earlier than *Kholodnyj Jar* (February, 1844) and which after *Rozryta Mohyla* [The Open Grave; October 1843] most directly addresses the total destruction of Ukraine in the present, that moment of defining the poet’s role becomes central. Its context is a lament-dialogue with the town of Chyhryn, which was once the capitol of the Cossack government, the residence of Bohdan Khmelnyc’kyj, and which at the writing of the poem is a decrepit and miserable provincial town—emblematic of a degraded and provincial Ukraine and a setting of utter amnesia: “No one is here to say a word,/ And no one rightly knows/ Where was it that you stood,/ Why you were even there./ They cannot say it even as a joke” (cf. lines 11-16). As with the prophet Jeremiah in the Hebrew Bible, the poet’s role here is to weep over the ruins of his culture—but also to hope that his word, which is now manifest as tears, will be sown, and from it (echoing the myth of Jason and the sowing of dragon’s teeth) will emerge knives that will provide a symbolic transfusion of blood, for the collective Ukrainian heart, letting out the rotten and infusing pure and holy Cossack blood:

*А на перелозі...
Я посію мої сльози,
Мої щирі сльози.
Можє, зійдуть, і виростуть
Ножі обоюдні,
Розпанахають погане,
Гниле серце, трудне...
І вицідять сукровату,
І наллють живої
Козацької тії крові,
Чистої, святої!!!*
(lines 59-70)

And on the earth
I'll sow my tears
My heartfelt tears
Perhaps they'll serve to grow a crop
Of double-edged knives
That'll open up that fetid heart
And spill the noxious blood
And fill it then with living Cossack
Blood that's pure and sacred.

While the echo of the blessing of the knives from *Haidamaky* is apparent, their function here is quite different: not killing, but transformation and salvation, which also resonates with the poem’s final hope that he will leave a legacy of a word that is “meek and God-fearing” [slovo tykho-sumne/ Bohobojazlyve].

The poem—“mystery,” *The Great Crypt* [Velykyj l’okh; 1845] continues the deep eschatological undercurrent of the poetry of *Try lita* and expands it with a symbolic and archetypal evocation of the imminent birth of twins that will mark out Ukraine’s future, in effect a struggle between the two symbolic antipodes

of the collective: one of the twins will be a new Gonta who will fight Ukraine's oppressors, and the other one will instead help them.²⁴ That opposition is also Ukraine's aporia: the national collective unconscious, symbolized by the "great crypt," is suspended between these contradictory alternatives and as if paralyzed in its torpor—just as is the Ukraine of Shevchenko's time. But as the pendant, or coda to the poem indicates (i.e., *There Stands in the Village of Subotiv* [Stojit' v seli Subotovi]) this impasse is resolved through Divine Providence—which is also the first articulation of Shevchenko's millenarian vision²⁵:

<p><i>Встане Україна. І розвіє тьму неволі, Світ правди засвітить, І помоляться на волі Невольничі діти!...</i> (lines 44-48)</p>	<p>Ukraine will rise up And dispel the darkness of slavery And light the beacon of justice And the children of slaves will pray in Freedom...</p>
---	---

Underlying the millenarian vision, enabling its agency, as it were, is the crystallization of the poet's prophetic voice, which with various nuances is being articulated throughout the poetry of *Try lita*. Its most dramatic and symbolically charged locus is, appropriately enough, the last poem of this period and cycle, i.e., the *Testament* ("Jak umru to poxovajte..."), written on Christmas Day, 1845.²⁶ In what has become in time perhaps the most canonic of Shevchenko's poem's, serving as a kind of unofficial national anthem, *The Testament*, while nominally expressing the poet's last will, to be buried on the banks of the Dnieper—which was in fact literally carried out after the poet's death—is also a symbolic rendition of his preternaturally chosen role as spokesman of the nation. His final resting place allows him to commune with all of Ukraine:

<p><i>Як умру, то поховайте Мене на могилі Серед степу широкого На Вкраїні милій, Щоб лани широкополі, І Дніпро, і кручі Було видно, було чути, Як реве ревучий.</i></p>	<p>When I am dead then bury me Atop a burial mound Amid the boundless steppe And in Ukrainian ground, So I can see the distant fields, The Dnipro and his cliffs And so that I can also hear His ceaseless rushing roar.</p>
--	--

24. As all archetypes, this one, too, is bipolar – evincing both a "high" and "uplifting" side and a "dark" and "shadowed" one. The mother, to take a universal archetype, and one prominent in Shevchenko's poetry, repeatedly shades off into the witch. Cf. C.G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Bollingen Series, *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Vol. 9, Part 1, Princeton, 1959.

25. Its full and programmatic articulation occurs only in the late post-exilic poetry; cf. my *Poet as Myth-maker*, Cambridge, 1982, Chapter 4, "The Millenarian Vision."

