

Four Poems

Taras Shevchenko

[Testament]

When I die,
let me rest, let me lie
amidst Ukraine's broad steppes.
Let me see
the endless fields and steep slopes
I hold so dear.
Let me hear
the Dniro's great roar.
And when the blood
of Ukraine's foes flows
into the blue waters of the sea,
that's when I'll forget
the fields and hills
and leave it all
and pray to God.
Until then, I know no God.
So bury me, rise up,
and break your chains.
Water your freedom
with the blood of oppressors.
And then remember me
with gentle whispers
and kind words
in the great family
of the newly free.

Translated by Alexander J. Motyl

Original publication: Taras Shevchenko, Untitled "(Iak umru to pokhovaite)," *Zibrannia tvoriv u 6 tomakh*, Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 2003, 1: 371.

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[Untitled]

Days go by and nights go by
and summers end;
leaves turn yellow, leaves turn dry;
my eyes are dead.
My thoughts are asleep,
my heart doesn't beat,
and all things sleep.
And I'm wondering:
Am I alive
or barely living
or just wandering?
If only I could laugh
or even cry.
Tell me, fate, where are you?
Have I none?
If you can't spare a good one, Lord,
then how about a bad one?
Just don't let me sleepwalk
and lose my heart
and roll through life
like a rotten log.
Let me live,
let my heart live,
let me love.
And if not—
to hell with the world!
It's bad to be in chains
and die a slave.
But it's worse to sleep
and sleep in freedom
and to fall asleep forever
without leaving a trace.
Did you live? Did you die?
Who cares?
Tell me, fate, where are you?
I have none!

If you can't spare a good one, Lord,
then how about a bad one?

1845

Translated by Alexander J. Motyl

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To N. N.

As the sun sets and hills grow dark,
as the birdsong ends and fields fall silent,
as the people laugh and take their rest,
I watch.

My heart hurries
to the twilit gardens of Ukraine.
And I hurry.

O, how I hurry with my thoughts,
as my heart yearns for rest.

As the fields grow dark,
as the groves grow dark,
as the hills grow dark,
I see a star.

And I weep.
Hey, you star! Have you reached Ukraine?

Do dark eyes scour the blue sky for you?
Or don't they care?

May they sleep if they don't.
May they know nothing of my fate.

1847

Translated by Alexander J. Motyl

Original publication: Taras Shevchenko, Untitled "(Sontse zakhodyt', hory chorniut'," *Zibrannia tvoriv u 6 tomakh*, Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 2003, 2: 35.

[Untitled]

If only I could see
my fields and steppes again.
Won't the good Lord let me,
in my old age,
be free?
I'd go to Ukraine,
I'd go back home.
There they'd greet me—
glad to see the old man.
There I'd rest,
I'd pray to God,
There I'd—but why go on?
There will be nothing.
How am I to live in slavery
with no hope?
Do tell me,
please,
lest I go crazy.

1848

Translated by Alexander J. Motyl

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