

TARAS SHEVCHENKO

SONG OUT OF  
DARKNESS

SELECTED POEMS

translated from the Ukrainian

by

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with

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## ПРИЧИННА

### BEWITCHED

- Roaring and groaning rolls the Dnipro,  
An angry wind howls through the night,  
Bowing and bending the high willows,  
And raising waves to mountain heights.
- 5 And, at this time, the moon's pale beams  
Peeped here and there between the clouds,  
Like a small boat on the blue sea,  
Now rising up, now sinking down.  
Still the third cock-crow was not crowed,
- 10 And not a creature chanced to speak,  
Only owls hooting in the grove,  
And now and then the ash-tree creaked.

- Such a night, beneath the mountain,  
There, beside the spinney
- 15 Which shows black above the water,  
Something white is glimmering.  
Maybe a rusalka-baby,  
Wandering by stealth,  
Seeks her mother or a lad
- 20 To tickle him to death.  
It is no rusalka roaming,  
But a young girl wandering,  
And she does not know, herself,  
Spell-bound, what she's doing.
- 25 Thus the old wise-woman made it,  
So to ease her grieving,  
That, by wandering at night,  
Do you see, while sleeping,  
She could seek the Cossack who
- 30 Left her last year—he promised  
That he would return to her,  
But probably he perished!  
Not with a silk kerchief have  
The Cossack's eyes been swathed,
- 35 Not by her caressing tears  
Were his fair cheeks bathed :

On a foreign field, an eagle  
 Plucked his eyes away,  
 And the wolves devoured his flesh—  
 40 Such must be his fate!  
 In vain the young girl waits for him,  
 Every night, in vain;  
 The dark-browed youth will not return  
 Nor greet her once again.  
 45 He will not have her long plait loosened,  
 Nor her kerchief tied;  
 Not in a bed, but in her coffin  
 Shall the orphan lie!

Such is her fortune . . . O God of all mercy,  
 50 Why dost Thou punish a maiden so young?  
 Because the poor child came to love so sincerely  
 The Cossack's dark eyes? Ah, forgive her this wrong!  
 Whom then should she love? Without father or mother,  
 Alone, like a bird on a far distant shore.  
 55 She is so young—O send her good fortune,  
 Or strangers will mock her and laugh her to scorn.  
 Is the dove to be blamed that she loves her heart's darling?  
 Is he to be blamed that the hawk comes to slay?  
 Grieving and cooing and weary of living,  
 60 She flies all around, seeks him lost from the way.  
 Fortunate bird, she can soar high above,  
 Can wing up to God and implore for her dear.  
 But whom, then, O whom, can the orphan approach,  
 And who is to tell her, who knows where her love  
 65 Is passing the night? Is he in a dark grove?  
 Does he water his horse in the Danube's swift stream?  
 Or perhaps there's another, another he loves,  
 And she, the dark-browed, is a past, faded dream?  
 If she were but given the wings of an eagle,  
 70 She would find her beloved beyond the blue waves,  
 In life she would love him and strangle her rival,  
 And if he were dead, she would share the same grave.  
 Not so the heart loves as to share with another,  
 Nor is it content with what God has to give,  
 75 Not wishing to live and not wishing to sorrow;  
 "Sorrow", says thought, overwhelming with grief.  
 Such is Thy will, then, O God, good and great,  
 Such is her fortune, such is her fate.

So still she walks, she speaks no sound,

80 The Dnipro flows on silently,  
 The wind has scattered the black clouds,  
 And lain to rest beside the sea.  
 And from the sky, the moon is pouring  
 Its light upon the grove and water,  
 85 And all is resting quietly. . . .  
 But see! From out the Dnipro's tide,  
 Jump little children, laughing there.  
 "Come, let us sun ourselves!" they cry,  
 "Our sun is up!" (No clothes they wear,  
 90 But braids of sedge, for they are girls.)  
  
 "Are you all here?" the mother calls.  
 "Come, let us look for supper.  
 Let us play and sport together!  
 Sing a little song together!"  
 95 "Whisht! Whisht!  
 Will o' the wisp!  
 Mother gave me life—once born,  
 Unbaptized, she laid me down.  
 Moon above,  
 100 Dearest dove,  
 Come and sup with us tonight:  
 In the reeds a Cossack lies,  
 In the reeds and sedge, a silver  
 Ring is shining on his finger;  
 105 Young he is, with fine dark eyebrows,  
 We found him yesterday in the oak-grove.  
 Shine upon the open field  
 So that we may sport at will,  
 While the witches are still flying,  
 110 Till the morning cocks are crying,  
 Shine for us . . . Look, something goes  
 Moving there beneath the oak!  
 Whisht! Whisht!  
 Will o' the wisp!  
 115 Mother gave me life—once born,  
 Unbaptized, she laid me down."  
  
