

KOBZAR

Ukrainian Poetry of
Taras Shevchenko

This book is a celebration of the 200th anniversary of the birth of poet Taras Shevchenko on March 9, 1814

■ Taras Shevchenko is not only the greatest poet of Ukraine he is also one of the great writers of the world. This book provides 50 of his poems in the original Ukrainian, plus 50 English translations and also French translations.

■ Shevchenko was born a serf, virtually a slave, on March 9, 1814 in Moryntsi, Ukraine, which was then under the rule of the Russian Empire. His great artistic talent made him a free man but for only nine years in a lifetime of 47 years. His works were censored and he was exiled to Siberia by the Tsar of Russia who ordered that he was forbidden to write or paint. The poet ignored the Tsar's order.

■ Shevchenko (1814-1861) was a genius who was a poet, artist, prophet and patriot of Ukraine. He is credited as the founder of the beautiful Ukrainian language today of 46 million people.

■ This book has 31 illustrations in color and black and white including three Shevchenko photo portraits, five self-portraits, and example of his art which show his great talent as an artist.

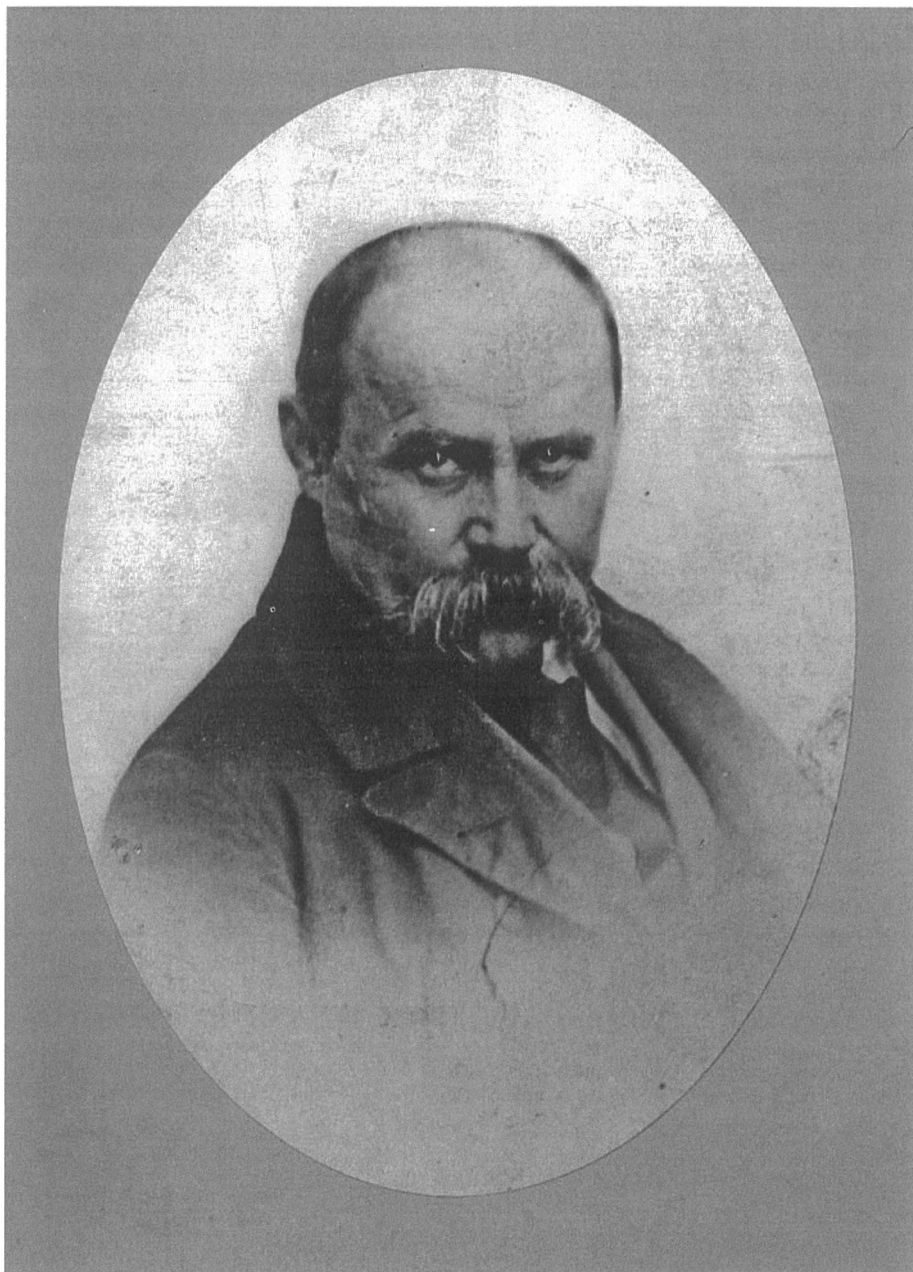
■ His poetry spoke of the universal desire for freedom from tyranny that is so relevant today.



