

MY TESTAMENT⁶¹

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.

When from Ukraine the Dnieper bears
Into the deep blue sea
The blood of foes. . . then will I leave
These hills and fertile fields—
I'll leave them all and fly away
To the abode of God,
And then I'll pray. . . . But till that day
I nothing know of God.

Oh bury me, then rise ye up
And break your heavy chains
And water with the tyrants' 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.

Pereyaslav,
December 25, 1845

*Translated
by John Weir*

Vydubetsky Cloister. 1843-1844.
Pencil drawing

THE CAUCASUS

To My True Friend, Yakov De Balmen⁵⁴

"O that my head were waters,
And mine eyes a fountain of tears,
That I might weep day and night
For the slain. . . ."

Jeremiah, Chapter 9, Verse 1

Mighty mountains, row on row, blanketed with cloud,
Planted thick with human woe, laved with human blood.

Chained to a rock, age after age
Prometheus there bears
Eternal punishment—each day
His breast the eagle tears.
It rends the heart but cannot drain
The life-blood from his veins—
Each day the heart revives again
And once again is gay.
Our spirit never can be downed,
Our striving to be free.
The sateless one will never plow
The bottom of the sea.
The vital spirit he can't chain,
Or jail the living truth.
He cannot dim the sacred flame,
The great god's fame on earth.

'Tis not for us to duel with Thee!
Not ours the right to judge Thy deeds!
Ours but to weep and weep, and weeping,
To knead the daily bread we eat
With tears and sweat and blood unending.
We groan beneath the yoke of hangmen,
While drunken justice sodden sleeps.
Oh, when will justice rise at last?
And God, when wilt Thou give
Thyself from all Thy toil a rest?—

And let the people live!
Yet we believe in Thy great might
And in the living soul.
There shall be liberty and right!
And then to Thee alone
All tongues will pray, all heads will bow
For ever and ever.
But in the meantime, rivers flow,
The blood of men in rivers!

Mighty mountains, row on row, blanketed with cloud,
Planted thick with human woe, laved with human blood.

'Twas there that We, the Gracious,⁵⁵ found
Poor freedom hiding 'mid the crags
(A hungry thing, and all in rags),
And sick'd our dogs to drag her down.
A host of soldiers on those hills
Gave up their lives. And as for blood!?
All emperors could drink their fill,
In widows' tears alone they could
Be drowned together with their seed!
The sweetheart's tears, in secret shed!
Unsolaceable mothers' tears!
The heavy tears of fathers hoary!
Not streams, but veritable seas
Of blazing tears! So—Glory! Glory!
To hounds, and keepers of the hounds,
And to our rulers golden-crowned
Glory!

And glory, mountains blue, to you,
In ageless ice encased!
And glory, freedom's knights, to you,
Whom God will not forsake.
Keep fighting—you are sure to win!
God helps you in your fight!

For fame and freedom march with you,
And right is on your side!

A hut, a crust—but all your own,
Not granted by a master's grace,
No lord to claim them for his own,
No lord to drive you off in chains.
With us, it's different! We can read,
The Gospel of the Lord we know! . . .
And from the dankest dungeon deep
Up to the most exalted throne—
We're all in gold and nakedness.
Come, learn from us! We'll teach you what
The price of bread is, and of salt!
We're Christian folk: with shrines we're blest,
We've schools, and wealth, and we have God!
Just one thing does not give us rest:
How is it that your hut you've got
Without our leave; how is it we
To you, as to a dog a bone,
Your crust don't toss! How can it be
That you don't pay us for the sun!
And that is all! We're Christian folk,
We are not heathens—here below
We want but little! . . . You would gain!
If only you'd make friends with us,
There's much that you would learn from us!
Just look at all our vast domains—
Boundless Siberia alone!
And prisons—myriads! Peoples—throngs!
From the Moldavian to the Finn
All silent are in all their tongues
Because such great contentment reigns!
With us, a priest the Bible reads
And then to teach the flock proceeds
About a king of ancient times,

h cloud,
in blood.

Who took to bed his best friend's bride,
And slew the friend he wronged besides. . . .
Now he's in heaven! See the kind
We send to heaven! You're denied,
As yet, our holy Christian light!
Come, learn from us! With us, it's loot,
 But pay the shot,
 And straight to God,
And take your family to boot!
Just look at us! What don't we know?
We count the stars, and flax we grow,
And curse the French. We trade or sell,
And sometimes lose in cards as well,
Live souls . . . not Negroes . . . our own stock,
And Christians, too . . . but common folk.
We don't steal slaves! No, God forbid!
We do not trade in stolen goods.
We act according to the rules! . . .

You love your brother as is writ
Within the Golden Rule?!
O damned by God, O hypocrites,
O sacrilegious ghouls!
Not for your brother's soul you care,
But for your brother's hide!
And off your brother's back you tear:
Rich furs for daughter's pride.
A dowry for your bastard child,
And slippers for your spouse.
And for yourself, things that your wife
Won't even know about!

For whom, O Jesus, Son of God,
Then wert Thou crucified?
For us good folks, or for the word
Of truth. . . . Or to provide

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And weep with the Cossacks o'er all of her woes,
And wait till from prison I come home again,
And in the meantime—I shall sow
My thoughts, my bitter tears,
My words of wrath. Oh, let them grow
And whisper with the breeze.
The gentle breezes from Ukraine
Will lift them up with dew
And carry them to you, my friend! . . .
And when they come to you,
You'll welcome them with tender tears
And read each heartfelt line. . . .
The mounds, the steppes, the sea and me
They'll bring back to your mind.

Pereyaslav,
November 18, 1845

*Translated
by John Weir*

who no give me
who robe → go Kalkagey

THE HERETIC *

To Šafařík⁴⁴

Bad neighbours came and set afire
Their neighbour's good new house:
They warmed themselves and then retired
To sleep, and failed to douse
The smoking ashes from the fire,
And sow them to the winds.
The ashes at the cross-roads lay,
Grown cold, and yet within
A tiny spark alive remained,
And waited for the day
It would be blown into a blaze,
Like an avenger waits
The hour to strike! A long, long time
Still glowed that living spark
And waited where the highways meet,
And then it, too, was dark.

'Twas thus the Germans to the torch
The Slavic mansion put, and rent
The family of Slavs apart,
And slyly planted in their hearts
The savage serpent of dissent.

The blood, in rivers streaming, quenched
The embers that yet glowed.
The fire site and the orphans then
The German neighbours stole.
And so the children of the Slavs
Grew up in slavery;
In shackles fettered, they forgot
Their very history!
But there, where once the fire had burned,

fažik⁴⁴

Of brotherhood a brand
Still glowed—still waited to be picked
By strong and steady hand.
'Twas not in vain. . . . For you looked deep
Where cold the ashes lie,
And found the ember with your heart
And with your eagle eye!
You shone the torch of truth, O Sage,
The light of liberty. . . .
And in the darkness and in chains
The large Slav family
You counted, naming every one,
Although no longer Slavs
But corpses of the Slavs you named.
And high upon a crag—
Upon the cross-roads of the world—
You stood like seer of old.
A miracle!—The corpses rose
And opened up their eyes;
The brothers at each other gazed
And fondly recognised,
Clasped hands in love, and warmly vowed
Forever friends to be!
And all the Slavic rivers flowed
Into a common sea!

Glory to you, sage and prophet,
O Czech, Slavic brother,
That you didn't let our justice
And our truth be smothered,
In the German flood to perish!
The sea you discovered,
The new Slavic sea of freedom,
I see filled with water,
On this sea will sail a vessel
Full speed, sheets distended,

At the wheel a trusted helmsman,
Will steer steady-handed.
May your fame endure, Šafařík,
Forever and ever,
For, into one sea you gathered
All the Slavic rivers!