 The unbaptized babes shrieked with laughter,  
 The grove replied; wild shrieks abound,  
 Like the fierce Horde hell-bent on slaughter.  
 120 Rush to the oak . . . and not a sound . . .  
 The unbaptized stop in their tracks,

They look : there something glimmers,  
 Some creature climbing in the tree  
 To the topmost limit.  
 125 See, it is that self-same girl  
 Who, in her sleep, would wander ;  
 Such is the bewitching spell  
 That the witch laid on her !  
 On a slender topmost branch  
 130 She stood . . . her heart was dwining.  
 She looked round, searching on all sides . . .  
 Then down she started climbing.  
 Round the oak, rusalka-babies  
 Waiting, held their breath,  
 135 Seized her as she came, poor soul,  
 And tickled her to death.  
 Long, indeed, they gazed upon her,  
 Wondering at her beauty. . . .  
 The third cock-crow rang—at once  
 140 They splashed into the water.  
 The skylark trilled its melody  
 Soaring ever up,  
 The cuckoo called its plaintive call  
 Sitting in the oak,  
 145 The nightingale burst into song,  
 It echoed through the spinney,  
 Behind the hills—a rosy blush,  
 The ploughman starts his singing.  
 The grove is black against the water  
 150 Where the Poles once crossed,  
 Above the Dnipro, the high mounds  
 With bluish light are touched.  
 A rustle passes through the grove,  
 Sets dense osiers whispering ;  
 155 There beneath the oak she lies,  
 By the footpath, sleeping.  
 Sound she sleeps, quite deaf, it seems,  
 To the cuckoo calling,  
 Does not count how long she'll live. . . .  
 160 Sound asleep she's fallen.

In the meanwhile, from the oak-grove  
 Comes a Cossack riding,  
 Under him, the raven horse  
 Can hardly move with tiredness.

165 " You are weary, my old friend,  
 But we shall rest today :  
 There's a cottage where a girl  
 Will open us the gate.  
 Or, perhaps, it is, already,  
 170 Opened to another. . . .  
 Good horse—faster ; good horse—faster !  
 Hurry, hurry homewards ! ”  
 But the raven horse is weary,  
 On he walks, half-falling,  
 175 Near the Cossack's heart, it seems  
 There's an adder crawling.  
 “ Look, it is our leafy oak-tree. . . .  
 There she is ! Dear God !  
 See, she fell asleep while waiting,  
 180 Ah, my grey-winged dove ! ”  
 He left the horse and rushed towards her :  
 “ O my God, my God ! ”  
 He calls her name and kisses her . . . .  
 But it does no good.  
 185 “ Why, then have they parted us,  
 Me from you ? ” He broke  
 Into frenzied laughs, and dashed  
 His head against the oak !

The girls go out to reap the rye,  
 190 And, as girls do, they start their songs,  
 How mothers bid their sons “ good-bye ”,  
 How Tartars fought the whole night long.  
 They go . . . beneath a verdant oak,  
 A tired horse is standing by,  
 195 And near the horse, a handsome young  
 Cossack and a maiden lie.  
 Curious (it must be told),  
 They tiptoe near to frighten them,  
 But when they saw that he was killed,  
 200 In sudden fear, they turned to run.

All her young friends gathered round,  
 In girlish teardrops bathed,  
 All his comrades gathered round,  
 And started digging graves.  
 205 The priests came with the holy banners,  
 All the bells were tolling,

The village paid their last respects  
By custom old and holy.  
There beside the road, they raised  
210 Twin mounds among the rye.  
There was no one there to ask  
How it was they died.  
A maple and a fir they planted  
Over the young lad,  
215 And a bright-flowered guelder-rose  
At the maiden's head.  
Here the cuckoo often flies  
To call above them still ;  
Here the nightingale will fly,  
220 Each night, to sing his fill,  
Sings to his heart's content, and carols  
Till the moon has risen,  
Till, again, rusalka-babies  
Steal out from the river.

[1837(?)  
St. Petersburg.]

ДУМКА (Тече вода в сине море)

SONG

The waters flow down to the sea  
And never more return ;  
A Cossack goes to seek his fortune,  
—Fortune there is none.

