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T. ŠEVČENKO'S "DAVYDOVI PSALMY": A ROMANTIC PSALTER

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One of the closing pieces of the collection *Try lita* (*Three Years*) (1843–1845) is Ševčenko's paraphrase of ten psalms from the Psalter. Whereas poetic reworkings of the Psalms in themselves constitute a long and varied tradition in European literatures, the Romantics invested this book of Biblical poetry with particular significance. The Psalter, like the Prophets and Revelation, provided them with a Biblical model for a poetry that claimed to be "divinely" inspired and in the figure of the Psalmist, with a prototype for the image of the poet as prophet.¹ At the same time, the Bible and Biblical thinking became important components in the development of the various historiosophic and messianic systems so characteristic for the tumultuous first half of the nineteenth century.² Certainly much of the poetry in *Try lita* can be viewed as an expression of these trends. Indeed, Ševčenko's drawing of an Old Testament prophet on the frontispiece to his manuscript copy of *Try lita* self-consciously highlights the poetic stance taken by the author.³ Similarly, then, Ševčenko's paraphrases of the Psalms serve to accent the profound influence of the Bible on the lexicon, diction, imagery, and conception of the poetry in *Try lita*.⁴ They emerge as a poetic recognition of the role the Bible plays in the collection: by directly paraphrasing one of the Biblical sources of his original poetry, Ševčenko "bares the device," as it were, of much of *Try lita*.

"Davydovi psalmy,"⁵ however, offer more than just a look into Ševčenko's poetic workshop. Even a cursory comparison of Ševčenko's paraphrases with their Church Slavonic originals reveals the degree of freedom with which the poet treated his material.⁶ In fact, Ševčenko, by means of various changes transforms the psalms into a medium for personal expression, the more powerful since the poet's voice could now merge with the voice of the Biblical Psalmist.

Critics, of course, have not agreed as to what, precisely, is being

expressed by Ševčenko in his paraphrases or what their status is within the context of the poet's canon. One position, based on Marx's well-known appraisal of the Biblical elements in the rhetoric of Cromwell's Revolution,⁷ suggests that Ševčenko utilized Biblical material as a means of "heroicizing" revolutionary struggle and lending credence to his "revolutionary" message. There is, of course, no denying Ševčenko's fervent "revolutionism" as it is expressed in "Davydovi psalmy" and in other poems of *Try lita*. However, the arbitrary dismissal of the Biblical moments which are *internal* to the conception of Ševčenko's work generates not only an incomplete reading, but an ahistorical one as well. If the term "revolution" is to have any concrete historical meaning, Ševčenko's "Davydovi psalmy" can be grasped only within the context of the Romantic understanding of the Bible and its impact on the often synonymous religious and political notions of the time.

Yet another view, propounded by, among others, Ju. Ivakin, sees in "Davydovi psalmy" an example of Ševčenko's use of "aesopic" language.⁸ Ivakin believes that Ševčenko was attempting to encode a "revolutionary" message into Biblical forms acceptable to the censor. While Ševčenko may certainly have been aware of such techniques,⁹ ascribing to him motives dictated solely by the requirements of tsarist censorship is an oversimplification. Moreover, in rejecting the immanency of Biblical inspiration for "Davydovi psalmy" for the purpose of underscoring their "revolutionary" appeal, the critic is forced to draw an artificial distinction between form and content. If the function of the Biblical material is reduced to that of a purely formal, stylistic device (whatever its ultimate purpose), "Davydovi psalmy" become almost incomprehensible.¹⁰

Clearly, Ševčenko's selection from the Psalter was motivated by a desire for aesthetic and thematic unity. In his discussion of the latter, Ivakin rightly points out that the unity of "Davydovi psalmy" is founded on the development of the opposition between the concepts "good" and "evil." These "two contrasting semantic series" are characteristic for the group as a whole: "On the one hand—'truth' ('pravda'), 'liberty' ('volja'), 'the good' ('dobri'), 'the poor' ('ubohi'), 'the righteous' ('pravi'), 'the just' ('pravedni'), 'brothers' ('braty'), 'slaves' ('raby'); on the other—'bondage' ('nevolja'), 'the wicked' ('zliji'), 'the unrighteous' ('lukavi'), 'the godless' ('nečestyvi'), 'hangmen' ('katy'), 'implacable enemies' ('vorohy ljuti'), 'the greedy' ('nesyti'), 'the evil' ('lyxi'), 'the haughty' ('hordi'), 'the destroyers' ('hubyteli'), 'tsars' ('cari'), etc."¹¹ These motifs are present in the Biblical originals and are largely a function of the psalm types into which the Psalter has been classified by contemporary Biblical scholars.¹² Ševčenko's selection, therefore, of particular psalms greatly facilitated his task of unifying his paraphrases into a conceptual whole. Thus, of the ten psalms included in "Davydovi psalmy," as many as six are

“national laments” (12, 43, 52, 53, 93, 136), while two are “didactic psalms” (1, 132), one is a “psalm of social injustice” (81), and one, a “psalm of thanksgiving” (149).¹³ However, by means of a number of additions, deletions, and other alterations, Ševčenko binds his paraphrases into a tighter organic whole. The changes performed on the originals are, in fact, significant indicators of the overall conception which provides “Davydovi psalmy” their meaningful unity.