So, among your many laurels
This mite, too, accept—
My elegy, poor and artless,
To the saintly Czech,
To Jan Hus,⁴⁶ exalted martyr
And great patriot!
Please accept this tribute, father.
While I pray to God
That all Slavs as faithful brothers,
As one man should stand,
True sons of the sun of justice
And heretics grand,
Such as was the deathless martyr
That at Constanz⁴⁶ flamed!
They'll bring peace to all the nations,
And eternal fame!

Pereyaslav,
November 22, 1845

The stone which the builders rejected
Is become the head of the corner.
This is the Lord's doing;
It is marvellous in our eyes.

Psalms 117, Verse 22

"With stark injustice all around
The shackled people silent wait,
While on the apostolic throne
There sits a fatted monk in state.

He wholesale trades in human blood
And rents out heaven for a price!
Thy reign's a mockery, O God,
Thy words of truth transformed to lies.
Despoilers, cannibals, O Lord,
Are trampling justice 'neath their heels,
They mock Thy glory and Thy word,
They mock Thy power and Thy will!
The very earth in bondage cries,
As cries a mother for her young:
Are there none, then, prepared to rise
To challenge slavery and wrong,
The gospel of the truth defend,
Direct the unenlightened throng?
Are there not now such righteous men,
O Lord, and never will be none?
Oh no! The day of wrath will come,
The day of Heaven's vengeance just!
And then the Papal Triple-crown
Will come down tumbling to the dust!
It will come tumbling down! To brave
Dire punishment and death
Bless these frail hands of mine, I pray,
O Lord, please give me strength!"

'Twas thus that in his simple cell
Jan Hus, the righteous, took the vow
To break the chains of hell! . . . To eyes
That were bereft of sight to show
A miracle!

"To battle, then!
God's will be done! . . . Let come what may!"
And to the Chapel Bethlehem⁴⁷
The good man went to preach and pray.

s rejected
corner.

, Verse 22

“In Jesus' holy name, who died
Upon the cross to save us all,
And in the twelve apostles' name,
Of Peter specially, and Paul,
By virtue of this sacred Bull⁴⁸
This woman, servant of the Lord,
Is hereby cleansed of all her sins,
And is absolved. . . .”

“Who is? This whore?”

The same who just two days ago
Solicited on Praha's streets.
The same who drunken reeled and rolled
In taverns, in the market-place,
And also on monastic cot!
She paid some money from her gains,
An absolution Bull she bought,
Now she's as pure as any saint! . . .
Almighty God!

Have mercy on people! In Thy serene heaven
From wreaking relentless revenge take a rest!
Why dost Thou condemn Thy good, loyal children
To punishment ruthless? Take pity! Desist!

Why didst Thou blind their eyes to light,
Their common sense, their reason free
Imprison in the darkest night! . . .

Oh people, look—the dawn is here!
Awake, O Czechs, from your deep sleep.
Cast off all cant, rise to your feet,
Be men, not butt for priestly jeers!
The robber princes of the church
Have trampled, plundered us, and raped
Our land, as Tatars put the torch
To Muscovy, and then they gave
Their dogmas to us! . . . Fire and sword,
All that is evil, squabbles, war,
And endless misery and woes. . . .

hore?

And Rome with bastards overflows!
Such are their dogmas, such the fame
Which they have earned! . . . Now all who die,
The holy conclave has proclaimed,
And did not absolution buy,
Go straight to hell! But he who pays
A double price is free to slay
All but the Pope or priest, and then
Goes straight to heaven! It's the end!
Now thieves from one another steal
Right in the church. Oh, serpent's seed!
Have you not drunk your fill of blood? . . .
O Lord Almighty, it is not
For me, a common man, to judge
The wondrous deeds that by Thy will
Are done on earth. Without a cause
Thou wouldst not work the people ill.

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Have mercy on us, Lord, I pray,
Deliver us from evil days!
For blasphemy corrupt my tongue,
But cure the earth of what is wrong.
Do not permit a priesthood vile
Thy glory and Thy name defile.
And mock the common human throng!"

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And Hus, as thus he prayed to God,
Wept bitterly. "What does he plan?"
The people in amazement thought,
" 'Gainst whom dares he to raise his hand!"

"Look, people, look! It's the decree
I read to you. . . ." He lifted it
So all could see. The people reeled:
Hus tore the Papal Bull to bits!!

The echo of his action rolled
Like thunder, till the news was told
In the world capital, in Rome.
The monks sought hide-outs. . . . Terror gripped
The hierarchy—fear of doom:
The proud tiara 'gan to slip!!

A serpent-pit, the Vatican
With hissing monks is filled,
The monks of Rome and Avignon
Conspire in whispers shrill,
The anti-Popes⁴⁹ together buzz—
This all-pervading hiss
E'en shakes the walls. The cardinals
'Bout the tiara twist
Like serpents. And like alley cats
Over a mouse they spit
And at each other snarl. . . . Of course,
They have good reason to:
There's fur, and hides . . . and meat galore!!!
The very walls shook, too,
With grim foreboding when the geese⁵⁰
In Praha 'gan to honk
And flew the eagles to engage
In battle. . . . Then the monks
Bestirred themselves, in council met
And 'gainst Jan Hus resolved
To take stern steps. In Constanz they
A raven's rally⁵¹ called!
They undertook to closely watch
And all precautions take
Lest to the spacious Slavic plains
The grey-winged fowl escape.

As ravens cover black a field,
So monks converged in mighty throngs

gripped

On Constanz city from all sides;
Like hungry locusts, all around
The dukes and barons are encamped
With heralds, minstrel-troubadours
And squires and servants by the score,
While on the highways soldiers tramp
In snake-like columns. Noble dames
Are followed by the German herd,
Some riding asses, some afoot,
And some with falcons—all inflamed
With fever of the hunt, to kill!
O Czech! D'ye hold your courage still??
Look at the might that's here arrayed
As though to bar Atilla's horde
Or else to start a new Crusade!

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In Praha angry rumblings grow
The thousand-headed synod's damned,
Both king and emperor⁵² condemned
On every side! Hus must not go
To Constanz! But Jan Hus replied,
"God's with me still! I do not quake!
My brothers, I don't fear to die!
I'll teach a lesson to those snakes!
I'll tear their poison fangs away!"
The Czechs then saw him on his way
Like loving sons their father kind. . . .

All bells that morn together tolled
In Constanz for the meet.
The cardinals in crimson robes
Foregathered, fat and sleek
Like prize bulls in a cattle pen.
The prelates took their seats,
Three Popes, some kings, and noblemen

Of various degrees;
Like Judases, in court unjust
They had assembled there
To judgement pass on Jesus Christ.
A clamour filled the air
Like in a Tatar camp, or when
A Jewish school is on. . . . And then—
The din stopped dead and all were hushed! . . .

Straight, like a cypress on a plain
In Lebanon—encased in chains,
He calmly stood before them: Hus!
He swept the whole assembly base
With eagle eye from face to face.
With limbs atremble, pallid cheeks,
His judges at the martyr gazed
In heavy silence. "Did you seek
My presence here for a debate?
Or did you wish my chains to see??"
"Be silent, brazen Czech. . . ." They hissed
Like vipers stirred up in their nest,
Then roared like frenzied beasts:
"A heretic! A heretic!
You sow dissension's evil seed!
You seek to foster schisms and splits!
God's holy will you do not heed! . . ."
"Pray, let me speak one word!" cried Hus.
"A heretic! You're damned by God!
A heretic! A heretic! . . ."
The prelates in a frenzy roared,
"A trouble-maker! . . ." "Just one word!"
"You are condemned! You're damned by all! . . ."
Jan Hus looked hard at the three Popes
And walked out of the palace hall! . . .
"We've brought him down! We've brought him
down! . . ."

