

**Julia Topenko,  
Ph.D., KNUTD, Ukraine**

**T.Shevchenko in the perception of the British:  
between W. Shakespeare and R. Burns**

**Abstract:** The article highlights the specific perception of creativity and personality of Taras Shevchenko both as a poet and as a national genius of Ukraine in England through the prism of the comparison of him with W. Shakespeare and R. Burns by the British. It has been done an attempt of comparative analysis of fragments of Ukrainian and English cultural samples.

**Key words:** Taras Shevchenko, perception, reception, interpretation, integrity, translation, culture sample, national genius.

The perception of one literature in the area of another in the union of reception (inspection, identification) and interpretation (comprehension, introduction to personal experience) is often associated with the emergence of “Delta”: the difference between the interpretation in “his” and “foreign” environment. To read any work of T. Shevchenko translated into English for a British or any representative of the English speaking cultural area may appear to be not enough to understand the work properly, sufficiently (bearing in mind the usual level and volume of the literature native for Kobzar). And the point is not in the availability of Ukrainian realities of life in many Shevchenko texts or their rootedness in some contexts, typical for Ukrainian worldview, but in allusion saturation for other contexts. Without the explanation as for Kobzar figure as the Prophet, the Messiah, the national genius, his significance for the Ukrainians, his contribution to the national idea formation, the identity of the translated text perception can hardly be complete and appropriate. The aesthetics and poetics of the author of

“Bewitched” for an English reader also seem unusual, not very clear, and maybe even a little (or even too) archaic.

“John Adams put marks on the books. Following him and his copy of Rousseau "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality", we can see how the Enlightenment radical philosophy was peeping in the hidden revolutionary in Queens's temperate climate, Massachusetts State”, - R. Darnton says [1, p.205]. In the same way full of the spirit of freedom – national, social, personal – the spirit of patriotism the poetry of worldwide Ukrainian genius “was peeping in” those who were interested in it and in Ukraine in “temperate climate” of London, Manchester, Liverpool and other cities and towns of Great Britain. For this “peeping” to be useful for new readers of Shevchenko poetry, it was just necessary for someone to interpret it for the English reader adapting Kobzar's work to specific conditions of the perception in this environment. The reception would certainly have been expanded and improved with the interpretation.

The reception of a national literature in a foreign literary community is the exterior of the other literature perception. The interpretation of the reads, the thing that got into the other literature receptive area is the interior. The inclusion into its own national context, – aesthetic, theoretical, methodological – giving the sense to the reads, - is the adaptation of the new material to its literary process, to its aesthetic and other purposes. This process occurs as the interaction of the phenomenon that becomes the reception issue, on the one hand, and a foreign area to which it is included as the result of the perception, on the other hand. The activity or the passivity of any part depends on a number of circumstances, but the perception nature and consequence peculiarities are defined, as a rule, by the perceptive part.

The perception of one national literature (in our case Ukrainian) by another national literature (in our case English) provides an idea of the integrity of the former, which is formed by the latter, that is the image integrity

of the former literature in the area of the latter one. However, to our mind, it is too early to speak about the perception of Ukrainian literature integrity by English literature. Displayed in English and English-speaking cultural area, Ukrainian literature and culture look quite different than for itself in its literary process. Throughout the history of Ukrainian-English cultural and literary contacts and relationships, it never appeared to be similar both real and imagined. If to talk about the integrity of Ukrainian literature perception in England, one should admit that was a different integrity that had to be, taking into account the actual point, peculiarities of its self-awareness and self-interpretation.

In the British perception Ukraine as a “new entire” – a sovereign state – is not completely defined, moreover, does not have a continuous historical tradition. The XX century drops out, and a “bridge” is thrown from T.Shevchenko, L.Ukrainka directly to modern Ukrainian literature, pro European by ideology and mostly post-modern by statistics. "From Shevchenko to Zabuzhko" is the title of Ukrainian literature evening in the Days of Ukrainian culture in the UK in autumn 2013. During the review and acceptance of such literature as Ukrainian in such literature as English, and in English-speaking cultural environment in general, a crucial role is played by such colorful figures as Shevchenko. They act as national symbols, emblems, according to which literature is recognized in the world, an impression is made, an attitude is formed, its international reputation and its general image is put together. Taras is the main person through whom Ukrainian culture is perceived and understood.