Although Ivakin’s identification of the “two contrasting semantic series” allows him to speak of the cyclical nature of “Davydovi psalmy,”¹⁴ he fails to notice that his series are only the component axes of three distinct groups of psalms. These I shall provisionally term “moments” in the linear “narrative” of “Davydovi psalmy.” The three moments are both conceptual and “chronological.” As such, they constitute a rather abstract historiosophic scheme. It is precisely this scheme that furnishes Ševčenko’s paraphrases with their underlying unity. The delineation of these moments and an examination of the scheme which they establish will make it possible to place Ševčenko’s work within a particular historical and ideological context and, at the same time, to reconcile its “revolutionary” and Biblical aspects.¹⁵

The first psalm of “Davydovi psalmy,” Psalm 1, encompasses the first moment of the narrative. Like its original, the psalm offers an ethical prescription in which “the good,” the “blessed man” (“blažennyj muž”), is contrasted with “the wicked” (“lukavyj,” “zlyj”). The opposition is presented in terms of a state of ideal justice in which all traces of “the wicked” disappear (“lukavyx, nečestyvyx / I slid propadaje”—1, ll. 13–14) while the “blažennyj muž” receives his bountiful reward:

І стане він
Як на добрім полі
Над водою посажене
Древо зеленіє,
Плодом вкрите. Так і муж той
В добрі своїм спіє.

(1, ll. 7-12)

(And he will stand—like a greening tree planted in a good field over the water, covered with fruit. Thus does this man grow ripe amidst his harvest.)

The punishment of the wicked and the attendant rewards bestowed upon the good are posited in Psalm 1 in abstract, ideal terms. In this “utopia” of justice, governed by the laws of God (*zakon hospodnij*), the dispensation of punishment and reward is categorical and absolute. The following psalms, however, will depict the disintegration of this ideal status quo as it occurs in the world of experience.

Psalms 12, 43, 53, 52,¹⁶ and 81 make up the second moment of the cycle. The abstract, prescriptive third-person depiction of the ideal state in Psalm 1 gives way now to a series of psalms written in the first person (either singular or plural). This shift in voice corresponds to the general concern of the second moment: the world of experience in the life of the individual and the collective, a world where wickedness acts with apparent impunity. The relationship of the second moment to the first is not, however, simply one of the contrast between ideal state and real experience or between harmony and corruption. It is, as can be seen from Ševčenko's paraphrase of Psalm 43, also one of relative "chronology." The lines

Боже, нашими ушима
 Чули твою славу,
 І діди нам розказують
 Про давні кроваві
 Тії літа; як рукою
 Твердою своєю
 Розв'язав ти наші руки
 І покрити землю
 Трупи ворогів.

(43, ll. 41-49)

(God, with our ears we have heard of Your glory, and our forefathers tell us about those by-gone, bloody years; how with Your firm hand You untied our hands and covered the corpses of the enemy with earth.)

indicate the existence of divine justice somewhere in the past. This past, moreover, depicted in the lines

І силу
 Твою восхвалили
 Твої люде, і в покої
 В добрі одпочили.

(43, ll. 49-52)

(And Your people praised Your power and rested in peace, in bounty.)

(the last two lines are not in the original),¹⁷ is an echo of the vision of plenty in the ideal past of Psalm 1. Through the tales of the "forefathers" ("didy") (not the "otcy" of the original), the past is at once idealized and retained in memory for future generations. In contrast to the corrupt world of the present, Psalm 1 thus attains here the status of a now lost condition of harmony and perfect justice.

The disintegration of the ideal past in the world of experience manifests itself in three forms of injustice: the personal, the national, and the

social. Accordingly, the abstract notion of wickedness introduced in Psalm 1 undergoes a series of concretizations which define the forms of wickedness in the world. It is significant that a lament at personal injustice, Psalm 12, opens this second moment of “Davydovi psalmy.” The lyric subject of the psalm sees himself as the victim of his enemies’ mockery:

Доки буде ворог лютий
На мене дивитись
І сміятись!

(12, ll. 27-29)

(How long will the implacable enemy stare at me and laugh!)

The personal injustice experienced by the individual becomes analogous to the suffering of the collective in the following psalms. Both he and the collective suffer at the hands of the enemy (*voroh*) and even the form of suffering is similar:

Покинув нас, яко в притчу
Нерозумним людям.
І кивають, *сміючись*,
На нас головами...

(43, ll. 63-66)¹⁸

([You] cast us off as an example for foolish people. And laughing, they nod their heads at us.) (*My italics*)

The individual-poet, through his own suffering, thus identifies himself with the collective, and this empowers him to take upon himself the role of spokesman for the entire collective (*my*).¹⁹

In Psalm 43, wickedness assumes the guise of national oppression. The psalm is a collective plaint for vengeance, for the punishment of the “accursed enemy” (“*vorohy prokljati*”) who in their persecution of God’s people (“*svoji ljude*”) have turned them into the laughing stock of their neighbors (“*susidy*”). Ševčenko, moreover, strongly hints at the identity of the “*vorohy*.” The opening lines of Psalm 43 (ll. 41–49, quoted above) are reminiscent of a passage from the “*Epiloh*” to *Hajdamaky*:

Батько діда просить, щоб той розказав
Про Коліївщину, як колись бувало.
Як Залізник, Гонта ляхів покарав.