Restraint had long gone overboard,
"Auto-da-fé! Auto-da-fé!"
The synod all together roared.

The whole night long the monks and dukes
Their triumph fêted. . . feasted, drank,
And drunkenly they railed at Hus,
Until the matin church bells rang.
The dawn. . . . The monks retired to pray
For Hus. The sun, a ball of fire,
Rose o'er the mountain. Did it, too,
That morning want to watch what they
To this most righteous man would do? . . .

In Constanz all the bells were tolled
As Hus in chains was led
Along his own Golgotha road. . . .
He showed no sign of dread
But, climbing on the faggot pile,
He turned and prayed aloud:
"O God of mercy, what's my crime?
What have I done, O Lord,
To these, Thy people? Men of God!
Why do they want my blood?
Why am I nailed upon the cross?
Oh listen, people! Pray!
Oh pray, ye guiltless ones, because
You, too, will end this way!
For savage beasts into the fold
Have crept as sheep disguised,
And now their wolfish claws they show. . . .
You'll find no place to hide,
No shelter from their greedy fangs.
A sea of blood will flow!
The blood from your own children's veins. . . .
Oh woe, my people, woe!

all! . . ."

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wn! . . ."

There, there in crimson robes attired
They stand! Their eyes are mad
With lust. . . . It's blood. . . ."

"Set fire! Set fire!"

"It's blood that they demand!
They want your blood! . . ." Then clouds of smoke
Concealed Jan Hus from view.
"Pray, people!" still the good man spoke,
"They know not what they do!
Forgive them, Lord. . . ." No further sound
Came from the martyr's pyre!
With eyes intent, the monks like hounds
Were clustered 'round the fire.
They feared he'd snake out from the coals
And slip along the ground
To the tiara of the Pope
Or to a royal crown.

The fire died down. The wind blew free
The ashes o'er the ground.
And yet the common folk could see
A red snake wrapped around
The triple-crown. The monks retired
Te Deum for to sing,
Then to the festive boards they hied
To gorge themselves and drink
Till they were bloated fit to burst.
With heavy hearts and sore,
A group of Czechs came, scraped some earth
From where he died, and bore
That dust to Praha. It was thus
The monks condemned to die
And at the stake burned good Jan Hus. . . .
And yet God's truth defies
Their bonfire. From behind the clouds
An eagle, not a goose,

Set fire!"
of smoke

Shall swoop, the triple-crown to claw—
And they don't even guess!
Without a care, the monks and lords
Dispersed each to his nest
From that red feast, like carrion crows.
In idleness they rest
And roister in their castle dens.
And as they feast and drink
And chant *Te Deum* now and then,
Their skins are safe, they think.
The danger is no more. . . . But wait!
Old Žižka⁵⁹ in Tabor
Above his hoary head has raised
And flashed the mace for war.

Village Maryinske,
October 10, 1845

*Translated
by John Weir*

I МЕРТВИМ, I ЖИВИМ . . .

TO MY FELLOW-COUNTRYMEN, IN UKRAINE AND NOT IN UKRAINE,
LIVING, DEAD AND AS YET UNBORN

MY FRIENDLY EPISTLE

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.
I John iv, 20.

Dusk is falling, dawn is breaking,
And God's day is ending,
Once again a weary people
And all things are resting.
5 Only I, like one accursed,
Night and day stand weeping
At the many-peopled cross-roads,
And yet no one sees me.
No one sees me, no one knows,
10 Deaf, they do not hearken,
They are trading with their fetters,
Using truth to bargain,
And they all neglect the Lord,—
In heavy yokes they harness
15 People; thus they plough disaster,
And they sow disaster . . .
But what shoots spring up? You'll see
What the harvest yields them!
Shake your wits awake, you brutes,
20 You demented children!
Look upon your native country,
On this peaceful eden;
Love with overflowing heart
This expanse of ruin!
25 Break your chains, and live as brothers!
Do not try to seek,
Do not ask in foreign lands
For what can never be
Even in heaven, let alone
30 In a foreign region . . .
In one's own house,—one's own truth,
One's own might and freedom.

There is no other Ukraina,
 No second Dnipro in the world,
 35 Yet you strike out for foreign regions,
 To seek, indeed, the blessed good,
 The holy good, and freedom, freedom,
 Fraternal brotherhood. . . . You found
 And carried from that foreign region,
 40 And to Ukraine brought, homeward-bound,
 The mighty power of mighty words,
 And nothing more than that. . . . You scream, too,
 That God, creating you, did not mean you
 To worship untruth, then, once more,
 45 You bow down as you bowed before,
 And once again the very skin you
 Tear from your sightless, peasant brothers,
 Then, to regard the sun of truth
 In places not unknown, you shove off
 50 To German lands. If only you'd
 Take all your miserable possessions,
 The goods your ancestors have stolen,
 Then with its holy heights, the Dnipro
 Would remain bereft, an orphan.

 55 Ah, if it could be that you would not return,
 That you'd give up the ghost in the place you were reared,
 The children would weep not, nor mother's tears burn,
 And God would not hear your blaspheming and sneers,
 The sun pour no warmth out upon the foul dunghill,
 60 Over a land that is free, broad and true,
 Then folk would not realize what kind of eagles
 You are, and would not shake their heads over you.

→ гoдopo гoдpa

Find your wits! Be human beings,
 For evil is impending,
 65 Very soon the shackled people
 Will their chains be rending;
 Judgment will come, and then shall speak
 The mountains and the Dnipro,
 And in a hundred rivers, blood
 70 Will flow to the blue ocean,
 Your children's blood . . . and there will be
 No one to help you . . . Brother
 Will by his brother be renounced,
 The child by its own mother.

75 And like a cloud, dark smoke will cover
The bright sun before you,
For endless ages your own sons
Will curse you and abhor you.
Wash your faces! God's fair image
80 Do not foul with filth!
Do not deceive your children that
They live upon this earth
Simply that they should rule as lords—
For an unlearned eye
85 Will deeply search their very souls,
Deeply, thoroughly . . .
For whose skin you're wearing, helpless
Mites will realize,
They will judge you,—and the unlearned
90 Will deceive the wise.

Had you but learned the way you ought,
Then wisdom also would be yours;
But thus to heaven you would climb:
"We are not we, I am not I!"
95 I have seen all, all things I know:
There is no hell, there is no heaven,
Not even God, but only I and
The stocky German, clever-clever,
And no one else beside. . . ." "Good, brother!"
100 But who, then, are you?"
"We don't know—
Let the German speak!"

That's the way you learn in your
Foreign land, indeed!
105 The German would say: "You are Mongols".
"Mongols, that is plain!"
Yes, the naked grandchildren
Of golden Tamburlaine!
The German would say: "You are Slavs".
110 "Slavs, yes, Slavs indeed!"
Of great and glorious ancestors
The unworthy seed!
And so you read Kollar, too,
With all your might and main,
115 Safarik as well, and Hanka,

Full-tilt you push away
 Into the Slavophils, all tongues
 Of the Slavonic race
 You know full well, but of your own
 120 Nothing! "There'll come a day
 When we can parley in our own
 When the German teaches,
 And, what is more, our history
 Explains to us and preaches,
 125 Then we will set about it all!"