SHEVCHENKO

March 9, 1814

200 Years



Taras Shevchenko
photo portrait, 1860-61

KOBZAR

Poetry of
TARAS SHEVCHENKO
in
Ukrainian, English and French

Introduction by
Andrew Gregorovich

Toronto
Taras Shevchenko Museum
2014

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ISBN 978-0-921537-94-6

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Published on the 200th anniversary of the birth of
Taras Shevchenko March 9, 2014

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PREFACE

Two centuries ago on March 9, 1814 in Moryntsi, Ukraine, then under the rule of the Russian Empire, was born Taras Shevchenko. He was a poet, artist, patriot, and prophet. Soviet scholars emphasized that he was a humanist a term that is uncommon in the western world. It is concerned primarily with human beings and their values. He was born a serf, virtually a slave, and was owned by Russian Vasily Engelhardt. His genius was stifled until he became free at the age of 24. In 1840 he published a slim book of eight poems titled *Kobzar* (Minstrel) which became a sensation in Ukraine and the Russian Empire because it was in the Ukrainian language. His influence on this language was so significant that he is credited as the founder of the modern Ukrainian literary language which reflects the language of 45 million Ukrainians. He is universally considered the greatest Ukrainian poet and one of the giants of international world literature. Our Taras Shevchenko Museum was opened on June 29, 1952 and is the only Shevchenko Museum on the American continents.

To celebrate the immortal Taras Shevchenko the Taras Shevchenko Museum in Toronto in 2010 started working on a collection of 50 poems representing some of his finest poetry. It was decided to make it a tri-lingual collection in Ukrainian, English, and French. The selection attempts to include examples from a variety of dates and subjects. In selection the quality of the translation was also considered together with an attempt to include examples of the work of various translators.

Canadians have created the largest quantity of English language Shevchenkiana. The selection was made by Museum President Andrew Gregorovich and Museum Director Lyudmyla Pogoryelova. She reviewed the Ukrainian poems, the President reviewed the English translations, Victoria McKhail and Elisabeth Zwirchowsky reviewed the French translations. French translations were not available for some poems. In transliteration the letter y for words like *Prychynna* is pronounced like e in pre-che-na.

In Shevchenko's day the Russian Empire used the older Julian Calendar which is 12 days later than the common Gregorian calendar used today. By today's Gregorian Calendar Shevchenko was born on February 25 mentioned by some writers.

The Taras Shevchenko Museum thanks everyone for their assistance and their generous support of the publication of this book. I thank my son Michael for his important help and also O. Danchenko. Contributors are listed in the acknowledgement at the end of the book. However it is important to recognize the especially generous financial contribution of these organizations and individuals:



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Introduction

Among the great names of world literature is that of the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko. We can say that Shevchenko is to Ukraine just as Shakespeare is to England, Dante is to Italy, Balzac is to France, Cervantes is to Spain, and Goethe is to Germany. All of them are national poets or writers who also have an international significance. Shevchenko is unique among them because of the persecution he suffered during his life. He was a serf, or slave, for 24 years, a free man for 9 years, an exile for 10 years and under Russian police surveillance 4 years. He once said "The story of my life is a part of the history of my homeland."

Shevchenko, like Shakespeare (with 154 sonnets), was both a poet and a dramatist. However, Shakespeare was a far greater dramatist (with 39 plays) since Shevchenko wrote only one surviving play *Nazar Stodolya*. However, Shevchenko was both more prolific and the greater poet with about 275 poems. Both of them are credited with their major contribution to their native languages, English and Ukrainian.