(ll. 2486-2488)²⁰

(And father asks grandfather for him to relate about the *Kolijivščyna*, how it once used to be, how *Zaliznjak* and *Gonta* punished the Poles.)

By means of this auto-reference, the poet implies that the lines (which are Ševčenko's own addition)

Поборов ти першу силу,
Побори ж і другу,
Ще лютішу!

(43, ll. 75-77)

(You [God] have conquered the first power, conquer then the second, even more wicked one!)

refer to the second generation of oppressors, the Russian tsars. This, in turn, raises the spectre of another vengeful bloodbath on the order of the Ukrainian uprisings against Polish landlords in 1768 (the *Kolijivščyna*), "those bloody, by-gone years" ("davni krovavi / Tiji lita").

The third incarnation of wickedness, social injustice, is the subject of Psalms 51 and 81. Here, "the wicked" ("lukaviji ljude") are clearly equated with the powerful rich:

Ўдять люде замість хліба
Бога не згадають,
Там бояться, лякаються
Де страху й не буде.
Так самі себе бояться
Лукавії люде.

(52, ll. 95-100)

(They eat people instead of bread, they don't call upon God, they are afraid and fear where there is no fear. And so they fear themselves, these wicked people.)

Psalm 81 is a particularly vituperative condemnation of social injustice. Taking what was already in the original a strong indictment of social inequality, Ševčenko paraphrased the psalm into an even more powerful statement:

Доколѣ судите неправду, и лица
грѣшниковъ приемлете;

Давайте судъ бѣдному и сиротѣ,
смирена и нища оправдайте.
Измите нища и убога, из руки
грѣшницы избавите его.
Не познаша, ниже уразумѣша
во тмѣ ходять.

(vv. 2-5)

"Доколі будете стяжати
І кров невинну розливать
Людей убогих? а багатим
Судом лукавим помагать?
Вдові убогій допоможіте,
Не осудіте сироту
І виведіть із тісноти
На волю тихих, заступіте
Од рук неситих."

(81, ll. 129-37)

(How long will you judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked:
Defend the poor and the orphan, do justice to the meek and needy.
Deliver the needy and the poor, save them from the hand of the wicked.
Not knowing, nor understanding they walk in darkness.)

(“How long will you [i.e., the oppressors] persecute and spill the blood of poor people? and help the rich with deceitful justice? Help the poor widow, do not condemn the orphan and lead the meek out from under oppression to freedom, protect [them] from the hands of the greedy.”)

Moreover, while in Psalm 43 the poet only hinted at the identity of the oppressor, here he is unequivocal when he paraphrases the original “*v*” *sonmi bogov*” (“in the congregation of the mighty”) by “*miž carjamy j sudijamy*” (“among the tsars and judges”—81, l. 125) and then expands his denotation by means of his own addition: “*Cari, raby odnakovi / Syny pered bohom*” (“Tsars, slaves are identical sons before God”—81, ll. 141–42).²¹

One of the most striking features of the psalms discussed so far is a refrain common to them all, the petition to God for the redressing of harm and for the punishment of the wicked:

Спаси мене,
Спаси мою душу.
(12, ll. 29-30)

(Save me, save my soul)

Встань же, боже, поможи нам
Встать на ката знову.
(43, ll. 83-84)

(Arise, then, God, and help us to arise against the hangman once again.)

Колись бог нам верне волю
Розіб'є неволю.
(52, ll. 103-104)

(One day God will return our freedom, [He] will shatter our bondage.)

Встань же, боже, суди землю
І судей лукавих.
(81, ll. 145-46)

(Arise then, God, and judge the earth and the wicked judges.)

If the world of ideal justice in Psalm 1 was the result of God's law (*zakon hospodnij*), then only He has the power to restore it. Not only is He the source of solace for the oppressed, He is, more importantly, a source of strength (“*Na vsim sviti tvoja pravda / I volja, i slava.*” / “Throughout

the earth is Your truth and Your will and Your glory" / —81, ll. 147–48) without which justice cannot be implemented:

Рукою
Твердою своєю
Розв'язав ти наші руки
І покрив землю
Трупнн ворогів.

(43, ll. 45-49)

(With Your firm hand You have untied our hands and covered the corpses of the enemy with earth.)

(The verse in italics [which are mine] is not in the original). Since the chastisement of the wicked is purely a function of divine ingerence, the oppressed must wait with patient passivity for the moment of final retribution. This attitude is most evident in Psalm 53 where the victimized individual (and, at the same time, the people's poet-spokesman) expresses powerlessness against "the powerful strangers" ("syl'niji čužiji") and can only appeal to God ("Bože, spasy, sudy mene / Ty po svojij voli." / "God, save me, judge me, You, according to Your will" / —53, ll. 109–10) while he himself awaits justice with Christian forbearance ("I na zlyx mojix pohljanu / Nezlym mojim okom." / "And I will glance at my malefactors without malice" / —53, ll. 123–24).