Summarizing accumulated assessments and submissions in domestic Shevchenko system, I. Dzyuba states that "... for many generations of the Ukrainians Taras Shevchenko means so much, that the illusion of his overpresence, overunderstanding and overknowledge about him is made. We say illusion, because to overpresence, overunderstanding and

overknowledge it was and it is far away. Shevchenko as something great and ever living - inexhaustible, infinite and ceaselessly" [2, p.5]. Such T.Shevchenko neither in the UK nor in the English-speaking world in general was not known, and the possibility of finding interpretations of his works in this way was never existed. We, Ukrainians, "appreciate the spiritual and aesthetic richness of his creative world, admire the ideological avant-garde and high public image, political and moral principles, his immortal belonging to the people, and many other precious qualities associated in our minds with his name" [3, p.5]. While these features of Shevchenko personality and creativity or a significant portion of them is irrelevant for the English. Their interpretation of the Ukrainian poet differs, for them he is different.

Shevchenko played a prominent role in the perception of Ukrainian literature around the world, including those in England and in the English-speaking cultural area. It gave an impetus to the transition from reception to the interpretation of Ukrainian literature and culture, defining basic trajectory meanings, codes of this interpretation. English and English-speaking Shevchenkiana looks pretty solid. However, the fact that for the Ukrainians is generalized in two formulas: "Taras Shevchenko is Ukrainian literature and national genius" and "world greatness of Shevchenko", is ignored by the British.

English culture model, if to use this term from the field of sociology of culture, by which after R.Benedykt, Kerber and their followers we commonly understand dominant values, beliefs, perceptions specific to a particular culture and distinguish that culture from the others, even having similarities with Ukrainian culture model, is different from it. A set of models of functionally justified algorithm and creativity as such, and the reflections of this creativity and receptive behavior, as well as these models themselves exhibit more different than common. More differences than similarities we see in common cultural configuration and the system of values upon which

this set of models is based and how it is defined and predetermined. If to set a task to illustrate this idea, the sharpest and most clearly the differences between English and Ukrainian culture models can be seen on the example of the creative thinking of Shevchenko, his importance for Ukrainian literature, culture, nation and its place and role in the history of European and world literature.

"If some Ukrainian believes that Taras Shevchenko has incomparable importance for national identity and culture, he is wrong - B.Tsyupyn writes on this. - This does not in any way detract the role of Shevchenko, but it is worth noting that almost every nation has its master of words, who symbolizes this nation. Moreover, some people believe they have not one national bard, but two, such as Lorca and Cervantes for the Spanish, or three like in Sweden and even four in Scotland" [4]. In this point, there is nothing that would cast doubt extraorality of T.Shevchenko as a poet and as a national genius of Ukraine. It is based on a different, distinct from Ukrainian, approach to value categories "poet" - "national genius". The fact that for Ukrainian looks like quite natural, for the British is perceived as something that is not uncontested, requires reconsideration or pre-consideration. The perception of Taras figure in England in this context takes on specific characteristics. The main one among them is his separation as a poet and as a national genius, in other words, adaptation to such development conditions that were characteristic for English literature, and to the position, at which at one stage of historical path exactly it existed but not the literature of other people - in this case, Ukrainian.

Additional confirmation of the correctness and fairness of such interpretation is given by the fact that the British, according to the same B.Tsyupyn, "more often call William Shakespeare to be their bard," whose works in view of its fundamental parameters are different from Shevchenko's, particularly that part that is related to mapping critical

condition of national life caused by the lack of their own national state and a foreign oppression and the people aspirations to liberation and independence. Unlike Shevchenko, he (Shakespeare – T.J.) had no need to address the themes of national or cultural enslavement, because England in Shakespeare's time (16-17 century) started the way of conquering and building empire itself. Nevertheless, the role of Shakespeare is important in the development of the English language and culture and its bringing to the people" [5].

The attitude towards Shakespeare as a nation genius in the collective consciousness of the British somehow exist, although not generally determined. In this regard, there are reasons to talk about, if not complete identity, at least about similarity of English and Ukrainian culture models, their proximity to each other in the assessment of the place and importance of an artist in creating the nation, and shaping the modern type of national identity. Noting this fact, however, one should not overlook that the specific content of the term "genius of the nation" in England in relation towards Shakespeare and in Ukraine towards Shevchenko is different. The same applies to the understanding of the role of each of them in the process of nation-building. When attitude towards Shevchenko as the national genius is characteristic for all the Ukrainians, for Ukrainian collective consciousness as such, in its entire volume, but a similar attitude towards Shakespeare exists only for part of the British collective consciousness, while does not exist for the other part, quantitatively no less than the first one.