26. While in the Ms. collection/album *Три літа* it is followed by the long poem *The Heretic* [Jeretyk], that was written a month earlier: November 22, 1845.

From his vantage point atop a high burial mound he will see the entire countryside *and* implicitly stand guard over the collective—for when the river carries into the sea the blood of the last battle (the blood of enemies) will he be able to depart and “come to know” (merge with) God:

<i>Як понесе з України</i>	And when he's taken from Ukraine
<i>У синє море</i>	Into the deep blue sea
<i>Кров ворожу... отойді я</i>	The blood of enemies – then
<i>І лани і гори –</i>	Will I depart the fields and hills
<i>Все покину, і полину</i>	And fly to God himself
<i>До самого Бога</i>	To pray...but until then
<i>Молитися... а до того</i>	I don't know God.
<i>Я не знаю Бога.</i>	

Only then can his message—in effect, the full significance of his life and his calling—be fully actualized. In effect his legacy is that of national liberation—reformulating the Christological image of “being washed in the blood of the Lamb”—by being washed and sanctified in the higher truth of the new national identity, “a family new and free.”

<i>Поховайте та вставайте,</i>	Bury me and then rise up
<i>Кайдани порвіте</i>	And break apart your chains
<i>І вражою злою кров'ю</i>	And with the enemy's black blood
<i>Волю окропіте.</i>	Confirm your liberty.
<i>І мене в сем'ї великій,</i>	And in the great community
<i>В сем'ї вольній, новій,</i>	A family new and free
<i>Не забудьте пом'янути</i>	With calm and quiet words
<i>Незлим тихим словом.</i>	Be sure to mention me.

The poet's transformation into an agent of redemption, and the functional role of a prophet, is thus given directly and with utter limpidity.

In the larger picture of Shevchenko's symbolic autobiography and his self-fashioning through his poetry the most crucial moment occurs in the period of exile when with a rare intensity he confronts his psyche and especially the Shadow, as Jungian psychoanalysis sees it, and through the pain of doubt and the energy of contemplation turns the writing of poetry into a form of prayer and proceeds to examine and exorcise the contents of the archetypal Shadow. This clearly deserves separate and more detailed treatment—especially since it is a subject virtually ignored, if not explicitly taboo, in the traditional approaches to Shevchenko.²⁷ But one can already note that this ordeal and the individuation that it projected—even if it was apprehended and conceptualized only partially by his immediate, contemporary audience—was instrumental in conferring on Shevchenko the status of martyr and prophet.²⁸ Central to this was a deeply

27. Cf. Hryhorij Hrabovych [George G. Grabowicz], “Архетипи Шевченка”, *Шевченківська енциклопедія*, vol. 1, (éd.) M. G. Žulins'kij (et alii), Kyiv, Nauková dumka, p. 253-271.

28. Cf. n. 6, above.

intuited, collective (and probably universally human) sense that these matters cannot be forced or faked: the role of national poet, or prophet—as a specific and highly potent subset of culture hero—must be seen as earned and not merely claimed by rhetorical or intellectual means.²⁹

THE IMMEDIATE POSTHUMOUS RECEPTION:
PROJECTING THE NUMINOUS

The intrinsic, poetic self-fashioning of Shevchenko as National Poet, is evident. It is also inherently circular: the poetry's discrete but inordinately powerful vision clearly projects this path, but it remains self-contained and no mechanism of its transmission to a broad readership is readily apparent. Between the intrinsic and transcendent cast of the poetry on the one hand, and the extrinsic and empirical reception proper on the other, there still appears a gap. And yet a link or bridging can be discerned and it is the already noted Brotherhood or Society of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, which had inordinate importance both for Shevchenko's biography and for the framing of his reception.

The facts of the Brotherhood and of Shevchenko's role in it are relatively straightforward, although some key moments still remain murky. Throughout 1846 and early 1847, in Kyiv, a group of young Ukrainian intellectuals would meet in secret to discuss matters ethical and political, among them a possible Slavic confederation, with a religious coloration; the Ukrainian past, Ukrainian national interests, popular democracy and their promulgation; reform in Russia, and especially the abolition of serfdom, and so on. A guiding force in the Society was the future Ukrainian and Russian historian Mykola Kostomarov, already known as a poet and literary critic. Panteleimon Kulish, who in time emerged as the major (after Shevchenko) presence in the Ukrainian national revival of the 19th century was physically absent from Kyiv at this time—but he was a real presence in the Society's discussions by way of letters and exchange of texts. Other prominent members were Mykola Hulak and Vasyl Bilozers'kyj; Shevchenko also participated in various meetings. By the mere fact of meeting in secret and discussing such fraught issues the Society was political and thus implicitly criminal—especially in the reactionary reign of Nicholas I marked by its primal trauma of the Decembrist uprising of 1825, the Polish uprising of 1830-1831, and the suppression of various subsequent groups and activities deemed to be subversive.

