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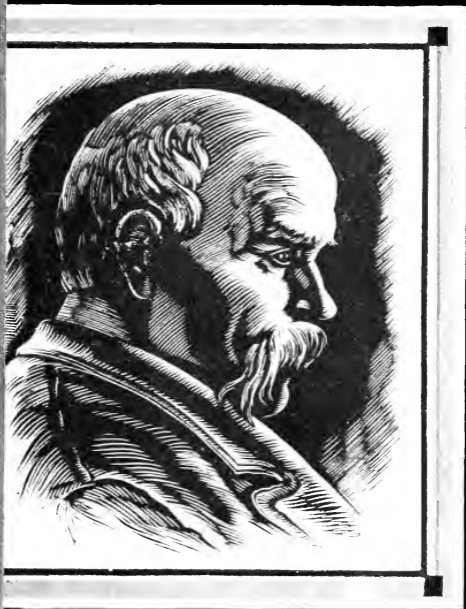
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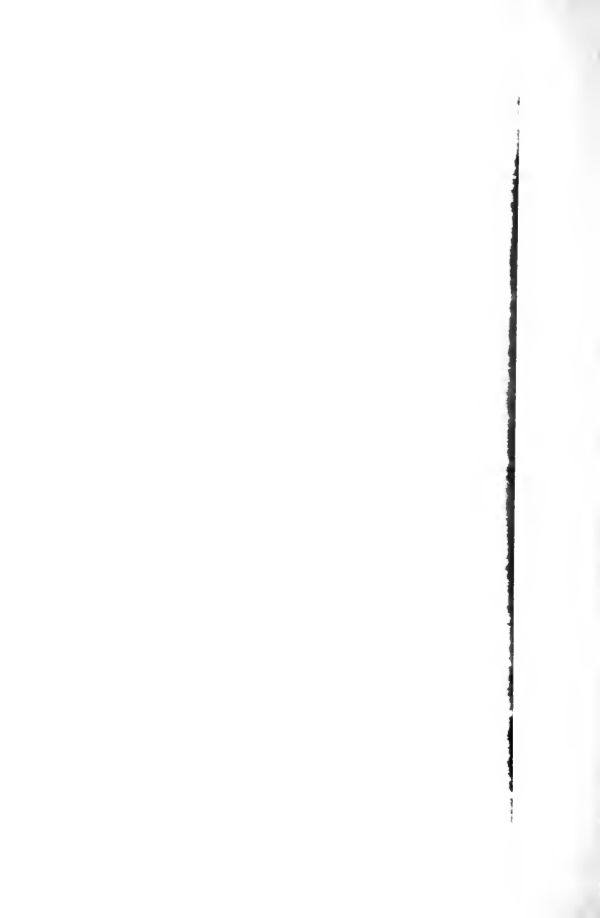
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Maxim Rylsky
Alexander Deutsch



TARAS
SHEVCHENKO



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TARAS SHEVCHENKO.
Self-portrait, 1840. Oil

MAXIM RYLSKY, ALEXANDER DEUTCH

**TARAS
SHEVCHENKO**

A Biographical Sketch

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M O S C O W

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ТАРАС ШЕВЧЕНКО
Биографический очерк

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INTRODUCTION

Years and centuries pass, generations succeed one another, but great works of art remain, long surviving their creators, and the message they bring is fresh in each new age. The specific features of the life portrayed in them have long since become a thing of the past, but the ideas and thoughts of their authors are always directed towards the future, and in this lies their significance for the new generations.

The writings of the great poet of the Ukrainian people, Taras Grigoryevich Shevchenko, belong to that category of world-important works.

Not far from the ancient city of Kiev, on a green hill beside Kanev, stands the bronze figure of the poet. High above the Dnieper River his grave-mound rises on the spot where Shevchenko had dreamed of building a home for himself. The majestic monument faces the Dnieper, and as the motor vessel smoothly glides along the silver-crested waves, the passengers' eyes are glued to

the verdant hills and picturesque villages, and to the gigantic statue of the poet, lit up by the rays of the sun.

Truly, a poetic place was selected for the poet's eternal resting-place!

In 1845, when he was thirty, Shevchenko wrote in "My Testament":

*When I am dead, then bury me
In my beloved Ukraine,
My tomb upon a grave mound high
Amid the spreading plain,
So that the fields, the boundless steppes,
The Dnieper's plunging shore
My eyes could see, my ears could hear
The mighty river roar.*

In his mind's eye Shevchenko visualised the steep bank of the Dnieper. Endless fields stretch to the horizon, while below him clamour the waters of the broad river, its waves rising and hurling themselves at the bank with a roar. Then, rising above the rumble of the Dnieper's waves, voices full of wrath and hate are heard—the people rise up against their enslavers, they break their chains, and then, free, surge forward to a new, happy life. . . .

From the agitated heart of the inspired poet poured verses that were to become a behest to the people forever:

*. . . Rise ye up
And break your heavy chains,
And water with the tyrant's blood
The freedom you have gained.
And in the great new family,
The family of the free,
With softly spoken, kindly word
Remember also me.*

That ardent call for the unity and friendship of all the peoples resounded more than a hundred years ago.

Shevchenko lived in a grim epoch. The brilliant Russian poet Pushkin was killed in a duel, hounded to death by the court nobility. His contemporary Lermontov met a similar tragic end. Many another writer and public figure in Russia was sentenced to hard labour, thrown into prison, their lives cut short by the autocracy in one way or another. Shevchenko's life was also thorny. For the first twenty-four years of his life (1814-1838) he was a serf and was compelled to suffer beatings, humiliations and petty tyranny from his landowner master. For more than ten years (1847-1857) he languished in exile in the distant Aral, Caspian and Orenburg steppes, where he was transported to serve as a private in the tsar's army.

The great people's poet possessed tremendous moral strength. Despite Tsar Nicholas I's personal order prohibiting him to write and paint, during the difficult years of exile and army drilling he created works marked by outstanding revolutionary power and indomitable courage. He wrote in the damp prison cell of the Third Department (political police) of "His Majesty's Personal Office" during the investigation of his case. He wrote in the sun-scorched steppes outside the walls of Orsk fortress. And he wrote in distant Fort Novopetrovsk on the uninhabited shore of the Caspian Sea. The poet inscribed his profound poetry in little note-books which he himself fashioned and which he kept hidden in his bootleg.

In his autobiography Taras Shevchenko wrote: "The history of my life is part of the history of my homeland." In these words is revealed the meaning of his life's journey, of his public activity and of his literary work.

CHILDHOOD

Taras Grigoryevich Shevchenko was born on March 9th, 1814 in the village of Morintsy near Kiev. He was the son of a serf peasant and belonged, as did all his family, to the big landowner, Baron Engelhardt. Soon after the birth of Taras, the Shevchenko family moved to the village of Kirillovka, which was owned by that same landowner.

A sensitive and pensive lad, Taras Shevchenko early experienced want, privations and the intolerable oppression of serfdom. His condition became still worse when at nine years of age he lost his mother, and his father, left with five children on his hands, brought a stepmother into the house. That ill-tempered woman, saddled with a large family, was especially harsh in her treatment of Taras. She was irritated by his day-dreaming, his passionate disposition and his freedom-loving and imaginative nature.

Two years later his father also died, and the boy became a complete orphan. The poet later wrote of his father's death:

*He could not stand his bitter lot
And died at work in servitude.*

From early childhood Taras displayed a passion for learning, music and drawing. He was especially sensitive to the bright and joyous nature of the Ukraine. Shevchenko's homeland, the Zvenigorod District of Kiev Province, was noted for its scenery. Talking of his childhood in later years, Shevchenko loved to recall the poor old hut where he had lived, the apple-tree with red-cheeked apples beside it, the gentle brook murmuring in the dale, and the steppes that spread outside the village, dotted with dark grave-mounds of Ukrainian Cossacks.

In many of his lyrical verses ("To A. O. Kozachkovsky", "I Was Thirteen...", "We Grew Up Together" and others) Shevchenko vividly describes the beautiful nature of Ukraine, the quaint loveliness of the villages and the mound-strewn steppes. Against the background of that scenic, sunny Ukraine stands out the image of that "poor, unsmiling peasant" who "has wrapped himself in that magnificent, eternally-smiling nature, and sings his doleful, heartfelt songs of hope for a better life".



Дом Шевченка

в Кирилловке

SHEVCHENKO'S CHILDHOOD HOME IN KIRILLOVKA.
1843. Pencil drawing by T. Shevchenko

In Shevchenko's autobiographical works (lyrics and novels) the time when little Taras, tattered and hungry, roamed over his home Kirillovka district in search of shelter and a crust of black bread is convincingly described. Polemising with authors of elegies and idylls, who painted the Ukrainian village of that time in rosy hues, Shevchenko wrathfully stated: "Twas there, in that wee house, that Eden fair, that I knew hell. . . ."