- 5 The Cossack journeys far away  
Where dance the dark blue waves,—  
Like them the Cossack's heart is dancing,  
But thought speaks and says :

- “ Where do you journey, without asking?  
10 To whose care abandoned  
Father, and your dear old mother,  
And a fair young maiden?  
In foreign parts the folk are strange,  
And hard to live, indeed,  
15 Among them ;—none to share your tears,  
No one with whom to speak.”

- The Cossack sits there on the further  
Shore—the blue waves dance.  
He dreamed that he would find good fortune :  
20 Sorrow crossed his path.  
And now the cranes fly in long skeins  
Towards the further shore.  
The Cossack weeps—the beaten tracks  
Are overgrown with thorns.

[1838  
St. Petersburg.]



Думи мої, думи мої

- O my thoughts, my heartfelt thoughts,  
I am troubled for you!  
Why have you ranged yourselves on paper  
In your ranks of sorrow?
- 5 Why did the wind not scatter you,  
Like dust-motes, in the steppe?  
Why did ill-fate not overlie  
You, her babes, while she slept?
- For ill-fate but bore you to mock and beclown you ;
- 10 You were watered by tears—why did they not drown you?  
Sweep you down to the sea? Wash you into the plain?  
For no one would ask, then, what caused me to suffer,  
Nor why I curse fortune, nor why I remain  
In this world . . . For they would not have sneered : “ He has  
nothing
- 15 To do! ” in their scorn. . . .
- O my flowers, my children!  
For what have I loved you and watched over you?  
Is there one heart in the world to weep with you  
As I have wept? Maybe my guess will come true!
- 20 Perhaps there will be found a girl’s  
Pure heart, dark eyes to pour  
Tears for these, my heartfelt thoughts,—  
I ask nothing more. . . .  
One tear from those dark eyes—and I
- 25 Am lord of lords in glory!
- O my thoughts, my heartfelt thoughts,  
I am troubled for you!

- 
- For a girl with hazel eyes,  
A maiden with dark brows,
- 30 The heart was rent—and smiled again,  
Pouring forth its words ;  
Poured them forth, as best it could,  
For the night’s dark shade,  
For the cherry-orchard green,

- 35 For a young girl's favour.  
 For the steppes and for the gravemounds,  
 There in Ukraina,  
 The heart swooned, and did not wish  
 To sing here among strangers.
- 40 Did not wish, far in this forest,  
 In the snow to gather  
 The Cossack host to council here,  
 With their staves and banners. . . .  
 Let the souls of Cossacks hover
- 45 There in Ukraina :  
 From end to end, there, it is broad  
 And joyful like that freedom  
 Which has long since passed away ;  
 Broad as a sea, the Dnipro,
- 50 Steppe and steppe, the rapids roar,  
 And gravemounds high as mountains.  
 There was born the Cossack freedom,  
 There she galloped round,  
 With Tartars and with Polish lords
- 55 She strewed the plain about  
 Till it could take no more ; with corpses  
 All the plain she strewed.  
 Freedom lay down to take her rest ;  
 Meanwhile the gravemound grew,
- 60 And high above it, as a warder,  
 Hovers the Black Eagle,  
 And minstrels come and sing about  
 The gravemound to the people.  
 They sing of all that came to pass,
- 65 Blind wretches, for they keep  
 Their wits awake. . . . And I? . . . And I  
 Know only how to weep,  
 Only tears for Ukraina,—  
 Words there now are none—
- 70 And for ill-fate, well, let it lie !  
 To whom is it unknown?  
 Hard it is for one who gazes  
 With his soul on people,  
 Hell is his, here, in this world,
- 75 But in the next. . . .  
 By grieving  
 I'll not conjure for myself  
 A fate which is not mine ;

Let miseries' throng abide for long,  
 80 Them I'll deeply hide,  
 The fierce serpent I shall hide  
 Near my very heart,  
 That enemies may never see  
 How ill-fate mocks and laughs . . .  
 85 Then let thought, like to a crow,  
 Fly and caw indeed,  
 But the heart, like a nightingale,  
 Warbles sweet songs and weeps  
 In secret ; people will not see,  
 90 Will not, then, mock me so . . .  
 Do not wipe my tears away,  
 Let them freely flow,  
 Let them soak this foreign field,  
 Water it day and night,  
 95 Until at last the priests with foreign  
 Sand shall close my eyes . . .  
 Thus it is ! And what to do ?  
 Sorrow brings no aid.  
 Who envies the poor orphan, then,  
 100 Take vengeance on him, Lord.