You've made a good beginning,
 Following the German precepts
 You have started speaking
 So that the German cannot grasp
 130 The sense, the mighty teacher,
 Not to mention simple people.
 And uproar! And the screeching:
 "Harmony and power too,
 Nothing less than music!
 135 As for history! Of a free
 Nation 'tis the epic . . .
 Can't compare with those poor Romans!
 Their Bruti—good-for-nothings!
 But oh, *our* Cocleses and Bruti—
 140 Glorious, unforgotten!
 Freedom herself grew up with us,
 And in the Dnipro bathed,
 She had mountains for her pillow,
 And for her quilt—the plains!"
 145 It was in blood she bathed herself,
 She took her sleep on piles
 Of the corpses of free Cossacks,
 Corpses all despoiled.

Only look well, only read
 150 That glory through once more,
 From the first word to the last,
 Read; do not ignore
 Even the least apostrophe,
 Not one comma even,
 155 Search out the meaning of it all,
 Then ask yourself the question:
 "Who are we? Whose sons? Of what sires?"

By whom and why enchained? "
 And then, indeed, you'll see for what
 160 Are your Bruti famed :

 Toadies, slaves, the filth of Moscow,
 Warsaw's garbage—are your lords,
 Illustrious hetmans! Why so proud
 And swaggering, then do you boast, you
 165 Sons of Ukraine and her misfortune?
 That well you know to wear the yoke,
 More than your fathers did of yore?
 They are flaying you,—cease your boasts—
 From *them*, at times, the fat they'd thaw.

 170 You boast, perhaps, the Brotherhood
 Defended the faith of old?
 Because they boiled their dumplings in
 Sinope, Trebizond?
 It is true, they ate their fill,
 175 But now your stomach's dainty,
 And in the Sich, the clever German
 Plants his beds of 'taties ;
 And you buy, and with good relish
 Eat what he has grown,
 180 And you praise the Zaporozhya.
 But whose blood was it flowed
 Into that soil and soaked it through
 So that potatoes flourish?
 While it's good for kitchen-gardens
 185 You're the last to worry!
 And you boast because we once
 Brought Poland to destruction . . .
 It is true, yes, Poland fell,
 But in her fall she crushed you.
 190 Thus, then, your fathers spilled their blood
 For Moscow and for Warsaw,
 And to you, their sons, they have
 Bequeathed their chains, their glory.

195 Ukraina struggled on,
 Fighting to the limit :
 She is crucified by those
 Worse-than-Poles, her children.

In place of beer, they draw the righteous
 Blood from out her sides,
 200 Wishing, so they say, to enlighten
 The maternal eyes
 With contemporary lights,
 To lead her as the times
 Demand it, in the Germans' wake
 205 (She crippled, speechless, blind).
 Good, so be it! Lead, explain!
 Let the poor old mother
 Learn how children such as these
 New ones she must care for.
 210 Show her, then, and do not haggle
 Your instruction's price.
 A mother's good reward will come :
 From your greedy eyes
 The scales will fall away, and you
 215 Will then behold the glory,
 The living glory of your grandsires,
 And fathers skilled in knavery.
 Do not fool yourselves, my brothers,
 Study, read and learn
 220 Thoroughly the foreign things—
 But do not shun your own :
 For he who forgets his mother,
 He by God is smitten,
 His children shun him, in their homes
 225 They will not permit him.
 Strangers drive him from their doors ;
 For this evil one
 Nowhere in the boundless earth
 Is a joyful home.
 230 I weep salt tears when I recall
 Those unforgotten actions
 Of our forefathers, those grave deeds !
 If I could but forget them,
 Half my course of joyful years
 235 I'd surrender gladly . . .
 Such indeed, then, is our glory,
 Ukraina's glory! . . .
 Thus too, you should read it through
 That you'd do more than dream,
 240 While slumbering, of injustices,
 So that you would see

High gravemounds open up before
Your eyes, that then you might
Ask the martyrs when and why
245 And who was crucified.
Come, my brothers, and embrace
Each your humblest brother,
Make our mother smile again,
Our poor, tear-stained mother!
250 With hands that are firm and strong
She will bless her children,
Embrace her helpless little ones,
And with free lips, she'll kiss them.
And those bygone times will be
255 Forgotten with their shame,
And that glory will revive,
The glory of Ukraine,
And a clear light, not a twilight,
Will shine forth anew . . .
260 Brothers, then, embrace each other,
I entreat and pray you!

14.xii.1845
V'yunyshcha.

ВЕЛИКИЙ ЛЬОХ

THE GREAT VAULT

A MYSTERY PLAY

Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us.

Thou makest us a byword among the heathen, a shaking of the head among the people.

Ps.xliv 13-14.

I

THREE SOULS

Like snow, three little birds came flying
Through Subotiv, and alighting
On an old church's leaning cross
They settled : " God will pardon us !
5 Not human, now, we souls are birds . . .
From here we'll easier observe
How they will excavate the Vault.
The sooner it is dug and broken,
The sooner heaven will be opened.
10 For thus to Peter spake the Lord :
' Thou wilt admit them into heaven,
When all by Muscovites is stolen,
And they have opened the Great Vault.' "

FIRST SOUL :

When I was of human-kind,
15 Prisyá was my name ;
And this village was my birthplace,
Here I grew, I came
Here to play, in this same churchyard
Joined the children's fun,
20 Playing blind-man's-buff with Yurus',
With the Hetman's son.
And the Hetman's wife would come ;
And to the house she'd call us,
Where that barn is now, and give me
25 Figs and raisins luscious,

And all good things, and in her arms
 She'd carry me and pet me,
 And when, sometimes, from Chyhyryn
 Guests came with the Hetman,
 30 Then they'd send for me, and dress me
 In fine clothes and slippers,
 And the Hetman'd carry me
 In his arms and kiss me.
 And so, here, in Subotiv,
 35 I grew up and blossomed,
 Like a flower, and everyone
 Made me loved and welcomed.
 And to no one did I ever
 Say an evil word.
 40 And a pretty girl I was,
 Indeed, I had dark brows!
 All the lads came courting me,
 Of marriage they were speaking,
 And, of course, betrothal towels
 45 I had started weaving.
 I was just about to give them
 When evil struck unseen.
 Early on that Sunday morning,
 On St. Philip's E'en,
 50 I ran out to fetch some water
 (Long years back, that well
 Grew all silted and ran dry,
 But I fly on still),
 I looked : the Hetman and his elders . . .
 55 I drew the water there,
 And with full pails I crossed their path ;
 But I was unaware
 He was going to Pereyaslav
 To swear Moscow fealty,
 60 And I could only carry home
 With great difficulty
 That same water. . . . And the pails,
 Why did I not destroy them?
 Father, mother, self and brother
 65 And the dogs I poisoned
 With that ever-cursed water!
 And for that I'm stricken,
 For that, sisters, they will not
 Permit me into heaven.

SECOND SOUL :

- 70 As for me, my dearest sisters,
I am still debarred,
For I watered once the horse
Of the Moscow tsar
In Baturyn ; from Poltava
75 Home he was returning . . .
I was still a thoughtless girl
When glorious Baturyn
Was fired by Moscow in the night,
And Chechel' by her slain,
80 And both old and young she took
And drowned them in the Seym . . .
And I fell, right in the very
Palace of Mazeppa,
Lay among the corpses. Near,
85 My sister and my mother,
Murdered in each other's arms,
Lying there beside me.
Only with the greatest effort
Could the men divide me
90 From my lifeless mother. But
However much I prayed
The captain of the Muscovites
To kill me too. . . . Still they
Would not kill me, but released me
95 For the men's amusement . . .
Somehow I got away and hid
In the burned-out ruins . . .
In Baturyn, just one house
Alone, unharmed, survived,
100 And in this house they made the tsar
A billet for the night,
On his journey from Poltava.
Bringing water, I
Went up to the house, and *he*
105 Beckoned me, and signed
That I should water him his horse,
And I watered it :
I did not know, then, that so gravely,
Gravely I had sinned . . .
110 I could hardly reach the house,
And at the door fell dead.
The next day, when the tsar had gone,

I was laid to rest
 By an old woman who'd stayed back
 115 In the burned-out wreckage,
 She it was who'd welcomed me
 To the roofless cottage.
 Next day, she died too, and lay
 In the house unburied,
 120 For there was none to bury her
 Left now in Baturyn . . .
 Long years back, they pulled the house down,
 And the carved king-beam
 They burned to charcoal. . . . Yet, till now
 125 Over the ravines,
 Over the steppes of the Cossacks,
 On and on I've flown ;
 And for what they punish me,
 Myself I do not know !
 130 Maybe for this—that everyone
 I would serve and honour,
 And to the tsar of Muscovy's
 Horse I once gave water.

