

A Russian Eschatology:
Theological Reflections on the Music of Dmitri Shostakovich

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Abstract

Theological reflection on music commonly adopts a metaphysical approach, according to which the proportions of musical harmony are interpreted as ontologies of divine order, mirrored in the created world. Attempts to engage theologically with music's expressivity have been largely rejected on the grounds of a distrust of sensuality, accusations that they endorse a 'religion of aestheticism' and concern that they prioritise human emotion at the expense of the divine. This thesis, however, argues that understanding music as expressive is both essential to a proper appreciation of the art form and of value to the theological task, and aims to defend and substantiate this claim in relation to the music of twentieth-century Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich. Analysing a selection of his works with reference to culture, iconography, interiority and comedy, it seeks both to address the theological criticisms of musical expressivism and to carve out a positive theological engagement with the subject, arguing that the distinctive contribution of Shostakovich's music to theological endeavour lies in relation to a theology of hope, articulated through the possibilities of the creative act.

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Note on Abbreviations

References to the score are made where possible citing the rehearsal figure and the number of bars preceding or following this. For example, [35]¹⁻³ refers to bars 1-3 after rehearsal figure 35.

Note on Translations

Translations of Russian names and places are cited consistently throughout, with the exception of those references occurring within direct quotations, where citations remain true to the translations of the original sources.

Introduction

From within the hidden depths of an attic in 2004, or so the story goes, the diary of Dmitri Shostakovich came to light. The discovery was the cause of great excitement amongst music scholars, who hoped at last to gain an insight into the private life of one of the most elusive and apparently contradictory of composers. A group of specialists was assembled, and they began eagerly to read Shostakovich's neat script. What secrets of the musical world were about to be revealed? None whatsoever, it transpires, for Shostakovich, perhaps in anticipation that his diary might fall into the wrong hands, had chosen to remain almost silent on matters of music, instead filling the pages with the precise goings-on in the world of his other great passion – football!¹

Thus the controversies surrounding Shostakovich's life and career live on. Born in St. Petersburg in 1906, Shostakovich was a child of the Soviet era, and the first truly Soviet composer.² During his life, he witnessed the political turmoil of twentieth-century Russia, and experienced firsthand the effects of the Stalinist regime. As a result, although he has become one of the most successful composers of the century, his place in history has been secured as much by the discussions surround his political allegiances – the now ubiquitous 'Shostakovich Question' – as by his music. Outlining the nature of such discussions, Ed Vulliamy writes:

The 'Shostakovich Question' is a debate over the relationship between the composer and the triad of Stalinism, Mother Russia and Shostakovich's own deep humanism. It asks: why did Shostakovich remain in the USSR while others like Stravinsky left? Was he obliged by a love of country to acknowledge, if not accept, the government? Or was his life torn between a public and private self? Indeed, was every musical phrase a thread woven through a tortured tapestry of dissent, a passionate but coded cry of opposition?³

¹ Paul Cassidy, *The Brodsky Quartet*, as told to Brian Viner, and recounted in Brian Viner, 'Shostakovich certainly knew the score when it came to the finer things in life', *The Independent*. www.independent.co.uk/sport/cricket/brian-viner-shostakovich-certainly-knew-the-score-when-it-came-to-the-finer-things-in-life-517956.html (03.12.2005; accessed 04.11.2011)

² The other two renowned Russian composers of this era, Rachmaninov and Stravinsky, had both grown up in pre-Soviet times.

³ Ed Vulliamy, 'Flak in the USSR', *The Guardian*.

www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/mar/14/russia.edvulliamy (14.03.2004; accessed 30.10.2011)

On one side of the debate has been the ‘official’ view, put forward primarily by the Soviet government and prominent within Russia during Shostakovich’s lifetime, that the composer was a genuine supporter of Stalin’s Communist Party; on the other has been the ‘dissident’ view, widely propagated in the West in the years following Shostakovich’s death, that he was in fact opposed to the Soviet authorities. This dichotomy has served to colour the ways in which we relate to the composer’s music, and has led to a number of his works being interpreted as either advocating or mocking the Stalinist regime.

In this thesis, I am not engaging closely with the Shostakovich Question. The task of uncovering the true nature of people’s allegiances during the Soviet era is profoundly difficult, not least because of the great risks entailed by making explicit personal views which did not toe the party line. Furthermore, as Richard Taruskin points out, not only is it unlikely that the question will ever be definitively answered, but perhaps to even try is to ignore the real meaning and value of Shostakovich’s music, and indeed it has at times been the case that such debate has threatened to eclipse the musical appreciation of his works, replacing it instead with questions of a purely political or autobiographical nature.⁴ However, such is the influence of these debates that they cannot be completely overlooked in any serious investigation of this composer’s life and music, and two areas in particular remain of significance to this thesis. One of these concerns the reliability of published material regarding the composer; the other has to do with the ambiguity portrayed within Shostakovich’s musical works.

Chief amongst the proponents of the ‘dissident’ interpretation is Solomon Volkov who, in 1979, published *Testimony*, a collection of the so-called memoirs of Shostakovich. Claimed by the author to have been dictated to him personally by the composer, *Testimony* paints a picture of Shostakovich as embittered, anti-Stalinist and firmly against both communism and the Soviet system.⁵ However, the publication of the work, four years after the composer’s death, proved to be the source of great controversy and, in the years that have followed, many heated discussions have taken place regarding its

⁴ Richard Taruskin, ‘Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth: Interpreting Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony’, in *Shostakovich Studies*, ed. by David Fanning (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 17-56 (p. 18)

⁵ Solomon Volkov, *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich*, trans. by Antonina W. Bouis (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979)

authenticity.⁶ It has been revealed that Volkov in fact met with Shostakovich on only three or four occasions – nowhere near long enough for the entirety of the book to have been compiled – and a close examination of the text points to its reliance instead on a number of previously published, and yet unacknowledged, sources.⁷ Although the title page of each chapter bears the signature of the composer, apparently endorsing the authenticity of the work, it has been argued that the original manuscript shows this to have been achieved as the result of careful editing, and doubts have also been raised about the reliability of a number of the eye witness testimonies included in the script.⁸

In reality, then, although some aspects of the volume are likely true, other elements, and in particular the ways in which these are presented, are less likely to be accurate; Volkov, it would appear, skewed Shostakovich's remarks for his own purpose and gain, and with the intention of deliberately sparking controversy. For Wendy Lesser, the emergence of other, more reliable sources in the wake of the publication of *Testimony* has ultimately rendered the work irrelevant. She writes:

...now we have numerous other kinds of evidence – the oral testimony of the composer's friends and relations, recently published letters to and from him, analogous instances in previously unprintable novels, stories, and poems, and our own increasingly informed sense of how life in that time was lived – to suggest that Shostakovich could never have been the placidly obedient Party apparatchik he was sometimes made to seem. So Volkov's central and rather doubtfully obtained revelation is no revelation at all. And, perhaps more importantly, nothing is gained by this sleight-of-hand effort to transform the reluctant public figure into a secret dissident, for the Volkov portrayal of a resentful, self-righteous Shostakovich is far less appealing and finally less persuasive than the tortured and self-torturing man it replaces.⁹

For these reasons, I shall not be using *Testimony*, or those works which seek to defend it, such as Ian MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich* and Allan Ho and Dmitry

⁶ Laurel E. Fay, 'Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose *Testimony*??', in Malcolm Hamrick Brown, ed., *A Shostakovich Casebook* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 11-21 (p. 11)

⁷ Laurel E. Fay, 'Volkov's Testimony Reconsidered', in Brown, ed., *A Shostakovich Casebook*, pp. 22-66 (p. 52); Fay, 'Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose *Testimony*??', pp. 14-17

⁸ Fay, 'Volkov's Testimony Reconsidered', p. 33 & pp. 53-55. Also, Shostakovich was renowned for signing documents he had never read. p. 43

⁹ Wendy Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices: Shostakovich and his Fifteen String Quartets* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 6

Feofanov's *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, as authoritative sources, but rather shall refer to them only within discussions about differing interpretations of Shostakovich's works, or where the information they present is corroborated by alternative, more verifiable sources.¹⁰ Instead, I shall be primarily engaging with works by scholars such as Elizabeth Wilson, Laurel Fay, Richard Taruskin and David Fanning who, in my view, provide a more rigorous investigation into and a more sophisticated interpretation of the events surrounding Shostakovich's life and music.¹¹

As the above discussion reveals, the conflicting interpretations which surround Shostakovich's works have arisen largely as a result of the way in which this music has come to be viewed in relation to its social and cultural context. As Isaak Glikman points out, '[Shostakovich] was no doubt ambivalent, torn asunder by conflicting emotions towards his native land, his art, politics, and deep commitment to humanity. This, at least, is the texture of his sound and the purgatorial genius of his work.'¹² Any discussions surrounding the 'meaning' of Shostakovich's works, then, undoubtedly remain more complex than a simple two-sided, 'for or against' debate, and this view is echoed by Fanning, who argues that the surface of Shostakovich's music appears as if it were 'overlaid with mirrors'. He writes of it:

if we fail to notice these mirrors – if we regard the musical surface as essentially a transparent window on Shostakovich's intentions – we may in fact be seeing only our own prejudices, ideological and/or aesthetic, reflected back to us. On the other hand, even if we do sense the presence of mirrors, we can never be precisely sure where and at what angle they are placed.¹³

Such ambiguity of expression thus forms a fundamental part of Shostakovich's music, and perhaps it is even the case that to deny this ambiguity is to stifle something of the creative power of these musical works. As Christopher Norris argues: 'Shostakovich's sufferings of artistic conscience are 'there' in his music, and the critic who ignores them – or regards them in purist fashion as matters of 'extra-musical' interest – is closing his

¹⁰ Ian MacDonald, *The New Shostakovich* (London: Fourth Estate, 1990); Allan B. Ho & Dmitry Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (London: Toccata Press, 1998)

¹¹ For a further discussion of the issues surrounding *Testimony*, see Brown, ed., *A Shostakovich Casebook*.

¹² Isaak Glikman, *Story of a Friendship: The Letters of Dmitry Shostakovich to Isaak Glikman, 1941-1975*, trans. by Anthony Phillips (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 1

¹³ David Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 6

mind to an important aspect of the music's meaning and form'.¹⁴ This is not to say that these works can only be related to in such a way, for it is still entirely possible for them to be enjoyed purely on the merits of musical sound alone; however, it also remains the case that a contextual interpretation creates for us an additional layer of meaning, equally as valid as any purely musical interpretation, and which further adds to our enjoyment of and ability to relate to the piece in question. Indeed, it is this very ambiguity of meaning and potential for a multiplicity of interpretations that arguably holds the key to understanding the enduring value and relevance of Shostakovich's music among audiences today. As literary critic Frank Kermode argues, it is through an interpretative flexibility such as this, whereby the nature of a work 'subsists in change, prevails, by being patient of interpretation... [and shows] tolerance to a wide variety of readings', that art comes to be identified as a classic – that is, as timelessly relevant and of inexhaustible value.¹⁵ In this thesis, then, I am seeking to take account of, and indeed to embrace, this interpretive ambiguity, understanding it as at least in part intentional on the part of Shostakovich, and as a defining characteristic of his musical style.

What is more, this sense of ambiguity also serves to draw us in, making us part of the process of the generation of musical meaning. Lesser points to the fact that, although Shostakovich's may be the voice we hear behind the works, we cannot infer their full meaning only or entirely on this basis: 'Shostakovich's quartets may speak to us of the world in which they were created and the man who created them', she writes, 'but that is only partly what they do, and they only partially do it'.¹⁶ Rather, it is the case that our interpretations as listeners play an integral role in forming the meaning of the work as a whole. As Taruskin puts it:

The fact is, no one owns the meaning of this music, which has always supported (nay, invited; nay compelled) multiple opportunistic and contradictory readings... But that hopelessness of final arbitration is precisely what has given the music its enormous social value, its terrific emotional force, and its staying power... We can never simply receive its messages; we are always implicated in

¹⁴ Christopher Norris, 'Shostakovich: Politics and Musical Language', in *Shostakovich: the Man and his Music*, ed. by Christopher Norris (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982), pp. 163-188 (p. 165)

¹⁵ Frank Kermode, 'A Modern Way with the Classics', *New Literary History*, 5:3 (1974), 415-434 (p. 429)

¹⁶ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, pp. 294-295

their making, and therefore we can never be indifferent to them. It is never just Shostakovich. It is always Shostakovich and us.¹⁷

In this thesis, I want to argue that one interpretation to which we might be drawn by Shostakovich's music is *theological* in nature. That Shostakovich was a self-confessed atheist living in a society which had as its aim the elimination of religion need not prove antagonistic to such an aim, for I am not here claiming the existence of any hitherto-undiscovered religious intent within Shostakovich's works, and neither am I attempting to cover them with a theological gloss or a self-imposed 'reading-in' of religious views. Rather, as with all interpretations, I am coming to these works from a particular *perspective* – in this case a theological perspective – with all the background and biases that perspectives necessarily entail. It is not the case, then, that Shostakovich's music is being forced to surrender its secular character, but rather that the secular, in my view, need not lie outside the realm of theological interest or endeavour.¹⁸

Much reflection on music from a theological perspective such as this has taken a metaphysical approach, interpreting the proportions of musical harmony as ontologies of divine order, mirrored in the created world, and an investigation of the development of this tradition forms the subject of my first chapter. Attempts to engage theologially with music's expressivity – its ability to relate to and convey matters of human context, emotion and meaning – have by contrast been largely rejected on the grounds of a distrust of sensuality, accusations that they endorse a 'religion of aestheticism', and concern that they prioritise human emotion at the expense of the divine – issues that are discussed in my second chapter. This thesis, however, informed by the music of Shostakovich, aims to defend the place within theology of reflection upon music as an expressivistic art: Shostakovich's music, it argues, both requires and inspires a theological engagement that is prepared to take music seriously as a fundamentally human form of artistic expression, and in this way, it suggests, we are enabled to discover something new not only about the music in question, but also about the way in which we approach the theological task.

Over the course of his life, Shostakovich wrote in excess of two hundred works including symphonies, operas, chamber music, choral pieces and film scores, and it is

¹⁷ Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 476-77

¹⁸ I shall explore this idea further in my discussions of Karl Barth in my first and third chapters.

hoped that the collection of works forming the body of this thesis reflects something of this diversity. Focusing on just a few pieces in this way enables a depth of reflection which would not be possible with a larger selection of works, and also takes into account the importance of understanding music in a specific rather than general sense, allowing as it does for a detailed engagement with the context of each work. Thus whilst the various theological interpretations offered might at times ring true for other of the composer's works, I have sought in each case to provide reflection upon a paradigmatic example, in order that a proper consideration of the individual characteristics of each work might be achieved.

Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony was written against the backdrop of the Stalinist Terror and in the wake of the composer's personal persecution at the hands of the government. In my third chapter, and informed by a theology of culture, I argue that this work presents a musical realisation of the cultural critique central to the thought of both Theodor Adorno and also Karl Barth. Written some four years later, Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony, the 'Leningrad', has a context no less turbulent or traumatic, begun as it was in a city under siege and completed after the composer had been evacuated. In light of the Russian Orthodox theology mediated through the novels of Dostoevsky, in my fourth chapter I argue that this work takes on the qualities of an icon, engaging as it does in a process of preservation and transformation. My fifth chapter has as its subject three of the composer's more intimate works – the Second, Eighth and Thirteenth String Quartets – which I here explore in relation to a theology of interiority. Finally, I turn in my sixth chapter to one of Shostakovich's earliest works – his opera *The Nose* – here considered from the perspective of a theology of comedy. In conclusion, I reflect theologically on a theme which runs through these works as a whole – that of hope.

Finally, it should be remembered that there are many differing kinds of music, and a wide variety of ways in which these might be perceived. As a result, theological reflection on the art form remains continually open to re-invention and re-interpretation – processes to which this thesis, it is hoped, contributes but one possibility. The following chapters, then, are by no means the right or only way of thinking theologically about music, or even about Shostakovich, but rather they offer a single perspective on an infinitely broader theological horizon.

Part One
Theology and Music

CHAPTER 1

Music in the Great Tradition

It is an evening in late September 1791, and in a theatre in Vienna Mozart is revealing his latest opera, *The Magic Flute*, to the world. On stage, handsome Prince Tamino must overcome a series of trials to claim the love of the beautiful Pamina, aided in his mission by a golden flute, the music of which has the power to transform the hearts of all who hear it. By turn light-hearted, comical and deeply beautiful, the work is received with tremendous acclaim, and will go on to be performed throughout the world. For the young composer, the opera is also to become his swansong, for his untimely death, at the age of just thirty-five, lies only a few months away.¹

Fast forward a century, and in a house in Basel, theologian Fritz Barth sits playing extracts from Mozart's masterpiece on the piano for his young son, Karl.² This was to prove a formative moment in Karl Barth's life and he went on to develop a passion for the works of the composer, beginning each day listening to Mozart's music and even admitting that, '...if I ever get to heaven, I would first of all seek out Mozart and only then inquire after Augustine, St. Thomas, Luther, Calvin and Schleiermacher'.³ After all, he writes, 'it may be that when the angels go about their task of praising God, they play only Bach. [But] I am sure... that when they are together *en famille*, they play Mozart, and that then too our dear Lord listens with special pleasure'.⁴

The music of Mozart was to have a deep impact upon both Barth's life and his theology. Towards the end of his life, in the last volume of *Church Dogmatics* he completed, Barth discussed what he calls 'secular parables'. Jesus used the form of the parable as 'no mere metaphor but a disclosing yet also concealing revelation, self-representation and self-offering of the kingdom and of life', and in the same way, argues Barth, we find evidence of God's revelation not only in Scripture but also in the secular and the

¹ Peter Branscombe, *W. A. Mozart: Die Zauberflöte* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

² Karl Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, trans. by Clarence K. Pott (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 15

³ Barth, *Mozart*, p. 16

⁴ Barth, *Mozart*, p. 25

everyday.⁵ We can do this because there is no autonomous, ‘godless’ sphere. All of reality comes from God and has the capacity to bear witness to God.⁶ At much the same time, Barth published a famous essay on Mozart to mark the bicentenary of the composer’s birth, and here he suggests that Mozart’s music might function in this way.⁷ In the collection of Table Talk *How I Changed My Mind*, Barth says: ‘I am not...inclined to confuse or to identify salvation history with any part of the history of art. But the golden sounds and melodies of Mozart’s music have always spoken to me – not as gospel, but as parables of the kingdom revealed in the gospel of God’s free grace...’.⁸

For Barth, Mozart’s music speaks of faith in God’s good creation.⁹ Prior to his explorations of the secular parable, Barth had set out his thoughts on Mozart’s music in *Church Dogmatics* III/3, where the focus of his discussion is *das Nichtige* (‘nothingness’) – Barth’s understanding of the concept of evil. Contrasted with this is the idea of *die Schattenseite* (‘shadowside’), which has to do with the necessity of death and decay in order for there to exist the possibility of growth and regeneration. *Die Schattenseite*, then, is not to be confused with *das Nichtige*, for it stands not in antithesis to God but rather is part of the goodness of God’s creation – ever-present but always in the end overcome by the light. It is precisely this understanding of creation which Barth hears in Mozart’s music: ‘[Mozart] heard the harmony of creation to which the shadow also belongs but in which the shadow is not darkness [and] deficiency is not defeat...Thus the cheerfulness in this harmony is not without its limits. But the light shines all the more brightly because it breaks forth from the shadow.’¹⁰ Later, this comes to be echoed in the Mozart essays, in which Barth argues that in the music of Mozart we hear the resurrection in light of the crucifixion – a victory which triumphs but does not negate that which has gone before: ‘the light rises and the shadows fall,

⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3 pt 1, trans. by G. W. Bromiley & Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), p. 112

⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/3, trans. by G. W. Bromiley & R. J. Ehrlich (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), p. 184, and from an informal discussion with Tim Gorringe. This understanding would also appear to revise Barth’s dismissal of all forms of proclamation, including music, in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, trans. by G. W. Bromiley & Thomas F. Torrance (revised ed. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), p. 55.

⁷ Following a discussion of Mozart’s music, Barth muses that ‘...the New Testament speaks not only of the kingdom of heaven but also of parables of the kingdom of heaven.’ Barth, *Mozart*, p.57

⁸ Karl Barth, *How I Changed My Mind*, ed. by J. D. Godsey (Richmond: John Knox, 1966), p. 72. For a further discussion of the analogous function of secular parables, see Philip E. Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance* (London, UK & New York, US: T&T Clark, 2006), pp. 159-161.

⁹ David J. Gouwens, ‘Mozart Among the Theologians’, *Modern Theology*, 16 (2000), 461-474 (p. 466)

¹⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/3, p. 298

though without disappearing...joy overtakes sorrow without extinguishing it...the Yearnings louder than the ever-present Nay'.¹¹ What is more, in this way, the music of Mozart also presents for Barth a parable for divine *freedom*.¹² At the centre of Barth's theology lies the freedom of God as true source of human freedom, achieved only through the embrace of finitude and the acceptance of limitation, and it is this sense of finitude which Barth finds in the perfectly balanced form of Mozart's music: 'In the face of the problem of theodicy', he writes, 'Mozart had the peace of God which far transcends all the critical or speculative reason that praises and reproves'.¹³

For Barth, then, Mozart's music is not about interiority or self-expression. He writes of the composer: '[Mozart] neither needed nor desired to express or represent himself, his vitality, sorrow, piety or any program. He was remarkably free from the mania for self-expression.'¹⁴ 'Mozart's music is not, in contrast to that of Bach, a message, and not, in contrast to that of Beethoven, a personal confession... Mozart does not wish to *say* anything: he just sings and sounds.'¹⁵ What marks Mozart's music out from that of other composers, argues Barth, is that it is the result of a purely objective perception of reality: '[Mozart] had heard, and causes those who have ears to hear, even to-day, what we shall not see until the end of time – the whole context of providence. As though in the light of this end, he heard the harmony of creation... He heard concretely, and therefore his compositions were and are total music.'¹⁶ Such an appropriation is also evident in the Mozart essays: 'Could it be that the characteristic basic "sound" of both the earlier and the later Mozart – not to be confused with the sound of any other – is in fact the primal sound of music absolutely? Could it be that he discovered and struck this "tone" in its timelessly valid form?'¹⁷

¹¹ Barth, *Mozart*, p. 55

¹² Gouwens, 'Mozart', p. 466

¹³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/3, p. 298. As Stoltzfus points out, the role given to the figure of Mozart would even appear to directly model that ascribed to Christ earlier in *Church Dogmatics* III/3, where he is referred to as the one who reconciles nothingness with the goodness of creation. Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, p. 147 For more on freedom in Barth's theology, see *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, ed. by Clifford Green (London: Collins, 1989)

¹⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/3, p. 298

¹⁵ Barth, *Mozart*, p. 37. Here Albert Blackwell concurs: 'Josef Krips is reported to have remarked that whereas Beethoven's music aspires to heaven, Mozart's music was written from there. Of course the great conductor's remark is a joke, but not a joke without significance. It reflects a judgement that on the asymptotic curve of musical genius, Mozart's music is farthest from subjectivism, from mannerism, from egocentrism. It is correspondingly nearer to universality and timelessness.' Albert Blackwell, *The Sacred in Music* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), p. 124

¹⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/3, p. 298

¹⁷ Barth, *Mozart*, p. 28. In this way, Barth overcomes the nagging issue of Mozart's less than spiritual personal life and any influence this might have had on his composition of (particularly religious) music. It has, however, been argued that Barth's near obsession with Mozart results in too much emphasis being

Here Barth is alluding to the ideal of ‘absolute’ music – music that exists autonomously from text, programme, drama or extra-musical function.¹⁸ This notion came to prominence in musical aesthetics during the eighteenth century and was revived in the early twentieth century by the *Neue Sachlichkeit* or ‘New Objectivity’ movement. Inspired by composer and scholar Ferruccio Busoni, whose work Barth greatly admired, the movement aimed to attain ultimate clarity in musical form and was thus responsible for a renewal of interest in the music of Mozart.¹⁹ Given that *Neue Sachlichkeit* was a dominant theme in Weimar Germany and the subject of theological critique in Paul Tillich’s *Religiöse Verwirklichung* (1929), Barth would certainly have been aware of its developments, and it is entirely plausible to think that it contributed to his deep appreciation of Mozart and his resulting theological reflections.²⁰

This account of Barth’s theological appreciation of the music of Mozart introduces my first chapter in which I set out two of the principal ways of regarding music in the Western tradition. The oldest way of regarding music in the West is to understand it as having intrinsic significance and as being ontologically autonomous, that is, as corresponding to, and echoing, the very structure of being. This idea has philosophical roots in the work of Plato, whose interest lies in the cosmology in which music is grounded, and later comes to be appropriated theologically by the Western church, especially through the writings of Augustine and Boethius. The accounts of these scholars form the first section of this chapter.

In the Enlightenment, philosophical ideas about music developed in very different although nonetheless related ways. The works of Immanuel Kant, and later of Eduard Hanslick, put forward an account of music which seeks to understand it in terms of its

placed on one composer, who is therefore unlikely to ever truly live up to the exemplary estimation in which he is held. Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (London: SPCK, 2007), p. 155 and Gouwens, ‘Mozart’, p. 468

¹⁸ The idea of absolute music might be understood in relation to the concept of ‘art for art’s sake’, which came to prominence through the art critic Theophile Gautier in France in the mid-nineteenth century. Focusing primarily on the visual arts, the movement represented a reaction to utilitarianism: it wanted to say that there is an area of life (aesthetics) which is not driven by capitalism, and thus that the true value of art is intrinsic. *Art in Theory, 1815-1900*, ed. by Charles Harrison, Paul. J. Wood & Jason Gaiger (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 95-100.

¹⁹ Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, p. 125

²⁰ Paul Tillich, *Religiöse Verwirklichung* (Berlin: Furche, 1930). As Stoltzfus puts it, for Barth, the ‘analysis of experiential feeling or mood can only lead to an interpretive dead end’, and rather he is seeking to provide ‘the aesthetic counterparts to a consciousness-based or interiority-based aesthetics... [which] are inadequate because they do not lay claim to the objective and liberating dimension of the God who loves in freedom, but rather wallow in a perpetual, “peaceful” negotiation of mood.’ Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, p. 152 & p. 155. For a further discussion of the musical aesthetic influences on Barth, see Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*.

specifically musical form. Continuous with the ontological tradition in that an interest in the internal construction of music remains, these later accounts differ significantly from earlier views in the sense that music's metaphysical connotations are replaced by an interest in its sonic, structural features. In the case of Kant, this interest is manifest in the notion of music as idea; in Hanslick, focus is placed on music as sensation. The contributions of these scholars to the development of our understanding of the philosophy of music form the subject of the second section of this chapter.

Finally, in the third section I consider the contemporary theological appropriation of both ontological and formalistic understandings of music, such as is set out above in relation to Barth's reading of the music of Mozart. Here the work of Jeremy Begbie comes to the fore, as I discuss the ways in which he has sought to provide theological support for music's structural features, and in particular its temporal processes, and also his move to uncover the potential of the ontological accounts of Plato and Augustine to inspire a contemporary appreciation of music's grounding in a created cosmos.

This first chapter, then, seeks to explore two related strands of the development of musical thought as it has occurred in the development of Western philosophical and theological reflection. In my second chapter, such discussions will be extended as I turn to investigate a third strand of this development, which attempts to account for music in terms of expressivity.²¹ Such discussions are necessary for the contextualisation of any theological study of Shostakovich, as his music has to be understood within the philosophical and theological traditions out of which it has developed.

I. The Pythagorean Tradition

(a) Pythagoras and Plato

In contrast to contemporary understandings of music as a form of art, in ancient Greece music was instead classified as a branch of mathematics, that is, as primarily concerned with the numerical proportions of harmony (*ἁρμονία* or *harmonia*) rather than the

²¹ A similar approach to discussing the theological relevance of music is to be found in Albert Blackwell, *The Sacred in Music*, in which music is dealt within in both ontological ('Pythagorean') and expressivist ('Incarnational') terms.

auditory experience of musical sound.²² The origin of philosophical thought regarding music is traditionally attributed to the figure of Pythagoras who lived in Greece in the late sixth century BCE, although given that little is known about him, and as he left no writings, it is likely that many of the ideas which now form what is referred to as the ‘Pythagorean tradition’ were in fact the product of his followers, which later included some of the Platonic school. According to legend, Pythagoras observed blacksmiths at work and noted how their anvils, when struck, produced sounds which were harmonious with each other. He deduced that this was the result of the sizes of the anvils being in simple mathematical ratios to each other. Pythagoras then applied this to music and found that the natural harmonics of a vibrating string – the octave, fifth and fourth – are produced when the string is divided into the mathematical proportions of a half, a third and a quarter respectively. From this Pythagoras was able to demonstrate that the proportions between overtones in any natural harmonic series are constant. Of particular interest to the Pythagorean tradition was the placement of the smaller intervals of the scale – those lying between the natural harmonics. Such intervals were not perfect but rather consisted of major and minor variations and were therefore considered dissonant rather than consonant. The exact sizes of these smaller ratios were the subject of great speculation and the differing possibilities for combining them led to the production of a variety of different scales or ‘modes’.²³ For the Pythagoreans, each mode represented a different character or temperament and carried with it associated ethical implications – ideas to which I shall return in my second chapter.

The work of the Pythagoreans was later taken up by Plato (429-327 BCE). As a rationalist, for whom mathematics underpinned every aspect of the universe, Plato was keen to emphasise the theoretical aspects of Pythagorean numerology. Although the harmonic ratios had been discovered empirically, Plato believed that it was only through the rational exploration of such notions that their truths could be properly understood. He suggests that the order of music is an echo of, and dependent upon, an ultimate order within the universe. This speculation developed to form the vision of the ‘music of the

²² The Ancient Greek language contains no single word for what we today class as ‘music’. Instead the terms ‘μουσική’ (music), ‘τέχνη’ (art in general) and ‘καλός’ (the domain of the beautiful) were used to refer to various aspects of what we understand as music, although μουσική included other cultural and intellectual studies such as drama and poetry, and likewise τέχνη involved a far wider understanding of art than we have today. These differences in terminology and conceptualisation need to be remembered when exploring ideas about music in Ancient Greece in light of modern day musical developments. Andy Hamilton, *Aesthetics & Music* (London & New York: Continuum, 2007), pp. 13-18

²³ For a more detailed examination of the understanding of harmony in ancient Greece, see Martin Litchfield West, *Ancient Greek Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

spheres’ – a metaphysical idea found in *The Republic* and rooted in ancient cosmology, in which the distances from Earth to the visible planets, and also the velocities of these planets’ orbits, are held in mathematical proportion to each other, as demonstrated by the harmonic ratios.²⁴ It was even thought that the planets each emitted the sound of a differing pitch, together producing each of the seven tones in the natural scale, although this cosmic ‘music’ was inaudible to humankind, for, as Cicero explains, the sound is ‘so great that human ears cannot catch it; you might as well try to stare directly at the sun, whose rays are much too strong for your eyes’.²⁵ Whilst the notion of the music of the spheres represents only one example of what was a far wider conception of ‘*ἁρμονία*’ – such ratios were also thought to exist in many other aspects of life, from proportion in architecture to concepts of God – it was in music alone that these ratios were considered to have been proven.²⁶

In the *Timaeus*, one of Plato’s later works, the musical application of number theory is referred to again, this time in the form of an allegory of the nature and creation of the ‘world soul’ as told by the character Timaeus, a Pythagorean.²⁷ The narrative clearly refers to the mathematical conception of musical harmony and details how the structure of the musical scale might be related to the underlying harmonic structure of the world. In the act of creation, the creator god combines ‘Sameness’ and ‘Difference’ (the two essential elements of reasoning in Platonic thought) together with ‘Existence’, and then divides the mixture into the proportions of Pythagorean harmonic ratios – first according to the powers of two and three (which in Platonic thought symbolise the two dimensional and three dimensional and which create intervals of octaves and twelfths) and then further into fifths, fourths and major seconds. The proportion which remains (an interval slightly smaller than a minor second) is taken as the size of the eight tones of the scale, probably as occurring in the descending Greek Dorian mode.²⁸ The scale is then divided along its length to form two strips which are placed across each other to form an ‘X’ and then bent around to form two concentric circles. The outer circle is named after the ‘Same’ and revolves clockwise, while the inner circle, named after the ‘Different’, turns anti-clockwise and is further divided into seven smaller circles, each

²⁴ Plato, ‘Republic’, trans. by Paul Shorey, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. by Edith Hamilton & Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 575-844 (X, 617a-b, p. 841)

²⁵ Cicero as cited in Edward A. Lippman, *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 7

²⁶ Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, p. 20. For more on proportion in architecture, see Leon Battista Alberti, *The Ten Books of Architecture*, Leonie edition (New York: Dover, 1986).

²⁷ Plato, ‘Timaeus’, trans. by Benjamin Jowett, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, pp. 1151-1211

²⁸ Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, pp. 21-22

with their own size and rotation. Timaeus' description is at this point somewhat unclear, although it appears the patterns of these smaller circles imitate the perceived movements of the planets, despite no explicit reference being here made to the 'music of the spheres'.²⁹ The whole of the physical world is then created within this soul which provides 'a divine beginning of never-ceasing and rational life enduring throughout all time'.³⁰

Later in the work, Timaeus discusses the human soul, formed in the same manner and of the same elements as the world soul only less pure in nature.³¹ Unlike the world soul, however, the human soul is not completed by this process but rather is given only its rational or divine part. To this are joined mortal aspects – the emotions and the appetites – which are created from the four elements.³² The soul is then 'impinged' upon by the unruly and irregular motions of these mortal aspects, the movements of which are known as 'sensations'. The impact of these sensations upon the soul, although not enough to destroy the proportions of *ἁρμονία* woven within it, nonetheless causes them to become distorted, thus rendering the soul vulnerable to temptation and distraction. Proper balance and control can be restored only through the immersing of the soul in the proper ratios of harmony, as mediated through certain modes of music.³³

Through the mathematical beauty of harmonic ratios, then, Plato finds the concepts to express his view of the balance, order and harmony that he felt to be inherent within both the structure of the cosmos and the human soul, and this view was to be shared by philosophers for many centuries.³⁴

(b) Augustine and Boethius

Drawing upon these accounts of music as mirroring the order and proportion of the cosmos, the first Christian writers extended and adapted such interpretations to reflect their understanding of God as divine origin of created reality.

²⁹ Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. by Desmond Lee (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), fn. pp. 49-50

³⁰ Plato, 'Timaeus', 36e, p. 1166

³¹ Plato, 'Timaeus', 41d-42, pp. 1170-1171

³² Edward A. Lippman, *Musical Thought in Ancient Greece* (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1964), pp. 37-38

³³ Plato, 'Timaeus', pp. 1170-1171

³⁴ Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, fn pp. 48-49

Although not a Christian, the third-century philosopher Plotinus (c. 205-270 CE) is of significance here for his role in bridging the gap between the philosophy of the ancient Greeks and the theological concerns of the early Christians. To understand his contribution to our perceptions of music, it is necessary to first look a little closer at Plato's conception of the relationship between art and the 'ideal' realm. For the Plato of *The Republic*, art is a form of *mimesis* (imitation) – a copy of some aspect of the world. As the material world, for Plato, consists of imperfect copies of the eternal Forms, art is therefore understood as an imitation of an imitation and thus as even further removed from perfection than the rest of the world.³⁵ In *Ion* and *Symposium*, however, a different approach emerges. Here, rather than being imitations of reality, art presents a more direct copy of the Forms than does the rest of the world, with the artist viewed as divinely inspired and as having the ability to reveal truths that could not otherwise been seen.³⁶

In Plotinus, we find a blurring of this division between the eternal Forms and their imperfect copies which comprise the material world. Plotinus begins with his notion of the 'One' – the indivisible, transcendent and unknowable cause of all else in existence, from which emanates first the *nous* (intellect or mind) and lastly the physical material which makes up the world as we experience it. So whilst paralleling to a degree Platonic beliefs, Plotinus in fact presents not a dichotomy between Form and experience but rather a continuum stretching between the ideal and the apparent. It is as though, he suggests, the ideal realm were a source of light which is brighter nearer its source and then gradually fades as it travels away, but still remains the same light no matter how faint it becomes.³⁷

Following from this, Plotinus' estimation of music is generally held to be more positive than that of Plato. As the direct, albeit distant, emanation of the One, for Plotinus sense experience remains trustworthy at least in part and thus music exists as 'the earthly representation of the music there is in... the Ideal Realm'.³⁸ Music 'goes back to the Ideas from which Nature itself derives...' – not merely an imitation of an imitation (as is the case in Plato's *Republic*) but rather as an active participant in the transcendent

³⁵ Plato, 'Republic', pp. 596-599

³⁶ Plato, 'Ion', trans. by Lane Cooper, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, pp. 215-228 (534b p. 220); Plato, 'Symposium', trans. by Michael Joyce, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, pp. 526-574 (186e-187c, p. 540)

³⁷ Plotinus, *The Six Enneads*, trans. by Stephen MacKenna (London: Faber and Faber, 1956) V.6.4, p. 417

³⁸ Plotinus, *Six Enneads*, V.9.11, pp. 440-441

power from which it originates (as is the view of Plato in *Ion* and *Symposium*).³⁹ However, even for Plotinus it remains the case that we should seek to look beyond the sensual qualities of music to the beauty ‘that manifests itself through these forms’, and that we must ‘be shown that what ravishes... was no other than the harmony of the intellectual world and the beauty in that sphere’.⁴⁰

The work of Augustine (354-430 CE), shows the introduction of ideas such as these into Christian thought. Although the extent to which he drew upon the Platonic-Pythagorean tradition remains an issue of some contention, the influence of many of its ideas upon his work is nonetheless obviously apparent: he, too, adheres to the notion that the universe is held together in the numerical proportions to be found in musical harmony. In his commentary on the Genesis account of creation he quotes from the Wisdom of Solomon 11:22: ‘But you have arranged all things by measure and number’, whilst allusions in his commentary on Psalm 42 to the ‘intellectual music’ of heaven heard at the point of death are further evidence of a Platonic approach towards music as something to be grasped conceptually rather than enjoyed sensually.⁴¹

In his early although incomplete *De Musica*, Augustine also discusses those ratios apparent in rhythmic verse – the patterns of light and heavy stresses which comprise the various poetic metres – and concludes that these, too, convey for us the proportions of musical harmony.⁴² These metres, he argues, can be arranged in order from the less-perfect ratios to the more perfect to form a hierarchy, and by listening to them with the help of divine guidance, the mind can rise from the ‘lowest’ numbers to the ‘highest’ and so attain knowledge and love of God.⁴³ Music, then, reveals to the fallen soul God as origin of all number and proportion.⁴⁴ So whereas for Plato music’s order pointed towards an ultimate order found within the universe, for Augustine this ultimate order comes to be defined as God. Indeed, for Augustine, in some sense God actually *is* music – the ‘supreme measure, number, relation, harmony, unity, and equality’ – and the

³⁹ Plotinus, *Six Enneads*, V.8.1, pp. 422-423; Plotinus, *Six Enneads*, I.6.2, pp. 57-58

⁴⁰ Plotinus, *Six Enneads*, I.3.1, pp. 36-37

⁴¹ Augustine, ‘Expositions on the Book of Psalms’, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), VIII.42.7, pp. 133-134

⁴² W. F. Jackson Knight, *St. Augustine’s De Musica: a synopsis* (London: Orthological Institute, 1949)

⁴³ Jackson Knight, *St. Augustine’s De Musica*, V.13.28

⁴⁴ Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, trans. by David L. Mosher (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 46.2, pp. 79-81

music of the world is a partial expression not only of the silent music of the spheres but also of the eternal music of God.⁴⁵

However, Augustine's theological embrace of music is not complete, for when it comes to music as an auditory rather than simply intellectual activity a profound ambivalence is made apparent. As Augustine himself puts it: 'I waver between the danger that lies in gratifying the senses and the benefits which, as I know from experience, can accrue from singing'.⁴⁶ On the one hand he wants to say that the experience of music can move us towards God, for it makes the divine, numerical properties of music available to the ear in tangible form. On the other he remains greatly concerned that music's more sensual qualities hold the ability to distract the soul from the proper contemplation of spiritual matters – a wariness to which I shall return in the following chapter. So following both Plato and Plotinus, Augustine concludes that we should not allow ourselves to be distracted by musical sound but rather that we should seek the pure, mathematical qualities from which this sound derives.⁴⁷

A further continuation of the Platonic-Pythagorean musical numerology that should here be noted is that of Roman scholar Boethius (c. 430-525 CE). Intent on bringing the ideas of Greek philosophy to the Latin world, his *De Institutione Musica*, one of a set of manuscripts written on the subject of the quadrivium, was to become the basis for the academic study of music for nearly a millennium.⁴⁸ As Leo Schrade puts it: 'More than anyone else did [Boethius] form the musical mind of medieval men'.⁴⁹

Continuing the idea that worldly music exists as in some way a copy of the eternal music of the universe, Boethius identifies a continuum of three levels of musical understanding. The first, *musica mundana*, is music of the universe, comparable to Plato's 'music of the spheres' and Augustine's eternal music of God – the highest and most perfect form of music. Below this is *musica humana*, or the music of human beings, which refers to the inaudible blending of the higher and lower parts of the soul

⁴⁵ Carol Harrison, as cited in Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, p. 85

⁴⁶ Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. by R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), X.33, p. 239

⁴⁷ This view is underpinned by Augustine's idea that earthly beauty should be seen as pointing to the true beauty of God rather than enjoyed in itself, evidencing the influence on his work of Plato.

⁴⁸ The term quadrivium refers to Boethius' division of the four mathematical disciplines from within Augustine's system of the liberal arts. For a more detailed explanation of this, see Wayne D. Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives on Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 63

⁴⁹ Leo Schrade, as cited in Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 62

into an harmonious balance. Finally, *musica instrumentis constituta*, the lowest form of music, is sonorous music as it is created by musical instruments – music as merely sound alone, which forms the necessary, albeit small, first step towards the proper comprehending of the proportion that exists in the unheard music of the universe.⁵⁰

Boethius' categorisation presented a renewed articulation of Augustine's sense of worldly music as a partial and inferior copy of the perfect, heavenly music that is God. It also served to further dismiss music as a practical activity in favour of the intellectual study of music theory. Indeed, in Boethius' day, performers of music were considered mere manual labourers, unaware as they were of the harmony which lay behind their actions. Composers were only a little better, for although they had awareness of the harmonic laws, this knowledge was based on intuition rather than reason. The only true musicians, therefore, were the philosophers – those who had perfected the study of music by perceiving it through reason alone. As Boethius himself puts it: 'How much nobler is the study of music as a rational discipline than as composition and performance. It is as much nobler as the mind is superior to the body, for devoid of reason, one remains in servitude... [A] musician is one who has gained knowledge of making music by weighing with reason, not through the servitude of work, but through the sovereignty of speculation.'⁵¹ The legacy of such divisions was to last for centuries, with the role of performing musicians considered menial right up until the eighteenth century and a prioritising of musical theory above musical practice is still to be found within some aspects of formal music education to this day.⁵²

⁵⁰ Calvin M. Bower, *Boethius' 'The Principles of Music', an introduction, translation, and commentary* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1966), pp. 44-48. These divisions of music are later adopted by Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) in his understanding of music as that which captures the cosmic spirit of the planets and conveys it to humankind. D. P. Walker, *Spiritual & Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000)

⁵¹ Bower, *Boethius* p. 34

⁵² In his biography of Joseph Haydn, H. C. Robbins Landon records the entertaining story of how, having been made Doctor of Music at the University of Oxford, Haydn was addressed by Prince Nicholas II in the third person – a form of address used towards those in an inferior position – until Haydn pointed out to him that, as a Doctor of Music, he should no longer be spoken to in this way! H. C. Robbins Landon, *The Great Composers: Haydn* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), p. 71

II. Musical Formalism

(a) Immanuel Kant

Even as the practice of music gradually began to evolve, with the advance of equal temperament and an increasing emphasis on music as an art of performance rather than the focus of numerological study, philosophical reflection on the subject remained in many respects unchanged, and it was not until the eighteenth century, and the work of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), that thought about music found a quite different expression in the development of musical formalism.⁵³

Kant sought to bridge the gap between the two differing schools of thought which characterised the Enlightenment period: rationalism, which prioritised the reasoning of the mind, and empiricism, which favoured the perceptions of the senses. Central to his endeavour was an attempt to account for the role of the mind in shaping what we perceive to be ‘reality’ – to explore the extent to which we can in fact ‘know’ anything. In the first of three influential treatises, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, which deals with questions of metaphysics, Kant argues that there must exist a level of reality which we cannot know – a ‘noumenal’, in-itself world which is inaccessible to ‘phenomenal’ human experience as it lies outside the perceptive or conceptive limits of the mind.⁵⁴ Here Kant is disallowing the kind of metaphysic that we find in Plato’s *Timaeus*. The second critique, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, moves from asking ‘what is’ to considering ‘what ought to be’, exploring moral judgements and the notion that free individuals are bound to certain ethical obligations.⁵⁵ Finally, *The Critique of Judgement* discusses aesthetic and teleological judgements – judgements of design and purpose.⁵⁶ Here Kant explores whether judgements of beauty might rightly be considered a form of reason and thus is concerned with developing the notion that aesthetic judgements are not simply expressions of subjective preference but rather have

⁵³ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 72. As Lippman points out, the relationship between the development of musical practice and that of musical aesthetics is symbiotic: whilst musical practice has often formed the stimulus for musical reflection, it is also the case that philosophical reflection on the nature of music has at times led to novel developments in music as it is performed. Lippman, *Western Musical Aesthetics*, p. 26

⁵⁴ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929)

⁵⁵ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, trans. by Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (London, Longmans, 1967)

⁵⁶ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. by James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980)

an underlying objective basis. For Kant, then, beauty holds a place of great significance within his philosophical system: without a theory of the aesthetic, he wants to say, metaphysics and ethics remain incomplete.⁵⁷

Although reflection on the nature of beauty has existed since the earliest times, such activity was not recognised as a distinct discipline until 1750, when Alexander Baumgarten, influenced by the work of the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, coined the term ‘aesthetic’ as referring to knowledge that is perceptual and sensory rather than conceptual and intellectual.⁵⁸ Drawing upon such ideas, Kant identifies four aspects, or ‘moments’, which define the characteristics of and grounds for judgements of beauty. Firstly, the quality of aesthetic judgement is ‘disinterested interest’: judgements of beauty are not the same as sensual pleasure, which is ‘interested’ in the gratification the stimulus provides, and neither are they the same as intellectual or rational judgements, which are ‘interested’ in the acquisition of knowledge outside itself. Instead, aesthetic judgement is freely undertaken – a ‘pure disinterested delight’. At the same time, however, it is not completely free, for in order to be a ‘judgement’ at all the perception of beauty must be rooted in something more than mere personal preference.⁵⁹ This forms Kant’s second aspect: that aesthetic judgement is without concept but at the same time universal – the result of common agreement as to what constitutes beauty. Here Kant is denying the complete subjectivity of taste urged by Hume: taste might be subjective, argues Kant, but this does not mean that anything goes. Disagreements regarding aesthetic value, then, occur not as the result of differing subjective opinions but rather through errors of judgement, that is, through engagements that are ‘interested’ or ‘conceptual’ rather than genuinely ‘aesthetic’ in nature.⁶⁰

Thirdly, Kant argues that the relation of aesthetic judgement to its object of contemplation is purposive yet at the same time free from purpose: beauty pleases in form alone, not in relation to any external use, nor even through comparison to our conceptions of what it ought to be, and thus comprises a ‘formal subjective finality’ – it is perceived with purpose and yet at the same time no thought is given to any purpose beyond the contemplation of beauty in itself.⁶¹ Finally, the modality of judgements of

⁵⁷ Roger Scruton, *Kant: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 99-100

⁵⁸ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p 3 & p. 13

⁵⁹ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, sections 1-5, pp. 41-50

⁶⁰ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, sections 6-9, pp. 50-60

⁶¹ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, sections 10-17, pp. 61-80

beauty is that of ‘exemplary necessity’ – that we identify a quality of necessity in beauty that is the result of an order which cannot be determined but which nonetheless exists. This, he maintains, forms the ‘subjective principle’ of beauty – that aesthetic judgements are ‘subjectively universal’ on account of the fundamental affinity shared by all human minds alike.⁶² Therefore, Kant concludes, although we might find pleasure in utility, which is enjoyed in relation to a purpose, and pleasure in sensation, in which we are gratified by the agreeable, it is pleasure in beauty alone which simply satisfies: beauty is ‘the one and only disinterested and *free* delight; for, with it, no interest, whether of sense or reason, extorts approval’.⁶³

Kant’s account of aesthetic judgement then rests on another apparent paradox: judgements of beauty do not lead to knowledge and yet they are still conducted in a cognitive fashion. In order to make sense of this it is necessary to look further at Kant’s theory of the relationship between imagination and understanding. The role of imagination, he argues, is to make order out of otherwise chaotic sense data, so that this order might then be unified by understanding. This is not to say that imagination simply copies or re-presents that which it perceives but rather it remains fundamentally free, acting in spontaneous creativity. When presented with an object of beauty, however, imagination ceases to act with complete freedom, for in beauty it comes to see something of the order which is normally to be found in the realm of understanding, and so in beauty, imagination and understanding are brought into a state of harmony. As Kant puts it, there is a ‘quickening of both faculties...to an indefinite, but...harmonious activity’.⁶⁴ What is more, whereas, when at the service of understanding, imagination must adhere to the laws of conception, in aesthetic experience, which is by nature conceptless, it becomes liberated from the constraints of conceptuality – still cognitively based, but no longer intellectually tied. At the same time, understanding, although perceiving in beauty evidence of its own ordered activity, cannot fit these patterns within the grounds of its normal conception, and so the mind simply delights in the free play that exists between imagination and understanding.⁶⁵

⁶² Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, sections 18-22, pp. 81-85

⁶³ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, section 5, p. 49

⁶⁴ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, section 9, p. 60

⁶⁵ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 82. So for Kant, feeling does come into play in a way, but in terms of the sensation between differing cognitive faculties rather than the sensation which comes from an external stimulus.

But how does art achieve freedom from concepts and yet still have the order of form required of objects of beauty? For Kant, the answer lies in the role of the genius who ‘gives the rule to art’, intuiting that state of harmony which cannot be articulated or taught but which is essential to beautiful art. The imagination of the genius must be honed and perfected through practice and learning, so that artistic ability in fact becomes a matter of the innate perception of beauty’s form tempered by the education of taste. When perfectly balanced, this combining of genius and taste results in what Kant refers to as an ‘aesthetic idea’ – a ‘representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever...being adequate to it, and which language, consequently, can never get quite on level terms with or render completely intelligible’.⁶⁶ Here imagination shapes reality to form an image which is both ineffable and yet at the same time recognisable to cognitive skill, and thus aesthetic judgements achieve the autonomy from conceptual and sensual determination necessary for the contemplation of true beauty. The ultimate form of beauty, then, is ‘free beauty’ – beauty as found in nature and the ‘fine’ arts which is pleasing through the perception of form alone. Judgement of such arts is reflective and detached, having ‘the effect of advancing the culture of the mental powers’.⁶⁷ By contrast, lesser beauties, (which Kant calls ‘dependent beauties’) are those arts which, classed as ‘agreeable’ rather than ‘fine’, merely entertain or amuse, and thus appeal more to sensation than cognition. Like dinner music, he argues, such art is little more than ‘a quaint idea intended to act on the mind merely as an agreeable noise fostering a genial spirit... [and make] the time pass by unheeded’.⁶⁸ So for Kant such arts might be considered ‘fine’ only in as much as their beauty derives from the sensations created by the interplay of cognitive functions as the result of sensations – from the ‘proportion of the different degrees of tension in the sense to which the sensation belongs’ – and not from the experience of agreeable sensation in itself.⁶⁹ In so doing, Kant would here seem to attribute a higher value to the mental cultivation which art might inspire, over and above the genuinely aesthetic experience in itself.

The emphasis placed by Kant on the aesthetic virtue of conceptlessness and on free beauty as found in the contemplation of form alone might be taken as suggesting that music should fare well within his system of philosophy. Indeed, many scholars have

⁶⁶ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, section 49, pp. 175-176

⁶⁷ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, section 44, p. 166

⁶⁸ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, section 44, p. 166

⁶⁹ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, section 51, pp. 188-189

appealed to Kant's theory of aesthetic judgement to argue that music might even enable us to glimpse the unknowable, 'noumenal' realm itself.⁷⁰ For Kant himself, however, this is not the case. Although arguing that music does offer something in the way of mental stimulation by merit of its diversity and intensity, its main recourse, he argues, is to emotion, and so it remains primarily a matter of sensual pleasure rather than cognitive delight. For Kant, music 'is certainly...more a matter of enjoyment than of culture...and it possesses less worth in the eyes of reason than any other of the fine arts'.⁷¹ What is more, although music consists in what might be perceived as pure form, its transient nature means that its patterns disappear in an instant, leaving nothing permanent for the mind to grasp, and hence music's conceptlessness, although an aesthetic virtue, is in music manifest as an artistic vice.⁷² So as an agreeable art, music is unparalleled in its ability to arouse feeling, but for Kant this remains of the least importance in terms of the merits of art. Music in its purest form is, in fact, furthest removed from the artistic ideal, and ultimately amounts to little more than the 'beautiful play of sensations'.⁷³

So how exactly does music, essentially conceptless by nature, end up so derided by an aesthetics which values freedom from conceptuality as highly as does Kant's? The reason lies in a disparity between Kant's application of his theory of aesthetic judgement to nature and to art. Whilst judgements of nature can indeed uphold the aesthetic ideal of free, disinterested and conceptless contemplation, judgements of art, on the other hand, are necessarily tied to the artistic object in question, and as a result, Kant develops a tendency to assess artistic value not so much in terms of aesthetic purity but rather in terms of contributions to culture.⁷⁴ Consequently, his theory of aesthetics fails to work in relation to music on account of this art form's transience and insubstantiality, but he blames this on music rather than on his theory.⁷⁵ As Herbert Schueller points out, if Kant had applied his aesthetic theory to music rather than his conviction that art should contribute to cultural advancement, music might have come to be held in higher estimation among the arts, given that, '[o]f all the arts, music is the most exemplary of this self-maintaining play which is not related to rational concepts at

⁷⁰ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, pp. 76-77 & p. 86

⁷¹ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, section 53, p. 194

⁷² Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, section 53, pp. 193-194

⁷³ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 86; Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, section 51, p. 188

⁷⁴ This is despite such instrumental contributions being explicitly excluded from questions of aesthetic worth. As a result, Andy Hamilton is led to conclude that Kant is an aesthetic formalist but generally not an artistic one. Hamilton, *Aesthetics & Music*, p. 72

⁷⁵ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 87

all... The order of ideas in music resembles the order of rational, intellectual ideas, but of course no concept can be adequate to musical... ideas as internal intuitions'.⁷⁶

Kant's aesthetic ideal, based as it is on the cognitive experience of form alone, leaves no room for the affirmation of sensuality. For some, however, this move is deeply problematic, for it serves to detract attention from the very essence of a work of art. This might be especially true of music, for, as Wayne Bowman puts it: 'A music emancipated from history, from science, from morality, and from sensation is ultimately a music emancipated from meaning itself'.⁷⁷ For Israel Knox, music which is perceived as purely form is nothing more than 'a beautiful and *ineffectual* angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain...'.⁷⁸ What is more, Kant's notion of 'free' beauty states that music is most music-like when it is pattern alone, completely removed from extraneous influences, and whilst this contributes to the ideal of 'absolute' music, it also implies that music in its purest form is actually the least acceptable within Kant's aesthetic theory, for by becoming conceptless and disinterested, music gives up those very aspects which provide any hope of its being accepted as cultural contributor rather than mere sensual distraction.⁷⁹ So in the end, Kant's liberating of judgements of beauty from sensual pleasure inadvertently leads to the devaluing of that which lies at the very centre of the experience of art.⁸⁰

But what if music is not just fleeting, sensuous experience? Perceived as an 'art of tone', for Kant, music pleases only the appetites and not the mind, having as it does little to contribute to the cognitive world of ideas. But how would it be, asks Bowman, if music were perceived not in terms of tones but rather as an 'art of time'? In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he argues, time is established as an 'a priori framer of experience, a pre-condition and necessary foundation for all general knowledge'.⁸¹ Could it be the case, then, as Carl Dalhaus suspects, that Kant's aesthetic theory 'suffers from too narrow an idea of the function of time in music'?⁸² Had he begun from a perspective of temporality he would have had a much stronger basis for assessing music both in terms of beauty and in terms of its appeal to cognition. What is more, temporal

⁷⁶ Herbert Schueller, as cited in Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 87

⁷⁷ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 87

⁷⁸ Israel Knox, as cited in Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 87

⁷⁹ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 87

⁸⁰ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 91

⁸¹ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 88

⁸² Carl Dalhaus, *Esthetics of Music*, trans. by William Austin (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1982), p. 34

events have the necessary formal requirements to be accepted by Kant's theory of judgement and thus such an understanding could easily have led to the endorsement of the musical experience. As Schueller puts it: '...time as a mode of human thought seems to occur in its purest form in music, of all the arts', and thus, as Bowman remarks, the potential for music to become a 'profound shaper of new orders of cognitive experience' is released.⁸³

The lowly role attributed to music by Kant very likely stems from his inability to appreciate it. Even when music lingers in the mind, he argues, it is 'more annoying to us than agreeable': it is like a 'perfume that...gives a treat to all around whether they like it or not'.⁸⁴ Music 'scatters its influence abroad to an uncalled-for extent...and thus...becomes obtrusive and deprives others, outside the musical circle, of their freedom'.⁸⁵ It has been suggested that Kant's emphasis on the fleeting existence of musical patterns might be attributed to an inability on his part to retain the tonal configurations which comprise the musical *gestalten* that truly and lastingly engage the mind.⁸⁶ However that may be, Kant is an object lesson that music is not a purely academic concept grasped by the intellect alone but rather can be properly known only in the genuinely *musical* experience.

(b) *Eduard Hanslick*

Eduard Hanslick's *On the Musically Beautiful*, published in 1854, is the classical account of musical formalism. Reacting against Romanticism, Hanslick argues that music must be understood independently of the feeling it arouses.⁸⁷ He does not 'underestimate the authority of feeling over music', and of course allows for the 'intense feelings which music awakens in us' – the 'otherworldly stirring' that music 'by the grace of God' achieves – but rather maintains that music's fundamental nature and the

⁸³ Herbert M. Schueller, 'Immanuel Kant and the Aesthetics of Music', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 14:2 (1955), 218-47 (p. 237); Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 88. This is the approach developed by Susanne Langer in Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953).