That hell was the incredibly hard slave labour of the serf parents, and the semi-starvation of their children. The poet wrote:

*That little cottage by the grove
Which you call paradise—I know.
In such a cottage once I dwelt,
And there my first hot tears were spilt,
My carly tears! I know no vice,
No wrong or evil anywhere
That's not within that cottage fair. . .
And yet they call it paradise!
I do not speak of that wee house
Outside the village, by the copse,
As though 'twere paradise on earth.
'Twas there my mother gave me birth,
And crooning as her child she nursed,
She passed her pain to me. . . 'Twas there,
In that wee house, that Eden fair,
That I knew hell. . . There people slave
Without a let-up night and day,
Not even given time to pray.
In that same village to her grave
My gentle mother, young in years,
Was laid by toil and want and tears. . .
My blood runs cold when I recall
That cottage in the village fair!*

In spite of all this, the “fair-haired sprig of a boy”, as Shevchenko wrote of himself, displayed a great deal of high spirits.

Day-dreaming and love of life were characteristic of Shevchenko from childhood. Once he set off to

find the "iron pillars" on the other side of the hills, which, he had been told, hold up the sky. He walked and walked until he was picked up and brought home late at night by some peasants.

After the death of his mother and father, his home was nearly always a "hell" for the orphan lad.

In order to get rid of an extra mouth to feed, his stepmother sent Taras off to be a shepherd. The boy spent his days from morning to night in the pasture where only the grave-mounds "stand and sorrow". He had a boundless love for the steppeland spaces and the warm, scented air of the fields. Later, far from home, in cold St. Petersburg, that love provided inexhaustible nourishment for creative inspiration of the poet.

Wandering blind bards—"kobzars"—often visited the village. For a copper coin, a chunk of bread or a handful of tobacco they sang folk songs about the legendary past of the Ukraine, about her enslavers, the Polish gentry, about the raids by Turks and Tatars, and of how the free Cossacks fought their enemies.

Little Taras listened to those songs enthralled, particularly enraptured by the courage of the Cossacks in the fight for freedom.

In the winter Taras was sent as chore-boy and "pupil" now to one, now to another village church

sexton (psalm-reader), who made the boy do heavy work for his keep, and as for "teaching" him, it was done mostly with the aid of the "salutary rod", i.e., the cane. Nevertheless, it was from those same sextons that the future poet learned to read and to write. Later on he independently kept improving his education.

When he was fifteen, Taras Shevchenko was taken as a servant into the manor-house of his master, Engelhardt.

At first he was a kitchen-boy, then a "kozachok", i. e., a chamber servant of the landowner himself. Day after day he was compelled to sit motionless and silent in the antechamber. At Engelhardt's first call he had to run and hand him his pipe or pour him a glass of water from the pitcher that stood under the very nose of the stupid, tyrannical landowner.

Shevchenko accompanied his master on visits to Kiev and Vilno (Vilnius). During stop-overs in wayside inns he would get hold of cheap popular prints portraying the heroes of the War of 1812—Field Marshal Kutuzov, the Cossack Platov and others, and he copied those pictures to the best of his ability.

In much of his poetry, in his diary and in letters which he wrote in later years, Shevchenko described his sufferings during those humiliating years.

Compulsory idleness in the master's manor was especially irksome to Shevchenko. The boy could not sit without work. So he sang his favourite Ukrainian songs under his breath and stealthily drew copies of the pictures that decorated the walls of Engelhardt's luxurious chambers.

Shevchenko contrived to devote every spare minute to his favourite occupation, drawing. Neither threats nor blows could compel him to desist.

Once—it was in Vilno on December 6th, 1829—Engelhardt went off to a ball. The “kozachok” Shevchenko, being left alone, lighted a candle and set about copying a popular print. Absorbed in his work, he did not notice when his master returned. Engelhardt cruelly boxed the young artist's ears; and next day at the master's orders, the coachman caned Taras in the stable. How dared the boy! Why, he might have burned the house down with the candle.

The landowner eventually became convinced that Taras would never be a good lackey, so he decided to make him his “court” artist.

IN ST. PETERSBURG

Engelhardt took Taras along with his other house servants when he took up temporary residence in St. Petersburg.

From an out-of-the-way village, and then from Vilno, which was at that time a provincial town, Taras Shevchenko landed in the magnificent and elegant capital of the tsars. The year was 1831. Nicholas I, a cruel despot, had been on the throne for six years.

Engelhardt apprenticed Taras for four years to mural painter Shirayev, who fulfilled with his apprentices various painting jobs in private houses and also painted murals and frescoes on the walls and ceilings of governmental and public buildings. Shevchenko suffered much from the nasty-tempered Shirayev, but at the same time he gained an understanding of painting and developed his artistic tastes. Taras found great joy in visiting the Summer Gardens, where there were copies of antique statues. Late in the evenings and during the quiet white nights, when the workday at Shirayev's was over, he would slip out to the Summer Gardens and draw the statues.

It was there that Shevchenko got acquainted with his fellow-countryman, the artist Soshenko. One night, as he was walking in the park, Soshenko noticed a youngster in a dirty teaking smock drawing the statue of Saturn. Soshenko went up to the youthful artist, looked at his work and immediately realised that here was an outstandingly gifted person. He became intensely interested in the serf lad's

fate and introduced him to influential people: to Karl Bryullov, the outstanding painter and professor at the Academy of Arts, and to the famous poet Zhukovsky. They decided to send him to study in the Academy of Arts, but he could not be enrolled because he was a serf.

It was necessary to free Shevchenko from serf bondage. The artist Venetsianov, a renowned master of the brush, went to Engelhardt and tried to talk him into freeing Shevchenko. The uncouth, arrogant landowner met the old man ungraciously. First, he kept Venetsianov waiting about an hour in the antechamber. And then, when the artist attempted to talk to him about human dignity, liberality and humanitarianism, Engelhardt rudely interrupted him: "What has philanthropy to do with this? It's a matter of money, that's all." The landowner named the sum of 2,500 rubles as the "ransom" for his serf.

The money for the ransom was obtained in a unique manner: Bryullov painted a portrait of Zhukovsky, which was then raffled off. The 2,500 rubles thus obtained were given to Engelhardt and on April 22nd, 1838, he signed Shevchenko's release.

Shevchenko became a student at the Academy of Arts, the personal pupil of Bryullov. "The rapid transition from the attic of a coarse painter to the

splendid studio of the greatest artist of our times," as Shevchenko himself wrote later, was an incredible, staggering turn in his life. The doors to the wide world of learning and art were suddenly opened to him. His teacher was "Karl the Great", as the students called Karl Bryullov, the author of the famous painting "The Last Day of Pompeii", and Shevchenko became his favourite pupil.

Shevchenko laboured assiduously to enlarge his knowledge. He read avidly, literally devouring books by Pushkin, Zhukovsky and Gogol, Homer and Shakespeare, Goethe and Walter Scott. He became absorbed in history, philosophy and physics, and started to study French. His acquaintance with the Polish language made it possible for him to read the Polish writers, of whom he especially loved Mickiewicz, in the original. It is not without reason that an inner connection is discerned between certain works of the mature Shevchenko and the works of this foremost Polish poet.

Personal contact with Bryullov, who treated his pupils in a friendly and informal manner, also contributed much both to Shevchenko's general development and to the growth of his mastery of art. Shevchenko's outstanding ability as a graphic artist was noted and encouraged by his teacher. Bryullov taught not to copy the model, but to closely scrutinise and attentively study it. He did not have



KATERINA

1861 Oil painting by T. Shevchenko

any one-sided partiality in the sphere of painting; for example, when the author of the spectacular "The Last Day of Pompeii" visited the Hermitage art gallery with his pupils, he directed their attention to the realistic painting "The Barracks", by the Flemish artist, Tenier Jr. (1610-1690), pointing out its great merits.

But Shevchenko did not become a follower of Bryullov as an artist. He dutifully drew from plaster of Paris moulds and placed his models in the poses of heroes of antiquity, as was customary, but for his test works at the Academy he exhibited not compositions on Biblical or antique themes, which was practically obligatory at the Academy of Arts, but "A Beggar Boy Gives His Bread to a Dog" (1840), and "A Gypsy Woman Telling a Ukrainian Girl Her Fortune" (1841). Such subjects went counter to the spirit and the letter of the Academy. In consequence, the favourite pupil of Bryullov (the latter, it should be added, fell in bad favour with the tsar at that time) was not promoted to front rank, receiving only slight signs of approbation. He was not awarded the title of academician, but only that of "artist without degree" (1845), nor was he granted the trip to Italy, which was the dream of all artists in his day.

In the meantime, he was already becoming an outstanding portrait-painter. He also was mastering

the art of engraving, at which he was later to be so proficient. He proved himself to be a fine illustrator; his illustrations were published in popular publications. He was already forming definite aesthetic views, sharply opposed to idealisation and embroidering of reality and to all that was false.

In a very short time the recent serf Shevchenko lifted himself to the level of the most educated people, into whose circle he entered upon liberation.

The young man was attracted not only by line and colour: he also wanted to express his yearning for his native Ukraine in words, to resurrect its beauty from memory, and to compose songs, as did the kobzars, to whom he had listened enraptured in his childhood.