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O my thoughts, my heartfelt thoughts,  
 My children, O my flowers,  
 I have reared, watched over you,—  
 Where to send you now ?  
 105 Go then to Ukraine, my children,  
 To Ukraine, so dear,  
 Wander on like homeless orphans,  
 I shall perish here.  
 There a true heart you will find,  
 110 A word of kindness for you,  
 There, sincerity and truth,  
 And even, maybe, glory. . . .  
 Bid them welcome, then, my mother,  
 My Ukraine, and smile  
 115 On these my children, still unwise,  
 As on thy own true child.

[1839  
 St. Petersburg.]

THE DREAM  
A COMEDY

The spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive,  
because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him. . . .  
John xiv. 17.

- To every man his destiny,  
His path before him lies,  
One man builds, one pulls to ruins,  
One, with greedy eyes,  
5 Looks far out, past the horizon,  
Whether there remains  
Some country he can seize and bear  
With him to his grave;  
That one his own kinsman robs  
10 By card-play in his home,  
One, crouching in the corner, whets  
His knife against his own  
Brother, and that one, quiet and sober,  
Pious and God-fearing,  
15 Would creep up like a kitten, wait  
Until the time you're having  
Some trouble, and then drive his claws  
Deep into your liver—  
Useless to implore—for neither  
20 Wife nor babes will move him.  
One, generous and opulent,  
Builds churches everywhere,  
And so much loves "the Fatherland",  
So deeply for it cares,  
25 And with such skill he draws away  
The poor thing's blood like water!  
And the brethren, looking on,  
Their eyes wide with wonder,  
Like lambs: "Let it be so!" they say,  
30 "Perhaps it should be thus!"  
It should be thus! For there is no  
Lord in heaven above!  
And you fall beneath the yoke,

Wishing still for some  
35 Paradise in the hereafter . . .  
There is none, is none!  
Useless labour! Stop and think :  
All on this earth,—no matter  
Be they tsars' or beggars' children—  
40 Are the sons of Adam!  
And that one, too. . . . And that . . .  
And I?

This is what I must be,  
Good people : Sundays and weekdays I  
Amuse myself and feast :  
45 And you are bored and envy me . . .  
I swear I do not hear you!  
You needn't even shout! I drink  
*My* blood, not other people's.

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So, late one night, clutching the fence,  
50 Drunk from a banquet I went home,  
So thinking as I went along,  
Till to the house I dragged my steps.  
At home the children do not cry—  
No wife is nagging,  
55 It's quiet as heaven,  
And all around God's blessings lie,  
In home and in heart.  
I lay down—and once fast  
Asleep, a drunkard, I declare,  
60 Even if guns rolled past,  
Would not twitch a hair.

And then a dream, a dream amazing  
Came into my slumbers :  
The sob'rest man would be a drunkard,  
65 A Jewish miser'd not mind paying,  
To see such marvels with his eyes.  
Not on your life!  
I see : it seems as if there flies  
An owl above the rivers, fields and thickets,  
70 Above the deep ravines and valleys,  
Above the steppe-land's broad expanses,  
Above the gulleys ;  
And after, after it I fly,

And bid the earth a last goodbye.

- 75 "Farewell, world! And farewell, earth,  
Farewell, land unkind!  
All my grief and torment I  
In the cloud shall hide.  
As for you, my dear Ukraine,
- 80 Widow without fortune!  
I shall fly to you, to speak  
With you from the clouds, and  
Seek your counsel, speaking sadly,  
Quietly with you,
- 85 I shall fall on you at midnight  
Like the abundant dew.  
Then together we'll take counsel,  
Grieving for our woe,  
Till the sun rise, till your babes
- 90 Rise up against the foe.  
Farewell, then, my dearest mother  
Widow poor and grieving!  
Feed your children: with the Lord  
Of Heaven truth yet is living!"
- 95 We fly . . . I look: the dawn is glimmering,  
The skyline is ablaze,  
In a dark grove a nightingale  
Greets the sun with praise.  
A gentle breeze blows quietly,
- 100 The steppes, the cornfields glimmer,  
Among ravines, by lakes there gleams  
The green blush of the willows;  
Orchards bow down, richly laden,  
Poplars, standing straight
- 105 Like sentinels, in the open land  
Are speaking with the plain.  
And all around me, the whole country,  
Mantled round in beauty,  
Shimmers green and bathes herself
- 110 In the morning dew,  
From the dawn of time, she bathes  
Herself and greets the sun,  
There is nowhere a beginning,  
Ending there is none.