⁸⁴ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, pp. 195-196

⁸⁵ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 196

⁸⁶ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, pp. 88-89

⁸⁷ I shall be considering the influence of Romanticism on theories of musical aesthetics in my second chapter.

feeling it arouse are two very different matters.⁸⁸ Such feeling does not contribute to music's 'content', and neither is it instrumental to musical beauty, but rather it must be understood as 'nothing more than a secondary effect'.⁸⁹ Hanslick is vehement about this. Appeals to feeling as constitutive of the true nature of music defile musical beauty: they are the musical equivalent of attempting to discover 'the real nature of wine by getting drunk'.⁹⁰ What is more, they direct attention away from music in itself – from the musical structures without which there would be nothing to feel about.⁹¹ To the argument that music represents not specific feelings but indefinite feeling, or feeling in general, he responds that the terms 'unspecific' and 'representation' are essentially contradictory: '[E]very artistic activity consists in individualizing, in impressing the specific upon the unspecific, the particular upon the universal'.⁹² Even in light of the many musical examples which would seem to have representation as their core – opera, 'programme' music, vocal music and so forth – he remains adamant that musical perfection is to be found only in instrumental music, for this alone 'is music purely and absolutely', and 'what *instrumental music* cannot do, it ought never be said that *music* can do...'.⁹³

So if musical beauty is other than feeling, how are we to conceive of it? Music's autonomy, argues Hanslick, is of the utmost importance. Musical beauty is an objective fact – an internal structure which remains intact regardless of whether or not those who perceive it respond emotionally. Indeed, music is beautiful even when it is 'neither perceived nor thought'.⁹⁴ Like Kant, Hanslick wanted to go beyond music's apparent subjectivity and transience, but unlike him he argues that beauty is to be found not in the Ideal but rather in the sensible. Such sensation is not, he argues, to be confused with subjective feeling, for, although it can at times result in such an end, it also leads to the outwardly-directed contemplation of the musical object – a contemplation that is specifically and uniquely musical in nature.⁹⁵ This contemplation is governed by the imagination, for, unlike both feeling and also understanding, which have largely prevailed in accounts of musical aesthetics, imagination does not degenerate into the

⁸⁸ Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music* trans. and ed. by Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1986), p. 58 & p. 7; Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 145

⁸⁹ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, p. 5

⁹⁰ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, p. 6

⁹¹ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, p. 9

⁹² Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, p. 21

⁹³ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, p. 15

⁹⁴ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, p. 3

⁹⁵ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, pp. 141-142

extremes of pathos or logic respectively but rather stands between the two, producing that which is neither fully reason nor fully feeling.⁹⁶

What, then, is the nature of musical beauty? Hanslick puts it thus:

The primordial stuff of music is regular and pleasing sound... Unconsumed and inexhaustible, melody holds sway over all, as the basic form of musical beauty. Harmony, with its thousandfold transformations, inversions, and augmentations, provides always new foundations. The two combined are animated by rhythm, the artery which carries life to music, and they are enhanced by the charm of a diversity of timbres.⁹⁷

Musical beauty consists in the purely musical – in *tönend-bewegte Formen*, or ‘tonally moving forms’.⁹⁸ By form, Hanslick is not referring to the underlying structure of a work as is so often denoted by the term: for him, musical form is no ‘mere acoustical beauty or...symmetry of proportion’. Rather, he argues, ‘forms which construct themselves out of tones are not empty but filled; they are not mere contours of a vacuum but mind giving shape to itself from within’. In the experience of music the musical imagination ‘enjoys in conscious sensuousness the sounding shapes, the self-constructing tones, and dwells in free and immediate contemplation of them’.⁹⁹ For Hanslick, then, the beauty of music’s forms remains autonomous and objective, heard rather than conceptual or ideal, and thus he seeks to affirm a specifically musical beauty, distinct from the general accounts of aesthetics which attempt to universalise various experiences of the beautiful.¹⁰⁰

Despite his earlier denial of the worth of music’s representational qualities, Hanslick now claims that, since music moves tonally, it might indeed represent kinetic qualities such as expansion and diminution, acceleration and slowing down. The shape and motion of music, he argues, are similar to feelings such as these, and so music, whilst incapable of representing feeling as such, might nonetheless still portray feeling’s

⁹⁶ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, pp. 4-5

⁹⁷ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, p. 28

⁹⁸ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, p. 29

⁹⁹ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, p. 30

¹⁰⁰ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 145 & p. 141

dynamic qualities.¹⁰¹ However, for Hanslick, this is indirect and incidental, and certainly not important enough to force us to account for feeling within our judgements of musical beauty. Rather, its significance lies more in that it serves as an explanation of his use of ‘feeling’ terminology within musical description – a use which, he maintains, is permitted provided that its essentially metaphorical nature is made explicit.¹⁰²

Hanslick’s rejection of feeling within musical aesthetics, then, is not absolute but rather allows for an, admittedly small, appreciation of it under qualified terms. This might be further demonstrated, he argues, through the differing responses to the musical experience by musicians and non-musicians. Whilst non-musicians are inclined to ask whether a piece is happy or sad, musicians, he maintains, ask instead whether it is good or bad, thus showing a properly contemplative perception in which music’s individuality and particularity come to the fore. Here attention is not primarily held by feeling but rather is directed towards music’s tonally moving forms which fully engage the imagination. The ‘worthiest, the wholesomest...manner of listening to music’, concludes Hanslick, is therefore one in which pleasure is primarily derived from ‘one’s own mental alertness’.¹⁰³

So for Hanslick, true musical contemplation is ‘the mental satisfaction which the listener finds in continuously following and anticipating the composer’s designs, here to be confirmed in his expectations, there to be agreeably led astray’.¹⁰⁴ As Morris Weitz puts it: ‘...listening to music ought to be a painstaking attending to the unfolding of the tonal combinations, much more an intellectual and an imaginative procedure than an emotional one. The enjoyment or disappointment derived from understanding the progression of sounds are the only legitimate emotional accompaniments of proper musical response’.¹⁰⁵ Music’s tonally moving forms comprise its only subject, for ‘[M]usic speaks not merely by means of tones, it speaks only tones’, and thus, in comparison to other examples of beauty, musical beauty demonstrates a complete unity of form and content.¹⁰⁶ Music means nothing and yet it remains meaningful, for its meaning is ‘wholly, specifically, and only musical’.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, pp. 10-12

¹⁰² Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, pp. 146-147

¹⁰³ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, p. 64

¹⁰⁴ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, p. 64

¹⁰⁵ Morris Weitz, as cited in Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 147

¹⁰⁶ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, p. 78

¹⁰⁷ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 148

Hanslick's fundamental belief that musical beauty consists in something more objective and universal than mere personal preference, and his insistence that music itself should form the focal point of our discussions of the art form, account for the impact his argument has had.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, however, his views remain problematic, not least because of his acceptance of the dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity and the idea that science is unwaveringly objective whilst that which is non-scientific is necessarily subjective. As he puts it: 'Scientific investigation should never ascribe to or presuppose of music any other concept than the aesthetical, unless we abandon all hope of ever establishing this tenuous science on a firm basis'.¹⁰⁹ The upshot of such beliefs are that music's beauty is in some way lessened if it is connected with anything other than the tonally moving forms of which it comprises: the abandonment of feeling becomes a foregone conclusion and many genres of music are consigned to a status of musical inferiority simply on the grounds of their association with text, drama or programme. At the same time, 'absolute' music, such as is typified by the Western tonal tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is raised to a position of supremacy on the basis of its pure, autonomous nature rather than the artistic merit of any individual work.¹¹⁰

The argument put forward by Hanslick that there is a domain of beauty which belongs to music alone is an attempt to establish music as the supreme art form. He wants to say that music's beauty is entirely intrinsic: that music's form is its content. However, as Bowman argues, this view of musical beauty as entirely self-contained, dependent upon nothing other than itself, all too often comes across not in terms of 'freedom of' but rather in terms of 'freedom from', thus creating the unintended impression that music is 'not only autonomous but utterly insular'.¹¹¹ Hanslick's arguments may therefore rebound and lead to the view that music is entirely irrelevant.

¹⁰⁸ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, pp. 149-150. In particular, Hanslick's views were to prove influential in the work of Edmund Gurney.

¹⁰⁹ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, p. 67

¹¹⁰ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, pp. 148-149

¹¹¹ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 150

III. Jeremy Begbie

(a) *Musical Temporality*

When discussing Kant I noted the criticism that had he taken account of temporality he might have ended up with a very different appreciation of music. In *Theology, Music and Time*, contemporary theologian Jeremy Begbie explores precisely this, arguing that doing so generates ‘fresh and fruitful resources for the theological task’.¹¹² He wants to reflect theologically ‘not simply *about* music but *through* music’, so that our musicality leads to greater understanding and clarity of thought within our theological endeavour.¹¹³

Begbie begins his reflection with a consideration of how music actually works. Music, he argues, is not an object but rather a practice, or a set of practices, most notably those of music-making and music-hearing: music is ‘the intentional bringing into being of temporally organised patterns of pitched sounds’, which are deliberately perceived not just as sounds but as musical *tones* and which are essentially temporal in nature.¹¹⁴ Following Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Begbie argues for an understanding of musical ‘meaning’ as created both through music ‘in itself’ and also through its extra-musical connections, although he notes that the pleasure we derive from music generally stems from the ‘dynamically and intrinsically interrelated’ nature of musical tones themselves.¹¹⁵ Further, he underlines music’s engagement with the physical world, arguing for an understanding which embraces music as comprising not only the sounds which are heard but also the musical instruments, human bodies and sound vibrations that make possible its existence.¹¹⁶

In terms of understanding music’s temporality, Begbie draws on the work of Victor Zuckerkandl, who argues that music is formed from multi-layered, metrical waves of tension and release which are created through the interrelation of beats through time, felt through rhythm and articulated in tones. Music is thus shown to be a ‘thoroughly this-worldly art’, experienced as ‘temporally, dynamically *alive*’, functioning through

¹¹² Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 4

¹¹³ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, p. 4

¹¹⁴ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, p. 9

¹¹⁵ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, pp. 11-12

¹¹⁶ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, pp. 12-19

time and therefore through the physical reality of the world.¹¹⁷ This understanding, argues Begbie, challenges and corrects two misguided notions of the linear conception of time – that future events are briefly present before fading into the past and that the present exists as a ‘swell’ which travels down a continuing line of events.¹¹⁸ Time, for Begbie, is intrinsic to God’s creation: it is a positive part of God’s ‘good ordering’ of the world.¹¹⁹ This contrasts with a tradition going back to Plato, mediated by Augustine, for which temporal things are unreal and fallen. For Augustine, as I showed above, the study of music focuses on what it might achieve outside of a temporal framework – how it might enable the fallen to return to God and how it might offer a glimpse of eternity – ideas which, to Begbie, are misguided.¹²⁰ Music, he argues, demonstrates that change can be an orderly affair and need not imply chaos, and also teaches us to regard waiting as a positive action through which we might be educated – a moral event which reminds us that we are within the narrative of the world’s history and not above it. Further, music’s layering of patterns of tension and release shows us the existence not only of different time-durations but also of different time-structures, and the experience of music serves to challenge a negative view of finitude: as Barth discovered through Mozart, decay is necessary for there to be the possibility of life, and music, which can exist only if sounds are allowed to die away, presents us with the artistic embodiment of this process.¹²¹

Applying such ideas to the doctrine of eschatology, Begbie argues that music teaches us about delay and patience, with its patterns of tension and release revealing what it means to have to wait for the fulfilment of promise: as the ending of one wave is at the same time the advancing of another, music shows us how temporary closure leads to greater longing for resolution.¹²² Through musical anticipation, such as is typified by the suspensions of a cadence, we glimpse the prefiguring of final resolutions – a demonstration of the present experience of a now that is yet to come – and in the experience of musical resolution we are enabled to better comprehend the inexhaustibility of God’s overflowing abundance.¹²³

¹¹⁷ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, pp. 37-51

¹¹⁸ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, pp. 51-68

¹¹⁹ This positive view of time is also to be found in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, trans. by T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight & J. L. M. Haire, ed. by G. W. Bromiley & T. F. Torrance (London & New York: T&T Clark, 2004) .

¹²⁰ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, pp. 75-85

¹²¹ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, pp. 85-97

¹²² Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, p. 98

¹²³ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, chapter 4

Begbie then argues that music's temporality might show us something of the relationship that exists between the eternity of God and created time. Here he focuses on contemporary composer John Tavener, whose minimalistic music aims to create an impression of timelessness and to give a window onto divine eternity. To this end, Tavener employs a restraint of directionality, change and motion within his works, so that the beginnings and endings which mark the passing of time are subtly avoided. Whilst acknowledging that such music provides a sense of 'space' in an otherwise crowded world, Begbie nonetheless finds Tavener's attempt at overcoming musical time theologically problematic, primarily because of its failure to realise the engagement and interaction of God with the temporality of the world – that God's eternity has been revealed through a human life and death, thus fundamentally affirming rather than negating the reality of time.¹²⁴

In relation to musical repetition, Begbie points to the integration of 'sameness' with 'difference' – the same melody heard again in a different key or on a different instrument, perhaps – arguing that music highlights for us how those instances of sameness would appear to be of greater significance than those of difference. When applied to the Eucharist and liturgy, which are themselves repeated acts, such an understanding, he argues, enables us to comprehend the necessity of both stability and disruption, together with the preservation of the key elements of the initial theme. Here Begbie identifies in particular the practice of musical improvisation as demonstrating for us reinvention, reinterpretation and the interpenetration of past, present and even future enactments.¹²⁵

Finally, in a continuation of this reference to improvisation, Begbie pursues an alternative understanding of the relationship between music and time to that of Tavener. Comparing the approaches towards musical freedom of John Cage, for whom musical form is a matter of chance acceptance, and Pierre Boulez, who instead maintains the importance of strictly dictating the pattern of musical development, Begbie argues for a third conception of improvisation in which the constraints of musical nature are embraced rather than avoided, thus reiterating his point about the necessity of limitation for genuine freedom. The practice of jazz improvisation here serves to illustrate

¹²⁴ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, chapter 5

¹²⁵ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, chapter 6

Begbie's point, governed as it is by a set of rules which both constrains the patterns of musical development and yet at the same time sets them free.¹²⁶

Relating this jazz-based freedom-within-constraints back to a theological framework, Begbie examines the idea of gift exchange, detailing how the skills involved in jazz improvisation – those of passing musical ideas from one musician to another – mimic the notion of divine 'gifting', that is, the endless abundance of giving and giving back which consists both within the triune God and between God and humanity.¹²⁷ From here, he expands his discussion to include the doctrine of election as found in Romans 9-11, which, he argues, might be understood in light of musical improvisation as 'a sustained attempt on the part of Paul to introduce the Roman Church to the improvising strategies of God, and to convince them that coming to terms with God's time and God's timing is integral to being caught up in God's electing purposes'.¹²⁸ Finally, he outlines the way in which musical improvisation might clarify for us the ecclesial notion of gifting as found in Romans 14:1-15:13.¹²⁹

By engaging with the formal aspect of musical temporality, Begbie demonstrates that, through music, we might come to understand both the physical world and the passing of time as affirmed by God. Music, then, helps us understanding both creation and incarnation. However, we might ask whether the formal analogies to which he appeals exhaust the potential of music to be interesting to theology, and here another of his works comes into play.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, chapters 7-8

¹²⁷ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, pp. 246-255

¹²⁸ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, p. 255

¹²⁹ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, pp. 265-269

¹³⁰ We might also question whether Begbie is doing theology 'not simply *about* music but *through* music'? Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, p. 4 For Philip Stoltzfus, Begbie presents us not with a genuine, theologically constructive musical device but rather with a theological account of music which is primarily an 'apologetic decor to previously articulated doctrinal positions'. To achieve his aim, argues Stoltzfus, Begbie would need to further pursue the questions left hanging in the conclusion to his work – most notably, the possibility for music to challenge theology to 'integrate a 'performative' mode into its work'. This is a subject which lies at the centre of Stoltzfus' own approach to doing theology through music. Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, p. 16; Jeremy Begbie in Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, p. 15

(b) Music and the Cosmos

Begbie's 2007 work *Resounding Truth* asks '[h]ow God's truth might sound and re-sound in the world of music'.¹³¹ Once again, Begbie here considers music both in terms of its inner workings and in relation to its external influences. Music's actions, he allows, are fundamentally socially and culturally embedded, influenced by the associations, both musical and extra-musical, which we encounter in our everyday lives and which together shape the common practices of our own traditions.¹³² At the same time music also involves elements which he refers to as the 'integrities of the sonic order' – the sound-producing materials, sound waves, temporality and distinctively musical sound patterns which remain essential to all music regardless of its context.¹³³ Do we, he asks, place too much emphasis on context and fail to understand music as an objective reality? By way of righting the boat he proposes a return to the more ontological ideas of the 'Great Tradition' – to the views of Pythagoras, Plato and the early theologians. A 'cosmological' approach such as this enables us, he maintains, to rediscover music as grounded in a universal, God-given order. This, he believes, in a way that in some respects echoes the Platonic tradition, helps us to know how we might live well in the world and in relation to God.¹³⁴

However, Begbie also acknowledges that aspects of the Pythagorean tradition, when viewed in the light of modern musical and scientific advances, remain problematic, and in particular he points towards its fundamental distrust of the physical and favouring of the intellectual and spiritual, together with its resultant emphasis on music as number rather than sound.¹³⁵ In contrast to such ideas, he suggests that we might draw upon the views of this tradition but also that we must modify them in some ways: '...we might do well', he tells us, 'to regain a sense of music's profound physicality – its embeddedness in God's given material world', and, as in his earlier book, he here underlines music's

¹³¹ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, p. 19

¹³² Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, pp. 44-46

¹³³ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, pp. 53-56

¹³⁴ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, pp. 94-95. A similar return to the Augustinian understanding of music's theological significance is to be found in the Radical Orthodox movement. For more on this, see John Millbank, 'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism': A Short Summa in Forty Two Responses to Unasked Questions', *Modern Theology*, 7 (1991), 225-237; Catherine Pickstock, 'Ascending Numbers: Augustine's *De Musica* and the Western Tradition', in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, ed. by Lewis Ayres & Gareth Jones (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 185-215; Catherine Pickstock, 'Music: Soul, City and Cosmos After Augustine', in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. by John Millbank, Catherine Pickstock & Graham Ward (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 243-277.

¹³⁵ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, p. 92

‘sonic integrities’ as pointing towards its fundamentally physical nature.¹³⁶ Such an approach, he maintains, is already to be found not only in the works of theologians including Augustine and Barth, but also in the music of composers such as J. S. Bach and James MacMillan.¹³⁷

Informed by such ideas, Begbie seeks to develop a theological account of music situated within what he refers to as a ‘Christian ecology’ – the created cosmos in which we live and our calling to respond to God within such a world. He considers first the role of music in an understanding of the world as created by God. Here music is viewed as a ‘gift of God’, which, far from imparting some kind of transcendental knowledge or experience, instead serves to affirm the goodness of created reality through its fundamental dependence on the processes of temporality. In the Western tonal system, Begbie finds evidence of the ‘ordered openness’ of the world, with the shaping of natural harmonics to form equal temperament pointing towards that which is given by God but shaped by humanity, whilst the blending of different tonalities and instruments to form a single musical work are seen as displaying the ‘diverse unity’ of creation.¹³⁸

From here, Begbie asks what music might show us about the nature of our lives within God’s world. Arguing that acts of human creativity are at the same time acts of *discovery*, he returns to the idea of the ‘sonic integrities’ to demonstrate the process of musical composition as primarily rooted in the order of God’s creation. Human creativity, he wants to say, is essentially bound up with the notion of limitation, not in a restrictive sense, but rather in that creativity is in fact *made possible* by the existence of such limits – an echo, again, of Barth’s understanding of the music of Mozart.¹³⁹ This emphasis on limitation is continued in Begbie’s notion of music as embodying *respect*, through which he seeks to replace the Romanticised image of the composer as one who creates from their innermost being – ‘through turning inside’ – with the notion of musical composition as a reaching outside the self to embody the order that exists in the whole of created reality.¹⁴⁰ In tying these ideas together, he concludes that music should be understood essentially as a process of *development* – a

¹³⁶ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, pp. 216-217. The Platonic influence remains tangible, however, as for Begbie, music as a physical reality still serves to direct our attention towards ‘the ideal and enduring harmonies beyond the material’. pp. 213-214

¹³⁷ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, pp. 119-139 & pp. 176-182

¹³⁸ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, chapter 9

¹³⁹ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, pp. 238-241

¹⁴⁰ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, pp. 241-250

shaping of the sonic integrities, not through personal imposition, but rather in line with God's good creation.¹⁴¹

Begbie then turns his attention away from the process of composition to ask instead how the *experience* of music might be of interest to theology. Considering music in relation to ideas of healing, he argues that music's harmonic patterns of tension and resolution might help us to avoid some of the common misconceptions associated with the doctrine of hope – that, in contrast to claims that it is nothing more than escapism from the real world of suffering, or naïve optimism, or a form of domination which attempts to control others by threats or promises about what is to come after death, music enables us to understand a 'cross-shaped' hope, which takes seriously the message that Easter does not negate the crucifixion, and realises that true hope can exist only in the face of suffering.¹⁴² He also considers how our experience of music serves to bring individuals together as *community*, and so once again rejects Romanticised notions of individualism and inwardness in favour of an understanding of music in terms of ensemble – especially important, he maintains, in terms of our perception of the role of music within the Church.¹⁴³

Finally, Begbie asks how certain sound patterns might be perceived as having particular theological resonances. The quality of musical sound is here of interest, and he argues that the interpenetration of several sounds within the same space without monopoly – an effect which cannot be achieved in more material art forms – presents us with an analogy for the Trinity, whose constituent parts exists as three distinct elements and yet as one unified whole.¹⁴⁴ He also considers music's emotional connections, arguing that music assists with our emotional education and thus with the wider redemption and renewal of humankind.¹⁴⁵ At the same time, however, our romanticised, anthropological notions of music, he argues, together with our reluctance to accept music's physicality, have served to prioritise the emotional expression of the composer at the expense of the reality of music 'in itself', resulting in 'a vast cosmology revolving around the human ego'.¹⁴⁶ Music has come to be used 'fundamentally *as a tool of human will*'; '[t]he

¹⁴¹ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, pp. 250-257

¹⁴² Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, pp. 257-263

¹⁴³ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, pp. 267-276

¹⁴⁴ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, pp. 286-294

¹⁴⁵ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, pp. 294-304

¹⁴⁶ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, pp. 214-215

harmony of the spheres has collapsed into the song of the self'.¹⁴⁷ Of course music has emotional effect, but Begbie wants to make 'a conscious effort to do justice to the other side of the matter, music's embeddedness in a cosmos created out of the inexhaustible abundance of the Triune God'.¹⁴⁸ Theologically this has to be right, because anthropology is part of cosmology: both are rooted in the divine creation.

IV. Conclusion

The immense appeal of the Pythagorean tradition of thought for Christian theology can clearly be seen. The fact of order, Plato and his successors want to say, is a miracle which is nowhere more vividly echoed than in music, and music, in turn, is possible only because of the existence of a profound metaphysical order. In Augustine, such cosmology is given theological grounding as he seeks to view the order of music as pointing towards the ultimate order of God. Centuries later, Barth, who in his younger days was a keen student of Plato, draws on this tradition in his writings on Mozart, though in a very different way. Begbie, too, revives aspects of it, albeit with significant revisions, most notably the development of an appreciation of physicality, in escaping from the 'song of the self' and seeking to re-situate music within a God-given world. Creation, the Priestly writers tell us, is the imposition of order on the whole of reality, including the human will; music makes this order known to us and instructs us in adherence to it throughout our lives.

Learning from the scepticism of his predecessors, Kant disowns this metaphysic but still affirms the significance of the aesthetic: order is again of importance, but here as an account of how it is we know anything at all. Placing judgements of taste in a sphere of their own, linked to those of reason and of morality, the aesthetic experience is, for Kant, part and parcel of our awareness of the world and of ourselves. Perceptions of music reside in the ideal – in the contemplation of musical form in the realm of imagination – and as such are an aspect of the way in which we come to grasp something of phenomenal reality.

¹⁴⁷ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, p. 94; Daniel Chua, as cited in Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, p. 94

¹⁴⁸ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, pp. 57-58

Hanslick argues for music's autonomous significance. Over against many of his contemporaries, he wanted to say that music is not dependent on feeling but rather that it is rooted in physical reality and, in contrast to Kant, that it is not the preserve of the ideal but rather comes from sensation – from the actuality of music's tonally moving forms. This view relates to the older tradition of thought in emphasising that music is not just titillation but rather says something about how reality is constituted and how human beings should relate to that.

Aspects of these ideas of musical formalism are also to be found within theological reflection. For Barth, it is in the structure of Mozart's music that we are enabled to glimpse something of the balance of God's creation, and to understand that peace which passes understanding. In the work of Begbie, music's temporal processes are read theologically, and the passing of time comes to be perceived not as an indicator of fallenness but rather as essential to God's redeeming love.

At the same time that Kant and Hanslick were writing a quite different way of thinking about music was being developed. This alternative tradition within the philosophy of music has, albeit to a lesser degree than the traditions discussed within this chapter, played a part in the shaping of theological reflection on music, and it also bears on how we are to understand Shostakovich. It is to the discussion of this alternative tradition that I turn in my next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

The Theological Significance of Musical Expressivism

On Christmas Eve, in a house in Germany, traditional festivities are underway. The family exchange Christmas presents, and a young girl, Sofie, who has a passion for music and a talent for playing the piano, is given music as her gift. ‘Oh, wonderful music!’ she exclaims, ‘a whole lifetime of Christmases! “You shall sing, O children of God, the most glorious things”’.¹ Her joy sparks discussion amongst the adults in the room, and they go on to explore the meanings of Christmas – the incarnation – in relation to those emotions which music inspires within us.

This is the opening of Schleiermacher’s *Christmas Eve: Dialogue on the Incarnation* – a collection of theological reveries on the subjects of family life, childhood, feminism and music, all woven together in the evocative setting of Christmas from a bygone era. As a theologian, Schleiermacher was greatly influenced by the Romantic and expressivist traditions of his time: reacting to the Enlightenment, and especially to Kant, Schleiermacher wanted to put theology on a new footing, characterised not by reason but rather by feeling. In his *Speeches* of 1799, he writes: ‘Religion’s essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling (*Anschauung* und *Gefühl*). It wishes to intuit the universe, wishes devoutly to overhear the universe’s own manifestations and actions, longs to be grasped and filled by the universe’s immediate influences in childlike passivity.’² He tells his cultured contemporaries to ‘Observe yourselves with unceasing effort. Detach all that is not yourself, always proceed with ever-sharper sense, and the more you fade from yourself, the clearer will the universe stand forth before you, the more splendidly will you be recompensed for the horror of self-annihilation through the feeling of the infinite in you.’³

Twenty years later these ideas have matured into the ‘feeling of absolute dependence’. Human beings, writes Schleiermacher, have a self-consciousness which accompanies all

¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christmas Eve: Dialogue on the Incarnation*, ed. by Terrence N. Tice (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), p. 31

² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* trans. by Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 102

³ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 156

activity and which is a consciousness of absolute dependence – a consciousness that ‘the whole of our spontaneous activity comes from a source outside of ourself...’ What is more, ‘The Whence of our receptive and active existence, as implied in this self-consciousness, is to be designated by the word ‘God’.’⁴ By now it is doubtless the case that *Gefühl* no longer means emotion as we would use the term today, but rather has become ‘both the immediate consciousness of the world transcendent to the self, and the original response of the self to the world...an irreducible, autonomous aspect or dimension of the self’ – in short, the sense that we are fundamentally reliant in every aspect of our existence on the infinite reality and presence of God.⁵

The *Christmas Eve Dialogue*, published in 1806, mid-way through Schleiermacher’s explorations of *Gefühl*, shows through music something of this process of development. On the one hand music reveals to us the ‘feeling of absolute dependence’ that characterises Schleiermacher’s later thought, with Sofie’s child-like wonder and enchantment at her Christmas gift illustrating music’s requirement of the listener that they be open and receptive to what is heard. Moreover, later in the Dialogue, Sofie plays the piano for those assembled in the house, and Schleiermacher writes of how, after the performance, ‘...all remained still, as so often happens with religious music, in a mood of inner satisfaction and retirement. This reaction was followed, however, by a few silent moments in which they all knew that the heart of each person was turned in love towards all the rest and towards something higher still.’⁶ Here, then, Schleiermacher’s concern is to show how music’s connection to feeling and emotion might tell us something *ontological* – how it might speak to us of our relationship of absolute dependence upon the infinite nature of the divine – and, in this respect, he is perhaps close to the thought of Augustine, for whom the harmony and proportion of music are a mirror for that of the divine.⁷

However, Schleiermacher’s use of *Gefühl* within the Dialogue has a tendency to slide. It does not always point towards his later ideas about absolute dependence, but rather, at times, has more to do with feeling as emotion. Here Schleiermacher draws on the thought of Wilhelm Wackenroder, who claims that the theorists of the ‘wretched web

⁴ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. by H. R. Mackintosh & J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), p. 16

⁵ Robert. R. Williams, *Schleiermacher the Theologian* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 25

⁶ Schleiermacher, *Christmas Eve*, p. 34

⁷ See chapter 1, pp. 26-27

of numerical proportions' that constitute formal musical training fail in their endeavours, for they do no more than attempt to describe artistic inspiration without properly comprehending what it is.⁸ A more productive method of relating to music, argues Wackenroder, is to understand it as the human attempt to express those emotions which otherwise cannot be expressed: although formless and sensual in character, it is through music's affective powers that human imagination and feelings come to be shaped, and it is this influencing which, he claims, is overlooked by the traditional theorists who are too concerned within thinking *about* music to actually hear what is going on within.⁹ To make sense of this musical shaping, he maintains, requires *Gefühl* – an aesthetic attitude towards life as a whole, expressed in individual instances of joy or sadness, and universalised through the art form of music.¹⁰

In the *Christmas Eve Dialogue*, such an understanding of music is echoed by Schleiermacher in theological form. Unlike words, which can convey only concepts, music, he argues, can instead be understood as expressive of feeling, and in particular as expressive of *religious* feeling. Thus music no longer performs an ontological function but rather musical feeling comes to be equated with that of a spiritual nature, as Schleiermacher, speaking through the character of Eduard, puts it: '...every fine feeling comes completely to the fore only when we have found the right musical expression for it... And it is precisely to religious feeling that music is most closely related.'¹¹ This opinion is summarised at the end of the Dialogue, where the old bachelor Josef rejects the debates about the meaning of Christmas, and instead calls on the company to simply 'sing something religious and joyful'.¹²

This account of the role of music within Schleiermacher's theology introduces my second chapter, in which I discuss an alternative way of relating to music to the ontological and formalist accounts of the previous chapter. The tradition of expressivism has various strands and connotations. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, music's expressivity has to do with 'its ability to relate to and convey matters of human context, emotion and meaning'. Further, and again as I have touched

⁸ *Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder's 'Confessions and Fantasies'*, ed. by Mary Hurst Schubert (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), p. 180

⁹ *'Confessions and Fantasies'*, p. 190

¹⁰ For an extensive analysis of Wackenroder's influence on the thought of Schleiermacher, see Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*.

¹¹ Schleiermacher, *Christmas Eve*, p. 46

¹² Schleiermacher, *Christmas Eve*, p. 86

upon earlier, expressivism can also imply a stress on music as humanly-made, that is, as a means of personal expression and creativity.¹³ In addition, an understanding of music as expressive at times also concerns music's connection to ethics and its moral effects. In summary, then, in exploring that to which I refer as music's expressivity, I am seeking to understand something of music's relation to human life and experience, as distinct from a dominant interest in music's internal structures and their supposed cosmological significance, such as was discussed in chapter one.

Although expressivist interpretations of music are generally understood as having come into being from the eighteenth century onwards, largely although not exclusively as a result of the Romantic movement, the tradition was in fact anticipated by Plato (whose works Schleiermacher translated into German) and I therefore begin this chapter by once more returning to ancient sources. From here, I turn to the later contributions to the philosophy of music of G. W. F. Hegel and Arthur Schopenhauer, some of whose ideas were appropriated theologically in the works of Schleiermacher as discussed above. Finally, I discuss the contributions to contemporary philosophical and sociological thought about music of Roger Scruton, Theodor Adorno and Susan McClary, together with the theological correlate of these ideas that is to be found in the reflections of Heidi Epstein. Once again, such discussions remain necessary in order for this study of Shostakovich to be contextualised within the traditions out of which it has developed.

I. Musical Expressivism

(a) Ancient Greek Influences

In chapter one I gave an account of the ancient Greek understanding of music in terms of its mathematical structure – in terms of the ratios and proportions found in harmony and rhythm. What needs to be noted is that at the same time music was also understood in terms of its affectual qualities, that is, its emotional and even its moral impact on both individuals and society as a whole. The earliest Greek thought about such qualities is to be found not in philosophical writings but rather in the mythical tradition, where music is viewed not primarily as numerological but rather as sonorous, sensuous and powerfully affective. Such ideas were embodied by the figure of Orpheus, the musical

¹³ See introduction, p. 16

talents of whom included saving the Argonauts by calming a storm with his singing, moving their souls with music more powerful than that of the sirens, and charming the guards of Hades whilst attempting to save his wife Eurydice.¹⁴ Early Orphic thought, which derived from the irrational and individualistic Dionysian cult, centred on the compulsive character of the human response to music, and in particular on music's apparent ability to induce the suspension of the will and reasoned thought.¹⁵ In its later formulations, however, by which time the influence of the more logical Apollonian tradition had become prominent, the Orphic concept of music is transformed from 'an inarticulate outpouring of emotion' to 'an harmonic science with a tonal as well as a verbal logos' through which the Orphics aimed to attain purity of the soul.¹⁶

It is in the works of Plato that we find the philosophical development of these mythical ideas. In *The Republic*, Plato considers again the harmonic aspects of music, only this time not simply in relation to number theory but rather in terms of music as an auditory and sensuous discipline, intimately bound up with the lives of both individuals and of society as a whole.¹⁷ Drawing on the 'ethos theory' formulated by Damon of Athens in the fifth century BCE, Plato considers how taste in music reflects a person's character, with different musical modes expressing differing personalities. He argues that music shapes people's souls and actions, and thus that musical education is morally important: '...rhythm and harmony penetrate deeply into the mind and take a most powerful hold on it, and, if education is good, bring and impart grace and beauty, if it is bad, the reverse'.¹⁸ Similar themes are also taken up in the *Laws*, in which he discusses how rhythmic and melodic complexities should be avoided as they lead to depression and disorder.¹⁹

So for Plato, music's power remains potentially harmful, as is reflected in his references to Orpheus as a model musician whose music is a source of inspiration but also of

¹⁴ As told in Apollonius of Rhodes, *The Voyage of Argo: The Argonautica*, trans. by E. V. Rieu (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959), in Apollonius, but also in Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), I, p. 112

¹⁵ Lippman, *Musical Thought in Ancient Greece*, p. 45

¹⁶ Lippman, *Musical Thought in Ancient Greece*, p. 48. Reference to this shift of association is found in one version of the legend of Orpheus' life, which concludes with his disregarding Dionysus as sun god in favour of Apollo, causing Dionysus to seek revenge and have Orpheus dismembered. His severed head is said to have continued to sing as it floated down the Hebrus River on his lyre. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, I, p. 114

¹⁷ Lippman, *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics*, p. 10

¹⁸ Plato, 'Republic', 401d-e, p. 646

¹⁹ Plato, 'Laws', trans. by A. E. Taylor, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, pp. 1225-1513 (II, 664a, p. 1260)

danger.²⁰ In particular, Plato argues that innovation in music should be treated with caution as it can threaten the order of the state and hence, in the ideal society of the Republic, music is viewed as a source of education and pleasure but also subject to censorship and control. ‘You should hesitate to change the style of your literature’, Plato tells us, ‘because you risk everything if you do; the music and literature [*mousikē*] of a country cannot be altered without major political and social changes – we have Damon’s word for it and I believe him’.²¹

Later Greek philosophy sought to further explore music in relation to its ethical affects. Aristotle (384-322 BCE) agreed with Plato that music could shape human character, but also argued that it had value as part of the good life – ‘the use of music for intellectual enjoyment in leisure’ – and, unlike Plato, did not call for certain musical modes to be banned. What is more, Aristotle would appear not to favour mathematical approaches to music but instead focuses on music in its auditory and experienced form.²² This empirical approach to the philosophy of music is further developed by Aristoxenus (4th century BCE), a pupil of Aristotle. Emphasising the role of the listener in musical appreciation, Aristoxenus’ primary focus is on neither Pythagorean numerology nor Damon’s ethos theory, but rather he views music as emotionally expressive, requiring the use of the hearing as well as the intellect in order to enable its understanding. As he puts it: ‘To be a musician, as we are always insisting, implies much more than a knowledge of harmonics, which is only one part of the musician’s equipment...’.²³

Whilst these experiential understandings of music are clearly distinct from the more formalist considerations of the harmonic tradition as discussed in the previous chapter, they nonetheless remain closely related to, and indeed reliant upon, the mathematical dimensions of music’s existence. As early as Greek mythology, then, and later in the works of Plato and his successors, attempts to unite the harmonic understanding of music with its emotional and ethical affects can be clearly perceived, for it is precisely through music’s patterns of tonality that such affects come to be achieved. What is more, these ancient interpretations in many ways foreshadow the later

²⁰ Plato, ‘Ion’, 536b, p. 222; Plato, ‘Laws’, VIII, 829e, pp. 1395-1396); Plato, ‘Protagoras’, trans. by W. K. C. Guthrie, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, pp. 308-352 (315a, p. 314)

²¹ Plato, ‘Republic’, IV, 424c, p. 666

²² *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton, US & Chichester, UK: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 2123

²³ Aristoxenus, ‘Harmonic Elements’, in *Source Readings in Music History*, ed. by Oliver Strunk (New York: Norton, 1998), pp. 25-33 (p. 26)

development of musical expressivism which, as I shall now show, was to characterise much of the modern discipline of musical aesthetics throughout the second half of the eighteenth century.

(b) *G. W. F. Hegel*

Expressivist theory arose as part of the response of Romanticism to the Enlightenment. Prioritising feeling, the irrational and the natural world, expressivism put forward the idea that we can connect with nature through turning to the inner self – an idea we already find in Schleiermacher. Our realisation of nature thus becomes a form of expression, for it can be known only through our articulations of it. What is more, such expression is not just a revealing of that which is already known but rather is in itself a process of making – of formulating fully that which was previously only formulated in part. It is within this process of shaping and revealing that art comes to play a central role: unlike the Platonic *mimesis*, art, too, is now seen as expressive in the sense that it not only makes truth manifest but also brings human nature to fulfilment. Thus earlier ideas of art as the mediation of a cosmic order begin to fade, and are replaced by notions of art as uniquely human activity which both conveys and creates our innermost being.²⁴

In the work of G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), the impact of expression theory on the development of aesthetics, particularly in relation to the understanding of music, becomes apparent. Although now generally regarded as misguided in their basic assumptions, his ideas were nonetheless an important pre-cursor to later ideas regarding music as an expressive art form, and remain fundamental to understanding the history of the philosophy of art.²⁵ In particular, Hegel was concerned with how we might address the question raised by Kant regarding the subjectivity of aesthetic experience, as discussed in chapter one.²⁶ He wanted to say that there cannot be aspects of reality which lie beyond the grasp of the human mind, that is, to do away with Kant's division of the phenomenal (that which we can know) and the noumenal (that true reality which lies beyond our comprehension). Arguing that aesthetic experience is more than simply a matter of taste, Hegel instead proposes that art can disclose to us something of the truth of reality: art, he argues, is not simply a matter of beautifying that which we

²⁴ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 368-390

²⁵ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 94

²⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London & New York: Continuum, 2006), p. 87

already know but rather is a way of discovering the truth about ourselves and the world. This cognitive element, he suggests, makes art a matter of profound significance within human life – a significance which is overlooked by Kant in his reduction of aesthetics to the judgement of taste.²⁷ Further, Hegel also questions Kant's belief that philosophical concepts result from timeless, abstract reasoning, arguing instead that the human mind evolves over time in relation to historical and cultural advancements. Thus our experience of the truth of art is underpinned by an historical consciousness so that 'aesthetics becomes a history of world views... a history of truth, as seen in the mirror of art'.²⁸

Of central importance within Hegel's philosophy of art is the notion of *Geist*, which is Absolute Spirit, or mind, or God. Reality, argues Hegel, consists in the unfolding of the divine truth of *Geist*, which is manifest throughout the history of humankind. In particular, *Geist* is made known through self-conscious human endeavour, most notably in religion and philosophy, in which *Geist* is realised as pure idea, but also, albeit to a lesser extent, through art, which is *Geist* in sensual form.²⁹ In this way, art comes to be perceived as a vehicle which elevates the mind's awareness of its ideality – a means by which we can come to know reality as it actually is.³⁰ Therefore, and in line with the expressivist tradition, Hegel understands art first and foremost as a product of human creativity: beauty is that which originates in the mind rather than that which can only be copied from nature, as had been argued by Kant.³¹

The history of art thus becomes a part of the story of *Geist* achieving self-conscious realisation within the world. For Hegel, this is a story in three parts. In the earliest form of art – symbolic art, such as is found in ancient Egypt – form represents content but does not transform it. Later, in classical architecture and sculpture, such as that of the ancient Greeks, the perfect balance of form and content is achieved, and this is the fullest realisation of beauty. Finally, in the Romantic art forms of music and poetry, content and form become one and the same thing, thus enabling the perfect self-expression of *Geist* in art. As Hegel puts it: 'symbolic art *seeks* that perfect unity of inner meaning and external shape which classical art *finds* in the presentation of

²⁷ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 95

²⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 87

²⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans. by Bernard Bosanquet (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Co., 1886), p. 105

³⁰ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 103

³¹ Hegel, *Introduction*, p. 3

substantial individuality to sensuous contemplation, and which romantic art *transcends* in its superior spirituality'.³²

So for Hegel, music is of higher value than the visual arts by merit of its inwardness. Unlike sculpture or painting, it is not the image of something external, but rather has as its content the 'inner life', making it closer to the ideal of pure mind.³³ What is more, through its temporality, its existence only at the instant of perception, music is understood primarily in relation to our inmost being: 'The ear has scarcely grasped it before it is mute; the impression to be made here is at once made within; the notes re-echo only in the depths of the soul which is gripped and moved in its subjective consciousness.'³⁴ Both music's form and content, therefore, are unique in their ability to reveal to the mind and soul their innermost nature. Despite its emotional quality, music is not, argues Hegel, irrational, but rather, in an echo of the Platonic-Pythagorean tradition, there remains a close connection between musical harmony and music's expression of the soul. Music is both the experience of 'formal inwardness, pure sound' and 'a retreat into the inner life's own freedom': it is no 'purely natural *shriek* of feeling but the developed and artistic *expression* of it'.³⁵

Nonetheless, Hegel still remains somewhat ambivalent about the true value of music, and this is because of the dangers he perceives to be inherent in an art form which is so closely aligned to the movements of the soul. Music's lacking of the constraints of materiality, he argues, mean that there is a risk that composers might get carried away, and thus that music might become nothing more than mere self-indulgence or amusement.³⁶ This risk is heightened in the case of music that is 'purely' music and so not confined within the limits of a text or programme. As a result, Hegel's philosophy might be held in tension with the notion of 'absolute' music, which, as we discovered in the previous chapter, was becoming prominent at this time; on the one hand, such music embraces the ideal through its indefiniteness, whilst on the other, this very indefiniteness threatens the clarity and unity of the whole.³⁷ So the music that we might

³² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. by T. M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), vol. 1, p. 302

³³ Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 889

³⁴ Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 892. Interestingly, the aspects of music which Kant derided – its felt character and temporality – are for Hegel the very essence of music's appeal. Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 103

³⁵ Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 895 & p. 910

³⁶ Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 897

³⁷ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 108

expect to be the highest expression of the ideal is in fact lacking in the very qualities that give music value, for music without ‘spiritual content and expression’ is ‘not yet strictly to be called art’ – it is not really genuine music at all.³⁸ Ultimately, then, music’s freedom of expression proves to be its downfall, leading Hegel to conclude that poetry is of greater value in the journey of the soul to true self-attainment, for ‘what poetry loses in external objectivity by being able to set aside its sensuous medium...it gains in the inner objectivity of the views and ideas which poetic language sets before our apprehension’.³⁹

It might be argued that art comes to be devalued as a result of the prioritising of the metaphysical notion of the ideal, for the Romantic phase, in which form and content are united in the highest artistic expression of *Geist*, signifies the *end of art*, which can be of no further use in the developing of humanity; the ideal can only be fully realised in the non-sensual form of philosophy, and thus art is in effect nothing more than a ‘sweet but transient interlude in the all-important quest for the absolute idea... a necessary...but ultimately inadequate expression of the truth’.⁴⁰ What is more, it might also be argued that Hegel’s claim to have achieved the unity of music’s form and content – of its outward expression and its inner nature – is false, thus leading him to his final conclusion that it is in poetry that *Geist* is more properly revealed.⁴¹

However, despite these difficulties, Hegel’s account remains interesting for what it tells us about the nature of music and its value within human life. It shows us how formal excellence is not the same as musical excellence – that the ‘musical and the more broadly human value of music are not the same’, and that ‘[m]usic without spiritual content is not yet music’.⁴² In so doing, it demonstrates how music is not simply a matter of entertainment but rather might be central to human growth and self-realisation.⁴³ For Hegel, music enables us to relate to ‘felt life’ in a way that no other art form, or even philosophy, is able: far from an ‘empty sounding’, music is rather a ‘vital expression of what it is to be human’.⁴⁴

³⁸ Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 902

³⁹ Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 899

⁴⁰ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 99

⁴¹ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 111

⁴² Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 111

⁴³ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 103

⁴⁴ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 111

(c) Arthur Schopenhauer

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), who was a contemporary of Hegel but outlived him by thirty years, further explored the role of music in relation to expressivism. In *The World as Will and Representation*, published in 1818 but not influential until the second half of the nineteenth century, Schopenhauer also contests the Kantian distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal; he, too, wants to say that there is no reality which lies beyond our experience. In contrast to Hegel's 'ideal', for Schopenhauer the 'in itself' of reality is 'Will' – an irrational and indestructible force which runs through everything in existence, the 'absence of all aim, of all limits...a blind, irresistible urge'.⁴⁵ The phenomenal manifestation of Will – through which we come to know, albeit indirectly, something of the true nature of reality – is found in the 'willing' of human consciousness.⁴⁶ In this we glimpse 'the thing-in-itself...manifested under the lightest of all veils...'⁴⁷ However, unlike Will itself, the willing of human experience necessarily entails a level of consciousness, and so is not blind or aimless, but rather consists in the relentless striving after and desire for particular objects or outcomes. Schopenhauer thus presents a view of the universe which, in contrast to the Hegelian prioritisation of reason, is instead characterised at the most fundamental level by an endless 'struggle for existence' fraught with stress, conflict and tension.⁴⁸ The idea of human progress is rejected and replaced instead by 'a picture of mankind in general as doomed to an eternal round of torment and misery' from which we cannot hope to escape but rather must continually endure.⁴⁹

In art, however, argues Schopenhauer, we 'keep the Sabbath of the penal servitude of willing; the wheel of Ixion stands still'.⁵⁰ In artistic representation, the world is revealed in abstract form, so our perceptions of it are free from the normal constraints of willing-led directedness and we experience momentary relief from the perpetual grasping that

⁴⁵ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols. (New York: Dover Publications, 1969) vol. 1 (second book, section 29), p. 164 and vol. 1 (fourth book, section 54), p. 275

⁴⁶ Schopenhauer stressed that the two terms, although similar in sound, are very different in meaning. Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 114

⁴⁷ Schopenhauer, *World as Will* vol. 2 (supplement to second book), p. 197

⁴⁸ Patrick Gardiner, *Schopenhauer* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), pp. 182-183

⁴⁹ Patrick Gardiner, 'Arthur Schopenhauer', in *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), VII, pp. 325-332 (p. 329). Schopenhauer would appear to abhor phenomenal willing, but not Will itself, for that is neither good nor evil but rather simply exists. Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, pp. 116-117

⁵⁰ Schopenhauer, *World as Will* vol. 1 (third book, section 38), p. 196

characterises our existence. Art is thus a form of knowledge, as was the case for Hegel, and like Plato, for Schopenhauer, the genius of the artist enables the rest of us to glimpse nature as it really is, although the point he is making here is that this glimpsing of reality is not achieved through the abstract act of reason but rather through the sensuality of perception.⁵¹ Here, too, are to be found echoes of Kant's understanding of aesthetic judgement as 'disinterested interest', in which artistic perception transcends ordinary forms of perception, and thus is attributed special value.⁵² Most importantly, for Schopenhauer, the respite from willing which art affords brings us to the closest possible point of experiencing the noumenal Will, that is, Will as it stands in true form rather than imperfectly expressed.⁵³

The art form of music, continues Schopenhauer, presents us with a very particular kind of artistic representation for, unlike the visual arts, it does not depict objects from the phenomenal world but rather has as its subject Will itself. As such, music becomes a means for expressing the ineffable – for 'communicating the incommunicable...for presenting that innermost essence of the universe which cannot, by definition, be represented' – and thus is understood as the highest of arts.⁵⁴ For Schopenhauer, melody is singled out as being of particular musical importance. Melody is, he suggests, 'a constant digression and deviation from the keynote in a thousand ways... [expressing] the many different forms of [W]ill's efforts, but also its satisfaction by ultimately finding again a harmonious interval, and still more the keynote', and thus its patterns of tension and release mimic the waves of human striving and satisfaction.⁵⁵ Rhythm, too, is of significance, for in its interaction with melody another layer of tension and reconciliation is added to the musical experience.⁵⁶ In these accounts, Schopenhauer is, for the first time in musical aesthetics, attempting to explain music from the 'inside' – in terms of the tonal reality of its phenomenal existence. He thus makes an important move towards the seeking of a way by which we might account for the profundity of the musical experience – a view later continued in Susanne Langer's conception of music as

⁵¹ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 117

⁵² Hamilton, *Aesthetics & Music*, p. 76

⁵³ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 118. In this, Schopenhauer is anticipating the later development of phenomenological approaches to art.

⁵⁴ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 119

⁵⁵ Schopenhauer, *World as Will* vol. 1 (third book, section 52), p. 260

⁵⁶ Schopenhauer, *World as Will* vol. 2 (supplement to third book), pp. 453-456

a ‘tonal analogue of emotive life’, and also in attempts to account for music’s expressivity within its formal nature.⁵⁷

For Schopenhauer, however, music remains one step removed from the world of feelings, for, as an expression of Will itself, it is not concerned with phenomenal representations. Music, he argues, does not express specific emotions but rather *abstract* emotions – the emotions *in themselves*, as they exist in noumenal reality, devoid from human striving and desire: ‘...music does not express this or that particular and definite pleasure, this or that affliction, pain sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, or peace of mind, but joy, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, peace of mind *themselves*, to a certain extent in the abstract, their essential nature, without any accessories, and also without the motives for them’.⁵⁸ Thus music does not cause us to feel actual emotions or experience actual suffering, for that which it conveys exists only ‘in mere tones’.⁵⁹ As Schopenhauer puts it: ‘The inexpressible depth of all music, by virtue of which it floats past us as a paradise quite familiar and yet eternally remote, is due to the fact that it reproduces all the emotions of our innermost being, but entirely without reality and remote from its pain’.⁶⁰

Music, then, has a language which is purely its own – one that is not derived from concepts or words of the phenomenal world but which is rather a direct copy of the noumenal Will. In this way, music has the ability to convey a universality which the mind alone is unable to attain, and thus Schopenhauer’s understanding of music goes deeper than that of Hegel, for whom music remains attached to reason and ideas. Here Schopenhauer cites Leibniz, for whom music is ‘an unconscious exercise in metaphysics in which the mind does not know it is philosophising’.⁶¹ As a result, argues Schopenhauer, music has no need for words, which ‘...remain for the music a foreign extra of secondary value, as the effect of the tones is incomparably more powerful, more infallible, and more rapid than that of the words’.⁶² Words give merely the ‘stripped-off outer shell of things’, but music gives us the ‘innermost kernel’.⁶³ So in contrast to Hegel, for whom poetry is ultimately superior to music, Schopenhauer, despite his

⁵⁷ Langer, *Feeling and Form*, p. 27; Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 122

⁵⁸ Schopenhauer, *World as Will* vol. 1 (third book, section 52), p. 261

⁵⁹ Schopenhauer, *World as Will* vol. 1 (third book, section 52), p. 264

⁶⁰ Schopenhauer, *World as Will* vol. 1 (third book, section 52), p. 264

⁶¹ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, as cited in Schopenhauer, *World as Will* vol. 1 (third book, section 52), fn. p. 264

⁶² Schopenhauer, *World as Will* vol. 2 (supplement to third book), p. 448

⁶³ Schopenhauer, *World as Will* vol. 1 (third book, section 52), p. 263

expressivist aesthetics, is nonetheless fully in support of instrumental or absolute music as the most pure representation of the abstract emotion of Will.

Despite the prominent position given to music within his aesthetics, Schopenhauer's appreciation of the art form remains tinged by his pessimism – his view that perfect harmony remains impossible, both on a cosmic level and in terms of the relations between the musical tones, and thus that our release from willing can never be more than a temporary experience.⁶⁴ Indeed, it would even appear that Schopenhauer's views are built around a central paradox, for, given his emphasis on the ultimately pointless nature of Will, the 'wonderfully stirring' nature of music can in fact be nothing more than the copy of something that is in fact 'inherently chaotic, miserable, and repugnant'.⁶⁵

However, Schopenhauer's claims remain striking in their account of music as a virtually direct encounter with the innermost reality of existence.⁶⁶ His views were also to yield practical effect, significantly influencing the works of Wagner and, as a result, the more general development of Western classical music.⁶⁷ What is more, in presenting an understanding of music as autonomous and yet nonetheless reliant upon feeling – in detailing how music expresses emotions but through tonality and only in abstract form – Schopenhauer's aesthetics of music serves to further combine formalist and expressivist accounts of musical meaning, and thus to foreshadow developments which were to later occur in the philosophy of music.

(c) *Roger Scruton*

The most important contemporary philosopher who endorses expressivism is Roger Scruton. Rather than initially setting out a particular way of viewing the world, Scruton instead begins with an analysis of the mode of perception used when we engage with musical sound. Music, he argues, is a special kind of sound, determined not by its objective nature but rather by our decision as to what should define it; the experience of music, he wants to say, is one that relies fundamentally upon a process of imagination and metaphor: we perceive musical tones as existing in an imaginary space, as separate

⁶⁴ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 124

⁶⁵ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 125

⁶⁶ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 124

⁶⁷ Lippman, *Musical Aesthetics*, p. 233

entities from their sources of production, and hear them as metaphorically ‘moving’ in terms of pitch. The difference between that which is just sound and that which is *musical* sound, therefore, lies in the fact that music is ‘the intentional object of the musical perception’ – the result of our decision to perceive sounds as distinctly musical tones.⁶⁸

For Scruton, music is not an inherently representational art form, for although it may be employed in representational ways – as, for example, in the case of programme music – thoughts about a subject are never essential to its understanding as they may be in the case of the visual arts.⁶⁹ However, as he notes, even representational art forms may mean more than simply the narratives they convey, and thus works of art, including music, have an aesthetic meaning over and above any representational qualities. It is to this aesthetic meaning that the term ‘expression’ refers and, although expression theory alone may not be the sum content of aesthetic meaning, for Scruton, it nonetheless serves to explain the impact of art and its place of value within our lives. Indeed, citing Croce and Collingwood, for whom something is grasped in and through aesthetic experience which cannot be made known in any other way, he argues for expression as *the* aesthetic value, that is, as the only criterion of aesthetic success, for aesthetic experience itself is the very definition of the ‘recognition of expression’: expression is part of what is understood when a piece of music is understood as music.⁷⁰

But what does it mean to understand music? For Scruton, understanding music is not like understanding language, for although there may be certain similarities between the two, music does not involve the assignment of values by use of a semantic theory as is the case with language: music does not give us knowledge of facts or information. Rather, he argues, musical understanding is inseparable from the experience of music; it is part of the very definition of aesthetic perception – part of the intentional hearing of sounds as tones and thus of attending to them purely for their own sake. Such perception, he maintains, plays an important part in the formation of our world, for in ‘disinterested’ contemplation, achievable only by humans, we ‘[search] the world for a meaning that is more authoritative and more complete than the needs of animal life’.⁷¹ What is more, Scruton here elaborates on his earlier observation that our perception of

⁶⁸ Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 20

⁶⁹ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, pp. 130-134

⁷⁰ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 148 & pp. 168-169

⁷¹ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 226

music is metaphorical, now noting that it is not only the case that our experience of life informs our understand of music, but also that our experience of music contributes to our understanding of life – that we ‘understand the music through the concept of life, but also life through its embodiment in music’.⁷² Thus the importance of aesthetic experience is underlined, for ‘[art] *shows* the meaning of the world, by translating the world into appearance’.⁷³

In contrast to scholars such as Schenker, for whom musical form comprises an underlying structure, Scruton argues that it is our perception of tonality through an ‘imaginative act of intention’ which provides music’s central organising force. In particular, Scruton is critical of the way in which scientific accounts of musical organisation, like that of Schenker and also of Leonard Meyer, overlook the very thing which makes music interesting: its life. Given his insistence on our metaphorical understanding of music, for Scruton, our perception of musical order is one of *movement*, and not merely any type of movement, but a directed, intentional action – a *gesture*.⁷⁴ It is through words, gestures and actions, he argues, that we understand the human world, and it is in art, and most of all in music, that these achieve self-sufficiency, so that the experience of movement as musical form is the ‘completion of human gesture in the sphere of total freedom’.⁷⁵ Thus, whereas for some, music has no meaning other than its form, through explaining musical structure in terms of metaphorical perception, that is, in relation to human life and to gesture, Scruton’s theory of form also points towards a theory of content and, what is more, even suggests that it is in music’s expressive power that its true meaning and value are to be found.⁷⁶

Taking emotion as a paradigm case of expression (for it is in the expression of an emotion, he argues, that the emotion itself comes to be created) Scruton’s theory of content has as its centre the thesis that ‘art provides us with a means not merely to project our emotions outwards, but also to encounter ourselves *in* them’.⁷⁷ Now his

⁷² Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 235. Here Scruton would appear to be drawing on Hegel’s notion of music as ‘felt life’.

⁷³ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 236

⁷⁴ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, pp. 222-224. Similarities may here be seen with the work of Schopenhauer.

⁷⁵ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 340

⁷⁶ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 342

⁷⁷ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 348. Here Scruton follows the Hegelian idea of the expression of emotion as its creation. For Scruton, this notion has the potential to explain the value of art and to give the grounds for a fully cognitive theory of aesthetic interest. However, as he points out, it has yet to be proven that artistic expression is truly the realisation of emotion. Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 152

contention here is that we can understand expression only if we can understand our response to it, and that this response is one of sympathy ‘awakened by the presentation of another life’.⁷⁸ This sympathy, he argues, is not simply a matter of feeling but also comes to be caught up in action and gesture – in the very things which constitute our understanding of music. Our whole being is absorbed by the movement of music; it is something that we join, such that ‘our whole body is absorbed by the movement of music...compelled by incipient gestures of imitation. The object of this imitation is life – life in the imagined form of music’.⁷⁹ What is more, and as Plato realised in his ethical approach to music’s affects, it is through the acting out of sympathies thus inspired that our emotions come to be educated, but also corrupted, and so, as Scruton points out, this is one reason why art matters.⁸⁰

For Scruton, the response of the listener to the aesthetic perception of sound thus forms a kind of dancing: a ‘sublimated desire to ‘move with’ music, and so to focus on its moving forms’.⁸¹ Therefore, he concludes, the hearing of meaning is inseparable from aesthetic experience, for musical expression is integral to what it is to experience music. Here Scruton’s debt to Schopenhauer, for whom the expressivity of music is a direct result of its formal nature, becomes apparent. What is more, for Scruton, such a conclusion also serves to explain how formalists can hear music as expressive of a musical content and yet at the same time deny that this is what they hear, maintaining that musical value is to be found in form alone.⁸² Returning to the ideas of Hanslick and his definition of our experience of music as *tönend-bewegte Formen* (‘tonally moving forms’), Scruton here argues that such an account in fact does not lead to an entirely formalistic understanding of musical meaning but rather is fundamentally reliant upon metaphorical perception, for the very understanding of musical movement is the result of an imaginative act of intention. Thus, he maintains, conceptions of musical formalism and expressivism are ultimately destined not to diverge but rather to tend

⁷⁸ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 354

⁷⁹ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 356

⁸⁰ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 355. Other notable attempts to account for music’s emotional resonances include Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1956), Malcolm Budd, *Music and the Emotions: The Philosophical Theories* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985) and Stephen Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁸¹ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 357

⁸² Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 343

towards each other, for our perception of form is necessarily metaphorical, whilst that which we perceive as metaphorical is, in the end, musical form.⁸³

Why, then, he asks, is it so difficult to produce descriptions of our experience of musical expressivity? Music remains ‘ineffable’: there exists ‘something that words cannot capture, but which must nevertheless be heard and grasped in our deeper experience of meaning’.⁸⁴ For Scruton, the theory of *Einfühlung* is of interest here. Although, as he discusses, the original theory drew a distinction between objective and subjective forms of knowledge, he argues that, given the inseparability of the mind from its outer manifestation, the difference in fact lies not between the awareness of ‘subjective’ facts and their outer expression but rather between two separate aspects of perception. In life, we experience the difference between first- and third-person perspectives on the same objective facts; in the ineffability of musical expression, we experience ‘a special case of the ineffability of first-person awareness – the impossibility of translating ‘what it is like’ into a description’.⁸⁵ As Scruton puts it:

Understanding music involves the active creation of an intentional world, in which sounds are transfigured into tones – into metaphorical movements in a metaphorical space. At a certain point, the listener has the experience of a first-person perspective on a life that is no one’s. This ‘recognition of expression’ is simply a continuation of the imaginative activity that is involved in understanding music: the activity of hearing sounds as figurative life, so that ‘you are the music while the music lasts’. That, in short, is why we should see expression as central to the meaning of music.⁸⁶

Therefore, we are presented with a modern account of the philosophy of music which demonstrates the possibility, and indeed even the necessity, of engaging with music in terms of its qualities of expressivity. What is more, Scruton argues that not only do musical form and content finally achieve inseparability in our understanding of musical meaning, but that in talking about meaning we are also faced with questions of *value*, and thus our judgements of appearance have implications which run deeper than those

⁸³ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, pp. 353-354

⁸⁴ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 360

⁸⁵ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 364. Here the influence of Schopenhauer is once again of prominence, for his work also shows the first-person perspective as central to the experience of music.