THIRD SOUL :

And in Kaniv I was born ;
 135 To speak I'd still not learned,
 Swaddled, in her arms, my mother
 Carried me around,
 When Catherine the tsarina came
 To Kaniv on the Dnipro,
 140 And on a hill my mother sat
 With me, in an oak-grove.
 I was weeping ; I don't know
 Whether I was hungry,
 Or whether (I was very young)
 145 Just then something hurt me.
 Mother was amusing me,
 She looked upon the river,
 And she pointed out to me
 The royal barge, all gilded
 150 Like a splendid mansion, there
 Princes, lords and governors
 In the barge, and the tsarina
 Sat in state among them.
 And I looked on her—and smiled—

155 And my soul had fled,
And my mother died . . . and in a single
Grave we both were laid.
This is why, my dearest sisters,
I am being punished,
160 For so long from Purgatory
Even I've been banished!
How should I, a swaddled baby,
Know this tsarina reigned
As a hungry she-wolf, the fierce
165 Enemy of Ukraine?
Sisters, please explain!

"Dusk is falling, let us fly
To pass the night in Chuta,
So that, should something come to pass,
170 We still may hear it, yonder."

The little white birds started up,
And to the wood took flight,
There, on a branchlet of an oak,
They perched to pass the night.

II

THREE CROWS

FIRST CROW :

175 Kr-rr, Kr-rr, Kr-rr!
Bohdan cribbed crocks
And carted to Kyiv,
And sold to crooks
The crocks he cribbed.

SECOND CROW :

180 I have been in Paris.
There I drank away three zloty
With Radziwill and Potocki.

THIRD CROW (*speaking Russian throughout*) :

Over bridge t'e devil goes,
Goat goes over vater :
185 Comes disaster! Comes disaster!

Cawing thus, three crows came flying
From three directions, and alighting
On a beacon on a mound
In the wood, they settled down,
190 All puffed, as if in frosty weather,
They sat and looked, one to the other,
Like three old sisters, withered crones
Who've spent their spinsterhood together,
Until with moss they're overgrown.

FIRST CROW :

195 This for you, and this for you !
I have just been flying
To Siberia, where from one
Decembrist I have stolen
A scrap of gall ; See, here it is,
200 A bite to break your fast !
Well, in your Muscovy, is there aught
To feed oneself at last ?
Or, not a single dam' thing still ?

THIRD CROW :

Sister, ve 'ave many.
205 T'ree Ukases I 'ave cawed,
For a single roadway.

FIRST CROW :

Which road was it? For the iron one?
Well, you've worked in style!

THIRD CROW :

Yes, six t'ousand souls I stifled
210 In a single mile.

FIRST CROW :

Don't lie, for there were only five,
With Von Korf helping too!
And she boasts and swanks about
What outsiders do !
215 O you smoke-dried cabbage-eater !
And you, gracious madam,
You've been feasting, then, in Paris?
You accursed heathen !

You've spilled blood in a mere river
220 And *you* only drove
Your nobles to Siberia
Yet how puffed up you've grown!
See, what a majestic peacock!

SECOND AND THIRD :

And what have *you* done?

FIRST CROW :

225 What right is it of yours to ask me!
You were still unborn
When I played inn-keeper here,
Drawing blood by quarts.
Look at them! Yes, they have read
230 Karamzin, of course!
And they think: 'how fine we are!'
Nitwits—hold your tongue!
Crippled and unfeathered birds,
You are still half grown!

SECOND CROW :

235 What a touch-me-not she is!
Not this one's up early,
Who's still drunk at dawn, but one
Who's slept it off already!

FIRST CROW :

Could you have got drunk without me,
240 With your Latin prelates?
You've got no dam' skill—I burned down
Poland with her monarchs.
And for all you did—you gossip!—
She would yet be standing!
245 As for the free Cossacks—well,
They had quite a thrashing!
To whom have I not hired them out?
To whom have I not sold them?
But how unkillable they are,
250 Damned things! I thought, with Bohdan
I had almost buried them . . .
No, up they rose—fate damn them—
With the Swedish vagabond,
And what events occurred then

255 I grow still fiercer to recall! . . .
 Then I burned Baturyn;
 Near Romny I dammed the Sula
 With officers alone
 From the Cossack force, with simple
 260 Cossacks I have sown
 Finland over, piled them up
 By the Orel' in mounds,
 And to Ladoga have driven
 Them in countless crowds.
 265 On the tsar's behalf, the swamps
 And marshy land I stopped up
 And I strangled in the dungeon
 Far-famed Polubotok.
 What a festival that was!
 270 Hell itself took fright,
 And the Irzhavets' Madonna
 Wept salt tears that night!

THIRD CROW :

I too 'ave lived it good!
 Vit' t'e Tartars I stirred mud!
 275 Vit' t'e Torturer gobbled up!
 Vit' Peterkin got drunk
 And to t'e Germans sold t'e lot!

FIRST CROW :

And this you couldn't have done better!
 So neatly into German fetters
 280 You've bound the Russkies, that one may
 Lie down and sleep the time away!
 And only the fiend knows for sure
 What my lot are waiting for!
 Already I've forced serfdom on them,
 285 A frightful lot of petty gentry
 I've reared in uniforms aplenty,
 As numerous as lice I've bred,
 All of 'em m'lords, the Bastards,
 And with Fritzes now that ghastly
 290 Sich is overgrown and spread.
 The Muscovite, too, no beginner!
 He knows just how to warm his fingers.
 I may be fierce—but all the same
 I cannot bring to pass that

295 Which in Ukraine the Muscovites
 Are doing to the Cossacks.
 Now look! They'll print a Ukase soon :
 " By God's abounding Mercy,
 Both you are Ours and all is Ours,
 300 Both worthy and unworthy."
 Already they are bustling round,
 Seeking in the graves
 " Antiquities ", for in the houses
 Naught is left to take,—
 305 They've made a lovely job of plundering
 Everything, but the devil
 Knows why they are making such
 Haste about this frightful
 Vault. Had they waited just a while
 310 The church would fall down too,
 Then in " The Bee " they could describe
 Both in the same review.

SECOND AND THIRD :

Why, then, have you summoned us?
 Upon the Vault to gaze?

FIRST CROW :

315 The Vault as well! Moreover, two
 Marvels will come to pass :
 In Ukraine this night, a pair
 Of twins are to be born.
 One of them, like old Gonta, will
 320 Torture the torturers,
 The other, though, will bring them aid
 (And this one is ours) !
 Already in the womb he bites,
 And I have read it all,
 325 How, when that Gonta will grow up,
 All that is ours will fall.
 He will plunder all that's good,
 Nor will he spare his brother,
 All Ukraine with truth and freedom
 330 He will scatter over.
 And so, dear sisters, you will see
 What here they're making ready,
 For torturers and all good things
 They are preparing fetters.

THIRD CROW :

335 I vit' melted gold upon
'Is eyes vill pour it t'ick.

FIRST CROW :

He'll have no desire for gold,
The cursed lunatic !

