

UDC 730(477.54-25) Shevchenko

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## IN THE BORDERLAND

This essay was completed by the author while serving as a Fulbright Scholar assigned to the Kharkiv State Academy of Culture in March 2010. The paper studies the symbolic aspects of the famous monument to Taras Shevchenko in Kharkiv. According to the author, the figure of Katerina is symbolic of the strength of the mother as a metaphor for the state's ability to lead and protect. The figure of the «Dying Haidamaka» symbolizes the fighting spirit of the revolutionary to fight and die for his country. Built in 1935, the monument was meant to transform the nationalist sentiments in Shevchenko's poetry into feelings of allegiance to the communist state. However, all these attempts have failed. In contemporary Ukraine this monument is honored and acknowledged not as a symbol of Stalinist Socialist Realism but as a testament to the valor and persistence of the Ukrainian people and state. Manizer's monumental public sculpture provides an authentic experience that helps the visitor unfold something of Ukrainian history and national identity.

**Key words:** *Manizer, Taras Shevchenko, monument, sculpture, symbolism, Socialist Realism, national identity.*

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## НА ПРИКОРДОННІ

Ця праця виконана автором під час відрядження до Харківської державної академії культури в межах програми академічних обмінів ім. Фулбрайта в березні 2010 р. Розглянуто символічні аспекти знаменитого пам'ятника Тарасові Шевченку в Харкові. Визначено, що Катерина є символом материнського духу, уособленням здатності держави вести за собою й захищати. Постаць «Гайдамаки, що вмирає» символізує бойовий дух революціонера, готового боротися і померти за свою країну. Споруджений 1935 р., пам'ятник був покликаний трансформувати націоналістичні настрої в поезії Шевченка в почуття відданості комуністичній державі. Проте всі ці спроби зазнали невдачі. У сучасній Україні цей пам'ятник шанують і поважають не як символ сталінського соціалістичного реалізму, а як заповіт мужності й завзятості українського народу та його держави. Монументальна скульптура Манізера — це унікальний досвід, що допомагає відвідувачеві краще зрозуміти українську історію та національну ідентичність.

**Ключові слова:** *Манізер, Тарас Шевченко, пам'ятник, скульптура, символізм, соціалістичний реалізм, національна ідентичність.*

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## НА ПОГРАНИЧЬЕ

Эта работа выполнена автором во время пребывания в Харьковской государственной академии культуры в рамках программы академических об-

менов им. Фулбрайта в марте 2010 г. Рассмотрены символические аспекты знаменитого памятника Тарасу Шевченко в Харькове. Определено, что Екатерина является символом материнского духа, олицетворением способности государства вести за собой и защищать. Фигура «Умиряющего гайдамаки» символизирует боевой дух революционера, готового бороться и умереть за свою страну. Созданный в 1935 г., памятник был призван трансформировать националистические настроения в поэзии Шевченко в чувство преданности коммунистической стране. Однако все эти попытки оказались неудачными. В современной Украине этот памятник чтят и уважают не как символ сталинского социалистического реализма, а как завещание мужества и упорства украинского народа и его государства. Монументальная скульптура Манизера — это уникальный опыт, который помогает посетителю лучше понять украинскую историю и национальную идентичность.

**Ключевые слова:** Манизер, Тарас Шевченко, памятник, скульптура, символизм, социалистический реализм, национальная идентичность.

In the heart of central Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest metropolis and a university and once thriving manufacturing city on the Russian border, is Shevchenko Park. In the winter of 2010, the park was an icy and windblown landscape whose zoo and other entertainment establishments bespoke of earlier times. For me, the outstanding feature of the park is the monument to Taras Shevchenko, Ukraine's beloved and renowned early nineteenth century poet and artist.

Shevchenko was born on March 9, 1814, in the village of Moryntsi, Ukraine, then part of the Russian Empire. A talented draughtsman at an early age, Shevchenko was recognized for his visual art and he entered the Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg, Russia in 1838. In 1840, Shevchenko published his first set of poems, *Kobzar* and in 1841 he published *Haidamaky*. He continued to paint and write throughout his life.