⁸⁶ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 364

of mere personal preference or subjective taste. Aesthetic values, he maintains, are intrinsic values, for they are the result of disinterested aesthetic contemplation from which there stands to be gained nothing except the experience itself, but, at the same time, they matter to us in a way that goes beyond appearances alone. They are ‘part of the attempt to create a place for ourselves in the world, and to situate our selves among our fellows’; they are what mark us out as human, that is, as able to contemplate our surroundings and identify some aspects as preferable to others.⁸⁷

An important step in the considering of aesthetic value, argues Scruton, is that of analysis – of the bridging of the gap between the sounds we hear and the aesthetic experience which results.⁸⁸ Analysis, he maintains, tells us how we should attend to a piece of music in order to appreciate it fully: it makes explicit the formally implicit and leads us to a level of understanding which could not otherwise be obtained.⁸⁹ Further, analysis is also an act of synthesis – a creating of the intentional object of musical perception through an awareness of the elements which comprise this experience – for, in describing the musical surface, we are also rearranging it so that the musical object itself comes to be constructed through the act of aesthetic attention.⁹⁰ However, as Scruton points out, music nonetheless remains an irreducible metaphor, and so cannot ultimately be reduced to a description of its parts; when too much emphasis is placed on analysis, it is merely sound and not *music* that becomes the object of concern.⁹¹ Given the potentially limitless bounds of aesthetic interest, the process of analysis might be approached in a variety of differing and equally valid ways, and it then falls to the task of *critical* reflection to decide which of these might be considered as of aesthetic value.⁹² The process of analysis thus forms an integral part of both our aesthetic experience of music and our considerations of musical value, and for this reason, in the following chapters, analyses of Shostakovich’s music will form the substance of my discussion.

But what does it mean to speak of aesthetics as part of human life? Why do aesthetic values matter, and what is at stake in the rest of our lives as a result of our judgements of taste? In Plato, Scruton recalls, taste in music was seen as a reflection of character,

⁸⁷ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 370

⁸⁸ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 396

⁸⁹ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 313

⁹⁰ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 427

⁹¹ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, pp. 427-428

⁹² Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 396

with the types of music an individual favoured revealing their attitudes and values in wider life. By the eighteenth century, this had developed into the belief in taste as an expression of virtue, thus meaning that aesthetic choices affected the way in which a person came to be perceived in a moral sense. So, concludes Scruton, aesthetic judgement is ‘as fully and immediately an expression of character as our taste in friends or jokes’, and thus the education of taste becomes a matter of primary importance, both in terms of the individual and society as a whole – an extraordinary return to Plato!⁹³ Once again, then, questions of musical criticism are raised – of the aspects of music which are selected as of value and importance and the process by which this selection takes place. In order to consider this further, I shall now explore an area of musical study which has become of increasing importance over the last few decades – that of the relationship between music and its social and cultural context.

II. Music and Context

Throughout the nineteenth century, as I have shown, the subject of absolute music took central place within formalist and, to an extent, expressivist discussions of musical aesthetics. By the twentieth century, however, some philosophers were challenging assumptions as to the autonomous and self-contained nature of musical experience, instead placing emphasis on music as a fundamentally social and cultural activity. In contrast to earlier ideas whereby there existed a ‘fixed, objective essence or inner core of musical practices’ without extra-musical reference or association, music now came to be understood as a product of its context, grounded firmly within an historical framework.⁹⁴ Such an understanding of music served to situate it within power struggle, ideology and propaganda, insisting on music as both reflection of and contributor to social change and development, and conceiving of it as part of the continual process of cultural creation and re-creation. Therefore, whilst the belief in a pure, idealised musical realm comes to be challenged, at the same time, and as was realised as far back as Plato, music is understood in such a way that it becomes genuinely relevant to, and powerful

⁹³ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 386

⁹⁴ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, pp. 304-305. For a further discussion of the relationship between musical aesthetics and the sociology of music see Lippman, *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics*, pp. 470-471

within, the developments of both the individual human character and the communal human life.⁹⁵

(a) *Theodor Adorno*

The most influential account of the interaction between music and society is that of Theodor Adorno. Following Hegel, Adorno argued that human consciousness is an historical process, fundamentally shaped by culture and society – a notion which, he maintains, is deeply problematic as a result of the fact that most people remain largely unaware of it, thus allowing themselves to become vulnerable to subliminal socio-political influences. In a specifically capitalist society, he argues, this influence takes the form of the translation of relationships between people into relationships between objects, so that even ideas become concrete and objectified, no longer appearing as part of a social and historical context but rather perceived as inevitable, universal and necessary. People are thus drawn into a ‘false consciousness’ whereby they no longer challenge the way in which society is run – a situation perpetuated by those in power, whose positions of authority are dependent on the continuing unquestioning submission of those whom they control. For Adorno, the task of the sociologist is the breaking down of this false consciousness so that capitalist functioning might be revealed as it really is. Arguing that capitalism has now advanced beyond the point at which it might be revolutionised to Socialism, as had been the aim of Marx, Adorno instead points to the importance of critical theory in raising awareness and thus as instrumental to the creation of a new consciousness.⁹⁶

For Adorno, music, too, is influenced by capitalism and as such has lost its ability to function critically within society. Following György Lukács’ application of Marxist economic and political principles to culture, according to which capitalism has led to the reification of cultural artefacts and practices into commodities that can be exchanged and consumed, Adorno argues that much contemporary music is now used by the culture industry as a tool of manipulation. ‘Popular’ or ‘light’ music, he maintains, is primitive and lacking in originality thus making it banal and vulgar, designed only for the casual entertainment of the listener and the economic interest of the music industry

⁹⁵ Susan McClary, ‘Narrative Agendas in ‘Absolute Music’’, in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. by Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley & Los Angeles, US & London, UK: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 326-348 (p. 344)

⁹⁶ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 309

(echoing, once again, Plato's *Republic*). Rather than providing a meaningful experience, such music exists only to create a demand which production can then claim to fulfil.⁹⁷ Even 'serious' contemporary music, he argues, is geared towards the same effortless consumption, such as, for example, the works of Stravinsky, which he perceives as an attempt to return to styles of the past which are then presented as timeless and objective, thus reinforcing the capitalist ideology that nothing can be other than the way it is.⁹⁸

It is not only musical works that have been damaged by the advances of capitalism; for Adorno, listening, too, has regressed so that, as a society, we are no longer capable of hearing music critically but only as mere entertainment. This is not simply a change in taste, but rather that our choices regarding that to which we decide to listen are no longer the result of personal interest but rather have become dependent on the influence of the culture industry, and thus are reduced to the consumption of standardised goods. People have become infatuated with the fame of composers, performances and pieces so that their response to hearing music bears no relation to the actual music they have heard but rather, in line Marx's doctrine of commodity fetishism, the products of labour come to be valued only in consumption and exchange and not in themselves.⁹⁹ As a result, argues Adorno, people no longer properly understand music, and what is worse, they fail to recognise that they do not understand. Music's role has become that of providing mindless, mind-numbing distraction, preventing people from serious reflection about the world and reassuring them that 'since this world provides such an abundance of enjoyable things it must be in good shape'.¹⁰⁰ Thus, he concludes, we no longer hear music in a critical way, but rather as yet another form of ideology which is unquestioningly consumed.¹⁰¹

Hope, however, is not entirely lost. For Adorno, the critical role of the composer is maintained: he or she need not always mindlessly follow the dictation of the state but rather has the potential to act independently and create music which subverts established orders. Such music, which Adorno terms 'modern', is typified by the works of avant-

⁹⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. by E. B. Ashton (New York: The Seabury Press, 1962), pp. 21-38

⁹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, 'On the Social Situation of Music', in *Essays on Music: Theodor Adorno*, ed. by Richard Leppert, trans. by Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 391-436

⁹⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, 'On the Fetish-Character of Music and the Regression of Listening', in Leppert, ed., *Essays on Music*, pp. 288-317 (pp. 288-317)

¹⁰⁰ Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, p. 42

¹⁰¹ Adorno, 'On the Fetish-Character of Music', p. 273

garde composer Arnold Schoenberg, whose adoption of the twelve-tone idiom was for Adorno the paradigm of the refusal to submit to the laws of consumption. Through his compositions, Adorno maintains, Schoenberg expresses the threat of social alienation through its own forms and structures so that his music, ‘without consciousness of its social location or out of indifference towards it, presents and crystallizes its problems...in a merely immanent manner’, and thus achieves severance from capitalist dictates whilst at the same time opening up to its audience the renewed possibility of critical reflection.¹⁰²

The problem with this argument is that if the influence of society is as great as he maintains, how can it ever escape hegemony to critique it? On the one hand, music must be freed from its cultural constraints in order to regain its critical potential; on the other, music is essentially a product of its social and historical context.¹⁰³ His argument as to the regressive nature of listening would seem to imply that, even if some degree of autonomy could be achieved, music’s message is nonetheless rendered unintelligible as a result of his assertion that those within modern society have lost the ability to hear what serious music is actually saying.¹⁰⁴ So perhaps Adorno is being deliberately paradoxical here, insisting that we need to register both music’s social significance and at the same time its bondage to social forces. This paradox, according to him, characterises all music at all times, though the hegemony of capitalism intensifies the difficulty of hearing music. In particular, his paradox seeks to put the lid on absolute music.¹⁰⁵

The virtue of his argument remains that, in recognising that music is ‘a socially and historically situated phenomenon whose very materials change through time’ and that ‘no era can rest on the insights, achievements, and values of another’,¹⁰⁶ difference is

¹⁰² Adorno, ‘On the Social Situation of Music’, p. 132. Scruton is critical of this idea that new forms of music can be created by composers at will, believing it to be based on a faulty understanding of musical form. He argues that ‘[n]ew forms in music cannot be created by fiat or convention. They must grow from a new musical gesture, which means a new style – a new *way of hearing tones, and their organization*’. Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 341

¹⁰³ Adorno, ‘On the Social Situation of Music’. As music is a product of its social and culture context, for Adorno, there can be no distinction between its musical and social values.

¹⁰⁴ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 333

¹⁰⁵ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives on Music*, p. 329. Here it should be noted that Adorno focuses on music’s ideological function and not music’s empirically social function. The only social function he is interested in is music’s capacity to advance critical awareness and this requires musical autonomy which is freedom from functional constraint.

¹⁰⁶ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 329

affirmed. Adorno challenges those who seek a single, unchanging ideal, a musical ‘absolute’.¹⁰⁷

Roger Scruton challenges Adorno’s account of false consciousness, finding the problem rather in the decline of the more cultured tastes of the elite, together with the rise of the ‘democratic man’ who believes in his entitlement to his own tastes.¹⁰⁸ ‘[T]he transformation of popular music’, he writes,

was not a bourgeois phenomenon at all, and had less to do with the triumph of capitalism than with the triumph of democracy. Nor does it illustrate the need for an ‘ideological’ music with which to mollify the exploited masses. The masses themselves produced this music...[and] it is precisely because people have been freed from ‘domination’ – that is, from a society constrained from above – that this mass culture of which Adorno complains is here to stay... It is the *collapse* of the bourgeois culture that has brought about the situation that Adorno deplures...¹⁰⁹

Scruton is sceptical of Adorno’s appeal to the critical power of composers such as Schoenberg. He doubts that the resources of tonality have been exhausted. Even if that were the case, he argues, ‘it seems to me, it cannot justify the belief that there is some other language available to the composer than the language of tonality’, for when we hear atonal music we in fact perceive it only in relation to the tonality which it seeks to subvert, thus explaining why we find atonal music difficult to comprehend.¹¹⁰ What is more, he maintains, modern music cannot be forced on people with the requirement that they enjoy it, but rather audiences decide for themselves which music they deem to be enjoyable and thus successful – an argument which would appear to explain the general lack of enthusiasm for the music of Schoenberg, which remains aesthetically inaccessible to most.¹¹¹ Thus for Scruton, avant-gardism can never be the answer to music’s regeneration; instead, this is to be achieved not through the abandonment of the

¹⁰⁷ Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives*, p. 307

¹⁰⁸ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 470

¹⁰⁹ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, pp. 469-470

¹¹⁰ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 308 & p. 234. Here Scruton is making a distinction between a truly musical rather than simply intellectual understanding of music.

¹¹¹ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 451

tonal system but rather through its rediscovery, as is the case with Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*, in which 'tonality triumphs, and, in its triumph, is also transformed'.¹¹²

(b) *Susan McClary*

The New Musicology movement of the 1980s took up Adorno's insistence on taking social context seriously. Here attention turned not primarily towards the potential (or lack thereof) for the development of music as a critical discipline within modern society, but rather to the rediscovery of music from past eras. When viewed through the lens of sociological critique, it has been argued, such music comes to be understood not simply as entertaining or amusing patterns of sound, but rather as a covert commentary on human life as lived during its period of composition.

Susan McClary, for example, has argued that music fundamentally exists as a 'human, socially grounded, socially alterable construct', which draws upon 'socially invested' norms and semiotic conventions.¹¹³ This is shown by the development of different musical styles over time, such as the seventeenth century solo genres of the sonata and cantata, which serve to address the tensions evident between society and the individual at the time, and, by contrast, the polyphony of the preceding century, which demonstrates an 'interest in integrating the best of both those worlds into one in which social harmony and individual expression are mutually compatible'.¹¹⁴ Even the Western tonal system itself, argues McClary, is an example of music's social embeddedness, for having developed, and later declined, in relation to the interests of the European bourgeoisie, such tonality is essentially teleological in nature, causing the

¹¹² Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 474. However, it might nonetheless be argued that that it is this very difficulty in comprehension which characterises the intent of atonal music – that such music consists in the fact that we hear it as a disruption of tonality. To understand atonality as Scruton does, as a failed attempt to provide a logical alternative to the tonal system, is to misinterpret its nature and intent. Tonality and atonality, after all, remain closely related as two sides of the same coin: dissonance is never far removed from consonance. Informal discussion with Marion Wood, Director of Music at the University of Exeter, Spring 2010. What is more, as we discovered in the previous chapter, and as Scruton himself goes to some lengths to explain, the Western tonal system itself is more complex in its development than a simple black and white dichotomy between tonality and atonality, but rather comprises various mathematical anomalies which the system of equal temperament has sought to even out. Therefore, whilst Adorno's rejection of the tonal system might be viewed by some as an unnecessary and perhaps even unmusical move, it remains the case that atonality might have more to offer than the criticisms of Scruton would wish to allow. Here the distinction made by Andy Hamilton between 'music' (that which is based on the traditional Western tonal system) and 'sound art' (more atonal, abstract conceptions of music) might be of interest. Hamilton, *Aesthetics & Music*, chapter 2

¹¹³ Susan McClary, 'The Blasphemy of Talking Politics during Bach Year', in *Music & Society: The Politics and Composition, Performance and Reception* ed. by Richard Leppert & Susan McClary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 13-62 (p. 15)

¹¹⁴ McClary, 'Blasphemy', pp. 23-24

listener to anticipate and ultimately experience a goal which is known from the outset but which can become meaningful only through delayed gratification.¹¹⁵ Although such a process might appear logical and rational, it in fact articulates ‘[t]he social values...held most dear by the middle class: beliefs in progress, in expansion, in the ability to attain ultimate goals through rational striving, in the ingenuity of the individual strategist operating both within and in defiance of the norm’.¹¹⁶

Against these conventions are set the particular intentions of the individual composer, who can choose to either submit to or react against the established order of the time. Therefore it is only through considering both of these aspects together that an accurate appreciation of the intentions of the composer can be gained. As McClary puts it: ‘...no composition can be reduced simply to the narrative conventions that informed it... [T]he specific details of any given piece are intelligible only insofar as they engage dialectically with those conventions.’¹¹⁷ For example, J. S. Bach, in the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto, subverts the traditional order of the concerto grosso by giving the harpsichord continuo the role of a soloist, thus identifying with an ideology that wants to encourage freedom of expression whilst still maintaining social harmony: it speaks of ‘...the exhilaration as well as the risks of upward mobility, the simultaneous desire for and resistance of concession to social harmony’.¹¹⁸ Elsewhere, McClary discusses Brahms’ Third Symphony, and argues that his presentation of ‘tonality and sonata in a state of narrative crisis’ reveals something of the incompatibility of individual will and social contract, thus questioning the Enlightenment assumptions of his time.¹¹⁹

For McClary, the idea of ‘absolute’ music is nothing more than an illusion – the presentation of ‘one’s own ideology as pure, non-social order’.¹²⁰ Reactions to this illusion, she maintains, are dependent upon attitudes towards dominant culture at the time. Music of the eighteenth century, for example, which was formed in line with the values of the newly created middle class, appears as ‘harmonious, perfect, organic,

¹¹⁵ McClary, ‘Narrative Agendas in ‘Absolute Music’’, p. 330

¹¹⁶ McClary, ‘Blasphemy’, p. 22. For a more detailed discussion of tonality in relation to society, see Richard Norton, *Tonality in Western Culture* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1984).

¹¹⁷ McClary, ‘Narrative Agendas in ‘Absolute Music’’, p. 334

¹¹⁸ McClary, ‘Blasphemy’, p. 41

¹¹⁹ McClary, ‘Narrative Agendas in ‘Absolute Music’’, p. 343

¹²⁰ McClary, ‘Blasphemy’, p. 55. Indeed, as McClary points out, Nietzsche, who originally coined the term ‘absolute music’, had intended it as a taunt, so it is somewhat ironic that it was then adopted by those he meant to parody. McClary, ‘Narrative Agendas in ‘Absolute Music’’, p. 331

unified, formally balanced, capable of absorbing and resolving all tensions'. Here the illusion of the absolute is allowed free-reign. In contrast, the 'fragmented structures' and 'illegitimate dissonances' of seventeenth century music reflect the struggle of the new bourgeoisie against the prevailing norms of both the church and the aristocracy, and thus acceptance of the absolute ideal is less forthcoming.¹²¹ Either way, she argues, the myth of the absolute needs to be dispelled, not simply because it is untrue, but because it prevents us from properly understanding music as it was intended, instead reducing it to the 'literal, note-perfect, reassuring but inert renditions of virtually all musics, whether originally affirmative or oppositional' that have come to be commonplace today.¹²² Music's universality, she argues, has been achieved only at the expense of its specific social meaning, so that 'no compositional choice can *mean* anything, except by virtue as a kind of closet metaphysics: as evidence of something beyond, which is the source of all perfection'.¹²³ Thus, she concludes, the reinterpretation of music becomes not only an artistic but also a *political* act – a rediscovery of how it might genuinely speak of and to human life.¹²⁴

Not everyone is convinced of the merit of sociological interpretations of music such as these offered by McClary. Roger Scruton argues that, although it is indeed the case that music bears relevance to the context of its creation, such claims about the implicit sociological commentaries found within even apparently absolute music are in fact not new, but rather are simply a re-presentation of the old debate about musical meaning. In response to McClary's analysis of Bizet's *Carmen*, he writes:

It is undeniable that the music projects a particular conception of Carmen, using compelling folk-rhythms and chromatic melodies...in order to emphasize her threatening quality. And the threat is real, working its way into the soul of José and slowly undermining it... But what follows? When it comes to describing the meaning of Bizet's work, McClary does exactly what any other critic would do: she shows how the drama is conveyed through the music...The sociological theory is dropped from the agenda...¹²⁵

¹²¹ McClary, 'Blasphemy', pp. 18-19. However, as McClary points out, even in such apparently ordered music, tension and deviation are still apparent, and composers asserted their own perspectives on and responses to the social situations of the time. McClary, 'Blasphemy', p. 19

¹²² McClary, 'Blasphemy', p. 18

¹²³ McClary, 'Blasphemy', pp. 55-56

¹²⁴ McClary, 'Narrative Agendas in 'Absolute Music'', p. 344

¹²⁵ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, pp. 431-432

Such a reading makes McClary's views less controversial and indeed more akin to Scruton's own theory of musical expressivity. However, perhaps it remains the case that the real value and contribution of McClary's sociology of music lies in the fact that that is precisely what it is – explicitly a *sociology*, which thus serves to bring to the forefront of our attention those aspects of musical interpretation which otherwise might pass unnoticed or be taken for granted within the broader appreciation of the meaning of music. McClary insists on interpreting music in relation to its wider context and argues that we need to do this if we are to understand it properly.

Scruton challenges the importance of context to understanding music. Accepting the contention that everything cultural is at some level a social construct, the question is, what is constructed unintentionally and what is deliberately created? Although art might in some cases constitute ideology, he argues, it is also always *more than* ideology: 'A work of art may express and endorse the social conditions which gave rise to it; but it may also question them. And if it is a great work of art, it will transcend them entirely, to see into the human heart'.¹²⁶ Here Scruton cites Kierkegaard's study of Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, which points to how Mozart's music both demonstrates for us the seductive nature of the title character and yet also remains one step removed so that we can critique this nature from afar. Music, argues Scruton, does not sanctify a culture, but 'turns the moral force of music upon human experience, and show this experience as it is lived'.¹²⁷ Although only those from a certain cultural background might appreciate Mozart's musical message, the message itself remains universal. Indeed, it even remains the case that a culture might be critiqued from within, such as is the case with Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*, which, he suggests, constitutes 'an attempt to dramatize through music, the very crisis that has put music in question'.¹²⁸

These critiques of Scruton regarding sociological theories of musical meaning ultimately lead him to a theory of the ideological significance of art which is diametrically opposed to the ideas we have explored so far. Far from seeking to expose the ideologies implicit in works of art, Scruton instead proposes that such ideologies might in fact be of the *least* importance within the aesthetic experience. Take the masses of Palestrina, he suggests. These are important not, as some have suggested, because

¹²⁶ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 430

¹²⁷ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 431

¹²⁸ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 431

they absolutise the powers of the Counter Reformation, but rather because they have at their centre a profound human experience – an experience of ‘serene belief in the midst of tumultuous change, of timeless stasis in the stream of time’ which enables ‘critical meditation on the possibilities of emotion which is the true business of art’.¹²⁹ Here Scruton would even appear to be seeking to *justify* the presence of ideology in art: ‘And if the music of Palestrina is ideology, then what is wrong with ideology? Is this music not the stuff of human life, and as good a justification as any that might be offered for those ‘power-relations’ which engendered the genius of Palestrina?’¹³⁰

For Scruton, then, the politicised forms of criticism espoused by Adorno and the New Musicologists might be ultimately rendered unnecessary if we do analysis properly. Pointing to the fact that ideological analysis tends to employ ambiguous terms such as ‘expression’ and ‘meaning’ which are then used in purely descriptive ways, Scruton argues that such criticism subsequently fails to critique, but rather is reduced to a set of statements supported by sociological theory. On the contrary, he maintains, if we are to use analysis in our search for meaning, then it should seek to offer genuine critical argument, ‘describing the shape and structure of melodies, harmonies and rhythms, and the musical movement that is projected through them’.¹³¹ Here Scruton cites Christopher Ballantine’s analysis of Beethoven, which seeks to distinguish the composer’s music from the styles of his contemporaries, and which argues that this music expresses aesthetically the spirit of the French Revolution. Such analysis, he argues, ‘is not a piece of Marxist sociology, even if it is derived from the Marxian caricature of history. It is a piece of criticism, inviting us to hear the revolutionary spirit in Beethoven’s music, and to judge accordingly’.¹³²

In Scruton’s appraisal of music’s cultural connections, then, it is not denied that music is socially and politically embedded, but rather he argues for a return to a prioritisation of music *as music* – for an understanding of music primarily in terms of its musical expressivity, and only secondly in terms of its social context. What is interesting here, however, is that many points within Scruton’s argument would appear to be little-modified adaptations of ideas which are in fact held by the New Musicology scholars: that music might express and endorse but also question social conditions is of key

¹²⁹ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 431

¹³⁰ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 431

¹³¹ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 433

¹³² Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 433

importance within McClary's work, whilst the notion that great art might transcend social conditions is not far removed from that which Adorno claims of the music of Schoenberg.

(c) *Heidi Epstein*

A feminist-theological gloss on this debate is given by Heidi Epstein who argues that many traditional theologies of music are in fact based on hidden gender assumptions which have, until now, passed largely unacknowledged and uncritiqued. Her aim, therefore, is twofold: to expose these underlying stereotypes, and then to suggest how we might respond theologically to a properly feminist understanding of music.

Epstein begins by examining the origins of thought about music as found in the Platonic-Pythagorean tradition and in particular focuses on their metaphysical basis. Here she highlights the use of music as symbol, where musical forms are perceived to 'participate in the transcendent reality to which they point' and thus become tied to a particular – and now outdated – worldview.¹³³ Epstein also describes how, in performance at this time, text was prioritised over and above music – a preference which, she argues, demonstrates a subliminal attempt to avoid the perceived dangers of music's sensuality and thus to overshadow its innate gendered and erotic overtones.¹³⁴ Thus, she concludes, the very foundations of the philosophy of music are at best ambivalent about music's expressive qualities – a response which she interprets as implicitly gendered in nature and which, she argues, had led to the perpetuation throughout history of masculine dominance and the silencing of music's more seductive, feminine characteristics.¹³⁵

The theologies of music of Augustine and Boethius, she argues, are a case in point, with their appeal to order rather than expression warning of the dangers of music's emotive qualities and of the power of music to distract and misguide. 'Music was indeed chaste and modest when it was performed on simpler instruments', writes Boethius, '[b]ut since it has been squandered in various promiscuous ways, it has lost its measure of dignity and virtue; and, having almost fallen into a state of disgrace, it preserves nothing

¹³³ Heidi Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg: A Feminist Theology of Music* (New York, US & London, UK: Continuum, 2004), p. 12

¹³⁴ Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, pp. 15-16

¹³⁵ Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, pp. 22-26

of its ancient splendor'.¹³⁶ In accounts such as this, then, Epstein discerns an implicit identifying of music's 'body' – its expressive character beyond that of the simply numerical – with that of 'Woman', both of which then come to be understood as something inferior and in need of control.¹³⁷ Therefore, she claims, despite their apparent concern with the purely transcendental, these theologies do in fact identify music as essentially bodily-based, but seek to suppress rather than celebrate this nature: they show metaphorically 'the channelling and arousing of human desire' and the resulting need for 'music's erotic powers...to be contained, sterilised, and if nothing else, redirected towards God'.¹³⁸

From here, Epstein charts the development of gendered ideas about music up to the twentieth century. In the writings of the early church fathers including Cyprian, John Chrysostom and Clement she identifies the emergence of an 'eroticised, musical dichotomy between spirit and flesh', in which 'pure' music, such as *a capella* vocal singing, is prioritised above the freer, instrumental music of the pagan tradition.¹³⁹ Throughout the Reformation, this condemnation of 'fleshly' music in favour of more spiritual tones is continued, demonstrated by Calvin's 'scorn [of] music's voluptuousness' and in Luther's command to 'shun perverted minds who prostitute this lovely gift of nature and of art with their erotic rantings'.¹⁴⁰ In the modern era, the notion of music as Woman comes to be perpetuated first in the works of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, both of whom depict music as 'emasculating seductress', and later in the twentieth century ideas of, amongst others, Adorno, for whom jazz presents a symbolic threat to male virility.¹⁴¹ In all of these accounts, Epstein points to the resultant socio-cultural side effects which she perceives as manifest in the repression of women in music-making, and in the way that the notion of keeping women in place becomes analogous to that of keeping music in place – as she puts it, 'subservient (to a text) and virtuously pure (free from the stain of dissonance)'.¹⁴²

In contemporary theologies of music, she argues, the idea of music as symbol for number, harmony and order is still unquestioningly accepted: music is decontextualised

¹³⁶ Boetheius, as cited in Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, p. 21

¹³⁷ Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, pp. 18-24

¹³⁸ Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, p. 26

¹³⁹ Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, p. 36

¹⁴⁰ Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, p. 37

¹⁴¹ Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, pp. 42-52. However, as Epstein points out, it has been argued that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in fact subvert rather than reinforce gender stereotypes.

¹⁴² Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, p. 57

and universalised rather than properly understood in relation to context, and its gendered subtext once again passes uncritiqued. As evidence for her argument, Epstein points to the works of many theologians, including Karl Barth and Jeremy Begbie, whom we discussed in the preceding chapter. In Barth, for whom the music of Mozart demonstrates the balance and order of creation, Epstein identifies a presentation of the composer as an idealised Christ figure – an ‘omniscient possessor and revealer of invisible truths’, in whom is to be found the ‘ultimate christic trait’ of freedom through submission, and who thus demonstrates both the perpetuation of a transcendentalised ideal as well as a masculinised sub-text.¹⁴³ The works of Begbie, on the other hand, which understand music as illustrating for us various aspects of theology, fail, she argues, to take music seriously as a cultural document, for in their appeal often to general rather than particular musical examples they do not recognise the need to interpret each musical work on an individual basis, that is, in relation to its specific social and political context.¹⁴⁴

The second part of Epstein’s work seeks to define an alternative, feminist, theology of music, in which music is ‘reframe[d]... as a technique of the self’ and explicitly understood as ‘the metaphor for sexual relations that it has always been’.¹⁴⁵ Reacting to the symbolism that she has identified as inherent within theologies of music thus far, she suggests instead the adopting of a metaphorical theology, such as that of Sally McFague, in which contrast and difference come to be properly acknowledged, and in which the inadequacy and impropriety of all language for God is emphasised. She also aims to draw upon Kathleen Sands’ ‘tragic sensibility’ – the notion that moral judgement has been stretched beyond conventional limits and thus can no longer fit within traditional metaphysical grounds. For Epstein, this idea is of central importance to the theology of music, as it does not demand an acceptance of music as ‘concrete evidence of God’s Truth, Beauty and Goodness...with its prerequisite of final harmonic resolutions... [which] defend an unequivocal good by erasing loss and negation’, but rather allows for a grappling with ‘the theological meanings of music’s nagging dissonances’.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, pp. 71-74

¹⁴⁴ Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, pp. 84-87. It is interesting here to note that Begbie is himself keen to emphasise music as bodily, but Epstein makes no reference to this fact in her critique of his work.

¹⁴⁵ Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, p. 58 & p. 119

¹⁴⁶ Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, p. 3

Epstein initially turns her attention to the recovering of a previously overlooked theological tradition which properly understands music's emotive significance, and here she focuses on the work of Hildegard of Bingen. Arguing that Hildegard perceives music as a bodily process, and thus, in contrast to Plato, musical practice as informing theoretical statements, Epstein argues that Hildegard assumes human beings to be inherently musical.¹⁴⁷ Through her fusing of Word and flesh, she maintains, Hildegard proposes a theology of music which is *incarnational* rather than mathematical or metaphysical. Music becomes not just a way of spreading the Gospel but rather an aspect of Christ's very nature: Christ is the 'incarnate song of God', 'God's-music-made-flesh'.¹⁴⁸ Further, Epstein also draws upon Bruce Wood Holsinger's reading of Hildegard's theology of music, which identifies homoerotic themes throughout her work and argues for 'a fundamental affinity between female spiritual devotion and female sexuality'.¹⁴⁹ Although even Epstein is prepared to admit that this might be pushing the boundaries of interpretative licence a little too far, she nevertheless argues that such a view serves to open up Hildegard's writings beyond what she perceives as the overly-spiritualised accounts that have come to be widely accepted, thus providing, as she puts it, 'seeds for a contemporary theology of music that enunciates music as an embodied practice and as an engagement of human sexuality'.¹⁵⁰

Secondly, Epstein attempts to develop a specifically feminist approach to the theology of music, and in so doing turns to the musical practices of two sets of women, thus reinforcing her thesis that theological reflection on music must be rooted in performance not theory. Investigating new interpretations of the previously overlooked musical practices of the nuns of Santa Cristina in early seventeenth-century Bologna, Epstein points to how their compositions and performances went against the edicts of the time, particularly in their use of banned musical dissonances and their singing of sacred texts set to Monteverdi's 'scandalous' madrigal tunes.¹⁵¹ In such music, she argues, we might discern the presence of an alternative, illicit musical language within the Church which serves to emphasise a new dimension of music's theological significance – that of music as 'redemptively transgressive, fleshly *imitatio*'.¹⁵² Further, Epstein also looks to recent compositional developments in the music of African women who are the descendents of

¹⁴⁷ Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, p. 122

¹⁴⁸ Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, p. 126

¹⁴⁹ Bruce Wood Holsinger, as cited in Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, p. 129

¹⁵⁰ Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, p. 130

¹⁵¹ Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, pp. 141-145

¹⁵² Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, p. 145

slaves and who are thus writing contemporary music out of that background. Focusing, amongst others, on the musical contributions of Diamanda Galas, Epstein argues that here musical *imitatio* becomes dissonant, disrupted and tortured, so that ideas of harmonic resolution are replaced with the notion of music as ‘suffering love’ – a development which, she concludes, stands in contrast to earlier theologies of music in which the idea of love is always sacrificed before the idea of harmony.¹⁵³

Therefore Epstein presents a theology of music in which music is understood primarily as performed and in particular as bodily, sensual and sexual, and in which music’s relationship to theology is understood in equally bodily – that is, incarnational – terms. In her emphasis on music as performed, Epstein contributes to an area of theological reflection on the art form which has as yet remained largely untapped.¹⁵⁴ Her reflections serve to challenge dominant ideas within the discipline about the importance of harmony, and in particular of harmonic resolution, allowing instead for the theological relevance of music’s more atonal qualities to be explored. Epstein also raises the possibility of looking beyond the traditional theological understanding of music as symbolic of certain metaphysical worldviews and of instead perceiving it in relation to other, more humanistic, concerns.

A problem with her work is that it is overly polemical and, contrary to her opening avowal of pluralism, in fact committed to only one possible reading of music. It might also be argued that, whilst music doubtless plays a role in both the expression and creation of gender roles, her eagerness to dispel the masculinised emphasis which she associates with more traditional interpretations of music perhaps leads her to overlook the harmonic and mathematical aspects which also necessarily form an integral part of the musical experience. Further, her understanding of music as metaphor for the body and for sexual relations is in fact derived from the much older notion of musical expressivity as explored above and so, whilst not comprising a dominant thread within the history of musical interpretations, the idea is perhaps not as revolutionary or as revelatory as she might have us believe. Indeed, as Philip Stoltzfus argues, Epstein to a

¹⁵³ Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, pp. 170-176 & p. 187. Epstein here notes how, for Hildegard, Satan – love’s antithesis – cannot sing. As St. Paul writes, without love we become a noisy going, a clanging cymbal (1Cor. 13:3).

¹⁵⁴ However, as Stoltzfus points out, despite Epstein’s focus on music as performed, her theological account of music nonetheless remains primarily imitative rather than performative in nature. Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, p. 14 For another contemporary theological take on music as performance, see Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*.

degree even *continues* with the Schleiermacherian tradition of expressivist theological reflection, even though her indebtedness to this tradition passes unacknowledged.¹⁵⁵

Consistent with the late twentieth-century's positive reading of sexuality, Epstein argues that, contrary to traditional beliefs, bodily, sensual and sexual understandings of music need not be detrimental to theological endeavour, but rather might serve to enhance, broaden and enrich our understanding. For my project here, the value of her work is that it illustrates music's relevance to theology beyond that of the numerical and formalistic interpretations prioritised in both traditional and contemporary reflections so far. It also demonstrates the importance of not making assumptions as to the nature of music and its role in our lives, but rather of seeking first to properly understand music in itself before turning to reflect theologically upon that which has been discovered.

III. Theological Reflections on Musical Expressivism

In this chapter, I have shown that understanding music as expressive constitutes an element essential both to a proper appreciation of the art form and to accounting for music's significance within human life: as Scruton points out, expression is part of what is understood when a piece of music is understood *as music*, and as Hegel reminds us, music that does not relate to human life is not really to be counted as music at all. I have also argued that expressivist interpretations such as these need to be understood as fundamentally interconnected with those approaches towards music discussed in the previous chapter: as early as the ancient Greeks it has been acknowledged that music's emotive affects are the product of its harmonic structures; as Scruton has shown, theories of form and expression are ultimately destined not to oppose but rather to converge; as Jeremy Begbie makes clear, emotional properties are intrinsic to music, yet anthropology remains rooted in cosmology.

A full understanding of the art form, therefore, needs to take account both of music's form and also of its expressivity. Within contemporary theological thought, Begbie, as I have shown, seeks to re-establish music's expressive elements as grounded in a God-given cosmos, re-situating music within the order of the world and giving theological grounding to music's temporal processes. To complete a theological appreciation of the

¹⁵⁵ Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, p. 14. The one reference to Schleiermacher is dismissive.

art form, then, an account must also be offered of how we might relate theologically to music's more expressive elements, for although prominent within the philosophies of music of modernity, theological reflection on expressivistic approaches towards music has remained relatively unexplored.

Such reflection, however, is not without difficulty, as past attempts to engage theologically with elements of expressivity reveal. A successful theology of musical expressivism cannot simply ignore these matters, but rather must seek to effectively engage with them and then to offer possible ways in which they might be resolved. I now turn to briefly summarise the nature of these difficulties, some of which I have already touched upon, and to outline the ways in which I shall seek to respond to them in the following chapters. In this way, I set the scene for the investigations of Shostakovich which are to come.

Firstly, for the Plato of *The Republic*, and also for Augustine, music's expressive qualities, as we have seen, amount to a potential distraction of the soul, drawing it away from the proper contemplation of spiritual matters. Such a concern was also shared by the Reformation theologians. John Calvin, compiler of the Genevan Psalter and advocate of the importance of congregational singing, displayed a profound interest in music as a human, expressive art form, and in this way might be seen as very much a modern writer.¹⁵⁶ Nonetheless, he at the same time still maintained the importance of not compromising God's otherness in the use of music within worship and of remembering that all human activity, including music, is liable to sin. Musical expressivity, he cautioned, can add to the power of negative words to corrupt, and thus only Psalms should be sung, and even then we should pay more attention to the words than to the music which accompanies them.¹⁵⁷ This prioritisation of text above music is also to be found in the work of Luther who, although affirming music as fundamentally good – the free gift of God to God's creation which enables us to glimpse, if not comprehend, 'God's absolute and perfect wisdom' – still upheld the primary purpose of

¹⁵⁶ 'It is a thing most expedient for the edification of the church to sing some psalms in the form of public prayers by which one prays to God or sings his praises so that the hearts of all may be aroused and stimulated to make similar prayers and to render similar praises and thanks to God with a common love.' John Calvin, *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia* vol. 10, ed. by G. Baum, E. Cinitz and E. Reuss (Brunsvigae: C. A. Schwetschke, 1871), p. 6

¹⁵⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), vol. 2, III.20.32, pp. 181-182. This is an echo of Augustine's view that musical beauty is but a partial reflection of the true beauty of God to which music directs us. Augustine, *Confessions*, X.27, pp. 231-232

music within worship as that of conveying the gospel message.¹⁵⁸ However, such an objection has since been dismissed as untenable: as Begbie has demonstrated, the physical is not to be feared as Augustine and perhaps Plato suggest. What is more, neither need we accept the distrust of sensuality which underlies the more formalistic theological reflections on music: as Barth reveals in his discussion of Mozart, God is also to be known in pleasure.

Secondly, there is a tendency within theological reflection on musical expressivism for the experiences of music and of religion to become synonymous. As we saw in the opening to this chapter, for Schleiermacher, the cultivation of a sensibility towards musical feeling is at the same time the cultivation of a deeper level of spiritual awareness. For Barth, this was deeply problematic. He felt that theology had lost its freedom and had instead become imprisoned within a particular worldview, leaving no room for God to act in contrary to the will of humanity. Schleiermacher's appreciation of the arts, he argues, amounts to the sanctification of cultural achievement, appealing to human feeling and experience to tell us about God. In his *The Epistle to the Romans*, Barth spells out this need to preserve God's otherness, and in so doing, presents us with a theological vision of Adorno's critical theory: that we must stand over and against culture and critique it.¹⁵⁹ In my third chapter, and in relation to Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, I shall explore the impact of such views for theological reflection upon musical expressivism.

Thirdly, following on from this, and as Nicholas Wolterstorff argues, there is the danger that we develop a 'religion of aestheticism'. In this, he writes,

Aesthetic contemplation takes the place of religious adoration; and the artist becomes one who in agony brings forth objects in absorbed contemplation of which we experience what is of ultimate significance in human life... When the secular religions of political revolution and of technological aggrandizement fail

¹⁵⁸ Martin Luther, as cited in Carl F. Schalk, *Luther on Music: Paradigms of Praise* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), p. 35 & pp. 37-38

¹⁵⁹ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933). For Stoltzfus, it is the very same musical expressivism that Schleiermacher draws upon in his theology which, for Barth, '...found its disastrous end in Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Wagner, liberal Protestantism, and royalist and Nazi absolutism.' Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, p. 138

their devotees, when they threaten to devour them, then over and over the cultural elite among modern Western men turn to the religion of aestheticism.¹⁶⁰

The concern here is that aesthetics might be construed in such a way that art comes to be seen as intrinsically revelatory – a move which stems largely from the Romantic view of the artist as revealer of the hidden depths of reality. In theological opposition to this, Barth's argument as to the importance of preserving the freedom of God to act again comes into play, here reinforced in relation to the arts by Walter Benjamin's warning that 'There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism'.¹⁶¹ It is a notion such as this which lies behind the aniconic traditions such as Judaism and Islam, which seek to draw attention to the power of art to blind us to the truths which that art depicts.¹⁶² How, then, might aesthetic experience be valued within a theological framework without monopoly? In my fourth chapter, I turn to Russian Orthodox theologies of the icon to further explore this question in relation to Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony.

Fourthly, there is Jeremy Begbie's argument that an 'anthropological' interpretation of music is theologically problematic. Although acknowledging the importance of context, as we have seen, Begbie argues that modern trends in musical interpretation seek to justify music 'solely in terms of human needs and aspirations' – that we are placing undue emphasis on the 'inner stirrings of the heart in creative activity' to the neglect of acknowledging the significance of music's 'sonic integrities'.¹⁶³ Begbie is right to reassert music as fundamentally rooted in the order of the physical world, and some aspects of the Romantic tradition do indeed present us with a view of human nature and abilities which is idealised and even naïve. Yet it remains the case that exploring the depths of life forms an essential element of what it means to be human, and our experience of music is often one in which the art form is understood as primarily a means of personal expression. In my fifth chapter, then, I shall consider how, through Shostakovich's string quartets, music understood in relation to interiority might be theologically embraced.

¹⁶⁰ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Towards a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 50

¹⁶¹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 248

¹⁶² Lionel Kochan, *Beyond the Graven Image: A Jewish View* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997)

¹⁶³ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, p. 94, p. 242 & pp. 53-56. Although Begbie does admit that this is something of an overgeneralization. Such understandings, he argues, have their origin in the romanticised views of the nineteenth century, but their legacy is still to be found in the musical views of today.

Finally, the subject of comedy, although remaining largely unexplored in theological reflection on musical expressivity, has frequently proved to be a theologically contentious issue. Some are sceptical of the theological value of humour and laughter; others argue for the importance of retaining theology's tragic aspect; still others embrace theology as essentially comic in nature. In his opera *The Nose*, Shostakovich draws upon a number of comedic devices, including a use of satire, parody and the grotesque, and also reflects something of the nature of the relationship between the comic and the tragic. In my sixth chapter, therefore, I shall argue that this work invites a theological reflection on musical humour which is fundamentally eschatological in nature.

Part Two
Shostakovich

CHAPTER 3

Music and Culture

The Fifth Symphony

I. The Context of the Fifth Symphony*(a) Soviet Expectations*

Following the death of Lenin in January 1924, the political and social climate in Russia was to change dramatically. Having trampled his rivals in the fight to take on leadership of the Soviet Union, and eliminated all those who opposed him or stood in his way, Joseph Stalin, together with his associates, set about affecting a complete overhaul of the way in which the country was run. 1928 saw the instigation of the First Five Year Plan – a series of reforms designed to facilitate the building of a new vision of socialism. Processes of industrialisation and collectivisation were set in place, accompanied by political and economic violence and the gradual formation of the Stalin personality cult.¹ Such revolutions extended to every area of society, with matters of culture also subjected to Party dictates. Literature and the arts were placed under strict ideological control, and approval granted only for those endeavours deemed to be of benefit to the development of the State.²

To facilitate such control, a number of ‘unions’ were created – first for writers and later for artists, composers and others – with the aim of ensuring the compliance of the various forms of cultural media to the purpose of furthering Party policy. The RAPM (Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians) was founded in 1925 and became increasingly powerful, until in 1928 a resolution was passed by the Central Committee granting the organisation exclusive ideological control of the musical arts. Under the RAPM, formalism was to be eschewed, and only music containing a social message which could be understood by the masses could be permitted.³ Richard Taruskin writes:

¹ Taruskin, ‘Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth’, pp. 18-19. For further details about Russia under Stalin, see Robert Service, *A History of Modern Russia from Nicholas II to Putin*, New ed. (London: Penguin, 2003)

² Orlando Figes, *Natasha’s Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 472

³ Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 65

Ideologists of the RAPM...consigned the composers of the past wholesale to the dustbin of history, excepting only Beethoven, the voice of the French revolution, and Mussorgsky, the proto-Bolshevist 'radical democrat'. Tchaikovsky, virtual court composer to Tsar Alexander III, was a special target of abuse. Composers were exhorted to spurn all styles and genres that had flourished under the tsars and cultivate instead the only authentically proletarian genre, the march-like *massovaya pesnya*, the 'mass song', through which proletarian ideology could be aggressively disseminated.⁴

All did not go according to plan, however. In 1932, in a desperate attempt to win back support in the face of the failure of the First Five Year Plan, the Party falsely declared its premature success before embarking on yet more strategies for restructuring and reorganisation. The RAPM, together with the other artistic associations, were dissolved and replaced with Unions of art workers. The Union of Composers, established in April 1932 first in Moscow and then in Leningrad following the passing of the resolution 'On the Reconstruction of Literary-Artistic Organizations', was one such attempt to regain control. The Union remained under the exclusive administration of the Party, although allowed for a greater degree of artistic freedom and a wider embracing of musical styles than had been permitted under the RAPM.⁵ Composers including Shostakovich were initially relieved and welcomed the change, although the apparent relenting of the rules was soon exposed as little more than a sham, with expectations of artistic and ideological conformity actually increased.⁶

The same resolution also made the philosophy of Socialist Realism into state policy.⁷ Advocating that all art must be relevant to and comprehensible by the workers, depict aspects of everyday life, and be supportive of the aims of the State, it in fact constituted a move towards the totalitarian control of the arts, insisting that they present to the rest of the world an image of Soviet society which, rather than realistic, was aspirational of all that a truly communist society might be. To this end, guidelines issues by the Union of Composers stated that:

⁴ Taruskin, 'Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth', p. 19

⁵ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 63-65; Elizabeth Wilson, *Shostakovich: a life remembered* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 70

⁶ Taruskin, 'Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth', pp. 19-21

⁷ Taruskin, 'Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth', p. 25

The main attention of the Soviet composer must be directed towards the victorious progressive principles of reality, towards all that is heroic, bright and beautiful. This distinguishes the spiritual world of Soviet man and must be embodied in musical images full of beauty and strength.⁸

Socialist Realist art, therefore, contained no margin for critique or independent reflection; the image portrayed was not merely the *right* option but the *only* option, and in this way, the State assumed a monopoly on the arts as a means of social manipulation and control.⁹

Despite these stipulations, the exact characteristics which defined Socialist Realism and precisely which art works would be considered acceptable remained somewhat uncertain. This was especially the case with regards to music, the depictional ambiguity of which simultaneously both provided a level of protection and left it open to scathing attack. In a bid to further define the requirements of Soviet art, works which were considered demonstrative of good practice were held up as exemplifications of the socialist ideal, and those branded as deviations were publically denounced. The consequences of producing art works deemed inappropriate were often severe, and many artists and musicians, including Shostakovich, lived in constant fear for their lives. Some were exiled or killed; others simply disappeared.¹⁰ It is therefore in relation to this climate of uncertainty and distrust that the composition of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony must be understood.

(b) *Lady Macbeth*

In the autumn of 1930 Shostakovich had begun work on a new opera. His subject was that of Nikolai Leskov's 1864 novel *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, which tells

⁸ As cited in Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 114

⁹ This is clearly deeply problematic. As Nikita Khrushchev puts it: 'I think Stalin's cultural policies, especially the cultural policies imposed on Leningrad through Zhdanov, were cruel and senseless. You can't regulate the development of literature, art, and culture with a stick or by barking orders. You can't lay down a furrow and then harness all your artists to make sure they don't deviate from the straight or narrow. If you try to control your artists too tightly, there will be no clashing of opinions, consequently no criticism, and consequently no truth. There will just be a gloomy stereotype, boring and useless. Not only will this stereotype fail to encourage the people to benefit from their art; it will poison and kill their relationship to art.' Nikita Khrushchev, as cited in Robert Stradling, 'Shostakovich and the Soviet System, 1925-1975', in *Shostakovich: the man and his music*, ed. by Norris, pp. 189-224 (pp. 204-205)

¹⁰ Stradling, 'Shostakovich and the Soviet System, 1925-1975', p. 196

the story of Katerina Izmailova, the young merchant's wife who engages in a passionate affair with Sergei, an employee of her husband. In order to sustain their relationship, Katerina is drawn to commit a string of murders with her lover, until the pair are caught and exiled to Siberia for their crimes. Blaming Katerina for their actions, Sergei here abandons her and instead attempts to seduce Sonyetka, another convict. Insane with jealousy, Katerina drags Sonyetka into the icy Volga River and the two are swept away to their deaths.¹¹ A brave choice of storyline, it might be argued, for a society in which upbeat heroism and cheerfulness of character were the enforced artistic norm.

The opera was premiered in January 1934 and was largely well-received both in Russia and abroad.¹² In December 1935, a new production opened at the Bolshoi Theatre, and on 26th January 1936, Shostakovich was ordered to attend a performance at which Stalin and other officials would also be present. It had been expected that the composer would be praised for his work, but Stalin was to walk out before the final act. Two days later, an article entitled 'Muddle Instead of Music' appeared in *Pravda* magazine, the official Party mouthpiece, severely criticising the opera.¹³ The attack was overtly political and was much rumoured to have been written by Stalin himself, although it is more likely that the author was David Zaslavsky, a high-ranking Party official and journalist. The opera was branded 'formalist' in its modernism and as appropriating 'coarse naturalism' derived from the influence of the bourgeois West.¹⁴ For some, the motivation behind this attack lay in the work's explicit and anarchic depictions of sexuality, which were clearly at odds with Communist ideals; others pointed towards Party disapproval of the undertones of the work, which parallel unmistakably the life and career of Stalin himself.¹⁵

Following the article's publication, Shostakovich became the subject of bitter persecution. Those who had previously admired the opera turned to criticise it, and friends, admirers and colleagues sought to distance themselves from the composer and

¹¹ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 67-68

¹² Wilson, *Shostakovich*, pp. 94-96; Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 75-78

¹³ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 109. This was shortly followed by another *Pravda* article, 'Ballet Falsehood', which criticised Shostakovich's ballet *The Limpid Stream*.

¹⁴ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 88-89. However, as Fay points out, when the opera is compared with Shostakovich's *The Limpid Stream*, which disregards folk sources, and the success of Dzerzhinsky's *The Quiet Don*, it might be argued that *Lady Macbeth* in fact presents an example of the attempt on the part of Shostakovich to deduce the requirements of Soviet Realism by looking at particular works of art.

¹⁵ Tim Ashley, 'Too Scary for Stalin', *The Guardian*.

www.guardian.co.uk/music/2004/mar/26/classicalmusicandopera.russia (26.03.2004; accessed 27.06.2011)

the disgrace with which he was surrounded. Some, such as Ivan Sollertinsky, dared to challenge the article and defend Shostakovich, and as a result found that they themselves became the subject of vicious attacks in the press. Punishment even extended to those critics who, in advocating the work of Shostakovich prior to Stalin's attack, were deemed to have failed to have drawn the composer's attention to his mistakes in time, and in doing so to have permitted others to follow his misguided example. Shostakovich himself managed to avoid further punishment but was advised to channel his efforts into the composition of music which drew more on Russia's folk tradition and which would appeal more generally to the masses. The composer would appear, at least to some extent, to have taken this to heart, although his refusal to personally denounce the opera nonetheless speaks of a certain degree of resistance to the demands placed upon him by the State.¹⁶

(c) *The Fourth Symphony*

By the time of the publication of the *Pravda* article in 1936, Shostakovich had already nearly completed his Fourth Symphony. Continuing with the work in the face of criticism as a means of preserving his sanity, he described it as a 'programmatic piece of great ideas and great passions' and publically declared it as embodying the 'credo' of his creative work.¹⁷ Completed in the April of that year, the Fourth Symphony was a work of epic proportions, in which 'expressivity...was couched in monumental terms, in the confrontation of extremes ranging from the banal to the sublime, the trivial to the tragic'.¹⁸ The initial reception of the work was positive, with both Fritz Stiedri, chief conductor of the Leningrad Philharmonic, and world-renowned conductor Otto Klemperer responding enthusiastically to Shostakovich's demonstrations of the piece. However, rumours soon circulated that, in defiance of the criticisms levelled against him, the composer had dared to write a largely formalistic work, and visits from officials of the Union of Composers soon followed. On their recommendation, Shostakovich subsequently announced the withdrawal of the Symphony, which was already in rehearsal for its first performance.¹⁹

¹⁶ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 89-91

¹⁷ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 115; Dmitri Shostakovich, 'Moy tvorcheskiy otvet' [My creative answer], *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 25th January 1938, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 93

¹⁸ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 94

¹⁹ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, pp. 161-120; Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 95

Numerous rumours abounded as to the true reasons behind Shostakovich's decision. Some point to the conductor, Fritz Stiedri, claiming that he was uncooperative in rehearsals of the work, or even suggesting that he was unable to deal with the demands of preparing a piece of such scale and complexity, and thus that the symphony would not have been ready in time for the premier.²⁰ Others, however, reject these accusations, vouching for the professionalism of Stiedri and his dedication to the work.²¹ Still others remain convinced that Shostakovich's decision was purely the result of pressure from the Party. Venyamin Basner, a friend of Shostakovich, writes: 'He would never have cancelled the performance of the Fourth Symphony if it had not been for the heavy-handed hints that were dropped by 'the bosses'. He had no choice in the matter. After all it wasn't only Dmitri Dmitriyevich that was threatened; it was insinuated that all the performers would live to regret the day if the performance of the symphony went ahead'.²² In any case, it seems likely that a premier of the work was inadvisable given the political interest surrounding Shostakovich at the time. There remains strong evidence that the work may have been interpreted as formalistic, and stylistically it was still far removed from the ideals required by the State.²³ So regardless of the events which transpired to force the silencing of the work, it would appear to be generally agreed that Shostakovich must have realised that, given the situation, 'for all concerned it was better to be 'safe rather than sorry''.²⁴

²⁰ For example, M. S. Shak, violinist with the Leningrad Philharmonic, and conductor Alexander Gauk. Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 115

²¹ Such as Issak Glikman and also Mark Reznikov, violinist with the Leningrad Philharmonic. Wilson, *Shostakovich*, pp. 116-120

²² Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 123

²³ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 96. Taruskin says of the Symphony that, '...while the unconventionally structured, maximalistic Fourth had been grandiose...to the point of mania, it was anything but 'classical' – which is exactly why it could not be performed in the aftermath of [Shostakovich's] denunciation'. Taruskin, 'Public lies and Unspeakable Truth', p. 26

²⁴ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 116. In an interview in 1973, Shostakovich said of the episode: 'I didn't like the situation. Fear was all around. So I withdrew it'. Shostakovich, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 96. Although Shostakovich himself pointed out faults in the work, claiming that it suffered from 'folies de grandeur', it was well-received when finally premiered on 30th December 1961 and, following the performance, Shostakovich is said to have remarked: 'It seems to me that in many respects my Fourth Symphony stands much higher than my most recent ones'. Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 120. Indeed, recent scholarship of the work suggests that it may even have been intended as an attempt to write a genuinely Soviet symphony, even though it was not received as such. Pauline Fairclough, *A Soviet Credo: Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) If this is the case, then it provides us with an example of the impossibility of ascertaining precisely what the requirements of the Socialist Realist philosophy actually were.

(d) Issues in Interpreting the Fifth Symphony

On 1st December 1934, Sergei Kirov, a high-ranking Party official and opponent of Stalin, was shot dead in an assassination attributed to the NKVD, and those with whom he had associated rounded up and executed. This event heralded the start of a period of renewed feelings of hostility and suspicion in Russia. 1936 saw the first of the great purges and ‘show trials’, in which Stalin’s political enemies were forced into false confession and then humiliated before being killed, and ordinary people began to suspect anyone they knew of being a possible informer or collaborator. At the height of the Terror from 1937-1938, it is estimated that approximately seven million people, many of them innocent, were arrested; around one million of these were executed, and millions more were imprisoned or exiled.²⁵

As the Terror took hold, Shostakovich approached the Arts Committee to ask how best he might respond to the criticism presented by ‘Muddle Instead of Music’. He was advised to admit his errors, and his friend, the Party official Marshal Tukhachevsky, wrote directly to Stalin on Shostakovich’s behalf. A year later, Tukhachevsky was arrested and shot as an enemy of the people. Following this, another of Shostakovich’s friends, the musicologist Nikolai Zhilyaev, was arrested because of his connection with Tukhachevsky. Shostakovich’s own position was now one of great danger, a situation compounded by the continued arrest of an increasing number of his colleagues, friends and relatives, many of whom vanished without trace.²⁶ In the spring of 1937, the composer himself only narrowly avoided arrest, having been summoned to the headquarters of the NKVD, questioned about his connections to the plot to assassinate Stalin and, despite his repeated denial of any involvement, ordered to return for further questioning the following week. After a weekend of what must have been unimaginable fear, Shostakovich returned only to find that Zanchevsky, the officer due to question him, had himself been arrested, leaving Shostakovich free to go.²⁷

It was this series of events that formed the context for the composition of the Fifth Symphony, completed in July or August 1937 and premiered on 21st November 1937 by

²⁵ Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 485-486

²⁶ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 121

²⁷ Venyamin Basner, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, pp. 123-125

the Leningrad Philharmonic under Yevgeniy Mravinsky.²⁸ The expectations surrounding the work were high: its success was vital both to restoring Shostakovich's career and to saving his life, and it was clear from the outset that it would be subjected to close public and official scrutiny. So on the one hand, not to have heeded Party criticism would have been a highly dangerous move, yet on the other, Shostakovich's commitment to the integrity of his own artwork remained strong, as did his desire to remain true to his fellow Russians, demonstrated in his refusal to flee the hostile climate of the Soviet Union and seek safety abroad as did so many of his contemporaries at the time.²⁹

As a result, Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony is particularly renowned for the issues it presents in terms of musical interpretation. Shostakovich himself is said to have stated that 'there can be no music without ideology', and the search for 'meaning', or deliberate lack thereof, in this work has been near unending.³⁰ As mentioned previously, an in-depth consideration of 'the Shostakovich question' – of the extent to which Shostakovich was supportive of or rebellious against the dictates of Stalinist society – falls beyond the scope of this project. Rather, the issues surrounding the interpretation of his music are here taken as an indication of the ways in which music is inextricably bound up with issues of context, and of how, in seeking a deeper understanding of such music, it is important to remain open to the influences borne upon a piece by the setting of its creation. Interpretation of the ambiguities of Fifth Symphony tends along a number of lines: some understand the music as a true example of Socialist Realist art and as a genuine attempt on the part of Shostakovich to atone for his past mistakes and to fully embrace Soviet ideals; others argue that the work is in fact anti-Stalinist and presents a mockery of the Soviet regime; others still argue that both positions are in fact problematic and detract from a proper engagement with and understanding of the work. I now turn to the further investigation of all these ideas, together with the possibilities and problems they raise, in an analysis and interpretation of the Fifth Symphony.

²⁸ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 99

²⁹ Others, such as Rachmaninov, reluctantly settled abroad.

³⁰ Shostakovich, as cited in Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, p. 130

II. The Fifth Symphony

(a) 'Fragments of Memory'

Shortly before the composition of the Fifth Symphony, Shostakovich completed a song cycle based on four poems by Pushkin. The first of the *Pushkin Romances* is a setting of the poem *Vozrozhdeniye* ('Rebirth'), which tells the story of a painting defaced by a barbarian artist and then, as the new layer of paint peels away over the years, revealed once again. The final stanza of the poem reads thus:

Так исчезают заблужденья	So do delusions vanish
С измученной души моей,	from my wearied soul,
И возникают в ней виденья	and visions arise within it
Первоначальных, чистых дней.	of pure primeval days. ³¹

As Richard Taruskin points out, when properly understood, this verse amounts not to the promise of a brighter future, but is rather an attempt to escape into a better past.³² The melody to which these lines is set, sung by a solo tenor, is accompanied by high strings playing a gentle, rocking figure (Fig. 3.1), and it is in the finale of the Fifth Symphony that we find the reappearance of this musical idea, as Shostakovich quotes from his own work in the still, quiet moment between the violent marches that both begin and end the movement. Here the rocking melody is found in the strings and harp, set below the theme of the movement in the horns (Fig. 3.2). In quoting the material from the song in this way, Shostakovich creates within the movement a layer of meaning which speaks of innocence and regeneration and which, given the recent completion of the songs, would at the time of composition have been understood only by the composer and a few of his closest friends.³³

³¹ Original text: Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin, *Sobranie sochinenii v odnom tome* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literature, 1984), pp. 35-6. Translation: Tom Kennedy, 'Rebirth', *The Lied, Art Song, and Choral Text Archive*. www.recmusic.org/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=35688 (2008; accessed 12.09.2011)

³² Taruskin, 'Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth', p. 45

³³ 'Shostakovich – Symphony No. 5', *Discovering Music*, BBC Radio 3. 2008

Fig. 3.1: Shostakovich, *Vozrozhdeniye*, Op. 46/1, bb. 18-29

Tak iz-che - za - yut za - bluzh - de - n'yas iz - mu-ch-en - noy du-shi mo - yey

voz-ni - ka-yut vney vi - de - n'ya per-vo-na - chal' - nikh, chi - stikh dney.

