

# Martyrdom, Spectacle, and Public Space: Ukraine's National Martyrology from Shevchenko to the Maidan

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***Abstract:** The article traces the concept of martyrdom through Ukrainian cultural history from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present. It identifies a tradition of martyrological thinking in Ukrainian culture and commemorative practices, arguing that this paradigm begins and is manifested prominently in literature, before spreading much more widely in Ukrainian culture in the twentieth century. The article argues that religiously inflected Romantic nationalist ideas, language and imagery have dominated since the formulation of the concept of Ukrainian national martyrdom in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and that these have been evident in various ways in official and unofficial uses of public space, from the creation of Taras Shevchenko's grave as a site of national memory in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century down to commemoration of the victims of the Maidan shootings in 2014. Finally, the paper identifies potential problems with the paradigm of martyrology in terms of what it includes into and excludes from Ukrainian memory culture.*

The image of the martyr can be found at the beginnings of the modern Ukrainian national project, in the writings of the Romantic writers and activists of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century as they cast their memories, and those of their readers, back to the Cossacks who laid down their lives in battle against enemies bent on subjugating Ukraine. The Cossack period was a golden age of liberation in the eyes of Taras Shevchenko and others, and was ended by the brutal strength of the Tsarist Empire, whose leaders “crucified” Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> The image can

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<sup>1</sup> Images of crucifixion recur in Shevchenko's work. One of the most famous instances is his poem “Son” (The Dream, 1844), in which he refers to Peter I and