THIRD CROW :

Vit' Imperial appointments
340 I vill 'andcuff 'im.

SECOND CROW :

All evils and all tortures I
From the whole world will bring.

FIRST CROW :

No, no, dear sisters, that is not
The way it should be done,
345 While men are blind, he must be buried,
Else ill-fate will come.
Look, there high over Kyiv town
A comet's tail is spreading,
And near the Dnipro and Tyasmyn
350 The earth has quaked and trembled.
Do you hear? The mountain groaned
Over Chyhyryn . . .
O, all Ukraine is laughing, weeping !
And this portends the twins
355 Have now been born into the world ;
And the demented mother
Screams that she'll name them both " Ivan "
And shrieks with crazy laughter.
Come, let us fly. . . .

360 They flew away,
And as they flew they sang :

FIRST CROW :

Down the Dnipro, our Ivan
Will sail to the Lyman,
With his aunt !

SECOND CROW :

365 Our wild dog will migrate
To feed upon snakes
In my path !

THIRD CROW :

Ven I seize and swoop, I
To 'Ades will fly
370 Like a dart !

III

THREE MINSTRELS

One was blind, another lame,
One a hunchbacked cripple,
To Subotiv they came to sing
Of Bohdan to the people.

FIRST MINSTREL :

375 Well, as folk say, those crows were quick
To find a cosy roost !
As though the Muscovites put up
That perch just for their use.

SECOND MINSTREL :

And who else for, then? Surely now
380 A man will not be put
To count the stars there?

FIRST MINSTREL :

You don't say !
Or maybe there they'll put
A little Muscovite or German ;
385 Germans or Muscovites, I swear,
Will find some pickings even there.

THIRD MINSTREL :

What nonsense are you jabbering?
What kind of crows, now is it?
What Muscovites? What roost d'you mean?
390 The Lord above forbid it !
Perhaps they'll want to force them to

Hatch Muscovites from eggs?
For the tsar wants to capture all
The world, so rumour says.

SECOND MINSTREL :

395 Maybe you're right, but why the devil
Build them on the mountains?
And such high ones, too, that you
Can reach the very clouds when
You climb up there?

THIRD MINSTREL :

400 This is why :
There'll be a flood for sure.
And then the lords will climb up high,
And they will watch from there
How all the peasant folk are drowned.

FIRST MINSTREL :

405 You folk may have a store
Of wisdom—but you still know nothing!
Here's the reason why
They set up these 'monuments' :
So that folk won't try
410 To steal water from the river
Or plough secretly
The sands that stretch around the Tyasmyn.

SECOND MINSTREL :

What the devil now?
You've no talent—so don't lie!
415 Why don't we sit down
Under this elm here for a while
And rest? And in my pack
I've still a bit of bread or two,
So we can have a snack.
420 Let's eat now, while we have the chance,
The sun will be up soon.
(They sat down.) And who, brothers, about
Bohdan sings a tune?

THIRD MINSTREL :

I can sing right well of Jassy
425 And the Yellow Waters,
And Berestechko's little town.

SECOND MINSTREL :

Great service they'll have brought us
Before this day has run its course :
For by the Vault there's plenty
430 Of folk, a proper market-day !
And quite a lot of gentry !
That's where the takings are for us !
Well, let us sing together
For practice !

FIRST MINSTREL :

435 Get along with you !
Let's lie down. Far better
To get some sleep ! The day is long,
There'll still be time to sing.

THIRD MINSTREL :

And so say I. Let's say our prayers,
440 Then sleep—yes, sleep's the thing.

They fell asleep beneath the elm-tree.
The sun sleeps on, the birds are still,
But near the Vault they're up and busy,
Already digging with a will.

445 Already they've dug one day, two,
And now the third—at last
After great effort there's the wall,
They take a little rest,
And station sentries all around.
450 The Sergeant prays and begs
Not to let anybody near.
Officially he sends
Report to Chyhyryn. The boss
Arrived with bloated face ;
455 He looked : " T'e arches must be broken."
He observed, " T'e case
Vill then be settled." They broke in,
And they were terrified :
Skeletons lay there in the Vault,
460 It seemed as if they smiled
To look upon the shining sun.

There Bohdan's treasure lay :
 A potsherd and a rotten trough,
 And skeletons in chains !
 465 Had they been regulation ones,
 They might be useful yet !
 They laughed. . . . The Sergeant in his rage
 Nearly went off his head :
 Nothing to take—and after he
 470 Had worked so hard, and set
 Himself a-dither day and night—
 And now he only looked
 A fool ! If only he could get
 His hands on him, he'd put
 475 That Bohdan straight into the army ;
 Then he'd know how, the pest,
 To fool the Government ! He shouts
 And runs like one possessed ;
 He sloshes Yaremenko's* face,
 480 And in the choicest Russian
 He curses everyone, swoops on
 The minstrels in a passion.
 " Vat you vant 'ere, good for not'ings ? "
 " Well, please, Sir, we can
 485 Sing a ballad, Sir, of Bohdan ! "
 " I'll give you Bogdan !
 Rogues and vagabonds, and you
 Made on an accursed
 Rogue, just like yourselves, a song ! "
 490 " Please you, Sir, we learned it ! "
 " I will learn you ! Give it t'em ! "
 They seized and gave—no mercy !
 And they steamed them in the Muscovites'
 Own bathhouse-Cooler !
 495 Thus the ballads about Bohdan
 Served the singers truly !
 Thus in Subotiv Moscow dug
 The small vault as her prize ;
 Still she has not yet discovered
 500 Where the Great Vault lies.

[1845
Myrhorod.]

* Cossack Yaremenko's barn is on the site where Bohdan's palace used to stand. (Shevchenko's note.)

And, all the signs say, nothing more.

Taras Shevchenko
St. Petersburg, November 22nd, 1858.
Translated by John Weir, Toronto

Top of the page

Shevchenko called the poem below (which, by the way, was the one which sent the tsar into the greatest rage) a Comedy, that is, a farce. It is one of the most devastating political satires ever penned.

In the first part, the poet describes conditions in Ukraine. In the second, he is transported to the northern reaches of Siberia where prisoners toiled in the mines, among them the revolutionary democrats - the Decembrists ("the king of freedom"). Then the scene shifts to St. Petersburg.

"The Second to the First" is engraved on the monument Empress Catherine II erected beside the Neva River to Tsar Peter I. Shevchenko recalls the destruction of the Sich (fortress) of the Ukrainian Cossacks by the tsars and how the Cossacks and serfs were driven to build St. Petersburg on the marshes, where many perished. He depicts their souls as a flock of white birds hovering over the tsar. The acting hetman (whose song is heard by the poet) was Pavlo Polubotok, imprisoned by Peter the Great in the Petro-pavlovsky fortress, where he died in 1724.

Dream

A Comedy

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

John, Chapter 14, Verse 17.

Each person's destiny's his own,
His road before him lies:
This one builds up, that one tears down,
And that casts greedy eyes
O'er all the earth, to find somewhere
A land not yet enslaved,
Which he could conquer and then bear
With him into the grave.
This fellow in his neighbour's home
His host cleans out at cards,
While that one in a corner hones
A blade for brother's heart.
Then there's the solid citizen,
The worthy, pious kind,
Who'll creep up like a cat and then
Bide patiently his time
Until hard luck hits your affairs,
Then pounce! - Don't plead your cause:
Your wife's appeals and children's tears
Won't save you from his claws.
And that one, generous and grand,
The fervent patriot,
So deeply loves his native land,
So worries o'er its lot,
As from his country's heart he sucks
The blood as though 'twas water!...
The brethren meanwhile sit and look,
Their eyes agape like saucers!

