Images of Center and Periphery in the Poetry of Taras Ševčenko

BOHDAN RUBCHAK

I shall examine in this article various selected images and implications of *periphery* in Ševčenko's poetical texts. This should lead me to a redefinition and, hopefully, a re-vision, of the notion of centrality *in* that poetry and the centrality *of* that poetry as a literary-historical fact. I shall use as my point of origin the image *popid tynom* (under-the-fence), frequently also expressed by the dialectal *popid tynniu* which (to my ear at least) implies a state of being under-the-fence—a kind of "under-the-fenceness."[1]

But before I approach the particulars of Ševčenko's poetry, I should like to turn briefly to the state of periphery ("under-the-fenceness") of literature in general and of Ukrainian literature in particular. I shall attempt to show that the causes of the state of periphery of literature as such are quite different from (one may even say—opposite to) the causes of the peripheral state of Ukrainian literature as a national literature.

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The literary theorist Wolfgang Iser turns to the currently popular Theory of General Systems (upon modifying it in the phenomenological

[1] We should keep in mind that this image, like much else in Ševčenko, does not originate with him. We find it, for instance, in Amvrosij Metlyns'kyj's strange little ballad "Syritka" (The Orphan), written before 1839. Its heroine moves from the humble situation of *popid tynom* into a state of miraculous metaphysical centrality. Ševčenko, like Shakespeare, borrowed many forgettable topical effects from his predecessors and contemporaries, and proceeded to render them unforgettable.

direction), in order to explain the relationship between the literary text and its reader as a social unit.

Individual social phenomena, as integral parts of temporal social processes, arrange themselves (or are arranged by such processes) into systems. Such systems, in their turn, "represent" or reflect reality as an ordered or structured social process, from a social point of view. In other words, such systems, engendered by the force of social processes (that is, by "life" as we use the term in daily discourse), structure or sort phenomena into hierarchical layerings on the basis of the social value of a given phenomenon for a given historical period, or for a given social class or group. Phenomena that are less significant to a social situation are relegated by such structuration to the peripheral margin, or they are suppressed altogether. The purpose of such rigorous selectivity is to order and control the hopes of an individual as a social unit, and to minimize the element of contingency in his daily life.

A literary text, by its own "system" (in this case, by its thematic as well as formal structure which obviously blend into one another), opposes the central social systems, although it is evidently also engendered by them and depends upon them. Such dialectical state of origin-and-opposition is the result of the fact that the system of a literary text is structured with those components of human experience, including the functions of language, which the central social systems either relegate to their own peripheral margins or reject altogether. It is with such demoted or suppressed components that the literary text restructures social reality according to its own *aesthetic order.*

It follows that the literary text "confounds" our daily hopes and expectations, deviating them from the dependable tracks of social causality and hence denying them the daily security implied for us by social systems: *vis-à-vis* a literary text, our hopes and expectations become "disordered," puzzling, *symbolic.* To put it another way, the system of the literary work provokes in us a *unique* set of hopes—much less calculated, much foggier and yet much more profound and much more urgent than our expectations of rewards or our fears of failure in our daily social relations, structured as these are by central social systems. The literary work, more precisely, re-sorts and encodes single compo-

nents of our social reality in such a manner that it becomes a sort of frame or, better yet, an intricate receptacle for the reader's own deep and confused hopes, marginal as they are to social processes. The reader "places" them into the literary work, raw and "unconditioned," rather than reads them off from the surface of the structure, as he does in the case of central social systems.[2]

By their very uniqueness—by the very fact that they are *our* personal, often semiconscious, hopes and expectations—they bypass the specific social conditioning inherent in the functions of social systems, thus becoming collective and more or less universally human on the widest psychological level. This is obvious in the case of a lyrical poem but is also true for a novel or a play.

It has become a truism that a literary work, from is distanced, peripheral situation with regard to central social systems, can tell us more profound, ultimately more important truths about those very social and historical processes than other discourses which may seem more "immediate" but in fact are generalized toward specific social purposes. (Such generalizations, incidentally, may either be open, as in law, or underhanded, as in political propaganda or commercial advertising.) Here is a rather obvious example: the ordinary, apparently uneventful life of a woman unhappy in her mundane situation, embodied in metaphorical language (a language in itself *apparently* useless for social analysis), has told us much that is crucially important about the society of a given period in Russia, France, England, Norway, or the United States, in the works of Tolstoy, Flaubert, Hardy, Ibsen, or Dreiser. A much more dramatic example of such "truth-telling" or "verisimilitude" would be Joyce's prose or Mallarmé's poetry, but the complexities of such a discussion would take me too far afield.

Even my rudimentary and obvious example implies that the system of a literary work, in the process of selecting and re-sorting social priorities, frequently (especially since the eighteenth century) turns to those social systems which in and by themselves are constructed from "devalued" social components, and therefore become peripheral with regard

[2] Wolfang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 70-85 *et passim.*

to the central systems of a given society. Literature attempts to find a "kindred spirit" on the social periphery. I have in mind the social systems of marginal groups—minorities, the street, the ghetto, the village, the artist, the criminal, the gypsy, etc. One reason is that such peripheral social systems better illuminate (or less efficiently mask) the naked existence of the individual. This frequently obtains even in works which seemingly treat segments of central social systems. In *War and Peace*, for example, Tolstoy employed the glittering center of the Russian Empire *eccentrically*, as a kind of peripheral frame for the purpose of a profound artistic probing into social phenomena which "in life" were situated on the periphery of the central structures of the Russian society of his time, but which the novelist nevertheless regarded as central.

Needless to say, peripheral social structures frequently oppose their own centers, although they are engendered by the latter. Obvious examples are strikes, protests, or more dramatically, political dissent, or even revolution; a particularly relevant example would be the romantic conflict between the artist and the bourgeois. Literature is concerned with such social phenomena because by the very structure of its system it constantly attempts to orient the social periphery centrally, thus in itself becoming, in a certain sense, "revolutionary." The most obvious difference between the procedures of the systems of marginal social groups and the systems of literary works consists in that the marginal social systems, with the implied or overt resistance built into their "otherness," are constructed causally, according to a social, rather than an aesthetic, project. It follows that they attempt to reconstruct *systematically* their corresponding central social systems, according to predetermined social structural laws, generated by, and in their turn generating, patterned and generalized social hopes and expectations of their respective collectives. One may conclude that in this sense literature is much more heedless and anarchical than the social periphery.

Let me now touch upon one more theoretical moment which bears upon my subsequent discussion. Literary works as such become components of a system which embodies a "national literature." Literary works written in a national language express (even through the various codes embedded within the very language) the common past, the common

hopes, and the common destiny of a people. These synthesize, in one sense, the profoundly psychological hopes and expectations with which a single reader invests a single work. National literatures, on a higher level, combine into ever larger systems (international genres, thematic strains, etc.), until the image of a "system of systems" of literaure as such emerges.[3]

When the synchronic "system of systems" which is a literature, or a single system within it, begins to move in time, we have a system of literary history. The relationship between central and peripheral social systems—their constant struggle for the center as the fulfillment of the particular hopes and expectations of their respective collectives—may be applied, within the system of literary history, to the so-called law of mutation of genres and forms. Viktor Šklovskij, Mixail Baxtin, Claudio Guillén, together with numerous other Western and Russian formalists and structuralists, have shown how, within a given literary-historical system, peripheral genres and forms conquer the overripe, decaying center and take its place.[4] As we see it particularly convincingly in Baxtin, young peripheral genres which attain centrality frequently originate in marginal social groups and their peripheral social systems: Baxtin shows, for example, how oral traditions of the anonymous and collective "folk" literature of disadvantaged groups forced out the established classical genres and replaced them, crystallizing into the centrally reigning genre of the novel.

Finally, let me mention another interesting aspect of this question. Literature, as a peripheral system with regard to central social systems, in itself can aspire to social centrality either indirectly or by pretending that it is a basic component of a given central social system. Such cooptation of literature into a system ordered according to social hopes and

[3] Among the many theorists who have outlined such a "system of systems" of literature is Northrop Frye. See his *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 16-18, 352-354 *et passim.*

[4] See Šklovskij, "Sviaz' priemov stixosloženija s obščimi priemami stilja," *Poética: Sborniki po teroii poétičeskogo jazyka* (Petrograd, 1919); Baxtin, "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," *The Dialogic Imagination,* Michael Holquist, trans. (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 40-83; Guillén, "Genre and Countergenre,"*Literature as System: Essays Toward the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 135-158.

expectations frequently occurs when that central social system suffers a crisis and must be ideologically resuscitated, as for example in totalitarian systems, revolutions, émigré groups (whose own social systems are hopelessly threatened by the normal, and therefore normative, systems of the host society), or enslaved nations, whose own social systems are either incorporated in the new central systems of the occupier or liquidated by him altogether. In any case, such a suspended state does not allow for the socially mediated hopes and expectations of the collective and thus causes a frightening abyss at its center. That abyss demands immediate impletion by other systems—even if they are most distantly peripheral under normal circumstances—such as the aesthetic systems of literary works. In that case, the specific responses of literary works to individual hopes and expectations, encoded in their intransitive metaphorical language, tend to be falsified by the pretense that they are generated by discourses belonging to other systems.