Psalm 53 also introduces a new element into "Davydovi psalmy," one which will be more fully developed in the following psalms. It is the element of prophecy. The Psalmist-poet, who has spoken in behalf of the collective and acted as their mediator before God, now assumes the role of prophet ("Moljus', hospody, vnušy jim / Ust mojix hlaholy . . ." / "I pray, Lord, make them [i.e., the malefactors] heed the words of my mouth." / —53, ll. 111–12). This stance becomes firmly established in Psalm 93 ("Umudritesja, nemudri." / "Understand, foolish ones." / —l. 167) which opens the final moment of "Davydovi psalmy," a moment directed away from the present towards the future.

Psalm 93 begins with a recapitulation of the concerns expressed in the previous psalms. It reiterates once more the existence of injustice in the world, particularly in its social and national manifestations:

Твої люде
Во тьму і в неволю
Закували... добро твое
Кров'ю потопили,
Зарізали прохожого
Вдову задавили...

(93, ll. 159-64)

(They (i.e., the wicked) have fettered Your people into darkness and bondage . . . Your bounty they have drowned in blood, they have slain the passerby and throttled the widow.)

The psalm also strengthens the bond between the poet and his people by formally alternating the objects of God's mercy:

Господь любить свої люде,
 Любить, не оставить,...
 Кто б спас мене од лукавих
 І діющих злая?
 Якби не бог поміг мені,
 То душа б живая
 Во тьму ада потонула...
 (93, ll. 177-78, 181-85)

(The Lord loves His people, loves them, will not abandon them . . . Who will save me from the wicked and those who do evil? If it were not for the help of God then my living soul would have sunk into the darkness of Hell)

Thus, the salvation of the collective ("tvoji/svoji ljude") is concomitant with the hope of the individual.

More importantly, however, Psalm 93 is both an affirmation of the poet-prophet's faith in the efficacy of God's aid ("Hospod' boh lyxux karaje—/ Duša moja znaje." / "The Lord God punishes the evil, my soul knows." / —93, ll. 149–50) and an anticipation of it. The previous psalms were stated as appeals to God for his intervention and for vengeance against the wicked. The supplicatory tone was thus primarily in the interrogative or imperative mode ("Doky" / "How long"/; "Vstan' že, bože" / "Arise, o God"). In fact, the first, recapitulatory third of Psalm 93 is expressed in this mode. The second portion, however, introduces the shift into the prophetic key. God is no longer addressed in a beseeching voice as a potential avenger, but as an existing, actual ally who has heard the voice of his people and will certainly intervene in their behalf:

І *пребудеть* твоя воля...
 І *воздасть* їм за діла їх...
Погубить їх, і їх слава
 Стане їм в неславу.
 (93, ll. 191, 197, 199-200)

(And Your will will come . . . And He will pay them [i.e., the wicked] back for their deeds . . . He will destroy them, and their fame will become their infamy.) (My italics)

These are the prophetic warnings of an unequivocal future, an intimation that God will heed the petitions of the poet and his collective and punish their oppressors.

The poet's faith in the power of God's intercession, a faith passed

on to him in the reminiscences of the forefathers in Psalm 43, is expressed in the form of a concrete example in Psalm 136. In including this often paraphrased psalm²² into his cycle, Ševčenko, however, imparts to it a unique function within the narrative of "Davydovi psalmy." The psalm is the lament of Israel in Babylonian captivity. For Ševčenko and his readers, the wish for freedom and the call for the destruction of the oppressors ("I rozib'je ditej tvojiĵ / O xolodnyj kamin.'" / "And he (i.e., the avenger) will dash your children against a cold stone." / —136, ll. 257–58) expressed in the original were already accomplished facts: Babylon was destroyed and the nation of Israel was freed from captivity. Ševčenko's paraphrase of the psalm, therefore, demonstrates to the oppressors of his day that the prophetic prayers of the kind voiced in Psalm 93 ("Dyvitesja dilam joho." / "Behold His deeds." / —l. 171) have been once, and will be again, heeded by God. As such, Psalm 136 fulfills, within the structure of "Davydovi psalmy," the role of a "figura," that promise for the future already accomplished in the Bible.²³

The final two aspects of the third, prophetic, moment of "Davydovi psalmy" are encompassed by Psalms 132 and 149. Both Psalms 93 and 136 had been expressions of faith in the power of God to discharge His obligations towards His people. Moreover, as prophetic warnings, the psalms appeal to the oppressors to heed the poet-prophet's call ("Umudritesja, nemudri;" "Dyvitesja dilam joho;" "Hospod' boh lyxĵ karaje- / Duša moja znaje.") before the wrath of God descends on them. This appeal is echoed in the form of a question (not in the original) which opens Psalm 132:

Чи є що краще, лучче в світі,
Як укупі жити,
З братом добрим добро певне
Познать, не ділити?
(132, ll. 201-204)

(Is there anything better, more beautiful in the world than to live together, to know and not divide secure goods with a kind brother?)

Phrased in this way, the psalm proffers the poet's alternative to the world corrupted by injustice.

The semantic field of Psalm 132 distinctly hearkens back to the images of tranquil harmony depicted in Psalm 1:

Або роси ермонській...
Спадають і творять
Добро тварям земнородним,
І землі, і людям.
(132, ll. 211, 214-216)

(Or the dews of Hermon . . . descend and create well-being for the creatures of the earth, and for the land, and for people.)