The core of the Society's ethos is expressed in its basic document, *The Books of Genesis of the Ukrainian People* [Knyhy bytija ukrains'koho narodu], which was authored by Mykola Kostomarov as an adaptation and strategic recasting of Adam Mickiewicz's well-known *Books of the Polish Nation and the Polish*

29. The attempt by the Polish Romantic poet Zygmunt Krasiński to implement the notion of "three national poets" (or *wieszcz's*) and its dubious persuasiveness seem to testify to this.

Pilgrimage [Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego] (1832). The treatise is dominated (in Kostomarov more than in Mickiewicz) by Evangelical religiosity, with history seen as the workings of Divine Providence and the principle of “the last shall be first,” and its concluding Gospel (Matthew 21: 42), and Psalms (118: 22), dictum that the stone that the builders rejected shall become the cornerstone of a new edifice, highlighting Ukraine’s status as the first victim of despotic rule, i.e., both under Muscovy-Russia and gentry Poland, that is now chosen to serve as a model for a resurgent Slavdom. The overall millenarian tone of *The Books of Genesis of the Ukrainian People* is also essentially linked to the legacy of Ukrainian Cossack egalitarianism³⁰; in a word, the coming national revival is made a function both of Divine Providence and the preceding national suffering and ordeal—and thus doubly inevitable.

As fundamental as this first modern Ukrainian articulation of collective identity was for later political developments, it remained essentially an archival fact: the legacy of the Society emerged only in the early 20th century—and the full record only in 1990.³¹ Its actual dissemination, however, did occur—precisely through the poetry of Shevchenko, which predated, inspired and shaped the program of the Cyrilo-Methodians and which with progressively greater force began to reach a broad reading public in the decades immediately after Shevchenko’s death. But, as we shall see, this process was far more complex and synergistic than we have for so long assumed.

On March 3, 1846 a student at Kyiv University denounced the Society to the authorities and in the course of the next weeks all of its members, and many who were not members, were arrested and brought to St. Petersburg for the inquest. Shevchenko was arrested on April 5, 1847 with the Ms. album of his *Try lita* in his possession; the evidence of subversive content was incontrovertible: the poetry not only could not have passed censorship; as noted, it essentially questioned the moral and existential status of the Empire, literally seeing it as the heart of darkness. The inquest lasted from March 30 to the end of May, 1847 (with the police and the Tsar as both prosecutor and judge—and jury as well). The main members received sentences of varying severity—imprisonment of a year or so and exile into the provinces of Russia. Shevchenko, whom the inquest found not to be an actual member of the Society was nonetheless judged most harshly for his poetry, which was deemed utterly seditious and its satire of the Tsar and

30. Cf. article 72: And Ukraine did not love either Tsar or lord, but created for herself Cosackdom, which is a true brotherhood, where each who joined became a brother to the others – even if before he was either lord or slave, as long as he was a Christian, and all Cosacks were equal, and their leaders were elected at a Council and were obliged to serve all according to Christ’s word, and no noble pomp or titles existed among the Cossacks. (І не любила Україна ні царя, ні пана, а скомпонувала собі козацтво, єсть то істєє брацтво, куди кожний пристаючи, був братом других – чи був він преж того паном, чи невольником, аби християнин, і були козаки між собою всі рівні, і старшини вибирались на раді і повинні були слугувати всім по слову Христовому, і жадної помпи панської і титула не було між козаками).

31. Cf. *Кирило-мефодіївське товариство*, op. cit.

his family all but sacrilegious. As noted, his sentence was most severe in being open-ended—and he was expressly forbidden to write and to paint. (Shevchenko proceeded to consistently violate both injunctions.)

Shevchenko's impact on the Society and the legacy he left for it can be summarized in several key moments. Most importantly, his relationship with the Society became profoundly synergistic: his impact on it was transformed into a rearticulation of his meaning—which in turn became the matrix for Shevchenko's overall reception as national poet. The steps along this path are the following:

1. Shevchenko's poetry of the *Try lita* period clearly predated and in manifold ways anticipated the postulates of the Cyrilo-Methodian Society, particularly as expressed in the *Knyhy bytija*. This relates above all to the sacred cast of Ukraine, her suffering and imminent resurrection, and along with that the transcendent qualities of freedom and equality that defined the Cossacks who exemplified Ukraine and her "political" (or more precisely her archetypal, male) essence. (To be sure, the theme of "holy freedom" is already voiced in *Haidamaky* and becomes progressively fleshed out in the later poetry.) Whether this "influence" comes only from Shevchenko is a separate question (and one should guard against a *post hoc* reading): the idea of resurrectionism was clearly part of the intellectual and eschatological climate of the time and its recent articulation was contained in the already mentioned *Księgi narodu i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* of Mickiewicz. But influence queue aside, the importance of Shevchenko's formulation—especially in light of the poetic power and resonance in which it was couched—seems unquestionable.