2

Literature as a peripheral system with regard to social systems; literature as a system of the systems of national literatures which in themselves are systems of individual works; the fact that in certain social conditions the peripheral system of a national literature can pretend to substitute for a corresponding central social system; peripheral social systems in which literature is particularly interested; within the system of literary history itself, peripheral genres and forms (frequently cultivated by peripheral social groups) which in time become central—all these questions become immediately relevant to my present reading of Ševčenko's poetry. Although I am unable in the space of this article to methodically examine each of these questions as it applies to Ševčenko, all of them should be obviously implicit in my subsequent remarks. This holds particularly true of the peripheral situation of literature as such.

Tolstoy, in *Anna Karenina,* removes his point of view from the central systems of the Russian Empire, in order to construct the aesthetic system of his novel around the metaphor of the "insignificant" life of a woman. Only from that significant and signifying distance he can afford

to examine, obliquely and symbolically, certain components of those central systems. In Ševčenko's poems, as for example in "Kateryna," such a line of departure may seem more direct, but in fact its course is much more complex and interesting. Even before Ševčenko could approach the task of the re-evaluation and reconstruction of the central social systems of his time in the peripheral systems of his poems, he was forced by circumstance to assume a specific *social* attitude toward those central systems of the Empire.

To begin with, Ševčenko decided to move across several peripheral zones of the social underground within the Empire. I mean not only the periphery of Ukrainian society as such with regard to the "Imperial Otherness," but those systems which were peripheral to Ukrainian society itself—a society rigidly structured *within* its own system, and hence rejecting serfs, unwed mothers, *kobzars, hajdamaks,* rebels, bastards, homeless wanderers, convicts, and other "undesirables" who subsequently found a warm welcome in the symbolic spaces of Ševčenko's poems. Aside from the fact that literature as such frequently turns to similar marginal types, Ševčenko had a more specific and political reason for his predilection. According to him (see, for example, "Poslanije" [The Epistle]) the Ukrainian centers, peripheral as they themselves were within the Empire, feverishly desired to be swallowed up by the "Imperial Otherness," submitting to its all-pervasive influence in acts of shameful flunkeyism. Ševčenko, therefore, saw such centers of Ukrainian society as impotent pseudo-centers; he went searching for the authentic centers of his people on the farthest and the least expected social periphery, where they presumably lay buried. It seems that those whom the Russian and even the Ukrainian pseudo-centers did not trust now became the only ones to be trusted.

Within the system of literary history, we again see Ševčenko crossing a double periphery. The poet decided to traverse the various peripheral genres, forms, modes, devices and, most important, the language not only of Ukrainian national literature—peripheral as that was within the larger literary system of the Empire—but those phases of Ukrainian literature which were peripheral to its own either Baroque-bookish or "travestied" centers. I mean, of course, the periphery of the "lowly" oral

or "folk" literature, on which writers (and by no means exclusively Ukrainian writers!) made frequent night raids, but whose existence as a visible, let alone viable, cultural area they would never admit. It was only immediately before Ševčenko's own zenith that some Ukrainians began to ask, in timorous Russian, whether or not the uncouth language of peasants was indeed developed sufficiently enough to express "deep sentiments," or whether it should remain a vehicle of crude and jolly country-gentry humor.[5]

Needless to say, Ševčenko crossed the two *double* peripheries—the social and the literary—in a single, totally unexpected, and socially unmotivated bound, without bothering to ask anybody's permission to do it: he saw no need to explain in long dissertations the right of his literature to be called a literature, and the right of his language to "languagehood." I shall now concentrate on some instances of Ševčenko's specific manner of crossing these peripheral zones, constantly holding in the periphery of my vision the periphery of literary systems as such, with regard to the social (including the intellectual) systems of his age.

Let me begin with some obvious examples. All of us recall Ševčenko's contrast between *xata* (the peasant house, the hut) and *palaty* (the palaces), to which the poet turns time and again, in various contexts in his poems. In the social sense, the "micro-structure" of such images is meant to embody and symbolically illuminate the peripheral situation of the serf with regard to the Ukrainian center, hypnotized as the latter was by the center of the Empire. It is supposed to show, in the literary sense, how Ševčenko restructures peripheral social systems within the aesthetic systems of his works. We recall that a literary work is in itself a socially peripheral system, and Ševčenko's literary work has the specific peripheral elements of "folk" language and "folk" literature.

Although in such clusters of images, as a rule, the palaces of the landlord are physically distanced from the village, with its centrally located village green, as if they were on its periphery (as they were in actuality)—in the social and even the psychological sense they do

[5] For example, Petro Hulak-Artemovs'kyj's doubts are described in George S.N. Luckyj, *Between Gogol' and Shevchenko: Polarity in the Literary Ukraine: 1798-1847* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1971), p. 45.

represent the center. They are, as it were, miniature replicas of the magnificent "center of centers" in distant Petersburg, out of which presumably flow just governance, economic strength, religious authority, and (most important for us) cultural energy over the huge uncultured, unlettered, uncouth, unclean, and finally unknown periphery of countless huts. The local palaces, countless in themselves, function as relay points of that tremendous "central" stream of influence.

Very soon Ševčenko's reader perceives that the territorial periphery of the palaces is indeed justified in every respect. Witness images such as "A na hori stojat' palaty" (And up above the palaces stand) or palaces being "nenače dyvo" (like a marvel), etc. The meanings of "up above," and particularly "like a marvel," refuse to stand still for long, changing before our eyes under the pressure of their contexts. And so, "up above" undergoes a metamorphosis against the background of the radically Romantic re-evaluation (and devaluation) of the high centrality of Jehovah Himself, an example of which we encounter in the following quotation:

Daješ ty, Hospody jedynyj
Sady panam v tvojim raju,
Daješ vysokiji palaty,—
Pany ž nesytiji, puzati
Na raj tvij, Hospody, plujut',
I nam dyvytys' ne dajut'
Z ubohoji, maloji xaty.

(You grant, O, Lord,/ gardens to lords in your paradise,/ You give them high palaces./ The lords—greedy and pot-bellied—/ Spit on your paradise, O, Lord,/ And do not let us look out/ From our poor, small hut.)

This quotation re-thinks for us the image of "the marvel"—perhaps even the miracle—of distant palaces. Here *dyvo* exploits its other, almost opposite Ukrainian meaning: "marvel" becomes "awe" (as in the contemporary meaning of "awful")—a monstrosity, worth one disdainful look from the narrowed eyes of a dignified peasant who knows his own humanity. But, perhaps because of the fear of such silent judgment, his look is banned, he is literally blinded. While he is forbidden to look on the lords' monstrosities, he is also forbidden (in an ambiguous syntactic construction) to look out on the beautiful paradise of God's earth.

But those who forbid him to look are themselves blind: their injunction is not so much against "us" as against themselves. The paradise of the earth, as well as the heart of the hut, must become transparent, and therefore illusory, under the gaze of the pot-bellied lord.

The central social systems of the Empire stipulate that the strength of the hut should be sucked out and its sooty shell discarded. This, incidentally, was already done with the language of that hut in sundry vaudevilles, travesties, fables, and rollicking "translations," so that the language could be used as an amusing toy, could be called *kabačnaja reč* ("tavern talk" in Russian), and thus painlessly pushed out onto the most remote periphery of oblivion.

Ševčenko makes plain that the energy of the hut and the energy of the palace—the generative and the degenerative forces—oppose each other on a profoundly atavistic level. The power that lurks in the illusory center of the palace is only violence which is born of weakness. The nature of such power is implied by the ironical use of the word *raj* (paradise), a word that in itself contains centrality or, more specifically, Logocentricity: paradise as the central symbol of the beautiful earth (the only paradise possible for Ševčenko) now has been betrayed and forced out onto the periphery by the monstrosity of those in power.

It is interesting that even when the owner of the palace plays the fashionable role of a "de-centralized" liberal, his pose does not save him from exile onto the periphery as against the really important, authentically moral centers. For example, the monster-father in the poem "Knjažna" (The Duke's Daughter) is regarded by his cronies as *"ubohyx brat"* (the brother of the poor), which subtly implies the Russian liberal, frequently himself a serf-owner, of the 1840s. He who in Dostoevsky is merely a distanced progenitor of evil-doers (for example, Stepan Verxovenskij), becomes in Ševčenko an evil-doer, a microcenter of evil. We should, of course, take into account not only the fact that Ševčenko's character was created earlier than that of Dostoevsky (which in itself is significant here), but also the more important fact that the peripheries of the two writers are situated quite differently.