THE POET

While working diligently in the Academy, Shevchenko was devoting himself with still greater passion to poetry. According to his own testimony, he began writing verses during the light summer nights when he slipped away to the Summer Gardens to draw the statues that adorned the park.

The young poet's earliest works were romantic ballads, lyrical elegies and songs: "The Bewitched", "The Wild Wind", "The Water Flows into the Blue Sea". . . . The wide, stormy Dnieper with the pale moon coming out from behind the clouds and

swimming in the sky above the river; water sprites splashing in the waves; a maiden grieving for her lover who has departed for distant lands; the spacious steppes, dotted with grave-mounds, the wild wind blowing over them—those are the pictures painted in Shevchenko's early verses.

The theme of the struggle of the Ukrainian people against their foes and enslavers, especially against the Polish nobility, also occupies a major place in Shevchenko's poetry of that period.

The first slim volume of Shevchenko's verse, entitled the *Kobzar*, came out in 1840. A wealthy Ukrainian, who was acquainted with Shevchenko, published it at his own expense. V. Sternberg, a close friend of the poet, drew the cover, depicting a kobzar seated beside a hut, strumming his kobza and singing, with a little boy, his guide, at his side.

The kobzar! Everybody knew those wandering Ukrainian minstrels, blind old men with guides, who composed and to the accompaniment of the kobza (bandore, a string instrument) chanted mournful songs about the bitter lot of the unfortunate Ukrainian people and about the legendary past of their homeland.

The title of the young poet's first booklet of verse and the drawing on its cover weren't accidental. Some of the poems in Shevchenko's *Kobzar* were similar to the songs which the kobzars sang.

The *Kobzar* made a great impression on both its Ukrainian and Russian readers.

What was the reason for the unexpected success of Shevchenko's verses?

What was the new quality which their author introduced into Ukrainian poetry?

Shevchenko's literary forerunners—the writers Kotlyarevsky, Kvitka-Osnovyanenko, Grebinka and others—in the main belonged to the gentry and were liberals, who reconciled love of the Ukrainian folk songs and native customs, interest in the Ukraine's past, and compassion for the sufferings of the people with toleration of serfdom—and sometimes even declarations of loyalty to the tsar.

Taras Shevchenko, coming from a different social stratum, introduced new themes and ideas in his poetry, truthfully describing the onerous life of the peasants and voicing the freedom-loving thoughts and aspirations of the people.

Shevchenko keenly hated the autocracy. He hated all forms of oppression of man by man, and he hated all oppressors. His revolutionary frame of mind was due not only to the fact that he was born a serf and himself experienced all the horrors of serfdom. Another reason was that his youthful years were spent among the most advanced Russian intellectuals in St. Petersburg, where not long before had sounded the voices of the Decembrists,

who had organised an uprising on December 14th, 1825 against the newly crowned Tsar Nicholas I. And finally, Shevchenko was a man of genius who could see centuries ahead.

Shevchenko held that folk songs, legends and sayings, historical lays and reminiscences of living witnesses of the glorious past provided an insight into the people's true aspirations. By calling his volume the *Kobzar* the poet demonstrated that he was following in the tradition of those nameless Ukrainian songsters, the kobzars, whom he so colourfully portrayed in his poetry.

Reactionary critics denounced the young poet, accusing him of writing "for peasants" and in a "peasant" tongue. Shevchenko proudly replied: "Let me be a peasant poet, so long as I am a poet—I want nothing more."

And indeed, Shevchenko's verse found a broad audience and won the warm approval of the people.

Generous nature bestowed three gifts on Shevchenko: the gift of a singer, the gift of an artist, and the gift of a writer—of both poetry and prose.

It was as an artist that the serf apprentice to the painter's trade, the son of a poor Ukrainian peasant, who landed at St. Petersburg at a land-owner's will, first attracted the attention of the foremost intellectuals of his time. It was his gift

as an artist that opened to the young man the doors into the circle of the humane people who helped him to get an education and gained his release from serf bondage. Shevchenko's importance as a painter, graphic artist and engraver would by itself have assured him a durable place in the history of art.

Contemporaries, who heard Shevchenko render folk songs, assert that they never heard anything to equal it. Musical experts of our own time, on the basis of Shevchenko's statements in his diary and novels, and also on the basis of the way he described his perception of music, claim that he was profoundly gifted in this sphere as well and had a wide, though not a systematised, knowledge of music.

But, of course, it is as a poet that Taras Shevchenko entered the history of Ukrainian and world culture, and it is as a poet that he has achieved immortality. At the same time it must be noted that elements of painting and especially of music are exceptionally strong in his works.

The melodiousness of Shevchenko's verse is amazing—no wonder that his poetry has attracted and continues to attract many composers. The arrangement of sounds is remarkably rich in Shevchenko's poetry. The opening lines of the ballad "The Drowned Maiden" particularly demonstrate this quality:

*In the coppice the wind drowzes,
Rustling through the thickets—
With the sun, which all arouses,
To the sedge it whispers:
“Who is she who nightly crosses
Here to comb her tresses?”*

In his understanding of poetry, his style and his attitudes Shevchenko travelled the road which was characteristic of the 19th century in general—from romanticism to realism. This fine master, who knew the most tender of words and made use of the most delicate nuances, did not refrain from applying the sharpest, even abusive terms to the enemy, which shocked many “aesthetes”, but sounded quite natural and artistically convincing in the “peasant” poet.

In Shevchenko’s poetry the rhythm is inexhaustively diverse and it always obediently harmonises with the poet’s thoughts and moods, while the variation of his verse form, his metaphors, comparisons and personifications charm the reader with their simplicity and originality.

Shevchenko’s adjectives deserve special attention. In the beginning of his creative work he utilised, in the main, the regular folk-song adjectives—blue sea, wild wind, wide field, etc.—but later more and more often his own, unique,



TARAS SHEVCHENKO AND KIRGHIZ CHILDREN-BEGGARS.
1847-1853. Sepia. By T. Shevchenko

sometimes daring innovations appear in the poet's works: frozen souls, unwashed sky, drowsy waves, blue-uniformed sentries, black-browed* holiday and black-browed fate (of a beloved woman), etc.

One of the images ever recurring in Shevchenko's works is that of the mother, the suffering mother, the martyr-mother. "Katerina", "The Servant Woman", "The Princess", "The Witch", "Marina" and "Mary" are all in essence variations of the one and the same theme. There probably is not another poet in the world in whose works can be found such an ardent cult of motherhood and such an apotheosis of woman's love and woman's suffering.

Shevchenko was unfortunate in his own personal life, and all his life he carried in his heart the captivating image of his first sweetheart. To the end of his days he dreamed passionately and hopelessly of establishing his own family. A man of great heart and deep feelings, Shevchenko saw in woman, in the mother the loftiest and purest manifestation of beauty on the earth. He often called woman the beloved, and woman the mother "zorya", which in Ukrainian means both a star and the dawn.

And yet there were "evil people" (one of the poet's fondest expressions) trampling that beloved

* In Ukrainian folk poetry black brows are the sign of beauty.

woman, that mother, that embodiment of purity, that star-dawn into the mud! Who were they? Landowners and their sons, sated and voluptuous representatives of the ruling class. Thus the moral protest in the poet's works became social protest.

Shevchenko, who himself experienced the brutality of the gentry, and whose brothers and sisters to his very death remained serfs, was a convinced enemy of the landowners and the biggest landowner of all—the tsar.

He knew the true worth of those landowners who called themselves “liberals” and “indulged in free-thinking in the inn”. One of the poet's favourite poetic devices to expose social injustice was to draw a contrast between the being he most abhorred, the stupidly tyrannical landowner, and the being he held most sacred, the pure image of the maiden, the woman, the mother.

The mother. . . . Among all nations that image symbolises that which is most precious and vital to a person—his country. Shevchenko called his homeland, the Ukraine, his mother, he dedicated his lines to her, he dreamed of her constantly and wrote of her in gloomy exile, he uttered heartfelt words about her, declaring that his own fate was of indifference to him in comparison with that of his country, which was more important to him than anything in the world.

*To me it matters not a jot
If in Ukraine I live or no,
If I'm remembered or forgot
To die unknown in foreign snows—
It makes no difference to me now.
'Mid strangers I grew up a slave,
And weeping I'll go to my grave
Without a tear from my own folk.
I'll take all with me when I go,
Nor leave the slightest trace behind
In the Ukraine, famed land of mine,
Our country—which we do not own.
There'll be no father to remind
His son: "Oh, pray for him, my lad,
He was a martyr for Ukraine,
He perished for our native land!"
It matters not a bit to me
If that son does or does not pray. . .
But oh! It matters much to me
If wicked men with cunning ways
Should lull our fair Ukraine to sleep,
To better plunder, set ablaze. . .
Ah yes, it matters much to me.*

Shevchenko ardently loved life, beauty and joy. What a bright, clean and good place our "hapless genius" wanted our earth to be!

The poet loved children warmly and kindly, and

the children reciprocated. Half-joking, he said: "A man is not yet all bad, if children love him."