That's how it's meant to be! Because
There's no God in the sky!
You pull your yoke until your breath
Gives out and you are done,
Yet pray for heaven after death?
In vain! There's none! There's none!
Your labour's lost. Come to! Come to!
In this world every one -
The princes, and the beggars, too,
They all are Adam's sons.
Both he... and he... What's this I prate?
What is it all about?
I banquet every single day,
Carouse day in, day out,
While you with envy burn and hate!
Don't scold: 'Twill do no good -
I'm deaf to you! I drink my own,
Not other people's blood!

Such thoughts went flitting through my head
As tipsy from a merry feast
In dead of night, on reeling feet,
I made my way to home and bed.
No bawling child or nagging spouse
Have I to spoil my rest -
With perfect peace I'm blest
Both in my mind and in my house.
I climbed into my bed
And soon slept like the dead.
And when a man has had a few,
Though cannon roar he still will snore,
He'll sleep whate'er you do.

Oh, what a vision rare I saw
In sleep that night:
A staunch abstainer would get fight,
A tightwad would a coin bestow,
If they could only get a glance.
But not a chance!
I dreamed: high in the air's expanse
It was as though an owl was flying
Over meadows, over valleys,
Over river banks and gulleys,
Over steppes and over forests.
And in the owl's wake I flew, too,
And flying, bid the earth adieu:

"Goodbye, O world, O earth, farewell,
Unfriendly land, goodbye!
My searing pain, my tortures cruel
Above the clouds I'll hide.
And as for you, my dear Ukraine,
I'll leave the clouds behind
And fall with dew to talk with you,
Poor widow-country mine.
I'll come at midnight when the dew
Falls heavy on the fields;
And softly-sadly we will talk
Of what the future yields.
Until the rising of the sun
We'll talk about your woes,
Until your infant sons are grown
And rise against the foes.
Goodbye, my lovely, poor Ukraine,

We fly... I look - the dawn has come,
The sky's edge bursts ablaze;
In shady glades the nightingales
Sing out the new sun's praise.
The breezes softly, lightly wake
The steppelands from their dreams;
About the coulees, by the lakes
The willows shimmer green.
The orchards, heavy laden, bow;
The poplars stand at ease
Like watchmen who, their duty done,
Hold gossip with the fields.
And all about, the whole land gleams
With nature's warmest hues,
Bedecked with blossoms, dressed in greens,
And bathed in drops of dew.
Since time began it bathes in dew
And greets the morning sun...
There's no beginning to all this,
Of ending, too, there's none!
There's no-one on the earth can raze
And ruin this beauty-land...
And all of this... My aching heart,
My soul, why are you sad?
My poor, my desolated soul,
Why do your useless weep?
For whom is your pity? Alas, can't you see?
And cannot you hear how the multitudes cry?
So go, take a good look! And meantime I'll fly
Into the blue sky, above the grey clouds;
Up there are no rulers, no prisons or knouts,
No jeers of contempt and no people's lament.
Go, closer look: in that same Eden which you flee
His tattered shirt from off a cripple's back they tear
With skin and all - because his hide they need
To shoe their princelings with. And over there
A widow's crucified for taxes, while they drive
Her only son - her only hope! - in chains
Into the army. And there - more dead than 'live,
A starving babe beside a hedge awaits
Its mother from the feudal lord's estate.

And there, d'you see? My eyes! my eyes!
While I was yet a child
Why did you not along with tears
Flow out and leave me blind?
An unwed mother with her babe
Is shuffling down the lane -
Her parents drove her from the house,
And none will take her in!
E'en beggars chase her from their midst!
Young master pays no mind:
He's had some twenty lasses since,
To while away the time!

Does God look from behind a cloud
And see our woes and ills?
Perhaps He does, but helps as much
As do these ancient hills
Which mute and motionless endure
While washed with human gore!
My soul! My miserable soul!
I cannot suffer more.
Let us drink down a poison draught

How long will hangmen longer rule
And turn earth into hell?

Then leave me, my thoughts, my torment, my pain,
And take away with you all evils, all woes -
Your constant companions! Together you've grown
And clung to each other; by woe were you trained
From earliest childhood. So take them and fly,
Unleash angry riot all over the sky.

Let it turn black, let it turn red,
Let conflagration spread,
Let once again the dragon's breath
Pile mound on mound of dead.
And meanwhile, I will hide my heart
And go far, far away
To seek and find somewhere a place
Where Eden still holds sway.

Again I tell the earth good-bye.
Again above the earth I fly.
It's hard to leave your mother dear,
No roof above her head,
But harder yet to watch her tears,
Her rags, her lack of bread.

I fly, I fly, the north winds blow;
Before lie endless miles of snow,
Muskeg and woods, a fog-bound land,
A wilderness untouched by man.
No human sound, not e'en a track
Is seen of fearful human feet.
To foe and friend alike I speak:
Farewell! I'm never coming back!

Carouse, make merry all you like!
I'll never hear you now -
All by myself I'll sink to sleep
Forever in the snow.
And till the day comes when you find
There is a corner yet
That's not been drenched in blood and tears
I'll take a little rest...
I'll rest a bit... What's this I hear? -
The clanging sound of chains
Beneath the earth... I'll take a look...
Oh, evil human race!
Where have you come from? And what for?
What is it that you seek
Beneath the earth? No! I'm afraid
There'll be no rest for me
In heaven too!... What have I done?
What way am I to blame?
To whom and how have I done wrong?
Whose heavy hands have chained
My soul within this searing breast
And set my heart on fire?
And who let loose these carrion crows -
These rebel thoughts of mine?
I don't know why I suffer so,
Why I'm tormented so!
Oh, when will I my sins atone
And pay the debt I owe? -
I am afraid, I must confess,
I neither see nor know!

On that, the final Judgment Day,
The dead arise to justice claim.
No, these are not the dead at all,
And not to judgement claim!
They're people - living, breathing men
In heavy irons chained.
Deep from the bowels of the earth
The gold they daily bring
To fill his hollow coffers with! . . .
They're convicts! . . . Why in chains?
Go ask the tsar... And even he,
Perhaps, cannot explain.

See, there a branded bandit drags
His ball and chain behind;
And there, fresh from the torture rack,
His teeth an outlaw grinds -
To kill his barely-breathing pal
Is topmost in his mind!
And there, amid those wretched dregs,
In iron chains he stands:
The king of freedom! World-wide king,
Crowned with a convict's brand!
In prison-dread he does not groan,
He does not quail or weep!
A heart that once with worth was warmed
Will warm forever keep!

And where are the thoughts you so lovingly nurtured,
Your lofty ideals, bold plans for the future -
To whom did you pass them, my friend, oh to whom?
Or will they lie buried with you in the tomb?
Don't bury them, brother! Scatter them widely!
They'll sprout and they'll grow - in time they will ripen!

Enough? Or must I undergo
Still more of this? Enough, it's cold
And I must flee these snows.

Again I fly. The land turns dark.
My mind is drowsing, faint my heart.
Big towns I see as I look down,
A hundred churches in each town,
With men their squares and streets are filled -
They're soldiers busy at their drills;
Supplied with boots and clothes and food,
And given heavy chains to boot,
They're training... But what's that ahead?
A swampy, boggy lowland spreads,
And in that slough a city stands;
A heavy cloud above it hangs,
A cloud of fog... Up close I fly -
The city's of enormous size.
Perhaps in Turkey,
Or in Germany,
Or, maybe, even Muscovy:
With churches, palaces galore,
Big-bellied masters score on score,
And not a solitary home!

'Twas growing dark... Then fires were lit -
With torchlights all about
The people press upon all sides...
"Hurrah! Hurrah!" they shout.
"Come to your senses, you poor fools!
What do you celebrate?