We see that the authentic, viable peripheries, which Ševčenko's reader quickly learns to identify as centers of lasting human values, are not the

various liberal circles of exploitative landlords' sons whom the poet castigates in a number of works. As we have already seen, they are the clusters of huts abandoned on the social periphery of the Empire. They are centers because each of these huts houses the heart, and it is only around the center of the heart that, according to Ševčenko, every authentic society can be built. Indeed, the poet frequently connects the image of the hut with the image of the heart—the spiritual center of the person, the center of love which survives all the temporal, transitory, illusory centers of power. The hut, as the house of the heart, becomes elevated to highly symbolic, almost mystical regions of significance. It is only now, in a state of kinship with the heart, that the hut as the center becomes fully comprehensible.

Needless to say, at this level of analysis the shift between center and periphery is not a purely literary matter; I have not attempted to prevent the almost inevitable intrusion of the social, psychological, and even philosophical implications of the periphery-center opposition. It is, nevertheless, the system of the literary work that provides such an exchange with immediate validity. I mean that such an exchange is *metaphorical* by its very form: it obeys the law of metaphorical transfigurations of superficial and causal actuality, in the name of a more profound syntonic, that is poetical, reality.

All this does not mean that the metaphorical centrality of the peasant hut swallows, in the insatiable hunger of the Ideal, the actuality of the tiny windows, the sooty walls, and the misery of the inhabitants. In frequent moments of pitiless cold sobriety, Ševčenko sees that the actual social periphery of the hut does challenge its symbolic centrality. The landlords' exploitation leads the peasants to desperate impoverishment which is not only economic but also spiritual, the latter caused by the former: the essential heart-center of the hut is frequently completely hidden under the ragged veil of the peasants' own meanness and small-mindedness. Here causal actuality shows through metamorphical reality, threatening its legitimacy. Hence it is not on the hard ground of the everyday that the hut stands as the inviolable heart-center of existence, but on the temporal peripheries of either the re-imagined past of a poeticized nucleus of the family or in a similarly imagined future,

enriched by uncompromising desire. Is it not in those possible-impossible extensions of time that the metaphor and its metamorphoses are born?[6] It follows that the *temporal peripheries* become the metaphorically legitimate center, replacing the illusory center of the peasant *actuality* which rules by the illegitimacy of naked power. Reality reigns simultaneously in the past and in the future, while the present is ruled by nightmarish illusion.

Let me now define more accurately the terms "reality," "actuality," "illusion" (or "illusoriness") and "imagination," as I have been using these terms so far. Because Ševčenko is an uncompromising Romantic (in fact, one of the few consummate Romantics in world literature), reality for him is not the depressing actuality of his environment—an actuality oppressed by chains of cause and effect—but poetic imagination, saturated (in his own case, perhaps over-saturated) by desire.

The opposition of center and periphery with regard to the hut and the palace is based precisely on the struggle for supremacy between the vital poetic imagination and the soul-destroying illusoriness. Imagination is constantly threatened by illusoriness for the very reason that the one may seem to be so similar to the other. The crucial difference between them consists, of course, in the fact that illusoriness, governing itself as it does by bad faith, manipulates the causal series of actuality in order to counterfeit the procedures of metaphor and hence of poetical reality: it reconstructs the "paradise of the earth" in the interests of the centers of power, in order to allow them to pretend to ontic legitimization. Hence such systems of illusoriness act, within the very centers of power, to the end not of illuminating but of masking. The most obvious examples of the verbal structures of illusoriness would be the pseudo-causal "proofs" of political ideology, which is reduced, in our case, to the "defense" of the illusory social centers of the Empire. With the immediate, acausal simultaneity of desire, embodied in the metaphor, the

[6] On the functions of temporal zones in the creation of metaphors, see Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language and the Cosmos,* Daniel Russell, trans. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 108-109, 117-124, *et passim.* On the circular structure of the past and the future in Ševčenko's *oeuvre,* see my "Shevchenko's Profiles and Masks: Ironic Roles of the Self in *Kobzar,*" in George S.N. Luckyj, ed., *Shevchenko and the Critics 1861-1980* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 405-407.

poetic imagination defeats illusoriness which pretends to the status of reality, in order to become reality within the system of the literary work, or, in other words, in order to become itself. The relationship between imagination and illusoriness as one between the center and the periphery is now evident.

3

Having established the ways in which the peasant hut occupies the center of Ševčenko's poeticized society, I should like now to return to the image *popid tynom, popid tynniu* (under-the-fence, under-the-fenceness) which embodies the periphery of that center and becomes the rich, multivalent symbol of banishment, exile, the state of being an outsider, and ultimately Otherness.

The peasant huts are surrounded by fences and cherry orchards. The fences and orchards, meant to contain and protect the huts from the evil outside wind and the evil eye of the lord, are products of authentic culture: the peasant defends the centers of his humanity from the arrogance of power, just as primitive man defended his sacred space from the blind forces of nature, in his growth from the zoological to the historical level. To be cast out from that enclosure is to be *popid tynom,* to be "under the fence," forsaken and forgotten by both friend and foe.

In primitive societies, in which the notion of the individuality and uniqueness of the person has not yet emerged from the rigorously bounded collective, the native village or settlement is sacred space, symbolizing the whole world—a world that is known, beloved, and secure. In such societies, the cruellest punishment is not death but banishment. Mircea Eliade writes: "[The religious man's] terror of the chaos that surrounds his inhabited world corresponds to his terror of nothingness. The unknown space that extends beyond his world—an uncosmicized because unconsecrated space, a mere amorphous extent into which no orientation has yet been projected, and hence in which no structure has yet arisen—for religious man this profound space represents absolute non-being. If, by some evil chance, he strays into it, he feels emptied of his ontic substance, as if he were dissolving in Chaos, and he finally

dies."[7] Having lost access to the sacred space of the village green and the secure warmth of the community collective, primitive man becomes *disoriented* in the fullest meaning of that word, because of his inability to think of his body-proper as the center of his personal space.[8]

Ševčenko seems to have intuited the very essence of those ancient systems of center and periphery: in his poetry we find numerous individuals, particularly women and children, thus banished and consequently thus destroyed. They are banished from the authentic center of the village because of manipulations by the illusory centers of power:

To pokrytka popid tynnju
Z bajstrjam škandybaje.
Bat'ko j maty odcuralys',
J čuži ne pryjmajut'!
Starci navit' curajut'sja,
A panyč ne znaje . . .

(An unwed mother, with her bastard,/ Hobbles under the fence./ Her own mother and father have turned away from her,/ And strangers do not accept her!/ Even beggars shun her!/ And the young lordling does not know . . .).

The children of such "marriages" between center and periphery are visited by the sins of their mothers: they, too, will be rejected by all. One such mother cynically-crazily sings:

Ja vže syna oženyla,
A dočka tak bude!
Lazytyme popidtynnju,
Poky stopčut' ljudy.

(I have already seen my son married,/ But my daughter will have to do without!/ She will crawl under fences,/ Until people trample her.)

Such thematic motifs are magnificently developed in Ševčenko's early poem "Kateryna." Here, as in a number of other works, we see the

[7] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959), p. 24.

[8] See Eliade's *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), pp. 12-21; *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), pp. 41-47, 51-55; *The Sacred and the Profane,* op. cit., pp. 20-29.

interesting question of Ševčenko's divided loyalty: on the one hand, he is faithful to the sanctified centers of hut and village, and the elaborately structured peasant society that they represent, but on the other, he is fascinated by the centrality of the individual and his free will, so assiduously preached by Sentimentalism and subsequently by Romanticism. Primitive culture and the "modern" Romantic cult of the free will of the individual (frequently united by Romantics and even, on occasion, by Ševčenko himself) are here put in a situation of fierce mutual antagonism. The symbol of the heart becomes thus bifurcated in an antagonistic opposition against itself: the wise heart within the heart-center of the hut—the love of the intimate but demanding collective—and the impetuous heart within the breast of a young individual which does as it pleases, against the laws of all collectives, frequently leading the individual astray, onto the dangerous periphery of ultimate estrangement. Hence, three spheres act against each other in "Kateryna": the primitive collective, the individual freedom of choice, and the "Imperial Otherness."

Having carelessly left the center of her native vital collective, the heroine Kateryna wanted to construct her own center beyond its fence *(popid tynniu),* in the illusory center of the palaces. She naively hoped to create a new family with her Russian lover, a lordling officer, outside of the village center. She wanted to build a family outside of the social system which (as her mother explains to her) always sanctifies all the phases of human existence—birth, initiation, marriage, and death—by celebrating them in structured rituals or "rites of passage." Grounding her hopes, her desire for the future, on the Romantic notion of the freedom of her heart beyond the ancient structures of the community, she was forced into the bondage of illusion—into the inauthentic "marriage" of the hut and the palace.