(The last three lines are not in the original.) In contrast to Psalm 1, however, it is eminently expressive that any images referring to wickedness are utterly absent from this vision of brotherhood. Consequently, in a world where wickedness has no place, the concept of divine justice, of punishment and reward, which was at the foundation of the ideal state in Psalm 1, is here no longer operable. In other words, Psalm 132 is the vision of a Christian utopia in which evil simply does not exist. This is in contrast to the earlier, one may say Old Testament, vision of ideal justice with its admission, nevertheless, of the existence of evil. The utopian Christian characteristics of Psalm 132 are, moreover, implied by Ševčenko through his own addition to the original of a vision of some sort of communal property (“Z bratom dobrým dobro pevne / Poznat’, ne dilyty.”). What is striking, too, is that Ševčenko, by adding to his paraphrase the words “on earth” (“v sviti”), envisions this communal harmony in terrestrial terms, here on earth. Psalm 132 thus sets forth the poet’s idealized, utopian vision of the future, his program, as it were.

The consequences of not heeding the prophetic warnings of Psalms 93 and 136, of rejecting the utopian alternative offered in Psalm 132 are represented in the final psalm of the cycle, Psalm 149. If the wicked do not voluntarily change their ways, the communal harmony envisaged in Psalm 132 can be achieved only by means of violence, already hinted at throughout the cycle in the images of God’s vengeance. The world must be totally cleansed of the national and social oppressors, of the “greedy tsars” (“cari nesytı”) and “the destroyers” (“hubyteli”), in preparation for the advent of a new world of brotherhood here on earth. This act of violent purification will resemble a last judgment (“I osudjat’ hubytelej / Sudom svojim pravym.” / “And they [i.e. the chosen avengers] will condemn the destroyers with their just judgment.” / —149, ll. 279–80). The judgment will be consummated by “the righteous in glory” (“Prepodobniji vo slavi”—l. 267), with the aid of God (“ . . . Boh kara nepravyx, / Pravym pomahaje.” / “ . . . God punishes the unjust, He helps the just.” /—ll. 265–66), in His name (“Xvaljat’ im’ja bože”—l. 270), and for the “eternal . . . glory of the righteous” (“I voviky stane slava, / Prepodobnyx slava”—ll. 281–82). The chosen, like their forefathers of Psalm 43, are the instruments of God’s vengeance, the purveyors of His justice, but now they are also the vanguard of the new order:

**І мечі в руках їх добрі
Гострі обоюди,
На отмщеніє язикам
І в науку людям.**

Окують царей неситих
 В залізній пута
 І їх, славних, оковами
 Ручними окрутять,
 І осудять губителі
 Судом своїм правим,
 І вівіки стане слава,
 Преподобних слава.

(149, ll. 271-282)

(And the swords in their hands are good, sharp two-edged swords, for vengeance against nations and as a lesson to people. They will chain the greedy tsars with fetters of iron and will bind them, the excellent ones, with shackles, and they will condemn the destroyers with their just judgment, and their glory will be eternal, the glory of the righteous.)

As outlined in "Davydovi psalmy," Ševčenko postulates a historiosophic scheme composed of three distinct moments: an ideal past (the now lost state of absolute divine justice); the corrupt world of experience (the national, social, as well as the personal oppression of the present); and a prophecy and vision for the future (the advent of brotherly harmony preceded by a violent, purifying judgment). Throughout the cycle, this movement of "history" is perceived as a struggle of the various incarnations of wickedness with an oppressed but divinely chosen people. The latter, by virtue of their special relationship to God, are the instruments of his justice, and, in the end, the beneficiaries of his glory here on earth. Their spokesman and mediator before God is the poet-prophet.²⁴

Of course such historiosophic conceptions were particularly widespread during the first half of the nineteenth century throughout Western Europe,²⁵ but especially among Polish patriotic exiles with whose ideas and literature Ševčenko was certainly acquainted.²⁶ More importantly, however, the conceptions of "history" underlying "Davydovi psalmy" were to be reflected in M. Kostomarov's *Knyhy bytija ukrajins'koho narodu* (The Books of Genesis of the Ukrainian Nation), in this instance with the history of the Ukraine in particular as their object. As a friend of Kostomarov and one of the more radical members of the Brotherhood of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, Ševčenko was influential in both the conception and composition of the tract.²⁷

If viewed in the context of the historiosophic scheme delineated above, it should be apparent that the ideas which furnish "Davydovi psalmy" with their underlying unity cannot be divorced from their Biblical sources. The expression in the Bible of the plight of the nation of Israel provided Ševčenko, as it did so many of his contemporaries, not only with a powerful stylistic model, but above all with parallels to the plight of his own people and with a blueprint for his historiosophic meditations.²⁸ Conse-

quently, the “revolutionary” formulations in “Davydovi psalmy” must be considered from a Biblical perspective. The calls for justice and for the punishment of the oppressors are inextricably linked to the expectation of and belief in the empowering intercession of God. They are deeply rooted in the Biblical conception of chastising justice and of an inevitable last judgement. Any “politically revolutionary” implications of Ševčenko’s psalms are thus contingent on a much broader belief in the possibility of a radical ethical change on a universal scale.