Fig. 3.2: Shostakovich, *Symphony No. 5*, fourth movement, [120]-[121]

pp

pp

p

mp

Timp.

The connections between the Symphony and the song run deeper than simply one quotation. The pattern of alternating quaver semitones in the violins which appears in the Symphony between [112]-[113], leading up to the moment of quotation, is also taken from the song, where it appears in the piano and cello lines accompanying a phrase detailing how, over time, the paints of the barbarian artist ‘fall off like threadbare scales’.³⁴ Further, the violin scale which leads into the quotation in the Symphony at ²⁻¹[120] is an echo of the passage which introduces the rocking figure in the song – a figure formed from the locrian mode, a highly unstable tonality which creates an atmosphere of suspense and uncertainty.³⁵ This section of the fourth movement, then, forms ‘the fulcrum for the whole Symphony. Its emotional weight pivots around this moment of rebirth...where hushed, troubled music grows into a moment of utter clarity. Here rebirth is not just a dream but a waking vision’.³⁶

It is not only in the final movement of the work that the presence of Pushkin’s *Rebirth* can be felt, but rather echoes of the quotation are to be found throughout the rest of the piece. In the second movement at [62], the modal scale and oscillating figure appear in the violins, now accompanying the second theme of the movement in the woodwind. The scalic pattern also features in the third movement at [89]², where it appears in the celli and piano as the music builds towards its climax. Here, too, in the concluding section of the movement, we find allusions to the rocking melody in both the strings and the harp.

So in effect, the Symphony is made up from ‘fragments of memory’ which resound throughout the different movements and which hold the power to make the listener react to the work in a variety of ways, depending on what is remembered from before and what links are made throughout the piece.³⁷ When the full quotation appears in the final movement, the effect is that of a magnet, drawing all the fragments together and thus giving cohesion to and making sense of the overall structure of the work. These references function not as a code, which needs to be broken, but rather as clues, open to interpretation and there to be found by all who listen with understanding. The work, then, is in a sense a dramatic elaboration and extension of the short extract from the

³⁴ ‘Shostakovich’, BBC Radio 3; Pushkin, ‘Vozrozhdenie’; Kennedy, ‘Rebirth’

³⁵ The pattern of semitones and tones of the locrian mode can be found by playing a major scale starting on the seventh rather than the tonic.

³⁶ ‘Shostakovich’, BBC Radio 3

³⁷ ‘Shostakovich’, BBC Radio 3

song, and thus the meaning of the song, through quotation and allusion, ultimately reveals the meaning of the Symphony as a whole.³⁸

(b) First Movement

Returning now to the opening of the first movement, we find material that in many ways contrasts with the theme of rebirth whilst at the same time continuing the notions of echo and of memory. The canonical motif (Fig. 3.3) with which the movement begins, consisting of a dotted rhythm which pits upper and lower strings against each other, has a largely chromatic feel and sets up a sense of tonal dislocation by gravitating towards the dominant rather than the tonic of the key. This forceful statement again presents the idea of an echo, only here the memory is recalled immediately in the imitative form of the canon, which is itself reminiscent both of the music of baroque composers such as J. S. Bach and of earlier works by Shostakovich himself. Also of significance in the opening bars of the Symphony is a short, dactylic motif (Fig. 3.4), consisting of a simple pattern of three detached quavers. Both the canonical motif and the dactylic pattern form essential elements in the later development of the work.

Fig. 3.3: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 5, first movement, opening



Fig. 3.4: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 5, first movement, ²[1]



The violin melody at [1]-[2]¹ forms the first subject of the movement (Fig. 3.5) and is derived from the same modal tonality as the scale which introduces the rocking quotation in the final movement. This theme is then developed and elaborated upon, as is the case with traditional sonata form, to provide the content for the remainder of the movement. Most notably, it appears in a distorted fashion in the horns and piano at [17]-

³⁸ 'Shostakovich', BBC Radio 3

[19], then in the woodwind at [19]-[20] and the brass at [25]³-[26], before being transformed into the Red Army march theme at [27]-[32]. Here the originally serious, lyrical theme takes on a melodramatic feel as layers of familiarity are compounded on top of each other to form an almost cinematic, deafening climax.³⁹ At [33], we find again the canonical motif from the opening, here echoed in extended form across the woodwind and strings below a different but equally canonical figure in the brass, itself derived from the originally lilting second subject of the movement which first appears in the strings at [9]-[11]³.

Fig. 3.5: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 5, first movement, [1]¹⁻²



The movement closes with further lingering fragments. At [44]¹ the flute recalls the first subject in inverted form, whilst at [45]²⁻⁴, the piccolo, solo violin and celest echo another motif (Fig. 3.6), this time from the opening of the work at ²⁻¹[6]. These melodies remain unresolved, and are gradually submerged by the static, pulsating accompaniment, itself derived from the canonical and dactylic figures, until the music finally sinks beneath its own weight.⁴⁰

Fig. 3.6: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 5, first movement, [45]²⁻⁴



(c) Second Movement

The second movement of the Symphony is a scherzo, and as such makes overt stylistic references to the music of Mahler, who is renowned for his treatment of this particular musical form. Also echoed throughout is the influence of the Tchaikovsky waltz, although in Shostakovich this flowing dance is oddly disrupted, broken up by

³⁹ 'Shostakovich', BBC Radio 3

⁴⁰ Norman Kay, *Shostakovich* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 35

occasional changes in metre and tempi and coloured variously by the comic and the grotesque. Written as a three-part rondo, this movement develops around the intertwining of two contrasting themes. The first of these is a grotesque march, initially in the lower strings at [48], then elaborated in the woodwind at [49] and later in the trumpets at [62]⁶. It even appears in a pizzicato version in the strings at [66], which present an almost ludicrous twist on an already bizarre theme. Here the influence of ‘Soviet swagger’ is clear to see, presented as powerful, threatening and slightly ridiculous. As an additional dimension to these developments, the theme itself is in fact derived from the violin melody that formed the first theme in the previous movement, although here played much faster (Fig. 3.7). What is more, the woodwind entry at [49] is yet another interpretation of this theme, here twisted even further and also extended. Again, then, echoes of forgotten familiarities continue to pervade.

Fig. 3.7: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 5, second movement cello opening and first movement violin theme at [1]¹⁻²



pushes it out of the way, thus asserting its overall dominance within the movement. The flower is crushed beneath the soldier's marching boot; the illusion is shattered, the dream is broken.

(d) Third Movement

The sombre, reflective mood of the *Largo* marks out the third movement as the centre of gravity for the whole Symphony.⁴³ Here echoing Mahler's chamber-style scoring – used by Shostakovich to create a hollow texture beneath lyrical melodies – this is the most 'inward' of all the movements.⁴⁴ Intensely sonorous and moving, it is written for orchestra without brass and for eight string parts rather than the usual five – an effect which is of evidence especially in the opening to the movement, scored as it is for strings alone.

As has already been shown, the Fifth Symphony played a role of great significance in the life of Shostakovich. It was also the case, however, that the work was to resonate deeply with those who were among the first to hear it, communicating something of the terror with which all were surrounded but of which no-one could speak, and bringing a small sense of solidarity to an otherwise fractured people. This is perhaps especially true of the third movement, which was received with open weeping by many present at the premier of the work.⁴⁵ Shostakovich was not a religious person, and indeed religion was not tolerated by the Soviet regime, but in this movement we find him, uncharacteristically, drawing upon music from sacred traditions, in particular alluding to religious chants and the harmonies of the Orthodox Church, including ideas from the *panikhida* – the Russian Orthodox requiem chant or prayer for the dead.⁴⁶ At [86], echoes of the *vechnaya pamyat'* (Eternal Remembrance) (Fig 3.8), the final requiem hymn, are heard in the strings (Fig. 3.9), interwoven with a sad, lingering solo flute and austere tremolo in the strings.⁴⁷

⁴³ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 102

⁴⁴ Ottaway, *Shostakovich*, p. 28

⁴⁵ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 100

⁴⁶ 'Shostakovich', BBC Radio 3

⁴⁷ Taruskin, 'Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth', p. 41. Quoting from the *Panikhida* was a compositional device employed in the orchestral works of many of Shostakovich's Russian predecessors and contemporaries and as such might be considered as characteristic of the genre. Taruskin, 'Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth', pp. 40-41

Fig. 3.8: *Vechnaya pamyat'* (Eternal remembrance)⁴⁸

Fig. 3.9: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 5, third movement, [86]

These are not the only evocations to be found within the movement. Again Shostakovich looks to Mahler, this time to a melody which originates in two movements from his *Das Lied von der Erde* (The Song of the Earth) – ‘Der Einsame in Herbst’ (‘The Lonely One in Autumn’) (Fig. 3.10) and ‘Der Abschied’ (‘The Farewell’) (Fig. 3.11). References from these works appear in the solo flute at [86]³ (Fig. 3.12), and also in oboe and clarinet solos of the same melody. For Taruskin, that this movement was composed as a mourning piece cannot be doubted, although such a view could not at the time be openly expressed. Some have suggested that it was Shostakovich’s memorial to Tukhachevsky, although as Taruskin points out, the impact and significance of the work would have stretched far beyond this in the minds of those who heard it first: ‘Every member of the symphony’s early audiences had lost friends and family members during the black year of 1937, loved ones whose deaths they had had to endure in numb horror’.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ From *Obikhod notnogo tserkovnogo peniya*, ed. by N. I. Bakhmetev, as cited in Taruskin, ‘Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth’, p. 42, transposed up a semitone for comparison

⁴⁹ Taruskin, ‘Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth’, p. 42

Fig. 3.10: Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde*, II ‘Der Einsame im Herbst’, [3]¹Fig. 3.11: Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde*, IV ‘Der Abschied’, [41]²Fig. 3.12: Shostakovich, *Symphony No. 5*, third movement, [86]³

The climax to this movement is a distraught passage in which, at [89], we find a return to the first theme, now in unison strings and woodwind and accompanied by fortissimo tremolo in the piano and violas. At [90], Mahler’s ‘Farewell’ theme appears in the cellos, with tremolo now in the clarinets and with accented chords in the double basses. The effect is emphatic and almost desperate – the ‘most distraught, Tchaikovsky-like passage in the whole work’.⁵⁰ For some, this passage left no question as to the meaning of the Symphony. Writing in her diary the night after the first performance, a friend of Shostakovich put: ‘He has given them an answer, and what an answer!’⁵¹ By the end of the movement, however, the passion subsides. It is as though the music has worn itself out with distress and anger and, as a quiet cello melody tails away, is reduced to quiet pleading.⁵²

Finally in this movement we again find reference to those fragments of memory which pervade throughout the Symphony as a whole. Now the violin theme from the first movement appears in the flute at [79], this time in a slightly different version in which

⁵⁰ Ottaway, *Shostakovich*, p. 28

⁵¹ ‘Shostakovich’, BBC Radio 3

⁵² ‘Shostakovich’, BBC Radio 3

and emotions intended to be conveyed throughout this passage, with opinion largely divided into those who view it as a victorious, pro-Stalin celebration and those who hear it instead as slow, drawn-out torture. Whichever interpretation is accepted or none, it is arguably the ending which makes the rest of Symphony mean something, and so before the wider interpretative questions surrounding the work can be considered, I need first to pause to consider in more depth what is at stake in each of these interpretations. To do so, I turn to look at the reception history which surrounded the first performance of the work.

(f) *Reception*

The significance of the premier was immediately apparent to all concerned. Shostakovich's fate was at stake, and the survival of his professional reputation, not to mention his life, rode on the success of the work. To his immense relief, the Symphony was both publically and officially well-received.⁵⁷ One eye-witness reported how, as the finale progressed, listeners rose to their feet, and as the audience cheered, the conductor, Mravinsky, waved the score above his head.⁵⁸ The applause is said to have lasted for nearly half an hour, with the crowd threatening to break into a riot.⁵⁹ Norris reflects: 'Shostakovich found a theme and a musical idiom perfectly suited to the demands of public occasion. One need not doubt the testimony of a witness at the first (Leningrad) performance, who reported that the impact of the music 'was felt not only by the listeners but also by the performers who read the music sheets as if they were reading a living chronicle about themselves...'.⁶⁰ Juri Jelagin concurs: '[The work's] musical qualities, no matter how great, were by themselves not enough to create that effect. The complex background of events and moods had to combine with the beautiful music of the Fifth Symphony to arouse the audience to the pitch of emotion which broke in the Leningrad auditorium...'⁶¹

That the reception of the Fifth Symphony was so overwhelmingly positive is perhaps surprising given that it did not conform to many of the standards required of Socialist

⁵⁷ 'D.D [Shostakovich] came out white as a sheet, biting his lips. I think he was close to tears.' Lyubov Vasilievna Shaporina, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 100

⁵⁸ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 100

⁵⁹ 'St. Matthew Passion and a note about Shostakovich's Fifth', *Gather*.

www.gather.com/viewArticle.jsp?articleId=281474977287596 (18.03.2008; accessed 30.06.2008)

⁶⁰ Norris, *Shostakovich*, p. 164

⁶¹ Juri Jelagin, as cited in Taruskin, 'Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth', p. 36

Realist art. In particular, the work's use of sonata form and thematic structuring marked it out as explicitly formalist, and formalism, as Norman Kay reminds us, 'from the Soviet point of view...was the greatest of all artistic sins... abstract or individualist goals were to be eschewed'.⁶² Socialist Realism had banned the inclusion of the tragic in art, yet the Fifth Symphony 'posed a dark drama that constantly bordered on the tragic'.⁶³ The influence of folk and national traditions, to which Shostakovich had specifically been ordered to refer in his music following the attacks in *Pravda*, was once again distinctly lacking. Given these apparent short-comings, then, it is interesting both that the work was nonetheless well-received and that Shostakovich had dared to write such music given the precarious position he occupied at the time. Indeed, officials from the Committee for Artistic Affairs were later drawn to conclude that the audience present at the premier had consisted of plants, handpicked to ensure the success of the work. It was even mooted that the celebration with which the work was received should be interpreted as a challenge to the Party's aesthetic leadership.⁶⁴ Alternatively, Taruskin suggests we might interpret the success of the Symphony as foreordained by the Party – that irrespective of the nature of the work, it had been decided that Shostakovich's reputation was to be restored: 'Its status as apology and as promise of a personal *perestroika* was a conferred status, bestowed from above as if to show that the same power that condemned and repressed could also restore and reward'.⁶⁵

Despite such issues, however, the enthusiasm with which the work was greeted by the masses gradually transferred, at least in part, to the critics. The programmatic intentions of the piece, which we shall consider shortly, were viewed favourably, with Alexey Tolstoy, novelist and admirer of Shostakovich, remarking that the work was 'an exemplar of the loftiest ideals of Socialist Realism' and coining the catch-phrase '*stanovleniye lichnosti*' ('formation of a personality (within a social environment)') as a metaphor to explain its narrative core and social significance.⁶⁶ Although not everyone was convinced by this interpretation, especially in light of the third movement, and also, in the case of those who had heard it, in comparison with Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony, general opinion seemed to agree that the composer was at least beginning to

⁶² Kay, *Shostakovich*, p. 30

⁶³ Kay, *Shostakovich*, p. 30

⁶⁴ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 100

⁶⁵ Taruskin, 'Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth', p. 24

⁶⁶ Taruskin, 'Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth', p. 32

move towards a true embracing of Socialist Realism.⁶⁷ Something of the uncertainty of his situation remained, however, for, as had been demonstrated in the case of *Lady Macbeth*, Stalin's opinion could change at any time, and initial acceptance of a work was by no means a guarantee of continued approval. Indeed, Isaak Dunayevsky, chairman of the Leningrad branch of the Composer's Union, pointed to the very success of the work as a potential danger to the government control of the arts:

Unhealthy instances of agitation – even of psychosis to a certain extent – are taking place around this work. In our circumstances this might do both the work and its composer a bad turn... Because of the chatter and the sensation we may let the most important thing slip through our fingers: a healthy influence on the composer and his education in the spirit of the tasks confronting Soviet music... One does not need to be a great prophet to foresee what this might lead to.⁶⁸

Nonetheless, this time Shostakovich's luck held out and the work maintained its positive position within the sensibilities of Soviet art – something which, given the circumstances of the time, was, as Fay points out, a 'remarkable achievement'.⁶⁹

Shostakovich himself was initially reluctant to comment publically on the Symphony.⁷⁰ Following the premier, when asked to present an analysis of the piece to the Composer's Union, he pointed simply to the performance of the work: for him, the music spoke for itself.⁷¹ In January 1938, two months after the first performance, he ventured an explanation of the work as in some way autobiographical – that it had as its subject the 'suffering of man, and all-conquering optimism. I wanted to convey in the symphony how, through a series of tragic conflicts of great inner spiritual turmoil, optimism asserts itself as a world-view'.⁷² Whilst one might question the integrity of a statement such as this, the intention of the composer to be re-accepted into the Soviet system was made even more apparent in a further comment made on the same day, in which he stated that: 'There is nothing more honourable for a composer than to create

⁶⁷ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 102-103

⁶⁸ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 104

⁶⁹ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 104-105

⁷⁰ As Fay argues: 'Shostakovich's reluctance to describe and discuss his music publicly in any terms but the most sweeping platitudes, a trait that would endure for the rest of his life, was born of common sense and a survival instinct.' Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 104

⁷¹ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 101

⁷² Dmitri Shostakovich, 'Pyataya simfoniya Shostakovicha', *Literaturnaya gazeta* 12th January 1938, p. 5. It is perhaps interesting to mention here that that the programme note given to the work at the premier was 'A lengthy spiritual battle, crowned by victory'. Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 99

works for and with the people. The composer who forgets about this high obligation loses the right to this high calling... The attention to music on the part of our government and all the Soviet people instils in me the confidence that I will be able to give everything that is in my power.’⁷³

Shortly before the Moscow premier of the Symphony, another statement was issued, supposedly from the composer, entitled ‘My Creative Answer’, which supported Tolstoy’s ‘formation of personality’ idea as a rationalisation for the presence of the tragic within the work: ‘It was man with all his sufferings that I saw at the center of this work, lyrical from start to finish. The finale of the symphony resolves the tragically tense moments of the opening movements in a life-affirming, optimistic plan.’⁷⁴ At the same time, Shostakovich is said to have asserted that, of the many critical interpretations which had been offered of the Symphony, ‘one gave me special pleasure, where it was said that the Fifth Symphony is the practical creative answer of a Soviet artist to just criticism’.⁷⁵ Once again, we cannot be sure of the true intentions behind this endorsement, although this has not prevented much speculation on the subject, with some disputing the authenticity of the term ‘just’, and others claiming that it referred purely to the structural cohesiveness of the work rather than to any ideological content.⁷⁶ Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that Shostakovich truly accepted the criticisms directed at him regarding his operas, and neither, it might be argued, does the Fifth Symphony do anything to demonstrate that he took genuinely to heart the advice regarding his compositional style, despite the fact that such a move would have constituted the most likely way of assuring his re-acceptance by the authorities.⁷⁷

(g) Musical Ambiguity and the Preservation of Value

These remarks return us to the dichotomy of interpretation surrounding the conclusion to the Finale. For Tolstoy, for whom the Symphony represented a genuinely pro-Stalin acceptance of the Soviet ideal, the work could be read as primarily autobiographical – as the musical depiction of the composer’s struggles, crowned with victory in its

⁷³ Dmitri Shostakovich, ‘Vmeste s narodom’, *Sovetskoye iskusstvo* 12th January 1938, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 102

⁷⁴ Dmitri Shostakovich, ‘Moy tvorcheskii otvet’, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 102

⁷⁵ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 102-103. As Fay points out, and contrary to popular belief, the statement was not adopted by the composer as a subtitle to the piece.

⁷⁶ Ottaway, *Shostakovich*, p. 24; Roy Blokner, *The Music of Dmitri Shostakovich: The Symphonies* (London: The Tantivy Press, 1979), pp. 65-66

⁷⁷ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 102-103

concluding bars. Of the final movement, Tolstoy writes that it produces ‘an enormous optimistic lift’ and, with the response of the audience present at the premier in mind, he concludes: ‘Our audience is organically incapable of accepting decadent, gloomy, pessimistic art. Our audience responds enthusiastically to all that is bright, clear, joyous, optimistic, life-affirming’.⁷⁸

For Taruskin, Tolstoy’s interpretation is overly simplistic, and he cites Georgiy Khubov’s analysis of the work as evidence of this. Tolstoy’s account, argues Khubov, consists primarily of descriptive rather than analytical writing, composed as it was by someone who was not a music specialist, and is also based largely on assumptions as to the programmatic nature of the work.⁷⁹ Comparing the actual musical performance of the Symphony with Tolstoy’s report, Khubov demonstrates in great detail the ways in which the work falls short of Tolstoy’s claims, pointing in particular to the disassociation between the material of the finale and that of the rest of work, which leads to its perception as ‘not so much bright and optimistic as...severe and threatening’.⁸⁰ So although deeply critical of the piece, (a Party official keen to maintain Shostakovich’s disgraced reputation, Kuhbov refers to the Symphony variously as ‘inorganic’, ‘torpid’ and ‘lacking in conviction’), the review nonetheless serves the purpose of revealing how Tolstoy’s interpretation, when subjected to a closer analysis, simply falls apart.⁸¹

The overwhelming majority of interpretations of the final movement, and by implication of the Symphony as a whole, have favoured less optimistic readings. Norman Kay argues that the attempt at ‘obvious optimism’ which concludes the Symphony is a common compositional device of Shostakovich’s, appearing in many of his works and never intended as genuine. In defence of this position, Kay cites the original tempo marking of the final section, which is considerably slower than the speed at which it is normally performed, and indeed than was the case at the premier. When played in this way, Kay hears within the music ‘undertones of Slav hysteria’, thus

⁷⁸ Alexey Tolstoy, ‘Pyataya simfonia Shostakovicha’, *Izvestiya*, 28th December 1937, as cited in Taruskin, ‘Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth’, p. 32

⁷⁹ Taruskin, ‘Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth’, p. 31. It has even been suggested that Tolstoy’s analyses were in fact ghost-written. This is attested to by Volkov, however, who, as we have seen, has himself been the subject of much controversy regarding the authenticity of his work.

⁸⁰ Georgiy Khubov, ‘5-ya simfoniya D. Shostakovicha’, *Sovetskaya Muzika*, 3, 1938, as cited in Taruskin, ‘Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth’, p. 38

⁸¹ Khubov, ‘5-ya simfoniya D. Shostakovicha’, as cited in Taruskin, ‘Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth’, pp. 38-39

implying a tragic rather than triumphant ending.⁸² Ian MacDonald, who adopts a similar interpretative approach, goes as far as to claim that the recapitulation section in the first movement represents a ‘cartoon satire’ of Stalin himself.⁸³ Interpretations such as these, if in general less extreme than those of MacDonald, have come to largely dominate opinion as to the meaning of the work, and are frequently presented as the ‘correct’, post-Stalinist way in which the Symphony is to be received.⁸⁴

Taruskin, however, remains no more in agreement with these alternative interpretations of the work, which he describes as ‘hermeneutic folklore’, than he does with the optimism of Tolstoy.⁸⁵ Considering the question of whether the Symphony in general, and the Finale in particular, were intended as a form of mockery of Stalin and the Soviet system, he concludes that such a theory has to be rejected as no more than a ‘self-gratifying anachronism’. ‘There were no dissidents in Stalin’s Russia’, he writes. ‘There were old opponents...but by late 1937 they were all dead or behind bars. There were the forlorn and the malcontented, but they were silent. Public dissent or even principled criticism were simply unknown.’⁸⁶ As Adam B. Ulam puts it: ‘People’s minds were benumbed by official propaganda or fear. How could there be any public protest against the inhuman regime when even a casual critical remark to an old acquaintance would often lead to dire consequences, not only for the incautious critic but for his family and friends?’⁸⁷ Whilst it is easy in hindsight to claim that no one ever really believed in the Soviet way of life, at the time, as Andrey Ustinov reminds us, ‘Anyone who did not wish to take part either left this world or went to the Gulag’.⁸⁸ Therefore, concludes Taruskin, if Shostakovich had written a Symphony as subversive as the likes of MacDonald seek to claim, ‘...it would have been more than an ‘amazingly bold

⁸² Kay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 35-36. Indeed, Volkov, in his *Testimony*, has Shostakovich say of the ending: ‘The rejoicing is forced, created under threat, as in *Boris Godunov*. It’s as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying, ‘Your business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing’ and you rise, shakily, and go marching off muttering, ‘Our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing.’ Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Volkov, *Testimony*, p. 140

⁸³ MacDonald, *The New Shostakovich*, pp. 129-130. Here Roger Scruton’s warning that knowledge of the artist’s biography can lead to the over-interpretation of a musical work should be remembered. Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, pp. 144-145

⁸⁴ According to *Testimony*, the composer might even have deliberately intended the work to be denounced, intentionally ending it not with genuine celebration but rather with a sense of forced rejoicing. Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 104

⁸⁵ Taruskin, ‘Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth’, p. 34

⁸⁶ Taruskin, ‘Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth’, p. 46

⁸⁷ Adam B. Ulam, as cited in Taruskin, ‘Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth’, p. 46

⁸⁸ Andrey Ustinov, as cited in Taruskin, ‘Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth’, p. 46

stroke'... It would have been suicide... [The work] may be viewed as irony, perhaps; but it is not mockery'.⁸⁹

Thus Taruskin begins a search for a musical interpretation which bears more weight than the highly-charged, polarised views of Tolstoy and MacDonald. Here he turns in the first instance to the suggestion of Leo Mazel' regarding the ending of the Symphony, which identifies it as comprising a distinctive modal dissonance and melodic progression also to be found in Shostakovich's other works, some of which are textured, and in which it is used to evoke 'a sorrowful, gloomy, or angrily plaintive character'.⁹⁰ In this way, argues Taruskin, together with other, similar aspects of the work, such as the 'funereal' third movement, the Symphony might be primarily characterised as 'an act of witness that gives voice to the wounded', achieved 'not by 'objective description' but by the purposeful intrusion of subjective feeling, the composer having learned that this subjectivity alone is what gives art – his art – its enduring value'.⁹¹ For Taruskin, it is this sentiment that was sensed by those present at the premier of the work, that underlies Khubov's report, albeit obscured by censure, and that appears again in an interview by Mazel' in 1960. Here, in a context masked by references to the Patriotic War, he sums up that which lies at the centre of the Fifth Symphony:

A sense of responsibility, consciousness that 'the struggle of progressive humanity with reaction is not over', that one must remember fallen heroes and think of future generations, that into our thoughts of victory our former grievous anxiety and the tormenting pain of former misfortunes must flow like a living current – all this permeates the work of this composer.⁹²

Taruskin therefore gives us an interpretation of the Symphony which seeks both to handle the contextuality of the work in a responsible manner and to remain true to the musical analysis of the piece. Not content with the somewhat rash conclusions of the

⁸⁹ Taruskin, 'Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth', p. 50 & p. 52

⁹⁰ Leo Mazel', as cited in Taruskin, 'Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth', p. 52

⁹¹ Taruskin, 'Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth', p. 52. For Taruskin, although the trials endured by the composer whilst writing the Symphony 'lent Shostakovich's voice a moral authority perhaps unmatched in all of twentieth-century music', he nonetheless acknowledges that 'the impulse to communicate urgently in an atmosphere of threat did lead, at times, to an overreliance on extroverted reference as bearer of essential meaning, and a correspondingly debased level of musical discourse'. Taruskin, 'Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth', p. 55

⁹² Leo Mazel', as cited in Taruskin, 'Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth', p. 52

pro-Stalinist crowd, he also refuses to capitulate to the opposite extreme represented by many more recent expositions of the work – interpretations in which, he argues, ‘Black and white have been conveniently reversed, all grey still resolutely expunged’.⁹³ Sadly, he notes, the process of *glasnost* would seem to have led not to greater interpretative clarity but rather to a sense of futility, and he finds himself, to a degree, mourning the passing of the ‘hedged, risky, guarded statements of the past’, which, he suggests, were ‘so much more powerful, so much richer’.⁹⁴ Here, then, we come to understand the work not as a demonstration of easy resolution but rather as one of complex revelation – the very message of the Pushkin song which provided the kernel for the Symphony’s development.⁹⁵ Indeed, it is in this very ambiguity, in danger of near complete erosion in the hands of the critics, that, he argues, the lasting value of the Fifth Symphony is to be found. It is the openness of the work to interpretation and reinterpretation that makes us actively engage with the music – that enables us to speak as part of the creative process and to be spoken to through the meanings which we find in the piece. This ambiguity was arguably the saving grace of the work at the time of its composition, and has served to open it to a variety of differing interpretations from those of the audience present at its premier right up to those who hear it today.⁹⁶

III. Theological Reflection on the Fifth Symphony

The Fifth Symphony is, I contend, not an attempt on the part of Shostakovich to write music simply to entertain and boost the morale of the Soviet people as the dictates of Socialist Realism required. It cannot be identified as a pro-Stalinist acceptance of Soviet ideology, and yet at the same time neither is it entirely anti-Stalinist, for it does not descend into blatant, and thus very dangerous, mockery of the Stalinist system: contrary to popular belief, the Shostakovich of the Fifth Symphony is no political reactionary. Rather, what is revealed in the work runs far deeper and is much more complex than any such message: it is an attempt to explain something of the *human condition* – to

⁹³ Taruskin, ‘Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth’, pp. 55-56. Liana Genina also calls for a halt to ‘cheap inversionism: to the insistence on reading formulaic ideological programmes in every Shostakovich composition – only the reverse of what was read before – and especially to the easy presumption that Shostakovich, ‘in the grip of horror, said, signed and did one thing, but always thought another’’. Liana Genina, as cited in Taruskin, ‘Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth’, pp. 55-56

⁹⁴ Taruskin, ‘Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth’, p. 55. Indeed, others have even suggested that the true Socialist Realists are those who have spent the past sixty years in the futile process of trying to decide whether the work is in fact optimistic or pessimistic. ‘Shostakovich’, BBC Radio 3

⁹⁵ ‘Shostakovich’, BBC Radio 3

⁹⁶ Taruskin, ‘Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth’, p. 30

remain honest to the situation of the Russian people by exploring aspects of the reality of their lives and expressing their fear, suffering and confusion. In this way, the work takes on a culturally-generated significance, exploring through the medium of music those issues which lie at the centre of human experience, creating a sense of solidarity and social cohesion in an otherwise fractured and terror-ridden nation, and maybe even suggesting, amidst all of this, the presence of hope. It is from this understanding of music in relation to culture, therefore, that I aim to construct my theological reflection on the work.

Before I can do this, I need first to say something about what it is that we mean when we talk about culture. In everyday speech culture has two normal uses: an anthropological one, in which it means a way of life, and a second, familiar from the ‘culture’ sections of the broadsheets, to mean the sum of human creativity.⁹⁷ By and large, over the last sixty years, this latter discussion has distinguished between ‘popular’ and ‘high’ culture. On the one hand, ‘high’ culture denotes that which is considered the ‘best’ or ‘greatest’ amongst artistic endeavour, such as is housed or performed in museums, galleries and opera houses, necessarily entailing an aspect of elitism in production and appeal, and often selective in its audience on the grounds of wealth and economic advantage.⁹⁸ On the other, ‘popular’ culture is that which appeals not to the elite but rather to the masses, and which has come to be associated not so much with artistic excellence as with entertainment and ease of consumption.⁹⁹

The notion of high culture has its roots in Plato, for whom, as we saw in chapter two, education in the high arts was essential to the moral development of human beings and thus to their ability to contribute to the good of society.¹⁰⁰ In eighteenth and early nineteenth century Germany, many streams developed this idea: Kant’s notion of culture as moral autonomy; Hegel’s idea of Absolute Spirit as achieving self-awareness in the world through, amongst other things, the practice of high art; Schleiermacher’s emphasis on the importance of the expression of ‘feeling’; and Wilhelm von

⁹⁷ For Clifford Geertz, human beings are animals suspended in webs of significance which they themselves have spun, and ‘culture’ in this first sense is, for him, the name for these webs. Culture, he writes, is ‘an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life’. C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana, 1993), p. 5 & p. 89

⁹⁸ T. J. Gorringer, *Furthering Humanity: A Theology of Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 47

⁹⁹ Gorringer, *Furthering Humanity*, pp. 52-58

¹⁰⁰ Gorringer, *Furthering Humanity*, p. 48

Humboldt's conceptualising of *Bildung* ('formation') in Prussian educational reform.¹⁰¹ In 1799, in the midst of the rise of *Kultur*, Schleiermacher published his famous *Speeches*, addressed to 'die Gebildeten' – 'the cultured, amongst the despisers of religion'. These were those who, having the free time to study philosophy and the arts, were thus able to practice that which, for Schleiermacher, lay at the heart of religion: the cultivation of a sense and taste for the infinite. As a result, religion and culture become almost inseparable, as is demonstrated through Schleiermacher's theology of music which, as we discovered in the previous chapter, seems to equate, in some sense, either music's sense of absolute dependence or its appeal to 'feeling' with ideas of the experience of the divine. The obvious danger, which Schleiermacher does not quite avoid in the *Speeches*, is that it suggests that culture, and thus religion, are the preserve only of the wealthy.¹⁰² This was one of the reasons why Schleiermacher's theology incurred Barth's ferocious attack when he was teaching at Göttingen and Munster.¹⁰³

So how might we understand the music of Shostakovich in relation to definitions of culture such as these? Throughout Stalin's lifetime, Shostakovich, following Socialist Realism, was supposed to produce music for the 'ordinary working man' – the proletariat. This was not quite popular culture, as we have come to understand it, but it was most certainly not high culture. However, much of the music which Shostakovich in fact wrote, including the Fifth Symphony, did not fit with official perceptions of this 'culture of the people' but rather continued to adhere to the classical, high art tradition. This led not only to the criticisms we have explored of *Lady Macbeth*, but also formed the substance of the notorious denunciation of Shostakovich at the first 'All-Union' Congress in April 1948, at which the composer was forced to publically repent of his work and to declare that he was willing to follow Party dictates and compose music for the masses.¹⁰⁴

Theologically, we might perhaps concede a point to this Stalinist criticism. Jon Sobrino, for example, argues that 'the history of God advances indefectibly by way of the poor; that the Spirit of Jesus takes historical flesh in the poor; and that the poor show the

¹⁰¹ Gorringer, *Furthering Humanity*, p. 49

¹⁰² Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 12

¹⁰³ Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its History and Background*, trans. by Brian Cozens & John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1972), ch. 11

¹⁰⁴ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 200; Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 161-162

direction of history that is in accord with God's plan'.¹⁰⁵ Is not high culture, then, the culture of the wealthy elite, standing against the Church's commitment to the poor as highlighted by the liberation theologians? In fashioning works of high art such as the Fifth Symphony, was not Shostakovich abandoning the poor? In response to such questions, I draw upon Matthew Arnold's appeal to the value of high culture in *Culture and Anarchy*. Arnold cites Jesus' command: "Be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48)', and whilst allowing that religion is vital, nonetheless felt that culture added an emphasis on harmonious perfection, 'developing all sides of our humanity'.¹⁰⁶ Those who cultivate only religion 'have developed one side of their humanity at the expense of all others, and have become incomplete and mutilated men in consequence'.¹⁰⁷ Glossing these arguments, Gorringer argues that the gospel as a call to perfection requires difficulty; it is a call to commitment, and that commitment can be expressed through art, music and literature – through the essentially demanding and difficult nature of high culture.¹⁰⁸

Arnold, an inspector of schools, believed that it was the task of education to further culture. Like Karl Barth, he argues that no culture embodies the values of the kingdom, but rather that all are profoundly unjust and in need of radical change. Towards this end, he maintained, the curriculum should strive to teach 'the best which has been thought and said'.¹⁰⁹ For Gorringer, such education is continuous and worldwide. It does not have as its aim the notion of trying to make everyone upper class, nor of imposing one style of education on all, but it is concerned with insisting on difficulty, acknowledging that truth and justice necessarily have to be struggled for, and aiming for the genuine realisation of 'life in all its fullness'.¹¹⁰

So Shostakovich's music might be understood as contributing to 'high' culture, and such culture might be perceived as of value to the theological task. To unpack the significance and implications of this claim, I return to the Socialist Realist tradition out of which Shostakovich wrote – an ideology which, as noted above, is more closely

¹⁰⁵ Jon Sobrino, as cited in Gorringer, *Furthering Humanity*, p. 47

¹⁰⁶ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (London: John Murray, 1920), p. 9 & xi

¹⁰⁷ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, xi

¹⁰⁸ Gorringer, *Furthering Humanity*, pp. 49-52. For Gorringer, folk culture offers a more favourable alternative to popular culture. Unlike mass culture, folk culture is not driven by economics, but its influence is sadly diminishing in contemporary Western society. The theological importance of folk culture, he argues, is to be found in its preservation of values and its identification with the poor and marginalised. Gorringer, *Furthering Humanity*, p. 65

¹⁰⁹ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, viii

¹¹⁰ Gorringer, *Furthering Humanity*, p. 149

aligned to mass or popular culture than to high culture. In my second chapter, I discussed the views of Theodor Adorno regarding the nature of mass culture, including his argument that, as a result of the commodification of cultural practices, much modern music can no longer function in a counter-cultural way, challenging social norms, but rather merely endorses and perpetuates the status quo. Now the same might be said, I submit, in the case of Socialist Realism, for this, too, as we have seen, eliminates the possibility of cultural critique. With its emphasis on the creating of uniform artworks that can be easily accessed and understood by all, it left no room for change, independent thought, or reasoned criticism, and in so doing, prevented artistic honesty and was anathema to genuine creativity. Socialist Realism, then, despite not originating in the capitalist system Adorno had in mind, might perhaps be helpfully viewed in light of Adorno's theory of the culture industry – that is, as a culture which is presented as 'a culture of the people' but is in fact instigated from the top by those in power. Again, it could be understood as the fetishisation of Russian folk culture – as the valuing of the Russian folk tradition only as a means of furthering Party ideology rather than for its own sake.

For Adorno, mass culture marks the onset of terminal cultural decline. It is the beginning of the end of culture: music cannot escape from cultural determination to recapture its critical capacity; it cannot deny the expectations of society and still be understood by its audience. However, as I have shown, the Fifth Symphony in many ways refuses to conform to the requirements of Socialist Realism and yet still succeeded in being publically well-received. The audience present at the premier would appear to have related deeply and genuinely to the work, not as a mere form of morale-boosting entertainment, but as that which presented 'a living chronicle about themselves' – 'an act of witness that gives voice to the wounded', full of the 'purposeful intrusion of subjective feeling which is what gives art its enduring value'. In this way, the work demonstrates, without recourse to the dictates of Socialist Realism, an appeal to 'ordinary' people. The immediate achievement of a public resonance such as this is a particularly remarkable achievement for a classical symphony to make, especially one composed in the twentieth century. This is high art, but high art that engages rather than excludes. So might it be, then, that Shostakovich is presenting us with a solution to the apparent dichotomy between the need for music to be autonomous if it is function critically and the danger of such music becoming alienated from its intended audience? Perhaps we hear in this work music recovering its critical edge, and in so doing, we are

provided with that which Adorno himself sought in the music of composers such as Schoenberg and Mahler.¹¹¹

In order to make sense of all this theologically, I turn to read these views of Adorno in light of the theological understanding of culture presented by Karl Barth. As I touched upon in my second chapter, Barth remains critical of what he regards as Schleiermacher's 'sanctification of cultural achievement', admonishing him for attempting to tie God too closely to human culture and for preventing the option for God to act in contrary to the will of humankind.¹¹² However, when studied more closely, it becomes apparent that Barth's approach to culture is in fact not entirely negative, but rather is *dialectical*. Christianity is not culture but at the same time is not other than culture; religion remains necessarily a part of culture, even though it cannot be identified with culture without the remainder of hope.¹¹³ Although arguing that cultural achievement cannot be sanctified in the way Schleiermacher attempts, Barth argues that there still always remains the possibility that culture might be revelatory.¹¹⁴ For Barth, both theology and culture are concerned with full humanity, but theology has to remain open to the counter-cultural, because revelation always tells us something we cannot tell ourselves.¹¹⁵

It is therefore through this theological appropriation of the views of Adorno that, I contend, the theological significance of the Fifth Symphony is to be found. This work, in my view, is an example of high art which functions in a counter-cultural way, seeking to subvert the artistic norms of its social context and thus critiquing the culture of which it is a part. By denying the perpetuation of the cultural deficiencies of Socialist Realism, the work stands as an example of music as a cultural artefact which nonetheless recognises the limitations and negativities of one particular culture and which strives to overcome these in the artistic creation of a new reality. The Symphony is revelatory in

¹¹¹ Judith Kuhn points to the fact that Adorno approved of Mahler as he created music that 'honestly reflected a contemporary world full of ruptures, contradictions and disillusionment', and argues that the same might be said of Shostakovich's music. Judith Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue: Form, Imagery and Ideas in Quartets 1-7* (Farnham & Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2010), p. 276 Adorno, of course, had little time for Shostakovich, criticising the composer, along with Britten and Stravinsky, as having a 'taste for tastelessness, a simplicity resulting from ignorance, an immaturity which masks as enlightenment, and a dearth of technical means'. Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* (New York & London: Continuum, 2004), p. 7

¹¹² See chapter 2, p. 87

¹¹³ Gorringer, *Furthering Humanity*, pp. 43-45

¹¹⁴ Gorringer, *Furthering Humanity*, p. 20

¹¹⁵ Gorringer, *Furthering Humanity*, p. 74

the way that Barth describes: it reminds us that cultural assumptions need to be challenged, and that art itself can form both question and reply.

In order to achieve this, Shostakovich retains an astonishing degree of independent artistic thought in the creation of the work. From the hidden fragments of the Pushkin *Romance*, through the inclusion of elements of sadness (most notably the third movement, although also in areas such as the conclusions to both the first and second movements) and aspects which provoke thought and reflection (in the third movement's recourse to Orthodox chant and quotations of Mahler, and in the way in which the work repeatedly contains echoes of its own formation), to the tongue-in-cheek second movement with its satirical nod to the Soviet march, the Symphony perhaps provides a far truer testimony to the composer's ability to subvert and challenge than can any written document. In this work, Shostakovich creates art which endeavours to truly reflect reality, even if that reality has become distorted, and that distortion has come to be accepted as the truth. To return to the dialect of Barth, this is music which recognises both the limitations and also the possibilities inherent within the cultural act.

Through seeking to say something genuinely original and meaningful with his music, Shostakovich reclaims the musical work as of importance to the development and flourishing of humankind in a culture in which the prioritisation of the banal and fake had become the norm, and this might be construed as a musical realisation on the part of Shostakovich of the call to commitment and to perfection. The 'reply to *just* criticism' contained within the work, although in part arguably the taking on board of genuine criticism resulting from the denunciation of *Lady Macbeth*, at the same time stands as the refusal to bow to demands of society at the time: a refusal to refrain from the inclusion of the tragic in art by not exploring controversial yet pressing topics; a refusal not to use art as a means of personal expression; a refusal to seek to draw more upon the Russian folk tradition so that he, too, might become instrumental in the fetishisation of his country's past. This is a work which does not refuse standards, but rather continually strives for that which can be achieved only through dedication to the ongoing task of the revival of cultural integrity. Such an act is a refusal to settle for the superficial and a decision to engage instead with the demanding and the difficult – with that which, theologically, makes for the perfection of humanity.

Understanding the Fifth Symphony within a context of the pursuit of the best that culture has to offer is an acknowledgement of the role of education in furthering culture. In this work, Shostakovich is giving musical life to the perception that we need to fight for that which is worth having. On one level, this is true in a musical sense, for Shostakovich is aiming for musical excellence rather than settling for the second-best, entertainment style of music so pervasive at the time of his writing. But on another level, this is also true in terms of that for which the music stands: Shostakovich is at the same time striving for creative excellence and the freedom to write what he likes and to write of life as it is. This is the antithesis of the vision of Socialist Realism and the reason why his music appealed to 'the masses' in a way in which that music which followed the dictates of the theory rarely achieved. The Fifth Symphony, therefore, shows us what music can be and what it can express: it strives for the best that is possible within musical composition, and as such might be viewed as forming an artistic contribution towards the genuine realisation of 'life in all its fullness'.

Having here shown that music understood as cultural expression need not lead to the sanctification of cultural experience but rather might be of value to theological endeavour, I now turn in my following chapter to address the concern that theological appeal to musical expressivity might result in a 'religion of aestheticism'.

CHAPTER 4

Musical Icons

The Seventh Symphony

I. The Context of the Seventh Symphony*(a) Declaration of War*

Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, Stalin had remained unconvinced as to the dependability of the West to support Russia during conflict. A general distrust of the changeability of democratic government was compounded in the summer of 1939, when Britain was perceived as not responding with sufficient urgency over talks with the USSR regarding Hitler's advances towards Warsaw.¹ As a result, discussions between Russia and Germany, which had been proceeding at the same time, were raised to a new level, and culminated in the signing of the Soviet-Nazi Non-Aggression Treaty on 23rd August. The pact contained two sections: one which was made public, in which both countries agreed to avoid war and to increase bilateral trade, thus guaranteeing Hitler open access to Russia's natural resources, and one which remained secret, in which the territories between Russia and Germany were divided between the two nations. Most of Poland was allocated to Hitler, who then invaded the country on 1st September. When the Nazi forces refused to withdraw, Britain and France declared war on Germany, and the Second World War began.²

The signing of the Treaty had lulled Russia into a false sense of security as to the nature of its relationship with Germany. Stalin, who had expected the war in Western Europe to be a lengthy affair, concentrated his efforts on securing Russia's territory in Eastern Europe rather than preparing for attack. Even when French military resistance collapsed in June 1940, he remained convinced that Hitler would first want to secure control of Britain before turning his attention towards the USSR. Stalin also remained unrealistically optimistic about the outcome of Russia's involvement in any such war, to the extent that Soviet commentators were banned from reporting on the true scale of the

¹ Service, *A History of Modern Russia*, p. 255

² Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 148; Service, *A History of Modern Russia*, p. 256

German army. When a group of brave German soldiers swam across the River Bug from Eastern Europe to Russia on 21st June 1941 to warn of an impending attack, they were shot as enemy agents, and the invasion of Nazi troops early the following morning – the start of ‘Operation Barbarossa’ – met with little resistance. Stalin even initially ordered the Russian troops not to respond to German ‘provocations’ – a move he was to later deeply regret – and, as a result, the German army began to make swift progress into the country.³

(b) The Siege of Leningrad

By the end of August 1941, Nazi troops had surrounded Leningrad.⁴ The city held a certain fascination for Hitler, and its capture and destruction was central to his plans for conquering the country. Although announcing publically in speeches and leaflets dropped on the city that, in order to avoid obliteration, it must surrender, Hitler secretly ordered Field Marshal Wilhelm von Leeb, the commander of the Nazi troops in the east, that both Leningrad and its inhabitants were to be annihilated, whatever the cost. A directive from Nazi general Walter Warlimont, entitled ‘The Future of the City of St. Petersburg’, reads: ‘The Führer has decided to raze the city of St. Petersburg from the face of the earth. After the defeat of Soviet Russia there will be not the slightest reason for the future existence of this large city.’⁵ At the same time, Stalin himself was ready to destroy both Leningrad, named after his predecessor, and Stalingrad, named after himself, rather than have to endure the spectacle of Hitler claiming them as his own.⁶

Hitler had expected Leningrad to fall easily, but the ensuing siege was to last for over two years before the Nazis eventually withdrew in the face of the advancing Red Army. During this time, limited supplies could still reach the city, but these provisions were nowhere near the level needed to sustain a population of two and a half million.⁷ German bombardment of power stations cut off electricity supplies, and coal reserves

³ Service, *A History of Modern Russia*, pp. 256-260

⁴ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 148

⁵ Ed Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 1’, *The Guardian*.
www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2001/nov/25/features.magazine27 (25.11.2001; accessed 30.12.2010)

⁶ Service, *A History of Modern Russia*, p. 266

⁷ In particular, Lake Ladoga provided a lifeline for the city, with supplies shipped over during the warmer months and driven over the ice through the winter, although this proved a precarious and somewhat unreliable means of transportation. Harrison E. Salisbury, *The Siege of Leningrad* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1969), pp. 407-422

soon disappeared.⁸ Food was rationed, and then the rations cut further.⁹ Composer Dmitri Tolstoy, resident in Leningrad during the siege, recalls: ‘The Germans completely surrounded us and the famine began. First of all the shops closed down. Then the lights went out. Then the water supply and the sewage system stopped. Then the heating. Winter was coming.’¹⁰

Over the winter of 1941-42, temperatures in Leningrad reached thirty-five degrees below zero, and with allocated daily food rations well below those needed in such cold conditions, the citizens of Leningrad slowly began to starve.¹¹ Over 52,000 people died in December 1941 alone.¹² A witness recalls: ‘You walk, someone falls, and you haven’t even got the strength to help them get up’.¹³ Another remembers how ‘We went to the ice-hole [to collect water] and people were dying there. They would go with their bucket and freeze there. I’d go to work – from Tolmachov Street to Zhdanov Street. I went by foot. I’d go, I’d see people there. And in the evening there were corpses lying there.’¹⁴ The dead lined the streets before being dragged away to mass graves on brightly painted children’s sledges. Where the ground was frozen, or people too weak to dig, explosives were used to blast pits into which bodies were dumped and left to be covered with snow.¹⁵

The battle against starvation was constant. Tolstoy again: ‘They ate nothing. Oh yes, they boiled glue, leather straps from the suitcases, things like that. All the cats and dogs had already been eaten by November or December.’¹⁶ Another survivor recalls how ‘At times you feel such pain that the stomach demands food, and everything inside you is clenched. Your psychological state changes. At these moments it seems you are ready to jump at the table, the chair, the walls, to gnaw at them, if only you could extinguish this.

⁸ Salisbury, *Siege*, p. 454 & p. 421

⁹ Salisbury, *Siege*, pp. 367-368

¹⁰ Dmitri Tolstoy, in *Shostakovich Against Stalin: The War Symphonies*. Dir. Larry Weinstein. Decca. 1997

¹¹ At its lowest point, the daily bread ration of a Leningrad citizen fell to 125g per day – about two slices. The nutritional value of the bread also gradually deteriorated as flour supplies dwindled and substitutes, such as malt, wood cellulose and refined cottonseed cake, made up increasingly large proportions of the bread formula. Salisbury, *Siege*, p. 388 & pp. 369-370

¹² Salisbury, *Siege*, p. 491. It is estimated that no fewer than 800,000 people died of starvation in Leningrad during the blockade. Salisbury, *Siege*, p. 516

¹³ *Shostakovich Against Stalin*

¹⁴ *Shostakovich Against Stalin*

¹⁵ Salisbury, *Siege*, pp. 435-446; Vulliamy, ‘Orchestra Manoeuvres: Part 1’

¹⁶ Tolstoy, in *Shostakovich Against Stalin*

And if you yield to this urge, that's the end.'¹⁷ There were even rumours of cannibalism. One witness remembers: 'We only really saw what winter did when the snow began to melt. 'Look, here comes spring!' But what did it bring? Decomposing, dismembered corpses in the streets that had been hidden under the ice. Severed legs with meat chopped off them. Bits of bodies in the bins. Women's bodies with the breasts cut off, which people had taken to eat. They had been buried all winter but there they were for all the city to see how it had remained alive.'¹⁸

It is this context of war, siege and starvation that provided the backdrop for the composition of Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony.

(c) Shostakovich and War

On Sunday 22nd June 1941, during Leningrad's 'white nights', Shostakovich and Isaak Glikman had planned to attend a football match and then to go out for dinner. Whilst they were travelling to the stadium, Molotov's radio broadcast announced Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union.¹⁹ In the weeks that immediately followed, life continued with relative normality for Shostakovich, who was currently involved with examinations at the Leningrad Conservatoire where he was chairman of the piano commission as well as a member of the composition jury. Although poor eyesight meant that he could not sign up for active service, he was determined to help his country, and so became an auxiliary of the Fire Brigade, working to protect the roof of the Conservatoire against incendiary attacks. A photograph taken on 29th July of him in a fireman's helmet and holding a fire hose soon featured in newspapers around the world as a symbol of Leningrad's resistance. In reality, however, the composer was never actually involved in the extinguishing of an incendiary and, after the war, Conservatoire official Aron Ostrovsky even confessed that excuses had been made to deliberately remove Shostakovich from the roof when danger threatened, such was the need for musical compositions for performance to frontline troops.²⁰

At the start of July, Shostakovich was writing arrangements of songs for the concert brigades to perform at the Front, and it was later that month that he began work on the

¹⁷ *Shostakovich Against Stalin*

¹⁸ Viktor Koslov, as cited in Vulliamy, 'Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 1'

¹⁹ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 122

²⁰ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 148; Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 122-123

Seventh Symphony.²¹ The vast first movement was completed in less than six weeks, and the second and third movements in only three weeks.²² He recalls: ‘I wrote my Seventh Symphony, the *Leningrad*, quickly. I couldn’t not write it. War was all around. I had to be together with the people, I wanted to create the image of our embattled country, to engrave it in music.’²³ Indeed, such was his compulsion to write the piece that he even took the score with him to the roof of the Conservatoire so that he could continue to work on it by night between attacks.²⁴

By the end of August, the Nazi blockade of Leningrad had been consolidated and the siege began. Although many of the city’s artistic and intellectual elite had already been evacuated to the relative safety of nearby towns, Shostakovich refused to leave. Following the pleas of anxious friends concerned for his well-being, he wrote in a letter to Sollertinsky dated 29th August of plans to leave with his family within the next two days. Nearly a week later, Shostakovich was still in Leningrad, and on 4th September, the Nazis began to bombard the city with shells.²⁵ On 17th September, an announcement by the composer was broadcast on Leningrad Radio:

An hour ago I finished the score of two movements of a large symphonic composition. If I succeed in carrying it off, if I manage to complete the third and fourth movements, then perhaps I’ll be able to call it my Seventh Symphony. Why am I telling you this? So that the radio listeners who are listening to me now will know that life in our city is proceeding normally.²⁶

²¹ Following the success of his Fifth Symphony, Shostakovich’s popularity had increased considerably. From a position of relative calm and stability, he had turned his attention to chamber music, completing, amongst others, the First String Quartet (July 1938) and the Piano Quintet (September 1940), both of which were well-received. During this time, he had also announced that he was working on a symphony dedicated to Lenin, which would consist of no less than four movements and would include texts by Russian writers and poets. However, it would appear that this description was purely aimed at silencing the critics, for the Sixth Symphony, completed in the summer of 1939, bore little resemblance to such programmatic ideals. Unlike the Fifth, the work did not adhere to traditional symphonic structure, consisting instead of a prolonged, introspective first movement, an energetic scherzo and a finale of ‘almost flippant hilarity’. It was premiered on 5th November 1939 under Mravinsky as the opening to the autumn season of the Leningrad Philharmonic where it was received positively although not on the level of the Fifth. Wilson, *Shostakovich*, pp. 127-128 & pp. 130-131

²² Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 148

²³ Dmitri Shostakovich, ‘Kak rozhdayetsya muzika’, *Literaurnaya gazeta*, 21st December 1965, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 124

²⁴ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 124

²⁵ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 125

²⁶ Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 125

Two days later, Luftwaffe bombs fell on the Gostiny shopping area, killing and wounding hundreds of civilians. That evening, friends of Shostakovich were gathered in the composer's home listening to him perform a piano arrangement of the first three movements of the Symphony when the sirens sounded. Pausing only to accompany his wife and children to safety in the cellar, Shostakovich then returned to finish his recital, his guests remaining at the house until the all clear was sounded.²⁷

The composer and his family were eventually evacuated from Leningrad to Moscow on 1st October by order of local Party officials. Amongst the few possessions they were allowed, Shostakovich took with him the three completed movements of the Seventh Symphony.²⁸ The subject of art in wartime had evidently struck a chord both with local people and also with the authorities, who were keen to make the most of the composer's popularity and success, and during his short stay in the city Shostakovich gave many interviews and made numerous appearances. As Fay puts it: 'His made a compelling story, that of courageous young composer resisting evacuation to defend his native city not only by physical deeds but also through one of the most venerated of human endeavours – one inherently antithetical to the destructive impulse of war – the creation of art. [The Seventh Symphony] was a heady propaganda weapon, evoking both inspiration and defiance, and its publicity was exploited skilfully almost from the moment of the work's conception.'²⁹

On 16th October, Shostakovich and his family, together with a large group of other composers, artists and writers, were allocated places on a train heading for Sverdlovsk.³⁰ The departure was chaotic. Karen Khachaturian, whose uncle, the composer Aram Khachaturian, was also leaving the city, recalls:

I suddenly caught sight of Dmitri Dmitriyevich on the platform. He looked completely bereft. He was holding a sewing machine in one hand and a children's potty in the other, while his wife, Nina Vasilyevna stood beside the

²⁷ Vulliamy, 'Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 1', *The Guardian*

²⁸ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 148; Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 125. Shostakovich had been assured that his mother, sister and nephew would follow him to Moscow the following day. This did not happen, and a distraught Shostakovich went to great lengths to try and secure their safety, including attempting to charter a plane to go and get them. Despite his efforts, however, they did not escape until the spring of 1942, by which time they were severely emaciated having endured winter in the besieged city. Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 167 & p. 169

²⁹ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 126

³⁰ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 149

children and a mountain of stuff. I helped them load their things on to the train. Later, when I made my way home from the station, I was struck by the number of howling dogs roaming the snowy streets, having been abandoned by their owners.³¹

The journey was slow, overcrowded and uncomfortable. There was not enough space for everyone to lie down, so the passengers resorted to sleeping in shifts. After several days, Shostakovich discovered that the two suitcases containing all of his and his children's personal possessions had been left behind at Moscow. For a short time it was feared that the score for the symphony had also been lost, although fortunately this was later discovered among the composer's remaining possessions on the train.³²

After seven days, the group reached Kuibyshev, the seat of the evacuated government and also the temporary home for a number of institutions including the Bolshoi Theatre and the editorial offices of *Pravda*. After much discussion, Shostakovich decided to alight here with his family rather than travel on to Sverdlovsk. Upon arrival, they were allocated spaces in a classroom in one of the local schools, together with a number of other artists, musicians and performers. They slept on the floor with no mattresses, although did receive access to the Bolshoi Theatre commissariat who provided a daily ration of food. A week later, the family were moved to a room of their own, and Shostakovich was given a grand piano in order that he might continue with his compositions.³³

During the evacuation, Shostakovich had not worked on the Seventh Symphony. Once in Kuibyshev, he announced that he had returned to work and that progress was strong: 'Currently I am completing the last, fourth, movement. I have never worked so quickly as now.'³⁴ In reality, however, he was struggling to complete the piece. In a letter to Sollertinsky dated 29th November he admitted that composition of the final movement was not going well; writing to Glikman the following day he revealed that he had not yet even started it.³⁵ Friend and artist Nikolai Sokolov, who had accompanied Shostakovich on the train from Moscow, recounts a conversation with the composer in

³¹ Karen Khachaturian, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 150

³² Nikolai Sokolov, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, pp. 150-151

³³ Sokolov, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, pp. 151-152

³⁴ Shostakovich, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 127

³⁵ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 127

which he confided that ‘...as soon as I got on that train, something snapped inside me... I can’t compose just now, knowing how many people are losing their lives.’³⁶ Living arrangements in Kuibyshev made matters worse, with Shostakovich again mentioning to Sokolov that ‘...now I realise how inconvenient it is to work in a single room; the children are rowdy and disturb me. Yet they have every right to be noisy, they are only children, but unfortunately I can’t work.’³⁷ In early December, however, the family was found a larger apartment, and Shostakovich finally had the space he needed in which to work. Spurred on by news that the Nazi troops had been held back outside Moscow, he went on to finish the Seventh Symphony in less than two weeks, completing it on 27th December 1941.³⁸

II. The Seventh Symphony

(a) ‘War Symphonies’

Many composers have taken war as the subject of their work, for example Boshuslav Martinu’s symphonic poem *Memorial to Lidice*, Gerogij Firtich’s cantata *Leningrad*, also in memory of the siege, and Benjamin Britten’s famous *War Requiem* to name but a few.³⁹ Indeed, the Seventh Symphony is only one of Shostakovich’s three so-called ‘War Symphonies’, which include the Eighth and Ninth Symphonies, and which all deal with themes of war in differing ways.⁴⁰ The Seventh Symphony, however, is unusual amongst musical compositions for the immediacy of its connection to its subject, given the context of its composition, and eventual performance, during the very events which it portrays.⁴¹ As Nicholas Slonimsky puts it: ‘No composer before Shostakovich had written a musical work depicting a still raging war, and no composer had ever attempted to describe a future victory, in music, with such power and conviction, at a time when his people fought for their very right to exist as a nation’.⁴²

³⁶ Sokolov, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 153

³⁷ Solokov, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 153

³⁸ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 154 & p. 149; Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 127

³⁹ Robert Dearling, in Norris, *Shostakovich*, p. 64

⁴⁰ For more on Shostakovich’s Eighth and Ninth Symphonies see Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 136-137 & pp. 146-148 and Wilson, *Shostakovich*, pp. 174-178. For a discussion of the relationship between the War Symphonies, see David Gow, ‘Shostakovich’s ‘War’ Symphonies’, *The Musical Times*, 105:1453 (1964), 191-193.