Consequently, Kateryna had to be condemned to a different type of exile in her lover's wasteland and kingdom of sands and snow, a "disorienting"—*because morally disoriented—space "under-the-fence" of the* human. In that kingdom, marvellously embodied in the "Gothic" landscape imagery of the Sentimentalist tradition, the ultimate horizon of desire is powerless to transfigure the heart-destroying everyday reality

into the life-giving reality of the imagination: there desire can be only suicidal, promising merely a puny, insignificant death ("Šubovst' v vodu" [Plop into the water]). The Romantic in Ševčenko commiserates with the disastrous result of Kateryna's free choice. But the poet also realizes that the very rigor of the social system of the village protects the heart of the hut from the rot of adultery, rape, incest, child-murder, which threaten from the illusory centers of the palaces. The poet regrets that things must be as they are, but he refuses to forgive Kateryna (as her own father and mother refused to forgive her) for her faith in the illusory glitter of her alien male—a representative of the illusory centers of power. And so, Kateryna is destined to remain in exile *with the sign of minus.*

There may remain for Kateryna a glimmer of posthumous grace for the sincerity of her feelings, although her feelings were sincere toward falsehood. As usual in Ševčenko, her son Ivas', as the fruit of her illicit union with illusion, will be punished for his mother's sin: a bastard, he will spend his life "under-the-fence" of the sacred space of the village and its beneficial laws. The poet indicates, nevertheless, that Ivas' will live with the *kobzars*, and probably one day will become a *kobzar* himself, as usually happened with the *kobzars'* young guides. If my surmise is correct—if Ivas' *is* destined by Ševčenko to become a *kobzar*—then he will be an exile *with the sign of plus.* He will occupy Perebendja's creative periphery ("popid tynniu siromaxa i dnjuje i nočuje" [sleeps and wakes, the poor soul, under the fence])—that is, the periphery of an artist working in the medium of his lowly "folk" language, in which Ševčenko's own *Kobzar* also grew and matured. Hence it is in Ševčenko himself that Ivas' will find a viable symbolic, or poetic, substitute for the vile bastard who was his natural or *actual* father. And so, the illegitimate child will be legitimized on a profound poetic level.

On the page, before the reader's eyes, a new and intricately linked family group comes into being. Needless to say, it is unlike the family in which Kateryna grew up, let alone the family that she planned for herself. Ševčenko himself, as the author, becomes the symbolic father both of Kateryna and of Ivas'. But, as Ivas' ' symbolic father, he also becomes Kateryna's true, poetically legitimized, lover. As a *kobzar* in

his own right, Ševčenko becomes Ivas' ' twin brother or double. Indeed, he frequently calls himself an orphan and identifies his own fate with that of the numerous illegitimate children in his poems. Thus Kateryna becomes Ševčenko's own unfortunate mother, as the Virgin Mary will become his symbolic mother in the later poem "Marija." If we admit that Kateryna symbolizes Ukraine (a supposition that is permitted by the text, when, for example, she is contrasted with the mighty oaks from the times of the Hetmanate)—then, in view of Ševčenko's frequent identification of his motherland with his mother, her role as his symbolic mother becomes certain. And so, a new center is created for Ivas' not so much in the sands of an alien periphery but on the borderline of the social periphery of the "folk" and the aesthetic periphery of the poetic text. Ivas' finds his center within the system of the book *Kobzar*, soon itself to become so dramatically central. We find in Ševčenko's poems sudden perversions of familial relations within the palaces by the act of incest. This is the dark obverse of the transformations of familial relations by the act of the poetic imagination, implied in the poem "Kateryna". Ivas' ' new "family", with its metaphorical shifts of familial ties, is the answer that the imagination gives to the brutal perversions of such relationships by incest within the palaces, which Ševčenko depicts in his other works.

To conclude my remarks on "Kateryna," let me mention the interchange between the central and the peripheral positions of the poem itself within the system of the history of literature. This will anticipate my comments on Ševčenko's poems as literary-historical facts, which I intend to propose later in this article. As Leonid Bilec'kyj, among others, has shown, much in "Kateryna" derives from the widespread Sentimentalist model. But while in that model social elements are subdued in favor of the intrinsic love intrigue, in which not only the injured woman but also her tormentor-lover are prominently featured, Ševčenko drastically reduces these elements, in order to concentrate on the psychological development of the heroine and on her position in society.[9]

An interesting paradox develops here. Shifting the components of the

[9] Leonid Bilec'kyj, "Kateryna," in Pavlo Zajcev, ed. *Povne vydannja tvoriv Tarasa Ševčenka,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: Mykola Denysiuk, 1962), 1:290-292.

popular literary model to the periphery, Ševčenko distances his poem from the literary convention, so as to approximate it not only to the problems characteristic of social systems as such, but specifically to the problems of the social periphery. Drawing that specific social periphery into the center of his literary work, he thereby centralizes it in the reader's consciousness, thus *saving* it almost in the religious sense. Such a crossing of the double (the literary and the social) periphery at the expense of the popular, somewhat generalized, model of the hurt heroine and the ogre-hero, is an excellent example of how drab social actuality becomes poetic reality by the agency of the imagination, within the peripheral systems of literature as such. It also suggests, from a somewhat different angle, the contrast of approach between "Kateryna" and *Anna Karenina* which I mentioned in the beginning of this article.

4

Ševčenko's implied identification with Kateryna's son Ivas' is one of countless examples of the role of Ševčenko's lyrical subject as an exile with the sign of plus. Here one is vaguely reminded of the Romantic outsider—vaguely, because the specificity of the social periphery (the Ukrainian situation) all but overshadows the generalized model of a literary work as in itself a peripheral system. Time and again Ševčenko places his lyrical subject in various quasi-biographical and quasi-psychological, but always specifically social, peripheral situations of "under-the-fenceness." Such a state of "under-the-fenceness" in itself opposes the generalized model of the Romantic hero: instead of the proud, early-Byronic outsider, openly flaunting his peripheral situation, we frequently meet an ironically self-depreciating "underdog." As I will attempt to show later, the proud outsider appears among Ševčenko's third-person (usually historical) heroes. When we deal with his first-person lyrical subject, however, we have to do with a sort of modern anti-hero, perhaps a precursor of Dostoevsky's underground man (although more dignified than he), a hater of anything and everything even remotely connected with Byronic pomposity and self-centered posing.

The peripheral situations in which Ševčenko's lyrical subject finds

himself—or, more accurately, willfully places himself—belong to two diametrically opposite kinds: I mean the peripheral situations with regard to the palace and those with regard to the hut. Although, as I pointed out, the lyrical subject is almost invariably an exile with the sign of plus, his peripheral situation *vis-à-vis* the hut on occasion *seems* to turn him into an exile with the sign of minus. It is in such instances that Ševčenko hints at a dark relationship between his lyrical subject and Kateryna, or exiles of her type in other works.

The lyrical subject as an exile with the sign of plus puts himself onto the periphery not because of inauthentic illusions (as Kateryna has done) but because of, *and for the sake of*, the life-giving poetic imagination. In such instances the state of "under-the-fenceness" only appears to be suicidal; in fact, it is the single moral choice that both the poet and his nation can afford. Needless to say, such a state of "under-the-fenceness" is not easy, because it is the opposite of a bohemian abnegation of social responsibility. It is made that much more difficult by the fact that it is not the freely chosen pose of a romantic rebel, but the poet's sole existential possibility.[10]

Ševčenko frequently complains that the unfair fate of a poet—more precisely, a Ukrainian poet—has pushed him out of the center of the village, with its imagined anonymous happiness of dwelling in the paradise of the earth, onto the world's crossroads. Hence the image of the crossroads *(rozputtja)* begins to form a pair with the image of "under-the-fenceness." In the following quotation, it is his Muse, the allegorized figure of his poetry—his symbolic but by no means illusory Mother—who carries him, like a baby, far beyond the protective border of the village, exactly as Kateryna carried her little son Ivas'. What saves the lyrical subject from becoming an exile with the sign of minus (and this also may be true of Ivas') is his identification with freedom:

Mene ty v pelenu vzjala
I het' u pole odnesla.

[10] On the inauthenticity of romantic dandyism and even its "metaphysical rebellion," see Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt,* Anthony Bower, trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), pp. 23-54 *et passim.*

I na mohyli sered polja,
Jak tuju volju na rozdolli,
Tumanom syvym povyla.

(You wrapped me in your skirt/ And carried me far into a field./ And on a mound, in the midst of that field,/ You swaddled me in grey fog,/ Just as freedom was swaddled out on the plain.)