As a culmination to much of the poetry in *Try lita*, “Davydovi psalmy” can, indeed, be regarded as a “baring of the device,” but of more than just certain stylistic features characteristic for the collection as a whole. For, by paraphrasing the Psalter, Ševčenko at the same time reveals a source for a historiosophic conception that ultimately underlies such works as “Velykyj l’ox,” “Poslanije,” “Xolodnyj Jar,” and his famous testament in verse (“Zapovit”). Yet, while the concerns of these poems—the destruction of the past, social and national injustice, the anticipation of the uprising and final victory of the oppressed—are also the subject of Ševčenko’s paraphrases, the latter shift the treatment of these concerns from a peculiarly Ukrainian context into the wider, more abstract context of the Bible. Transcending the bounds of the nationally specific, Ševčenko in “Davydovi psalmy” imbues his vision with an all-encompassing universality which, at least for the European community of the nineteenth century, was embodied in only one book, the Bible.*

*This study is a substantially revised version of a talk given in Ukrainian at the Scholarly Ševčenko Conference (Naukova Ševčenkoznavča Konferencija) organized jointly by The Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences, The Ševčenko Scientific Society, and The Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute in New York City in May of 1981.

NOTES

- 1 For a discussion of the impact of the Bible on the formation of early Romanticism, see Murray Roston, *Prophet and Poet: The Bible and the Growth of Romanticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965).
- 2 See, for instance, J. L. Talmon, *Political Messianism: The Romantic Phase, The History of Totalitarian Democracy*, II (London: Secker and Warburg, 1960); Hans Maier, *Revolution und Kirche: Studien zur Frühgeschichte der christlichen Demokratie 1789–1901* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 1965); and Andrzej Walicki, *Filozofia a mesjanizm: Studia z dziejów filozofii i myśli społeczno-religijnej romantyzmu polskiego* (Warsaw: PIW, 1970), esp. 5–31. For a discussion of these ideas on literature, see Paul Bénichou, *Le sacre de l'écrivain 1750–1830: Essai sur l'avènement d'un pouvoir spirituel laïque dans la France moderne* (Paris: José Corti, 1973); and Zofia Stenowska, *Historia i*

profecja: Studium o "Księgach narodu i pielgrzymstwa polskiego" Adama Mickiewicza (Warsaw: PIW, n.d.).

- 3 In connection with this, P. Kuliš makes a telling observation in his recollections of Ševčenko in the "three years" period. For Kuliš, Ševčenko's poetry seemed to be "the prophetic (*proročyj*) lament and prophetic call of the bard (*kobzar*) of Ukrainian bards"; later he adds that for him and his companions Ševčenko "was no longer a bard, but a national prophet (*prorok*)."³ (O. Konys'kyj, "T. Ševčenko Hrušivs'kyj: Xronika joho žyttja," *Zbirnyk filolohičnoji sekciji Naukovoho Tovarystva im. Ševčenka* (NTŠ) I, cited in Pavlo Zajcev, *Žyttja Tarasa Ševčenka*, Biblioteka ukrajinoznavstva, No. 4 (Paris-New York-Munich: NTŠ, 1955), 163.)
- 4 The Biblical epigraph to the collection as a whole as well as those to the poems "Son" (The Dream), "Kavkaz" (The Caucasus), "Poslanije" (I mertvym i žyvyim i nenarodženym . . .) (Epistle (To the Dead, the Living and the Yet Unborn . . .)), "Velykij l'ox" (The Great Vault), and "Jeretyk" (The Heretic) are just the most obvious manifestations of this pervasive biblical influence. Cf. Ja. Hordyns'kyj, "Ševčenko i Krasins'kyj," *Zapysky NTŠ*, No. 119–20 (1917), 184–97 for possible Polish models for some of the poetic uses of the Bible in *Try lita*. However, at the time of the composition of much of the collection, the Bible, in fact, provided Ševčenko with one of his few sources of reading pleasure as well as of inspiration. In a letter to the Rodzjanoks dated 23 October 1845, the poet writes: ". . . There is nothing to read. If it were not for the Bible, one could go crazy . . . I have tried writing some verses, but such garbage has dribbled out from under my pen that I am ashamed to pick it up . . . I am reading the Bible, and there . . . and there . . . I will begin anew."⁴ (*Povne zibrannja tvoriv u šesty tomach (PZT)* (6 vols.; Kiev: AN URSSR, 1963), 6, 37–38.) For a general discussion of the role of the Bible in Ševčenko's poetry, see V. Ščurat, *Svjate Pys'mo u Ševčenkovej poeziji* (Lviv: Myxajlo Petryc'kyj, 1904); and D. Čyževs'kyj, "Ševčenko i religija," *Povne vydannja tvoriv Tarasa Ševčenka* (14 vols.; Chicago: Mykola Denysjuk, 1960), 9, 329–47.
- 5 This is the original title as it appears in the manuscript collection *Try lita* (cf. Taras Ševčenko, *Try lita: Avtohafy poeziji 1843–1845 rokov* [Kiev: Naukova Dumka, 1966]). In the *Kobzar* of 1860, Ševčenko altered the title to "Psalmy Davydovi." The latter, published text is the basis for the work as it appears in *PZT*. Because *PZT* has restored the censored portions of the published 1860 version according to the manuscript copy of *Try lita* and since the 1860 text shows only minimal variations from the original, I have used the *PZT* text (which notes all variations) for the purposes of this study. The texts of the psalms are to be found in *PZT*, 1, 339–47. They will be referred to in the body of the paper by psalm number and line as it appears in *PZT*.
- 6 The most detailed comparison of Ševčenko's paraphrases with the Church Slavonic originals was provided by Bohdan Strumins'kyj in a talk entitled "Rolja cerkovnoslov'jans'koji movy v Ševčenka" presented at the Naukova Ševčenkoznavča Konferencija co-sponsored by The Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences, The Ševčenko Scientific Society, and The Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute in New York City on 3 April 1982. See also Ščurat and M. Laslo-Kucjuk, "Oryhinal'nist' ukrajins'kyx obrobok psalmiv" in her book *Velyka tradycja: Ukrajins'ka klasyczna literatura v porivnal'nomu vysvitlenni* (Bucharest: Kryterion, 1979), 61–95.
- 7 See, for example, D. Tamarčenko, *Tvorčist' Tarasa Ševčenka i rosijs'ka revolucijno-demokratyčna literatura* (n.p.: AN URSSR, 1944), 32–33, 134; and I. Ajzenštok, "Vdovnovenie i trud v tvorčestve Ševčenko," *Literaturnaja učeba*, 1 (1939), esp. the section entitled "Ševčenko i biblija," 52–59. For a similar approach to Biblically inspired poetry, in this case, the poetry of F. N. Glinka, see V. G. Bazanov's introduction to F. N. Glinka, *Izbrannye proizvedenija*, Biblioteka poëta, Bolšaja serija (L.: Sovetskij pisatel', 1957) 26–31.