Taras Shevchenko dreamed of a beautiful, radiant life, childishly pure and artless, but "evil people" profaned, fouled and dirtied it, and his heart was filled with hatred for them. "Evil people"—that's first of all a social category. The brilliant poet fought all his life against social injustice, against oppressors, against "tsars and princelings".

In his first big poem "Haidamaki" (1841) Shevchenko described the Ukrainian peasant uprising of 1768. The poem was quickly sold out and had great success among the more advanced sections of society. The poet glorified Zaliznyak and Gonta, the leaders of the uprising. He portrayed the rebels—Haidamaki—as strong and resolute people who were defending their homeland from the Polish lords.

In the beginning of this great epic work Shevchenko in imagination gathered together the people's champions, the heroes of his poem, in his St. Petersburg room, and talked with them as though they were alive—"Haidamaki, my sons!"—sharing with them his views on the literary tastes of his times, confiding his creative dreams to them, and outlining the path he had firmly determined

to follow despite his advisers, who tried to convince him to "sing about Matryosha", i.e., to compose sentimental romances. His was the path of developing Ukrainian national culture and creating literature in the language which ill-wishers unjustly labelled "dead words". The feeling that this conversation with his imagined guests is real persists throughout the whole reading of that magnificent introduction to the poem.

*My sons, my Haidamaki brave!
The world is free and wide!
Go forth, my sons, and make your way—
Perhaps you'll fortune find.
My sons, my simple-minded brood,
When you go forth to roam,
Who will receive my orphans poor
With warmth into his home?
So fly, my fledgeling falcons, fly
To far Ukraine, my lads—
At least, if there you hardship find,
'Twon't be in foreign lands.
Good-hearted folks will rally 'round
And they won't let you die;
While here. . . . Well, here . . . it's hard,
My sons! If you're allowed inside
The house, it's only to be jeered—
You see, they are so wise,*

*So literate and so well-read,
The sun they even chide. . .*

That same lyrical note and that same invisible presence of the author are characteristic also of Shevchenko's later poems, such as "The Neophytes" and "Mary". His poetic gift was lyrical in its very essence.

Of course, some of Shevchenko's works are obviously not written from his own person, such as the women's and maidens' songs and avowals: "Wild Wind, Wild Wind", "What Use to Me Are My Black Brows", "I Went to the Ravine for Water", "He Did Not Return from the War", "I Walked in the Oak Forest", "If I Had a Necklace, Dear", "If I Had Boots. . .". Those are wonderful examples of poetic penetration.

*Wild wind, wild wind, winged rover!
To the sea you speak—
Wake it, set its waves a-rolling,
Ask them of the deep. . .
It knows where my lover lingers,
It bore him away;
Let it tell you where it took him,
What's my lover's fate.*

But only a reader bereft of poetical feeling will fail to sense the presence of the author in these lit-

the masterpieces (some perkily merry, others—the majority—achingly sad), won't see his melancholy, yet kindly smile, and won't hear his voice—that voice in which, according to his contemporaries, Taras sang the songs of his people with such sincerity and charm.

It is hard to name any notable poet who does not have a poem which defines the social role and purpose he sets his poetry. Such are Heine's "Dedication" and his "Prologue" to the third edition of "The Book of Songs", Béranger's "The Last Song", Pushkin's "Monument", Lermontov's "Prophet", Lesya Ukrainka's "My Word, Why Are You Not Hard As Steel", etc. Shevchenko also has such a poem: "Perebendya".* In it he describes a wilful poet (a people's bard, a kobzar), who

*Starts a merry song to sing,
Then sudden swings to sad.*

The image of Perebendya is painted in romantic colours (this is one of Shevchenko's early works). He is solitary, the people don't understand his "whimsies", and he goes far away from people, into the steppe, where he asks of the sun:

Where does it sleep? How does it rise?

* The word "perebendya" in Ukrainian means a wilful, capricious, fanciful sort of person.

He asks similar questions of the hills and the sea. . . . But actually, he has no need to ask, for he “knows everything” and “hears everything”—“of what the sea grumbles” and “where the sun rests”. He is like that all-embracing genius in the noted Russian poet Baratinsky’s description of Goethe (“He Breathed in Unison with Nature”).

Is Perebendya, however, really so solitary, so far removed from the people and from their earthly interests? Of course not. He lives with the people and sings for the people—“with the girls on the common”, “in the inn with the young men”, and “with married couples at the feast”,

*Or chants a sad, sad tune,
That they should know, how long ago
The Cossack Sich* was ruined.*

Those lines are significant: Perebendya not only entertains people with such songs as are appropriate to the occasion and to his audience, but

* Sich—the organisation of the Cossacks which arose in the 16th century for the protection of the Ukraine from incursions by enemies (Turks and Crimean Tatars). It was situated on the Dnieper beyond the rapids (in Ukrainian “za porohami”) from which comes its name, the Zaporozhian Sich. It was finally abolished in 1775 on orders of Empress Catherine II. Many folk songs were devoted to that event.

he also takes upon himself the duty to awaken lofty civil sentiments in the people. He isn't a mysterious solitary man at all, he isn't a recluse, he loves people:

*He chases people's gloom away,
Although himself is sad.*

In the image of Perebendya Shevchenko does not completely portray his ideal of a poet, and his own creative personality is not reflected in it all-sidedly, in all its profundity and complexity, but the main traits are there.

Ugly relations between people bring about tragedy, break lovers' hearts and separate them forever. "What good to me are my black brows?" sorrowfully asks a maiden in a lyrical verse. Of what benefit is beauty to her if she does not have the happiness, to which people so ardently aspire and which is denied them mainly for social causes. Her parents will not let a girl marry her lover because he is poor; a Cossack is compelled to depart for distant lands and leave his beloved behind; a lord seduces a girl and then abandons her with her child. All these themes of broken hearts and woman's fate trampled underfoot are already found in Shevchenko's early poetry.

Under the cover of folk fantasy, the ballad "The Bewitched" tells of the love of a maid for a Cos-



SELF-PORTRAIT.
1843-1845. Pencil drawing by T. Shevchenko

sack who went away to foreign lands. On a moonlit night the water sprites of the Dnieper tickled the girl to death, and the Cossack returns to find his sweetheart's lifeless body—and in despair he kills himself. The story is simple, yet Shevchenko put so much ingenuous and vital feeling into it that it greatly moves the reader with its humaneness. The poet is invisibly present at that lovers' tragedy, and he condemns the bitter life that doomed his heroes. The poem has a clearly defined folk colouring, such as is found in Ukrainian folk songs and ballads. The images of the water sprites splashing in the Dnieper and warming themselves in the light of the moon, and of the Straw spirit (devil) tie this work in with ancient beliefs. The poet wove those images belonging to the realm of fantasy in with other, fully realistic folk images, such as of a bold Cossack and a girl grieving over their painful separation.

In the poem "Katerina" we see a subject which often recurs in folk songs, the bitter fate of a betrayed maiden, take on social overtones. Katerina is not a serf girl who was seduced by her master. It is clear that her parents were "free" peasants. She gave herself to the nobleman-officer, with whom she fell deeply in love, of her own free will. But he trampled on her love, because a simple peasant girl would not suit him as a wife—he must

marry a woman from a wealthy noble family. Driven from home by her strict parents and brought to despair, Katerina commits suicide. The image of Katerina is captivating in her spiritual purity and nobility, her unselfishness and self-sacrifice. Shevchenko had noted all those qualities among the common people, and that is why he presented them with such cogency and realistic power.

*O lovely maidens, fall in love,
But not with Muscovites,
For Muscovites are foreign folk,
They do not treat you right.
A Muscovite will love for sport,
And laughing go away;
He'll go back to his Moscow land
And leave the maid a prey
To grief and shame. . . . It could be borne
If she were all alone,
But scorn is also heaped upon
Her mother frail and old.
The heart e'en languishing can sing—
For it knows how to wait;
But this the people do not see:
"A strumpet!" they will say.
O lovely maidens, fall in love,
But not with Muscovites,
For Muscovites are foreign folk,*

*They leave you in a plight,
Young Katerina did not heed
Her parents' warning words,
She fell in love with all her heart,
Forgetting all the world.
The orchard was their trysting-place,
She went there in the night
To meet her handsome Muscovite,
And thus she ruined her life.
Her anxious mother called and called
Her daughter home in vain;
There where her lover she caressed,
The whole night she remained.
Thus many nights she kissed her love
With passion strong and true,
The village gossips meanwhile hissed:
"A girl of ill repute!"
Let people talk, let gossips prate,
She does not even hear:
She is in love, that's all she cares,
Nor feels disaster near.*

When the poet visited his homeland in 1843, he heard his own songs and ballads from the lips of peasants and kobzars. Shevchenko visited some notable places in the Ukraine, and saw his relatives who were still languishing under the yoke of serfdom. . . . "I have been everywhere and I wept

all the time," the poet wrote to a friend. "They have ruined our Ukraine."

