

Title: The Hymen and the Burial Mound: Taras Shevchenko and the Politics and Poetics of National Rebirth

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Abstract:

George Grabowicz notes that Taras Shevchenko's poetry teems with illegitimate children, abandoned women, and the burial mounds of the Cossack past. The Hetmanate past evoked by the Cossack graves stresses a state structure no longer autonomous in Shevchenko's lifetime and the tropes of familial and reproductive dysfunction can indeed be read as emblematic of the relationship between Ukrainian geography, history and the imperial state. The liminality of birth and of death indicate the possibility of regeneration, and the fertile mythology of Shevchenko's oeuvre has served as a foundational narrative of suffering and purification still dominant in Ukrainian national self-definition today. Focusing on the family as a model of *narodnist'*/*narodnost'*, this presentation analyzes Shevchenko's Ukrainian-language poetry collections *Kobzar* (1840, 1844, 1860) - alongside his Russian-language narrative poems *Slepaia* (1842) and *Trizna* (1843) - to consider the relationship between history, language, and collective identity in the changing landscape of mid-nineteenth-century Ukraine and the Russian Empire.