- 8 Ju. Ivakin, "Do pytanija pro ezopivs'ku movu Ševčenka (tajnopys 'Davydovyx psalmiv')." *Zbirnyk prac' 8-oji naukovoji Ševčenkiv'skoji konferenciji* (Kiev: AN URSSR, 1960), 80–95.
- 9 See, for instance, the poet's comments on the Book of Revelation in an entry in his *Dnevnik* (Diary) dated 18 December 1857: "Reading . . . the Apocalypse, one realizes that the apostle wrote this revelation for his neophytes using allegories familiar to them with the purpose of hiding the real meaning of the sermon from his jailkeepers. Or maybe with the more material purpose of having them (the jailkeepers) think that the old man had gone mad . . . and would free him sooner from imprisonment." (*PZT*, 5, 177.)
- 10 Cf. Stefanowska, 66–67, who, speaking of Mickiewicz's Biblically stylized *Księgi narodu i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* (Books of the Polish Nation and the Polish Pilgrimage) (1832), points out that "the choice of Biblical prose was not simply a question of a formal decision, of a stylistic experiment, or a propagandistic convenience . . . The eschatological conception of history based on a Biblical presentation necessitated the types of formulations, the lexicon, the syntax." Incidentally, the vagaries of Soviet Ševčenko scholarship are brought into relief by Ivakin who, while polemicizing with the views of both Tamarčenko and Ajzenštok in his 1960 article on "Davydovi psalmy," passively agrees with them in his later *Komentar do "Kobzarja" Ševčenka* (Kiev: Naukova Dumka, 1964) without even mentioning his previous argument (353–57).
- 11 Ivakin, 1960, 86–87.
- 12 Cf. Mary Ellen Chase, *The Psalms for the Common Reader* (New York: Norton, 1962), 37–69.
- 13 Chase, 128. See also Moses Buttenweiser, *The Psalms*, The Library of Biblical Studies (New York: Ktav, 1969), 136, 219–20, 477, 617–18, 763, 770, 807, 851.
- 14 Ivakin, 1960, 86; and idem., 1964, 356–57.
- 15 In his book "Psalmy Davydovi:" *Jix značennja u zbirci Taraca Ševčenka "Try lita"* (Irvington, N.J.: The Brotherhood of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, 1969), T. Pasičnyk goes so far as to suggest that "Davydovi psalmy" constitute a single long poem on the order of "Kavkaz" or "Son." However, he draws no conclusions beyond the usual émigré generalities concerning the poet's piety and patriotism. It is also interesting that the editor of *PZT* 1, Je. P. Kyryljuk, decided to number the verses of "Psalmy Davydovi" as though they constituted one poem. No reasons for this decision are given in the notes (460–61).
- 16 In the manuscript copy of "Davydovi psalmy" the order of Psalms 52 and 53 is reversed. In the published version of 1860, they appear in canonical order. The latter may have been the result of church censorship.
- 17 For the purposes of comparison I am using the Church Slavonic Bible published by the Rossijskoje Biblejskoje obščestvo (St. Petersburg, 1818).
- 18 Significantly, Ševčenko underscores this similarity by altering the lexicon of the originals of both Psalm 12 and Psalm 43:

Psalm 12

Доколѣ вознесетъ врагъ мой
на мя.

(v. 3)

(How long will my enemy exalt over me.)

Psalm 43

Положивъ есы насъ въ притчу
во языцѣхъ, покиванію главы
въ людѣхъ.