Where is that desolate field, in terms of Ševčenko's own life? It lies in the "center of centers" of the vast Empire, in glittering Petersburg itself. We know that in Petersburg Ševčenko spent many happy hours among more or less cultivated people. But it is equally obvious that the poet had no other authentic choice than to put his lyrical subject into the situation of a lonely provincial immigrant in that city.[11] Petersburg becomes in the peripheral system of *Kobzar* the consummate embodiment of illusoriness—a nightmare city, where there are countless *palaces* but not even a single *hut* ("palaty, i ni odnisin'koji xaty"). The capital of the Empire, aping pell-mell the latest intellectual fashions of Western Europe, becomes for Ševčenko a "smitnyčok Mykoly" (Nicholas' garbage dump), it becomes a remote, God-forsaken periphery of the authentic center of the hut. It becomes a carnival of illusionism where all human values have been distorted beyond recognition, where not only the profound dignity of the heart has been vulgarized (the degeneration of immigrant Ukrainian "zemliačky" [countrymen]), but where the intellectual centers of the West have been caricatured, in stupid arrogance, beyond all recognition:[12]

Vse pys'menni drjukovani,
Sonce navit' hudjat':
"Ne vidtilja," kaže, "sxodyt',
Ta ne tak i svityt'. . ."

(All of them are literate, published,/ They even manage to find fault with

[11] The central situation of the famous Russian critic Kornej Čukovskij has blinded him to such obvious reasons in his otherwise excellent and sympathetic essay "Ševčenko's 'Abandonment,'" in *Shevchenko and the Critics*, pp. 135-144.

[12] Ševčenko writes about the vulgarization of Western European thought in the Empire in his "Poslanije," where he attacks with particular vehemence unintentional caricatures of the theories of personality in German Idealism, especially Fichte's celebrated "das Ich und das nicht-Ich."

the sun:/ "It does not rise," they say, "where it should."/ "And it does not shine right . . .")

The poet is morally compelled not only to walk "under the fence" of such a society, but even to act as a drunken derelict, so as to be able to deliver his prophetic condemnations with the radical irony that the object of his scorn deserves.

Otak iduču popidtynnju
Z benketu pjanyj unoči,
Ja mirkuvav sobi jduču,
Poky doplentavs' do xatyny.

(So walking under the fence/ From a banquet, drunk, one night/ I was thinking to myself, while walking,/ Until I dragged myself to my little hut.)

Was *this* the only "little hut" in Petersburg—the only space where thoughts of the heart were being thought?

Occasionally Ševčenko depicts his underground state of "under-the-fenceness" not as alert awakening (as he usually depicts it), but as depressive slumbering which causes spiritual decay. In such cases, the state of "under-the-fenceness" seems to be a state of exile with the sign of minus. Such moments of weakness can be explained psychologically. Behind the ironic, worldly-wise mask of his lyrical subject, Ševčenko at times can see that in his peripheral state of "under-the-fenceness" he has not so much lost the way of a "decent citizen" (which would be quite proper under the circumstances) but that he has alienated himself from the systems of the authentic center with its authentic spiritual order. It is at such moments of doubt that Ševčenko turns to the protective circle of the *anima*, embodied for him in the structure of maiden-reader-lover-sister-mother-Muse-Ukraine-Virgin Mary.

In any event, even if such (incidentally, quite justifiable) fear motivates Ševčenko, it seems to be temporary. In general, the periphery of "under-the-fenceness" becomes for him the territory of revolutionary explosiveness, the volcanic zone of the central poetic imagination which must take the place of the calm, dignified, anonymous, and rigorously

structured center of the hut, even as the hut appears in temporal projections. It must substitute for the hut and it must transcend it, as the only possible battleground. Ševčenko received his state of "under-the-fenceness" from history, as his personal fate. But, despite his numerous ironical protests to the contrary, he accepted that verdict as if it were the consequence of his personal choice. After all, he could have rejected it, staying on in Petersburg, continuing to paint, to drink good wine, and to visit interesting people, "ploughing his field" in that elegant and pleasant manner.

Such a choice, as we have seen, was closed to Ševčenko on moral grounds. The symbolic, and only occasionally psychological, state of alienation on Nevskij Prospekt (surely Ševčenko in daily life was less alienated in Petersburg than, for instance, his neurotic compatriot Gogol) soon turns into an immediate actuality in the distant, desolate landscapes of his punitive banishment. There he is given a taste of actual "under-the-fenceness," when he is forced to write stealthily, against the specific ban of the Tsar Himself ("nenače zlodij toj, poza valamy" [like some thief under the embankments]). The illusory center of power—as if reacting to the poet's constant provocations from the periphery, and as if *literally* interpreting (in the literal linearity of all illusory centers of power) the motifs of exile and banishment in the first *Kobzar*—finally provided Ševčenko with an actual fence, the prison embankment, to live under:

[Dolja]
Kynula maloho
Na rozputti, ta j bajduže . . .
A vono, ubohe
Molodeje, syvouse
(Zvyčajne, dytyna!)
I podybalo tyxen'ko
Popid samym tynom
Až za Ural. Opynylos'
V pustyni, v nevoli . . .

([Fate]/ Left the small boy/ At the crossroads, and did not care,/ And he—poor,/ Young, greybearded,/ (A child, to be sure!)/ Proceeded to hobble softly,/ Right under the fence/ All the way beyond the Ural Mountains. He ended up/ In the desert, in captivity.)

The pose of a passive victim of fate—half-greybeard and half-baby, or an immature, childish adult—is an example of Ševčenko's ironical protests against the state of "under-the-fenceness" as the only existential situation possible for him. But in fact there is no trace of passivity even in the poet's actual imprisonment. Now that the periphery of banishment has become an actuality, the need to turn it, metaphorically, into a spiritual center, which implies a center of the explosion of poetry, has become even more crucial for the poet's self-preservation as a human being.

We can readily understand the urgent reasons that prevented Ševčenko from regarding Petersburg as the center of his existence and of his aspirations. But what about the center of the hut? To conclude this section, let me return to that important question.

Members of some primitive societies give directions to a stranger not from the actual center that is formed by both parties at the moment of their meeting (I have mentioned the hypothesis that primitive man cannot visualize his body-proper as the center) but from the center of their village, no matter how far from it they may find themselves at that moment. This is a very important point for our understanding of the relationship between the heart-center of the hut and the periphery of exile in Ševčenko's poetry.

The hut as the center of the heart, which also means sacred space, must stand only on the ground of symbolic transcendence. The hut—even the one in the past of a poeticized childhood or in the futurity of desire—must remain, paradoxically, as a distanced point of orientation, as an "unrealistic" (and quite deliberately "unrealistic" at that) possibility of a symbolic return. And what does it represent in actuality? As we have seen, the poet's childhood as thematic material is active only when it is poetically saturated with desire: the past can be alive only when it is imbued with the future. Ukraine disappointed the poet terribly when he visited it as a mature man, hence it too had to remain for a very long time (until Ševčenko's plans to settle there, immediately before his death) as a symbolic center, distanced for proper poetic illumination. The poet, furthermore and for seemingly opposite reasons, must shun the comforts of anonymity in "the paradise of the earth," protected by

the secure cycles of the agricultural calendar, for the sake of struggle. He must not be lulled by such a vision, even if he finds it only in the space of his imagination. We recall that it was his own Muse, the eternally-feminine embodiment of his genius, who banished him onto the periphery of cold, transient rooms which have to serve as unsatisfactory surrogates ot the hut—onto the zone of constant farewells, constant roads and crossroads, constant losses and constant regrets—into the region of ultimate solitude and purification, like that of a knight before his decisive battle.

The existential freedom that the periphery promises, already mentioned in connection with the poet's Muse, is by far more "central" than political or economic freedom which, finally, depends on it and becomes only one of its numerous results. This is the most important reason that the poet cannot afford the longed-for anonymity of the hut, although he is condemned to a constant striving for it in the unrealizable futurity of the ultimate horizon of desire, while at the same time knowing that its actual attainment would mean his death:

Brydnja! A j dosi, jak zhadaju,
To serce plače ta bolyt':
Čomu Hospod' ne dav dožyt'
Maloho viku u tim raju?!
Umer by, orjučy na nyvi,
Ničoho b na sviti ne znav,
Ne buv by v sviti jurodyvym,
L'udej i Boha ne prokljav.

(Nonsense! And yet, when I remember it even now,/ My heart hurts and weeps:/ Why didn't the Lord let me end/ My short life in this paradise?!/ I would have died, ploughing my field,/ I would not have known anything of the world,/ I would not have gone through the world as a holy fool,/ I would not have cursed God and men.)

5

Ševčenko frequently puts the heroes of his dramatic poems, together with his lyrical subject, into peripheral situations. Kateryna, as we have seen, is a peripheral heroine with the sign of minus; but the heroes as *heroes* in *Kobzar* are peripheral with the sign of plus. It is no wonder that those heroes are on the periphery *together* with Ševčenko's lyrical

subject: they are, after all, masks of that subject, as he is obviously a mask of Ševčenko himself.[13] Their grand heroic gestures, however, draw them much closer to the model of the Romantic hero than the deliberately self-belittling gestures of the lyrical subject. Space permits me to discuss only a few examples from among a considerable number of such characters.