Taras Shevchenko was born a serf on March 9, 1814 in Moryntsi, Ukraine, which was then under the rule of the Russian Empire. It was near the capital of Ukraine Kyiv (Kiev). When he was two his family moved to the village of Kerelivka, which in 1926 was renamed Shevchenkove. As a serf he was the property of landowner Vasily Engelhardt. Shevchenko's father was Hryhory, who was literate, and his mother was Kateryna Boyko. Their family had three sons and three daughters. When his mother Kateryna died age 32 when he was nine years old his father married again and Shevchenko had a cruel step-mother. Shevchenko became an orphan at age eleven when his father died. He was put to work as a shepherd at age 13 as he says in his poem *When I was Thirteen*. At age 15, he was a servant in his master's residence. On one occasion he was drawing by a candle he had lit while his master was away. Unexpectedly

his master arrived and caught him by the burning candle and complained that he could have burned the house down. Shevchenko was beaten by the master.

As a boy he became fascinated with art and painting. At age 16 he did his earliest surviving art work, the *Portrait of a Woman*. In his early years he was influenced by Rembrandt and by Briullov his teacher and mentor at the St Petersburg Academy of Art. He had entered the Academy as a free man in 1838 and graduated with his diploma in 1845 as a talented painter of portraits and landscapes in oil, water color, pencil, ink and engraving. In Shevchenko's thousand paintings many are portraits for which he was paid as little as one ruble. In 1961 the Ukrainian Academy of Science published a large four volume set of books about his art. Three of his famous paintings are *Kateryna*, *Gypsy Fortune Teller* and an oval *Self-Portrait*, 1840.

His new master, Paul Engelhardt, who owned 10,190 serfs in Kyiv region, central Ukraine, decided to take the 15 year old Shevchenko. to Warsaw and Vilnius in 1829 and finally to the Russian Empire capital St Petersburg. His owner decided to make Shevchenko into an artist and he was apprenticed to a painter, Vasili Shiryaev.

There was a large Ukrainian community in St Petersburg. A Ukrainian art student, Ivan Soshenko (1807-1876), made his acquaintance when he was sketching one white night in the Summer Garden Park. He introduced him to prominent people including intellectuals, writers, historians and artists. His new friends recognized Shevchenko's artistic talent and wanted him to study at the Imperial Academy of Art but as a serf he could not. These friends finally decided that the famous Russian artist Karl Briullov, of French Huguenot origin, should paint a portrait of the famous Russian poet Vasili Zhukovsky and then raffle it off.

Engelhardt wanted a huge sum of 2,500 rubles to free Shevchenko from serfdom. This was raised by the painting and paid and on April 22, 1838 at age 24 Shevchen-



Portrait of a woman by Taras Shevchenko, 1830.
Shevchenko was age 16 and he was
first interested in art and only later in poetry.

ko became a free man.

It has sometimes been thought that Shevchenko was not well educated. However, he actually was very highly educated through his own efforts and from his presence in the highest circles of the intelligentsia of the Russian Empire and his studies at the Academy of Art. Taras became the favorite student of Karl Briullov. Friends who helped free him included K. Briullov, V. Zhukovsky, and the Secretary of the Academy of Art V. Grigorovich. He dedicated his 1841 *Haidamaks* to Grigorovich. Others include artist A. Venetsianov, A. Mokrytsky, composer M. Vielgorsky, and Ukrainian writer Evhen Hrebinka.

Shevchenko has been called the Bard of Freedom and was a voracious reader of history and novels all his life. For example, he read the works of over 33 different authors including Homer, Herodotus, Plutarch, Ovid, Petrarch, Dante, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, Byron, Walter Scott, Dickens, Defoe, Burns, Richardson, Rousseau, Hugo, Goethe, Schiller, Lermontov, Mickiewicz, Gogol, Voltaire, Hugo, Balzac and the *Bible*. He read much history including *Istoriya Rusov* a patriotic history of Ukraine promoting its independence which was available from about 1800 in manuscript and 1846 in print. Shevchenko's earliest surviving poem is *Possessed (Prychynna)* from 1837. It includes *The Mighty Dnipro River Roars* which became a popular song. He advised his people: "Study/ read, /learn foreign subjects/ but do not shun your own." He spoke fluent Polish, knew some French and read world literature in Russian and Polish translations.