(v. 14)

(You made of us a lesson among the heathen,
a shaking of the head among the people)

- 19 The Psalmist speaking on the behalf of the collective is a common feature of the Psalter (cf. Chase, 49). However, the stance of a personally afflicted poet suffering with and speaking for the collective is also characteristic of Ševčenko's original poetry beginning with the "three years" period. In his Russian poem "Trizna" (The Wake) (1843), for example, this stance is quite explicit:

О, святая!
 Чвятая родина моя! С
 Чем помогу тебе, ридая?
 І ты закована, и я.
 (PZT, 1, 211, 11. 233-236)

(O, sacred, sacred motherland of mine! How shall I help you whilst I cry? And you are enchained and so am I.)

For a discussion of the significance of this poem in the development of Ševčenko's view of himself as a national poet-prophet, see G. Grabowicz, "The Nexus of the Wake: Ševčenko's *Trizna*," *Eucharisterion: Essays presented to Omeljan Pritsak on his 60th Birthday by his Colleagues and Students, Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 3/4 (1979-80), pt. 1, 320-47.

- 20 PZT, 1, 139.
- 21 As can be expected, these lines were censored in the *Kobzar* of 1860. Cf. PZT, 1, 460.
- 22 Although a comparative study of Ševčenko's paraphrases is not within the scope or intent of this study, it is, nevertheless, interesting to point out that three of the so-called Decembrist poets, Glinka, Jazykov, and Dmitriev all paraphrased Psalm 136. Moreover, Jazykov reworked Psalm 1, Glinka, Psalm 43, and Krylov, Psalm 93. Considering Ševčenko's contacts with Decembrist traditions both during his visits to the Ukraine and his residence in St. Petersburg, it is possible that the earlier Russian paraphrases may have partially provided an impetus for some of the individual paraphrases of Ševčenko (cf. P. P. Fylypovych, "Ševčenko i dekabrysty" in *Ševčenkivs'kyj zbirnyk*, ed. P. P. Fylypovych (Kiev: Sorabkop, 1924), 1, 25-41). Similarly, Deržavin's famous reworking of Psalm 81 ("Vlastiteljam i sudijam") may also have had some influence on Ševčenko's own paraphrase. For some comments comparing Ševčenko's paraphrases to those of his Russian predecessors, see Ivakin, 1960.
- 23 For a discussion of the uses of *figurae* in Romantic literature, see Stefanowska, 33-57. See also Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953), esp. 48-49, 73-76.
- 24 The historiosophic scheme outlined here contains many features which would make it akin to nineteenth century messianism (cf., for example, J. Ujejski, *Dzieje polskiego mesjanizmu do powstania listopadowego włącznie* (Lviv: Ossolineum, 1931), 12) or even millenarian movements in general. For a recent study of such millenarian systems, see Yonina Talmon, "Millenarian Movements," *Archives européennes de sociologie*, 7 (1966), No. 2, 159-200. In his book *The Poet as Mythmaker: A Study of Symbolic Meaning in Taras Ševčenko* (Cambridge, Mass.: HURI, 1982), which was still unpublished at the time of the completion of my study, George G. Grabowicz, in a chapter entitled "The Millenarian Vision," makes a convincing argument about the millenarian elements in Ševčenko's poetry from the point of view of structural anthropology and symbolic analysis. Grabowicz focuses primarily on the poet's later, post-exile, work, but his conclusions are in some ways similar to those presented in my analysis of "Davydovi psalmy." I would here like to take the opportunity to express my thanks to Professor Grabowicz for his helpful suggestions in the course of my work on the present subject.

- 25 See fn. 2, esp. J. L. Talmon.
- 26 The fullest study of this question is V. Ščurat's "Osnovy Ševčenkovyx zv''jazkiv z poljakamy," *Zapysky NTŠ*, No. 119–20 (1917), 217–347. See also Wacław Kubacki, "Taras Szewczenko wobec polskiego romantyzmu" in his book *Poezja i proza* (Cracow: WL, 1966), 208–76.
- 27 Cf. *Le livre de la genèse du peuple ukrainien* (Paris: Institut d'études slaves de l'université de Paris, 1956) with a French translation of *Knyhy bytija*, voluminous notes, and an extensive introduction by Georges Luciani. See also Stefan Kozak, "Knyhy bytija ukrajins'koho narodu Mykoły Kostomarowa i Księgi narodu i pielgrzymstwa polskiego Adama Mickiewicza," *Slavia Orientalis* 22 (1973), 177–88. For an examination of Ševčenko's role in the Brotherhood, see Volodymyr Mijakovs'kyj, "Ševčenko in the Cyril-Methodius Brotherhood," in *Taras Ševčenko 1814–1861: A Symposium*, eds. Volodymyr Mijakovs'kyj and George Y. Shevelov (The Hague: Mouton, 1962), 9–36.
- 28 Compare the comments of J. L. Talmon: "There is something in the Jewish tradition which refuses to take history as the flow of time for granted. History must be heading towards a denouement of a Messianic nature . . . A non-conforming minority, persecuted or at best questioning itself and being questioned by the world on the meaning and purpose of its separateness, must either assert a superior peculiarity and missionary destiny or regard its position as essentially provisional and its life as a kind of preparation for some apocalyptic denouement, after a violent spasm" (80–81).