Jarema Halajda, the hero of the poem *Hajdamaky,* enters the historical arena from an area quite alien to the centers of "decent citizens:" his social periphery is so marginal that in the beginning of the poem he is oppressed by the oppressed. Nevertheless he too dares to dream of his own "central" hut and of a structured family with his betrothed Oksana. He too, moreover, dares to relinquish that dream in favor of the volcanic periphery of the *hajdamaks'* uprising. It is only thus that his dream of the anonymity of a happy agricultural life will become a reality, *although not for him,* because only in the peripheral guerilla warfare can he find the center of his own existence.

We should keep in mind that the *hajdamaks* as such suddenly appear out of distant, dim social peripheries, and that their battle is not only peripheral but, historically, of problematical value. For some historians, as for Ševčenko's friend Pantelejmon Kuliš, the *hajdamak* uprising was definitely a peripheral enterprise with the sign of minus, and Kuliš (that advocate of Ukrainian centers) strongly disapproved of Ševčenko's glorifying it in his admittedly great poem.[14] Although in the poem itself Ševčenko imagines for the *hajdamaks* genealogical roots in the *kozaks* and even in the Hetmanate—thus attempting to historically legitimize or "centralize" their struggle—when we consider the context of all of *Kobzar,* they seem to be placed in a situation of opposition (or periphery) to those centers of Ukrainian history.

Jarema Halajda is but one example from among many heroes in

[13] See my "Shevchenko's Profiles and Masks," *passim.*

[14] See George Luckyj's comments on Kuliš's article "Maljovana Hajdamaččyna" in his *Panteleimon Kulish: A Sketch of His Life and Times* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1983), pp. 159-160. Kuliš also expresses his dislike of the poem in a letter to Oleksandr Barvins'kyj, written in 1869: Jurij Luc'kyj, ed., *Vybrani lysty Pantelejmona Kuliša ukrajins'koju movoju pysani* (New York: UVAN, 1984), p. 195.

Kobzar (both in the literary and the historical sense) who suddenly explode from the periphery in order to create new centers, and with whom Ševčenko openly identifies in his own situation of "under-the-fenceness." Another interesting example, chosen almost at random, is a more recent revolutionary, the hero of the poem "Jurodyvyj" (The Madman or The Holy Fool), who also stems from the social periphery:

A miž vamy
Najšovs' taky jakyjs' projava,
Jakyjs' durnyj oryginal
. . . . . .
Iz miliona svynopasiv.

(And among you/ Appeared some strange fellow,/ Some foolish original/ . . . From among a million swineherds).

It takes a peripheral *jurodyvyj* to perform a heroic revolutionary act: the hero's peripheral state is stressed by the fact that the poet has bestowed it upon him in an ironical sense.

Doubtless, the most interesting peripheral heroes in Ševčenko's *Kobzar* are Jesus and his mother Mary. We read in the poem "Marija" that Mary, in contrast to Kateryna and much like Jarema, spent Her youth as a servant to a citizen of the periphery (Joseph), without a hut of Her own and without the benefit of the protective structure of a family. And when Her Son begins to preach, She follows Him onto an even more distanced periphery:

Pišla tynjatys' popid tynnju,
Až poky-poky ne dijšla
Až do Holhofy . . .

(She went wandering under-the-fence,/ Until she finally ended up/ On Golgotha).

She follows Him onto the periphery not only of His, but of Her own ultimate disgrace, through which solely authentic Grace can be reached. (The parallel, incidentally, between this and an earlier quotation, in which the poet himself winds his way under the fences, until he ends up in captivity beyond the Ural Mountains—in the only morally possible situation—cannot be missed.) And so, from Her seemingly hopeless

peripheral situation of "under-the-fenceness," not unlike the poet himself, Mary finds the strength to rally Her Son's cowardly and speechless Apostles to hopeful revolutionary activity, although She Herself must die in that very situation:

Ty ž pid tynom,
Sumujučy u burjani
Umerla z holodu. Amin'.

(And you, grieving/ Under a fence, among weeds,/ Died of hunger. Amen.)

In the poem "Marija," Christ Himself is born without a father, but also without a miracle. He is born far from the circle of "decent citizens," not even in the traditional stable but directly under the sky, near a road (perhaps at a crossroads), without any mysterious signs of Heavenly centrality. As is implied in "Marija" and overtly stated in other poems, it is from such a distant social periphery that Christ explodes against the illusory centers, embodied in the systems not so much of His own as of Ševčenko's hated society. He explodes against the Tsar's cruelty, against the church which has become the flunkey of the exploitative Empire, against both the foreign and the native lords and lordlings. Moreover, Christ frequently opposes—not like the Son of God but like the son of Mary—the center of centers that has no periphery, namely the reign of Jehovah Himself, Who is then identified with the central system of absolute power:

...I za ščo
Joho, svjatoho, morduvaly,
Vo uzy kuvaly;
I hlavu joho čestnuju
Ternom uvinčaly?
I vyvely z zlodijamy
Na Holhofu horu;
I povisyly miž nymy—
Za ščo? Ne hovoryt'
Ni sam syvyj Verxotvorec',
Ni joho svjatiji—
Pomoščnyky, pobornyky,
Kastraty nimiji!

(And for what/ Did they torture and enchain Him in fetters,/ Him, Who is Holy,/ And crown his noble head with thorns?/ Why did they lead Him together with some thieves/ Onto the hill of Golgotha,/ To hang Him among them?/ For what purpose? The grey-haired Supreme Creator does not answer,/ Nor do His saints—/ His helpers, the defenders of His faith—/ The mute *castrati!*)

(Let me point out in this quotation the irony of the parodic application of the "central" pseudo-Church-Slavonic dicton.)

From his own situation of "under-the-fenceness," the poet profoundly sympathizes with Christ who hangs between two thieves—on the most distant social periphery. His sympathy becomes that much more brotherly when he reflects upon the fact that Christ's Logocentric message gave birth not to authentic centers of the heart but to false, illusory centers of exploitative power. The poet comes to the conclusion that instead of love—but *still* in the name of love—other modes of action are now needed. Ševčenko hopes, in a strange little poem of his late priod, that Christ will again come back to the people from His periphery (out of which, in a gesture of ultimate but unconscious irony, we have created the center of Western culture)—that He will return to us not as a meek poet of love, but as a sudden explosion of rebellion. Ševčenko, quite simply, identifies Christ with a *hajdamak*: together with brother Christ, Ševčenko's lyrical subject will tear strips of the ecclesiastical purple cloth for leggings,

I kropylom budem, brate,
Novu xatu vymitaty.

(And we will use the holy-water sprinkler/ To sweep out our new peasant hut.)

Christ as an "illegitimate" (not centrally legitimized) Son, Christ as our brother, Christ as a *hajdamak*—such a Christ *is the new poet* who has matured, without us knowing it, on a periphery, the existence of which the centers of power do not even suspect. Ševčenko identifies this word of Christ with his own directly and courageously, when, speaking in Christ's name but in the first person, he says:

. . . Vozvelyču
Malyx otyx rabiv nimyx!
Ja na storoži kolo jix
Postavlju slovo.

(I shall raise/ And ennoble these mute, petty slaves!/ And I shall place the Word/ To guard them.)

That word explodes on the periphery, and finally returns to it—to beggars, to lepers, to Marys-Magdalenes, to the poor, bitter serfs of Ukraine. That peripheral and therefore anti-Logocentric Logos must serve them as the explosive answer to the lying words that drift to them from the illusory centers of power:

. . . I ponyče
Nenače stoptana trava
I vaša dumka i slova.

(And your words and thoughts/ Will lie prostrate/ Like trampled grass.)

Be it in the mask of a lyrical subject (either a weak and passive orphan or an all-powerful poet-magus), be it in the masks of the heroes of his longer poems (Jarema, Prometheus, Christ)—in all these *personae* Ševčenko's Logos explodes on the periphery, vanquishes the center, and forces the periphery to take its place.

6

The periphery as the zone of transformations, which means the zone of renewal, is particularly noticeable in the space of poetry as such. Throughout this article I have alluded to the peripheral centrality of poetry as the source of transformative, or metaphorical, energy which radiates into other spaces of human existence. We should always keep in mind the obvious fact that Ševčenko's radical upheavals in the history of his people were exclusively *poetical,* and only by the grace of poetry have they become *political.*

As I have also implied, time and again, from the very beginning of his poetic career, Ševčenko shared the insistence of the Romantics that the situation of a vital separation, a viable apartness, is absolutely crucial for the health of poetry. Let us recall that Perebendja—Ševčenko's prototypical model of the poet—spends his life in a situation of under-the-fenceness:

Popid tynnju siromaxa
I dnjuje j nočuje.