As a young man Shevchenko was handsome, of medium height with a strong body and broad shoulders. His eyes were hazel color. He had an excellent memory and a good baritone singing voice. He loved to sing Ukrainian folk songs and was an optimist. Sometimes in Kyiv he would go alone to a place where he could sit and see the Dnipro River and sing songs. He drank rum, wine and horilka liquor but was seen drunk only one time in his whole life according to his friend Kostomarov. He could hold his

liquor but it was bad for his health. His favorite foods were borshch beet soup, kasha (buckwheat) and cabbage. He was attractive to women and one who fell in love with him was Princess Varvara Reppina who told him she would give him a gold pen to write his poetry. He proposed to several women but never married. The poet enjoyed smoking cigars. Shevchenko was very generous giving money to anyone who asked him. Sometimes his poor finances left him penniless. He used a cane in his last years. He traveled to many cities and villages in Ukraine and the Russian Empire. Late in 1842 he took a trip to Stockholm, Sweden and to Copenhagen, Denmark. In Ukraine in 1843 and 1845 he was once again captivated by the beauty of nature, the Dnipro River and Ukraine itself.

He was a passionate patriot of Ukraine and wrote many times about the love of the people for their motherland. He was not biased against any other people but he hated tyrannical governments. His friendship with the American black actor Ira Aldridge is one example of his friends. Some of his poetry was intended to inspire all peoples to freedom, justice and peace.

Shevchenko declared many times his desire for the freedom and independence of Ukraine. However, he was also interested in Slavic unity or a federation. Perhaps he visualized something like the British Commonwealth of Nations in which countries are independent but united on major issues. Shevchenko represented the Ukrainian love of freedom. He was a man of great courage. For example, he signed a document supporting the Jews against anti-Semitic prejudice. He did this after exile which might have inspired the government to persecute him again by exile.

He had a love of the beauty of life, a great love of mankind and liberty. He was not a leader but he identified an American leader when he wrote "When shall we get our Washington / With a new and just law? / One day we shall." Ukraine needed a Washington to fight for its independence just as Washington did for the USA. The poet predicted Ukraine would become free.

The first Shevchenko monument on the American continents was unveiled in Oakville (Palermo), Ontario, Canada on July 1, 1951. It has not survived. In Winnipeg, Canada, a Shevchenko monument was unveiled in 1961 beside the Manitoba Parliament. A magnificent monument of Shevchenko by Ukrainian Canadian sculptor Leo Mol was unveiled in the American capital Washington on June 27, 1964. Our Taras Shevchenko Museum was officially opened in June 1952 and is the only Shevchenko museum in the western hemisphere.

Shevchenko has been honored in many ways. For example in 1970 a new element was discovered by the Ukrainian scientist Eugene Lazarenko. He named it Tarasovite in honor of Taras Shevchenko and the International Mineralogical Association in Washington DC officially added it to the world list of minerals. This is a rare honor for the Ukrainian poet. In the USA and Canada many organizations such as the Shevchenko Scientific Society, buildings and streets have been named after Shevchenko. For example in Manitoba there was a town named Shevchenko (now Vita) and in Montreal there is a Shevchenko Boulevard.

He intentionally created some poems in the form of Ukrainian folk songs. Because of their musicality there have been a very large number of music composers who have written over 800 pieces of music to his poems. Even today, his poem *Zapovit* serves as an unofficial Ukrainian National Anthem as it did in the 19th and 20th centuries. Ukrainian concerts often include a Shevchenko poem to be sung.

Music was important to the poet. He regularly went to the opera, concerts and musical salons as well as theaters. Living in the Russian capital city he attended many performances among them Shakespeare's *Othello* starring Black American actor Ira Aldridge. One of the poet's drawings was *King Lear* for Shakespeare's play. He occasionally complained that he was penniless and couldn't afford the opera or theater. He was familiar with the works of many music composers, pianists, violinists and singers. He men-