From memoirs and other sources we know that in the course of 1846 (and possibly in the preceding months) members of the Society participated in Shevchenko's readings of his poetry—and in the copying of his texts which would then circulate in ms. form; this is particularly attested for his *Epistle* [Poslanije], which was finished on Dec. 14, 1845 and which had a dramatic effect on the listeners.³² In short, to the extent that he entered the Society, Shevchenko did so not as a "novice" but as a celebrity, as a poet with a formidable reputation. By all indications, his impact on the "brothers" was transformative—and this, indeed, become the centerpiece of the canonizing narratives that emerged after his death.

2. What is crucial here is that this poetry could only be heard and absorbed as a unity, as a "package deal." It was not only of a piece, it was totalizing. Given its archetypal and mythical structure, the dominance of the affective and its intense psychological cathexis, and not least of all aspects of oral and dramatic construction, it was a poetry that insisted on being received as an experience—even an epiphany. It still functions in this fashion when it is read.

32. Cf. ZTShT, vol. 1, p. 737-738.

3. Central within the poetic message was the projection of the poet charged with the ordeal and the sacred task of discovering and promulgating the Word that would transform the consciousness of men.³³ This is the repeated message of numerous poems, especially of the *Try lita* period, and it continues and develops to the very end of his life. It is a message that once heard cannot be unheard. As noted, the issue for the listener was not whether one was affected by it, but only the degree to which one was transformed by it. The implicitly illegal, subversive nature of the poetry was itself highly selective and transformative of its audience: to come close to the poetry was to become a believer, a “neophyte” as a later Shevchenko poem would put it. Building on the Romantic and all-Russian cult of genius and poetry, and amplified by the manifest and unprecedented parrhesia that the poetry expressed, exposure to the poetry also implied becoming a witness to prophecy.

4. That ambient internal and psychological sense was adumbrated by the trial and its outcome: that Shevchenko was the least cowed and repentant, and that he received the harshest sentence, was apparently felt by all, especially his comrades from the Society. The period of exile and the injunction against mentioning his name did turn him into a non-person in the censored discourse of that time, but as soon as that injunction was lifted and his freedom imminent, Shevchenko was immediately restored to his status of hero and martyr. (That in the background, for his closest friends who survived the debacle with much less pain, there may have also been a sense of guilt vis a vis the poet who took the brunt of despotic punishment is an issue that is both central and hard to assess.) By the time of his actual return to St. Petersburg Shevchenko’s acclaim in all-Russian society as the Ukrainian national poet was all but universal.

5. For Kulish and Kostomarov, who had been closest to Shevchenko in the Society, and who now had become the central spokesmen of the Ukrainian national revival, there was also a sense of fraught chosenness—as to Shevchenko and to themselves as well. While all too conscious of his human imperfections they also fully felt his singularity, the fact that he occupied a unique place in the literature and national revival they were championing. His death galvanized that sense and implicitly turned them into his first exegetes. In their immediate responses to his death they both instinctively couched their grief and their vision of

33. Discovering and defining the nature of this Word is the central topos of Shevchenko’s poetry and images and iterations of its role abound. One of the more poignant of these is in the exile poem *Марина* (1848) where the poet directly addresses God to give his words the power to break through to the frozen human heart – to teach it compassion for fellow man.:

<i>Мій Боже милий,</i>	Dear God
<i>Даруй словам святу ю силу –</i>	Allow my words the holy power
<i>Людське серце пробивать,</i>	To pierce the human heart,
<i>Людські сльози проливать,</i>	To shed real human tears,
<i>Щоб милость душу осітила...</i>	So grace can fortify the soul...

(ll. 122-126.)

Shevchenko's role in a numinous mode, implicitly articulating a new all but religious sense of the poet-prophet. As Kostomarov put it, echoing the Gospels (Mathew 27, 51):

Shevchenko's muse tore in two the veil of national life. It was terrifying and sweet and painful and fascinating to peer inside.³⁴

Kulish no less so draws on the sense of the transcendent:

Shevchenko is our great poet and our first historian. It was Shevchenko who was the first to ask our mute burial mounds what they were, and it was to him alone that they gave their answer, clear as God's word.³⁵

As much as the subsequent reception, and the cult of Shevchenko within it, were tinged by the usual mythologizing and hagiographic responses that attend the memory of national heroes, the traces of the original poetic vision that underlies them are also distinct and striking.

34. М. І. Костомаров, "Воспоминание о двух малярах," *Основа*, St. Petersburg, vol. 4, 1861, p. 48-50.

35. «Слово над гробом Шевченка», *Твори Пантелеймона Куліша*, Lviv, vol. 6, 1910, p. 495-496.