115 No one has power to add to it,  
 No one may destroy it,  
 And all around. . . My soul! My soul!  
 Why are you not joyful?  
 Why, my poor soul, are you sad?  
 120 Why so vainly weeping?  
 What are you so sorry for? "But do you not see it?  
 Do you not hear how the people are weeping?  
 Look, then, and see! Meanwhile, I shall fly, speeding  
 High, high above, through the blue-clouded heavens,  
 125 Where there are no rulers, where there is no vengeance,  
 Where comes no sound of man's laughter or tears.  
 See there—in that paradise you are now quitting,  
 They tear off the patched ragged coat of a cripple,  
 Tear it off with the skin, for they lack, it appears,  
 130 Shoes for young princelings. And there a poor widow  
 For poll-tax is crucified, and her one dear  
 Son, her one child, her one hope, must be seized,  
 Handcuffed, and put in the army—he's missing,  
 You see, from the total they need . . . And there, under  
 135 The fence (while its serf-mother reaps for her master),  
 A child, starved and swollen, is dying of hunger.  
 And yonder—do you see—Eyes, eyes!  
 What are you good for? Why  
 Have you not shrivelled up from childhood,  
 140 All your tears run dry?  
 Here by the fence, a ruined girl  
 Limpis footsore with her bastard,  
 Father and mother both renounced her,  
 To strangers she's an outcast,  
 145 Old beggars shun her . . . The young lord  
 Knows naught; still under age,  
 Squanders away his serfs on drink  
 With his twentieth flame."

Does God see from behind His cloud  
 150 Our tears and suffering?  
 Maybe He does see it, too—  
 But the help He brings—  
 Like that of ancient mountains, watered  
 With the blood of men! . . .  
 155 O my poor, unhappy soul,  
 How you cause me pain!  
 Let us drink poison, and lie down

In the ice to sleep,  
Let us even unto God  
160 Send thought, and answer seek :  
How long will hangmen in this world  
Their dominion keep?

Fly then, my thought, my suffering so bitter !  
And take away with you all evils, all troubles,  
165 For they're your companions ! You grew up with them,  
Their heavy hands swaddled you, dearly they loved you,  
And you loved them dearly. Go, gather them, fly,  
And then scatter the horde across the great sky.  
May it grow black, may it grow red,  
170 Blow and fan the flames,  
Once more may serpents be belched forth,  
The earth be strewn with slain,  
And without you, somewhere I  
Shall hide my heart,—and then  
175 I'll seek some realm of paradise,  
Far at the world's end.

Once more above the earth I fly,  
Once more to her I bid goodbye.  
It is hard to leave a mother  
180 In a roofless shack,  
But it is worse to look upon  
Her tears and tattered rags. . . .

I fly, I fly, a cold wind blows,  
Before me spread white drifts of snows ;  
185 Around me woods and swamplands stretch  
Mist, mist and emptiness . . .  
No human sound,—here no trace can  
Be seen of the dread foot of man. . . .

“ Both enemies and friends—farewell,  
190 Farewell ! I shall not come  
To be your guest. Feast ! drink your fill !  
I'll hear no more,—Alone  
For endless ages I shall sleep  
The long night in the snow,  
195 And, until you have discovered  
There's a country left  
Still undrenched by tears and blood,



I shall take my rest . . .  
Take my rest. . . .”

200                                Yet hark, I hear  
Fetters clank and rattle  
Beneath the earth. Let me see . . .  
O wicked, wicked people!  
Whence have you come? Why this toil?  
205 What, then, are you seeking  
Beneath the earth? No! Maybe I'll  
Hide no more, not even  
In heaven! Why this punishment?  
Why am I tormented?  
210 What harm have I done any man?  
Whose harsh hands have fettered  
My soul fast in my body, fired  
My heart, and sent my thoughts  
Scattering around,  
215 Like a flock of daws?  
I'm punished, but I know not why,  
Punished bitterly!  
When shall I expiate it? When?  
When will the end be?  
220 I neither know nor see.