(The poor soul/ Sleeps and wakes/ Under the fence.)

We recall, however, that Perebendja has another life—the life of the authentically central imagination—carefully hidden from society. That life is Perebendja's symbolic periphery which would be impossible without his actual voluntary "under-the-fenceness."

A jakby počuly, ščo vin odynokyj
Spiva na mohyli, z morem rozmovlja,—
Na Božeje slovo vony b nasmijalys',
Durnym by nazvaly, od sebe b prohnaly:
"Nexaj ponad morem", skazaly b, "hulja."

(And if they [his village audience] heard that he, the lonely one,/ Sings on the mound and speaks with the sea,—/ They would ridicule God's word,/ They would call him crazy, they would chase him away:/ "Let him," they would say, "stroll along the seashore.")

As in his personal life fate helped Ševčenko to find his own periphery, so in the system of literature history itself marked the periphery on which his poems were to be born. I have mentioned this periphery of Ukrainian literature as a national literature in the beginning of this article. Ševčenko utilized this periphery, as he had used his personal periphery, for his explosive transformations. The most obvious moment here is his attitude to Russian literature as the literature of the center, which was seen as such not only by Russians but by most Ukrainian intellectuals. Let us keep in mind that no Russian writer, because of his role in the social and literary centers of the Empire, could achieve Ševčenko's tremendous shift. I mean even those Russian writers who took up arms against their centers—even they could not avail themselves of Ševčenko's specific and uniquely fruitful periphery of the serfs' huts. Only Ševčenko's radically distanced periphery at the crossroads of several peripheral systems gave the poet both the proper symbolic space and the proper distance for such levering.

Although, as is well known, Ševčenko was fascinated by fame and desired it for himself, at the same time he was afraid of that fascination precisely because of its "centralizing" powers: one has to pay for being famous, as one has to pay a prostitute. Ševčenko addresses the following words to one of his several personifications of fame:

. . . Kesarja-kata
I hreka dobroho ty poljubyla
Odnakovisin'ko, bo . . . zaplatyly.
A ja, ubohyj, ščo prynesu ja?
Za ščo siromu ty pociluješ?
Za pisnju-dumu "Oj haju, haju" ?

(You, [fame], loved/ The henchman-caesar and the good Greek/ Equally, because they paid you./ And I, impoverished, what will I bring you?/ For what will you kiss me, a beggar?/ For a song-duma about a tree grove?)

In the long run, the periphery, which the whore fame visits but rarely, is the only viable creative region.

As late as in the very last poem of his canon, Ševčenko expressed his views on "central literature":

Tvoryly b, leža, epopeju,
Paryly b skirz' ponad zemleju—
Ta vse b heksametry plely,
Ta na horyšče b odnesly
Myšam na snidannja . . . A potim
Spivaly b prozu—ta po notax,
A ne jaknebud' . . .

(Stretched out, we would write an epic poem—/ We would fly everywhere above the earth,/ And we would constantly plait hexameters,/ Taking them up to the attic/ And serving them to mice for breakfast . . . And later/ We would sing prose—according to a musical score,/ And not any old way . . .)

The fact that Puškin admitted to the habit of writing while lying on his couch, the fact that his prose is still admired for its careful structure (written according to a musical score, and not any old way), and then all the parodic "parquet floors," "spurs" and so forth in Ševčenko's earlier work, seemingly straight out of *Evgenij Onegin,*—all of this begs for a thorough investigation of the possibility of Ševčenko's parodic attitude to Puškin's work, that "center of centers" of Russian literature.

We have often heard the argument that "folk" literature must always remain peripheral to "mainstream" literature: various folk or dialectal writers remain peripheral in any national literary process. This is precisely the fate that Vissarion Belinskij predicted for Ševčenko. What Belinskij and countless others did not take into account is, first of all,

the radical difference between the literature of a nation and that of an Empire and, second, the uncanny power of Ševčenko's re-imagination, and subsequent transfiguration, of the folk literature of his own nation. Searching for alternatives to their own sclerotic cultural centers, Herder, Goethe, later Wordsworth, Coleridge, and many other Western European pre-Romantics and Romantics paid polite visits to the periphery of the "folk." For Ševčenko, however, the periphery of folk literature was not the place of a *temporary* abode but an existential necessity. Only one other Romantic, Robert Burns, comes to mind here, but the talents and scopes of vision of the two poets are so incommensurate that any comparison between them cannot exceed one or two sentences. It is historically irresponsible to even mention the various Kol'covs and Nikitins in Ševčenko's presence, as some American scholars of Russian literature still insist on doing. Such practice, incidentally, has an interesting bearing on my theme: Ševčenko's creative, existential periphery is identified (either willfully or, what is much worse, unconsciously) with the completely different "periphery" of the second-rate. Such is frequently the vengeance of the centers.

The caricature of Ševčenko as a quaint "folk poet" is negated outright by his immediate participation in the processes of Western European literature of his time. We recall Leonid Bilec'kyj's comments on the position of "Kateryna" in the constellation of Sentimentalist works. As Franko, and later Fylypovyč, have demonstrated so eloquently, Ševčenko did not shun Western Sentimentalist and Romantic models.[15] But the poet reconstructed such models *almost* beyond recognition. We should keep in mind that between 1838-1861 such models were already central, if not overripe, in Western Europe and even in Petersburg. It is interesting to observe how Ševčenko transfigured such central models with the energy of his own periphery. By literally rejuvenating them in his work, he returned those central phenomena of Romanticism to the

[15] From among the several articles by the two critics devoted to this problem, let me cite only those that are conveniently reprinted in Luckyj's *Shevchenko and the Critics*. Franko, "Foreword to Shevchenko's 'Perebendja' (pp. 96-114) and Fylypovyč, "Shevchenko and Romanticism," (pp. 168-181). See further Lisa Efimov-Schneider, "An Examination of Shevchenko's Romanticism," pp. 430-453.

sphere of periphery whence they had come, restoring to these models—already made almost trite by fashion—their pristine romanticality.

I should like now to make a few remarks about the nature of periphery *within* the form of Ševčenko's poems. The existential freedom which the state of "under-the-fenceness" affords has allowed Ševčenko to create a poetry of phenomenal formal freedom, a poetry not only "modern" but, for its time and perhaps for ours, daringly experimental. The formal "periphery" of Ševčenko's poetry is particularly evident in his short works written in banishment. They are singularly "informal" fragments of calm narration, with very few images or even completely imageless, and their tone and diction approaches speech, rather than "writing," not to mention the so-called "poetic style." This is the kind of poetry that Wordsworth would have liked to write, had he been *peripheral* enough to write it.

Roman Jakobson found a poem by Puškin "Ja vas ljubil" (I Loved You), in which there are no images at all, and as was his habit, built upon that discovery an elaborate theory of a poetics of oppositions, repetitions and syntactic variations, but particularly of intonation.[16] Some contemporary American poets, in their "poetry of statement," also count on intonation as the structural element of cohesion: their "statements" are supposed to be poeticized by the voice, by a mimesis of speech.[17] It would take some time to list all of Ševčenko's lyrical poems in which "statement" takes the place of imagery, and in which the energy of poetry flows from the poet's amazingly fresh, vital and often subtly ironical voice with its absolutely unique coloration. As our contemporary American poets try to do, Ševčenko challenges the very conception of "lyrical poetry," as it has been defined by the "central" institution of literature.

[16] Jakobson's analysis has gone through many revisions and reprintings. See, for example, "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles," *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956), pp. 76-82. See also, "Two Poems by Pushkin," *Verbal Art, Verbal Sign, Verbal Time* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1985), pp. 48-51.

[17] The term "poetry of statement" was originally used by twentieth-century critics to describe some imageless English poetry of the eighteenth century, but its meaning has obviously been changed by contemporary American poets and their commentators to suit their own particular needs, much different from those of the Augustans.

Ševčenko's decentralization of structure becomes dominant in most of his narrative poems, in which matters of structure as such are obviously crucial. Ševčenko's contemporaries, steeped in "centralized" literary conventions, regarded this as a drawback. Later, Myxajlo Drahomanov believed that Ševčenko's narrative poems are "examples of disarray and dishevelment" and expressed regret that the poet did not use Russian literary models.[18] Even Franko complained that the poem "Son" (The Dream) is weak because "there are no *logical* connections of images in it."[19]

The decentralization of structure in Ševčenko's narrative poems consists in the fragmentation of the whole into more or less independent sections. It is as if the poem had no center at all. One can still perceive a trace of plot on the thematic level, fragmented as it is in itself, but on the formal level even metrical patterns change from section to section, and in one instance some sections appear in prose, while others are cast in formally presented dramatic dialogues. Set pieces of authentic folk songs, or stylizations of folk songs, also contribute to the fragmentation of the unity of the given poem.