The years 1844-1847 constituted a new period in his life both as an artist and as a poet. The poems written during that time were grouped by Shevchenko himself in a new collection, headed *Three Years*. It includes such masterpieces of revolutionary poetry as "The Dream", "The Caucasus", "The Heretic", "Three Years", and a number of others, among which "The Blind Man" ("The Slave"), "The Servant Woman" and "The Witch" are especially notable.

The period of the *Three Years* is marked by the rapid growth of Shevchenko's revolutionary understanding and class consciousness, and, alongside that, the growth of critical realism in his poetry, the shedding of national romanticism.

From a distance his fellow-Ukrainians, representatives of gentry liberalism, seemed to be "very pleasant" people of a sort. Great landowners, it would seem, carefully preserved the memory of the past glories of Ukraine, collected portraits of the Hetmans and various other relics of Cossack times, and treated their serfs in a "patriarchal" manner. The petty gentry stood closer yet to the people: they were good-natured, inoffensively playful and hospitable. They all adored Ukrainian songs—and Shevchenko sang them so marvellously! How glad

all those landowners were to meet the famous Ukrainian poet, how they vied with one another to invite him to their homes, how heartily they entertained him!

Pan* Lukashevich, for example, sent his manor serf over dozens of versts in a blizzard to invite the poet to visit him. Shevchenko did not go. Instead, he wrote Lukashevich a letter, reproaching him: his lordship, he wrote, should be ashamed of himself for sending a poorly clad man over such a distance, and not permitting him even to rest and warm up, but ordering him to return at once with the reply! Lukashevich flew into a rage and immediately sent that same messenger back with a new letter, in which, according to contemporaries, he wrote: "I won't permit anybody to interfere with my orders, especially you, a recent swineherd!" Perhaps the quotation is not exact, but that was the sense of that abominable letter.

That was one of many instances when before Shevchenko's eyes landowners suddenly dropped their masks of sham "Ukrainian" good nature and beneath the meek exteriors exposed the vile visages of beasts of prey. Those fellow-countrymen, masters of "serf souls", who fancied themselves Ukrainian

* In Ukrainian, as in Polish, "pan" means master, lord, sir, and also mister (here, of course, it is a title given to a member of the gentry).

“patriots”, showed themselves to be not good-natured, but terrible people.

In one of his poems Shevchenko wrote that the suffering of the Ukrainian people was more horrible than the torment of the sinners in Dante's *Inferno*. Thus the poet's eyes, as he put it, gradually began to be opened. His aesthetic admiration of the past, which was not without its class contradictions either and was full of sharp struggles between the Cossack chiefs and the “mob”, gave way to ardent protests against contemporary society, founded on social and national oppression.

The poet began to seek contacts with progressive people of his own times, who were vitally concerned about the working people's interests, just as he was. Returning to St. Petersburg in 1844, Shevchenko became closely associated with members of an underground circle headed by M. V. Petrashevsky. Gatherings of that circle were attended by such prominent writers as F. M. Dostoyevsky, M. Y. Saltykov-Shchedrin, the poet A. N. Pleshcheyev, and others.

In that same year—1844—Shevchenko wrote his revolutionary satirical poem “The Dream”. Prior to Shevchenko no one had scaled such heights of denunciatory poetry. He drew a terrible picture of tsarist and landowners' misrule in the Russia of Nicholas I. He showed St. Petersburg built on the

bones of working people, and he satirically presented the tsarist nobles as "big-bellied lords", and denounced "the tsar, our father" as a cruel hangman and oppressor of the peoples.

*... I made myself
Invisible again
And to the chambers made my way.
Oh God, what I saw then!
Now there was heaven! In those halls
The very cuspidors
Are gold-encrusted! Scowling, tall,
Here comes himself, the tsar,
To stretch his legs; and at his side
His empress struts and preens,
All wrinkled like a dried-up prune
And like a bean-pole lean,
While every time she steps, her head
Goes jiggling on her neck.*

*.
Behind the gods come gentlefolk
In gold and silver dressed,
With heavy jowl and portly paunch—
Of well-fed hogs the best! . . .
They sweat, but closer, closer press
Around the august thing:
Perhaps he'll deign to slap a face
Or show a royal fig,*

*Or even half a fig to show,
Or maybe tweak a nose—
If but with his own hand.
Then all line up in one long row
And “at attention” stand.
The tsar-god jabbars; and his spouse,
That royal marvel rare,
Just like a heron among birds
Hops briskly here and there.
They walked about a goodly while,
A pair of puffed-up owls,
And talked in whispers all the time—
We couldn’t hear at all—
About the fatherland, I think,
The officers’ new pips,
And still more drills for army men!...
And then the empress sits
In silence on a tabouret.
I watch: the tsar comes close
To him who is of highest rank
And whops him on the nose!...
Poor fellow, he just licked his lips,
And then poked in the pot
The next in line!... That one then gave
A smaller ace a clout;
That one punched still a smaller fish,
And he—still smaller fry,
Until the smallest at the end*

*Got theirs and opened wide
The palace gates, and poured outside
Into the city streets
To put the boots to common folks;
Then those began to screech
And holler fit to wake the dead:
“Our royal father deigns to play!
Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah, ’ray, ’ray!”*

In “The Dream” Shevchenko paid tribute to the Decembrists, who had risen against the autocratic regime. Hating the empire of landowners and satrap officials, Shevchenko extolled the strength of will and the courage of the nations that inhabited tsarist Russia, and called for joint struggle against the oppressors.

In “The Caucasus” (1845) the poet described the empire of Nicholas I as a prison in which

*From the Moldavian to the Finn
All silent are in all their tongues.*

“The Caucasus” is one of Shevchenko’s most powerful anti-government works, full of sympathy with the enslaved nationalities of the Caucasus and suffused with fervent internationalism. “The Dream” and “The Caucasus” reveal Shevchenko in his full stature as a people’s spokesman.

ARREST AND EXILE

In 1845 Shevchenko finished the Academy of Arts and left for the Ukraine. He began to work for the Kiev archeographic commission and in this capacity he visited many towns and villages.

Wherever he happened to be, the poet associated with the rural and urban poor, read his poems to them, talked about the glorious past of the Ukraine, and said that the time was ripe to throw off the yoke of the landowners, the officialdom and the tsar.

In the spring of 1846, in Kiev, Shevchenko met the young Ukrainian historian Kostomarov, who was an ardent admirer of his poetry.

"I saw," Kostomarov wrote, "that Shevchenko's muse tore away the curtain from the people's life. It was both terrible and sweet, both painful and intoxicating to look inside!" It was true that mixed feelings clashed in Kostomarov's breast. A moderate liberal, he perceived the justice of Shevchenko's wrathful attacks on serfdom and the autocracy, but the thought of a popular uprising frightened him.

Together with a group of young Ukrainian liberals Kostomarov organised a political association, called the Society of Cyril and Methodius, named after the legendary disseminators of reading and writing among the Slav peoples, the apostles

Cyril and Methodius. The society called for the unification of all the Slav nations on the basis of equality, and stood for the annulment of serfdom and for close cultural and political fraternisation. However, they imagined that they could achieve their aims through propaganda, ruling out any idea of revolutionary action.

Shevchenko, to whom Kostomarov disclosed the plans and rules of the society, became interested in its activities. The poet attended meetings of the secret fraternity, where he read his flaming poems, calling for an uprising. He headed the left wing of the society, which included Gulak, Savich, Navrotsky and some others.

In March of 1847 the society was denounced to the authorities and its members—Kostomarov, Shevchenko, Gulak and others—were arrested.

Shevchenko, whose revolutionary poems, disseminated in the form of handwritten copies, had become known to the tsar, was sentenced to exile as a rank-and-file soldier of the Orenburg battalion.

Nicholas I with his own hand added to the sentence: "Under strictest surveillance, with prohibition to write and to paint."

The poet later wrote of the tsar's sentence: "If I had been a monster, a vampire, even then a more effective torture could not have been devised for me."

After the verdict was read, Taras Shevchenko was immediately taken from his prison cell and turned over to the military authorities, and the following day he was placed in a mail coach and transported under convoy to distant Orenburg.

The gendarmes were in a hurry and drove the horses hard. In eight days Shevchenko was delivered to his place of exile. From Orenburg he was sent farther yet, to the Orsk fortress.

The appearance of Orsk was anything but attractive. A solitary hillock rose from a dismal plain. On one side were the poor huts of the local populace, and on the other the barracks of the convicts. The only vegetation consisted of prickly weeds and withered sedge-grass.

After the magnificent nature of Ukraine, the green banks of the Dnieper, the picturesque avenues of beautiful Kiev, and the spacious southern steppes, Shevchenko viewed this wilderness with profound sadness.

Here began the army life of Private Taras Shevchenko. In the daytime he went through the drills, and in the evenings, sitting with the other soldiers in his stuffy barracks cell, Shevchenko listened to their unhappy tales about beatings and humiliations.

Shevchenko spent ten years in exile in the distant reaches of the tsarist empire. The humiliations he suffered at the hands of his obtuse and

cruel superiors, and the difficult conditions of harshly disciplined army life undermined his health, but they could not make him toe the line—on the contrary, his hatred of the tsarist regime grew still more implacable.