⁴¹ Dearling suggests that we might draw a comparison between the Seventh Symphony and the poetry of Wilfred Owen. Dearling, in Norris, *Shostakovich*, p. 64

⁴² Blokker, *Shostakovich*, p. 81

Although normally declining to provide dedications for his work, Shostakovich titled the Seventh Symphony ‘to our struggle against fascism, to our coming victory over the enemy, and to my native city, Leningrad’,⁴³ and even provided accompanying programme notes for each movement, thus appearing much more, if not completely, open as regards his intentions in the creation of the work.⁴⁴ In contrast to the Fifth Symphony, the Seventh is free from internal conflict, as Hugh Ottaway puts it: ‘Running right through the *Leningrad* Symphony is an underlying joy, a peace of mind, as if the composer’s inner life had become simple and free. There are no subjective problems, and in that sense this is one of the happiest of works.’⁴⁵ However, the undercurrent of an alternative agenda is detected by some, who suggest that the Symphony represents not only an opposition to fascism but also to Stalinism. Indeed, Flora Litvinova recalls a conversation with the composer in which he said of the work: ‘Of course – Fascism. But music, real music, can never be literally tied to a theme. National Socialism is not the only form of Fascism; this music is about all forms of terror, slavery, the bondage of the spirit.’⁴⁶

(b) *First Movement*

‘The exposition of the first movement’, writes Shostakovich, ‘tells of the happy, peaceful life of people sure of themselves and their future. This is the simple, peaceful life lived before the war by thousands of Leningrad militiamen, by the whole city, by our country.’⁴⁷ The opening theme of the movement (Fig. 4.1) presents us with the musical depiction of this happy and peaceful life in the form of a unison string melody with solo bassoon. Nonetheless, and characteristically for Shostakovich, the mood of this passage remains open to interpretation, with its dark tone and resistance to development (at bar six we are returned unexpectedly to the opening motif of the theme) perhaps suggesting a less positive programme than is openly stated.⁴⁸

⁴³ Dmitri Shostakovich, ‘Sed’maya simfoniya’, in *Pravda* 29th March 1942, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 131

⁴⁴ The programme notes for the Symphony were originally reported to Dmitri Rabinovich, a biographer of Shostakovich. Ottaway, *Shostakovich*, p. 33 As a piece of ‘programmatic’ music, then, the Symphony invites reflection on the intentions of the composer as overtly stated in words as opposed to consideration of it as an ‘absolute’ musical work.

⁴⁵ Ottaway, *Shostakovich*, p. 34

⁴⁶ Flora Litvinova, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, pp. 158-159

⁴⁷ Dmitri Shostakovich, ‘V dni oboronı Leningrad’ [During the defence of Leningrad], in *Sovetskoye iskusstvo* 9th October 1941, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 129

⁴⁸ Blokker, *Shostakovich*, p. 83

Fig. 4.1: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 7, first movement, opening



In the second subject of the movement (Fig. 4.2), introduced at [6]², this interpretative tension continues, for although noticeably calmer and more placid than the first, this theme might at the same time be construed as somewhat ‘subdued and doubtful’.⁴⁹ Also of significance here is a subsidiary scalic figure, for example in the oboe at [8]⁸, which then forms an integral part of the piccolo solo beginning at [14] before the exposition is concluded by a muted violin solo, setting the scene for the opening of the development section at [19].⁵⁰

Fig. 4.2: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 7, first movement, [6]²

‘In the development’, continues Shostakovich, ‘war bursts into the peaceful life of these people.’ His portrayal of war, however, is not concerned primarily with the musical illustration of actual events but rather with the expression of feelings: ‘I am not aiming for the naturalistic depiction of war, the depiction of the clatter of arms, the explosion of shells, and so on. I am trying to convey the image of war emotionally...’⁵¹ This outbreak of war is symbolised in the opening bars of the development by a side drum ostinato (Fig. 4.3), which begins pianissimo at [19] before continuing in a gradual crescendo throughout the entire 350 bars of the section. Shostakovich himself anticipated that such a figure might invite comparisons, not all of them favourable, with Ravel’s *Boléro*, although, upon performing the extract to Glikman during its composition, declared: ‘Well, let them, for this is how I hear the war’.⁵²

⁴⁹ Blokker, *Shostakovich*, p. 83

⁵⁰ Ottaway, *Shostakovich*, p. 35

⁵¹ Shostakovich, ‘V dni oboronı Leningrad’, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 129; Ottaway, *Shostakovich*, p. 34

⁵² Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 148

Fig. 4.3: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 7, first movement, [19]



Over this ostinato appears the march theme (Fig. 4.4) for which this Symphony has become renowned – the sound of ‘the executioners invading Russia and the world’.⁵³ Consisting of a simple melodic line heard first at [19]⁵, it is then subjected to numerous repetitions, changing only in dynamic (a gradual crescendo matching that of the ostinato) and instrumentation. With each variation linked to the next by a four-bar string motif, the theme develops from an initial string pizzicato and *col legno* version to be performed by several permutations of wind, strings and brass, including, most notably, canonical versions between solo oboe and bassoon at [25] and oboes and clarinets at [31], and also in an inverted version in the brass at [45] (Fig. 4.5). Described by some as ‘rat-like’, this theme has also been identified, again following Shostakovich’s instruction of the work as an emotional rather than literal depiction of conflict, as a portrayal of the recognition of war as it gradually encroaches upon the human psyche.⁵⁴ As Ottaway puts it:

The tune is [at first] facile, jaunty, perhaps slightly cocky, but certainly not menacing. If Shostakovich really intended to portray Nazism on the march...he must have been dreaming of a paper tiger! His own words, however, were ‘war breaks suddenly into our peaceful life’. At first it is distant and unreal...but all the time it bears directly on more and more lives until at last the whole nation is involved in a life-and-death struggle.⁵⁵

⁵³ Isaak Glikman, in *Shostakovich Against Stalin*. The theme has since been borrowed by other composers including Bartók and Jarre, and Shostakovich himself may have borrowed ideas for it from Nielsen and Sibelius. Blokker, *Shostakovich*, p. 82

⁵⁴ Flora Litvinova, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 128; Blokker, *Shostakovich*, pp. 84-85

⁵⁵ Ottaway, *Shostakovich*, p. 35

Fig. 4.4: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 7, first movement, [19]⁵

Fig. 4.5: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 7, first movement, [45]



The backdrop to this theme consists of a number of additional ostinati which are derived from a variety of differing motifs and which become increasingly dissonant and chromatic as the march progresses. Particularly significant amongst these accompanying figures are the imitative ostinato found in the cellos and basses at [23], derived from the opening notes of the march, and the staccato, angular ostinato, again in the cellos and basses, beginning at ¹[25], then following in a variety of instrumentations throughout the middle section of the march. At ¹[39], a ‘tortured’ ostinato appears to finally break free of its accompanying role to overpower the main theme, before a chromatic ostinato, initially in crotchets which become first quavers and then triplets, accelerates the development section towards its close.

Some have criticised the development of the first movement, and indeed the symphony as a whole, as being ‘immensely protracted’, and as lacking in the musical material and compositional technique necessary to sustain a work of such proportions.⁵⁶ Others have argued that the introduction of new material in this section, although necessary, perhaps, to fulfil the programmatic nature of the work, nonetheless cannot be defended on a musical level, especially in the context of the traditional sonata form on which this

⁵⁶ Dearling, in Norris, *Shostakovich*, p. 65

movement is supposedly based.⁵⁷ However, the sheer scale and magnitude of this section doubtless makes a profound impression, as Litvinova remarks:

I was overwhelmed by the impression made on me by the first movement. Initially just playful, primitive, if unserious, it is gradually transformed into something terrifying, acquiring a force capable of obliterating everything in its path. Mechanical and relentless, it possesses a seemingly unlimited and inexorable strength.⁵⁸

Finally in this movement, ‘The reprise is a funeral march or, rather, a requiem for the victims of the war. Simple people honor the memory of their heroes... After the requiem there is an even more tragic episode. I don’t know how to characterize this music. Maybe what is here are a mother’s tears or even that feeling when grief is so great that there are no tears left. These two lyrical fragments lead to the conclusion of the first movement, to the apotheosis of life, of the sun.’⁵⁹ Here the tension of the march theme is finally resolved in a climax at [52], where material from the opening theme of the movement fuses the end of the development with the start of the recapitulation. As this section gradually dies away, we are left not with a funeral march as such, but rather with a solo bassoon singing a requiem for the dead – a melody derived from the second subject of the movement and here transformed to fit alternating 3/4 and 4/4 time signatures (Fig. 4.6).⁶⁰ The movement ends with an echo of the opening theme, heard again in the strings although here far broader and somewhat elaborated, and also the memory of a later extract derived from this theme, heard first at [12] on solo flute and now presented on muted violins. Lastly, ‘At the very end distant thunder appears again reminding us that the war continues...’, as the irrepressible side drum ostinato and march theme on muted trumpet return in the movement’s concluding bars.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Ottaway, *Shostakovich*, p. 35

⁵⁸ Flora Litvinova, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 158

⁵⁹ Shostakovich, ‘V dni oboronī Leningrad’, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 129. Shostakovich also tells us of his initial consideration of completing the work in a single movement with a choral ending, and of how, to his later satisfaction, he eventually decided against such a conclusion: ‘How much I needed words for this episode! But I couldn’t find them anywhere. There was even a moment when I set out to write them myself. But now I am glad that there aren’t any words, because it would complicate the score too much.’ Ottaway, *Shostakovich*, p. 34

⁶⁰ Blokker, *Shostakovich*, p. 87

⁶¹ Shostakovich, ‘V dni oboronī Leningrad’, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 129

Fig. 4.6: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 7, first movement, [60]⁴(c) *Second Movement*

In contrast to the epic first movement, writes Shostakovich, ‘The second and third movements are not associated with a specific program. They are intended to serve as a lyrical respite... The second movement is a very lyrical scherzo. There is a little humor in it, but for me it is somehow connected with the scherzo of the quintet.’⁶² Later, in his programme notes for the premiere, the composer expanded this description to the following: ‘The second movement is a scherzo, a fairly well-developed lyrical episode, recalling pleasant events and past joys. The atmosphere is of gentle sadness and reverie.’⁶³ The movement opens with a theme in the second violins (Fig. 4.7), who are then joined by the first violins in developing the melody at [73]¹. Here the ascending semiquaver scale found in both violin parts at [73]⁴ echoes the clarinet and bassoon figure found in the development of the first theme in the previous movement at [2]¹⁰. As the movement develops, we here find yet another rhythmic ostinato figure (Fig. 4.8) beginning in the strings at [76], over which is floated an oboe solo (Fig. 4.9) carrying the ‘infinitely searching’ second theme of the movement.⁶⁴ In both this and the first theme are contained the ‘irregularity and unexpected inflections’ of both pitch and rhythm which might be regarded as characteristic of Shostakovich’s works.⁶⁵

Fig. 4.7: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 7, second movement



⁶² Shostakovich, ‘V dni oboronī Leningrad’, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 129

⁶³ Shostakovich, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 129

⁶⁴ Blokker, *Shostakovich*, p. 88

⁶⁵ Ottaway, *Shostakovich*, p. 36

Fig. 4.8: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 7, second movement, [76]

Fig. 4.9: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 7, second movement, [76]²

A pizzicato version of the first theme leads into the Trio section at [82]⁷, where a change of tonality – from B minor to C sharp minor – together with a metrical change to 3/8 time facilitate a ‘horrifying episode’ in which the piccolo clarinet’s ‘dance of death’ at [82]¹³ leads the rest of the orchestra into a ‘distorted waltz full of pain and stress’.⁶⁶ Again we might here be led to question the integrity of Shostakovich’s statement regarding the optimistic nature of this movement’s programmatic intentions, for the passage would seem to be far removed from a depiction of ‘pleasant events and past joys’.⁶⁷ The movement ends, however, with a return at [96] to the lilting first theme of the Scherzo and, despite a somewhat ‘sinister’ appearance of the second theme in the bass clarinet at [97]², finishes with the lighter sound of a brief solo from the contralto flute.⁶⁸

(d) Third Movement

Shostakovich continues: ‘Joy of life and the worship of nature are the dominant moods of the third movement’ which ‘is a passionate adagio, the dramatic center of the work’ – a commentary which would once more seem to belie the darkly emotive quality of the movement.⁶⁹ The ‘Stravinsky-like’ opening of ‘vast, static, glacial chords’ on woodwind and horns has been referred to as a ‘haunted, almost sacral evocation of war and the meaning of war’.⁷⁰ Within these chords is outlined a pattern of three notes – F#,

⁶⁶ Blokker, *Shostakovich*, p. 88

⁶⁷ Darling, in Norris, *Shostakovich*, p. 66

⁶⁸ Blokker, *Shostakovich*, p. 88

⁶⁹ Shostakovich, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 129; Shostakovich, ‘V dni oboronī Leningrad’, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 129

⁷⁰ Ottaway, *Shostakovich*, p. 36; Blokker, *Shostakovich*, p. 89; Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 1’

G and C# (Fig. 4.10) – which becomes a recurring motif throughout the movement.⁷¹ A theme which has been described as ‘strong but featureless’, like ‘a desolate Siberian winter landscape set with vast frozen mountains’, is introduced in the violins at [106] (Fig. 4.11), before an allusion to the Fifth Symphony at [109]⁶⁻⁸ is elaborated upon to become the second theme of movement on solo flute at [112]³, set to a sparse, pizzicato accompaniment in the upper strings.⁷² Also of interest within this first section are a tender, almost yearning melody in the violins at [119], and a chromatic, dotted figure which leads into the middle section.

Fig. 4.10: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 7, third movement, three note motif



Fig. 4.11: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 7, third movement, [106]



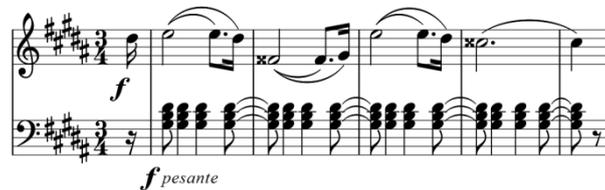
The middle section, from [121], is by contrast much more violent than the opening of the movement. Again we find echoes of the Fifth Symphony – this time the canonical motif from the opening of the work (see Fig. 3.3) – in the trumpet theme which opens the section, here set against syncopated chords in the horns and strings (Fig. 4.12). As the section develops, the chromatic, dotted figure which formed its introduction now extends to form much of the accompanying material, providing the momentum that drives the section towards its climax at [129]. The recapitulation of the movement features fragments of the opening section mingled with the chromatic accompaniment of the middle section. Allusions to elements of the opening appear at [130] and [131]⁶ in the brass and at [132] at [134]⁴ in the wind and strings. The echoes of the Fifth Symphony found first at [109] are also reiterated here, first at [135] and then in the closing passages of the movement at [145]⁶⁻⁸. Finally, the first theme of the movement

⁷¹ The intervals implied within these tones – a minor second or semitone, and a diminished fourth or tritone – were later to become characteristic of Shostakovich’s harmonic language.

⁷² Blokker, *Shostakovich*, p. 89; Dearling, in Norris, *Shostakovich*, p. 66

is heard in direct repeat in the strings at [142] before quiet clarinet chords, again featuring the three-note motif of the opening, lead into the Finale.

Fig. 4.12: Shostakovich, Symphony No .7, third movement, ¹[121]



(e) Fourth Movement

Of the Fourth Movement, Shostakovich writes simply: ‘In the finale I want to describe a beautiful future time when the enemy will have been defeated’.⁷³ Continuing attacca from the preceding movement, two ideas initially emerge which are of importance to the unfolding of this section: a dotted motif in the lower strings (Fig. 4.13) at [150]¹⁻⁵, which develops to form a theme in the strings at [152], and a triplet motif (Fig. 5.14), appearing first in canon between oboe and muted horn at [151]¹⁻⁸.

Fig. 4.13: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 7, fourth movement, [150]¹⁻⁵



Fig. 4.14: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 7, fourth movement, [151]¹⁻⁸



⁷³ Shostakovich, ‘V dni oboronī Leningrad’, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 129. Samosud tried to persuade Shostakovich that the finale needed to include soloists and chorus to sing the praises of Stalin. Shostakovich, however, declined to rearrange the parts, writing to Glikman that he accepted the conductor’s comments ‘for purposes of information rather than for guidance, since I don’t believe the movement needs either chorus or soloists and it has quite enough optimism as it is’. Dmitri Shostakovich, in Glikman, *Story of a Friendship*, pp. 6-7

From this follows a section which, calling to mind the composer's Third Symphony, consists of a 'torrent of fragmentary themes and rhythmic off-shoots'.⁷⁴ Within this, the canonical triplet motif eventually returns to herald the climax of the movement at [174], where it morphs into an ostinato which combines with woodwind trills and a brass fanfare, again based on the interval of a diminished fourth (initially implied in the three-note motif of the third movement), to create an impenetrable wall of sound. This motif is later to be found in the section immediately following the climax, where it launches a grotesque march at [175], set against a quaver accompaniment which then forms an integral part of the angular 7/4 section at [176], before gradually dying away.

The concluding section of the movement, beginning at [179], returns to a rhythm derived from that of the march theme from the first movement (Fig. 4.15).⁷⁵ Again the canonical triplet motif maintains a nagging, almost warning presence, heard in the cor anglais and bassoon at [193]⁵⁻⁷ and in the oboe and flute at ⁴⁻³[197]. From here onwards the movement builds towards its end in a manner not dissimilar to that of the Fifth Symphony, with a fortissimo quaver and triplet motif (Fig. 4.16) repeated mechanically in the woodwind and strings whilst a brass fanfare, developed from the string theme from the opening of the movement, sounds above them. For some, this conclusion pronounces a victory distinctively Russian in character.⁷⁶ However, it might also be argued that the manner of the ending of this work depicts a battle which is still being fought rather than an enemy already defeated and thus, again as is the case with the Fifth Symphony, is the portrayal not of successful triumph but rather of gritty determination.

Fig. 4.15: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 7, fourth movement – comparison of rhythms at [19]⁵ and [179]



⁷⁴ Blokker, *Shostakovich*, p. 91

⁷⁵ Blokker, *Shostakovich*, p. 91

⁷⁶ Dearling, in Norris, *Shostakovich*, p. 66. Dearling argues that the ending of this movement is less ambiguous than that of the first, and suggests that this is possibly because of the composer's distance from Leningrad at the time of its composition, making Shostakovich less involved in its struggles against the Fascists and so freer to portray a Russian victory.

Fig. 4.16: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 7, fourth movement, [204]

*(f) Reception*

The Seventh Symphony was premiered on 5th March 1942 in Kuibyshev by the Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra conducted by Samuel Samosud and was a tremendous success.⁷⁷ As with the Fifth Symphony, it immediately resonated with popular conscience and become ‘a potent national and even international symbol of just cause and steely resolve in the war against fascism’.⁷⁸ Hailed as ‘the ultimate example of Patriotic Art’, the piece even met with the approval of Stalin, and on 11th April 1942 it was announced that Shostakovich had been awarded a Stalin Prize, category one, for the work.⁷⁹ The composer had now reached the height of his fame, and was regarded as something of a war hero in the mind of the public.⁸⁰

Within a month of its premiere, Samosud had directed the first performance of the Symphony in Moscow, and performances in other cities across Russia soon followed.⁸¹ During the War, nearly every Soviet city that could amass the required instrumental forces gave at least one performance of the work, perhaps realising, as Litvinova points out, the political significance to be held in refuting the claim that ‘When cannons fire, the Muses remain silent’.⁸² In the April of 1942, a microfilmed copy of the score was smuggled out of the country via Tehran to the West, where it was performed under Henry Wood in London and later by Toscanini in New York.⁸³ Undoubtedly the most

⁷⁷ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 149. Shostakovich had wanted Mravinsky to conduct the premiere, but wartime conditions together with the propaganda value of an imminent performance of the work meant that this was not possible. Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 130. According to Flora Litvinova, Shostakovich also went to the effort of signing a programme for each of the musicians in the orchestra, in the hope that ‘maybe each one of them will try a little harder, and the performance will benefit as a result’. Flora Litvinova, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, pp. 159-160.

⁷⁸ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 160; Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 131.

⁷⁹ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 174; *Shostakovich Against Stalin*, Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 132.

⁸⁰ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 169; Dearling, in Norris, *Shostakovich*, p. 64. The later reception of the work was, however, less favourable, with some claiming that, when taken out of its wartime context, the Symphony loses its impact and meaning: ‘Stripped of its programmatic foundation, its huge gestures seem hollow’. Kay, *Shostakovich*, p. 40.

⁸¹ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 131-132.

⁸² Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 132; Flora Litvinova, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 159.

⁸³ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 149; Dearling, in Norris, *Shostakovich*, p. 64. The American premiere was held the week after the issue of *Time* magazine featuring the fireman image of Shostakovich reached the

significant performance, however, was that of the Leningrad premiere, held in the besieged city on 13th August 1942 and performed by the Leningrad Radio Orchestra and Karl Eliasberg.⁸⁴

(g) Performance in Leningrad

The Radio Orchestra was by now the only ensemble left in Leningrad. Ordered to remain there, they had continued to perform throughout the autumn of 1941, although following a concert on 14th December including Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture, which depicts the Russian defeat of Napoleon's army, the season was abandoned. Hereafter, the Orchestra's log records the following: 'Rehearsal did not take place. Srabian is dead. Petrov is sick. Borishev is dead. Orchestra not working.'⁸⁵ However, following the first winter under siege, it was decided that, in order to raise morale, the city's cultural life should be revived, and the authorities went to great lengths to ensure that this could be achieved.⁸⁶ On 2nd April 1942, the Leningrad edition of *Pravda* announced that a season of symphonic concerts was being planned and that the finale, naturally, was to be Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony.⁸⁷

Facilitating a performance of the work became a matter of civic, and even military, pride.⁸⁸ The Orchestra's archive preserves a fragment of an order from the Party instructing that they should 'By any means, get a score of the Seventh from Moscow. Transport it to Leningrad as soon as possible.'⁸⁹ The score was flown by night to the city, where copyists worked around the clock and with a limited supply of paper, pencils and pens to prepare the parts.⁹⁰ Andrei Krukov, then a music student, recalls Eliasberg's reaction to first seeing the score: 'When I saw the Symphony, I thought

shelves. Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 132 For more on the Western performances of the work, see Christopher H. Gibbs, 'The Phenomenon of the Seventh': A Documentary Essay on Shostakovich's 'War' Symphony', in *Shostakovich and his World* ed. by Laurel E. Fay (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 59-113. The Symphony was finally performed by Mravinsky and the Leningrad Philharmonic in July 1942 in Novosibirsk where they were in evacuation – an event of special significance for Shostakovich. Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 132

⁸⁴ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 149

⁸⁵ Vulliamy, 'Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 1'

⁸⁶ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 132; Ed Vulliamy, 'Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2', *The Guardian*.

www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2001/nov/25/features.magazine27 (25.11.2001; accessed 30.12.2010)

⁸⁷ Vulliamy, 'Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 1'. There exists only one historical document of this event – a booklet by Prof. Andrei Krukov, which has been out of print for many years. 'Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2'

⁸⁸ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 133

⁸⁹ Vulliamy, 'Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2'

⁹⁰ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 133

‘We’ll never play this.’ It was four thick volumes of music.’⁹¹ The work is one of monumental proportions, scored for the largest orchestra of any of Shostakovich’s symphonies, and at around eighty minutes in duration, it is also the longest.⁹² By contrast, the winter had reduced the Radio Orchestra to a mere fourteen players.⁹³

Remembering the first rehearsal of the work, oboist Edith Katya Matus recalls:

When I got to the studio, I nearly fell over with shock. Of the orchestra of 100 people, there were only 15 left. I didn’t recognise the musicians I knew from before, they were like skeletons... It was evident that we couldn’t play anything, we could hardly stand on our feet! Nevertheless, [Eliasberg] said: ‘Dear friends, we are weak but we must force ourselves to start work,’ and he raised his arms to begin. There was no reaction. The musicians were trembling. Finally, those who were able to play a bit helped the weaker musicians, and thus our small group began to play the opening bars... Everybody did their best, but we played badly, it was hopeless, and the first rehearsal broke up after 15 minutes.⁹⁴

Eliasberg realised that reinforcements must be found. Retired musicians were brought back to play and, following an order from commander-in-chief General Leonid Govorov himself that all military bands and musicians should report to the studio, many soldiers, and in particular brass players, were released from the army units defending the city.⁹⁵ Captain Parfionov, a senior officer in the orchestra of the army’s 45th Division, brought men from his ensemble to join the group. He recalls: ‘Rehearsals were from ten to one o’clock. No time for fun or to ask anyone who they were; we came, did our job and left. People were in a terrible condition... To be honest, no one was very enthusiastic.’⁹⁶

The musicians were issued with extra rations, although these proved desperately insufficient.⁹⁷ Viktor Kosolov, a musician from Parfionov’s orchestra, remembers: ‘We would start rehearsing and get dizzy with our heads spinning when we blew. The symphony was too big... We might talk to the person sitting next to us, but the only

⁹¹ Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2’

⁹² Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 131

⁹³ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 149

⁹⁴ Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2’

⁹⁵ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 149; Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 133; Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2’

⁹⁶ Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2’

⁹⁷ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 149

subjects were hunger and food – not music.’⁹⁸ Eliasberg himself once fainted on his long walk home from the studio and so was provided by the authorities with a bicycle, living quarters near the Philharmonic hall, a telephone and extra food supplies.⁹⁹ Rehearsals were also frequently interrupted; some of the musicians were working in anti-aircraft factories and had to leave when the sirens sounded, and some were called away to emergency fire-fighting duty.¹⁰⁰ Others did not even survive. Parfionov recounts: ‘Some of our orchestra died. Three, as I recall, including a flautist called Karelsky. People were dying like flies, so why not the orchestra? Hunger and cold everywhere... Some people just fell over onto the floor whilst they were playing.’¹⁰¹

Despite the appalling conditions, Eliasberg remained strict. Edith Matus again:

He would allow for no mistakes, or delays. If a musician played badly, or was late, they would lose their bread ration. If someone was late because of a bombing raid, he would accept the excuse only if there had been no warnings from the siren. One day, a man came late because he had to watch them bury his wife that morning. But Eliasberg said that was no excuse, and the man would lose his ration.¹⁰²

Koslov, too, recalls the incident: ‘[Eliasberg] said ‘This must not happen again. If your wife or husband dies, you must be at rehearsal.’ He demanded absolute commitment and attention. When people said, ‘It’s no good, I can’t play it,’ Eliasberg would reply, ‘Go on, No complaining!’¹⁰³ ‘It sounds harsh’, continues Parfionov, ‘but he was right. We had a concert to prepare.’¹⁰⁴

Only one complete run-through of the symphony was rehearsed before the performance, for the musicians did not have the strength for any more.¹⁰⁵ The concert itself was broadcast on loudspeakers throughout the city, on radio to the world and, in psychological warfare, to the German troops stationed outside the city, who, prior to the performance, had been subjected to a sustained period of artillery bombardment in order

⁹⁸ Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2’

⁹⁹ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 149

¹⁰⁰ Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2’

¹⁰¹ Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2’

¹⁰² Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2’

¹⁰³ Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2’

¹⁰⁴ Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2’

¹⁰⁵ Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2’

to ensure that the concert would not be interrupted.¹⁰⁶ Edith Matus remembers how, although it was the middle of summer, ‘it was too cold to play without gloves. We wore them like mittens with the fingers cut off; even then it was hard to move the keys on my instrument.’ Cold-in-heat syndrome, associated with starvation, was also reported by Auschwitz survivors.¹⁰⁷ Koslov recalls that ‘The lights above the stage went on. I’ll never forget that – they’d never been on before. I’d forgotten what electric light was like. It was more like a ceremony than a concert.’¹⁰⁸ ‘For the first time in months’, continues Edith Matus, ‘there was silence. Eliasberg lifted his baton, and we began’.¹⁰⁹

That evening brought a new sense of purpose for all involved. Parfionov recounts:

It had been an everyday job until now. But we were stunned by the number of people, that there could be so many people starving for food but also starving for music. Some had come in suits, some from the front. Most were thin and dystrophic. Some I recognised from fishing before the war. That was the moment we decided to play as best we could... The finale was so loud and mighty I thought we’d reach a limit and the whole thing would collapse and fall apart. Only then did I realise what we were doing, and hear the grand beauty of the symphony.¹¹⁰

Edith Matus recalls how, ‘When the piece ended, there was not a sound in the hall – silence. Then someone clapped at the back, then another, then there was thunder’, as every member of the audience applauded with all the strength they had left.¹¹¹ Playwright Alexander Kron has said of their reaction: ‘People who no longer knew how to shed tears of sorrow and misery now cried from sheer joy’.¹¹² Tatiana Vasilyeva, a member of that audience, remembers: ‘When I entered the hall, tears came to my eyes because there were many people, all elated. We all listened with such emotion, because we had lived for this moment, to come and hear this music. This was a real symphony which we lived. This was our symphony. Leningrad’s... It was so meaningful for all of

¹⁰⁶ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 133

¹⁰⁷ Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 1’

¹⁰⁸ Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2’

¹⁰⁹ Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2’

¹¹⁰ Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2’

¹¹¹ Vulliamy, ‘Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2’; Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 133

¹¹² Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 149

us. We realised that this concert might be the last thing we'd do in our lives.'¹¹³ As Eliasberg himself puts it: 'People...knew this was not a passing episode but the beginning of something. The hall, the homes, the front, the whole city, was one human being seizing his victory over the soulless machine. And we had it, in the music.'¹¹⁴

The creation of an orchestra of this scale in such terrible conditions would seem almost beyond belief, and the Leningrad performance of the Seventh Symphony proved to be an event which not only inspired those within the city but also captured the imagination of those listening around the world. 'Never before had music acquired such heroic force or become such an effective symbol of patriotism'.¹¹⁵ There remained, however, another eighteen months before the end of the siege, and no official recognition was given of the concert until after the War. Nevertheless, the importance of the event remains firmly in the hearts of many and, for some, might even be regarded as the moment when the fate of those in Leningrad was decided, as Edith Matus concludes:

So many years have passed since that day and memory is a funny thing, like drying paint. It changes colour as it dries. But that symphony has stayed with me the way it was that night. Afterwards, it was still a city under siege, but I knew it would live. No-one could feed us, but music inspired us and brought us back to life. Music is life, after all, what is life without music?¹¹⁶

II. Theological Reflection on the Seventh Symphony

In reflecting theologically on the Seventh Symphony, I have taken my clue from Shostakovich's well-known passion for Russian literature, and especially for the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky. Shostakovich's knowledge of, and appreciation for, many of the Russian classics was extensive,¹¹⁷ as Tatyana Litvinova recalls:

¹¹³ Tatiana Vasilyeva, as cited in *Shostakovich Against Stalin*

¹¹⁴ Vulliamy, 'Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2'

¹¹⁵ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 149. This was doubtless fuelled by the fact that the performance was on the day Hitler had planned to hold a reception at the Astoria Hotel, opposite St. Isaac's Basilica in the heart of Leningrad, to celebrate the capture of the city. Vulliamy, 'Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 1'

¹¹⁶ Vulliamy, 'Orchestral Manoeuvres: Part 2', *Shostakovich Against Stalin*

¹¹⁷ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 458

[What] impressed one was his perfect mind, just like his perfect pitch, and his amazing knowledge of Russian literature from Pushkin and Lermontov to Babel and Zoshchenko. Once...he noticed that I was reading Dostoevsky's *A Raw Youth*. He began to recite the book from memory, paragraph by paragraph... He was also very fond of Chekhov...¹¹⁸

Shostakovich's love of Russian literature also translated into his compositions, with his opera *The Nose* and his unfinished opera *The Gamblers* based on Gogol's plays of the same names. Indeed, for film director Grigori Kozintsev, Shostakovich possessed a remarkable ability to depict in music Gogol's own grasp of the Russian language. He argues that, in his compositions, Shostakovich appropriates musically 'Gogol's axiom that the Russian language has the potential to transform itself within a single sentence from the elevated to the everyday, from the frivolous to the tragic'.¹¹⁹

Although the grotesque fantasy world of Gogol greatly appealed to Shostakovich, it was not until near the end of his life that he began to set the texts of his favourite authors – Chekhov and Dostoevsky.¹²⁰ It is here that the first glimpse of the composer's admiration of and respect for the latter writer in particular is to be found, as disclosed in a letter to Leningrad literary critic and musicologist Abraam Gosenpud:

I have many times thought of writing on themes from Dostoevsky, but cannot bring myself to do so. It is too frightening. I thought of *The Meek and Oppressed*, and that most Dostoevskyan of all works, *Bobky*, and also the scene from *Crime and Punishment* with the crazed Marmeladov and his children. But I always retreat from these ideas. Do you know that it is easier to have dealings with Shakespeare than with Dostoevsky? I envy the courage of those composers who dare to handle Dostoevsky.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Tatyana Litvinova in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, pp. 169-170

¹¹⁹ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 458. For more on the connections between Shostakovich and Gogol, in particular in relation to their shared use of parody within their respective artistic forms, see Caryl Emerson, 'Shostakovich and the Russian Literary Tradition', in *Shostakovich and his World*, pp. 183-226, and Esti Sheinberg, *Irony, Satire, Parody and the Grotesque in the Music of Shostakovich: A Theory of Musical Incongruities* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000). I shall explore this topic further in my sixth chapter.

¹²⁰ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 459. However, Shostakovich's intent to compose an opera of Chekhov's *The Black Monk* was never realised.

¹²¹ Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 461

However, Shostakovich did eventually dare to be inspired by Dostoevsky, with the *Four Verses of Captain Lebyadkin* (1974) painting a musical portrait of the writer's character of the same name – the grotesque buffoon from *The Devils*.¹²²

What is more, when looked at in greater detail, several other of Shostakovich's compositions do in fact contain passing references to aspects of Dostoevsky's novels. Kovalyov's lackey in *The Nose* sings the song 'With Unconquerable Strength', which is borrowed from *The Brothers Karamazov*, and in *Lady Macbeth*, Shostakovich's attempts to justify the actions of Katerina given the suffering she endures and the love she has for Sergei arguably touch upon themes which feature prominently in many of Dostoevsky's works.¹²³ Shostakovich himself later confirmed these influences in his letters to Gozenpud, again making reference to how profoundly he was moved by the author, and it is here that we can see emerging a close affinity between the creative ideals of the two artists. '[I]t is very hard for me to convey to you what Dostoevsky's work stirs up in me,' he writes. 'He has too powerful an effect on me, so powerful that it is difficult for me to organize my impressions... I love him and admire him as a great artist, I admire his love for people, for the humiliated and wretched.'¹²⁴

More specifically, Shostakovich shares in the Dostoevskian appreciation for the tragic. As Leningrad pianist and musicologist Mikhail Semyonovich Druskin comments: 'It was Shostakovich's vocation to realise the concept of tragedy, for this was how he perceived the world. One can draw an analogy in this with Dostoevsky's work; in particular, the last act of *Katerina Izmailova* [Shostakovich's film version of *Lady Macbeth*] was written under the influence of Dostoevsky's *From the House of the Dead*.'¹²⁵ Indeed, respected Russian intellectual Griorgi Kozintsev observes how the two share '...an obsessive need to react in an almost physiological way to the suffering of others (what Dostoevsky calls 'the compulsive response')...'¹²⁶ This is made particularly apparent in the Seventh Symphony, as Gozenpud concludes:

¹²² Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 452. To have approached the works of Dostoevsky with a degree of caution may also have been a politically-inspired move, for although the writer was regarded as highly talented, his political and religious views could not be accepted under the Soviet system. Marc Slonim, 'Dostoevsky under the Soviets', *Russian Review*, 10:2 (1951), 118-130

¹²³ Abraam Gozenpud, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 460

¹²⁴ Shostakovich, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 460

¹²⁵ Mikhail Semyonovich Druskin, in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 41

¹²⁶ Griorgi Kozintsev, in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 373. Further, Gozenpud points out that the two also shared a belief in the compatibility of tragedy and satire: *Lady Macbeth* was intended to be both, and in his workbook Dostoevsky wrote: 'Why should satire exclude tragedy? Tragedy and satire are two sisters

A compassion for the wretched and unfortunate, a desire to help them and to defend them from abuse, injustice and the power of the forces of darkness – these are characteristic features of Shostakovich’s work. And in this he is close to Dostoevsky. There is so much that links the composer to this author: identification with the humiliated and distressed, hatred of man’s violence against man, an amazing capacity to penetrate the secret recesses of the soul, a merciless accuracy in depicting the terrors of this world, irony, sarcasm, a combination of the tragic and the comic. Shostakovich, like Dostoevsky, shows how evil is born, and how what appears to be harmless in origin can turn into something dangerous and destructive... [For example] in the first movement of Shostakovich’s Seventh Symphony the harmless marching song gradually acquires the force of a hurricane which blows everything from its path.¹²⁷

In order to flesh out the claim that a theological understanding of the Seventh Symphony is deepened by an understanding of Dostoevsky, I need now to say something about that author’s theology, and in particular about the importance he attributes to the role of the icon. This will involve rather a long excursion but I believe it ultimately gives the interpretative clue needed for a theological engagement with this work.

(a) Dostoevsky and Russian Orthodox Theology

The novels of Dostoevsky inhabit a world in which the beliefs of Russian Orthodoxy are intimately present, and the writer’s own, albeit at times ambiguous, faith and spiritual awareness, primarily shaped through his experiences in exile in Siberia, are made apparent throughout his narratives.¹²⁸ As George Strem comments: ‘The moral world of Dostoevsky is dominated by precepts which are basic to Christian philosophy deepened by Christian mysticism’.¹²⁹ Avril Pyman argues for the existence of an Orthodox ‘semiosphere’ – a cultural system of signs steeped in the Orthodox tradition from within which Dostoevsky (amongst others) writes, drawing attention to both the religious elements which might be rightfully discerned within Dostoevsky’s literature,

and belong to each other; thus, jointly, their name is – the truth’. Gozenpud, in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 460

¹²⁷ Gozenpud, in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 459

¹²⁸ Richard L. Chapple, ‘A Catalogue of Suffering in the Works of Dostoevsky: His Christian Foundation’, *The Southern Central Bulletin*, 43:4 (1983), 94-99 (p. 94)

¹²⁹ George Strem, ‘The Moral World of Dostoevsky’, *Russian Review*, 16:3 (1957), p. 15

together with the dangers of over-interpretation which, he maintains, occur all too easily in such studies.¹³⁰ Here Rowan Williams is in agreement, noting that the extent to which Dostoevsky might truly be called an ‘Orthodox’ novelist is open to debate, although nonetheless remaining open to that which might be gained from an engagement with the spiritual aspects of the author’s works.¹³¹

In particular, Dostoevsky’s engagement with Russian spirituality is manifest in the form of a prioritising of suffering – a practice embraced within the Orthodox belief system as part of kenosis, or self-emptying, whereby the individual accepts poverty, simplicity and self-humiliation as part of what it is to follow Christ in his suffering.¹³² The theme of suffering is pervasive throughout Dostoevsky’s works: Alyosha Karamazov is sent by Zossima to experience suffering in the world outside of the monastery; Raskolnikov suffers after murdering the old pawn-broker woman in a vain attempt to prove his own nature; Stavrogin is tortured to the point of suicide by the guilt he suffers for his misguided actions.¹³³ Such suffering, however, is not an empty or hopeless process, but rather one which plays an important role in the creation of the human person. As John Simons puts it: ‘...Dostoevsky felt that man must make his way through the machinery of life and suffering in order to become aware of life's real value – which is freedom’.¹³⁴ This is not to valorise suffering in any way, as Rowan Williams is keen to point out, but rather that, in Dostoevsky, ‘[s]uffering confers a certain authority. We learn from it. Dostoevsky is often accused of masochism. But he’s not saying suffering is good for you. He’s saying suffering is how you are likely to learn. Don’t be frightened when it happens to you.’¹³⁵

This acceptance of suffering is further embedded, it might be argued, deep within the very nature of what it is to be Russian – as part of the phenomenon that is the ‘Russian

¹³⁰ Avril Pyman, ‘Dostoevsky in the Prism of the Orthodox Semiosphere’, in *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition* ed. by George Pattison & Diane Oenning Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 103-115 (pp. 104-105)

¹³¹ For more on this see Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction* (London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 189-190 & pp. 211-212

¹³² George P. Fedetov, ‘Religious Background of Russian Culture’, *Church History*, 12:1 (1943), 35-51 (pp. 44-45)

¹³³ Chapple, ‘Catalogue of Suffering’, p. 94; Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* trans. by David McDuff (London: Penguin Books, 2003); Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* trans. by David McDuff (London: Penguin Books, 2003); Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Devils (The Possessed)* trans. by David Magarshack (London: Penguin Books, 1971)

¹³⁴ John D. Simons, ‘The Nature of Suffering in Schiller and Dostoevsky’, *Comparative Literature*, 19:2 (1967), 160-173 (p. 163)

¹³⁵ Rowan Williams, as cited in L. Chamberlain, ‘Rowan Williams’, *Prospect*.

<http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2007/05/rowanwilliams/> (26.5.2007; accessed 22.02.2011)

soul'.¹³⁶ As Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev puts it: 'The problem of suffering stands at the center of Dostoevsky's creation. And in this he is very Russian. The Russian is capable of enduring suffering (*vynosit' stradanie*) better than the Westerner is, and at the same time he is exceptionally sensitive to suffering, he is more compassionate (*bole sostradatel'ny*) than the Western person.'¹³⁷ Dostoevsky himself is cited as saying that, '[e]ven in its happiness, the Russian people feel it essential to have an element of suffering, otherwise its cup of happiness could not be full'.¹³⁸ Suffering therefore takes on mystical properties, becoming even 'a source of energy, a reason to love life'.¹³⁹ Dostoevsky again: 'I believe that the main and most fundamental spiritual quest of the Russian people is their craving for suffering – perpetual and unquenchable suffering – everywhere and in everything...it gushes from the people's very heart'.¹⁴⁰

A second, related, feature of Russian Orthodoxy of prominence in the works of Dostoevsky is that of the icon. Deriving from the Greek *eikona* meaning image or portrait (*ikona* in Russian, and frequently used with *obraz* or 'image'), the icon and its veneration form distinctive aspects of the Orthodox faith in general and of Russian spirituality in particular.¹⁴¹ The traditions of iconography and icon veneration originated in Byzantium in the late fourth century and became widespread practices until the iconoclasm of the eighth century deemed such activities unacceptable and even idolatrous. The cult of the icon was eventually re-established by the second Nicene Council in 787CE, which stated that to reject icons is to reject the incarnation. Following a second period of iconoclasm in the early ninth century, the practice was eventually restored by Empress Theodora in 843CE. Iconography spread to Russia after the conversion of the country to Christianity in 988CE, and here rapidly developed a distinctive Russian form, as exemplified by the work of Andrei Rublev in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁴²

The icon itself exists as representation of and expression for the divine. Regarded in contemplative veneration, it is the archetype portrayed and not its image that is truly

¹³⁶ For more on the Russian soul in Dostoevsky see Strem, 'Moral World of Dostoevsky', p. 18

¹³⁷ Nikolai Berdiaev in Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, *The Slave Soul of Russia: Moral Masochism and the Cult of Suffering* (New York & London: New York University Press, 1995), p. 55

¹³⁸ Fyodor Dostoevsky as cited in J. K. Folsom & N. Strelsky, 'Russian Values and Character: A Preliminary Exploration', *American Sociological Review*, 9:3 (1944), 296-307 (p. 305)

¹³⁹ Strem, 'Moral World of Dostoevsky', p. 18

¹⁴⁰ Fyodor Dostoevsky, as cited in Simons, 'Nature of Suffering', p. 167

¹⁴¹ Sophie Ollivier, 'Icons in Dostoevsky's Works', in *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, ed. by Pattison and Thompson, pp. 51-68 (p. 51); Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 190

¹⁴² Ollivier, 'Icons', pp. 51-52

adored.¹⁴³ Thus icons remain as imperfect images, although, as Rowan Williams points out, this imperfection does not negate their importance. ‘There is’, he maintains, ‘a distinction between saying that the ultimate truth of God is incapable of being captured definitively by any picture or idea and saying that the truth of God is radically *different* from what is represented’.¹⁴⁴ Therefore it is not that the image is dishonest in itself, but rather that it becomes this way only if the nature of representation is not properly appreciated and understood.¹⁴⁵

In the works of Dostoevsky, an icon is often used to take on a role of particular significance. As Sophie Ollivier puts it, the icon ‘testifies to Russian Orthodox faith, protects from evil and expresses the renewal of creative forces which can be fulfilled only through great sufferings’.¹⁴⁶ ‘The presence of icons is never fortuitous in Dostoevsky’s works’, but rather always fulfils a particular purpose within plots and exists in certain relationships to characters, often enabling them to reveal – and even helping to shape – their inner selves.¹⁴⁷ Icons are of central importance in both *The Landlady*, in which the reactions of the main characters to icons of the Mother of God speak of the natures of their faiths, or lack thereof, and also in *The Idiot*, where an icon represents the (albeit ignored) possibility of transformation and rebirth.¹⁴⁸ It is in the relatively minor portrayals of icons in a number of Dostoevsky’s other works, however, that the interest of this present study of the Seventh Symphony lies, for it is in these that the relationship between the icon and suffering comes to be particularly explored.

(b) *Icons in Dostoevsky*

As a writer and also an artist, a fundamental aspect of Dostoevsky’s work was the creation of a *lik* – a ‘face’ that expresses an ‘idea’.¹⁴⁹ Studying the faces of others was both a favourite pastime and also an essential part of his creative process: ‘When I wander about the streets I enjoy examining certain total strangers, studying their faces and trying to guess who they are, how they live, what they work at, and what is in their

¹⁴³ Ollivier, ‘Icons’, p. 51

¹⁴⁴ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 222

¹⁴⁵ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 222

¹⁴⁶ Ollivier, ‘Icons’, p. 64

¹⁴⁷ Ollivier, ‘Icons’, p. 51

¹⁴⁸ Ollivier, ‘Icons’, pp. 53-59

¹⁴⁹ Konstantin Barsht, ‘Defining the Face: Observations on Dostoevskii’s Creative Processes’, in *Russian Literature, Modernism and the Visual Arts* ed. by Catriona Kelly & Stephen Lovell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 23-57 (p. 23)

minds at this particular moment'.¹⁵⁰ For him, value is to be found not simply in the human life, but in the human facial image, representing as it does the 'quality of single and unrepeatable individuality: the unity...of the internal (the 'idea') and the external (the face)... A man's face is the image of his personality, his spirit, his human worth'.¹⁵¹ Dostoevsky's works, therefore, might be conceived as a collection of individual images, a 'whole little gallery of family portraits', although in reality, his literary portraits are far subtler than this, presenting us not with actual portrayals but rather with 'the impression made by one man in the eyes of another, as they together make contact with and/or are repelled by Beauty/Truth'.¹⁵² In a sense, then, these images might be considered akin to those of the icon, which is also concerned with the evocation of the likeness between man and God.¹⁵³

For Dostoevsky, the highest expression of love is to 'gaze lovingly into the face of a person, to seek spiritual communion with his or her *lik*'; by contrast, the greatest display of hatred is the destruction of a portrait.¹⁵⁴ Violence against icons thus becomes doubly significant, representative of the sacrilegious destruction of God's *lik*, but also containing a very human element of personal defacement.¹⁵⁵ In *A Raw Youth*, the nobleman Versilov smashes an icon in an act which symbolises both his split personality and his (ultimately ineffectual) rejection of iconic spirituality. The title character of *The Meek One* pawns an icon, causing it to assume an ambiguous status as spiritual artefact and yet at the same time as commercial entity. Fyodor in *The Brothers Karamazov* threatens to spit on the icon of his wife, whose piety he can neither understand nor tolerate.¹⁵⁶ Here, however, I shall be focusing on the desecration of icons as portrayed in one of Dostoevsky's novels in particular – his 1872 work *The Devils*.

Icons and their various destructions appear repeatedly throughout *Devils*.¹⁵⁷ In one such event, an icon of the Mother of God is stolen from its place outside a church in the

¹⁵⁰ Fyodor Dostoevsky, in Barsht, 'Defining the Face', p. 24

¹⁵¹ Barsht, 'Defining the Face', p. 23. Here we might draw a parallel between Dostoevsky's appreciation of the human face and the thought of Levinas, for whom the 'first philosophy' is an ethics based in the face-to-face encounter of the Self with the Other. In this encounter, we are called by another and respond to that call with an asymmetry which gives priority to the Other, and to the infinite Other, who is God. The face, then, for Levinas as for Dostoevsky, is an 'epiphany', a 'revelation'. David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 37

¹⁵² Barsht, 'Defining the Face', p. 24 & p. 26

¹⁵³ Barsht, 'Defining the Face', p. 26

¹⁵⁴ Barsht, 'Defining the Face', p. 27

¹⁵⁵ Barsht, 'Defining the Face', p. 27 & p. 37

¹⁵⁶ Ollivier, 'Icons', pp. 60-64

¹⁵⁷ Ollivier, 'Icons', pp. 59-61; Williams, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 190-192

town. Jewels are removed from its metal frame and a live mouse set to scurry inside the now empty glass casing. Amid the distraught outcries of the townspeople, a couple of young men push their way to the front of the crowd to throw an insultingly small offering into the collection plate. One onlooker, however – the beautiful Lizaveta Nikolaevna, whose increasing attraction to Stavrogin forms a part of the backdrop to the chapter – kneels in veneration before the absent icon and offers her diamond earrings to the collection.¹⁵⁸

Later in this section of the novel, a conversation takes place between the irresponsible and erratic intellectual Stepan Verkhovensky and his wealthy and influential patron, Vavara Stavrogina. Stepan is proposing to talk about the holy image of the Sistine Madonna at a forthcoming literary event; Vavara is adamant that he should not, fearing that his outdated appreciation of its aesthetic values will appear foolish in relation to contemporary intellectual judgements of the piece: ‘No one finds anything remarkable in it now, neither Russians nor the English’.¹⁵⁹ Despite her efforts, Stepan will not be dissuaded, but rather strengthens his resolve to speak out against the ‘fashionable, rational, utilitarian spirit’ which he observes to be taking over the society in which they live, and which he feels has lost sight of what has true meaning and importance.¹⁶⁰

For Rowan Williams, these passages essentially have to do with the importance of sacrilege and desecration in the identification of that which is holy. In Dostoevsky, argues Williams, the diabolical results from the inability to understand loss – from the failure to grasp signification or depth. This is the case with Fyodor Karamazov, who appears to be incapable of relating in any way to the icon in his possession.¹⁶¹ In *Devils*, however, although she may not fully comprehend the meaning of the icon when present, Lizaveta nonetheless understands what it means for it to be lost. Similarly Stepan, despite his personal shortcomings, is still able to appreciate the truly human (the value of the picture) in the midst of the falsely human (the priorities of his society). Thus Dostoevsky highlights the difference between those who, despite the imperfections of their own lives, remain open to the possibility of a greater truth, and those who fail to make this realisation. As Williams puts it: ‘The difference is between someone whose evildoing “inhabits” a world in which acts have meanings because persons bear the

¹⁵⁸ Williams, Dostoevsky, pp. 190-191

¹⁵⁹ Dostoevsky, as cited in Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 192

¹⁶⁰ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 192

¹⁶¹ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 200; Ollivier, ‘Icons’, pp. 63-64

image of God, and someone whose evil is...essentially a refusal to belong in any world at all, to belong in bodies, histories and limits'.¹⁶²

So whilst Lizaveta and Stepan might be sinners, they do not become diabolical. Likewise, the escaped convict Fedka, who elsewhere in the novel steals jewels from icons and yet continues to believe in God, nonetheless retains the ability to recognise that 'life has a meaning which he does not control', and so there remains something of the icon about him: however disfigured, he remains to some extent an image of the truth.¹⁶³ These passages therefore point towards what Williams identifies as a 'basic polarity' within Dostoevsky's moral world, where people are divided not into 'good' and 'bad' but rather into 'those who acknowledge their iconic dimension and those who struggle to resist or extinguish it': for Dostoevsky, '...ethics is not about good and evil; it's about truth and falsehood, reality and illusion. The right way to live doesn't amount to a series of approved actions. It's about living in recognition of reality.'¹⁶⁴

Here, observes Williams, Dostoevsky is making a number of points about the visual representation of that which is holy. Firstly, the icon is not merely an imitation of reality but is rather a transparency through which this reality might be seen: icons are "true" images not because they reproduce something absent but because they express, and give vehicle for, something present'.¹⁶⁵ So within the desecrated sacred image is contained something of the tension of the actual world, and in this way it provides a point of reference from which we might derive the significance of human action.¹⁶⁶ What is more, in this the icon exists not simply as object but also as narrative, created by the life of the person who, through their embracing of presence, becomes iconic.¹⁶⁷ The broken icon is thus symbolic for what it is to lose touch with, although not lose sight of, that which is essential to meaningful life.

Further, Dostoevsky's portrayal of the icon necessarily involves a Christological dimension in the form of a kenotic emphasis. As the vehicle for conveying the limitless world of the divine into the limited world which we inhabit – as sign of the 'primordial

¹⁶² Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 195. Hence for Dostoevsky, real blasphemy is only possible where belief is strong. Williams, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 215-217

¹⁶³ Ollivier, 'Icons', pp. 59-61; Williams, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 195-196 & p. 200

¹⁶⁴ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 200-201; Williams, as cited in Chamberlain, 'Rowan Williams'

¹⁶⁵ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 200

¹⁶⁶ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 200

¹⁶⁷ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 205

icon' that is the eternal image of God as incarnate in Christ – the icon entails 'the coexistence of infinite abundance with historical limitation...only thinkable in connection with a divine self-withholding, a voluntary absence that most powerfully testifies to loving presence'.¹⁶⁸ In placing such importance on the acceptance of limitation, and therefore on suffering, Dostoevsky argues for resistance against placing the notion of invulnerability at the centre of human identity.¹⁶⁹ For Williams, the idea which Dostoevsky is trying to get at here is that 'it is in the nature of sacred images to be capable of desecration, and that what makes them sacred is not some magical invulnerability...but their capacity to retain in themselves the real energy of another world'.¹⁷⁰ The icon, therefore, as reflection of and window on the incarnation, likewise portrays something of this vulnerability. As Williams puts it: 'A true image of it will necessarily be something that can be broken or spat upon; a narrative image is one that has endured something of the self-disfiguring of rebellious individualism. Take away the 'kenotic' story at the centre, and the complex unfolding of true images in narratives of sin and forgiveness, rupture or suffering and enduring presence, loses its logic.'¹⁷¹

Icons in Dostoevsky also perform a vital role in making visible the 'assumption of plentitude', that is, in questioning that which prevents human flourishing.¹⁷² Stepan eventually makes his plea for the meaningfulness of the Sistine Madonna in a society that is increasingly losing sight of that which matters more than simple social harmony, arguing, albeit ineffectually, for 'a recognition that beauty is more important than science or bread, because there is no impulse to invent anything in a world without beauty and nothing to live for if our only concern is to guarantee that we all stay alive'.¹⁷³ Although he is not without serious faults, Stepan has nonetheless grasped something of the importance of avoiding the reduction of human possibility: he has realised that 'a humanity with its problems definitely solved is no longer human'.¹⁷⁴

Finally, Dostoevsky challenges us to consider what might become of a world in which there are no icons. Such a world, he seems to suggest, would be lacking in the very qualities which Stepan is so desperately seeking to preserve; it would be a world in

¹⁶⁸ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 207

¹⁶⁹ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 210

¹⁷⁰ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 208

¹⁷¹ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 214

¹⁷² Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 207

¹⁷³ Dostoevsky, as cited in Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 193

¹⁷⁴ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 194

which those points of reference which enable a recognition of presence no longer exist.¹⁷⁵ Here we are returned to the central question of Dostoevsky's moral world to which we referred above, now expressed as the conflict between 'a world in which image, word, and presence are realities that create transformation by addressing the human subject from outside their own frame of reference and one in which there is no such dimension to reality and no such register for speech'.¹⁷⁶ Without icons, Dostoevsky would appear to be saying, the revelation of that higher plane which enables us to negotiate the depth of human life is prevented: the holy – 'that which sustains an infinite perspective on the worth or dignity of every other' – is denied.¹⁷⁷

(c) *The Seventh Symphony as Musical Icon*

For Edith Matus, the Seventh Symphony 'inspired us and brought us back to life'. 'Music is life', she says; 'after all, what is life without music?' As I discussed in chapter two, the romanticised notion of art as intrinsically revelatory is problematic, both theologically and in terms of wider human life. To this we might add the view of P. T. Forsyth, for whom the aesthetic is not, in and of itself, ethically instrumental. 'If Art is to be raised', he tells us, 'it is the public that must be raised. And that Art cannot do. It is not an evangelist, or a prophet, or a moral reformer.'¹⁷⁸ Similarly, Tzvetan Todorov, reflecting on the crimes committed during the war by those in command of the concentration camps, notes how a love of art does not necessarily translate into a high moral standing. 'Could people who love music', he asks, '...people who can cry when they hear it, be capable, at the same time, of committing so many atrocities on the rest of humanity?'... Alas, they can be.'¹⁷⁹ 'Recent arguments in defense of culture', he continues, 'all of them more or less conscious avatars of Enlightenment thought, seem based on a total disregard of the caveat that cultural growth need not have a moral corollary. Intellectual pursuits may lead to material abundance, but they do not prevent our moral frailty.'¹⁸⁰ Thus the aesthetic, although clearly of deep importance, cannot be allowed to become of ultimate importance. Perhaps it is rather the case, then, that the Seventh Symphony takes on, for those such as Edith Matus who respond so strongly to

¹⁷⁵ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 237

¹⁷⁶ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 223

¹⁷⁷ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 225

¹⁷⁸ P. T. Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus* (London, New York & Toronto: Hodder & Stoughton, 1911), p. 290

¹⁷⁹ Tzvetan Todorov, *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps* (London: Phoenix, 2000), p. 100

¹⁸⁰ Todorov, *Facing the Extreme*, p. 101

its themes, something of the quality of an icon – that it becomes, in the Dostoevskian sense of the word, *iconic*. In this way, we might begin to understand the work as a musical representation of and vehicle for the expression of the holy: as a transparency onto that presence without which the worth of life is denied.

The extent to which Shostakovich was directly affected by the Orthodox traditions discussed in this chapter remains a difficult question to answer. As a child of the Soviet era, he was raised an atheist in a society in which religion was banned and in which many of the traditions of the old Russia had been re-written. However, this is by no means to suggest that the composer remained completely immune to his wider cultural heritage; he, too, dwells within the ‘semiosphere’ of which Pyman speaks and, most notably, it would appear that the influence upon him of the Russian literary tradition was particularly profound. My argument, then, is that at the core of the Seventh Symphony there lie meanings which resonate deeply with the themes which Dostoevsky so skilfully portrays, and which relate in particular to his understanding of the icon.

To suggest that the iconic might be found in non-visual, and even non-sacred, art is not new. Dostoevsky himself, argues Williams, employs the figure of the ‘narrative icon’, whilst for Barth, in the music of Mozart, turned as it is towards the light of the resurrection, we are enabled to hear the peace which passes understanding, that is, to glimpse an iconic dimension signifying the possibility of life transcended and right relations restored. But what of the Seventh Symphony? Whatever the work might be said to convey, it would seem clear that it is not the peace of God, given that it has as its subject a very different theme – that of war.