Opposition to the social and national oppression of the Ukrainian people grew in Shevchenko. Tsarist Russian censorship deleted many lines from his works, and created problems for the printing of the writer's poetry. In 1843, the poet left St. Petersburg, and at the end of May he was in Ukraine. In Ukraine, Shevchenko did many pencil studies for a projected book of engravings to be called Picturesque Ukraine. In Ukraine, the poet had seen the heavy social and national yoke borne by the working people and the inhuman conditions of life of the peasants. This evoked new themes in Shevchenko's poetry. In the spring of 1846, the poet lived for some time in Kiev, where he met the members of the Kyrylo-Methodius Society. In 1847, arrests began of the members of the Kyrylo-Methodius Society and Shevchenko was arrested on April 5 on a ferry crossing the Dnipro River near Kiev. The next day, the poet was sent to St. Petersburg. He arrived there on April 17, 1847, and was imprisoned. Here he wrote the cycle of poems *In the Dungeon*. He was exiled as a private with the Military Detachment at Orenburg. Russian Tsar Nicholas I, in confirming the sentence, wrote, «Under the strictest surveillance, with a ban on writing and painting.» On June 8, 1847,

Shevchenko was established at distant Orenburg, and later he was sent to the fort at even more distant Orsk. In 1848, Shevchenko was included as an artist in the Aral Sea Survey Expedition. In 1850, Shevchenko was arrested for violating the Tsar's order. Then he was sent to a remote fort in Novopetrovsk. Once again, strict discipline was imposed, and the poet was subjected to more rigorous surveillance. It was not until 1857 that Shevchenko finally returned from exile. On August 2, 1857, having received permission to travel to St. Petersburg, Shevchenko left the fort at Novopetrovsk. In Nizhniy Novgorod, he learned that he was forbidden to go to Moscow or St. Petersburg, on pain of being returned to Orenburg. In May, 1859, Shevchenko got permission to go to Ukraine. He intended to buy a plot of land not far from the village of Pekariv, to build a house there, and to settle in Ukraine. In July he was arrested on a charge of blasphemy, but was released and ordered to go to St. Petersburg without fail. The poet arrived there on September 7, 1859. Nevertheless, to the end of his life, the poet hoped to settle in Ukraine. Taras Shevchenko died in his studio apartment in St. Petersburg at 5:30 a.m. on March 10, 1861. At the Academy of Arts, over the coffin of Shevchenko, speeches were delivered in Ukrainian, Russian, and Polish. The poet was first buried at the Smolensk Cemetery in St. Petersburg. Then Shevchenko's friends immediately undertook to fulfill the poet's Zapovit (Testament), and bury him in Ukraine. The coffin with the body of Shevchenko was taken by train to Moscow, and then by horse-drawn wagon to Ukraine. Shevchenko's remains entered Kiev on the evening of May 6, and the next day they were transferred to the steamship Kremenchuh. On May 8 the steamship reached Kaniv, and Taras was buried on Chernecha Hill (now Taras Hill) by the Dnipro River. (<http://www.infoukes.com/shevchenkomuseum/bio.htm>)

The massive sculptural array in Kharkiv provides insight into the role of Shevchenko in Ukrainian history and of Socialist Realism public sculpture in Kharkiv and its environs as manifested by Soviet artists between the two world wars and afterwards. This work incorporates evidence of both the forces that shaped the Soviet political environment of the time and the internal dynamic of the Ukrainian struggle to capture and define a national identity. The function of Soviet political monumental sculpture was to manifest official state values and to play a role in the control of ideas and images. While much of the earlier official Soviet art was proffered as a refutation of older norms, the period of this monument from the mid 1930's also recognized a need to shore up Ukrainian allegiance by using a strong nationalist icon such as Shevchenko in light of the imposed famine in Ukraine, the Holodomor, in 1932-33 as instigated by Stalin. While the invented and often repeated motifs of the Soviet revolution, such as the hammer and sickle, the red star, and the heroic laborer and soldier are not the focal point of this monument, the elements of the piece still unfold the orthodox posturing and standards of official Socialist Realism. Socialist Realism became state policy in 1932 when Stalin disseminated the declaration *On the Reconstruction of Literary and Art Organizations*.

As an intended art of the people, the imagery used in the Shevchenko monument was accessible and easily comprehensible to residents and visitors to

Kharkiv. This mode of clearly depicted hero or icon was consistent throughout the era. Bold, toiling, muscular, selfless workers rising up and looking forward are the armature that structures this piece. During Stalin's reign in the early 1930's, Soviet monumental sculpture and other art forms under official sanction began to not only depict the heroic worker but also put forth images of the great leader. Of course, Stalin himself begins to appear in settings across the Soviet Union as do sculptures and images of Lenin. In some respects, under Stalin's drive for collectivization and the construction and propagandizing of the heroic and forwarding thinking Soviet Man, the Shevchenko monument adds to this norm a deeper connective tissue in the Ukrainian psyche. Here the nationalist forward thinking hero artist and poet of the nineteenth century is a stand-in for the progressive Soviet Man.