The artistic managing director of London theater "Shakespeare's Global" D.Dromhul - one of those who explains the importance of Shakespeare as a national symbol. "Shakespeare influenced me greatly for the whole my life. If you, like me, grew up in a relatively educated family where religion was not present and there was little politics, it was just necessary to have something fundamental on which ground it was important

to understand yourself. Therefore, Shakespeare played just such a role. Shakespeare was a huge part of my grandfathers' and great-grandfathers', my parents' lives. The complete works of Shakespeare has always been somewhere in the corner of the room, as if radiating wisdom, knowledge and insight. It was wonderful to grow up with and learn more about ourselves through reading those works" [6].

So we can see even from this quote, the role of T.Shevchenko in Ukraine and W.Shakespeare in England, understanding of creativity and figures in general both of them in the national unseen discourse as, using the expression of D.Dromhul, "something fundamental" is much more congenial. In both cases, we talk about them – their creativity and personality - as a required element in the formation of personality, its upbringing, education and formation in terms of national identity and patriotism. In new and modern times (including, even perhaps with some citation, postmodern days) it is hardly possible to imagine a Ukrainian national consciousness without Shevchenko, outside Shevchenko, and English one – without Shakespeare, outside Shakespeare. The congeniality should not be confused or especially mixed with similarity. Shakespeare for the English is essential, indispensable, popular, but all these - importance, indispensability, and extreme popularity do not coincide with importance, indispensability, extreme popularity of Shevchenko for the Ukrainians.

One more common point of value of Shevchenko and Shakespeare for their national culture and national identity should, to our mind, be considered a significant contribution of Ukrainian and English artists in ensuring the continuity of the national spirit, in maintaining communication between the generations. In the same way or perhaps even more, as in the case with the director of London theater's grandfathers, great-grandfathers, fathers for whom Shakespeare, according to his words, "was a huge part of life," Shevchenko was an integral part of the lives for many generations of the

Ukrainians, and such perception of his creative work and his personality was handed out from generation to generation, from father to son, with tremendous enthusiasm, attention and respect.

Many common things exist in the nature and specific features of the presence, in the world of art of English and Ukrainian specifications, of religion classics, in respect of each of them towards it; in separation them from each other of such concepts as "religion", "church", on the one hand, and "faith", on the other hand. It is significant in this context, that the mentioned English admirer of Shakespeare specifically emphasizes and stresses the fact that in his family "there definitely was no religion". Thus, for him as a representative of one of the social groups in England and the United Kingdom as a whole, the oeuvre of the author of "Macbeth" was something that was not based purely on religious beliefs and dogmas, was not limited to them, allowing to perceive the outworld and the people in it in the "out of religion" mode. Shevchenko, when looking at his oeuvre from this perspective, would also have to be considered and interpreted as a versatile thinker and master, independent of a particular religious doctrine, such, who can equally positively and constructively be viewed by Orthodox and Greek Catholics, Catholics and members of other religions.

Understanding and evaluation of Shevchenko's religion – non-religion (or individual kind of religion) has recently been undergone and continues to be undergone with significant changes. Without going into details, we note that the indicative in this sense, to our mind, is a monograph of D.Stepovyk "Following Christ, God believer Taras Shevchenko", where the poet's religion turned into a kind of cult, and his world reception and world understanding look as such that completely, from the very beginning to the end, due to the religious spirit and principle, in the closest way are associated with this spirit and with this principle. The author of the book focuses all his efforts on getting as much as possible to focus attention on this particular

poetic world of "Katerina" author, to reduce it to the level of the cornerstone, the cornerstone of Shevchenko's consciousness, his conceptual , aesthetic thinking, moreover, tearing religion from morality. The religious motives are not just given special and exclusive values, their interpretation in almost every case is accompanied by uncritical exaggeration, ensuing that Shevchenko finally appears to us primarily as a religious poet, and then as a national, social and individual poet, that he is accepted to be considered, and that he, we believe, was in reality.