The desert wilderness has stirred . . .  
As from a coffin's narrow girth  
For the last Judgment-day of doom,  
The dead are rising for the truth.  
225 These are not the dead, the slain,  
They come not seeking Judgment-day:  
No! They are people, living people,  
Put in irons, they draw  
Gold up out of holes, to pour it  
230 Down the Glutton's maw,  
The Imperial Gullet. These are convicts!  
And what for? The Almighty  
Knows the reason, or, maybe,  
He's not yet noticed either!  
235 Yonder there a branded thief  
Drags his chains, and there  
A tortured robber grinds his teeth,  
Longing to knife his friend,  
Who, himself, could only just

- 240 Escape from execution.  
 Among them, the old lags, in chains  
 Is the King of freedom,  
 The King of all the world, the King  
 Wearing a brand for crown.
- 245 In torment, in hard labour, he  
 Pleads not, nor weeps, nor groans . . .  
 Once the heart is warmed by goodness,  
 Cold it will never grow.
- 250 Where, then, are your thoughts, your rosy-pink flowers?  
 Well-cared-for and brave, those dear children of yours?  
 To whom, then, to whom, my friend, did you give them?  
 Or perhaps in your heart for all ages you hid them?  
 Do not hide them, my brother! But scatter them far!  
 They will germinate, grow,—and go into the world.
- 255 Enough? Do torments yet remain?  
 Enough, enough, for it is cold,—  
 And frost stirs up the brain.
- Once more I fly. The earth grows dark.  
 Brain drowns. Fear is in the heart.
- 260 I see : along the roadsides—houses—  
 Cities with a hundred churches,  
 And in the cities, set like storks,  
 Muscovite soldiers forming fours :  
     Well-fed, with leather
- 265      Boots and fetters,  
 On parade. I look a bit  
 Further : there, as in a pit,  
 The city gleams below me far  
 Set on a gigantic marsh.
- 270 Above, black mist-clouds hover thickly.  
 I reach it.—Endless city.  
     Turkish? Or  
     German for sure?  
 Or, maybe, even Muscovite!
- 275      Palaces and churches,  
     Pot-bellied worthies,  
 —Nowhere a *simple* house emerges!

It was growing dark. Like fire,  
 It blazed up all about,

- 280 I even grew afraid. . . . "Hourra!  
Hourra!" they raised a shout.  
"Hush, you fools! Come to your senses!  
Why are you so gay?  
That you're on fire?" "The bumpkin, lo!
- 285 He knows not the parade!  
'Tis a parade! For *He* this day  
To take his revels deigns."  
" But where is *She*, that marvel, then? "  
" Seest there the palace, hey? "
- 290 I pushed on in, till, thank the Lord,  
A fellow-countryman,  
Tin-buttoned, recognized and spoke  
To me : " Whence hast thou come? "  
" From Ukraine." " How thus is it
- 295 Thou knowest not to converse  
The local parlance! " " Not at all!  
I *can* speak," I observe,  
" But I don't want to." " 'Tis, indeed,  
A curious fool! I know
- 300 How everywhere to enter, being  
In service here ; an so  
Thou wish, I'll try within the palace  
To bring thee. Only do  
Not begrudge a tip,—we, friend,
- 305 Are enlightened! " " Off with you,  
Foul inkpot! " And invisible  
Once more, I hid from sight,  
So pushed my way into the palace.  
God of endless might!
- 310 A paradise indeed! For here  
Even the very spongers  
Are all gold-smothered! And, behold,  
Tall and grimly sullen  
*He* strides out, and at his side
- 315 The Tsarina comes, poor thing,  
Like a dried-up mushroom, lanky,  
And all bone and skin  
And moreover, the poor creature,  
Troubled with the Twitch.
- 320 So this is what the goddess is!  
Gracious! You poor wretch!  
And I, poor fool, not having seen  
You even once, you marvel,

- Was even ready to believe  
 325 Your poetasters' drivell!  
 What a fool! A dunderhead!  
 I trusted on my life  
 A Muscovite! Go, read, and then  
 Believe them if you like!
- 330 After the divinities  
 Come the crowds of nobles  
 In gold and silver! Just like fattened  
 Boars, bigmugged and bloated!  
 They get quite sweaty, pushing, shoving,  
 335 So that they can gain  
 A nearer place to Them: Maybe  
 They'll hit them, or else deign  
 To cock a snook—even a small one,  
 Even a half-snook, if it's only  
 340 Straight at their own mug—  
 They've got themselves ranged in a row,  
 As if without a tongue,  
 Not a murmur! . . . the tsar jabbers,  
 And that tsarina-wonder,  
 345 Like a heron among birds,  
 Hops round, gathering courage.
- For quite a while, like puffed-up owls,  
 The pair walked back and forth,  
 Discussing something in low voices  
 350 (One could not hear, far off)—  
 About "the Fatherland", it seemed,  
 And the new gorgets, and  
 About the even newer drill-rules;  
 Then the tsarina sat  
 355 Down silently upon a stool.  
 I look: the tsar comes up  
 To the *most senior in rank*—  
 And swipes him round the mug!  
 With all his might! The poor chap licked  
 360 His lips, then punched the belly  
 Of his subordinate till it echoed . . .  
 The latter a still lesser  
 Ace hit between the shoulders; he—  
 A lesser; and the lesser  
 365 A smaller one, and he the petty;