However, whilst overtly presented as a piece concerned with ideas of a military or nationalistic intent, the Symphony nonetheless has at its heart far more humanitarian concerns – concerns which are also of paramount importance within the fictional world of Dostoevsky. Interviewed on the process of writing the work, Shostakovich was recorded as saying of it: ‘I was guided by a great love for the man in the street...love for people who have become the bulwark of culture, civilisation and life. I have written my symphony about them and others like them because I love them from the bottom of my heart.’¹⁸¹ Such love in the midst of suffering, or at least an intense dislike for the cause of that suffering, is referred to by Kozintsev, who puts it thus: ‘In Russian we have a

¹⁸¹ Dmitri Shostakovich, in Ottaway, *Shostakovich*, p. 34

wonderful word – virulent. No good exists in Russian art without a virulent hatred of all that degrades man. In Shostakovich's music I hear a virulent hatred of cruelty, of the cult of power, of the persecution of truth...'¹⁸² Ideas of love which survives barbarity are present throughout the main themes of this work, as identified by its programme – the mother's tears, a requiem which mourns those whom we have lost – and thus the work as a whole is concerned not simply with matters of nationalistic pride, but also with the recognition of what stands to be lost in war, which, in the end, amounts to those very things that we are fighting to save. As Robert Dearling puts it: 'Shostakovich provided a synthesis not only of war but also of all the things to be preserved by the struggle'.¹⁸³

So the Seventh Symphony is fundamentally a depiction of the suffering, brokenness and vulnerability of the Leningraders, and yet also of that which still remained despite the War. We might perhaps sense this best through the responses to the work of both the performers and audience present at the premier in Leningrad, for whom it spoke of solidarity in suffering and the will to survive. The Symphony served to make those who heard it aware of the depth of human life and also of what is at stake when that depth is denied: it showed how that which is holy, valued or cherished might become all the more apparent when set against the backdrop of its destruction, yet without losing a vital sense of spirit or energy. The Seventh Symphony, then, paints a musical picture of what it is to lose touch with, but not lost sight of, presence: it paints for us a Dostoevskian broken icon.

Through the exploration of what is at stake in war – through the portrayal of war not naturalistically but emotionally, and primarily expressed through the theme of love in barbarity or grief at suffering – the work further constitutes the recognition of there being a meaning to life which lies outside our control. It gives musical voice to what it is to understand the experience of loss: it speaks of what it is to live in the presence of immeasurable value and to have the capacity to comprehend when this reality is broken or deformed. In this way, the work stands as a marker of the humane and the humanising – of that which, for Dostoevsky, makes us iconic rather than demonic. What is more, in so doing, it exists as a sign of human flourishing for, as was grasped by those who, during the Siege, drew hope from its performance, it forms the musical representation of the possibilities which exist for humankind, in spite of, and at times

¹⁸² Kozintsev, in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 371

¹⁸³ Dearling, in Norris, *Shostakovich*, p. 82

precisely because of, the experience of suffering. Here the kenotic element of the icon comes into play, for this is a work which is complete only through its incompleteness – which is fully realised only through the acceptance of those very things it signifies against.¹⁸⁴

A world without icons, Dostoevsky tells us, would be infinitely the poorer, for it would lack a register of speech to enable us to relate to that dimension of reality which lies outside our own frame of reference: it would no longer be able to recognise presence. Stepan's narrative has already expressed the truth of D. H. Lawrence that 'the human soul needs actual beauty more than it needs bread', and through the character of Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky goes so far as to suggest that 'beauty will redeem the world'.¹⁸⁵ As I have noted, we cannot equate art with salvation, but there remains within the icon an element of the artistic *transformation* of reality into the envisaging of another realm of life – a way of interpreting existence without which humanity would be less than human. Roger Scruton, as we saw in the second chapter, alludes to this when he speaks of the value of music in human life. Music *matters*, he argues, in a way that goes beyond mere appearance: the aesthetic is fundamental to our perception of reality, shaping how we view our place in the world and marking us out as distinctively human. It was precisely this element of the aesthetic which Stalin's dictates regarding the arts were designed to manipulate and control, but which nonetheless finds expression in at least some of the music of Shostakovich, and in particularly genuine and poignant form in his Seventh Symphony.

The icon, writes Williams, 'does not leave the world unchanged. Response to what the icon opens up draws more out of the icon itself: it is not something that we can *finish* with, interpretatively or imaginatively'.¹⁸⁶ This continual process of the enabling and exemplifying of transformation, of the creating of an ongoing dialogue between icon and observer, starts for the Seventh Symphony with those musicians such as Edith Matus, whose performance of the work in the besieged city spoke to orchestra and

¹⁸⁴ In this way, Shostakovich does not fall into the trap of sentimentalism, as is implied by Roger Scruton when he writes of 'the lingering backward glance towards that which can never be recovered (and which is falsified in the very yearning for it)...' Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, p. 492

¹⁸⁵ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* trans. by David McDuff (London: Penguin Books, 2004). For Dostoevsky, for whom the idea of the utility of art created tension with the value attributed to the human *lik*, the idea of 'art for art's sake' nonetheless still held great appeal, concerned as it is with restoring beauty *for its own sake* in a world which he perceived to be 'dying from its growing dis-figurement' – from 'the gap opening up between man and the image and likeness of God'. Barsht, 'Defining the Face', p. 37

¹⁸⁶ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 207

audience alike of the possibility of hope in the midst of destruction and the denial of human dignity and potential. From here, as Eliasberg realised, it was to spread throughout Russia, and then throughout the world, as a symbol of the victory of humanity over the 'soulless machine'. And for us today, removed as we are from the context fundamental to the creation of the meaning of the work, although not from other instances of the inhumane, its message of the possibility of transformation in the face of brokenness and despair doubtless still remains as of the greatest significance.

Dostoevsky's exploration of the iconic, therefore, gives us the theological language to talk about the significance which the Seventh Symphony holds for many. The work demonstrates musically that which is expressed through many of the writer's novels: that destruction is needed for transformation; that redemption occurs only out of suffering; that there exists a profound spiritual depth which comes precisely through the darkest experience. It shows us, too, how the aesthetic might be understood as of central importance to the recognition of presence, and thus to the transformation of humanity. The Seventh Symphony, then, perceived in the light of the Russian Orthodox tradition mediated by Dostoevsky as a musical icon, depicts the role of desecration in the true realisation of the holy, and the place of art in revealing the depths of human life.

Having here shown that theological engagement with musical expressivity need not result in a 'religion of aestheticism', I turn in my next chapter to consider how an understanding of music as an expression of human interiority might be theologically embraced.

CHAPTER 5

The ‘Song of the Self’

The String Quartets

Following the publication of ‘Muddle Instead of Music’ in *Pravda* in 1936, Shostakovich had been left with the choice of either not writing any more music, or only writing music that would not prove antagonistic to the Soviet authorities. For him, ceasing to compose altogether was simply not an option. As Wendy Lesser puts it: ‘...silence was never a real possibility... If he was not a composer, he was nothing’.¹ To have left the country, as did many of his contemporaries, was by this time no longer legal, and illegal defection would have endangered not only his own life but also those of his wife and young daughter. In any case, his ability to earn a living abroad was far from certain, given that his knowledge of the music profession was rooted firmly in Soviet Russia with its particular system of financial support for the arts and, practical issues aside, his attachment to his homeland was such that leaving it was not a thought that he could ever realistically entertain.²

So Shostakovich continued to write full-scale symphonies but adopted a style which, as we have seen, if not entirely resigned to the Soviet ideal, was nonetheless often designed at least in part to placate the Party officials and thus ensure both his personal and professional safety. In order to earn a living (he had lost both of his professorships and thus a considerable proportion of his income during the ‘Muddle Instead of Music’ incident), he composed music for films, later going on to produce the scores for Grigoriy Kozintsev’s *Hamlet* (1963-64) and *King Lear* (1970).³ In addition to these more public works, however, Shostakovich also worked on a third kind of music – his ‘desk drawer’ music, consisting of the compositions he wanted personally to write but which may not have been deemed acceptable by the authorities. These works were filed away, hidden from the public eye, and often performed only in front of a select few.

¹ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 25

² Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, pp. 24-25

³ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 87; Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 350-351

Among these more discreet compositions were many pieces for chamber ensembles and, in particular, a number of works for string quartet. This was a medium which Shostakovich, like many others before him, would come to favour as a relatively safe outlet for individual expression. Requiring fewer musicians and a smaller amount of space than works scored for larger forces, music for the string quartet could be performed in the private setting of a house rather than on the public platform required by orchestral works, and this would no doubt have proved an attractive option for the composer, working as he was in an environment of close public scrutiny and official critique. As Helga Landauer puts it:

Writing quartet music was the closest he could come to being a poet who just picked up a pencil and wrote for himself, after playing for himself on the piano. The smallest model of the universe, the first acoustic. Nothing is required for these four people to come play: they are the closest friends, they can just come. With a symphony, you have to ask how and whom. These were the four who were always on his side.⁴

In chamber music, then, and in the string quartet in particular, Shostakovich ‘could toy with cacophony, immerse himself in irony, indulge in all his darkest, least acceptable moods, and not be called unpatriotic, because nobody who cared about such labels was listening to these compositions’.⁵

Shostakovich’s turning to the string quartet might be understood as having ideological as well as practical functions. Whereas the full symphony orchestra might be taken as representative of the lost individualism of mass society, and solo genres as the rebelling of the individual against the state, the string quartet, by contrast, presents the ‘ideal society in which musicians look to each other for guidance’: it is a ‘metaphorical democracy...of four equal players’.⁶ Indeed, the string quartet in particular is renowned amongst all the chamber ensembles for the way in which, at the highest level of musicianship, the timbres of the four instruments combine to form the sound of a single, unified whole. ‘When you have a piano trio’, writes Peter Cropper, ‘it is three soloists.

⁴ Helga Landauer, as cited in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 278

⁵ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 178

⁶ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 42. For Mendelssohn, however, the string quartet is rather ‘the most sublime form of democratic anarchy you can imagine’! *4 Better 4 Worse: The Anatomy of a String Quartet*. BBC4. 17th April 2009

[But] when you have a string quartet it becomes a new instrument'.⁷ Such an idealised vision of social harmony and democratic utopia would doubtless have held great appeal for Shostakovich, presenting as it did an image far removed from the reality of politics in Stalinist and post-Stalinist Russia.⁸

As a more private means of personal expression, then, Shostakovich's string quartets offer a unique insight into the composer's inner world. As his widow, Irina Shostakovich, puts it: they are 'a kind of "diary" that records "the story of the soul"'.⁹ For Lev Ginzburg, the intimate reflection of the life of the individual afforded by the quartets becomes particularly apparent when they are viewed in relation to several of the composer's symphonies, most notably the Eleventh and Twelfth, which, he argues, were written as 'concessions to the rulers', and as such display 'all his mastery, but without a trace of his soul'.¹⁰ In the string quartets, by contrast, Shostakovich no longer had to resort to such self-censorship but rather could remain honest to himself. Philip Setzer puts it thus:

I think art definitely can lie, or at least not tell the truth. I think Shostakovich wrote a lot of lies in his music, sometimes sacrificing the whole work: maybe in a moment of weakness, maybe because he had a sense of the bigger picture and wanted to preserve his ability to keep writing music... As much as I love Shostakovich – and the greatest of the symphonies are pinnacles of their kind – I think there's a greater percentage of truth in the quartets than in anything else he wrote.¹¹

One of Shostakovich's earliest childhood memories, he tells us, was of listening to his neighbours playing string quartets, his ear pressed up against the wall of their apartment.¹² It was not until May 1938, however, after the successful premiere of his Fifth Symphony, that he began work on a quartet of his own, in the first of what would

⁷ Peter Cropper, *4 Better 4 Worse*

⁸ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 43

⁹ Irina Shostakovich, as paraphrased in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 3. Such a sentiment is also expressed by Peter Cropper, who argues that quartets have as their aim that of bringing out the deepest emotions and most intimate thoughts of the composer. Unlike an orchestra or brass ensemble, the quartet does not produce an enormous sound, and unlike the soloist, it does not try to reach out to the audience. Rather, the job of the string quartet is to bring the audience in. Cropper, *4 Better 4 Worse*

¹⁰ Lev Ginzburg, as cited in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 285

¹¹ Philip Setzer, as cited in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 284

¹² Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Wilson, in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 34

be a total of fifteen recourses to the genre.¹³ Now aged thirty-one, this was the first time since his late teens that he had set to work on a musical form completely new to him, and as he himself notes, ‘the quartet is one of the most difficult musical genres’.¹⁴ That he was following in the footsteps of masters of the quartet including Haydn, Mozart, Schubert and Beethoven would doubtless have added to the pressure.¹⁵

In Beethoven, it has been argued, the string quartet was pushed to the limits of musical possibility: now Shostakovich set about taking it one stage further. By nature a self-exposing medium, it was here made even more so, with all traces of the sonorous tradition of Brahms stripped away until only the most basic tenets of the form remained. This, when combined with periods of silence either for some or all of the instruments simultaneously, enabled Shostakovich to introduce to the quartet his characteristic sparseness of timbre. In addition to the obsessive repetition and sudden changes of key and tempi to be found throughout the majority of his works, here he also made use of techniques specific to stringed instruments, such as pizzicato and double stopping, and in so doing disrupted the traditional eighteenth-century distinction between melody- and rhythm-carrying voices. The resulting works thus served to redefine how the string quartet might sound, and did so in a way that paid no heed to the Socialist Realist guidelines for a ‘simple and popular musical language accessible to all’.¹⁶ Instead, they paint for us an increasingly vivid picture of a ‘world of purgatorial numbness’, written as they were in response to the composer’s darkest moments of despair and recurrent thoughts about death.¹⁷

Shostakovich composed his quartets over a period of some thirty-six years – a time span which took in major events in the life of the Russian state as well as significant developments in the life of the composer himself. In this chapter, I shall explore three of these works which, when taken together, provide a sense of the overall scope of his writing for the genre, and give something of an insight into that which he sought to express through this most personal form of art.

¹³ Shostakovich had initially intended to write twenty-four quartets – one for each key, as with his *Preludes and Fugues* – although did not live to see his ambition realised. Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 216

¹⁴ Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 111. As Mendelssohn puts it: ‘For a composer, the string quartet is the ultimate test. For the listener, it is the most refined relation with music they can have. Four instruments very much alike and a little bit different that tell a story.’ *4 Better 4 Worse*

¹⁵ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 40

¹⁶ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 40 & pp. 43-44

¹⁷ David Fanning & Laurel Fay, ‘Shostakovich, Dmitri’, *Grove Music Online*.

www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/52560pg5 (2011; accessed 09.11.2011); Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 13

I. The Second String Quartet

(a) Context

In 1926, twenty-year-old Shostakovich was attending an oral exam in Marxism-Leninism at the Leningrad Conservatory in order to be admitted for postgraduate study. Also taking the exam that day was a young man named Ivan Sollertinsky – talented, erudite and only a few years older than Shostakovich. The composer recalls the event:

Before the exam I was extremely nervous. We were examined in alphabetical order. Presently, Sollertinsky was called in by the commission. He came out again very quickly. I plucked up courage and asked him: “Please would you tell me, was the exam very difficult?” “No, not at all,” he answered. “What did they ask you?” “The simplest of questions: the origins of materialism in Ancient Greece; the poetry of Sophocles as an expression of materialist tendencies; English seventeenth-century philosophers and something else as well [which Shostakovich was unable to recall].” Need I add that Ivan Ivanovich’s account of the exam instilled me with terror!¹⁸

Although initially overwhelmed by Sollertinsky’s abilities, it was not long before Shostakovich had announced to his younger sister, Zoya, that he had made a ‘wonderful new friend’.¹⁹ She says of it: ‘They had an insane friendship. Sollertinsky came to see us every day in the morning and stayed until the evening. They spent the whole day together, laughing and chuckling... On the days they didn’t meet, Mitya and Ivan Ivanovich wrote to each other’.²⁰ The two were ‘kindred spirits uniquely able to challenge and divert each other’; for Shostakovich, it was almost as though he had found another wife.²¹

A talented philosopher, linguist and cultural historian, Sollertinsky lectured at many academic institutions in Leningrad and, although his knowledge of music was largely self-taught, grew to become a distinguished critic, first of music theatre and ballet, and

¹⁸ Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 41-42. Although having first been introduced in 1921, it was this second meeting that was to prove unforgettable.

¹⁹ Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 54

²⁰ Zoya Shostakovich, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 42

²¹ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 42-43; Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 55. Sollertinsky was also responsible for introducing Shostakovich to a number of other close friends, including Isaak Glikman.

later of the symphonic repertoire. It was Sollertinsky who encouraged Shostakovich's interest in the music of Mahler, which was to prove highly influential in the development of his compositional style, and he remained one of the few people willing to speak honestly of Shostakovich's works, even when that meant risking official disapproval. Shostakovich valued greatly the professional opinion of his friend, and looked to him as a source of both inspiration and support.²²

During the War, Sollertinsky was evacuated from Leningrad to Novosibirsk, and among the few possessions taken with him were the precious letters written to him by Shostakovich.²³ The two were able to meet occasionally in Novosibirsk in 1942 as Shostakovich attended rehearsals for the forthcoming performance of his Seventh Symphony and these were occasions of much joy.²⁴ In the spring of 1943, Shostakovich managed to obtain a small apartment in Moscow and, in order to aid his move to the city, began to encourage his best friend to move there also. Sollertinsky would visit regularly, and at one such meeting in September 1943, Shostakovich played for him his newly-completed Eighth Symphony. They met again in the November of that year and further discussed their plans to transfer Sollertinsky to Moscow. This was to be the last time Shostakovich saw his friend: on 5th and 6th February 1944, Sollertinsky introduced premiere performances of the Eighth Symphony in Novosibirsk, and only five days later, on 11th February, he suffered a sudden heart attack, collapsed and died. He was only forty-one.²⁵

With the War nearly over and his latest compositions in favour, life had been looking up for Shostakovich; now it fell apart. A sense of his utter devastation can be gained from his letter to Glikman of 13th February:

I must share with you bitter and most heartfelt condolences on the death of our closest and most beloved friend Ivan Ivanovich... We shall not see him again. I have no words with which to express the pain that wracks my entire being. May his memorial be our abiding love for him, and our faith in the inspired talent and

²² Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 42-43; Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, pp. 55-56

²³ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, pp. 55-56

²⁴ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 132

²⁵ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 141-142

phenomenal love for the art of music to which he devoted his matchless life. Ivan Ivanovich is no more. It is very hard to bear.²⁶

The profound influence of Sollertinsky upon Shostakovich's life and work, however, and the respect which the composer held for his friend and mentor, lived on. Whenever he finished a new composition, Shostakovich would ask himself, 'And what would Ivan Ivanovich have said about this?', and he would always be met by silence.²⁷

At the time of Sollertinsky's death, Shostakovich had been working on his Piano Trio No. 2, which was to be his final foray into that particular musical genre. It was completed on 13th August 1944 at the Ivanovo artists' retreat and dedicated to the memory of Sollertinsky.²⁸ On hearing the Trio's second movement, Sollertinsky's sister recognised 'an amazingly exact portrait of Ivan Ivanovich, whom Shostakovich understood like no one else. That is his temper, his polemics, his manner of speech, his habit of returning to one and the same thought, developing it'.²⁹ Lesser writes of the piece: 'Those who knew Sollertinsky felt that the second movement...a haunting, lilting Allegro, perfectly mirrored the quicksilver intelligence of the man it honoured, and Shostakovich was no doubt eager to commemorate those years of shared jokes and sardonic laughter; but there is also a deep sadness to the piece...as well as the slowed-down, quiet ending'.³⁰

The Second Piano Trio is very close in mood to that of a string quartet, and it might well have been this work which inspired the composer's return to the form after a break of some six years.³¹ He wrote quickly, finishing the String Quartet No. 2 in A Major on 20th September 1944, less than a month after the completion of the Trio, and the piece was premiered by the Beethoven Quartet in Leningrad on 14th November 1944.³²

²⁶ Dmitri Shostakovich, in Glikman, *Story of a Friendship*, p. 24

²⁷ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 53

²⁸ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 141-143. Here Shostakovich was following the distinctively Russian tradition, also observed by Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov, of composing musical memorials in the form of the piano trio.

²⁹ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p.143

³⁰ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, pp. 58-59

³¹ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 60. Judith Kuhn additionally points to a wartime growth in the composition of chamber music, fuelled by the founding of several notable string quartets together with the evacuation of composers to rural areas leading to the writing of folk-inspired works, as providing the perfect context for Shostakovich's further exploration of the genre of the string quartet. Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, pp. 43-44

³² Of the speed of his composition of the work, Shostakovich writes: 'The process of music composition gives me no little concern and unrest. What bothers me is the lightning speed with which I compose.'

Shostakovich dedicated the work to Vissarion Shebalin, a loyal friend and fellow composer, to mark the twentieth anniversary of their first acquaintance.³³ However, the piece arguably honours not only Shebalin but also, once again, Sollertinsky. This delay in dedications was to happen several times over the course of Shostakovich's career: the Twelfth Quartet, which was dedicated to the first violinist of the Beethoven Quartet, clearly reflects on the earlier death of its second violinist, to whom the Eleventh Quartet had been officially dedicated, whilst the Seventh Quartet was dedicated the memory of his late wife, Nina, even though he had written the Sixth Quartet immediately after her death.³⁴ As Lesser points out, it is perhaps not surprising that it should take one or two compositions for the composer's bereavements to sink in, and we should not take these discrepancies as meaning the dedications are insincere, but rather that 'the dedicatee is, in each instance, also standing in for someone else'; after all, she remarks, 'it would be natural for Shostakovich to associate his dead friend with the loyal and musically talented Shebalin'.³⁵

(b) Analysis and Interpretation

In the same way that the official dedication of the Quartet seemingly distracts from its underlying intentions, so do the titles of the movements of the piece – Overture, Recitative and Romance, Waltz, and Theme and Variations – appear to serve as unemotional covers for the work's true meaning. For Lesser, this conscious move away from a psychological or narrative programme has to do with resistance: 'If Shostakovich is to be true to the memory of his strongly rational dead friend', she writes, 'he must not wallow self-pityingly in his grief...if he is to convey the profundity of his loss, he can best do so by not baring his soul too easily'. It is this inwardness, she argues, that is the key to the emotional power of quartets: 'Something is being given to us freely, on the level where music and intuition converge, and something else is being withheld from us: that is the dynamic that makes the quartets both so moving and so mysterious'.³⁶

Without a doubt, it isn't good. One shouldn't compose as quickly as I do... It is exhausting, not particularly pleasant and, on conclusion, one has no confidence that the time hasn't been wasted. But the bad habit reasserts itself and, as before, I compose too quickly.' Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 142

³³ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 142

³⁴ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, pp.60-61; Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 216

³⁵ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, pp. 60-61

³⁶ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 61

The emphatic Moderato provides a ‘passionate assertion of vital human strength’ from which the rest of the work unfold[s].³⁷ Opening with a theme on the violin (Fig. 5.1), which plays around with accentuation and is punctuated by chords in the other three instruments, and then featuring a secondary, dotted motif (Fig. 5.2), also in the first violin, the movement clearly alludes to the Jewish folk music tradition, with a klezmer-like tonality and wailing quality to the highest notes. At [9], a quieter section is introduced, with a slower melody, derived from the opening theme, heard first in the violin and then in the cello with pizzicato accompaniment. This develops to include a countermelody comprising of rocking quavers which becomes increasingly forceful and prominent before a return to a modified version of the opening theme on the violin concludes the movement. The voice of the violin melody, then, provides the thread which leads us through the movement, and indeed through the whole of the Quartet, taking on a variety of differing emotions along the way. For Lesser, this is to be identified with the personality of Sollertinsky, and she writes of it: ‘This is a voice that is planning to keep us company for a while...to lead us into places that we may find both fearful and enjoyable, seductive and threatening... It is a strong voice, capable of snappy retorts and enlightening observations’.³⁸

Fig. 5.1: Shostakovich, String Quartet No. 2, Moderato, opening



Fig. 5.2: Shostakovich, String Quartet No. 2, Moderato, [5]

³⁷ David Rabinovich, as cited in Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, p. 66

³⁸ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 62

The Second Piano Trio had been Shostakovich's first work to draw noticeably upon the traditions of klezmer music, and the Second Quartet remains one of his most overtly 'Jewish' works.³⁹ Such themes again link back to Sollertinsky, for he, too, held an appreciation for Jewish culture that went against the grain of popular opinion at the time. For some, this sympathy for, and even identification with, the Jews stemmed from a shared sense of oppression, and might even have taken the form of a political statement against the Soviet anti-Semitic regime. Others suggest the fact that many Jews were to be found in Russian intellectual and music circles of the day provided a natural connection to the Jewish cause. Alternatively, it might simply have been the case that Jewish folk music's tendency to favour melodies in minor keys and its darkly humorous nature appealed to Shostakovich's tastes, and that he was encouraged by Sollertinsky in the pursuit of such characteristics. In any case, Shostakovich's use of Jewish melodies rapidly came to be associated with themes of tragedy, for as Judith Kuhn puts it: '[Jewish music's] undercurrent of sadness, its 'laughter through tears' seems to have provided Shostakovich with a wonderful language to say something he needed to say about trauma, the struggle to emerge from it, and the enduring injuries and scars that remain'.⁴⁰

In the second movement, the first violin continues to dominate, although here it is a very different voice to before – no longer bright and confident, but mournful and filled with occasional, uncertain silences. The movement begins with a recitative – a haunting, and once again Jewish-sounding, lament in the first violin accompanied by static, slow-moving chords. The narrative device of opera, used to convey action and story, the style of recitative writing is akin to that of the spoken voice, and Shostakovich's instrumental recitative here proves to be no exception, with the chromaticism of the violin melody mirroring the inflection of the spoken word.⁴¹ From here we are led into a short Romance – an initially beautiful waltz which becomes gradually more disturbed, with

³⁹ Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, pp. 44-46. Kuhn points to the music of three composers working in Russia in the early 1940s – Venyamin Fleischmann, Mieczyslaw Weinberg and Moisey Beregovsky – as providing for Shostakovich particularly rich resources of Jewish music.

⁴⁰ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, pp. 59-60; Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, p. 53. However, as Lesser points out, some of Shostakovich's more explicitly Jewish music later came to be persecuted, for although the composer had followed the directives of Zhdanov and Stalin that he should draw more upon music from the folk traditions, the music from this particularly tradition had not been what they had in mind. Lesser, *Music for Silenced Music*, p. 90. For a more detailed examination of the influence of Jewish folk music on the works of Shostakovich and the resulting controversies, see Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, pp. 44-56

⁴¹ Tsyganov once commented that the recitative of the Romance appeared to have been written with his personal performance style in mind. When he mentioned this to the composer, Shostakovich replied: 'Yes, indeed it was, Mitya. I wrote it for you'. Fyodor Druzhinin, in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 440

frequent changes of time signature and increasingly dissonant harmonies. The movement concludes with a return to the opening recitative, this time punctuated by accented pizzicato chords in the violin, eventually dying away to leave the lingering sound of muted strings. For Kuhn, this movement is the image of ‘a dance that cannot quite dance wholeheartedly, of a struggle to move beyond grief without having experienced the full extent of its ravaging effects’.⁴² This sentiment is echoed by Lesser, for whom the violin voice now speaks of ‘intimacy, dependence and loss...professing its own weakness in the face of...death-dealt absence, and also its despair’.⁴³

Altogether the strangest movement is that of the Waltz. Here we are returned to the bright voice of the opening movement, but now it is a mere shadow of its former self. As Lesser puts it: it is as though ‘that first-violin self is no longer alive’ but rather ‘moved by some force outside itself, compelled to do a dance of death’.⁴⁴ The main theme of the movement, appearing initially in the cello, is once again deeply chromatic, and has an alluring yet strangely disconcerting quality about it. As one critic writes of it: this Russian-style waltz, in contrast to the tradition of Tchaikovsky, Liszt and Berlioz, is not graceful and dance-like, but rather ‘ominous; it is a terrifying waltz’.⁴⁵ Creating rhythmic interest through syncopation devices such as the hemiola, for example at ⁴⁻¹[58] and again at [66], the movement also contrasts the legato melody line with abrupt pizzicato and accented chords. Fast-moving quavers provide a frenetic backdrop to the middle section of the movement, before a return to the opening theme, with sparse pizzicato accompaniment, gradually fades away to a silent end. For Lesser, the Mahlerian nature of this movement’s waltz provides a thoughtful if eerie tribute to Sollertinsky, the founder of Leningrad’s Mahler Society, but it is also, she believes, a ‘frightening portrait of the emptiness that is death’. ‘Shostakovich is attempting to revive his dead friend’, she writes, ‘to animate the inanimate, by using as his lure the kind of macabre music his friend loved. But the end result is ghoulish and scary... the Mahler expert has himself been Mahlerized, made into a thing that is no longer human,

⁴² Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, p. 82

⁴³ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 62

⁴⁴ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 63. The relationship between dance and death has been explored by a number of other composers, and here we might in particular draw a parallel between Shostakovich and his contemporary, Igor Stravinsky, whose work *The Rite of Spring* tells the story of a young girl, offered in sacrifice to the god of Spring, who dances herself to death.

⁴⁵ David Rabinovich: ‘It seems to me that there is nothing more opposed than a waltz from Shostakovich’s Quartet and a traditional waltz of Tchaikovsky’. Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, p. 66

and the effort to retrieve him seems all the more hopeless as he disappears into the music'.⁴⁶

Finally, the Theme and Variations provides what is arguably the most rhythmically exciting sequence of any of the Shostakovich quartets.⁴⁷ Following a brief, adagio introduction, the initial theme of the movement (Fig. 5.3) is presented in the viola. The melody, which draws upon traditional Russian folk song, then appears in several different guises, featuring variously semiquavers, triplets, off-beat quavers and accented crotchets.⁴⁸ The emphatic adagio ending comprises an extended form of the introduction and concludes with a series of slow, fortissimo, minor chords. For one critic, this movement is 'spirited, passionate, tempestuous in parts', and yet also grounded in an 'inner harmony' carried over from the first movement of the work.⁴⁹ For Lesser, although the 'galloping dance...carries us relentlessly onward', that the initial theme survives throughout the variations gives us cause for 'if not celebration, then at any rate resignation to the facts of existence': the voice of the first violin, she believes, makes the decision to survive, not by forgetting death, but by taking death into itself in order to overcome it. 'The feeling of this whole final movement', she writes, 'is one of setting off on this road, the only one available to us, and trying to get to the end of it in as good a shape as we can'.⁵⁰

Fig. 5.3: Shostakovich, String Quartet No. 2, Theme and Variations, ¹[92]



In the Second Quartet, then, Shostakovich demonstrates that he has already mastered the genre, and his skills in this area, which will be further refined over the years and works to come, provide him with the perfect means of expressing his most personal concerns and inward musings. Also in this work is to be found the true subject

⁴⁶ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 63

⁴⁷ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 63

⁴⁸ Yury Shaporin, in Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, p. 61

⁴⁹ David Rabinovich, as cited in Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, p. 66

⁵⁰ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, pp. 63-64

of all his quartets: that of death, or more accurately, ‘mortal terror, sorrow [and] guilt-ridden survival’.⁵¹

II. The Eighth String Quartet

(a) Context

In July 1960, Shostakovich visited Dresden whilst writing a score for his friend Leo Arnshtam’s film *Five Days, Five Nights* – a Russian-East German collaboration which tells the story of the salvaging of artwork from Dresden by Red Army soldiers prior to the firebombing of the city at the end of the Second World War.⁵² On his return, however, he did not continue with the film score but rather started work on the Eighth Quartet, completing it in just three days. Although officially dedicated ‘to the memory of victims of War and Fascism’,⁵³ the piece also contains the subtext of a more personal pre-occupation, made clear by Shostakovich’s encoding of his initials ‘DSCH’, D, E^b, C and B in German transliteration, into the motif (Fig. 5.4) from which the whole work derives.⁵⁴ Furthermore, in a letter to his close friend, Isaak Glikman, Shostakovich said of the work: ‘I started thinking that if some day I die, nobody is likely to write a work in memory of me, so I had better write one myself. The title page could carry the dedication: ‘To the memory of the composer of this quartet’!’⁵⁵ This statement, together with the dark mood of the piece and the fact that it was written shortly after Shostakovich’s apparently coerced joining of the Communist Party, have even led to

⁵¹ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 64

⁵² Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, p. 17

⁵³ Dmitri Shostakovich, interviewed by Mikhail Dolgoplov, ‘The Happiness of Creating for the People’, 1960, in Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, p. 151. This dedication can also be read as subversive for, as Lesser points out, ‘the Party leaders could hardly complain about a work dedicated to ‘the victims of fascism and war’ to whom they themselves were always building gigantic monuments. And yet who were the primary victims, or at least targets, of German fascism? Why, none other than the Jews, against whom the Russians had recently been waging their own vigorous campaign... [And] from a Dresden-based perspective, the “victims of war” would certainly have included the many thousands of German civilians killed in the Allied firebombing of that city.’ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, pp. 150-151

⁵⁴ This encoding of initials was also practiced by a variety of other composers, most notably J. S. Bach, and so Shostakovich is here acknowledging his Baroque ancestry. Also, the dark, Jewish-sounding nature of his motif fits perfectly with his appeal to klezmer melodies. Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 150. The motif also appears in a number of Shostakovich’s other works, most notably the Tenth Symphony. For a more detailed study of its origins, see Stephen C. Brown, ‘Tracing the Origins of Shostakovich’s Musical Motto’, *Intégral*, 20 (2006), 69-103. Interestingly, the composer’s parents had originally intended to name their son Yaroslav but were persuaded otherwise by the priest who presided at the child’s christening. Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 8. It is perhaps fortunate for Shostakovich that this was the case, as the alternative set of initials would doubtless not have formed such a versatile musical motif!

⁵⁵ Dmitri Shostakovich, in Glikman, *Story of a Friendship*, pp. 90-91

speculation that the work was originally intended as a suicide note, although Shostakovich was in fact to die of natural causes some fifteen years later.⁵⁶

Fig. 5.4: 'DSCH' motif



The theme of death, then, is once again close at hand. Although the death of Stalin in 1953 and the resulting onset of the Thaw had seen a move towards the rehabilitation of the reputations of those artists whose works had previously been denounced, and despite the success of Shostakovich's latest compositions, most notably his Tenth Symphony, other events in the life of the composer remained decidedly bleak. In December 1954, Shostakovich's beloved wife, Nina, died of cancer at the age of forty-three. Her illness had been undiagnosed, and her death came as a terrible shock to Shostakovich and their family.⁵⁷ Shortly after, the composer married the young Margarita Kainova, but the relationship was unsuccessful and short-lived.⁵⁸ At the same time, his own health was deteriorating, with as yet undiagnosed poliomyelitis causing tremors in his right hand, and he was increasingly plagued with guilt at having survived the Terror when so many of his friends and colleagues had not.⁵⁹

Having in mind the task of composing a film score whilst working on the piece, the Quartet is, as Fanning remarks, 'rich in cinematographic continuity techniques'.⁶⁰ Throughout the work, Shostakovich weaves quotations from and allusions to previous compositions of his own together with references to a number of works by other composers, many of which, in line with the overall themes of the Quartet, draw associations with ideas of death, destruction and tragedy. Interspersed with these, musical images of his closest friends and family – Nina, Sollertinsky, Rostropovich –

⁵⁶ Lev Lebedinsky, in Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, pp. 149-150

⁵⁷ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 193-194

⁵⁸ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 197-198. Shostakovich was later to marry his third wife, Irina, in 1962. His Ninth Quartet is dedicated to her. p. 227 & p. 243

⁵⁹ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 209-210; Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 126. However, Shostakovich still managed to remain characteristically humorous about his increasingly compromised physical health, once remarking in a letter to Glikman: 'Here is a general report. Target achieved so far: 75 per cent (right leg broken, left leg broken, right hand defective. All I need to do now is wreck the left hand and then 100 per cent of my extremities will be out of order.)' Dmitri Shostakovich, in Glikman, *Story of a Friendship*, p. 147

⁶⁰ Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, p. 40

flicker briefly to life, only to die away again once more.⁶¹ Arranged as they are in mostly chronological order, these extracts and images function as something of a musical flash-back over the major events in the life of the composer so far, and thus serve to further underline the autobiographical nature of the work.

The employing of such techniques has meant that, of all Shostakovich's quartets, the Eighth has doubtless been the subject of the greatest level of interest on the part of musicologists and critics, to the extent that, at times, it has been all too easy to view the work as merely an analysable structure rather than as a piece of music. Furthermore, the temptation to confuse the work as revealing to us something of Shostakovich's emotional life with the work as having a meaning which can be perfectly and exclusively understood in relation to his biography has led to a degree of 'reading in' to interpretations of the piece.⁶² So whilst questions of context remain of interest and of relevance to the study of this work, it is important that events in the life of the composer are not allowed to eclipse an appreciation of the work as a musical entity. As Lesser reminds us, it is 'a matter of balance'.⁶³

(b) Analysis and Interpretation

The work opens with the initial presentation of the DSCH motif in the form of a fugue. This motif is to reappear throughout the work in a variety of melodic and harmonic permutations, most notably in the first section of the second movement at [17]–[18], in which it takes the form of a more violent fugal arrangement, in the opening to the third movement at [35]^{1–3}, where the solo violin foreshadows the development of the movement's first theme, and also in the conclusion to the fourth movement at [72]^{1–12}. What is more, the intervals implied within this motif, in particular the semitone of the minor second and also the diminished fourth, are used to generate much of the other material found within the work, with an extensive use of the former both melodically and harmonically lending the work a deeply chromatic and dissonant tonality. Further, a falling semitone is used to form a 'sigh' motif (Fig. 5.5), initially found in the violin in the first movement at [2]³, then in an elaborated form at ⁷[3], and finally as part of an

⁶¹ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 152

⁶² Such an error is referred to by Roger Scruton as the 'biographical theory', which suggests that 'a work of art expresses a state of mind because the artist 'puts his state of mind into' the work' so that '[i]n understanding the product, we recuperate the mental state that went into making it'. Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, p. 144

⁶³ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, pp.142

extended sequence at 3^{-1} [5]. Later, this motif forms part of a larger, dactylic pattern (Fig. 5.6), which is established in the first movement at 5^{-3} [4], and is then used to form *ostinati* in both the first and second movements.

Fig. 5.5: Shostakovich, String Quartet No. 8, first movement, ‘sigh’ motif



Fig. 5.6: Shostakovich, String Quartet No. 8, first movement, dactylic pattern



The DSCH theme that opens the work is itself a quotation, for Shostakovich used it first in his Tenth Symphony, composed in the year Stalin died. Also to be found in the first movement, the character of which is largely mournful and reflective, are allusions to Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony – a work which, as I discussed in my third chapter, is renowned for its ambiguity of meaning and underlying current of suffering and despair, and which features prominently the diminished fourth interval, the dactylic pattern, and an almost modal tonality, present in the Quartet at [4]–[6]. In addition to these quotations from works of his own, at 10^{-8} [3] Shostakovich also draws upon Tchaikovsky’s Sixth Symphony, a piece which is arguably one of the most tragic ever written.

In the second movement, we are returned once again to the theme death in relation to dance. The second theme of this movement (Fig. 5.7), at [21]¹⁻²⁶, is drawn from the so-called ‘Jewish’ theme of Shostakovich’s Piano Trio No. 2 which, built around the harshly dissonant interval of an augmented fourth (the ‘tritone’ or ‘devil’s chord’) and with awkward and irregular phrasing, has come to be associated with the image of Jews in Nazi labour camps being forced to dance, prior to their execution, in the pits that were to be their mass graves.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the abrupt ending of the theme mid-phrase

⁶⁴ Reichardt, *Composing the Modern Subject*, p. 82

in the conclusion to the movement serves to highlight the notion of untimely death and disconcerting unpredictability.

Fig. 5.7: Shostakovich, String Quartet No. 8, second movement, opening of ‘Jewish’ theme, [21]¹⁻²⁶

Shostakovich once again plays with musical connections between death and dancing in the third movement, where the first theme, at [36]⁵⁻¹³, alludes to Saint-Saëns' *Danse Macabre*, a work which tells the story of how, at midnight on Halloween, Death calls the dead to dance whilst he plays the dance of death, again featuring the augmented fourth, upon a mistuned fiddle.⁶⁵ This type of dissonant waltz is to be found in Shostakovich as far back as the third movement of the Second Quartet, although here, as Lesser remarks, it is 'less alluring [and]...also less frightening, for there is not as much to lose now, when even death has become familiar'.⁶⁶ Highly erratic in character, the movement features irregular bar lengths and many new themes which are introduced and then abandoned. For Fanning, this creates a sense of 'unrealized potential', both in terms of musical development and in a wider sense, and so once again indicates early death and failed opportunity.⁶⁷ Such sorrow is overtly apparent in the concluding bars of the movement, in which a solo violin plays a sorrowful extract from the plainsong *Dies Irae* – the thirteenth century poem about the Day of Judgement used in the Requiem Mass.

It is from this single melodic line that the fourth movement erupts with a motif (Fig. 5.8) of three highly dissonant, pesante (strongly accented) chords, with which Shostakovich weaves yet more layers of meaning into the Quartet. On one level, these

⁶⁵ Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, p. 92

⁶⁶ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 155

⁶⁷ Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, p. 100

chords represent the bombs that fell on Dresden, and the melodic line the drone of the aircraft overhead. On another, they are a quotation from the opening of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, where the hand of fate knocks loudly on the door. Deeper still, the knocking is here said to be that of the NKVD – a visit from whom Shostakovich lived constantly in dread.⁶⁸ From this, the movement develops into what has frequently been referred to as a 'collage of quotations', once again revolving around the subject of death. Among the citations included are the theme from the execution scene of Shostakovich's *The Young Guard*, funeral music from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* and an extract from the revolutionary song *Zamuchen Tyazholoy Nevoley (Tormented by Harsh Captivity)*. Arguably the most moving statement, however, is at ¹[62]–²[63], where reference is made to a passage from Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth*. Originally an aria of Katerina's in the final act, the phrase is here played by the haunting upper register of the cello, and although Katerina sings of her love for Sergei, the theme of death once again remains near at hand, for her song falls on deaf ears and is ultimately to lead to 'heartbreak, despair and suicidal vengefulness'⁶⁹.

Fig. 5.8: Shostakovich, String Quartet No. 8, fourth movement, opening

The final movement brings to the fore the work's cyclical nature, implied through the repetitions of the DSCH theme and its derivations throughout the piece, and now revealed in a direct return to the material of the first movement. The start of this concluding section of the work mirrors almost exactly its opening, with the only differences found in the delayed entries of the fugal voices and the shorter reference to the First Symphony. The countersubject of this movement (Fig. 5.9), heard first in the cello at ²[66]–[66]¹, is formed by another reference to *Lady Macbeth*, this time a phrase

⁶⁸ Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, p. 103

⁶⁹ Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, p. 115

which in the opera is associated with sleeplessness, although in contrast to the rest of the work, this is to be the only quotation contained within the movement. Instead, and again unlike the preceding movements, Shostakovich follows musical convention in terms of structure and development, presenting a fully worked-out fugue which is no longer interrupted by musical quotation. This creates a sense of musical coherence previously lacking in the work and, for Fanning, represents a ‘shift away from semantically charged gesture to pure(r) musical thought’.⁷⁰ The Quartet ends with a sparse, sustained chord, the tonality of which is ambiguous as it contains no third, and above which the solo violin breathes a final, extended sigh.

Fig. 5.9: Shostakovich, String Quartet No. 8, fifth movement, ²[66]-[66]¹



The Eighth Quartet is therefore a work rich in allusion which creates multiple layers of meaning by drawing upon semantic encoding within the work itself (the DSCH motif) together with musical associations from wider repertoire. For Fanning, however, the work also presents us with something more than just a collage of quotations. The meaning of the piece as a whole, he argues, ultimately transcends the meanings implied by the individual extracts of which it is comprised, and thus it becomes a unique musical work. In particular, he points to the musical unity of the final movement to demonstrate that the work is in fact an example of ‘the overcoming of programmatic dependence and the ultimate triumph of philosophical reflection’ – an idea which echoes Shostakovich’s own conclusions about the finished piece, as expressed in a letter to Glikman: ‘...I tried a couple of times to play it through, but always ended up in tears. This was of course a response not to the pseudo-tragedy so much as to my own wonder at its superlative unity of form’.⁷¹

For Fanning, such an interpretation might be translated in relation to the life of the composer, with the work raising questions of freedom, autonomy and liberation that operate not only on the level of musical form – in the relation between musical

⁷⁰ Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, p. 131

⁷¹ Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, p. 137; Dmitri Shostakovich, in Glikman, *Story of a Friendship*, p. 91

quotation and new composition – but also in terms of the relationship between individual and wider society. Understood in this way, the piece symbolizes one of music’s unique properties amongst the arts: its ability to ‘encapsulate the relationship between the self and the world’.⁷² He puts it thus: ‘At one level [the Quartet] is certainly a powerful reminder of an individual artist’s suffering, and of his compassion. But more than that, it is a reminder of what it is to have a self at all – in a society founded on the notion of subordinating the self to the collective, and in an era when the forces of dehumanization were by no means confined to that society’.⁷³ Shostakovich’s use of self-quotation, and then the deliberate setting aside of this self-quotation, he argues, demonstrate that ‘the self – symbolized here by its cultural trope, music – is indeed the remainder when the phenomenal world, symbolized by quotation and allusion, is subtracted’. The Quartet thus ‘works its way from a concept of self bound up with suffering in the outside world to one that achieves – or at the very least strives for – inner liberation, by means of the power of creative thought’, and as such has at its centre a concern for the value of the individual.⁷⁴

A somewhat different argument is presented by Sarah Reichardt, for whom the continual presence of ideas derived from the DSCH motif throughout the work and the ultimate return of the motif in fugal form in the final movement serve to disrupt the musical development of the piece and repeatedly prevent its flourishing. For her, the Quartet presents not the triumph of the musical work above contextual association, but rather its sinking beneath the confines of inherited intentionality, and thus she perceives it as representative not of the liberation of the individual but rather of the ‘unfreedom of...[the] composer’.⁷⁵ This is not to say, however, that the Quartet cannot speak to us of autonomy; on the contrary, she goes on to argue that ‘it is via its display of failure that the quartet is able to symbolize autonomy through a failed struggle for such autonomy’.⁷⁶ At the heart of the interpretations of both Reichardt and Fanning, then, lies a shared concern: that the work ultimately has to do with the continuing struggle between freedom and captivity, exercised on both a musical and a personal level. Once again, the medium of the string quartet provides the perfect setting for such ideas to be explored for, as Adorno reminds us, it represents ‘a kind of utopian social balance

⁷² Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, p. 138

⁷³ Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, pp. 138-139

⁷⁴ Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, pp. 138-139; Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, p. 1

⁷⁵ Sarah Jane Reichardt, *Composing the Modern Subject: Four String Quartets by Dmitri Shostakovich* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 97

⁷⁶ Reichardt, *Composing the Modern Subject*, p. 97

between the promulgation of individuality, on the one hand, and the relation of individuality to the enactment of community, on the other'.⁷⁷

III. The Thirteenth String Quartet

(a) Context

In the years preceding the completion of the Thirteenth Quartet in 1970, the harsh reality of Russia's political system became increasingly apparent. The gradual move away from the optimism of Khrushchev's Thaw to the stagnation of the Brezhnev era was seen by many as a dangerous sign that Russia's repression might not yet be over, whilst the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Russia in the August of 1968 marked a low point in the relationship of the USSR with the West. Political disagreement, however, no longer proved necessarily fatal and, although Shostakovich retained something of his learned instinct to keep a low profile wherever possible, new opportunities were presenting themselves for the expression of personal views and opinions.⁷⁸

Although only sixty-two, the composer's thoughts were by now turning increasingly to the subject of death. His own demise had become the subject of frequent reflection after he was finally diagnosed, in late 1969, with the rare nerve disease poliomyelitis, following which he spent much time in a clinic in Kurgan in what was, by most accounts, an unsuccessful attempt to seek a cure.⁷⁹ He also continued to be haunted by the memories of those he had lost. In August 1968, he and Glikman visited the grave of Mikhail Zoshchenko, who had died in poverty ten years earlier, and during a hospital stay in the February of 1969, Shostakovich's found himself increasingly preoccupied by memories of Sollertinsky, writing to Glikman: 'It is incredible to think that twenty-five years have passed since he died'.⁸⁰

This obsession with death was made overtly apparent in several of his more public works composed during this time. His Thirteenth Symphony, completed in 1962 and comprising settings of five works by young Russian poet Yevgeniy Yevtushenko, most famously includes the poem 'Babi Yar', which has as its subject the massacre of Jews in a ravine in Kiev during the war. Published in September 1961 and intended as an overt

⁷⁷ Richard Leppert, 'Commentary', in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, p. 522

⁷⁸ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 224

⁷⁹ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 323

⁸⁰ Dmitri Shostakovich, in Glikman, *Story of a Friendship*, p. 159

condemnation of the anti-Semitism of the Russian authorities in their refusal to provide a memorial at the massacre site, the poem had proven highly controversial, and the premier of the Symphony, although not forbidden, was downplayed by officials. Later, it was demanded that some of the text be changed, and Yevtusheko obligingly provided eight substitute lines which Shostakovich, despite his disapproval, then incorporated into the work.⁸¹

By 19th March 1969, Shostakovich was writing to Glikman: ‘It came into my head that there exist certain eternal themes, eternal problems. Among them are love and death... [U]p to now I haven’t tackled death. The day before I went into hospital I was listening to Mussorgsky’s *Songs and Dances of Death*, and idea of addressing the question of death finally came to fruition in me’.⁸² The form of this fruition was his Fourteenth Symphony, completed on 2nd March of that year. Scored for chamber orchestra, the Symphony is ‘quieter and more painful’ than the Thirteenth, although, like its predecessor, is also a setting of textual sources.⁸³ Built around a sequence of melancholic recitatives for bass and soprano, the Symphony draws on works by Lorca, Apollinaire, Rilke and Küchelbecker, all of which are concerned with the subject of death, and speaking at the unofficial premier of the piece in June 1969,⁸⁴ Shostakovich gave the following explanation regarding his choice of theme:

It is not because I am rather old and not because... I am losing my friends and relatives. I should like to recall the words of that remarkable Soviet writer

⁸¹ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 228, pp. 234-236.

Original text:

I imagine now that I am a Jew.
Here I wander through ancient Egypt.
And here, I am crucified on the cross and die,
And still bear the marks of the nails

...

And I become like a long, soundless scream
Above the thousand thousands here interred.
I am each old man shot dead here,
I am each child shot dead here.

Replacement:

I stand there as if at a wellspring,
That gives me faith in our brotherhood.
Here lie Russians and Ukrainians,
With Jews they lie in the same earth.

...

I think about Russia’s heroic feats,
In blocking fascism’s path.
To the very tiniest dewdrop,
Her whole essence and fate is dear to me.

⁸² Dmitri Shostakovich, in Glikman, *Story of a Friendship*, p. 160

⁸³ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 227

⁸⁴ Although the Fourteenth Symphony was officially premiered on 29th September 1969 at the Leningrad Capella, there was also an unofficial, earlier premier on 21st June 1969 in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory in front of an invited audience, as Shostakovich, with his health deteriorating, was by now particularly concerned about hearing his compositions performed as soon as possible lest he should die before the event. In the case of the Fourteenth Symphony, however, it turned out to be an audience member – the Communist Party functionary Pavel Apostolov, one of Shostakovich’s harshest critics – who suffered a heart attack or stroke during the unofficial premier and died the following month. Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 260-262

Ostrovsky, who said that life is given to us only once, so we should live it honestly and handsomely in all respects and never commit base acts. In part, I am trying to polemicize with the great classics who touched upon the theme of death in their work. Remember the death of Boris Godunov. When Boris Godunov has died, a kind of brightening sets in. Remember Verdi's *Otello*. When the whole tragedy ends and Desdemona and Otello die, we also experience a beautiful serenity. Remember *Aida*. When the tragic demise of the hero and heroine occurs, it is assuaged by radiant music. I think that even among our contemporaries...for instance the outstanding English composer, Benjamin Britten. I would also fault him in his *War Requiem*... It seems to me that all this stems from various kinds of religious teachings that have suggested that as bad as life might be, when you die everything will be fine; what awaits you there is absolute peace. So it seems to me that perhaps, in part, I am following in the footsteps of the great Russian composer Musorgsky. His cycle *Songs and Dances of Death* – maybe not all of it, but at least “The Field Marshal” – is a great protest against death and a reminder to live one's life honestly, nobly, decently, never committing base acts... [Death] awaits all of us. I don't see anything good about such an end to our lives and this is what I am trying to convey in this work.⁸⁵

The Fourteenth Symphony, dedicated to Britten, might be conceived as something of a creative response to the *War Requiem*.⁸⁶ The two composers were close friends and, upon hearing a recording of the *Requiem*, Shostakovich wrote to Glikman: ‘I...am thrilled with the greatness of this work, which I place on a level with Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* and other great works of the human spirit’.⁸⁷ As a non-believer, however, Shostakovich felt that the *Requiem* was compromised by its concluding lines, wherein lies the offer of eternal rest in the hereafter – the promise of ‘*In paradisum deducant te Angeli*’.⁸⁸ By contrast, the Fourteenth Symphony offers little by way of consolation or reassurance, and its stark musical treatment of death and fundamental denial of the

⁸⁵ Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 261. Although writing on the subject of death in his letter to Glikman of March 19th he added wryly: ‘I cannot say that I am wholly resigned to this event’. Dmitri Shostakovich, in Glikman, *Story of a Friendship*, p. 160

⁸⁶ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 263

⁸⁷ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, pp. 229-230; Dmitri Shostakovich, in Glikman, *Story of a Friendship*, p. 114

⁸⁸ ‘May angels lead you into paradise.’ Once asked if he believed in God, Shostakovich responded: ‘No, and I am very sorry about it’, and in light of the *War Requiem*, he is said to have remarked of Britten: ‘You can't achieve anything without God’. Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 263

existence of an afterlife have for many proved profoundly unsettling.⁸⁹ Whilst not as overtly political as the Thirteenth Symphony, it nonetheless remains ‘shockingly rebellious’, not least because of its employing of levels of melancholy and despair which would have been unacceptable under Socialist Realism.⁹⁰ As Lesser puts it: ‘To acknowledge death as Shostakovich is doing here is to place the individual’s fears and sorrows at the forefront of human experience. There can be no socially designed solution to the “eternal problem”...’⁹¹

The Thirteenth Quartet, which was written over the period of a year, was completed in August 1970 between two of Shostakovich’s stays at the Kurgan clinic and premiered by the Beethoven Quartet on 13th December in Leningrad.⁹² The composer shared a particularly close relationship with this group of musicians, offering them the first performances of all the string quartets save the first and last. Not a string player himself, he would also check with them as to the playability of his works.⁹³ Later, he even came to incorporate aspects of the talents and personalities of its members into his writing, with the Eleventh and Twelfth Quartets dedicated to its second violinist (Vasiliy Shirinsky) and first violinist (Dmitri Tsyganov) respectively.⁹⁴ With the Thirteenth came the turn of its original, then retired, violist, Vadim Borisovsky, to whom Shostakovich presented the work, which paid particular attention to the role of the viola, in celebration of his seventieth birthday.⁹⁵

(b) Analysis and Interpretation

As aesthetic tolerance grew, and as Shostakovich turned increasingly to chamber music as a more personal and private means of musical expression, so he also began to experiment with various compositional techniques which would not have been considered acceptable in his earlier, more public works.⁹⁶ By his Twelfth Quartet, completed in 1968, the composer was experimenting with twelve-tone rows – a modern, atonal technique made famous by the works of Arnold Schoenberg, in which melodies are created by sounding each of the twelve notes of the chromatic scale once before any

⁸⁹ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 263

⁹⁰ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 228

⁹¹ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 228

⁹² Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 268

⁹³ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 112; Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 42

⁹⁴ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 65; Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 247 & p. 257

⁹⁵ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, pp. 232-233

⁹⁶ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 292

of them are repeated. If the Twelfth Quartet is to be deemed ‘modern’, then the Thirteenth Quartet is, as Lesser puts it, ‘downright strange’.⁹⁷ Described by Alan George of the Fitzwilliam Quartet as ‘a harrowing experience for all concerned’,⁹⁸ the work, which is formed from a single movement lasting around eighteen minutes, is both ‘bleak and inventive, despairing and disruptive’.⁹⁹ Lesser continues:

Its horrors are those of the human condition, particularly as they manifested themselves in the twentieth century, but they are also the funhouse horrors of dancing skeletons and rattling bones. Creepiness has been elevated to the highest form of art here. At the same time, novelty has been pressed into active duty in the service of emotional seriousness. The tricks in this quartet are never just tricks; whatever pleasure they give on the level of invention is balanced, indeed weighed down, by the chilling sadness they help to convey.¹⁰⁰

Shostakovich’s morbid reflections are here evidenced in the melancholy mood of the work and perfectly matched by the sonorous timbre of the viola.¹⁰¹ For the quartet’s dedicatee, Borisovsky, the theme of death was also pertinent: having retired six years earlier due to ill health, no-one had expected that he would live to this age, and indeed he was to die just two years later. Head of the viola department at Moscow Conservatory, principal violist with the Bolshoi Theatre’s orchestra and renowned soloist in addition to his role with the Beethoven Quartet, he was a note-worthy figure in the world of viola playing, as composer and fellow violist Paul Hindemith exclaimed in Berlin in 1967: ‘The world Union of viola players! Borisovsky is their chairman’.¹⁰² For Shostakovich, however, the appeal of writing for this musician was not simply his technical expertise but also resulted from the deep friendship which had developed between the composer and all the members of the Quartet over the years. Reflecting on the subject, Shostakovich writes: ‘If asked what exactly attracts me most in Borisovsky’s personality, I would answer: Everything’.¹⁰³ What is more, although dedicated to Borisovsky in particular, in a sense the work was also written in part for Fyodor Druzhinin, the young violist who had taken Borisovsky’s place in the Beethoven

⁹⁷ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 233

⁹⁸ Alan George, as cited in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 233

⁹⁹ Lesser, *Music for Silences Voices*, p. 233

¹⁰⁰ Lesser, *Music for Silences Voices*, pp. 233-234

¹⁰¹ Lesser, *Music for Silences Voices*, p. 235

¹⁰² Paul Hindemith, as cited in Lesser, *Music for Silences Voices*, p. 236

¹⁰³ Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Lesser, *Music for Silences Voices*, p. 236

Quartet and who would actually play the work. As Lesser notes, this gives the piece ‘a kind of life-in-death...quality, an acknowledgement that the world goes on without us even though we are no longer there’.¹⁰⁴

Although written in honour of Borisovsky, the role of the viola in the Thirteenth Quartet is coloured by Shostakovich’s characteristic ambiguity, for it is at once both the hero and the victim of the work, perhaps reflective not only of the famous violist’s successful life but also of his imminent death. The viola solo which opens the work, performed whilst the other players sit in silence, speaks as ‘the only voice in an otherwise empty world’, and this effect is recreated throughout the piece as each instrument in turn takes centre stage alone.¹⁰⁵ Eugene Drucker of the Emerson Quartet says of it: ‘It’s as if you’re on a darkened stage and the spotlight is on one or two instruments at a time...I don’t know if he sat down and said, ‘I’m lonely and life is bleak,’ but that’s the feeling that this conveys’.¹⁰⁶ These solos are formed from the twelve tone rows Shostakovich explored in his previous quartet, only now used to signal the end of life through their failure to develop: unlike the music of Schoenberg, in which the tone rows progress serially, or earlier works by Shostakovich, in which they return to tonality, here they hit a dead-end where they dissolve into harshly dissonant chords. In the conclusion of the work, the viola plays a final solo which is more melodic than those which have gone before, but which is ultimately swamped by the high-pitched crescendo of the violins until we can hear it no more.¹⁰⁷

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this Quartet, however, is the middle passage, in which the viola does not play a prominent role. Encased by a slower opening which returns as a recapitulation at the end, this section is used by Shostakovich to experiment with his newest and most unusual compositional techniques. The result is a ‘weirdly jazzy episode’, which has been described as a ‘very sinister passage that sounds like a jam session from hell’.¹⁰⁸ Here rhythmic pizzicato on the cello creates a jazz walking bass line, whilst the high-pitched, three-note motif of the first violin alludes to the ‘three knocks’ of the fourth movement of the Eighth Quartet. The second violin performs a

¹⁰⁴ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 235

¹⁰⁵ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 236

¹⁰⁶ Eugene Drucker, as cited in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, pp. 236-237

¹⁰⁷ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, pp. 236-237

¹⁰⁸ Drucker, as cited in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 237

series of pizzicato scales which interweave with the lines of the first violin and cello, whilst the tremolo of the viola shimmers ghost-like in the background.¹⁰⁹

The most bizarre element in this section is an unusually percussive sound created by tapping the wood of the bow on the front of the instrument – a technique which both sounds and looks odd, and of which only a handful of earlier occurrences are to be found.¹¹⁰ In the Fitzwilliam Quartet, so as to remove the possibility of damage to valuable instruments, the effect is created by suspending a cheap violin from a music stand and hitting it, although this affects not only the sound quality but also the visual effect of the musicians attacking their own instruments. As Lesser explains, ‘the point, of course, is psychological as well as visual and auditory. We need to feel that there is something truly at stake in the gesture – a serious possibility of less, the presence of real fear – if it is not to descend into the merely comical’.¹¹¹

Speaking of the Quartet to his colleagues at the Composer’s Union, who had the power to withdraw the piece, Shostakovich said simply that he had written ‘a short lyrical quartet with a joke middle’.¹¹² However, Galina Shirinskaya recalls that, during rehearsals of the work with the Beethoven Quartet, the composer told them that the strange tapping device in fact made reference to ‘the lash of a whip in a concentration camp’.¹¹³ Reflecting on the unexpected reappearance of the sound in the concluding bars of the piece, Alan George of the Fitzwilliam Quartet remarks that ‘[t]he effect of the return of these taps during the awful stillness of the viola solo at the end is often shattering, even when one knows they are coming’. Wilson here concurs, noting that, for many Russians, such tapping is to be associated with ‘the last act of farewell, the sinister sound of the final nailing down of the coffin lid’.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices* p. 237

¹¹⁰ This effect is different to normal col legno, which requires the player to tap the strings of the instrument with the wood of the bow. It is to be found in Heinrich von Biber’s seventeenth century *Battalia* for string and continuo, and in several works from 1960s, including pieces by George Crumb and Krzysztof Penderecki. It is likely that Penderecki was the immediate source of inspiration for Shostakovich, as he was familiar with compositions of the Polish musical avant-garde. Laurel Fay, as cited in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 238

¹¹¹ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 239. ‘I remember we joked with Shostakovich’, writes Alan George of the Fitzwilliam Quartet, ‘about the implication that the original first violinist must have had a more expensive instrument than his colleagues (the first violin is not called upon to do any tapping)’! Allan George, in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 240

¹¹² Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 239

¹¹³ Shostakovich, as cited in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 239

¹¹⁴ Elizabeth Wilson, as cited in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 240

As Lesser points out: ‘In a period like the one Shostakovich lived through, the right to feel and express sadness takes on a political dimension’. She rightly observes that this need not mean that the composer necessarily wrote mournful music as a form of protest, but acknowledges that a certain degree of courage would have been needed to produce music as pessimistic and death-focused as that of the Thirteenth Quartet, even if it was intended for performance away from the public eye.¹¹⁵ For all its idiosyncrasies, however, the work nonetheless retains its formal coherence, as Drucker puts it: ‘It’s fugal, so it’s jazzy and fugal at the same time’.¹¹⁶ Indeed, for Lesser, the most terrifying aspect of the piece is to be found not in its obsessive morbidity but rather in ‘how unexpectedly enticing its weirdest passages are’. ‘To be drawn against one’s will into music like this’, she concludes,

is to perceive how powerful a grip Shostakovich had on his material, and therefore on his audience. No wonder he had to disguise his Quartet No. 13 as “a short lyrical quartet with a joke middle” when he presented it to the musical commissars; they would have been appalled if they had understood what he was really doing. But the audiences understood... “Britten, moved and shaken after hearing the Thirteenth Quartet, kissed Shostakovich’s hand.”¹¹⁷

IV. Theological Reflection on the String Quartets

In reflecting theologically upon the string quartets my argument will follow two strands: one which explores how music understood as an expression of interiority might function theologically; and one which adopts the ideas of G. W. F. Hegel regarding the role of the negative in art. These aspects provide differing but related reflection upon the themes which lie at the heart of the string quartets.