The concept of the new Soviet Man or person (*Novy Sovetsky Chelovek*) may be best exemplified in Vladimir Mayakovsky's 1924 *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin: A Poem*:

Who needs a «1»?  
The voice of a «1»  
is thinner than a squeak.  
Who will hear it?  
Only the wife...  
A «1» is nonsense.  
A «1» is zero.

The substantial sculpture on Sumska Street not far from Kharkiv's famously large Svobody Square is a highly stylized response to the realities of the Soviet dominated and biased cultural imperative as well as an idealized depiction of the contradictions involved in trying to capture, within the dynamics of public art, the heartfelt nationalism that was exemplified in Shevchenko's life and work. The Stalinist cultural imperative was a view that looked to art as a propaganda tool, a means of political persuasion and indoctrination. This non-violent method of persuasion still had the same intention as more coercive forms of control and sought to have power over the thoughts and ideas of the populace. Monumental art was a manipulative tool under Stalin and also undermined the ideas of opponents and previous cultural imperatives, such as those derived from the church.

Noteworthy for its projected physical strength and sweeping arrangement of archetypal Ukrainian characters as typified in Shevchenko's writing, the sculpture relates its narrative in a panoramic approach that engages the viewer in a circular walk around the structure. The sixteen subjects depicted in this grouping are as diverse, yet no less subtle in their depiction than the commanding central and dominating figure of Shevchenko himself. Shevchenko's visual art and poetry depicted the harsh reality of life he saw around him and can be seen as an unfolding of a distinctly Ukrainian national character. He was certainly cognizant of the injustices perpetrated upon the Ukrainian people. His own life history made him particularly aware of the struggle for personal freedom and his

revolutionary spirit and distaste for the oppression of the Ukrainian people made the use of his image for Soviet propaganda the ideal appropriation.

The artist, Matvey Manizer, at the time a sculpture teacher at the Leningrad Institute of Proletarian Visual Arts formed in 1932, captured the potent force of Shevchenko's character and nature, and shaped the monument out of powerful collective memories, observations of the human form in dynamic movement, and imaginative thinking. He built upon traditions that Soviet era authorities accepted as the language of public art. The tenets of Socialist Realism mandated that the work of art be straightforward and clear to viewers, that relevant subject matter be chosen, that the artwork should be in the realm of subjective realism and not abstract or non-objective, and that the sculpture serve the purposes of the State.

Manizer was born in St. Petersburg in 1891 and studied sculpture at the Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg. He produced numerous portrait sculptures and monuments of Lenin which were erected in many cities across the Soviet Union. His portrait of Lenin in the revolutionary's birthplace of Simbirsk, formerly known as Ulyanov, is particularly notable for its heroic realism.

The Shevchenko monument in Kharkiv is one of a series of Shevchenko sculptures he created in Ukraine. The Kharkiv monument is his most famous and he worked with the architect Iosif Langbard on the landscaping and pedestal. Langbard, of Jewish heritage, was born in Bielsk, Belarus (now in Poland) in 1882 and during the 1930's he was quite active in architectural projects in his native Belarus where he was named, in 1934, «Honorary Worker in the Arts and Architecture of Belarus.»

In 1958 he was awarded the People's Artist of the USSR and he was Vice-President of the Academy of Arts of the USSR from 1947 until his death in Moscow in 1966.

Manizer and the monument's architect, Langbard, created a tribute to Shevchenko that allows the viewer to be disposed to reverie. At times their visionary quest to capture the spirit of the poet and his place in the Ukraine patriotic landscape results in hackneyed characterizations. On the other hand, a dreamy utopian world is exemplified. Even if the sculpture is intended to represent objective reality, the artist appears to make references that are of people that are somehow not quite real. It is in this imaginal space that an awareness of the artist's quest takes place. The focus may be one that works to reveal an idiosyncratic journey, a quest for a unifying identity.

