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## LITERATURE ART OF TARAS SHEVCHENKO

### Introduction

Taras Shevchenko is one of the most famous Ukrainian writers, popular not only within our country, but also throughout the world. However, what influenced his creativity? What was the life of an artist like? What made him famous? What is his importance and relevance? This article, written by studying research about this author, reading his works and biography, will help you find answers to these questions and learn more about Shevchenko and Ukrainian literature.

### What is Behind Shevchenko's Works?

Taras Shevchenko was born on March 9, 1814, in the village of Moryntsi, Kyiv Province, into a family of serfs [1]. Serfdom in Ukraine at the time was a system where peasants were tied to the land and the landowner. They were obligated not only to pay taxes but also to perform labor and services for their master. Essentially, this was slavery, where people's lives were owned by landowners. By the early 19th century, millions of Ukrainian peasants lived under these oppressive conditions, which deeply shaped Shevchenko's experiences and outlook.

From a young age, Shevchenko witnessed the brutal realities of serfdom. His parents, Hryhoriy and Kateryna, worked tirelessly for their landowner, Vasyl Engelhardt, while also caring for their 6 children. This harsh environment exposed young Taras to the injustices of the social system. He grew up listening to folk songs, ballads, and stories from his grandfather about the Cossacks and their struggles for freedom, as well as the Koliyivshchyna uprising – a historical rebellion against oppression [2]. These narratives planted the seeds of resistance and a longing for justice in his heart.

The sharp contrast between the suffering of serfs and the privileged lives of the landowning class was a theme Shevchenko carried throughout his life and work. These early experiences fueled his desire to fight for the dignity and liberation of his people. The folk songs he loved not only inspired his art but also gave him a vision of a free and fair Ukraine, where the oppressed could reclaim their human rights.

The rest of Shevchenko's life, marked by his artistic development and eventual fight for freedom, reflects the indelible mark left by these formative years.

### The Life and Work of the Writer

Shevchenko showed interest in art from early childhood. He learned to read at the parochial school. Taras' parents died early, but he cherished warm memories of the love and care of his family until the end of his life. Later, the landowner Engelhardt made the young boy his footman. He was quite cruel to Taras, but he allowed the boy to learn to draw from the

Lithuanian artist Jan Rustem. As a teenager, Shevchenko traveled with his master to Vilno, where he was inspired by the ideas of Adam Mickiewicz, and later to St. Petersburg, Russia [3].

He convinced his master to send him to work for the artist Vasyl Shyryayev. Shyryayev also was a servant, but this was Taras's only opportunity to learn from a professional. Ivan Soshenko, a Ukrainian artist from Bohuslav, invited Shevchenko to visit, and they became friends despite their differences. Soshenko introduced his fellow artist colleagues who helped free talented individuals from serfdom – Vasyl Hryhorovych, Oleksiy Venetsianov, and Karl Bryullov, the most famous Russian Empire painter, known for his painting "The Last Day of Pompeii." Shevchenko amazed Bryullov, who remarked that his face did not resemble that of a serf. Bryullov personally went to Engelhardt to ask for Shevchenko's freedom, but the master refused.

Then the master announced that he wanted 2,500 rubles for Shevchenko's freedom (the equivalent of nearly five serfs). Zhukovsky called Taras "a diamond in sheepskin" and sought to help. They decided to raise money for Shevchenko's freedom this way: Bryullov painted a portrait of Zhukovsky, which was raffled off in a lottery, and the rest was contributed by ten friends. On April 22, 1838, Zhukovsky handed Shevchenko the signed letter from his master, confirming that 24 years old Taras is free. Ivan Soshenko, tells in his memoirs how Taras ran into his apartment and started jumping with a joyful cry of "Freedom!" [4].

A free Shevchenko learned French, studied at the Academy, and began to earn well by painting commissioned portraits. He became successful, no longer wearing simple clothes but purchasing fashionable items. Moreover, Shevchenko began to write poetry, rhymes seemed to come to him naturally. Taras shared his poems with Yevhen Hrebinka (a fable writer), who greatly liked them. Hrebinka sent them to the St. Petersburg committee for permission to publish in the collection "Kobzar" [5]. Pyotr Korsikov reviewed them for censorship, gave a positive review, and they were published in 1840. There were eight works in total, including the poem "Kateryna," dedicated to Zhukovsky. However, it didn't gain much popularity, as the Ukrainian language used was seen as a dialect not worthy of attention by the aristocracy. In 1842, the artist also painted one of his most famous paintings – "Kateryna" as an illustration for the novel of the same name.

In 1843, Shevchenko sold the rights to "Kobzar" and the poem "Haidamaky" to the St. Petersburg bookseller Ivan Lysenko, as he needed money to travel to Ukraine. Upon returning to his homeland, "Kobzar" caused a sensation, and he was treated like a star.

By the way, the name of the collection comes from kobzars – Ukrainian traveling singers who told stories and ballads about the heroic past, playing the kobza musical instrument. Shevchenko himself is also often called the Big Kobzar in our country.

In 1845, he planned to stay in Kyiv permanently, and he was already being referred to as the "Father of the Nation," though he was only 31. In Kyiv, he joined the Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood. The group was inspired by his poetry, and they wanted to create rural schools and publish textbooks. Cyril and Methodius brotherhood was the first secret political organization in Ukraine and embodied autonomist views. It also included such famous Ukrainians as Mykola Kostomarov, Panteleimon Kulish, Vasyl Bilozerskyi, Mykola Gulak and others [6].