“It is difficult, it is hard, it is impossible to stifle all human dignity within oneself, to stand at attention, and to listen to commands and move like a soulless machine,” Shevchenko wrote.

Nothing could break his ardent will to struggle and to engage in creative labour. “I am tormented, I suffer, but I don’t repent,” Shevchenko said at the time of his most arduous ordeals.

Violating the tsar’s prohibition and disregarding all threats, Shevchenko secretly continued to write poetry. During his ten years of exile he composed many marvellous works, in which, disclosing his own feelings and experiences, he expressed the cherished aspirations of all the oppressed.

In letters to friends Shevchenko continually asked them to send him more books, paper, pencils and paints. Every time he saw a picturesque caravan of Bukhara merchants cutting across the wilderness, a wild fire in the steppe, or a colourful group of Kazakhs beside their tents, the artist’s heart began to burn with the desire to paint them.

Writing, painting and the hope that he would yet win his freedom were the sole consolations of

Taras Shevchenko, Private No. 191 in the regimental rolls.

During his life as a soldier Shevchenko became friends with the local working people, and also with the exiled Polish revolutionaries Zygmund Sierakowski, Bronislaw Zaleski and others. Contact with those progressive people and letters from friends in Russia and the Ukraine, who did not forsake the poet, brightened the gloomy days of his exile.

In the beginning of 1848 a group of officers of the General Staff, headed by A. I. Butakov, undertook a scientific expedition to explore the Aral Sea. The tasks of the expedition were to study the special features of the Aral Sea and the flora and fauna on its shores, and to conduct meteorological and astronomical observations.

Butakov was an energetic man who took great pains in preparing for the expedition. He was particularly careful in his selection of the personnel for the various tasks, so it is not strange that he became interested in the artist Taras Shevchenko, who could be entrusted with the job of sketching the views of the Aral Sea.

Taras Shevchenko was glad to join the expedition. It meant that he would be rid of the tyranny of harsh sergeant-majors, and would leave the stench of the barracks, while the difficulties which

the members of the expedition would have to face did not daunt him.

The expedition began with the crossing of the sands of the Kara-Kum desert on the way from Orsk to the Raim fortress. The huge "waggon caravan" (1,500 waggons) transported the parts of the schooner *Konstantin*, which was to be assembled for sailing the Aral Sea.

The crossing took more than a month. The sun beat down mercilessly, clouds of dust rose to the sky, and people fell ill and some even died.

Shevchenko quickly came to share the scientific interests of the expedition. He acquainted himself with the work of the botanists, geologists, astronomers and hydrographers, and devoted his talents as an artist to serve all their needs.

In one month's time the schooner *Konstantin* was assembled and made ready for sailing, and then they put out to sea.

Two months passed in intensive work, full of dangers and unpleasant surprises. The schooner was knocked about by gales, the weather was changeable and the seas unpredictable.

Shevchenko made many sketches and water-colour paintings. He sketched the severe appearance of the Aral Sea and its shores with utmost expressiveness. Shevchenko's drawings and water-colour paintings became interesting artistic documents.

At the end of September the schooner dropped anchor in the estuary of the Syr-Darya near Kos-Aral Island. Here the expedition encamped for the winter.

On Kos-Aral Shevchenko wrote a great deal. In his diary the poet termed the poetry written in exile "prisoner's muse". It consisted of both lyrical pieces and poems ("Marina", "The Sotnik", "The Church-warden's Daughter").

The Kos-Aral lyrical cycle is a poetical recording of the poet's life in his "unlocked prison". In some of those verses Shevchenko uses amazing expressions to describe the nature around him, such as "the unwashed sky" and "drowsy waves" of the Aral Sea, and the rushes "reeling as though they're drunk".

Other verses of the Kos-Aral cycle have an intimate, subjective character and are imbued with a mournful mood.

*The waves are sleepy, unwashed is the sky,
And stretching 'long the shore away,
Without a wind the rushes sway,
They reel as though they're drunk. Have I
A long time yet, good God, to wait
In this drear prison without gates
Or locks, o'er this so shabby sea
To mope? The yellow grass won't speak,
It will not tell me anything,*

*Although as though alive it swings;
It won't disclose the truth, alas,
And I have no one else to ask.*

However, you will not find a trace of hopelessness in Shevchenko's poetry of that period. The militant, fiery spirit of the poet, who was bereft of the opportunity to do things, did not become reconciled to circumstances. Shevchenko believed in the future, and his poetic eye looked ahead to better times. Through the misty curtain of the reality of his day the poet discerned the bright outlines of the happy Ukraine-to-be without lords and slaves.

Never did freedom seem so precious to Shevchenko as it did there, in exile and bondage. With all his heart he yearned for Ukraine.

That winter Shevchenko composed many songs in the folk-song tradition—sad songs and merry ones, serious songs and jesting ones. During the same period he wrote several autobiographical poems, which carried him back to his childhood and the years of his youth.

In the autumn of 1849 the expedition returned to Orenburg. Shevchenko's sketches and paintings of the Aral Sea were dispatched to headquarters with a petition to have the exile's lot ameliorated.

In Orenburg the poet roomed in private quarters and was without surveillance. He wrote and



PORTRAIT OF ACTOR M. S. SHCHEPKIN
by T. Shevchenko. 1858. Pencil and white lead

painted, and he wore civilian clothes. And then a base young lieutenant informed on Shevchenko to the authorities. A search was made of the poet's quarters and books and letters were taken, including a letter from S. Levitsky, in which he wrote of the great sympathy which the progressive youth entertained for Shevchenko.

Soon after the search and investigation, orders were received from St. Petersburg that conditions be made worse for Private Shevchenko. Nicholas I personally was behind that command. The poet was sent to the far-away Novopetrovsk fortress on the north-eastern shore of the Caspian Sea. For a second time he was most sternly forbidden to write and paint. He was now watched more closely.

The poet would not give up. At the risk of bringing the wrath of his superiors down on his head, he kept writing. In his new place of exile Shevchenko wrote a number of stories in the Russian language ("The Artist", "The Musician", "The Princess", "A Stroll with Pleasure and Not Without a Moral" and others). These narratives contain a wealth of biographical material. Shevchenko described his childhood and the years of his apprenticeship. He drew pictures of his friends and acquaintances. The plots of his stories unfolded on the broad background of serfdom.

In 1857 Shevchenko began to keep a diary in the Russian language. He began his diary "out of boredom", as he put it, simply because he had "a terrible desire to write" and because he wanted to practise writing: "Just as his instrument is imperative for the virtuoso and his brush to the painter, so must a man of letters practise writing."

He had no literary pretensions. He didn't worry about "genre". The diary consists of one hundred and two large-size pages, bound in Morocco leather, each page covered with distinct handwriting, with practically no corrections. The writer had no idea, of course, that his "Journal" (that's how he titled his manuscript, according to the old style) would become one of his most remarkable works.

His diary is not just a biographical document, and not only a detailed description of the events in Shevchenko's life from June 12th, 1857 to July 13th of the following year. It not only constitutes important material which reveals the psychology of his works, his outlook, and the extent of his erudition and education. It is also a unique self-portrait of the man whom Nekrasov called "a most remarkable person of the Russian land"—a self-portrait that allows us to become intimately acquainted with the poet, with his feelings, thoughts and philosophical and political convictions.

In his "Journal" Shevchenko stands forth as a staunch fighter, incapable of compromise and firm in his belief in the final victory of the people over the powers that held them in slavery.

We have become accustomed to visualise Shevchenko as he is shown in the most popular portraits of him—those by Kramskoi and Repin, and the etching by Maté. He is depicted with a severe, oldish face and with long, hanging moustaches. But this severe, frowning man was a person of gentle and sensitive spirit, of lofty and versatile thought, an advanced man of his times.

When Shevchenko was finally released in 1857, during the reign of Alexander II, the poet became revived as though he had dumped the hard years of exile off his back: "It seems to me that I'm exactly the same as I was ten years ago. Not a single trait of my inner being has changed. Is that good? It's good!" he wrote in his "Journal".

FREEDOM ON A CHAIN

On August 2nd, 1857 Taras Shevchenko sailed from Novopetrovsk fortress on a fishing boat and after three days on the Caspian Sea arrived at Astrakhan. From there he took a steamboat up the Volga River to Nizhny Novgorod (today the city of Gorky).

On board ship he procured the latest illegal Russian revolutionary literature, and also became engrossed in the works of his contemporary, the great satirist Saltykov-Shchedrin, whom he considered a worthy successor to renowned Gogol. Addressing the revolutionary democratic writers, Shevchenko wrote in his diary: "Write, raise your voices on behalf of that poor, dirty, reviled rabble! On behalf of that desecrated, lowly smerd!"*

Literary evenings were organised on the boat in the captain's cabin. Shevchenko listened with enthusiasm to Barbier's poem "The Dogs' Banquet". Béranger's songs and the revolutionary poems of the Russian poet Ryleyev, a Decembrist. He read newspapers and journals and was interested in the struggle for social emancipation of the people in far-off China and in the movement of the Volga peasants against their landowner oppressors.