The quality of this state is the tendency toward harmony, accord, and oneness. Approaching the sculpture, it can be noted that the artist made significant choices about what is to be captured and translated into bronze. In this process, the exploration of both the ordinary and awe inspiring in Shevchenko's poetry is transformed into a tamed and accessible world. The artist seems to be searching for continuity, and deviations in nature are subjected to the control of his modeling. The diverse parts of this naturalism are ordered for an effect of wholeness and togetherness. The solidarity of the derived elements exerts an influence that implies a cooperative spirit between the figures and the viewer.

This union is captured by the artist as an effort to project an integrity that stands in contrast to the chaos that thrived in the period of its execution. The investigation of the national character of Ukraine through this monument, by the artist, can be almost scientific, where-in close observation and depiction there-of is of primary concern. However, the pursuit also involves a bit of adventure to a place of dreamlike proportions.

Heroic sculpture such as this, as seen in the light of a quest for unity, is not so much an imitation of nature, but it is a response to a reverence and deference to the sweep of the patriotic landscape. Whether in close study of the human figure in motion or a subdued arrangement of forms in space, the artist joins in a spirit of cooperation with his subject.

The monument stands sixteen and half meters high and the Shevchenko element stands five and half meters tall. The sixteen bronze figures spiral along a massive raw labradorite podium. The bronze pieces were fabricated in Leningrad. At the dedication ceremony on March 24, 1935, the following was reported:

A great holiday in Kharkov: the unveiling of the monument to the great son of the Ukrainian people Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861), the revolutionary-democrat, the ardent fighter against Tsarism and serfdom was taking place. Red banners decorated the city. People filled in Sumska street, adjacent streets and Dzerzhisky square...

2 o'clock p.m. The trumpets sound. The veil goes down. All who gathered see the monument's multfigured sculptural composition crowned by the Kobzar statue. The sounds of «International» are heard. Then a large chorus sings Shevchenko's «Will»... The meeting begins. Greetings and addresses are read. Yanka Kupala, a national poet of Byelorussia recites his poetry dedicated to the national poet of the Ukraine... (<http://www.kharkov.ua/about/shevchen-e.htm>)

The reference to «Kobzar» in the above address brings forth the Ukrainian folk tradition of the itinerant bard or balladeer. The Kobzar was someone who played the kobza, a stringed instrument similar to a lute. Shevchenko brings forth in his poetry and artwork this reverence for the nationalist ideal of the Kobzar, and published a collection of poems titled *Kobzar* (<http://www.infoukes.com/shevchenkomuseum/articles.htm#Doroshenko>) in 1840 in St. Petersburg. Interestingly enough, the demise of the Kobzar tradition came about at the same time as the inclusion of Ukraine as a republic of the Soviet Union. Referring to this very Ukrainian folk tradition may be interpreted as a means to tacitly incorporate the nationalist sentiments into feelings of allegiance to the communist state. Kupala read from his Shevchenko series at the monument's dedication.

In 1909, Yanka Kupala wrote two poems *The Memory of Shevchenko* (February 25, 1909) and *Shevchenko's Memory* – which started the Byelorussian Shevchenkiana poetic series. In the first of these impassioned creative tributes, the Byelorussian bard acknowledges the truly boundless influence of the Kobzar's revolutionary Muse on vast social strata and expresses heartfelt admiration of this impact as a son of the Byelorussian people: «In the north, in the south, in the east, In the west, where the sun sets, The Kobzar plucks the strings of human

souls. In a cabin, a palace, a prison cell, a tavern, He stirs hearts as a warden does with his bells. His verse reaches us every time, We listen happily to our neighbor, We add our flowers to his garland. Brother, dear, Byelorussians salute you.» This motif is stressed even more in the second poem. Kupala refers to the Kobzar as the father of not only Ukrainians but also Byelorussians. Shevchenko's image prompted Kupala to write the epic poem *The Fate of Taras*. It turned out as a kind of life story of the great Ukrainian bard, full of charming lyricism, a soft poetic narration. The meter of *The Fate of Taras* is characteristic of Shevchenko's kolomyika — a lively Western Ukrainian folk song or dance. Maxim Gorky, the great Russian author, noted at one time that he knew of no other poet, except Yanka Kupala, who had so completely and profoundly utilized the Kobzar's creative principles. (<http://bestreferat.com.ua/referat/detail-8872.html>)

Beneath the sculpture of Shevchenko, the Kobzar, at the pinnacle of the spiral monument in descending order are a female student, signifying the youthful spirit of Kharkiv as a center for higher education in the Soviet Union, a young farmer raising the flag and, again, a symbolic figure of the forceful and youthful revolutionary laboring on behalf of the state, and just behind the figure of the farmer, stepping onto the penultimate pillar is the figure of the miner. Actors from the local Kharkiv theatre scene posed for the sculptor, allowing him to capture the naturalistic poses of each character.