And beyond the threshold  
The petty ran with all their might  
Through the streets, and knead  
The remnants of the orthodox,  
370 Who start to yell and scream  
And shout and roar : “ He’s revelling !  
Our Little Father, our dear Tsar,  
Revels ! Hourra ! Hourra ! Hourra-aa ! ”

I roared with laughter ! Why, what else ?  
375 And I, too, with the rest  
Caught quite a bit. Before the dawn  
They all went off to rest.  
Only in the corners, groaned  
Believers here and there,  
380 And, groaning, for the Little Father  
Made to God a prayer.  
Laughter and tears ! And then to see  
The city I went out,  
For night is there like day. I look :  
385 Palaces all about,  
Palaces over the quiet river,  
And the bank is faced  
All in stone. And like a half-wit  
I am quite amazed :  
390 How did it all come to pass,  
That such a swamp was built  
Into this wonder ? Here what floods  
Of human blood were spilt,  
Even without a knife ! Across  
395 On the further bank  
A fortress and a belfry, like  
A whetted awl,—it stands  
Strange to look at. The clock jingles.  
I turn around—and lo !  
400 The horse is charging, with its hooves  
It breaks the rock below.  
And on the horse there rides bare-back,  
In coat—but yet not coat,  
Without a hat ; some sort of leaves  
405 Bind his head about.  
The horse is rearing ! Wait, just wait,  
It will jump the river.  
And he stretches out his hand,

As, it would seem, he wishes  
 410 To seize the whole world. Well, who is it?  
 So I go and read  
 What is forged on to the rock :  
 This miracle, indeed,  
 " The Second to the First " erected.  
 415 Now at once I see :  
 It is that *First* who crucified  
 Our poor Ukraina,  
 And the *Second* gave the death-stroke  
 To the prostrate widow.  
 420 Executioners, cannibals !  
 They ate their fill, that pair !  
 Stole to their hearts' content ! And what  
 With them did they bear  
 To the next world ? My heart grew heavy,  
 425 Heavy, as I were reading  
 The history of Ukraine. I stand there  
 Stock-still, without moving.  
 And meanwhile softly, very softly,  
 Something unseen and grieving,  
 430 Invisible, was singing there :  
  
 " From the city, out from Hlukhiv,  
 Went the regiments,  
 With their spades to man the earthworks.  
 And I, too, was sent  
 435 To the capital as proxy  
 Hetman to command  
 The Cossack troops. O God of mercy !  
 O thou evil tsar !  
 Accursed tsar, insatiate,  
 440 Perfidious serpent, what  
 Have you done, then, with the Cossacks ?  
 You have filled the swamps  
 With their noble bones ! And then  
 Built the capital  
 445 On their tortured corpses, and  
 In a dark dungeon cell  
 You slew me, too, me, a free Hetman,  
 In chains, with hunger martyred ! . . .  
 Tsar, O tsar ! Not even God  
 450 Himself can ever part us,  
 Me from you ; with strongest fetters

You are chained for ever  
 To me. But my heart is sad  
 To hover above Neva!  
 455 Ukraina, far away,  
 Perhaps does not exist . . .  
 I would fly and gaze on her,  
 But God will not permit.  
 Maybe Moscow burned her down,  
 460 And drained away the Dnipro  
 Into the blue sea, and dug  
 The high mounds through to rob  
 Our glory? God all-merciful!  
 Take pity on us, God! ”  
 465 And it grew silent. Then I look :  
 And a snow-white cloud  
 Cloaks the grey sky : and in this cloud  
 —As if a wild beast howled  
 In a wood. It was no cloud,  
 470 But white birds that descended  
 Down upon that brazen tsar,  
 And mournfully lamented :  
 “ And we, too, are chained to you,  
 Dragon, cannibal!  
 475 And upon the Judgment Day  
 ’Tis we that shall conceal  
 God from your insatiate eyes.  
 You from Ukraina  
 Drove us, naked, starving, to  
 480 The snows of foreign regions,  
 Cut our throats, and from our skins  
 Sewed yourself a purple  
 Robe, with thread of toughened sinews ;  
 Clad in this new mantle  
 485 Founded your capital! Behold!  
 Palaces and churches!  
 Rejoice, fierce executioner,  
 Accursed, O accursed! ”