When Shevchenko arrived in Nizhny Novgorod, he was informed that entrance to the capital was forbidden him. In consequence, he was compelled to live about six months in Nizhny (from September 20th, 1857 to March 8th, 1858).

"Now I'm free . . . as free as a dog on a chain," he wrote from Nizhny Novgorod to his friend, the famous Russian actor M. S. Shchepkin.

* "Smerd"—peasant in ancient feudal Rus.

Shchepkin, who was then seventy, came to Nizhny for several days in the cold winter of 1857 in order to brighten up Shevchenko's enforced stay in that city.

His release returned the pen to Shevchenko the poet. He began by rereading, correcting and re-writing his earlier works.

Simultaneously he began work on a new poem, "The Neophytes". The scene of the poem was transferred to the ancient Roman empire. It is easy to surmise why that was done.

Even prior to his exile Shevchenko spoke of the cruel Roman emperor Nero, having in mind Nicholas I. In "The Neophytes" the same holds true. The reader readily saw through the camouflage and understood that Nero was Nicholas, the patricians were the landowners and upper classes generally, the plebs were the people, and the Neophytes were the revolutionaries, champions of the people's happiness.

The heroes of the poem were the Neophytes, "knights of freedom", led by the youthful Alcides, who foresaw the radiant day when the tyranny would fall and the despot-emperor would be chained in irons.

It was an unequal struggle: on the one hand a handful of ardent revolutionaries, and on the other—the imperial power. Alcides perished, so did his

comrades-in-arms. But his mother, a courageous and determined woman, took his place. If characteristics of the Decembrists are discerned in the Neophytes, then the image of Alcides's mother doubtlessly embodied those beautiful human qualities of the wives of the Decembrists, which were later glorified by the great Russian poet Nekrasov in his poem "Russian Women".

In one of the poems written in Nizhny Novgorod, Shevchenko tells his muse:

*With lips that know no lie
Teach but the truth to preach...*

To preach the truth—that, to Shevchenko, was his lofty duty. And he remained true to that precept all his life.

Shevchenko served the truth as a man, as a citizen, as an artist, and as a master of the pen, who profoundly understood the power of words and selected them as his weapons in the struggle for the happiness of the humble and the oppressed:

*I shall lift up
These lowly, voiceless slaves!
And I shall put my words
To stand on guard for them!*

In March 1858, Shevchenko finally received permission to enter the capital of the tsar. On his



TARAS SHEVCHENKO STATE MUSEUM IN KIEV

way to St. Petersburg he stopped over in Moscow in order to visit Shchepkin and other Moscow friends.

Shchepkin's hospitable home in Moscow was a gathering place for artists, literary people and public figures. Shevchenko spent several days in their friendly company.

"In Moscow I was particularly pleased to find among educated Muscovites the very warmest cordiality towards me personally, and unfeigned appreciation of my poetry," Shevchenko noted down in his diary.

A wave of new impressions overwhelmed the

poet. He realised that an intense struggle was being waged by the revolutionary-democratic camp in Russia, which was striving to emancipate the working people and destroy the autocracy, a struggle against all that was old, ossified and reactionary.

So he hastened to St. Petersburg, although he knew that the freedom that awaited him there was but a phantom thing, since he would be under constant police surveillance.

CALLING RUSSIA TO TAKE UP THE AXE

Taras Shevchenko arrived in St. Petersburg in the spring of 1858. He was enthusiastically welcomed by the foremost Russian intellectuals. The doors of the literary salons were flung open to him. "A new star has risen over Taras's head. . . . St. Petersburg now doesn't know where best to seat him, how best to entertain him," said the historian Kostomarov, a former member of the Society of Cyril and Methodius, at one of the receptions.

Shevchenko became closely associated with Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov and other writers who were grouped around the most progressive journal of that time *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*). Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov held Shevchenko's revolutionary ardour in high regard and greatly esteemed the poet-accuser and poet-citizen.

The struggle of the peasantry of tsarist Russia against the autocracy and against serfdom occupied the centre of attention with revolutionary democrats. Thus, the prominent Russian writer, thinker and public figure Alexander Herzen, who had been compelled to emigrate abroad and there published a revolutionary paper *Kolokol* (*The Bell*), in 1858 printed in that paper an appeal to the serf peasantry of Russia, in which he wrote: "Listen, ye poor folk, the hopes you place in me are absurd, the tsar tells you. So in whom can you place hope now? In the landowners? Not a bit. They are at one with the tsar, and the tsar openly takes their side. Place hope only in yourselves, in the strength of your hands: sharpen your axes and go to it. . . ."

Shevchenko also called on the people to take up the axe, to start decisive struggle:

*Await no good,
Expected freedom don't await—
It is asleep: Tsar Nicholas
Lulled it to sleep. But if you'd wake
This sickly freedom, all the folk
Must in their hands sledge-hammers take
And axes sharp—and then all go
That sleeping freedom to awake.*

In that period Shevchenko's political poems became especially mature and sharp. One of his

contemporaries wrote: "Shevchenko's accusations have become unrestrained; he strikes and he smashes; he is all afire with a frenzied, all-consuming flame."

Supported by Chernyshevsky and his friends, the poet composed a cycle of new poems in which he castigated the tsar and his myrmidons. He foretold that the day was near when "they'll lead the tsar to execution", when "there'll be no foes, no evil-doers, there will be sons, there will be mothers, and there'll be people on the earth".

In all of Shevchenko's works of that period the unanimity of his views with the views of the Russian revolutionary democrats can be felt. The Ukrainian poet was not only a participant in the revolutionary movement of the 1860s, but he exerted a fruitful influence on the development of progressive thought in Russia. Not for nothing did Chernyshevsky consider Shevchenko to be "the incontestable authority" on the peasant problem, which was of special concern to the revolutionary democrats.

In 1859 Shevchenko went to the Ukraine for the last time. He visited the places where he had spent his childhood, he saw his relatives, and observed the same life of poverty and slavery, the same drudgery for a crust of bread as before. There, too, he was under constant secret police

surveillance. Gendarmes and spies listened in on his conversations with the peasants. Finally he was arrested again.

In the police report Shevchenko was accused of making anti-government and blasphemous speeches.

The poet was barred from living in the Ukraine, and was returned to St. Petersburg. He lived in the attic of the Academy of Arts, and enthusiastically busied himself with engraving, seeing in it a marvellous means for the propagation of art. Shevchenko achieved significant successes in etching and engraving; in 1860 the title of Academician of Engraving was bestowed upon him.

In that same year, 1860, a new edition of the *Kobzar* was published in St. Petersburg. The poet's most powerful political verses were removed by the tsar's censors. But even in that curtailed form the *Kobzar* enjoyed tremendous success among the reading public.

It would be incorrect to assume that Shevchenko limited himself only to themes and subjects from the life of the peasantry which were close and dear to him. His wide knowledge in all spheres of world culture enabled him to turn to any historical epoch and make bold conclusions and generalisations: describing the bloody struggle of the Haidamaki, the poet recalled the St. Bartholomew's night massacre; telling about the Neophytes (early

Christians), he drew an analogy between them and the Decembrists. Shevchenko often turned to biblical themes, and especially to the psalms of the old Hebrew prophets, from which he borrowed both themes and epigraphs. He found much genuine poetry both in the psalms of the ancient prophets and in the legends of the Gospel. All this served him as material that affirmed the principles of beauty, justice and love of human labour. The poet did not simply retell the contents. With all the



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power of an original talent he gave revolutionary interpretations of the legends and stories of the past.

Shevchenko's revolutionary convictions were formed gradually. He forged and tempered his outlook in the crucible of suffering and agonising meditation, and it was the stronger because of that. If in such early works of Shevchenko's as "Ivan Pidkova" and "Hamaliya" one can't fail to see a certain idealisation of the Cossack past of the Ukraine (echoes of such idealisation are also present in a poem of somewhat later date, "The Monk"), in one of his last poems, "There Were Battles and Quarrels" we discern a decisive re-appraisal of that past.

The "scarlet coats" that once held the poet's fancy had now lost all their attraction for him. He now saw the essence of life in the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressors, and the "golden age" of the past was replaced by the golden age which he foresaw in the future. For the sake of justice it must be mentioned that already in such an early work as "Haidamaki" Shevchenko stressed the social, rather than the national theme.

From his early years Shevchenko reacted painfully to the oppression of man by man, and hated the oppressors. However, in the poem "To the Dead and the Living..." (1845) the poet still tended fleetingly to entertain the illusion of what we now

ironically call "class peace", and he could yet address the Ukrainian gentry with the plea:

*I pray you, brothers mine, embrace
Your smallest brother too...*

Such appeals became impossible for him later, as belief in the reconciliation of irreconcilable forces gave way to indomitable anger and flaming hatred of "the tsars and princelings", landowners, priests and the stooges of the tsar and the masters. The lyrical poems "The Dream" and "The Caucasus", which evoked the wrath of Nicholas I and his faithful lackeys, were written prior to the exile; there can be no doubt about their revolutionary, anti-tsarist character, and the indignation which they aroused in "the crowned hangman" is quite understandable. Shevchenko's revolutionary outlook became more profound and was steeled during his exile, and became fully defined and crystallised after his return.