The first sculpture at the foot of the monument is named «Katerina» and was inspired by the Shevchenko poem of the same name. The young mother clutches her baby in a protective and caring fashion. While somewhat melancholy, the figure of Katerina is symbolic of the strength of the mother as a metaphor for the state's ability to lead and protect, as well as the anti-Tsarist sentiments as expressed in the original poem published in 1838. In the poem, Katerina is an unwed mother rudely abandoned by her lover, a soldier in the Tsar's army.

The next figure in line is a powerful and expressive characterization of the «Dying Haidamaka.» Again, the figure is drawn from a Shevchenko poem of the same name and symbolizes the fighting spirit of the revolutionary to fight and die for his country. The poem depicts a peasant uprising and the artist has captured the tense moment of the physical and emotional pain of the dying peasant. The figure above the dying Haidamaka is of another esne using his scythe as a weapon and the next figure positioned in the crux of the first spiral upward is breaking his chains to fight for his freedom.

The name Haidamaky was given by the Polish gentry to the peasant rebels that operated together with the Cossacks in the region of Ukraine that was under Polish rule during the eighteenth century. The word is of Turkish origin and means «unruly ones.» The Haidamaky movement, known as Koliyivshchina, was at its strongest in the late eighteenth century and was the inspiration for Shevchenko's poem.

My sons, my Haidamaki brave!  
The world is free and wide!  
Go forth, my sons, and make your way—

Perhaps you'll fortune find.  
My sons, my simple-minded brood,  
When you go forth to roam,  
Who will receive my orphans poor  
With warmth into his home?  
So fly, my fledgling falcons, fly  
To far Ukraine, my lads –  
(<http://www.infoukes.com/shevchenkomuseum/poetry2.htm#link10>)

The next figure is of a seated Cossack or Zaporochet bound at his hands and feet. Passive in his body language, the figure, sometimes referred to as a representation of Taras Bulba (<http://kharkov.vbelous.net/english/shevchen/zaporozh.htm>) is a symbol of defiance. Like Gogol's «Taras Bulba» this figure is the epitome of strength and sorrow.

Zaporozhci were Cossacks who lived in the central Ukrainian region of Zaporozhia. The Zaporozhci became a political force that sought a Ukrainian identity and opposed the Ottoman, Polish-Lithuanian, and Russian empires.

As one makes the next turn around the sculpture the second major grouping of figures comes into view. The figure of a woman and then a man hunched over, weighted down by a millstone on his back, are both symbols of the oppression of the people under tsarist rule. The woman holds the tools of a farmer in a defiant gesture as she seems to be protective of the fate of the laborer burdened by the pressure of his oppressive stone. The next figure up the spiral is of an indentured soldier in the Tsar's army, his heavy coat wearing down his spirit.

As the figures twist their way up the monument, another set of young people and heroic soldiers makes their way along the pedestal. First a young boy, perhaps a student, behind the image of a revolutionary clutching his banner, followed by a sailor raising his hat and then a worker striding forward with his rifle at his side. The next in line is the upright figure of a Red Army soldier proudly standing guard.

Reaching to the top of spiral are the figures of the coal miner, the farmer, and the female student. From the depiction of Shevchenko's «Katerina» at the base of the monument to the compelling portrayal of the woman student gripping a book, the monument captures the narrative of the characters of Shevchenko's writings of the peasant revolt and the heroic nature of the underclass in opposition to the tsarist regime forward and through the Bolshevik revolution and into the modern spirit of the Soviet man and woman looking forward to the predicted bright future of Stalin's Soviet Union.

The irony of the position of this monument in contemporary Ukraine is that it is honored and acknowledged not as a symbol of Stalinist Socialist Realism but as a testament to the valor and persistence of the Ukrainian people and state. Unlike the Soviet military medals and Lenin lapel pins that are traded in the street markets of Ukrainian cities along with other memorabilia and kitsch items, Manizer's monumental public sculpture provides an authentic experience

that helps the visitor unfold something of Ukrainian history and soul-fullness, as well as connect the viewer to universal conditions of humanity.

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