---

The birds flew away and scattered.  
 490 The bright sun was rising ;  
 And I stood there in amazement  
 Till I grew quite frightened.  
 The poor already were astir,  
 Hastening to their toil,

495 At the cross-roads—Moscow's troops  
 Already at their drill,  
 On the pavements drowsy girls  
 Hastened, they did not come  
 From home—but going back, for mother  
 500 Sent them out from home  
 To labour through the live-long night,  
 And thus to earn their bread.  
 And as I stand hunched, pondering,  
 The thought comes to my head :  
 505 " How hard the means that folk must take  
 To earn their daily bread ! "

There the Civil Service swarms  
 To the Ministries,  
 To sign and scribble documents  
 510 And, at the same time, fleece  
 Father and brother. My compatriots  
 Too, may be observed,  
 Here and there ; they carry on  
 In Russian, laugh, and curse  
 515 Their parents who'd not had them taught  
 To jabber, while still children,  
 The German language, so that now  
 They would not be ink-pickled. . . .  
 Leeches, leeches ! For, maybe,  
 520 Your father had to sell  
 His last cow to the Jews, till he  
 Could teach you Russian well ! . . .  
 Ukraina, Ukraina,  
 These are thy children, think !  
 525 These are thy own fair young flowers,  
 Watered well by ink,  
 And by Muscovite henbane  
 In German hothouse stifled ! . . .  
 Weep, then, widow Ukraina,  
 530 Weep for thou art childless !

Should I, maybe, go and look  
 In the tsar's palaces  
 To see what's happening there ? I come—  
 Pot-bellied officers  
 535 Stand in a wheezing, snorting row,  
 Puffing out their cheeks,  
 Like turkeys, and towards the doors



Furtively they peep  
 From the corners of their eyes.  
 540 Doors opened—from his cave,  
 It seemed, a bear came rambling out—  
 But hardly could he make  
 His legs move—puffed up, even blue,  
 And an accursed hangover  
 545 Tortures him. Suddenly he shouts  
 At the extra-rotund  
 Pot-bellied ones—and one and all  
 Pot-bellies disappear  
 Into the earth—he made his eyes  
 550 Pop out—all shook with fear  
 Who still remained. Like one possessed,  
 He rages at the lesser,  
 And they go underneath the earth,  
 He rages at the petty,  
 555 And they are gone. He moves near  
 The household,—they are gone.  
 He nears the guard;—the little guardsmen  
 Give a heavy groan  
 And go into the earth! Great wonders  
 560 Came to pass! I stare  
 Wondering what will happen next,  
 What my little bear  
 Will do? But he just stands and stands  
 And his head is hanging,  
 565 Poor creature. But then where has all his  
 Bearish nature vanished?  
 Like a kitten—and so comic!  
 I laughed, as well I might!  
 He heard that, and at top blast  
 570 He bellowed—I took fright  
 At that . . . and I awoke.  
 And such  
 Was my dream of wonder!  
 Strange indeed! For only a  
 575 Madman or a drunkard  
 Dreams such a dream. And so, dear friends,  
 Be not astonished, for  
 I have not told my own tale, but  
 What in my dream I saw.

8.vii.1844  
 St. Petersburg.

Чого мені тяжко

- Why weighs the heart heavy? Why drags life so dreary?  
Why is the heart weeping and sobbing and wailing  
As a child cries from hunger? Heart, heavy and weary,  
What do you long for? Why are you ailing?  
5 Are you longing for food or for drink or repose?  
Slumber, my heart, for eternity sleeping,  
Uncovered and shattered. . . . Let hateful people  
Rage on. . . . O my heart, let your eyes gently close! . . .

13.xi.1844  
St. Petersburg.

Не завидуй багатому

- Have no envy for the rich man,  
For he never knows  
Naught of friendship nor of love—  
He must hire all those.  
5 Have no envy for the mighty,  
For he must compel;  
Have no envy for the famous  
For he knows full well  
That it is not him men love  
10 But his bitter fame  
Which he poured out to please from blood  
And tears of bitter pain.  
And the young folk when they meet,  
All is quiet and bliss  
15 As in paradise—but see :  
Something stirs amiss.  
  
Have envy, then, for nobody ;  
Look round—and you will never  
Find paradise upon this earth,  
20 Nor, indeed, in heaven.

4.x.1845  
Myrhorod.

# 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 roadvay.

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 vill 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.)



## 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.

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.

- 
- Ukraina struggled on,  
 195 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,  
 Ukraine'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.