The absolute priority of one element in isolation from the others, to the detriment of them one can hardly consider constructive, it is hardly appropriate to expect positive results from an approach based on it. Taras is far from atheism or theomachy, though religious conceptualization of his poetic thought and his oeuvre is an exaggeration. I.Dzyuba, to our mind, is closer to understand the truth, when he draws attention to the fact that in Kobzar's poetic texts there are various detection of religion and belief in God, whose contextual and emotional range includes the elements close to both the Puritan-independent ideals of "Christian socialism" and the extreme manifestations of religious criticism, given, moreover, in a harsh, "anarchic" form (as, for example, in the poem "The world clear, the world silent ..."). I.Dzyuba is right when he suggests to take as one general formula of Taras attitude to religion, he says "To make fun of those moral and religious beliefs, which are time-honored as well as by millions of people, is unreasonable and flagitious", stating that "... the matters of belief or disbelief (not religion!) Shevchenko considered each individual to be personal and deeply intimate thing... Any association of belief with some strategies, national political claims, global missionary aspirations ... with some kind of compulsion and gregariousness was unacceptable and placeless for him" [7, p.578-579 ].

If you have a number of similar to each other features and peculiarities that T.Shevchenko and W.Shakespeare share, nevertheless the have more

differences than similarities. The dominant writers' interpretation are also different both as a national spiritual environment of each and outside of this environment in a foreign cultural space. Indicative in this sense is the standpoint of perhaps the most fruitful Kobzar's translators, one of the most established in the English-speaking cultural area experts on his oeuvre and Ukrainian literature in general V.Rich, who in an interview, from the height of practical experience of Shevchenko's word reception and interpretation, says that we should not hang on Taras labels of "prophet" or "national genius", it is better to look at him as a man, to see him as an artist in all of his complexity, ambiguity, contradiction. V.Rich advised the Ukrainians not to force their children to learn and recite the following Shevchenko verses as, for example, "My Testament", considering them to be too difficult for the child's perception, capable to be understood only by adults who have some life experience. For Ukrainian collective consciousness, this approach seems strange, too specific and hardly acceptable.

As a proof of the mentioned thesis the distinction between Ukrainian and British views at Shevchenko can serve, concerning whom of the representatives of England and Britain to take to compare with him. At the same time from Ukrainian side we can see some definite efforts and desire to compare Shevchenko as an outstanding poet and national genius of the best poets of other nations, particularly when talk about England, with W.Shakespeare, from the British side he can be compared to R. Burns, a Scotch poet, but not the author of "Macbeth".

The crucial role that this view was the most common and popular, is played by a similarity factor of art form, closest to the folk-song samples. Everything similar that exists between Shevchenko and Shakespeare, mostly belong to the world of ideas, primarily affecting human problems and motives, "eternal" themes of human existence, and, preferably, not social or national, but individual. The similar things that can be traced in the works of

Shevchenko and Burns, belongs to the world of forms, the characteristics of the expression. Both poets in their poetic works actively and fruitfully used folk narratives of their peoples, folk style. The formal texts folklore, after all, has become a presentation type of both Shevchenko's artistic style and his Scottish counterpart's. An important complement to it turned out to be organic combination of national, social and individual motives in the works of both artists and the theme of miserable homeland, comprehend as a weary way from lost glorious past to a brighter future, to restoration of national independence. Similar for both of them is the fact that their poetry has become an integral part of the national identity of their peoples.

Ivan Franko was one of the first who noticed typological proximity of T.Shevchenko and R. Burns poetry. Outlining Kobzar's artistic originality and innovation not only for his own national literature, but also in the global context, Franko stated: "In 1840 almost completely new (except R. Burns) phenomenon follows up new in the world literature – the man who more than 20 years inyoked of feudal bondage. He stands for ... as a living figure, as a worker and a fighter for trampled human rights of all hurt and offended by long history the Ukrainian people, as the defender of all resentful, oppressed and persecuted people "[8, p.113]. After years, this point of view was developed by O.Biletsky, Y.Pervolf, H.Verves, I. Dzyuba etc.

### ***References:***

1. Darnton R. The history of reading . / New approach to historywriting . Ed. P.Berka . / Second Ukrainian. publication. – K., Nick Center, 2010. - 367 p.
2. Dzyuba I. Introduction. / Ivan Dzyuba. Taras Shevchenko. Life and Work. - 2nd ed. , - K., Publishing House "Kyiv- Mohyla Academy ", 2008. - 718 p.
3. The same

4. Tsyupyn B. Not simple Shevchenko, Shakespeare and Burns. -  
Electronic Resource [www.Radiosvoboda.org](http://www.Radiosvoboda.org), 07.XI.2013].

5. The same

6. The same

7. Dzyuba. I. God, religion, church in Shevchenko life and work / Taras  
Shevchenko. Life and Work.

8. Franko I. Works Collection: in 50 vol. - K., 1980 - V.28 . - 468 p.