This day to promenade!"
"So where's that marvel to be seen?"
"There - through the palace gate."
I push my way; a countryman
With buttons made of brass
Elected to acknowledge me:
"Where are you from?" he asked.
"I'm from Ukraine." "How comes it that
You do not even know
To talk the way they do up here?"
I answered, "That's not so -
I know, but do not choose to." "Queer!
Well, I'm in service here,
I know the ins and outs, and so
I'll lead you, if you care,
Into the palace. But, you know,
We're educated folk
So don't be stingy with the tip..."
Oh loathsome inkpot, go
Away from me... I made myself
Invisible again
And to the chambers made my way.
Oh God, what I saw then!
Now there is 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 beanpole lean,
While every time she steps, her head
Goes jiggling on her neck.
Is this the beauty rare they praise?!
Poor thing, you are a wreck!
And silly I, not having seen
You once with my own eyes,
Accepted what your scribblers wrote,
Believed your poets' lies.
Oh, what a fool! I took for cash
A Moscow pledge to pay.
How can I after this believe
The things they write again!
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 -

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 poked right in the pot
The next in line! . . . Then that one 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 little father deigns to play!
"Hooray, hooray, hooray, 'ray, 'ray!"

I laughed out loud, and that was all;
I own, in the melee
I too got banged. 'Twas nearing dawn,
The city was asleep;
Just here and there some orthodox
Lay groaning on the street,
And moaning, begged the Lord their tsar
In best of health to keep.
Laughter and tears! I sauntered forth
The city's sights to see.
There night is bright as day. I look:
Beside the silent stream
Rich mansions, palaces abound,
The river banks are seamed -
Shored up with stone. I look around
As though I were entranced!
What magic wrought such marvels rare
Where once was a morass? . . .
What quantities of human blood
Upon this spot were shed -
Without a knife! Across the way
There looms a fortress dread,
Its steeple rising like an awl -
A comic sight to see.
The tower clock ticks off the time.
I turn - I see a steed
A-gallop and his flying hooves
The granite seem to cleave!
The rider, bareback on the horse,
In something like a cloak,
Is hatless. His bare head's adorned
With leaves, perhaps of oak.
The steed rears up as though it means
To leap across the sea,
And he extends his arm as though
He coveted to seize
The whole, whole world. Who is that man?
I read the message terse
Inscribed upon the mound of stone:
"The Second to the First."
I understand right well what's meant
By those laconic words:
The First was he who crucified

Oh, butchers! butchers! cannibals!
And did you gorge and loot
Enough when 'live? And when you died
What did you take with you?
A heavy weight pressed on my heart.
It was as though engraved
Upon that granite I could read
The story of Ukraine.
I stand . . . And then I faintly hear
A melancholy strain,
From ghostly lips a mournful song:

"From Hlukhov-town at break of dawn
The regiments withdrew
To build abutments on the line.
I, with a Cossack crew,
As acting hetman of Ukraine
Due northward took my course -
Up to the capital. Oh God!
Oh wicked tsar, accurst!
Oh crafty, evil, grasping tsar,
Oh viper poison-fanged!
What did you with the Cossacks do?
Their noble bones you sank
In the morass and on them built
Your capital-to-be,
On tortured Cossack corpses built!
And me, a hetman free,
You threw into a dungeon dark
And left in chains to die
Of hunger . . . Tsar! We'll never part.
We are forever tied
Together by those heavy chains.
E'en God cannot untie
Those bonds between us. Oh, it's hard
Eternally to bide
Beside the Neva! Far Ukraine
Exists, perhaps, no more.
I'd fly to see if she's still there,
But God won't let me go.
It may be Moscow's razed the land,
And emptied to the sea
Our Dnieper, and our lofty mounds
Dug up - so none may see
The relics of our former fame.
Oh God, please pity me."

Then silence fell again. I look:
Across the leaden sky
A white cloud like a sheet is drawn
And from it comes a cry,
A dismal howl. That's not a cloud -
A flock of snowy birds
Soar like a cloud above the tsar
And wail a mournful dirge:
"We're chained together with you too,
Inhuman monster vile!
When Judgment Day comes we'll screen God
From your rapacious eye.
"Twas you that drove us from Ukraine
A hungry, tattered lot -
Into these far-off snows to toil,
And here our throats you cut;
Our bleeding skins you used as cloth

.....
Your new throne-city thus you built:
Palaces and churches!
Rejoice then, wicked, vicious tsar!
Curses on you, curses!"

They flew away, they all dispersed.
The morning sun appeared.
I still stood fascinated there,
With awe akin to fear.
The poor were hurrying to work
Though it was early still,
And soldiers, lined up in the squares,
Were busy at their drills.
Young drowsy girls came scurrying
Along the sidewalk's edge,
But homeward, not away from home
They bent their weary tread! . . .
Their mothers send them out all night
To earn a crust of bread.
I stand there with a heavy heart
And bow my aching head
And think how hard must people toil
To earn their daily bread.
The civil servants hasten next
Their office desks to man,
To scribble - and to rob the folks
Of everything they can.
Among them here and there I see
My fellow-countrymen.
They chatter in the Russian tongue
And bitterly condemn
Their parents that when they were small
They didn't teach them how
To jabber German - that's the cause
They've no promotions now!
Oh leeches, leeches! It may be
Your father sadly sold
His last remaining cow that you
The Moscow tongue should know.
My poor Ukraine! My poor Ukraine!
These are your hapless sons,
Your youthful blossoms, splashed with ink,
In German reared salons,
On Moscow's silly-potions fed
Until they are inane! . . .
Oh weep, my childless widow-land!
Unfortunate Ukraine!

And now to visit once again
The royal palace hall
And see what's doing there. I come -
The upper crust stands, all
Panting, snorting, short of breath,
Big-bellied, puffed with pride
Like turkey gobblers, and each one
Askance the doorway eyed.
And now the waited moment's here -
The portal swings ajar
And like a grizzly from his den
He shambles out - the tsar;
All bloated and his face tinged green:

And instantly they disappeared,
 Just vanished into air!
 With bulging eyes he looked around
 And struck fear everywhere.
 And then as though he'd gone berserk
 At smaller fish he roared -
 They disappeared. Then at the fry -
 They too are there no more!
 To servants next he turned - and they,
 They too were whisked away.
 Then to the soldiers - they dissolved
 And didn't leave a trace
 Upon the earth. Oh what a sight -
 A miracle for fair!
 I look to see what else will be,
 What next my teddy-bear
 Intends to do! He just stands there
 With hanging head. And lo,
 What's happened to the raging beast
 He was a while ago?
 Meek as a kitten now - how droll! . . .
 I laughed to see the sight.
 He heard and cast a glance at me -
 I froze from sudden fright
 And woke from sleep . . .
 Such was my rare
 And truly wondrous dream!
 How strange it was! . . . 'Tis but by loons
 And drunks such dreams are seen.
 Don't be astonished at this tale,
 My well-beloved friends,
 I did not tell you what I saw,
 But only what I dreamt.

Taras Shevchenko
 July 8th, 1844, St. Petersburg.
 Translated by John Weir

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Silver Poplar

(Maiden's song from "Topolya" — Silver Poplar.)

Swim, o swan, my snowy cygnet,
 O'er the sea's blue water!
 Keep on growing taller, taller,
 Slender silver poplar!
 Rise up slim and straight and stately
 To the clouds above
 And ask God if I am fated
 Ne'er to find my love?
 Rise until your topmost branches
 See across the sea!
 On that side's my happy future,
 Here — just misery.
 There, perhaps, my handsome lover
 Spends his days at play,
 While I wait and weep and wither,
 Years slip fast away.
 Tell my sweetheart how I suffer,