(a) Music and Interiority

In my second chapter I discussed expressivist theory as it arose as part of the Romantic response to the Enlightenment. Focusing on the idea of connecting with nature through

¹¹⁵ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, pp. 234-235

¹¹⁶ Drucker, as cited in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 242

¹¹⁷ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 242; Wilson, as cited in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 242

turning to the inner self, expressivism points towards the possibility of art as a means of both conveying and creating our inmost thoughts.¹¹⁸ For Charles Taylor, the ‘subjective turn’ which occurs at this period bears negatively upon how we conceive of the self, bound up as it is with an essentially narcissistic frame of mind. ‘A total and fully consistent subjectivism would tend towards emptiness’, he writes. ‘[N]othing would count as a fulfilment in a world in which literally nothing was important but self-fulfilment’.¹¹⁹ An individualistic outlook such as this, he argues, contributes to the ‘erosion of the political’, so that ‘[c]ommunity affiliations, the solidarities of birth, of marriage, of the family, of the polis, all take second place... A society of self-fulfillers, whose affiliations are more and more seen as revocable, cannot sustain the strong identification within the political community which public freedom needs’.¹²⁰

Christopher Lasch, too, writes of ‘...the culture of competitive individualism, which in its decadence has carried the logic of individualism to the extreme of a war against all, the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of a narcissistic preoccupation with the self’.¹²¹ Modern narcissistic man, he tells us, ‘extols cooperation and teamwork while harbouring deeply antisocial impulses. He praises respect for rules and regulations in the secret belief that they do not apply to himself. Acquisitive in the sense that his cravings have no limits, he...demands immediate gratification and lives in a state of restless, perpetually unsatisfied desire.’¹²² What is more, argues Lasch, ‘[s]trategies of narcissistic survival now present themselves as emancipation from the repressive conditions of the past, thus giving rise to a “cultural revolution” that reproduces the worst features of the collapsing civilisation it claims to criticize’.¹²³

Such narcissism has also proven to be theologically problematic. As far back as Augustine, and later in the works of Luther and of Barth, the notion of ‘*homo incurvatus in se*’, of ‘man curved in on himself’, has been used as a metaphor for sin, speaking as it does of the person turned away from God and towards the self.¹²⁴ For Matt Jensen, this

¹¹⁸ See chapter 2, pp. 54-55

¹¹⁹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 207

¹²⁰ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 207-208

¹²¹ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in a Culture of Diminishing Expectations* (London & New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1991), xv

¹²² Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, xvi

¹²³ Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, xv

¹²⁴ Matt Jensen, *The Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther and Barth on ‘Homo Incurvatus in Se’* (London & New York: T&T Clark, 2006). In his commentary of Romans, Luther radicalises the Augustinian view of sin in terms of the denial of relationality by applying it to the *totus homo*, and in particular to the *homo*

idea speaks of sin in terms of relationality – of ‘sin as a violation, perversion or refusal of [our]...relationships with others...a radical self-centredness in which we assert an insidious gravitational force, seeking to pull all others into our orbit’.¹²⁵ Again for Eberhard Jüngel: sin is ‘the urge towards relationlessness and disassociation’.¹²⁶ By contrast, then, full humanity can exist only where we are prepared to move from the self to the other – where we seek to mirror the perfect relationality that exists between the members of the triune God.¹²⁷

In the work of Jeremy Begbie, such concerns come to be viewed in relation to theological reflection on music. He argues that within certain Romanticised approaches to music – namely those based on the perspectives outlined above – music comes to be swept up in the culture of the self and is no longer perceived in terms of the ‘sonic integrities’ which root it in the physical world. Here an over-emphasis is placed on the ‘inner stirrings of the heart in creative activity’, and music is reduced to little more than the emotional outpouring of the artist – the narcissistic ‘song of the self’.¹²⁸

For Begbie, then, there exists a strong tendency, both within the philosophy of music of modernity and also within much Christian thought about the arts, for the ‘subjective turn’ of Romanticism to be unquestioningly adopted. In seeking to counter this, and as I explored in my first chapter, he suggests that the subjectivity and interiority of art might be more appropriately understood when contextualised as part of a broader vision of created reality, that is, as telling us something about the universe of which we are a part. What is needed, he tells us, is a move from looking inwards to looking outwards, where the turn to the self is replaced with a turn towards God.¹²⁹

Begbie is doubtless right about the flaws of the narcissistic subjective turn that characterises this distinctive strand of Romanticism. At the same time, however, there remains space for discussion about other aspects of the role and importance of interiority within music – elements which, I contend, remain relatively unexplored within theological reflection on music. Such exploration therefore seeks to develop

religiosus; in Barth, the notion of *incurvatus in se* is extended so that it also applies to pride, sloth and falsehood.

¹²⁵ Jensen, *The Gravity of Sin*, p. 2

¹²⁶ Eberhard Jüngel, as cited in Jensen, *The Gravity of Sin*, p. 2

¹²⁷ Jensen, *The Gravity of Sin*, p. 1

¹²⁸ See chapter 2, p. 86

¹²⁹ See chapter 1, pp. 46-47

Begbie's understanding of the expressive and emotive significance of music, as it exists within the wider order of creation.

Interiority clearly remains of central importance to artistic endeavour, for without it art becomes shallow, superficial and meaningless.¹³⁰ Shostakovich's quartets, as my analyses have shown, are in essence prime examples of art used in this way, that is, as a means of conveying our innermost thoughts, yet without crossing the line of indulgence to fall foul of the narcissistic charges of self-absorption and self-obsession. So interiority, we might say, forms a necessary but not sufficient element of the artistic experience, and it is precisely this fact which is recognised and reflected in the music of the string quartets, which thus in turn point towards how we might engage with the 'song of the self' in far more positive and theologically valid way.

This form of introversion seems to me to echo the famous saying of Lessing, who wrote that, if God was to hold the knowledge of all truth in one hand and the continued search for truth in the other, and to offer him the choice between the two, then he would choose the latter: 'The worth of a man', he argues, 'does not consist in the truth he possesses, or thinks he possesses, but in the pains he has taken to obtain that truth. For his powers are extended not through the possession but through the search for truth. In this alone his ever-growing perfection consists. Possession makes him lazy, indolent, and proud.'¹³¹ Just as for Lessing the process of searching for truth is itself of importance, so it is this search which lies at the heart of Shostakovich's string quartets. The medium of the quartet has as its essence a form of conversation, comprising as it does a series of interactions between differing voices, and it is through directing this conversation that the composer is enabled to explore and communicate his most personal ideas. Here Shostakovich is plumbing depths of human life, and doing it through the dialogue which this particular musical form allows.¹³²

The *War Requiem* of Benjamin Britten, written for the re-consecration of Coventry Cathedral in 1962 following its near-destruction at hands of Nazi bombers, sought not

¹³⁰ As, for example, in the pop art of Lichtenstein.

¹³¹ Gotthold Lessing, as cited in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing & Henry Chadwick, *Lessing's Theological Writings: Selections in Translation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), pp. 42-43

¹³² As Lesser points out, there is 'an impulse towards communication of some kind in these works', which stands in contrast to many of his Western counterparts, such as Schoenberg, who were not at all interested in communicating with their audiences. Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 278 & p. 293

to glorify war but rather to denounce its futility, waste and loss of life.¹³³ As mentioned above, the work was the subject of deep admiration and yet also cautious reservation on the part of Shostakovich, whose appreciation of its musical achievement was tempered by its location within a spirituality of which he felt unable to partake. Despite such misgivings, however, the Requiem's appeal proved to transcend the bounds of religious observance, with its musical outpouring of the sense of tragedy shared by a whole culture offering for many a profound and deeply moving experience.¹³⁴ Addressing as it did the unanswered questions posed by the killing of so many, it served as a focal point for the outpouring of a collective grief left unacknowledged by traditional memorials such as Armistice Day. At the heart of the work, then, lies the message of philosophers going back to Plato: that meditation on death forms a necessary part of understanding and appreciating what it means to be human, and it is this message which is also to be found at the centre of Shostakovich's string quartets.¹³⁵

Shostakovich, as we have seen, was a self-described unbeliever. 'Death is terrifying', he announced at the premier of his Fourteenth Symphony, 'there is nothing beyond it. I don't believe in a life beyond the grave'.¹³⁶ This sentiment, consistent with the emotions expressed throughout the string quartets, does not, however, mean that the subject of death is neglected or ignored; on the contrary, it would seem to lead to an increasingly serious engagement with the issue, as Shostakovich continually returns to the musical medium as a way of exploring both the inevitability of mortality and also the complexity of the human emotional response to the event. Frequently, his theme is that of the death of close friends or members of his family, as he contemplates the feelings both of loss and of being left behind. In the Second Quartet, as he reflects on the death of Sollertinsky, Shostakovich tries to grasp what it means for those he has loved to now be entirely out of reach, and for their absence to be felt all the more strongly as a result of their vivid presence in his memory and music. Of the Sixth Quartet, composed shortly after the death of Nina, although still surprisingly upbeat in character, Lesser writes that it is nonetheless tinged by a sense of guilt which results from the realisation that, even in the midst of death, life continues, and even continues well. This

¹³³ Mervyn Cooke, *Britten: War Requiem* (Cambridge, New York & Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

¹³⁴ 'I believe it to be the most impressive and moving piece of sacred music ever to be composed in this century, and one of the greatest musical compositions of the 20th century... I am at a loss to know how to praise the greatness of this piece of music.' Peter Schaffer, as cited in Cooke, *Britten: War Requiem*, p. 79

¹³⁵ John de Gruchy, *Being Human: Confessions of a Christian Humanist* (London: SCM Press, 2006), p. 40

¹³⁶ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 77

‘discomfort of happily surviving one’s dear dead’, however, is laid to rest in the following quartet which, as the work finally dedicated to Nina’s memory, speaks of the peace that is to be found in ‘the comfort of truly mourning them’.¹³⁷

Yet the quartets explore not only loss but also themes of survival and moving on. In the Second Quartet, the first violin melody which leads us through the work seeks by the final movement not to ignore or avoid death but rather to embrace it in a bid to move beyond it – to take death into itself and make it a part of an ultimately greater whole. Such ideas are taken further in Shostakovich’s later quartets. The Eleventh, dedicated to the memory of violinist Vasily Shirinsky, is coloured overwhelmingly by the pain of loss – ‘the quietest, most broken, most passively depressed quartet Shostakovich ever wrote’, for in it ‘musical structure (along with everything else) is breaking down under the pressure of an annihilating despair’.¹³⁸ The Twelfth, however, ‘embodies a fierce attempt to create some kind of new order out of that chaotic disintegration’ in which we were left at the end of the preceding quartet, and thus to speak of death not as final destruction but rather as hope for a new beginning.¹³⁹

In other of the quartets, Shostakovich deals not with the deaths of those he knows but rather uses music as a means of reflecting upon his own mortality. The Eighth Quartet, although publically a memorial to those who died in conflict, also provides the composer’s first attempt to depict in music what it means to perceive one’s own life in relation to its certain end. Whether it is ultimately interpreted as depicting the triumph of the individual in the face of adversity or the inescapability of the bonds of context and society, the work’s autobiographical nature and (albeit insincere) dedication to the composer himself doubtless point towards an intense and deeply personal wrestling with the nature, and ultimately the demise, of one’s own existence. In the later quartets, written as his health deteriorated, Shostakovich’s obsession with his own death becomes increasingly apparent. Discussing the Fifteenth Quartet, Kurt Sanderling uses the term *abgründig*, which has within its meaning the idea of ‘standing on the edge of a precipice, looking down into the abyss’,¹⁴⁰ and, as Lesser points out, the finality of the work’s tonality, together with the absence of an official dedication, suggest that ‘this

¹³⁷ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 139

¹³⁸ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 200 & p. 212

¹³⁹ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 212

¹⁴⁰ Kurt Sanderling in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 261

piece was meant for the wishful fifth Beethoven', that is, as a final memorial to Shostakovich himself.¹⁴¹

The music of the quartets, then, is something of a double-edged sword, for whilst reminding us that we do in fact survive death in as much as a trace of our former selves remains in the minds of others, it at same time reveals that we cannot remember the dead without first reminding ourselves of their absence.¹⁴² This becomes especially apparent in the later quartets, marked as they are by a 'pervasive and deepening sense of sorrow' – in the Thirteenth, with its melancholy viola solos, undeveloped atonality and disconcerting percussive effects, and finally in the Fifteenth, the six slow movements of which speak of 'death casting its shadow over life'.¹⁴³ Death thus remains pervasive of the entire quartet cycle, even in its lighter, more optimistic moments. What is more, as Lesser reminds us, the very act of hearing music can itself awaken within us a heightened sense of our own mortality: 'Music', she writes, 'speaks only to mortal ears, so its very assurance that we are alive is also a reminder that one day we won't be.'¹⁴⁴

Underlying Shostakovich's approach to death in the quartets is what Lesser identifies as an element of self-doubt – a 'deeply internal and undemonstrative feeling' not present in the Symphonies and which suggests that the quartets contain a greater degree of honesty than do the larger works.¹⁴⁵ In particular, this doubt is manifest in the way in which Shostakovich remains critical of his own emotions, which 'saves the saddest quartets, like the Eighth, from self-pity, and...the more cheerful ones, like the Sixth from any tincture of smugness or self-assurance'.¹⁴⁶ As Lesser points out, for Bernard Williams, such shame is in fact evidence of freedom – not literal freedom, but rather an 'existential freedom through which a human being asserts that he is still a self-determining individual rather than a mere movable force'.¹⁴⁷ 'Until we leave off being human', she argues, 'we will always – if we remain morally astute enough – retain a

¹⁴¹ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 260. Although as Lesser points out, despite his near-obsession with death, Shostakovich remained 'the master of having it both ways, of looking simultaneously toward life and toward death'. Shostakovich, as cited in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 139 This is evidenced in a letter to Glikman in 1957, in which the composer writes with characteristic irony about his persistently fragile health: 'Altogether life is hard. But maybe it will be over soon; after all, I am over fifty. Nevertheless, my blooming health and my mighty organism hardly allow much hope for an early curtailment of my earthly activities.' Dmitri Shostakovich, in Glikman, *Story of a Friendship*, p. 67

¹⁴² Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 265

¹⁴³ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 200 & p. 265

¹⁴⁴ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 269

¹⁴⁵ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 300

¹⁴⁶ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 299

¹⁴⁷ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 302

salutary awareness of the difference between what we did do and what we might have done. And Shostakovich's music speaks to that capacity in us.'¹⁴⁸

The sense in which Shostakovich relates to such questions of mortality, then, is fundamentally based in the reality of human life as it is lived. Commenting on the end of the Eighth Quartet, Lesser remarks that the feeling we are left with is not one of religious or spiritual transcendence but of something far more human: '...what we are being offered', she writes, 'is not consolation or redemption, but companionship'.¹⁴⁹ Ignat Solzhenitsyn, when asked whether he considered Shostakovich's music to be transcendent, responded:

No. Broadly speaking, I wouldn't. I don't know that Shostakovich tries to transcend: transcend our nature, the limitations of who we are. Beethoven's entire will is bent upon that, I think, even from early on, and it becomes more evident as his life unfolds. With Shostakovich, I think more of adjectives like 'mesmerizing', 'hypnotizing', 'arresting' – because his music can have this utterly intangible magic, but it's centred around the human being *sui generis*, rather than the humans' attempt to break free.¹⁵⁰

For Solzhenitsyn, however, this human-centredness is not reductive: that the quartets are the reflection on a particular time and context by no means prevents them from being of relevance to wider human life: 'No composer', he writes, 'is more a reflection of his times, [but] what is completely obvious to me is that this is a genius for all time'.¹⁵¹

It is also the case that the human-centeredness of the quartets need not be spiritually reductive. Although not having as their basis an explicitly religious theme, through engaging in depth with the reality of the world, that is, by exploring musically the subject of death, Shostakovich, I want to argue, is in fact dealing with that which the theist would call God. For Karl Rahner, for instance, 'there is no form of human living in which an encounter with God does not take place at least anonymously, non-thematically, and transcendently (or however we may wish to express the reality

¹⁴⁸ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 303

¹⁴⁹ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 157

¹⁵⁰ Ignat Solzhenitsyn in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, pp. 298-299

¹⁵¹ Solzhenitsyn in Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 299

referred to)'.¹⁵² Such a view led him to coin the term 'anonymous Christian' to describe those who would not identify themselves as Christians but whose actions and words nonetheless identify them as 'taken hold of by...grace'.¹⁵³ This claim sparked a huge debate, with many claiming that such an idea in fact amounted to the colonisation of atheism in that it failed to take unbelievers seriously and, to the extent that Rahner prevents the option for unbelief, this objection would appear to be justified. At the same time, however, Rahner's views serve to highlight a tradition of transcendence which goes back as far as Plato and which states that where beauty, truth and goodness are to be found, human beings are touching the ultimate. As the Maundy Thursday antiphon reminds us: '*Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est*'.¹⁵⁴ In this way, then, the string quartets, in grappling with profound truths and that which is of the utmost importance within human life, provide us with a tangible encounter with that aspect of reality which is inescapable.

Theological transcendentals such as these, as expounded in the thirteenth century by Thomas Aquinas, essentially have to do with that aspect of human life which cannot be fully articulated in words. They are the 'certain necessary notes of being [which] recur in all beings... [and] reach out beyond the limited orders of individual beings or surpass all limits',¹⁵⁵ and which speak to us of the open-ended dimension of being to which Wittgenstein refers when he concludes his *Tractatus* with the admonition that 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence'.¹⁵⁶ Very often, then, it is only through recourse to the expressive arts that we can gain access to this realm of the indescribable, as Wittgenstein in *Culture and Value* would again concur: there are, he agrees, matters of which we cannot conceive in words but which push us towards poetry, music and painting – towards that which enables us to grasp something of the mysterious truth of existence.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² Karl Rahner, 'Theological Considerations of Secularization and Atheism', in *Theological Investigations* XI, trans. by David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), pp. 166-184 (pp. 175-176)

¹⁵³ Karl Rahner, 'Anonymous Christians', in *Theological Investigations* VI, trans. by Karl-H. & Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969), pp. 390-398 (p. 395)

¹⁵⁴ 'Where charity and love are, God is there.'

¹⁵⁵ Johannes Baptist Lotz, 'Transcendentals', in Karl Rahner, ed., *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology* (London: Burns & Oates, 1968), pp. 285-287 (p. 285). For more on the Thomistic tradition of the transcendentals, see Jan A. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996).

¹⁵⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 74

¹⁵⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value: A Selection from the Posthumous Remains*, ed. by Georg Henrik von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman, trans. by Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980)

For some, a humanistic emphasis such as this, which seeks to place the exploration and discovery of the human person in a central position within theological endeavour, might prove difficult to unite with, or even seem antagonistic to, the aims of Christian theology. For John de Gruchy, on the other hand, ‘the purpose of the Christian faith is not to make us religious, but to make us more truly human’.¹⁵⁸ As far back as the Hebrew psalmist, he argues, theology has posed the question ‘What are human beings?’,¹⁵⁹ whilst both Julian of Norwich and John Calvin tell us that although we cannot know ourselves without some knowledge of God, at the same time we cannot know God without some knowledge of ourselves.¹⁶⁰ Finally, we can look to Barth’s response to Feuerbach’s view that ‘the true sense of theology is Anthropology’.¹⁶¹ Barth argues that Feuerbach is right in his claim, but in the sense that this is, in fact, precisely what the incarnation is all about – a point which Feuerbach had failed to understand.¹⁶²

(b) *G. W. F. Hegel and the ‘Negative’*

These themes which the quartets of Shostakovich explore resonate not only with the transcendental dimension of interiority but also with that of which Hegel writes in his appraisal of the arts. In chapter two, I discussed the Hegelian view of art, together with religion and philosophy, as part of the historical process through which *Geist* is made known in the world. The arts, argues Hegel, are the realisation of *Geist* in sensual form: first in the Symbolic art of the ancient civilisations; then in the Classical arts of sculpture and architecture; and finally in the Romantic art forms of music and poetry, through which *Geist* achieves ultimate self-expression in art. Music, then, having as its content the ‘inner life’, reconciles musical form and content, and so reveals to the soul its inmost nature. Thus music is not merely a matter of entertainment, but rather is fundamental to human growth and development, so that, for Hegel, ‘[m]usic without spiritual content is not yet music’, and music, as the inimitable expression of ‘felt life’, is for us a ‘vital expression of what it is to be human’.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ de Gruchy, *Being Human*, p. 21

¹⁵⁹ Psalm 8.4, as cited in de Gruchy, *Being Human*, p. 2

¹⁶⁰ de Gruchy, *Being Human*, p. 107. This idea is also to be found in Rosemary Haughton’s *The Passionate God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982), where she argues that we move from an understanding of human love to a revelation of divine love: ‘we can begin to make sense of the way God loves people if we look very carefully at the way people love people’. p. 6

¹⁶¹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Prometheus Books, 1989), xvii

¹⁶² Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 534-540

¹⁶³ See chapter 2, pp. 55-59

What is especially interesting for thinking about Shostakovich is the role given by Hegel to the negative dimensions of experience. In Romantic art, argues Hegel, *Geist* achieves self-consciousness not only by reconciling form with content, but also by embracing its ‘opposite’ and in particular the ‘negative’ – a negative that results from the inadequacies of previous art forms which have failed to truly represent the self-conscious realisation of the inner self. Romantic art, he claims, takes such negativity into itself and, in doing so, overcomes it. For Hegel, then, ‘the pain of the negative is simply something all consciousness must go through in order to fully realise itself’,¹⁶⁴ and the Absolute itself is formed from ‘infinite negativity’.¹⁶⁵ ‘The infinite grief of subjectivity’s very heart’, he writes, ‘as well as suffering and death, which were more or less excluded from the representations of classical art or rather appeared there as mere natural suffering, acquire their real necessity only in romantic art’.¹⁶⁶ Thus the ultimate self-conscious expression of *Geist* in sensual form is manifest not through harmony but rather through engaging in art with darkness, suffering and despair, and Romantic art is perfected not through the beauty of classicism but rather ‘...there enters here as a necessary feature what is unbeautiful in comparison with the beauty of Greek art’.¹⁶⁷

For Hegel, then, Romantic art requires ‘infinite grief’ for its completion – a phrase which, occurring throughout his works, is frequently used in order to make reference to the crucifixion.¹⁶⁸ ‘[T]he process of *negativity* which the absolute subject enters in the course of overcoming the finitude and immediacy of his human appearance’ he writes, is ‘a process which is unfolded in the life and suffering of God and his death for the world and mankind whereby mankind’s reconciliation with God was made possible’.¹⁶⁹ Thus ‘the cross lies at the heart of romantic art as [Hegel] defines it’: the story of art is one of resurrection viewed in the light of crucifixion.¹⁷⁰ Such a subject, he maintains, is beyond the grasp of classical art, for ‘Christ scourged, with the crown of thorns, carrying his cross to the place of execution, nailed to the cross, passing away in agony of a torturing and slow death – this cannot be portrayed in the forms of Greek

¹⁶⁴ Unpublished lecture by Tim Gorringer

¹⁶⁵ Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 519

¹⁶⁶ Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 522

¹⁶⁷ Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 538

¹⁶⁸ Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 522

¹⁶⁹ Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 533

¹⁷⁰ Unpublished lecture by Tim Gorringer

beauty...'.¹⁷¹ Christianity, therefore, provides the ultimate subject for Romantic depiction, and in turn finds its perfect expression in Romantic art.

Hegel's appraisal of Romantic art, then, with its notion of the centrality of fractured beauty within both art and theology, points us to the heart of a genuinely theological understanding of aesthetics. Through it, we are given the locus by which we might engage theologically with the arts, and in particular with music, in a way in which takes account of the more troubled aspects of artistic expression. The need for a theological response such as this has been made clear by Heidi Epstein who, arguing for the importance of attending properly to 'the theological meanings of music's nagging dissonances',¹⁷² remains unsatisfied by those who simply point to music's harmonic resolutions as implying 'clean and peaceful resurrections'.¹⁷³

Romantic art, Hegel tells us, has Christianity, and particularly the crucifixion, at its centre. However, his definition of Romantic art need not be understood only in relation to theology but rather is also of relevance to that which Shostakovich was trying to achieve. As has been shown, the quartets explore repeatedly themes of death and the human response to death – of loss, loneliness, guilt and brokenness. More than this, however, they also speak of the drive to move beyond death – to create a new order out of the chaos of bereavement, to strive for inner liberation from the inevitability of life's curtailment. So death, although pervasive, is not the final message of these works; rather, it forms but one, albeit essential, part of an ultimately greater whole.

In the quartets, then, we find expressed the paradox located at the heart of Hegel's aesthetics. In musical form, the questions of self-conscious recognition through art and of the achieving of this only in relation to the negative are posed. Through asking such questions – indeed, through simply having the capacity to ask such questions – the music thus interrogates the darkness implied within, and in the very act of so doing is enabled to look beyond these questions to demonstrate both the embracing and yet the overcoming of negativity. So the string quartets, as secular works of art, remain paradigmatic demonstrations of Hegel's Romantic, and so truly Christian, art – of self-expression which has to cope with darkness.

¹⁷¹ Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 538

¹⁷² Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, p. 3

¹⁷³ Kathleen Sands, in Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, p. 3

Here we might return to the interiority with which I began this theological reflection, which perceives the quartets as part of the limitless exploration of the inexhaustible depths to life, embracing those negative elements of suffering and death that form unavoidable elements of the human experience. Now for de Gruchy, it remains the case that ‘the more we discover about ourselves, the more we recognize that we have only begun to scratch the surface’. In an echo of Dostoevsky, he argues that our perception of and relation to life is greatly altered depending on whether ‘our approach to being human is open or closed to this depth dimension of being human’, the fathoming of which ‘defies neat formulae and definition and is often best explored through art, poetry, drama, music and religion’.¹⁷⁴ This, then, is the theological import of Shostakovich’s string quartets: they show us that there exists an aspect of human nature which grapples with profound questions and which finds expression in art forms such as music; and in so doing, they give us the space to explore that which lies at the heart of our existence and the opportunity to discover that aspect of reflection which marks us out as truly human.¹⁷⁵

Having here shown how music’s interiority might be theologically embraced, I turn in the following chapter to consider how we might engage theologically with that aspect of Shostakovich’s music which embraces comedy.

¹⁷⁴ de Gruchy, *Being Human*, p. 3

¹⁷⁵ Shostakovich is not the only composer to have used chamber music for explorations such as these. The famous *Chaconne* of J. S. Bach, scored for solo violin although implying through tortuously difficult chords the effect of a four-part fugue, might also be understood in this way. Following a period of time abroad, Bach returned home to find that Maria Barbara, his wife of thirteen years, had died whilst he was away and had already been buried. Stricken with grief, Bach wrote the intensely moving *Chaconne*, filled with dissonant chords and anguished, drawn-out melodies. John Marchese, *The Violin Maker: A Search for the Secrets of Craftsmanship, Sound, and Stradivari* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), p. 96 This use of music in such a personal, cathartic form undoubtedly parallels that which Shostakovich is doing in his string quartets.

CHAPTER 6

Music and Comedy*The Nose*

One morning, barber Ivan Yakovlevitch sits down to his freshly-baked breakfast roll to find, to his surprise, that it contains a nose! What is more, this is not just any nose, but the one belonging to a client of his – the Collegiate Assessor Kovalyov. Yakovlevitch is at a loss to explain the presence of the nose – ‘Devil knows how it happened...bread is something you bake and a nose is nothing of the kind’ – and following accusations from his wife that he must have cut off the nose whilst drunk, resolves to discard the offending object.¹ After several failed attempts, he eventually throws the nose into the Neva River, but is witnessed doing so by a police officer who, we are led to believe, reprimands him for the act.

Meanwhile, in another part of St. Petersburg, Major Kovalyov has woken to find his nose mysteriously missing from his face and in its place merely ‘a ridiculous, empty, smooth space’.² Now Major Kovalyov has a tendency to ideas of grandeur and is not lacking in social ambition, so this occurrence is for him the height of embarrassment and shame: ‘It would be all right for some market woman, selling peeled oranges on the Voskresensky Bridge, to sit there with no nose; but...I’m hoping for a promotion...’³ Heading out on his daily walk on Nevsky Prospekt, his noseless face covered with a handkerchief, the Major is then shocked to discover his nose masquerading as a gentleman, dressed in the uniform of a State Councillor – a higher rank than that of Collegiate Assessor – and riding in an elegant carriage!

When the Major eventually catches up with his nose and summons up the courage to approach it, the nose denies its true position before once again departing in its carriage. Kovalyov then attempts to place an advertisement in the newspaper offering a reward for the return of the nose, but is merely mocked by the clerk who offers him a pinch of snuff. His visit to the police is equally unhelpful, with the inspector remarking

¹ Nikolai Gogol, ‘The Nose’, in *Nikolai Gogol: Plays and Petersburg Tales*, trans. and ed. by Christopher English, intro. by Richard Peace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 38

² Gogol, ‘The Nose’, p. 41

³ Gogol, ‘The Nose’, p. 43

dismissively that ‘if a man was respectable he would not thus be rudely parted from his nose’.⁴ The Major by now has nearly given up hope, when at his flat that evening appears the officer who happened to see the barber throwing an object into the river. The nose, he tells Kovalyov, was apprehended as it tried to leave the country with the stolen passport of an official, and he returns the lost nose, which has been wrapped in paper in his pocket, to Kovalyov. ‘‘That’s it!’’ exclaimed Kovalyov. ‘‘The very one!’’⁵

Now a new problem arises: how is the nose to be reattached? The Major consults a doctor who, after much prodding and examination, recommends that nature should be left to take its course, lest matters be made worse by the reattachment. It would be better, he suggests, much to Kovalyov’s horror, that the nose be pickled and sold! With rumours of the nose’s escapades spreading throughout the city, Kovalyov seeks to blame the mother of a potential suitor for the misdeed, but when it appears that this is not the case after all, he is left utterly unable to explain the strange occurrence. A few days later, however, he wakes to find the nose reattached to his face, just as though nothing had ever happened. The Major goes about his business as normal, his much-coveted position in society restored, and the nose, we are told, never leaves his face again.

So concludes Nikolai Gogol’s story *The Nose* – a fantastical and humorous tale first published in 1836.⁶ Full of incongruities, to the extent that its only consistency is in fact its inconsistency, the work has provoked a variety of attempts to locate a cohesive inner theme around which the story is built.⁷ Some perceive the piece primarily as a satire, in part on the bureaucracy of the St. Petersburg officials but mainly on those who are possessed of social ambition.⁸ Personified by the character of Kovalyov, who desires promotion to ‘a position appropriate to his rank’, such ambition is mercilessly ridiculed by the author, who first removes Kovalyov’s nose, making him embarrassed to show his

⁴ Gogol, ‘The Nose’, p. 50

⁵ Gogol, ‘The Nose’, p. 53

⁶ The piece was originally written in 1833-36 for the *Moscow Observer* but the manuscript was returned to Gogol as it was considered too ‘sordid’. Although initially resistant to further attempts at the work’s publication, Gogol eventually revised it for inclusion in the third edition of Pushkin’s *The Contemporary* in 1936. Pushkin noted his approval of the story, commenting that it was original, bizarre and very humorous. In 1842, Gogol revised the piece again and it was published in the author’s own collected works. *Nikolai Gogol*, ed. by Harold Bloom (Broomall, PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004), p. 48

⁷ Bloom, ed., *Nikolai Gogol*, p. 48

⁸ Bloom, ed., *Nikolai Gogol*, p. 48; Peter C. Spycher, ‘N. V. Gogol’s “The Nose”: A Satirical Comedy Farce Born of an Impotence Complex’, *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 7:4 (1963), 361-374 (p. 361)

face in public, and then parades his inadequacies before him as his nose adopts a position superior to his own.⁹ Others suggest that the work has at its centre a theme of sexual impotency, with the loss of the nose alluding to a castration complex on the part of Kovalyov.¹⁰ Here the nose becomes a symbol not only of social status but also of virility, with its loss equated with the loss of his sexual organ, or at least his sexual power, so that ‘under the guise of a grotesque farce, a drama of sexual failure is enacted’.¹¹

Still others argue that, rather than there being a deep, unifying meaning to the work, Gogol is instead deliberately applying the artistic principle of art for art’s sake, writing a tale that is simply a ‘nonsensical jest, brilliantly told in such a fashion as to produce an illusion of some kind of reality’.¹² As D. S. Mirsky puts it: ‘*The Nose*...is a piece of sheer play, almost sheer nonsense. In it more than anywhere else Gógol displays his extraordinary magic power of making great comic art out of nothing.’¹³ Indeed, the Russian title of the work, ‘*Nos*’, is the inversion of ‘*Son*’, which means ‘dream’, and in an earlier version of the tale, Gogol explains away the apparent idiosyncrasies by having Kovalyov awaken at the end to discover that the whole escapade has been nothing more than a dream.¹⁴ Even in the final version, an essence of this dream-like quality is retained, for ‘the inverted logic of this world is in essence that of a nightmare’.¹⁵

I. Shostakovich and *The Nose*

(a) *Creation*

Alban Berg’s modernist opera *Wozzeck* saw its Leningrad premier on 12th June 1927. Shostakovich, who had not yet reached the age of twenty-one, was at this time working

⁹ Gogol, ‘The Nose’, p. 41; Richard Peace, intro. to Gogol, ‘The Nose’, xvii-xviii. For some, this is a reflection of the author’s own anxieties at the time, concerned as he was about his abilities as a university lecturer, yet still harbouring the ambition of becoming Chair of History of Kiev University. Indeed, when working on the manuscript for *The Nose*, Gogol on three occasions made the error of writing ‘collegiate professor’ rather than ‘collegiate assessor’! Peace, intro. to Gogol, ‘The Nose’, xix

¹⁰ Peace, intro. to Gogol, ‘The Nose’, xix

¹¹ Spycher, ‘N. V. Gogol’s “The Nose”’, p. 365, p. 367 & p. 361. For a detailed account of the sexual imagery of *The Nose*, see Spycher, ‘N. V. Gogol’s “The Nose”’.

¹² V. Setchkarev, as cited in Spycher, ‘N. V. Gogol’s “The Nose”’, p. 361

¹³ D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature*, ed. and abridged by Francis J. Whitfield (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), p. 152

¹⁴ Peace, intro. to Gogol, ‘The Nose’, xvi-xvii

¹⁵ Peace, intro. to Gogol, ‘The Nose’, xvii

on his symphony poem *To October*, but on the day before the *Wozzeck* premier, confided to his friend, the musicologist Boleslav Yavorosky, that he already had an idea for an ‘exciting new project’ in mind.¹⁶ This project was to be a musical setting of Gogol’s *The Nose*, the libretto for which the composer would himself write, and which would form his first attempt at the genre of opera.¹⁷ *The Nose* thus marks the beginning of Shostakovich’s lifelong appeal to Russian literature as a source of inspiration, the scope of which I discussed in chapter four.

In contrast to those works of Shostakovich discussed in my previous chapters, *The Nose* has as its context a decade of relative musical freedom, resulting first from the October Revolution and later inspired by Lenin’s 1921 speech on the Five Year Plan, in which he stated that:

A cultural problem cannot be solved as quickly as political or military problems... It is possible to achieve political victory in a few weeks in an acute crisis. In war it is possible to achieve victory in a few months, but it is impossible to achieve cultural victory in such a short time; for that we need to adapt ourselves to a longer period, plan our work and display the greatest persistence, perseverance and systematisation.¹⁸

With the doctrine of Socialist Realism yet to be enforced, composers remained able, and indeed were encouraged, to explore a variety of different compositional devices. Whilst ‘proletarian’ groups had as their ideal that music which was accessible to the wider population, those musicians who belonged to the Association for Contemporary Music focused instead on the study and performance of more innovative, intellectualised works, such as those by, amongst others, Hindemith, Berg, Schoenberg and Stravinsky. *The Nose* is clearly indebted to this latter group of composers. Formed from an intricate interplay of complex rhythmic and harmonic structures, it contains a number of original orchestral effects – most notably the percussion entr’acte separating scenes ii and iii of Act I – and also experiments with the use of the grotesque, with both the ‘giant

¹⁶ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 41

¹⁷ In adapting Gogol’s text to form the libretto for the opera, Shostakovich ultimately sought some assistance. Whilst he was responsible for the majority of Acts I and II, the writing of Act III was shared with Georgiv Ionin and Alexander Preys. One scene in Act I was originally contributed by Yevheniy Zamyatin, but Shostakovich later announced that he had considered this piece to be unsuccessful and had removed it from the finished opera. Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 41

¹⁸ Geoffrey Norris, ‘Shostakovich’s ‘The Nose’’, *The Musical Times*, 120:1635 (1979), 393-394 (p. 394)

orchestral sneeze' with which the work begins and the 'grunting' accompaniment to Kovalyov's bedroom scene in Act I scene iii introducing a new style of music into Russian operatic repertoire.¹⁹

Writing on his choice of subject matter for the libretto, Shostakovich comments that: 'One only has to read this story to see that *The Nose*, as a satire of the reign of Nicholas I, is more powerful than any of Gogol's other stories', and as Norris puts it, the score of the opera essentially 'reveals to the full Shostakovich's talent for stage-writing, his skills as an orchestrator, and, above all perhaps, a sharp, youthful wit'.²⁰ As with Gogol's tale, then, underpinning Shostakovich's operatic realisation of *The Nose* is a frequent recourse to satire, and as such the work is representative of a trend dominant within Russian comedy of the 1920s.²¹ Although the composer was to later deny the presence of any intentional comedy within the score for the opera, for Norris, that it remains amongst the most entertaining of the Soviet comic operas – 'as biting satire in its way as Gogol' – points towards a degree of insincerity within Shostakovich's remark, akin to the comedic values that the work itself portrays.

In addition to the satirical qualities of the narrative, Shostakovich details Gogol's use of language as another feature which drew him to the work: '...it seemed to me', he writes, 'that, not being a professional literary man myself, I could recast the story as an opera more easily than *Dead Souls*...[whilst] the colourful language of the text of *The Nose*, more expressive than Gogol's other 'St. Petersburg tales', presented more interesting problems of 'musicalizing' the text'.²² Commenting on Gogol's writing, Shostakovich is said to have once exclaimed to a friend: 'isn't it well put, how wonderful!',²³ and in

¹⁹ Norris, 'Shostakovich's 'The Nose'', p. 394

²⁰ Dmitri Shostakovich, 'Pered prem'yeroy', *Rabochiy i teatir*, as cited in Norris, 'Shostakovich's 'The Nose'', p. 394; Norris, 'Shostakovich's 'The Nose'', p. 394

²¹ Norris, 'Shostakovich's 'The Nose'', p. 394

²² Shostakovich, 'Pered prem'yeroy', as cited in Norris, 'Shostakovich's 'The Nose'', p. 394. Despite wishing to remain close to Gogol's original text, Shostakovich made a number of changes to facilitate the successful scoring of the work: indirect speech was converted to direct speech to remove the need for a narrator; the style of speech became at times more vivid and colloquial; text was simplified in order that it might be clearly perceived within the musical phrase; and aspects of Gogol's original text which had previously been censored – most notably the setting of Kovalyov's first meeting with the Nose in Kazan Cathedral – were restored. Alexander M. Tumanov, 'Correspondence of Literary Text and Musical Phraseology in Shostakovich's Opera the Nose and Gogol's Fantastic Tale', *Russian Review*, 52:3 (1993), 397-414 (pp. 402-403) Further, in order for there to be enough text to form an opera, additional passages from other of Gogol's works were incorporated into the libretto, including scenes from *Old World Landowners*, *May Night*, *Tara Bulba* and *The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich*, together with Smerdyakov's song from Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. Norris, 'Shostakovich's 'The Nose'', p. 394

²³ Dmitri Shostakovich to Grigori Kozintsev, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 75

setting *The Nose*, he paid particular attention to preserving Gogol's textual style within the musical phrase: the 'musicalization of words' pronunciation', he maintains, 'was placed at the foundation of the construction of vocal parts', which are 'built on conversational intonations'.²⁴ Further, the score reveals a repeated use of vocal imagery, in which the musical settings enhance that which is conveyed by the text. As Shostakovich puts it: 'I tried to present a synthesis of the art of speech and music... Why are all the parts written in such a high register? Let us take the police inspector. This is a police bureaucrat who speaks shouting at the top of his voice. This has already become a habit with him. So I gave him top notes.'²⁵

Finally, Gogol's tale offered for Shostakovich 'many interesting theatrical possibilities'.²⁶ The composer held a long-standing interest in opera and the theatre, having been inspired chiefly by the contemporary work of Vsevolod Meyerhold, the productions of whom he had seen in both Leningrad and Moscow.²⁷ In particular, Shostakovich was captivated by Meyerhold's innovative approach to dramatics and by the central role he assigned to music in the theatre. Following a visit to Moscow in 1927, during which time he stayed with Meyerhold and his wife, the young composer wrote to thank the director for his hospitality, saying: 'I remember my entire stay with you with delight. I've never had such a wonderful time in Moscow as on my last trip. As for your theatre, it is the most remarkable thing I have ever seen in my life.'²⁸ In 1928, Shostakovich moved to Moscow to take up a temporary position as a pianist at the Meyerhold Theatre, whilst continuing to work on his score for *The Nose*.²⁹ The opera thus shares a close affinity to many of the works of Meyerhold, in particular

²⁴ Dmitri Shostakovich, 'K prem'ere Nose', *Rabochii i teatre*, as cited Tumanov, 'Correspondence', p. 413. As Tumanov points out, within this, two differing styles of composition are to be discerned. One favours a cosmopolitan modernism, generally involving a full correspondence between the musical and spoken phrases, and in the opera this is attached to dialogue belonging to the everyday, rational world. The other echoes the folkloric-nationalist realism of the Russian tradition, making use of modernistic musical language, often vastly removed from the flow of colloquial speech, and this represents dialogue from the fantastic world. Through the intertwining of these two apparently conflicting styles, Shostakovich is able to communicate musically the absurdity and unreality of the events which take place in the opera. Tumanov, 'Correspondence', pp. 413-414

²⁵ Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Tumanov, 'Correspondence', p. 410

²⁶ Shostakovich, 'Pered prem'yeroy', as cited in Norris, 'Shostakovich's 'The Nose'', p. 394

²⁷ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 44

²⁸ Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 45

²⁹ Despite his enthusiasm for Meyerhold's theatrical vision, Shostakovich was keen to ensure that he would be in receipt of a generous salary, and noted his resolve to 'not sell my freedom cheaply'! During his stay, however, Shostakovich remained overwhelmed by the hospitality of the Meyerholds, recalling that 'a serious fire once broke out at his [Meyerhold's] flat. I was out at the time, but he gathered up all my manuscripts and returned them to me in perfect condition. I was amazed, after all, there were far more valuable things that could have burned.' Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 45

bearing a resemblance to his 1926 production of Gogol's *Inspector General*.³⁰ During the two months of his stay, and encouraged by Meyerhold, Shostakovich succeeded in completing the first Act, and made substantial headway with the second.

The Nose was finally completed in the summer of 1928. Although he had been working on it sporadically over the past year, Shostakovich worked out that it had taken him a total of only nine weeks to write the entire opera.³¹ His sister, Zoya, however, recalls that the composer encountered a creative block when writing the third act: 'It simply wouldn't come. But then I remember him coming into our living room one morning and telling us that he had heard the whole of the third act in a dream; he there and then sat down and wrote it all out.'³² According to Shostakovich's mother, he had dreamed that he had attended a dress rehearsal of the opera but had been running late and so only arrived in time to hear the final act of the work together with the ensuing applause of the audience. When he awoke, the composer wrote down everything he had heard, completing the opera in just a few days.³³ The dreamlike nature of Gogol's tale, then, is aptly mirrored by the dreamlike conception of its musical realisation.

(b) Preparation for Performance

Pervasive within Russian musical circles in the 1920s was the recognition that little headway had yet been made towards the development of a Soviet form of opera, despite there being a strong operatic tradition in the country's past.³⁴ So when, in the May of 1928, Shostakovich auditioned the first two acts of *The Nose* in front of the Artistic Council of the Leningrad opera houses, the opportunity to stage this promising new work was eagerly accepted by the Leningrad Maly Theatre and initially scheduled for performance in their 1928-29 season.³⁵ With the prospect of a bright future for Soviet opera now before them, the theatre's creative team, including director Nikolai Smolich and conductor Samuïl Samosud, channelled all their energy and resources into the production. As the company announced at the time:

³⁰ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 44-45

³¹ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 45-46

³² Zoya Shostakovich, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 46

³³ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 46

³⁴ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 53

³⁵ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 46; Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 73. The opera was also accepted by Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre who hired Meyerhold to stage the work, but after many postponements the production was eventually cancelled without performance. Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 46

With the staging of Shostakovich's opera *The Nose*, the Maliy Opera Theater and its Artistic-Political Council are embarking on the path of the decisive Sovietization of the operatic repertory... Soviet opera should not arise by means of the lowering of artistic quality in comparison with the operatic works of the past. The form of Soviet opera should be different from the forms incorporating bourgeois ideology. Our goal, therefore, is to lend every possible assistance to the task of raising the cultural level of the proletarian masses.³⁶

The new production was also supported by a number of critics, including Shostakovich's great friend Sollertinsky, who wrote:

[Shostakovich] has finished with the old form of opera... he has showed opera composers the need for creating a new musical language, instead of drawing on the old clichés of those imitators of Tchaikovsky and Korsakov... he has offered the most interesting musical experiments, based on rhythm and timbre alone... he has given life to the usually slow-moving opera stage... he is perhaps the first among Russian opera composers to make his heroes speak not in conventional arias and cantilenas but in living languages, setting everyday speech to music... The opera theatre is at the crossroads. The birth of Soviet opera is not far off...³⁷

Despite such enthusiasm in professional circles, it was nonetheless realised that *The Nose* might well provoke controversy among its audiences, and so great care was taken to prepare the public for what would be a new kind of cultural experience.³⁸ When Shostakovich had announced the initial conception of the work to Yavorsky, his friend had been somewhat incredulous about the composer's choice of subject matter, and Shostakovich now felt obliged to explain the reasons behind his choice of a text which was neither Soviet nor revolutionary.³⁹ The Soviet authors, he maintained, despite his repeated requests, had failed to produce a new libretto for his work and, given the absence of suitable material in existing contemporary repertoire, he had been forced to turn to the classics for inspiration.⁴⁰ That the work was a satire of the historical period in question would doubtless have helped to support his case. In the summer of 1928,

³⁶ Maly Opera Theatre, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 54

³⁷ Ivan Sollertinsky, as cited in Norris, 'Shostakovich's 'The Nose'', p. 393

³⁸ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 54

³⁹ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 41

⁴⁰ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 54

articles commenting on the innovative nature of the piece began to appear, whilst in the November of that year, Shostakovich, who was keen to hear a live performance of at least part of his latest work, arranged a suite of seven pieces based on parts of the opera, and this was performed in Moscow under Nikolai Malko on 25th November.⁴¹ This event served to raise the profile of the work, as did lecture-demonstrations concerning the piece which were held for composers' groups in the months that followed.⁴²

By June of the following year, plans had been made for a concert performance of the entire opera to be held as part of the All-Russian Musical Conference in Leningrad.⁴³ From the outset, Shostakovich was vehemently opposed to the project, arguing that, with the dramatic element removed, his work would lose all sense of meaning and purpose. Opera, he maintained, is essentially a 'theatre symphony', in which words are 'musicalised' and the elements of music and theatre balanced equally.⁴⁴ In a letter to Smolich he put it thus:

Rimsky-Korsakov in the introduction to his operas wrote that "opera is, first of all, a musical work". If one takes that position, then all opera theaters should be closed and operas should be performed in tuxedos in the Philharmonics. When I wrote *The Nose*, it seems to me that I was coming from quite a different position than Rimsky-Korsakov. That's why *The Nose* loses all sense to me if it is viewed only from a musical standpoint. For its musical component is derived exclusively from action... It is clear to me that a concert performance of *The Nose* will destroy it... And offering *The Nose* at 10 per cent of its potential, instead of 100 percent will provoke a terrible song and dance.⁴⁵

Despite Shostakovich's protests, the concert performance went ahead on 16th June and, as he had warned, resulted in an onslaught of attacks and criticisms. Some pointed

⁴¹ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 54 & p. 46

⁴² Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 54

⁴³ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 54

⁴⁴ Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 54-55

⁴⁵ Dmitri Shostakovich, in a letter to Nikolai Smolich, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 54; Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 73. Elsewhere, Shostakovich expanded on his decision to write a 'theatre symphony': 'The elements of action and music are equal. Neither one nor the other occupies a predominant place. It is in this matter that I intended to create a synthesis of music and theatrical presentation. The music was not written by numbers [Shostakovich refers to the fact that he abandoned the practice of dividing the opera by "numbers" attributed to arias and recitatives], but in the form of an *uninterrupted symphonic current*, although without *Leitmotifs*. The interruptions take place only between the acts. Every act appears as part of a united music-theatrical symphony.' Shostakovich, 'K prem'ere Nose', as cited in Tumanov, 'Correspondence', p. 402

towards the work's absence of a properly Soviet theme, whilst others remained unconvinced by its musical complexity and apparent inaccessibility, and the accusation of 'formalism', which was to underlie so many of the later tirades against the composer's works, was first used towards him in relation to this opera.⁴⁶ The composer Zhitormirskiy, writing for the journal *Proletarsky Muzikant*, condemned the opera for its lack of social and ideological relevance to the masses: '...with his opera', he wrote, 'Shostakovich, without a doubt, has strayed from the main road of Soviet art. If he does not accept the falsity of his path, then his work will inevitably arrive at a dead end.'⁴⁷ However, there remained enough support for *The Nose* for work to continue on the full production, and preparations for this continued throughout the rest of the year.⁴⁸

On 14th January 1930, four days before the Leningrad premier, the decision was made to perform three scenes from the opera with piano accompaniment before an audience of workers from the city. Despite the absence of an orchestra, costumes and scenery, Shostakovich did not appear on this occasion to object to the performance of a reduced form of the work. As part of the event, members of the production team together with Sollertinsky gave introductions and explanations to help guide the audience through the work, and feedback from audience members following the performance revealed, along with a degree of confusion, nonetheless largely constructive responses.⁴⁹ As Sollertinsky surmised: 'It is evident that the majority are for the opera. I am satisfied that it will not be difficult for the working class viewer. It will be difficult for the opera buff accustomed to Italian opera, but understandable to the worker.'⁵⁰

(c) Reception

Following in excess of a year's preparation, *The Nose* was finally premiered at the Maly Opera Theatre on 18th January 1930. Although only the composer's first attempt at writing for the theatre, the originality and talent displayed in the opera were immediately apparent.⁵¹ Grigori Kozintsev, member of the Factory of the Eccentric

⁴⁶ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 55; Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 74

⁴⁷ Daniil Zhitormirskiy, "'Nos' – opera D. Shostakovicha", *Proletarskiy muzica*, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 55; Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 71

⁴⁸ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 55; Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 74

⁴⁹ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 55

⁵⁰ Ivan Sollertinsky, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 55

⁵¹ Fay, *Shostakovich*, pp. 53-54

Actor, for which Shostakovich had written music to accompany the silent film *New Babylon*, attended one of the final rehearsals for the premier and commented thus:

Vladimir Dmitriev's sets spun and reeled to the sounds of rollicking gallops and dashing polkas; Gogol's phantasmagoria was transformed into sound and colour. The particular imagery of Russian art that was linked to urban folklore – the signs of taverns, shops and picture booths, cheap dance orchestras – all burst into the kingdom of Aida and Il Trovatore. Gogol's grotesque raged around us; what were we to understand as farce, what as prophecy? The incredible orchestral combinations, texts seemingly unthinkable to sing ('And what makes your hands stink?' sung Major Kovalyov)...the unhabitual rhythms; the mad *accelerando* when the Nose is being beaten up at the police station and the chorus shrieks: 'Take that, take that, and that!'; the incorporating of the apparently anti-poetic, anti-musical, vulgar, but what was in reality the intonation and parody of real life – all this was an assault on conventionality...⁵²

Also evident was the extreme complexity of the score. Malko commented that the director, Samosud, had been forced to call 'innumerable stage rehearsals' in order that the production be ready in time, and as one singer at the premier recalls: 'It was difficult to present [the opera] in such a way that something useful and interesting might come out of our efforts'.⁵³

However, whilst Malko spoke of the opera's 'tremendous success', the majority of reviews of the premier were unfavourable, with criticism focused not on the performance *per se* but rather on the opera's 'serious ideological flaws, esoteric style and rejection of classical operatic values'.⁵⁴ Branded as 'the infantile sickness of leftism', despite questionnaires handed out to working-class audience members across two performances indicating one hundred percent support for the opera, proletarian critics maintained that the work was both unsuitable for and inaccessible to the masses.⁵⁵

⁵² Grigori Kozintsev, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 75

⁵³ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 74; B. O. Geft, 'Kak ya pel v opere *Nos*', *Smena*, as cited in Norris, 'Shostakovich's "The Nose"', p. 393

⁵⁴ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 74; Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 55

⁵⁵ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 55

Underlying much of the criticism surrounding the work were questions regarding the ideological validity of the avant-garde.⁵⁶ Despite the relative openness of 1920s Russia to experimentation in the arts, a number of groups with varying views on the matter were already in existence. The most experimental among them, referred to as ‘leftist’, fully embraced revolutionary ideology, others were overtly political and claimed to represent the view of the proletariat, and in the minority were those who simply sought to maintain professional artistic standards.⁵⁷ In music, the most influential of the proletarian groups was the RAPM which, as discussed in chapter three, maintained that music should contain a social message and be accessible to the masses.⁵⁸ Whilst the music of Beethoven was favoured for its revolutionary spirit, composers such as Tchaikovsky were considered decadent and most modern experimental music criticised as ‘formalist’. Although militant in its agenda, the organisation remained less anarchic than other organisations such as Proletkult, which had as its aim the destruction of all inherited bourgeois values and contexts. Disbanded by Lenin in 1920, the ideas of Proletkult nonetheless survived in the art of the most progressive Russian artists, and elements of its philosophy are even to be found in *The Nose*.⁵⁹

Despite its progressive nature, however, the opera failed to receive the approval of the RAPM or its associated organisations. Not only was its experimental nature now held against it, but it was also criticised both as ‘formalist’ and at the same time as ‘decadent’.⁶⁰ For Mark Yankovsky, *The Nose* stood ‘outside the development of Soviet opera and the development of the composer himself’, and although remaining true to the theme of Gogol’s story, nonetheless failed to produce true ‘social satire’.⁶¹ Semyon Kukurichkin, writing under the pseudonym A. Gres, offered harsher criticism in an article entitled ‘Ruchnaya bomba anarkhista’ (‘An anarchist’s hand-grenade’), in which he referred to *The Nose* as a ‘destructive phenomenon’ and a ‘talented row’ which ‘spread[s] panic through the whole front of the music theatre establishment’,⁶² whilst a reviewer named Gvozdev concluded that: ‘It cannot be considered a Soviet opera; rather

⁵⁶ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 94

⁵⁷ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 70

⁵⁸ See chapter 3, pp. 88-90

⁵⁹ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 70

⁶⁰ Wilson, *Shostakovich*, pp. 70-71

⁶¹ Mark Yankovsky, ‘Nos v Malom opernom teatre’, *Rabochiy i teatr*, as cited in Norris, ‘Shostakovich’s ‘The Nose’’, p. 393

⁶² A. Gres, ‘Ruchnaya bomba anarkhista’, *Rabochiy i teatr*, as cited in Norris, ‘Shostakovich’s ‘The Nose’’, p. 393

an example of decadent Western traditions, of an outlived genre in the process of extinction'.⁶³

Understandably upset by this criticism, Shostakovich discussed the subject with Smolich, saying: '[The reviews] will make me suffer a week, and I will have to bear the malicious delight of my friends at the flop of *The Nose* for the next two months'.⁶⁴ When the scheduled fourth performance of the work was pulled at the last minute, the composer complained to Zakhar Lyubinsky, the director of State Theatres in Leningrad, that the true reason for the opera's curtailment – the illness of a lead actor – had not been disclosed, thus sparking rumours of poor ticket sales.⁶⁵ By 16th April, Shostakovich was asking Lyubinsky to withdraw the work, stating that: 'I am convinced that *The Nose* is one of my most successful works... The path taken by *The Nose* is the correct path. But if *The Nose* is not perceived the way I would like, then it is necessary to withdraw it.'⁶⁶ Lyubinsky, however, ignored the composer's request, and the opera went on to be performed a total of sixteen times during the Theatre's 1929-30 and 1930-31 seasons.⁶⁷

Shostakovich remained inordinately fond of his first opera, and later was even to form opinions of people on the basis of whether or not they approved of the work. He also remained frustrated at the hypocrisy of the critics who, despite having voiced their enthusiastic support during the run-up to its premier, nonetheless turned to deride the work following its performance. Earlier, in April 1929, as part of a debate regarding the state of musical criticism in Soviet Russia, Shostakovich had spoken out about the increasingly polarised positions occupied by the contemporary press, and had argued for 'objective, musically competent evaluations capable of explaining – both to the reader

⁶³ Gvozdev, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 74

⁶⁴ Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 74. However, the composer also added that, after this, '...I'll calm down and work; I'd like most of all to write something on [Nikolai] Oleinnikov's story, 'The Carp'. This conversation reveals that Shostakovich had not yet considered abandoning the genre of opera, and neither did the events surrounding the performance of *The Nose* cause the Maly Opera Theatre to turn against him. Back in the summer of 1929, the Theatre had commissioned the composer to write a new Soviet opera called *The Carp*, based on the satirical poem by Nikolai Oleynikov, and the furore surrounding *The Nose* did nothing to change the scheduling of this new performance for the following season. However, Oleynikov's failure to complete the libretto stalled Shostakovich's progress on the new venture and ultimately led to the abandonment of the project. Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 56

⁶⁵ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 56

⁶⁶ Dmitri Shostakovich, as cited in Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 56

⁶⁷ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 56. Although receiving several performances in the West, the work was not heard again in Russia until 1974, when it was revived by the Moscow Chamber Theatre. Wilson, *Shostakovich*, pp. 444-452. For a recording on this staging, see Dmitri Shostakovich, *The Nose*. Video Artists International. 2010

and to the composer being reviewed – why something is good or bad and how shortcomings could be avoided'.⁶⁸ Now, in the wake of the criticism surrounding his opera, the composer felt that those responsible should be made to publically account for and explain their changes of opinion. In reality, and as Shostakovich himself would have been only too well aware, behind these shifts in allegiance lay 'the increasingly militant hegemony of a narrowly defined "proletarian" cultural agenda', which was to gradually take hold of the arts in Soviet Russia and which, as I discussed in chapter three, was to lead to the eventual condemnation of Shostakovich's second, and final, opera, *Lady Macbeth*, on which he began work in the autumn of 1930.⁶⁹ Had the course of Russian history been other than it was, then, the path of Shostakovich's career might have taken a very different turn: as Mikhail Druskin points out, *The Nose* is clear evidence that, had he been so inclined, the composer could have become 'the leader of the musical avant-garde', and doubtless this would have included many more operas at the forefront of modernist musical theatre.⁷⁰

II. Comedy in *The Nose*

In addition to its contributions to the operatic genre, *The Nose* also provided an excellent outlet for Shostakovich's sense of humour and penchant for comedy. For Ed Vulliamy, this lighter side to the composer's personality has often been overlooked by those seeking to emphasise the more troubled aspects of his life and works. Such negative accounts, he maintains, cannot be the whole story. He writes:

[Shostakovich] played poker, had a complex love life and adored football... There is a photograph...I love, which shows him laughing, briefcase on his lap, between two friends at a match of his beloved Zenit [Leningrad football team]. Another shows him in what appears to be a gentlemen's club, lighting a cigarette from a candelabra beneath a picture of a scantily-clad woman... According to Gergiev, the greatest Shostakovich interpreter of his generation, the composer would drink a large glass of vodka before entering a roomful of famous people,

⁶⁸ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 56

⁶⁹ Fay, *Shostakovich*, p. 57. Later in his life, Shostakovich was to return once more to the genre, and to Gogol, with his opera *The Gamblers*, although the work was to remain unfinished. Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 173

⁷⁰ Mikhail Druskin, as cited in Wilson, *Shostakovich*, p. 45

and was the life and soul of the party. There are accounts of him dancing on a piano... These hint at another Shostakovich.⁷¹

It is this Shostakovich, Vulliamy maintains, that is expressed in paradigmatic form through the humour of *The Nose*.⁷²

Wendy Lesser, writing on the subject of comedy, asserts that '[p]ractically all humor is one way or another based on the discrepancy between truth and falsehood, between things as they are and things as they are not', and it is a sense of comic ambiguity such as this which lies at the heart of Esti Sheinberg's study of Shostakovich, to which I shall be referring throughout this chapter for analysis and explanation.⁷³ Drawing upon ideas within the semantics of music, Sheinberg explores the variety of ways in which incongruity is expressed through musical structure and the statements of ambiguity that are produced as a result.⁷⁴ Arguing that the ironic – in which two or more incongruous layers of meaning are brought together to create either temporary or permanent states of confusion – presents us with the prototype for such ambiguity, she points towards parody, satire and grotesque as specific realisations of the genre, and asserts that all of these techniques appear frequently in the music of Shostakovich.⁷⁵ Informed by these ideas, I now turn to look more closely at each of these forms of irony in turn, and to examine the specific ways in which they are employed to comic effect in *The Nose*.