Exhausted by the ordeals he underwent during his exile, in prisons and in the army, the forty-seven-year-old poet dreamed of settling in the Ukraine, in the midst of that nature which he loved so well and described so beautifully. But a severe illness brought him down. On the morning of March 10th, 1861 Shevchenko died.

At first he was interred in St. Petersburg, and

only later was permission granted to take his remains for burial in the Ukraine.

Shevchenko's death evoked a wave of popular demonstrations. Great crowds of people streamed to his grave. Shevchenko became a symbol of the unification of the progressive forces of the Ukraine. Legends arose about him. It was said that in his grave there were buried weapons which rebel peasants would take into their hands at the proper time to march against the tsar and the landowners.

Even after his death Shevchenko's name inspired fear and hate in the tsar's government. Armed police guards stood by the poet's grave. The works of Shevchenko were forbidden or mutilated by the censors.

A GREAT PEOPLE'S POET

Shevchenko has gone down in history as a great people's poet.

That concept has nothing in common with what was once known as "folk poesy" and was always associated with a rehash of folk-lore motifs, superficial national colouring and tone, local scenery and set characters. At the same time it is evident that poetry which does not grow out of the national soil and does not reflect the finest traits of the poet's own people, will always remain a sterile flower.

A great poet is the voice of his epoch. The poet may be glorifying the heroic past, but his eyes are always directed forward, to the future. In a class society, which is based on social and class inequality, on the oppression of man by man, a great poet is always on the side of the oppressed against the oppressors.

Marx and Engels were delighted with the brilliant gifts of Heine when he scourged the bourgeoisie, kings and priests of his day with the lash of his satire, when together with his "Silesian weavers" he wove a shroud for the old Germany, and when in his lyrical pieces he sincerely and pre-eminently expressed the finest and most delicate of human feelings—but they criticised him sharply when he turned away from the path of democracy and vacillated in political matters.

Byron and Pushkin soared on mighty wings above their class and their epoch to become the spokesmen of the foremost ideals of humanity, and that is why (and not just thanks to their brilliant poetic gifts) they are genuinely great national poets.

Our contemporary Julian Przyboś writes correctly of the great poet of the Polish people, Mickiewicz: "Not a single human feeling is alien to his poetry, the poet confesses his innermost personal emotions, but the voice of Mickiewicz is first and foremost the voice of the millions, it's the heroic



TARAS SHEVCHENKO OPERA HOUSE IN KIEV

call to the struggle for freedom. That Mickiewicz who remains ever alive in the hearts of the people is first and foremost the poet of struggle."

All those finer traits that are common to Heine, Byron, Pushkin and Mickiewicz are also found in Shevchenko. He was a truly people's and truly national poet, a poet-fighter, a true revolutionary.

His friends, the Russian revolutionary democrats, valued highly that essence of Shevchenko's poetry. Nikolai Dobrolyubov wrote of him: "He is a genuine people's poet. . . . The whole range of

his thoughts and feelings is in complete conformity with the meaning and order of the people's life. He came from the people, he lived with the people, and not solely in his thoughts but also in the circumstances of his life he was firmly and vitally bound with the people."

Taras Shevchenko was truly the founder of the new Ukrainian literature. As Dante did in Italian poetry and Pushkin in Russian, Shevchenko fashioned a poetical language that was realistically accurate and was saturated with the imagery, thoughts and feelings of his own people.

The most progressive tendencies of his epoch and the most advanced aspirations of the public circles in Russia, the cherished thoughts and hopes of the people found their expression in Shevchenko's works. In that lies the all-national significance of the great Ukrainian poet.

During Soviet times the works of Taras Shevchenko have been published in 440 editions in forty-two languages of the peoples of the U.S.S.R., a total of more than twelve million copies. There isn't a corner of the Soviet Union, from the extreme north to the torrid south and from the shores of the Pacific Ocean to the westernmost borders, where the works of the great Ukrainian poet aren't read and held in high esteem. In every Soviet Republic and autonomous region the best

Soviet poets are translating Shevchenko's works into their native languages.

It is clear why such enormous importance is attached to the heritage of Shevchenko. As a penetrating thinker and as a poet, Shevchenko stands alongside such giants as Pushkin, Lermontov, Nekrasov, Goethe, Byron, Hugo, Heine, Mickiewicz, Rustaveli, Burns and Petöfi.

Shevchenko's works have achieved world fame. They have been translated into many languages. In Britain he is compared to Burns, in Germany to Bürger, in France to Béranger and Mistral.

By the way, in an article on Frédéric Mistral, A. V. Lunacharsky drew an interesting comparison between the fate of the bard of Provence and that of Taras Shevchenko. "The role of Mistral, perhaps, is to some extent similar to the role of Shevchenko," Lunacharsky wrote. "But Mistral received the ribbon of the Legion of Honour, and during parades the regimental banners were lowered in front of his balcony. In reward for his services to the language and spirit of our own Provence, Shevchenko received a crown of thorns.

"But despite Mistral's greatness, and no matter how sweet it is to recall the sounds and images of his 'Mireille', he is not the equal of the poet-martyr who reflected the soul of the people not only in rest and self-admiration, but also in their wrathful



MONUMENT TO TARAS SHEVCHENKO IN KIEV

and mournful moods, in their collective weeping over their historical fate. If Mistral could meet Shevchenko in the Valhalla of great poets, he could embrace him as a brother, since their missions were similar and each is blessed for his resurrection of his national tongue, but after that Mistral would have to bow not only before the martyrdom of the Great Taras, but also before the doleful music that he poured into his works, to which the personal sorrow of poor little Mireille cannot aspire."

One German critic has declared that there is not a poet in world literature who personified the spirit and historical fate of his people as much as did Shevchenko. Professor Morfill in Britain called Shevchenko one of those children of the sun in whose veins flowed fire instead of blood. The Swedish critic Alfred Jensen wrote that Shevchenko's struggle against serfdom was of international importance and that Shevchenko's protest against all social, religious and political oppression—a protest which ennobles his poetry—is of universal significance. Beginning with E. Durant (1876), whose article about Shevchenko was written under the influence of the Russian writer Ivan Turgenev, Frenchmen have extolled Shevchenko as a bard of social protest and the enunciator of revolutionary ideas. Shevchenko is widely known in the countries

of Europe, and beyond Europe—as far as China and India.

Great poets always remain the contemporaries of the new generations. Each new generation finds something new in their works that is in keeping with its own epoch.

In the world today the united forces of progressive humanity are waging a struggle against the forces of reaction, for democracy and a lasting peace. The passionate works of Taras Shevchenko, with his call to put an end to all oppression and violence, and his appeal for friendship and unity of all the peoples, are in conformity with our own times. His works are immortal, just as is immortal the people that gave birth to the great poet.

Shevchenko's works shine bright as a guiding star in the sky of modern Ukrainian literature, and they also light up the boundless vistas that lie before Soviet literature as a whole.

Taras Shevchenko, a prophet of the dawn of mankind—that dawn whose light has begun to shine in our great times—has joined the galaxy of those brilliant creators and fighters whose words and whose glory belong to all humanity.

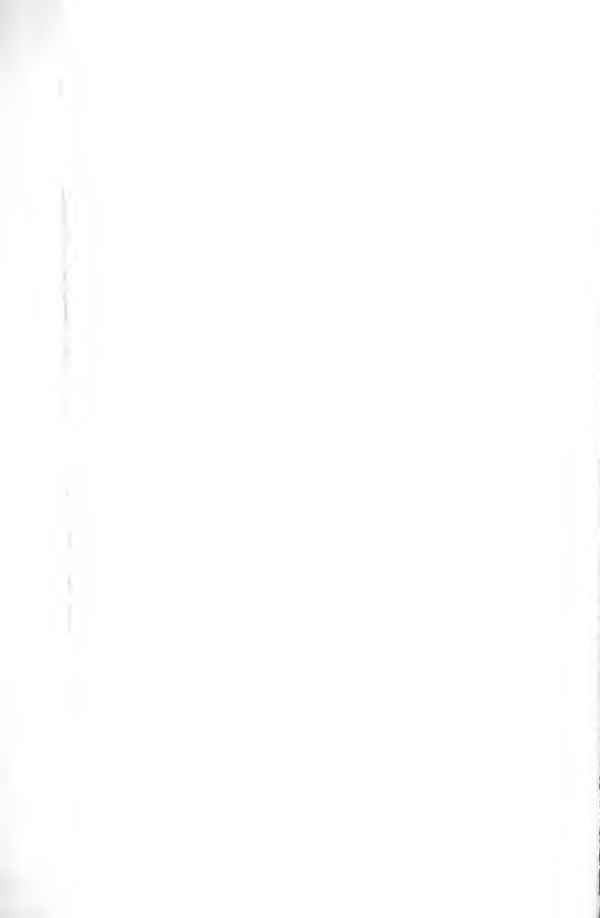
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