The secret society was exposed in 1847, leading to arrests, because the Russian authorities banned any national ideas. Shevchenko was sent into the army, with a ban on writing and

painting. In the Orsk fortress, he served as a private and, due to his charisma, gained friends among the officers. Oleksiy Butakov took him on an expedition to the sea, and the officers began to commission portraits from him. He even moved from the barracks to an apartment but was soon reported on and punished. He was then exiled to the desert in the new Petrivske fortification. In 1857, Shevchenko was finally released from exile. He managed to visit Ukraine and his native village, but later he was forced to return to St. Petersburg.

Ten years in prisons had ruined his health, and after his exile, he lived only four more years. He died on March 10, 1861, from dropsy [7].

### Literary Heritage

“From Taras Shevchenko,” emphasized M. Kostomarov, “under fortunate circumstances, we can expect works worthy of his people.”

The literary heritage of Taras Shevchenko is about 240 poetic works, one of the most famous is “Testament.” In this work, he commands Ukrainians to resolutely fight against national oppression, which remains relevant nowadays.

The author is also known for his poems, of which he wrote more than 20. Here are the most famous of them:

The poem “Kateryna” by Taras Shevchenko tells the tragic story of a young woman who falls in love with a Russian soldier, gives birth to his child, but is betrayed – the soldier abandons her, refuses to acknowledge his son, and leaves Kateryna to face her sorrow alone. She endures condemnation from society and her parents, ultimately leading her to suicide. The poem explores themes of love, betrayal, social inequality, and the hardships of a woman’s fate, carrying an allegorical meaning for Ukraine.

The poem “Haidamaky” by Taras Shevchenko depicts the events of the Koliivshchyna – an uprising of Ukrainian peasants against the Polish nobility in the 18th century. The work portrays the struggle for freedom, the people’s wrath, the pursuit of justice, and the tragic fate of heroes willing to sacrifice everything for the liberation of their homeland. The poem is marked by its epic scope, deep patriotism, and poignant awareness of the sacrifices that accompany the fight for independence.

The poem “Dream” by Taras Shevchenko tells about the flight of the lyrical hero over Ukraine, where at first he sees the “heavenly nature,” and later, looking closely, he sees poverty, serfdom, hunger. Then the hero gets to Siberia, which became the place of exile of convicts; and to Petersburg, where the greed of the ruling elite is exposed. This poem covers such topics as the suffering of serfs and the wonderful life of masters, bribery of officials, and also the author sharply condemns autocracy and serfdom in the Russian Empire.

The poem “Caucasus” depicts the aggressive policy of the Russian autocracy, in particular the long war in the Caucasus. The main image in the work depicts Prometheus, personifying the enslaved peoples, as well as their invincible desire for freedom. The leading idea of the work became Shevchenko’s most famous aphorism – “Battle on – and win your battle!!” “The main idea of the poem is a call for the unification of peoples against a common enemy.

Nine novellas by Taras Shevchenko have survived to this day, written by him between 1852 and 1858, during his exile in the Novopetrovsky fortress: “The Maidservant,” “The Convict,” “The Princess,” “The Musician,” “The Unhappy,” “The Captain’s Wife,” “The

Twins,” “The Artist,” “A Walk with Pleasure and Not Without Morality.” In all the novellas, he depicts different sections of the population and different plots, but in each of them his high moral principles are noticeable. Furthermore, the author wrote the play “Nazar Stodolya.” He also wrote other plays, but this one is the only one completed.

### **Honoring the Memory of the Author and His Significance**

During the writer’s lifetime, his works were translated into Russian and Polish. Later, translations into Bulgarian appeared. In total, Shevchenko’s works have been translated into 147 different languages [8].

There are more than 1,200 monuments to Shevchenko in Ukraine. The first bust of the poet was installed in the Alchevsky estate in 1898. The first public monument to the poet in full height was made by sculptor Ivan Kavaleridze and opened in Romny in 1918. Another 128 monuments were erected in 35 other countries.

Taras Shevchenko is a fighter for Ukrainian freedom and independence. Once his directness and confidence frightened the Russian Tsar, and therefore he tried to destroy the poet. “Taras Shevchenko! One man was enough to save an entire nation!” This is what the famous Ukrainian novelist Ostap Vyshnya wrote about him. Now Shevchenko continues to be a model of struggle for Ukrainians and an object of hatred and fear for Russians. We can see this attitude in the consequences of the occupation. The Russian military purposefully shot at Shevchenko’s monuments, trying to destroy not just the statue, but the entire spirit of our people [9]. Cherkasy – the writer’s homeland – is also now regularly subjected to terrible shelling. Occupiers kill people and destroy their homes.

The National Award of Ukraine named after Taras Shevchenko is a state award, the highest creative honor in Ukraine for a significant contribution to the development of culture and art [10]. It was founded in 1961. Such famous Ukrainians as Mykola Vingranovskyi, Ivan Bilyk, Yevhen Gutsalo, Dmytro Bilous were awarded the prize.

### **Conclusions**

Taras Shevchenko is a symbol of Ukrainian culture, national identity, and freedom. His work united the people, inspired the struggle for rights and independence, and his ideas of dignity and justice remain relevant to this day. For the world, he became a voice against oppression, an example of the power of art to transform society. Shevchenko is not only a national genius but also a cultural heritage of humanity.

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