(a) *Satire*

Sheinberg argues that satire works through the interplay of two levels of meaning. In one there is an overt meaning which is later rejected, and in the other a meaning which is at first hidden but then comes to be accepted as the preferential value. This is achieved through the distortion of the initial phenomenon, often by a process of either exaggeration or understatement, so that it comes to be ridiculed, as is the case, for example, with the condemnation of greed in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and in

⁷¹ Ed Vulliamy, 'Shostakovich and his Fifteen Quartets by Wendy Lesser – Review', *The Guardian*. www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jun/22/shostakovich-quartets-wendy-lesser-review (22.06.2011; accessed 26.11.2011)

⁷² Vulliamy, 'Shostakovich and his Fifteen Quartets'. For a detailed discussion of humour in the music of Shostakovich, see Sheinberg, *Irony*.

⁷³ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 303. Indeed, as Lesser points out, a use of comedic devices such as those found in *The Nose* provides 'an invaluable tool for someone who lives in a period when lies are routinely put forth as truth and vice versa'.

⁷⁴ For a more detailed discussion of the structure of musical ambiguity, see Sheinberg, *Irony*, pp. 3-27.

⁷⁵ Sheinberg, *Irony*, pp. 27-28

Gogol's *Dead Souls*. In communicating a preference for a particular set of norms or values which are often ethical or social in nature, satire remains essentially underpinned by reality rather than fantasy, and by always revealing its true meaning rather than leaving an unsolved puzzle, it represents irony in its simplest form.⁷⁶

One way in which such exaggeration might be achieved in quantitative fashion is by means of *repetition*, whereby a feature of the subject being satirised is distorted as the result of appearing multiple times in close succession.⁷⁷ This process of simplification, in which emphasis is placed arbitrarily on only a few chosen characteristics, is noted by Ernst Gombrich in his analyses of caricatures, and in *The Nose* is used to the extreme, with many passages derived from the continued repetition of a single motif.⁷⁸ In the first scene of the opera, in which Yakovlevitch is thrown out of the house by his wife following the discovery of the nose in a bread roll, a surrealist event is played out, but behind these strange events, as Sheinberg points out, two human characters are caricatured: Ivan, trying to defend himself against the protests of his wife and claiming that he has no idea as to how the nose should have found its way into the bread, and his wife, Praskovya Osipovna, shocked by the discovery and gradually working herself into a state of frenzied hysteria. Gogol, in his original text, is at this point already employing the use of repetition as a satirical device for, in describing the outrage of Praskovya Osipovna, he resorts to a 'stream of words':

'Not another word! Do you think that I would allow a cut-off nose to sit in my room?... You numskull! All you're good for is stropping razors, and soon you won't even be able to do your job at all, you stupid oaf! You scoundrel! Do you think I'm going to stick up for you with the police?... No fear, you good-for-nothing, you blockhead! Take it away! Away! I don't care where you put it, just so long as I never set eyes on it again!'⁷⁹

Shostakovich, in his musical depiction of this scene, picks up on and further accentuates this use of repetition (Fig. 6.1). Against the non-repetitive melody line carried by Ivan, who is trying to 'speak sense' and rationalise the mysterious appearance of the nose, Praskovya Osipovna launches into a tirade of high-pitched screaming which culminates

⁷⁶ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 28 & pp. 69-71

⁷⁷ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 115

⁷⁸ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 117

⁷⁹ Gogol, 'The Nose', p. 38

with repeated shouts of ‘Out!’.⁸⁰ In an additional layer of musical satire, this expression of horror, through its continued repetition, then forms a ‘piece of sound wallpaper’, thus ultimately becoming a caricature of its very self.⁸¹

Fig. 6.1: Shostakovich, *The Nose*, Act 1, scene i, [40]-[41]³

ff Вон! Вон!

чёрт е - го зна - ет как з - то сде - ла - лось.

Вон! Вон! Вон! Вон! Вон!

Пьян ли я все ра - воз - вра - тил - ся.

Praskovya: Out! Out! Out! Out! Out! Out! Out! Out! Out!

Ivan: The devil knows what happened! I’m not sure if I was or wasn’t drunk last night.

An alternative form of quantitative exaggeration is achieved as a result of the *accumulation* of characteristics of the satirised object. Satire of this kind is generally applied to subjects that are representative of a certain ‘type’, for example, a people, a race or a musical or literary style, and in the case of *The Nose* it is used in relation to the police.⁸² In the third act of the opera, a group of Russian policemen, who are waiting for a carriage to leave the station, engage in a singing session to pass the time. Shostakovich, in order to satirise the scene, draws their musical caricature by means of an exaggerated ‘New Soviet Folk Song’, in which a variety of features from the Russian folk tradition are accumulated (Fig. 6.2). Set to an already satirical text describing the Russian policeman’s life, the new folk song provides a ‘ridiculous amalgam’ of Russian musical characteristics, which are themselves exaggerated out of all proportion. The disorganised melodic leaps reminiscent of the Latvian, Lithuanian and Volga-Ural traditions depict the lack of direction and futility of the policeman’s role, whilst the heterophony characteristic of Volgorod, Kaluga and Bryansk folk music, here distorted to the point of dissonance, points towards the senselessness of both the plot in general

⁸⁰ Sheinberg, *Irony*, pp. 117-118

⁸¹ Sheinberg, *Irony*, pp. 117-120

⁸² Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 120

and figure of the policeman in particular. Accompanying this is a ‘North Estonian’ drone in the violas and ‘Siberian’ bass drum, used to indicate the policeman’s dullness of thought. In addition, part way through the repetitious passage the policeman’s captain becomes a ‘heroic tenor leader’, launching to a Ukrainian-style *dishkant* solo in a high falsetto voice, filled with Smolenskian whooping and held for a sustained period of time as is characteristic in the Armenian folk tradition (Fig. 6.3). The resulting effect, which is reminiscent of a dog’s howl, provides a satire on the life of the policeman which, as the text describes, is ‘like a dog’s’.⁸³

⁸³ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 135

Fig. 6.2: Shostakovich, *The Nose*, Act III, scene vii, [299]⁵-[301]

Как Ка - ин, он за - тряс - ся весь, не
 но - са по - тек - ла та - ба - ка.
 Под - жав хвост, как со - ба - ка, как
 Под - жав хвост, как со - ба - ка, как
 Ка - ин, он - за - тряс - ся весь!
 Ка - ин, он - за - тряс - ся весь!

sempre pp
pp

Policemen: His tail is sagging like a dog's, like Cain he is shaking all over, and tobacco is dribbling from his nose.

Fig. 6.3: Shostakovich, *The Nose*, Act III, scene vii, [303]-[306]

8

А

8 Из но - са по - тек - ла та - ба - ка. Под -

Из но - са по - тек - ла та - ба - ка.

8 жав хвост, как со - ба - ка, как Ка-ин, он - за - тряс - ся весь

8 Из но - са по - тек - ла та - ба - ка.

Из но - са по - тек - ла та - ба - ка.

A third form of satirical exaggeration, this time qualitative in nature, is achieved by the increasing of a particular quality of the satirized object to extreme proportions. As Sheinberg points out, such a technique is commonly employed by Shostakovich, whose ‘musical satires are not a subtle hint that arouses a smile but a shockingly absurd caricature’, and *The Nose*, the text of which already presents a satirical distortion of reality, is in Shostakovich’s opera caricatured further by the taking of exaggeration to the limits of possibility.⁸⁴ Act II scene v, in which Kovalyov visits the newspaper’s office with the intention of placing an advertisement for the return of his missing nose, is clearly the portrayal of an absurd situation. However, Gogol’s text at this point also alludes to an additional layer of satire, here created by reference to the meaninglessness of the lives of the people Kovalyov encounters whilst waiting to speak to the clerk. A meaninglessness of this kind is articulated by Gogol in a letter to his mother in 1828, in which he writes that: ‘the people there seem more dead than alive. All the civil servants and officials can talk about is their department or government office; everything seems to have been crushed under a great weight, everyone is drowned by the trivial, meaningless labours at which he spends his useless life’,⁸⁵ and it is precisely this sentiment that Gogol is depicting in exaggerated terms in the scene in the newspaper’s office:

The worthy clerk listened gravely to this discourse and at the same time continued his calculations, counting the number of letters in the notice submitted for publication. Around him hovered a great number of old women, shop assistants, and doormen with notes. One sought employment for a coachman of sober habits, another advertised for sale a little-used calash, brought in 1814 from Paris; elsewhere a position was sought for a serf-girl, 19 years old and trained as a laundress, but suitable for other work; offers were invited for a sturdy droshky, missing one spring, a spirited young horse with grey dappled markings, a mere 17 years of age, new turnip and radish seeds imported from London, a country cottage with all amenities; stabling for two horses and land on which an excellent birch or fir grove could be planted; another notice drew the attention of all those anxious to purchase old boot soles, inviting them to visit the auction rooms any day, between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 109

⁸⁵ Nikolai Gogol, as cited in Sheinberg, *Irony*, pp. 112-113

⁸⁶ Gogol, ‘The Nose’, pp. 46-47

Whilst in Gogol this meaninglessness is conveyed merely by means of an accumulative description, in Shostakovich emphasis is also placed on the human *significance* of the scene – on ‘the indifference that human beings feel and show for each other as the practical outcome of the disconnectedness between their goals and interests’.⁸⁷ Here an image of musical disconnectedness is created, which is itself a parody of *hocketus* – an imitative technique used in medieval motets, in which each part has only a few scattered, disconnected notes, often set to meaningless shouts and cries such as ‘hau’, ‘hou’ or ‘houp’.⁸⁸ To further exaggerate this already absurd technique, Shostakovich adds to the disparate effect an atonal background and nonsensical individual melody lines (Fig. 6.4). So, concludes Sheinberg, whilst Gogol present a satire on the ‘discommunication caused by the meaningless’, in Shostakovich, we find a further, musical satire on the ‘meaningless caused by non-communication’, with the fact that his setting of this scene is, in fact, a skilfully-elaborated canon, only adding to its ironic effect.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 113

⁸⁸ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 113

⁸⁹ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 115

Fig. 6.4: Shostakovich, *The Nose*, Act II, scene v, [228]-⁴[233]

Мо - ло - да - я го -

Но - вы - е,

Да - ча

Проч - ны - е дрож - кн без

Ма - ло - по - дер - жа - на - я ко -

От - пус - ка - ет - ся дво - ро -

От - пус - ка - ет - ся ву - слу - же - ни - е ку - чер

ря - ча - я ло - шадь, сем - над - ца - ти

по - лу - чен - ны - е не Лон - ло - на, се

со все - ми у - го - дья - ми, дву - мя

Же - ла - ю - ших ку - пить ста - ры е

од - ной рес - со - ры, проч - ны - е дрож - ки

ляс - ка, вы - ве - зен - на - я в ты - ся

ва - я дев - ка де - вят - над - ца - тн лет

трез - во - го по - ве - де - ни - я,

(b) Parody

Parody comprises one layer of meaning which is ripped from its original context and another which provides a new context. Normally involving some degree of distortion, often by exaggeration, parody can either ultimately reveal its true meaning, in which case it functions satirically, or leave an unresolved puzzle, in which case it forms an

example of either romantic or existential irony.⁹⁰ In the former of these, humour arises from the irreconcilable nature of the paradox presented, whilst in the latter, the absence of a resolution is seen as reflective of the doubt and disorientation which lie at the heart of the human condition.⁹¹

Of particular interest in Russian literature and art during the early twentieth century was the use of parody as a means of achieving *defamiliarisation*, or the distorted replication of a convention.⁹² Yuri Tynyanov, in his influential article ‘Dostoevsky and Gogol: towards a theory of parody’, writes of the technique as a tool which enables an artist or writer to ‘play’ with the style of an earlier artist, manipulating it so that a new personal style emerges in the form of a ‘struggle’ or parody.⁹³ Tynyanov details a number of such techniques, several of which were to later become apparent in the music of Shostakovich, and, in relation to the works of Gogol, points in particular towards a device he terms a ‘mask’. This comprises an exaggerated appearance which serves to defamiliarise, and thus to parody, the true identity of the object, person or idea in question, and in Gogol, argues Tynyanov, the depicting of characters in such a way forms a basic parodic device.⁹⁴

‘Masks’ of this kind are also apparent throughout *The Nose*, with the musical portrayal of the hysterical Praskovya Osipovna in the opening scene of the opera providing a prime example. In the following scene, which opens with Yakovlevitch attempting to dispose of the nose but being caught in the act by the police constable, the tirade to which the barber is subjected by the officer, who stands increasingly close to Yakovlevitch so as to create an impression of intimidation and oppression, presents another such exaggerated ‘mask’. The culmination of this scene, in which the officer sings in an extremely high pitch, demonstrates a third occurrence, with the ‘mask’ here created not only through the comedic effect of the high tessitura, but also as a result of the immense vocal effort required on the part of the singer to produce such notes, which serves to add an element of physicality to the caricature.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 28, pp. 141-142 & pp. 147-148

⁹¹ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 27 & p. 208

⁹² Sheinberg, *Irony*, pp. 160-161

⁹³ Yuri Tynyanov, in Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 161

⁹⁴ Sheinberg, *Irony*, pp. 162-163

⁹⁵ Sheinberg, *Irony*, pp. 163-164

For Sheinberg, this scene might also be understood as a parody of the opening of Berg's opera, *Wozzeck*. Shostakovich, she argues, 'plays' with Berg's style of writing, thus employing that technique to which Tinyanov refers in his discussion of parody in the works of Dostoevsky:

Dostoevsky's style so obviously repeats, varies, combines the style of Gogol that his contemporaries were immediately struck by it... Dostoevsky's letters are crammed with Gogolian *bon mots*, names and phrases... What we have here is stylization; it is not a question of following a style but rather of playing with it. And if one recollects how readily Dostoevsky underlines Gogol...how he so obviously proceeds from Gogol without concealing the fact, it becomes clear that it is more appropriate to speak about stylization than about 'imitation', 'influence', and so on.⁹⁶

In *The Nose*, the high pitch the constable uses to address Yakovlevtich presents an exaggerated imitation of the register of the captain's voice in *Wozzeck*, with the similarity between the rhythms of the two passages further underlining the parodic relation (Fig. 6.5). Yakovlevitch's spoken replies, which on the one hand serve to accentuate Shostakovich's caricature of the shrieking police officer, also provide an exaggerated echo of *Wozzeck*'s monotone responses, whilst the melody line of the officer mimics the laughter of Berg's captain (Fig. 6.6). What is more, Shostakovich's parody of Berg is to be found not only in his musical realisation of the opera, but also in his formation of the libretto: *Wozzeck*'s meek replies are exaggerated in Yakovlevitch's 'I wish your Highness the best', and the constable imitates not only the melody and rhythm of the captain's part but also his vowel sounds, reproducing the 'he, he' of the captain's laughter in his own cry of 'Nyet! Nyet!'. In this way, then, Shostakovich parodies Berg's characters so that they, too, becomes examples of exaggerated 'masks'.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Yuro Nikolayevic Tinyanov, as cited in Sheinberg, *Irony*, pp. 164-165

⁹⁷ Sheinberg, *Irony*, pp. 164-165

Fig. 6.5: Comparison of pitches of captain's voice in Berg's *Wozzeck* and constable's voice in Shostakovich's *The Nose*

Er hat kei-ne Mo - ral! Mor - al! das is wenn man mo - ra - lisch ist!

По-дой-ди сю - да, ло-без-ный.

Fig. 6.6: Comparison of rhythms of captain's voice in Berg's *Wozzeck* and constable's voice in Shostakovich's *The Nose*

(laughter) Süd - Nörd! (laughter)

Нет! Нет! Бра-тец не бра-го - ро-ди-ю, ска-жи-ка, что ны нам де-лал, сто-я у ре-ки?

Further, Sheinberg points towards the way in which Shostakovich transforms the tragedy of Berg's opera into the comedy of Gogol's tale. Once again, Sheinberg here draws upon the work of Tinyanov, here concerning the parodic relationship between the tragic and the comic:

Stylization is close to parody. Both live a double life: behind the apparent structure of a work, its first level, lies a second level, that of the work which it stylizes or parodies. But in parody it is obligatory to have a disjunction of both levels, a dislocation of intent; the parody of a tragedy will be a comedy (it matters little whether this is done through an exaggeration of the tragic intent or through a corresponding substitution of comic elements), and a parody of a comedy could be a tragedy. In stylization there is no such disjunction. There is, on the contrary, a correspondence of the two levels – the stylizing level and the stylized level showing through it – one to another. Nevertheless, it is but a single

(c) The Grotesque

The grotesque appears frequently in the literature, art and music of the Romantic and Modern eras, and was again of particular prominence in Russian culture during the first thirty years of the twentieth century. Formed of a hybrid between the ludicrous and the horrifying, the grotesque comprises pairs of contradictory qualities, for example, tragic/comic, beautiful/ugly or life/death, and, like satire and parody, often involves the hyperbolic distortion of reality.¹⁰⁰ Fundamentally unresolvable in nature, the grotesque often presents a form of existential irony, although the device may also be used satirically, whereby its two layers together comprise a single element within the larger satirical structure.¹⁰¹

In music, this satirical form of the grotesque is commonly created by reference to popular social dances, which are then depicted in a distorted fashion. As Sheinberg puts it: ‘Dance, in Western culture, is associated with lightness and grace. Whatever clashes with this basic assumption will be perceived as a grotesque. A grotesque dance, then, is the antonym of refined dance. As such it is heavy, clumsy and exaggerated’.¹⁰² A variety of such dances are to be found in the music of Shostakovich, where gallops, polkas and waltzes are coloured by a Mahlerian-style grotesquery and incorporate a use of tension and even of violence – ‘an escape, a chase or a frantic motion that [is] caused by some horrible, even if undefinable, threat’.¹⁰³ The gallop towards the end of Act III of *The Nose*, which accompanies Kovalyov’s journey to the police station to report the loss of his nose, is a case in point, portraying as it does a grotesque distortion which becomes particularly apparent when viewed in comparison to more traditional forms of the dance, such as those which are to be found in the music of Johann Strauss.¹⁰⁴

As can be seen in Fig. 6.8, the archetypal gallop of Strauss is formed from a light-hearted melody which is reasonably quiet, contains no extremes of pitch and is set at a sensible speed. Accompanying this melody is an ostinato which changes in pitch and pattern every few bars, thus avoiding any feeling of tension or heaviness.¹⁰⁵ By contrast, Shostakovich’s gallop in *The Nose* is characterised by a fast tempo, loud dynamics and

¹⁰⁰ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 207 & p. 210

¹⁰¹ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 28, pp. 207-208 & p. 229

¹⁰² Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 233

¹⁰³ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 234

¹⁰⁴ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 234

¹⁰⁵ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 234

a background of relentless, stamping quavers. The four bars which precede the passage mock typical introductions to the gallop style, with the traditional ‘fall to the start’ mimicked by a high A-flat literally ‘falling’ in a long glissando to form a heavy, lumbering accompaniment. This, too, is distorted, with lower bass notes than are to be found in the Strauss and an absence of variation lending a heavy, violent and compulsive slant to the passage. In many of Shostakovich’s satirically grotesque dances, this element of violence is taken to the extreme, often far exceeding that which is necessary and at times approaching ‘frenzied insanity’, and it is a violence of this kind which, in *The Nose*, accompanies the scene of the crowd chasing along behind the nose.¹⁰⁶

Fig. 6.8: Comparison of Strauss’ ‘Jugendfeuer Gallop’ and Shostakovich’s gallop in *The Nose*

The figure displays a musical score comparing two gallop pieces. The first system shows Strauss' 'Jugendfeuer Gallop' in 2/4 time, marked piano (p). The second system shows Shostakovich's gallop in 2/4 time, also marked piano (p). The third system shows Strauss' piece again, but with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic and a glissando marked 'aliss'. The fourth system shows Shostakovich's piece with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic and a glissando marked '8va'.

In Russian visual art, the first influences of the grotesque can be discerned in the paintings of Boris Kustodiev (1878-1927), in which are depicted women who are ‘ridiculous’ yet ‘astonishingly beautiful’.¹⁰⁷ As a child Shostakovich was frequently invited to play the piano for Kustodiev and the influence of the artist on the young

¹⁰⁶ Sheinberg, *Irony*, pp. 234-235 & p. 238

¹⁰⁷ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 251

composer can be seen in a number of his musical works. Most notably this is the case in his second opera, *Lady Macbeth*, which reflects Kustodiev's paintings of 'broad, sensual *kupchikahs* (merchant-women or merchants' wives)' in the figure of Katerina Izmalova. Further, the grotesque incongruity of the opera's themes of love and murder, simultaneously portraying both the sublime and the depraved, are characteristic of the juxtapositions posed by many of the works of Kustodiev, who had a tendency to combine the satirical with the macabre.¹⁰⁸

Whilst Kustodiev's influence on *The Nose* is less obviously apparent, the opera's appeal to the bodily nonetheless suggests that it, too, may have been coloured by at least something of the artist's interest in the grotesque. For example, in Act I scene iii, Kovalyev sleeps behind a screen whilst his servant, Ivan, helps himself liberally to a bottle of vodka. Accompanying the scene is the sound of Kovalyev's snoring, performed in an exaggeratedly grotesque fashion. As Sheinberg puts it: '...Shostakovich uses here the extremes of the orchestral compass: the contrabassoon and the trombone, in their darkest, almost indecipherable sounds, in a series of moans and groans, echo Kovalyev's snores, while a solo violin, in high-pitched squeaks of glissandos, flageolets, trills and out-of-tune sounds, mockingly imitates the wealth of whistles, sighs, and shrill sounds of sleep' (Fig. 6.10).¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, Shostakovich's colourful musical depictions of groups of people to be found elsewhere in the opera are also suggestive of the influence of Kustodiev, with the crowd surrounding Yakovlevitch as he attempts to throw the nose into the river, the curious characters awaiting the arrival of their carriage and the rowdy mob pursuing the nose towards the end of the work all drawn from Kustodievan images of fairgrounds and marketplaces.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Sheinberg, *Irony*, pp. 253-261

¹⁰⁹ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 261

¹¹⁰ Sheinberg, *Irony*, pp. 262-263

Fig. 6.9: Shostakovich, *The Nose*, Act I, scene iii, [95]

Garish and fantastical settings such as the fairground, circus or theatre, together with the imagery of crowds, are also to be found in the work of Russian artist Marc Chagall (1887-1985), whose fascination with chaos led him to create grotesque portraits of individuals with distorted faces, postures and proportions, as well as images of violent crowds, made up of the mass presence of disturbingly unidentifiable individual faces.¹¹¹ It is likely, although not proven, that Chagall's work would have been known to Shostakovich, and in *The Nose*, he, too, depicts the faceless, angry mob as an embodiment of the grotesque. This is the case in the scene where the policemen accost the young pretzel-seller in the marketplace and, more significantly, in the scene in which the crowd chase the nose prior to its capture. Here, argues Sheinberg, Shostakovich is demonstrating in musical form not only the mentality of the mob itself, but also the process of dehumanisation by which individual persons are transformed into an impersonal crowd.¹¹²

At the start of the capture scene, parts are scored for numerous individual characters, set at a moderate speed and with a quiet accompaniment so as to allow each voice to be clearly discerned. The melody lines are here unique in character and enter separately so as to create a sense of disconnectedness. Thus while each voice is enquiring about the whereabouts of the nose, the overall impression is of a balanced and comprehensible conversation between people with distinct personalities and individual points of view (Fig. 6.11).¹¹³

¹¹¹ Sheinberg, *Irony*, pp. 263-267 & p. 276

¹¹² Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 268 & pp. 276-279

¹¹³ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 280

As the scene progresses, and an increasing number of people begin to inquire ‘Где?’ (‘Where?’) of the nose, the tempo and dynamic of the melody lines are raised, although some individual voices, such as those of the pretzel seller and the colonel, remain distinct from the crowd. Then one voice begins to cry in a monotone pitch, a characteristic feature of Shostakovich’s crowd-scene music, and gradually the others assembled begin to join in. Significantly, the melody lines at this point lose their individuality and are instead grouped into two choirs, thus providing, as Sheinberg puts it, ‘a metaphor for the individuals’ loss of identity for the sake of a unified, homogenized group sound’ (Fig. 6.12).¹¹⁴ In the climax to the scene, as the nose is finally glimpsed, the two groups unite in a repetitive, monotone shout of ‘СМОТРЕТЬ’ (‘Look’), to the accompaniment of a dissonant yet resonant chord, composed of minor seconds, fifths and octaves.¹¹⁵ This moment, then, provides one of the most powerful examples of the satirical grotesque: that of ‘pitiful, harmless individuals who uncontrollably accumulate into a terrifying social chaos’.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Sheinberg, *Irony*, pp. 280-181

¹¹⁵ Sheinberg, *Irony*, pp. 280-281

¹¹⁶ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 280

Fig. 6.10: Shostakovich, *The Nose*, Intermezzo after Act III, [463]-[464]¹

p marc.
 Нос май - о - ра Ко - ва - ле - ва про - гу - ли - ва - ет - ся здесь

p marc.
 По - зволь - те вам

p marc.
 А

p marc.
 Как по - ду - ма - ешь

p marc.
 Не слы - хал я об э - том ни - че - го.

p marc.
 Он тут сей - час прой - дёт.

до - ло - жить, что я не о - чень по - ни - ма - ю з - то де - ло.

p marc.
 А где он? Где? Где?

где он? Где? Где? Где?

толь - ко: че - го не про - ис - хо - дит на све - те! Где?

А где он? Где? Где?

mf solo
 Э - то,

Fig. 6.11: Shostakovich, *The Nose*, Intermezzo after Act III, ³[479]-[480]

ff Ой, ку-та ле-зешь!
A spoken male voice: Ты не держишь, а ступай в часты.
An awarded Colonel (*steps over and stands on a bench*)

По-жа-луй-те! По-жа-луй-те! По-жа-луй-те пос-мот-реть! Пос-мот-реть!
Где-же-он? Где-же-он? Смо-три-те смо-три-те!
Где-же-он? Где-же-он? Смо-три-те смо-три-те!
Где-же-он? Где-же-он? Смо-три-те смо-три-те!
Где-же-он? Где-же-он? Смо-три-те смо-три-те!
Вма-га-зи-не за-вет-ри-ной.
Во-тон! Смо-три-те смо-три-те!
4/8 soli Вма-га-зи-не за-вет-ри-ной.
Ха-ха-ха-ха! Ха-ха-ха-ха! Смо-три-те смо-три-те!

реть!
три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те!
три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те!
три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те!
ff Смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те!
ff Смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те!
ff Смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те!
Смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те!
три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те смо-три-те!

III. Theological Reflection on *The Nose*

My question, in this chapter, is what we take for theological reflection from this side of Shostakovich's musical output. My proposal is that we understand it in terms of an

eschatological tension between comedy and tragedy, light and darkness. I shall begin with the comic.

(a) *Theology and Comedy*

Within Christian theological tradition, as Umberto Eco famously explores in his novel *The Name of the Rose*, there has been held an attitude of deep suspicion towards humour.¹¹⁷ John Chrysostom, for example, writing in the fourth century, points the finger at those who fail to display a sufficient degree of composure: ‘...thou standest laughing, raising a laugh after the manner of women of the world who are on the stage. This has overthrown, this has cast down everything. Our affairs, both our business and our politeness, are turned into laughing; there is nothing steady, nothing grave’.¹¹⁸ In particular he is critical of those who cannot take even their time at Church seriously: ‘For the Church has been filled with laughter. Whatever clever thing one may say, immediately there is laughter among those present: and the marvellous thing is that many do not leave off laughing even during the very time of the prayer’.¹¹⁹

In defence of this position, Chrysostom points to the teachings of Paul, writing: ‘Do ye not hear Paul saying, Let “filthiness and foolish talking and jesting” (Eph. v. 4) be put away from you? He places “jesting” along with “filthiness”, and dost thou laugh?’¹²⁰ He also points to the example of Christ: ‘Where dost thou hear of Christ doing this? Nowhere: but that He was sad indeed oftentimes. For even when He looked on Jerusalem, He wept; and when He thought on the Traitor He was troubled; and when He was about to raise Lazarus, He wept; and dost thou laugh?’¹²¹ Finally, Chrysostom warns of the consequences that await those who refuse to cease from laughter: ‘This is the season of grief and tribulation...of conflicts and sweatings, and dost thou laugh? Dost not thou see how Sarah was rebuked? dost thou not hear Christ saying, “Woe to them that laugh, for they shall weep”? (Luke vi. 25)’¹²²

¹¹⁷ Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. by William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1994)

¹¹⁸ John Chrysostom, ‘Homily XV on Hebrews’, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, XIV, ed. by Schaff, pp. 438-442 (p. 441)

¹¹⁹ Chrysostom, ‘Homily XV on Hebrews’, pp. 441-442

¹²⁰ Chrysostom, ‘Homily XV on Hebrews’, p. 442

¹²¹ Chrysostom, ‘Homily XV on Hebrews’, p. 442

¹²² Chrysostom, ‘Homily XV on Hebrews’, p. 442

This view is later echoed by the seventeenth century Lutheran theologian David Hollaz who, to Karl Barth's indignation, urges the belief that Christ never laughed as evidence for his divinity.¹²³ Barth argues that such a view is docetic. It also implies a dour view of creation, as laughter is equated with the fallenness of humanity and with those aspects of existence which are inherently sinful.

Earlier, in the Munster ethics, which were unpublished during his lifetime, Barth had argued that 'To have real humor...we have to be children of God... Those who have hope of Christ only in this life cannot laugh'.¹²⁴ Arguing that humour comes about as the result of our continual awareness of the contrast between our existence now and our future existence (which is to say eschatologically), he maintains that this requires of us that we do not take the present with ultimate seriousness, not because we wish to make light or be dismissive of it, but rather because 'God's future, which breaks into the present, is more serious'.¹²⁵ After all, he reminds us: 'Humor makes concrete the saying in Romans 8:18: 'I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us', and the further saying in Romans 8:28: 'We know that all things work together for good to those who love God'.¹²⁶

Christianity, then, both relates to and embraces the whole of life in all its dimensions: although including sorrow and suffering, it at the same time has room for laughter and humour. As the author of Ecclesiastes reminds us: 'To everything there is a season...a time to weep, and a time to laugh'.¹²⁷ Now this is also the case with art, for whilst some artists display either joy or sorrow but never both, in the works of the greatest artists we are enabled to glimpse the multiple dimensions of life. Pablo Picasso, for example, although melancholy in his blue period and tragic in *Guernica*, nonetheless remains teasing and joyful in much of his art, whilst Mozart, whose most profound works include the *Requiem Mass*, also gives us *Ein Musickalischer Spass* (A Musical Joke) – a light-hearted divertimento comically scored for two horns and strings.

¹²³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/2*, trans. by G. W. Bromiley & Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), p. 153

¹²⁴ Karl Barth, *Ethics*, ed. by Dietrich Braun, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), p. 507 (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 19)

¹²⁵ Barth, *Ethics*, p. 511

¹²⁶ Barth, *Ethics*, p. 511

¹²⁷ Ecclesiastes 3. 1-4

George Steiner agrees with Barth. In *The Death of Tragedy*, drawing upon the *Divina Commedia* of Dante, he argues that theology is written in the comic mode. The message of the resurrection, he argues, is that everything will ultimately be reconciled – that there will be victory over death and a final rest in God – and Christianity, therefore, is nothing other than comedy: ‘an anti-tragic vision of the world’.¹²⁸ ‘The Passion of Christ’, he writes, ‘is an event of unutterable grief, but it is also a cipher through which is revealed the love of God for man. In the dark light of Christ’s suffering, original sin is shown to have been a joyous error (*felix culpa*). Through it humanity shall be restored to a condition far more exalted than was Adam’s innocence. In the drama of Christian life, the arrow beats against the wind but points upwards.’¹²⁹

Thus, argues Steiner, even death cannot be understood as ultimately tragic, and he points to Manoah’s command following the demise of Samson in Milton’s *Samson Agoniste* – ‘Come, come, no time for lamentation now’ – as an illustration of precisely this fact.¹³⁰ Rather, for Steiner it remains the case that ‘Real tragedy can occur only where the tormented soul believes that there is no time left for God’s forgiveness’.¹³¹ Faustus’ remark that ‘And now ‘tis too late’ thus goes some way towards expressing a tragic vision of Christianity but, as Steiner points out, even he is ultimately mistaken, for ‘It is never too late to repent, and romantic melodrama is sound theology when it shows the soul being snatched back from the very edge of damnation’.¹³² Christianity, then, ‘knows only partial or episodic tragedy’, for whilst there exist ‘moments of despair...cruel setbacks [which] occur during the ascent towards grace’, as the Portuguese proverb tells us: ‘*Deus escreve direito por linhas tortas*’ – God makes crooked paths straight.¹³³

The question is whether we can understand Shostakovich in this way. In the previous chapter I discussed Wendy Lesser’s view that his music speaks to us of shame and self-doubt, and my explorations of the string quartets point in this direction.¹³⁴ However, and as Lesser herself acknowledges, this is not the full story. Rather, as she continues:

¹²⁸ George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 331. Although in Dante, of course, we also have purgatory and hell.

¹²⁹ Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 332

¹³⁰ Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, as cited in Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 332

¹³¹ Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 332

¹³² Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 332. For Steiner, this is the reason why, amid the tragic dramas of the Greeks and Romans, Christianity never developed its own specific form of the genre. Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 331

¹³³ Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, pp. 332-333

¹³⁴ See chapter 5, p. 194

‘[Shostakovich’s] shame may speak to one aspect of our complicity in human error, but his notorious sense of humor addresses us in another, more companionable, possibly somewhat lighter way, though in his case even the lightness can be extremely dark’.¹³⁵ This is the Shostakovich of whom Vulliamy writes: the Shostakovich who enjoyed football and laughter, who entertained his friends, who danced on the piano. This, too, is the Shostakovich we hear in *The Nose*. Comedy and humour, then, have their place within the works of this composer just as much as do the tragic, the morbid and the moving, as the hysteria of Yakovlevitch’s wife at the discovery of the nose in the freshly-baked roll, the idiotic mimicking of Wozzeck’s tragic drowning, the hilarity of the exaggerated gallop and the grotesque grunts and groans of Kovalyov’s snores all reveal. Perhaps, then, we might say that Shostakovich shared Barth and Steiner’s view, but before jumping to that conclusion we need to examine the theme of theology and tragedy.

(b) *Theology and Tragedy*

Barth’s views on humour are, of course, exemplified by Mozart, for whom the darkness is ultimately overcome by the light.¹³⁶ However, whilst this might indeed be true in the case of Mozart, we should perhaps question the extent to which it is true of the music of Shostakovich. Despite the more humorous elements of a number of his works, including *The Nose*, in his music as a whole, the presence of tragedy continually pervades, and the overriding sense conveyed is one of melancholy and sadness: here the Yea does not always ring louder than the ever-present Nay; here the shadow is at times darkness and deficiency can mean defeat. Even within his more humorous compositions this remains the case, as Lesser’s remark, quoted above, about the ‘extremely dark’ lightness of his music reveals, and this is indeed true of the music of *The Nose*, made apparent most notably in the grotesquely distorted caricatures of human nature which lurk among the apparent comedy of the work: the shallowness of Kovalyov; the drunkenness of Yakovlevitch; the stupidity of the policemen; the indifference of the crowd in the newspaper office; the savagery of the chasing mob. To fully reflect upon Shostakovich’s comedy, then, I need also to say something about the portrayal of the tragic and its place in theological endeavour.

¹³⁵ Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, p. 303

¹³⁶ See chapter 1, pp. 19-20

In his work on the ethics of tragedy, Donald MacKinnon reflects on the subject of tragic expression in art. Focusing on Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, MacKinnon discusses how the tragedy of the play unfolds as we witness Brutus wrestling with his inner self over his role in Caesar's death. Here Brutus commits what is essentially an act of self-deception as he attempts to avoid holding himself accountable for his own actions, but at the same time there remains a willingness on his part to engage with the moral unease with which he is now preoccupied. In this, argues MacKinnon, Shakespeare illustrates for us 'the *inwardness* of the dilemma facing any man who finds himself compelled to consider playing a part in such an enterprise'. He continues: '[Here Shakespeare] is able to combine remarkable power in tracing the windings of human thought and imagination in men compelled to make such a decision, even indeed imposing upon that decision, once it has been made, the form of their spontaneous enquiry in the making of it'.¹³⁷ For MacKinnon, then, what we are here shown are not just tragic *events* but also the *mentality* which necessary surrounds such actions and endows upon them the quality of the truly tragic.

Further, he argues, such plays also serve to tell us something about the so-called victors of these tragic circumstances: even those characters who manage to achieve that which might be regarded as a degree of triumph are not free from the inner turmoil that besets the likes of Brutus, but rather their victories all too often are marred by the heavy costs incurred both to others and to themselves in the process of attaining such a goal. Victory, then, for MacKinnon, is in essence but another aspect of tragedy. This is illustrated again by Brutus, whose tribute, which he receives amid the victory of the triumvirs, is tragically devalued as a result of its being paid by men whose moral accountability does not match even that of Brutus himself. Here MacKinnon notes the reply of the elderly Duke of Wellington to the woman who supposed that victory must be 'a supremely exhilarating and glorious experience': 'A victory, Madam, is the greatest tragedy in the world, only excepting a defeat'.¹³⁸

The tragic exploration of the human condition in art, argues MacKinnon, speaks across time and distance to all those who, like Brutus, must make a decision arising from a conflict of moral duties, warning them of that which stands to be unavoidably lost in the process. 'From it they must learn to count the cost', he writes, 'and to see that they may

¹³⁷ Donald MacKinnon, *Explorations in Theology 5* (London: SCM Press, 1979), p. 184

¹³⁸ MacKinnon, *Explorations in Theology*, p. 192

go forward only when they have counted it'.¹³⁹ Here the consequences of our actions are played out in dramatic form before our very eyes, thus enabling us to perceive of our own emotional responses to the outcomes of the choices we have made, and requiring of us that we fully appreciate the devastation we have inevitably wrought upon the life of the individual.¹⁴⁰ Here, too, we glimpse something of the intractable nature of our moral decision-making, which stems from both 'the situation which confronts us as it develops... [and] from ourselves as we are revealed to ourselves in the action which we have to undertake...'.¹⁴¹ MacKinnon also remains clear about the challenges of such art. It is not the case, he maintains, that we should cease from acting in the face of the inevitably tragic outcomes of our deeds, but rather that our witness of tragic drama should serve to guard against precisely this potential *failure to act* – to forestall the danger that we might '[pass] by on the other side lest, by our intervention, we imperil not only ourselves, but those who have none other than ourselves to give them succour'.¹⁴²

For Sheinberg, it is a form of tragic art akin to that described by MacKinnon which is to be found in the music of Shostakovich, and particularly in *The Nose*. Citing the work of Søren Kierkegaard, for whom irony is 'not a mode of speech, but a basic attitude towards life and human existence' and thus 'a matter of the utmost ethical consequence', Sheinberg suggests that it is an ideological view such as this which is also to be found at the centre of works by this composer.¹⁴³ Shostakovich's music, she argues, 'delivers a...satirical message condemning human stupidity and cruelty', and in so doing continues the very Russian tradition of stating ethical aims through artistic endeavours, albeit now in a humane rather than political manner.¹⁴⁴ In particular, she maintains, this becomes apparent through his use of music to convey a sense of existential irony – of those contradictions within reality which point not to our incapability to know the truth, but rather to the truth that is the 'infinitely contradictory' nature of our existence.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ MacKinnon, *Explorations in Theology*, p. 185. For MacKinnon, this message becomes particularly pertinent when viewed in relation to those involved in the plot to assassinate Hitler.

¹⁴⁰ MacKinnon, *Explorations in Theology*, p. 186

¹⁴¹ MacKinnon, *Explorations in Theology*, p. 187 It is this very intractability – the idea that 'the issue of the day is not within our power, even if there are no human agents other than ourselves to undertake it' – which lies at the heart of Plato's rejection of tragic drama.

¹⁴² MacKinnon, *Explorations in Theology*, p. 186

¹⁴³ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 318

¹⁴⁴ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 318

¹⁴⁵ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 33 & p. 318

Thus for Sheinberg, Shostakovich's music speaks of that which we find at the heart of MacKinnon's appraisal of the tragic in art. *The Nose*, although not tragic drama in the Shakespearian sense of the term, nonetheless shows, most particularly in its recourse to the grotesque, that this composer's comedy is one that is also tempered by an underlying presence of the tragic. In his caricatures of the darker sides of human nature, Shostakovich is showing through his art that very same intractability of our moral decision-making, and thus the unavoidable tragedy inherent in human life, with which MacKinnon is concerned. As Sheinberg puts it: '...Shostakovich's music speaks about human nature as horrifying and ludicrous, simultaneously repellent and cruel, cowardly and loving, humorous and courageous. This very presentation adorns his music with the bitter-sweet smile of human compassion, which embraces, with helpless resignation as much as with ironical acceptance, the view that all people are grotesque, simply because they are human beings.'¹⁴⁶ What is more, Shostakovich does not spare even himself from such appraisals but rather counts himself among those he caricatures, for '[w]hen he inserted his own musical initials into several of his whirling, frenzied dances of life and death, he showed his awareness of being as human as those to whom his music is addressed'.¹⁴⁷

In so doing, argues Sheinberg, Shostakovich charts new territory in the musical expression of human nature. Whilst Mahler, one of the greatest influences upon Shostakovich's musical development and the closest to him in terms of musical style, 'eventually grants the pathetic and banal humankind the gift of divine grace', Shostakovich, by contrast, does not seek in his music to transcend the limits of the tragic reality of human nature.¹⁴⁸ Rather, she concludes, what we are given instead is 'the gift of human compassion achieved through ironic acceptance' – the musical realisation and embrace of the true nature of human existence.¹⁴⁹ Here, then, in the same way as in the string quartets, Shostakovich desires to speak more immediately of the human than of the transcendent, and to speak of that humanity as it really is, in all its lightness and in all its tragedy.

Returning to MacKinnon, we find in his work a way by which we might relate theologically to a sense of tragedy such as is here expressed. In contrast to Steiner, for

¹⁴⁶ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 318

¹⁴⁷ Sheinberg, *Irony*, pp. 318-319

¹⁴⁸ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 319

¹⁴⁹ Sheinberg, *Irony*, p. 319

MacKinnon, Christianity is not comic, but rather has an essentially tragic resonance. For him we never escape from the surd of suffering and evil.¹⁵⁰ Tragedy thus forms an inescapable part of theology, implicit within its very nature because of the fact that all victories are scarred by that which has been done to those instrumental in their success. Proper recognition of this, he remarks, is all too often lacking from the works of those who discuss the resurrection, which often become shallow and meaningless as a result, and many scholars have until relatively recently, he maintains, shied away from reading the gospels as the works of tragic literature which they truly are.¹⁵¹

If Shostakovich's musical comedy speaks to us theologically, then it would appear that it speaks of a theology such as this, for whilst *The Nose* contains much that is genuinely humorous, it also includes a perceptiveness of human nature that passes through the comically grotesque to embrace the grotesquely tragic.

To bring together what I said earlier about humour and what I have said here about tragedy I turn to the notion of *forgiveness*. For Steiner, as we have seen, Christianity is only tragic when there is no room for God's forgiveness – when we believe that the finite limitations of human nature are the sum total of our existence. This, I contend, is the oversight of MacKinnon who, in his estimation of theology as irredeemably tragic, fails to acknowledge the fundamentality of forgiveness to the work of theology, and thus cannot accept the ultimate comedy of Christianity. What is more, it also rings true of Shostakovich, whose music, although filled with empathy and compassion, has little to offer by way of restoration or reconciliation. Indeed, as was discussed in chapter five, Shostakovich struggled even to forgive himself, let alone to portray through his music the notion of forgiveness between others.¹⁵²

Following Barth's suggestion in the *Ethics*, I propose that we understand the relation between comedy and tragedy in Shostakovich by way of eschatological tension: if Steiner's comedic theology, glimpsed in the lighter moments of *The Nose*, awaits us in the fullness of a time still to come, then the tragedy of humanity inherent within this work serves to remind us of the distance left to travel, and of the inevitable darkness that lies along the way. This, then, is music not so much about forgiveness as about the

¹⁵⁰ MacKinnon, *Explorations in Theology*, p. 194

¹⁵¹ MacKinnon, *Explorations in Theology*, pp. 192-194

¹⁵² See chapter 5, p. 173 & p. 192

human *need for* forgiveness: of the need for that means by which we overcome tragedy, and through which that which is foreshadowed by the humour of this work comes to be genuinely and tangibly embraced. As with so many of Shostakovich's works, therefore, at the heart of *The Nose* there lies an absence which speaks of a presence, where what is missing becomes all the more apparent precisely because of the fact that it is not yet to be found.

Having explored the musical expressivity of Shostakovich in relation to culture, icons, interiority and comedy, I now turn in my concluding chapter to ask how we might conceive theologically of Shostakovich's music as a whole.

Part Three
Conclusion

Conclusion

‘We shall not cease from exploring’, writes T. S. Eliot in the concluding part of his *Four Quartets*, ‘and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time’.¹ In this thesis, I have explored the music of Shostakovich from a theological point of view. Now, in the conclusion of my arguments, I return to that place from which I started – the musical works of this composer – to reflect upon how we might perceive them afresh in light of that which has gone before.

Shostakovich’s music, I have argued, can be understood primarily as an engagement with, and an expression of, the nature of the human condition. In his public works, refusing either to simply support the government or to effectively commit suicide by frankly opposing it, Shostakovich instead provides a reflection of the reality of life for his compatriots, in all its fear and suffering, confusion and sadness. In his more intimate pieces, he turns to explore what I referred to in chapter five as the ‘eternal questions’ of love and death, and to consider the inner life of the individual. Human nature, he tells us, is both tragic and terrifying, humorous and courageous, and, most significantly, never lies beyond the possibility of transformative action.

Within this music, I have argued, Russian themes are often prominent. In the Seventh Symphony Dostoevsky’s influence becomes particularly apparent, reflected in the composer’s portrayal of concerns central to this writer’s novels: the spirituality of Russian Orthodoxy; the importance of the icon; the value of the human person. Also of evidence both here and in other of Shostakovich’s works is a musical engagement with what we can call, especially although not exclusively in relation to Dostoevsky, a Russian notion of suffering – of those trials which are unavoidably present in human life and which are necessary for true fulfilment – heard in the slow, moving requiems of the Symphonies, the death-obsessed string quartets and the tragic vision of humanity contained within *The Nose*.

At the same time, Shostakovich’s music is not entirely bleak, for it explores not only themes of suffering and death but also the idea of *hope*. This music, I have argued,

¹ T. S. Eliot, ‘Little Gidding’, in *Collected Poems* (London: Faber, 1963), p. 222

stands as a challenge to cultural inhumanities, offering the possibility of critique and also of regeneration. An expression of solidarity with those who suffer, it provides a testimony to that which should be preserved against all odds. It reveals the potential for the exploration of the depths of human life in art, and opens up the possibility of there being a register of expression through which we might refer to a dimension of reality outside of our own. What is more, even in its darkest moments, it still succeeds in raising questions of hope, here felt all the more profoundly by virtue of the absence of this very theme.

My understanding of the music of Shostakovich, then, has been predominantly shaped by an expressivist interpretation of the art form, in which emphasis is placed not upon music's form or structure but rather upon its interconnectedness with human experience. As Mozart is for Karl Barth a paradigm of musical order, so Shostakovich, I have argued, is exemplary of the relationship that exists between music and life. Through voicing the inner turmoil of its creator and the suffering of a whole nation, in taking on culturally-generated significances and by conveying both a sense of comedy and of tragedy, this music demonstrates for us that the value of aesthetic experience is, as Scruton puts it, 'the attempt to create a place for ourselves in the world, and to situate our selves among our fellows'. To hear music thus, as McClary tells us, is to perceive it as a commentary on human life as it is lived, and so to liberate it to bear true meaning and significance within the world.²

Whilst making a case about Shostakovich, I have also tried to establish that musical expressivity contributes to a Christian understanding of music. Drawing upon the work of Jeremy Begbie, who argues for a theological understanding of music in which the cosmological gives grounding to the expressive, I have attempted to do justice to the latter part of this account of music's nature and, in so doing, to engage with and to ultimately overcome those difficulties which have previously been aligned with such an approach. In light of Barth's warning, informed by the theology of Schleiermacher, that an appeal to musical expressivism makes music and religion synonymous, I have put the suggestion that, in the case of Shostakovich, the Fifth Symphony points to the preservation of God's otherness by standing over and against culture and critiquing it. Responding to the concern that expressivism leads to a 'religion of aestheticism' I have argued, with recourse to a theology of the icon, that the Seventh Symphony

² See chapter 2, pp. 72-74

demonstrates the potential of art to inspire transformation without becoming intrinsically revelatory. Through the string quartets, I have sought to reflect upon the place of interiority within theology, arguing with reference to Hegel that an exploration of the depths of life such as is here achieved is central both to what it means to be human and to theological endeavour. Finally, I have affirmed the place of comedy within theology, demonstrating through *The Nose* how the comic and the tragic, when taken together, bring to the fore a sense of eschatological tension.

Music's 'sonic integrities', then, remain of central importance for theological reflection, but so, too, do those features that give music its life. Here the need for music to be understood as a metaphysical category is removed and we are enabled, as Epstein puts it, to 'articulate music's theological significance beyond its traditional symbolism of harmony and order'.³ In this, music's relevance to the whole of human experience, in all its darkness and its light, becomes accessible to theological enquiry, and such enquiry is in turn prompted to engage with, appreciate and celebrate music as the human-made and culturally-embedded form of artistic expression that it truly is.

At the heart of understanding music as expressive lies the notion of music as a fundamentally *creative* act. It is true that thinking of art in terms of creativity is found in Scripture only, at best, in Exodus 31, and not at all in the Patristic and Medieval tradition. By the late fifteenth century, however, as the curators of the Leonardo exhibition illuminatingly make clear, it was possible to move from a celebration of God's works in creation to a celebration of imagination as a divine act.⁴ Three centuries later Blake can write in Jerusalem, 'I know of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty of both body and mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination – Imagination, the real and Eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow, and in which we shall live in our Eternal or Imaginative Bodies, when these Vegetable Mortal Bodies are no more'.⁵ Imagination is, for him, 'the Divine Body of the Lord Jesus'.⁶ Though Blake was a marginal figure he aptly expressed the veneration of creativity characteristic of Romanticism which has survived in our much more cynical and disenchanting age. Today it is more or less taken for granted that, as

³ Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg*, p. 14

⁴ They argue this in the contrast between the Louvre version of *The Virgin on the Rocks* and the London version which, they suggest, celebrates imagination more than the beauty of creation.

⁵ William Blake, *Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: OUP, 1966), p. 716

⁶ Blake, *Complete Writings*, p. 624

John de Gruchy puts it, honouring human creativity is a way of honouring God who enables us to be creative, so that creativity comes to be understood as a gift of the spirit.⁷ Human creativity, he argues, should be understood not simply as a means to self-satisfaction but rather as an element essential to the personal and social well-being of humankind: 'Becoming more human' he writes, 'has to do with...the deepening of the capacity to imagine'.⁸ Drawing on the work of P. T. Forsyth, he concludes that 'art speaks to the soul and can save religion from becoming closed and hardened. Faith without a sense of beauty, or religion severed from imagination and over-engrossed with public and practical affairs...leaves us with a 'drought in our own souls'... Art, in fact, is 'not a luxury' but 'a necessity of human nature'.⁹

Understanding creativity thus, I want to argue, provides the key to unlocking the specific contribution of Shostakovich to a theological understanding of music. As I have argued, hope runs through the works of this composer, and does so in the midst of great darkness: Shostakovich was able to be creative even whilst enduring hopelessness and despair. Even in its blackest moments, when it speaks only of the absence of hope, that this music should exist at all provides a testimony to the flourishing of creativity against all odds and, in so doing, affirms the survival of what it means to be human in the most inhumane of worlds. Artist Helga Weiss, who witnessed as a child the Holocaust in Poland and later survived imprisonment in Terezín, recounts that: 'My father told me that, whatever happens, we must remain human, so that we do not die like cattle. And I think that the will to create was an expression of the will to live, and to survive, as human beings.'¹⁰ I understand Shostakovich as exemplifying precisely this and therefore as displaying some kind of redemptive force, as de Gruchy argues. 'Artists', he maintains, 'help awaken our awareness to the present reality in all its pain and hope, thereby enabling transforming vision'.¹¹ Ernst Bloch argued something similar, focusing on the hope which, 'akin to inspiration and creativity', keeps the utopian impulse

⁷ de Gruchy, *Being Human*, p. 195. Blake had already argued virtually this point: 'Poetry fetter'd Fetters the Human Race. Nations are Destroy'd or Flourish in proportion as Their Poetry, Painting and Music are Destroy'd or Flourish!' Blake, *Complete Writings*, p. 624

⁸ de Gruchy, *Being Human*, p. 50

⁹ de Gruchy, *Being Human*, p. 198. As Russian pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy puts it: 'Art is not just entertainment... Art is something terribly essential, terribly important, that communicates to you something...eternal. And when it doesn't: then it is entertainment.' Vladimir Ashkenazy in *Imagine: Being a Concert Pianist*. BBC2. 2nd August 2011

¹⁰ Helga Weiss, as cited in Vanessa Thorpe, 'The schoolgirl who survived the Holocaust by fooling the Nazis', *The Guardian*. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/oct/16/schoolgirl-who-fooled-the-nazis> (16.10.2011; accessed 16.10.2011)

¹¹ de Gruchy, *Being Human*, pp. 199-200.

alive.¹² For Bloch, as for Dostoevsky, there is no incentive to remain alive in a world devoid of beauty's creative potential.¹³

Famously, it was Bloch's work which prompted Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*. Arguing that eschatology must form the starting point of theology, for Moltmann, the world of imagination is central to revolutionary change. 'Christian hope', he writes, 'is...summoned and empowered to creative transformation of reality', and thus 'imagination for the kingdom of God in the world, and for the world in God's kingdom' necessarily lies at the heart of theological endeavour.¹⁴ As Trevor Hart puts it: 'The power of the future to transform the present lies chiefly in the capacity of God's Spirit to capture our imagination and to open up for us a new vision of God's promise and the present which it illuminates, thereby stimulating alternative ways of being in the world in the present, living towards the future.'¹⁵ Eschatology, as Moltmann understands it, is fundamentally a matter of hope.¹⁶

As we have seen, eschatology is not a new theme in theological reflection on music: in my first chapter, I discussed how, for Begbie, music's temporal processes stand as an analogy to the unfolding of eschatological promise, whilst for Barth, it is in the harmony of Mozart that we are enabled to hear darkness being overcome by light. In the music of Shostakovich, however, this theme comes to be explored in a different way. Here, I have argued, we are not drawn to relate to ideas of hope through the harmony or temporality of musical form, but rather that it is through engaging with the value and meaning of music understood as an essentially expressive and creative act that we are enabled to perceive, interpret and relate to what it means to have hope for the world. In

¹² Verena Kast, *Joy, Inspiration, and Hope*, trans. by Douglas Whitcher (Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), p. 152; Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* 3 vols., trans. by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice & Paul Knight (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2986), vol. 1, p. 10

¹³ Douglas Kellner, 'Ernst Bloch, Utopia and Ideology Critique', in *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch*, ed. by Jamie Owen Daniel & Tom Moylan (London & New York: Verso, 1997), pp. 80-95 (p. 82); see chapter 4, p. 155. Bloch here calls into question the capitalist organising of society and, in asserting that it is creativity and not production that drives us forward, he also gives us a modified view of Marxist ideology. Kellner, 'Ernst Bloch', p. 81

¹⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. by James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, 1967), p. 34; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1996), xiv

¹⁵ Trevor Hart, 'Imagination for the Kingdom of God? Hope, Promise, and the Transformative Power of an Imagined Future', in *God Will Be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. by Richard Bauckham (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), pp. 49-76 (p. 75)

¹⁶ Love, which for Epstein must play a part in theological reflection on music, is here also to be found, for as Tina Beattie puts it: 'Hope is love's commitment to the future.' de Gruchy, *Being Human*, p. 210. Others who have sought to account for artistic creativity as in some way the key to a theological understanding of the significance of art include Anthony Monti in *A Natural Theology of the Arts: Imprint of the Spirit* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) and Nicholas Wolterstorff in *Art in Action*.

this way, then, music's eschatological significance is revealed not only in the qualities that comprise its structural existence, but also through the unique experience of sound translated into art.

In the works of Shostakovich, therefore, the expression of a truly Russian eschatology is to be found: here human nature is unredeemed but not beyond redemption; death is inevitable but the will to live triumphant; suffering is not negated but neither does it eclipse all hope. This, then, is the theological dialectic of Shostakovich's music: a dynamic creativity in which hope and despair are found together, in which the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it.

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