The center of Ševčenko's narrative poem, however, is not a void. It is a source of intuitive energy—a definitely *musical* energy, together with the energy of the poet's unique voice—which ties the work together for the reader on some profound pre-conscious level. The first critic who realized that Ševčenko's decentralized structure was not a drawback but a virtue (readers, obviously, had intuited that long before!) was Pavlo Fylypovyč. But even Fylypovyč was not equipped to take this problem to the end. Relying on the Formalist Viktor Žirmunskij, he did not go further than some unconvincing comparisons between Ševčenko and Byron, saying that in both poets the spark of the plot jumps from one peak to the next, thus uniting the seemingly formally varied sections.[20] The trouble here is that in Ševčenko the spark of plot does not

[18] M. Drahomanov, "Ševčenko, ukrajinofily i socijalizm," *Literaturno-publicystyčni praci u dvox tomax* (Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1970), 2:93-94.

[19] Ivan Franko, "Temne carstvo," *Zibrannja tvoriv u pjatdesjaty tomax* (Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1980), 26:138.

[20] "Shevchenko and Romanticism," pp. 183-184.

jump thus, because the plot is also fragmented, and there are whole chunks of quasi-autobiographical interludes (advancing suddenly, sometimes in the middle of a line) where the plot vanishes altogether. Furthermore, the sections in Byron's narrative poems are not all that varied, or (to be more precise) are varied in an orderly, systematic manner. We understand the mechanics of Ševčenko's "organic" unity (in this case, the term "organic" seems to regain its validity) only when we arm ourselves with our contemporary theories of the fragmentariness of literary works, such as Joseph Frank's celebrated essay on spatial form in modern literature or Albert Cook's excellent study *Prisms,* on the structure of modern poems.[21]

Another well-known element of Ševčenko's style, evident in both his lyrical and narrative poems, is the frequent parodic mixing of "stylistic levels" in his diction and of logically or historically incompatible fragments in his imagery. Although our contemporary commentators of Ševčenko's work have become used to this practice, it not only startled the early critics but seemed to disturb them on a profound psychological level. The reason for such reactions becomes obvious when we consider that Ševčenko's "irresponsible" hodge-podge of drastically varying lexical and cultural elements very effectively questions the legitimacy of the language and the culture of the centers. This is especially true of his miniature parodies of the pompous "poeticality" of the central literature of his time on the one hand and of the Church Slavonic diction of religious centers on the other. By the discontinuous simultaneity of incompatible cultural fragments, moreover, Ševčenko immediately unmasks the diachronic continuity of the abuse of power by centers throughout history—be it by the Old Testament kings, the Roman caesars, or the Russian tsars.

What is most interesting, and seemingly paradoxical, here is that two representatives of the *social* periphery—one Russian and the other Ukrainian—were particularly chagrined by this practice of Ševčenko.

[21] Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," *The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), pp. 3-62, especially pp. 9-14; Albert Cook, *Prisms: Studies in Modern Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), pp. 3-24 *et passim.*

Belinskij strongly objected to the great quantity of vulgar and street language *(vul'garnyé i ploščadnye slova i vyraženija)* in Ševčenko, appearing as it does next to "pompous, artificial diction" which a peasant could never understand. In view of Belinskij's pronounced sympathies with Russia's imperialistic policies which seriously threaten the authenticity of his liberal sentiments, his defense of centrality here and in his other attacks on Ukrainian literature is hardly surprising.[22] What *is* surprising is that the Ukrainian thinker Drahomanov, whose Ukrainian patriotism is surely beyond question, enthusiastically quotes Belinskij's condemnation of Ševčenko's style, and proceeds to add numerous criticisms of his own. He points an angry finger at the cultural and historical impurity of Ševčenko's imagery, mixing as it does ancient and modern elements (for instance, the Bible and St. Petersburg), the poet's pose as an illiterate country bumpkin alongside his erudite references to Apollo, the general "inconsistency" of his "jokes," and many another "inconsistency."[23]

Drahomanov, aside from his own pronounced Positivist orientation, speaks from the position of the structured social periphery. Or, perhaps more precisely, he speaks from a social periphery structured according to Positivist tenets. As I mentioned early in this article, the structure of a politically cohesive social periphery, no matter how radical, is forced to operate according to certain rigid laws of cause and effect (let us say, a "program"). An unstructured social periphery, even if it chooses to express quasi-political ambitions, obviously falls outside of the framework of organized political dissent: it is only history that may, *a posteriori,* structure its activities, thus "legitimizing" them. Paradoxically, the structured social periphery usually clings to causal laws more tenaciously than institutions of the center do: its very revolutionary state of emergency does not permit "deviation." Hence, given the condition of victory, it can so "naturally" become a center of unprecedented ferocity. This is its curse.

The poet, on the contrary, is not bound by such laws. A peripheral

[22] See Victor Swoboda, "Shevchenko and Belinsky," in *Shevchenko and the Critics,* pp. 302-323.

[23] Drahomanov, 2:93-96.

poet's various "irresponsibilities" can, in fact, directly threaten the structure of organized dissent, and the latter reacts accordingly. We recall that this is Drahomanov's second attack on Ševčenko's "disorder" mentioned here: there are many others in his several articles on the poet. They illustrate and summarize Drahomanov's belief that Ševčenko has no place in the ranks of organized political opposition—that his very literary periphery prohibits his presence on the social periphery, as Drahomanov saw it. To this may be added the violent reactions to Ševčenko by some early Soviet critics, when they were still, to a greater or lesser extent, revolutionaries.

The profound distrust that the organized social periphery harbors for the literary periphery becomes quite plain when a peripheral poet himself desperately wants to join the ranks of the organized social periphery or believes that he is already marching in them. Let us recall attacks, surprisingly similar to Drahomanov's, on the literary periphery of Surrealism from the organized social periphery of orthodox Western Marxism (I obviously do not mean here its own periphery, such as the Frankfurt School). Such attacks continued as late as the 1960s. It is well known that the Surrealists, at least for quite some time, openly flirted with Marxism and considered themselves to stand on the same social periphery with the Marxists. The vehemence with which orthodox Marxists in the West rejected such *camaraderie* is quite revealing: it was the danger of proximity that made them react so violently. To orthodox Marxists, Surrealism was not a viable periphery but a "lunatic fringe" which would confound and compromise their political program, so clearly proceeding from cause to effect.

Let me, parenthetically, mention the reverse of this. Many literary revolutionaries (T. S. Eliot being, perhaps, the most significant example) professed an incorrigible, even dangerous, "centrality" in their views on social issues, including the institution of literature as a social instrument. And yet such poets—often in the name of a poetic vision of some peripherally distant "centrality"—have threatened the very form of central social discourses (Mallarmé, Valéry, Stevens), as well as the very soul of central social institutions (Eliot in *The Wasteland*), incomparably more effectively than all the committed Marxist poets put together.

The reasons for such one-sided or mutual antagonisms are too obvious to discuss further. Suffice it to say that they all point to the dialectical bifurcation—that of opposition-within-unity—of the literary and the social peripheries, as I have attempted to outline it in the opening section of this article.

I have attempted to show that the spirit of the periphery, of "under-the-fenceness," permeates and governs Ševčenko's work on all levels—from broad philosophical concerns to specific questions of structure and diction. It is on the God-forsaken periphery that Ševčenko constructed new centers of his word, of his ultimately central imagination.

Skaży jim os' ščo:—Brešut' bohy,
Ti idoly v čužyx čertohax,
Skaży, ščo pravda ožyve,
Nadxne, naklyče, nažene
Ne vetxeje, ne drevlje slovo,
Roztlinneje, a slovo nove
Miž ljud'my krykom ponese.

(Tell them this: gods lie/ —Those idols in foreign palaces./ Tell them that truth will come alive,/ Truth will inspire, will call out and will bring forth/ Not the ancient, worn out,/ Rotting words, but the new word/ And truth will carry its shout among the people.)

From the periphery of his decentralized folk language, Ševčenko attacked the Imperialistic Logocentrism, a Logocentrism that uses language—frequently in a pseudo-mystical, pseudo-theological way— to enslave and to oppress. Out of this decentralized folk language Ševčenko created the center of the freedom of language and, in the same gesture, a language of freedom.[24]

[24] The nucleus of this article was presented in the form of an address at the Ševčenko Memorial Concert in Toronto, on March 22, 1980. A somewhat expanded paper was given at the Ševčenko Scholarly Conference, sponsored by the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the U.S. and by the Ševčenko Scientific Society, in New York on May 2, 1981. Subsequent versions were read at a number of centers of Ukrainian studies. This is the second of a trilogy of articles on Ševčenko with a common theme. The first has been cited above, and the third is ready for the printer.