

I

Shostakovich and Us

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I

'I wish, Ladies and Gentleman, I could cure myself of the habit of speaking ironically,' Max Beerbohm once teased a radio audience. 'I should *so* like to express myself in a straightforward manner.' Earlier, just as straightforwardly, he had written (in *Zuleika Dobson*) that 'one is taught to refrain from irony, because mankind does tend to take it literally'.¹ Every letters column, every writer's mailbag, overflows with corroboration. Recently, a Bay Area columnist tried kicking at the budget cuts that are hobbling the state of California's public library system with a burst of fulsome mock-approval. Her next column naturally consisted of apologies to all the book-lovers and librarians she had offended. 'I was being ironic,' she tried explaining to one. 'If you were, I would know it,' her caller retorted.² Surely one of the most striking features of the theatre historian Isaak Glikman's 1993 edition of Shostakovich's letters, the first major post-Soviet contribution to the literature on the greatest of all Soviet artists, is the frequency with which the editor (one of the composer's closest friends) intervenes to explain that Shostakovich, you see, was making a joke. A choice specimen is his commentary to a letter Shostakovich sent him from Odessa as a new year's greeting on 29 December 1957. This is the first paragraph:

I arrived in Odessa on the day of the nationwide celebration of the fortieth anniversary of Soviet Ukraine. This morning I went outdoors. You, of course, can well understand that it is simply impossible to stay at home on such a day. Despite overcast skies, all of Odessa turned out. Everywhere there were portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and also Comrades A. I. Belyayev, L. I. Brezhnev, N. A. Bulganin, K. E. Voroshilov, N. G. Ignatov, A. I. Kirilenko, F. R. Kozlov, O. V. Kuusinen, A. I. Mikoyan, H. A. Mukhitdinov, M. A. Suslov, E. A. Furtseva, N. S. Khrushchev, N. M. Shvernik, A. A. Aristov, P. A. Pospelov, Y. E. Kalinberzin, A. P. Kirichenko, A. N. Kosygin, K. T. Mazurov, V. P. Mzhavanadze, M. G. Pervukhin, N. T. Kalchenko.

¹ Quotations from Beerbohm via 'Aristides' (Joseph Epstein), 'Toys in My Attic', *American Scholar*, 61/1 (Winter 1992), 8.

² Adair Lara, 'Oh, I see, You're Making a Joke', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9 Nov. 1993, p. D8.

And this is Glikman's annotation: 'The whole paragraph, seemingly borrowed from a standard newspaper account of those days, is full of pointed irony. Dmitry Dmitriyevich with deliberate comic pedantry lists the names alphabetically [*sic*], omitting neither initials nor surnames. Indeed the whole letter maintains a satirical tone.' Here, with apologies, is Shostakovich's second paragraph:

Everywhere there are flags, slogans, posters. All around are joyful, radiant Russian, Ukrainian and Jewish faces. Here, there and everywhere one hears salutations honoring the great banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, and also in honor of Comrades A. I. Belyayev, L. I. Brezhnev, N. A. Bulganin, K. E. Voroshilov, N. G. Ignatov, A. I. Kirichenko, F. R. Kozlov, O. V. Kuusinen, A. I. Mikoyan, H. A. Mukhitdinov, M. A. Suslov, E. A. Furtseva, N. S. Khrushchev, N. M. Shvernink, A. A. Aristov, P. A. Pospelov, Y. E. Kalinberzin, A. P. Kirilenko, A. N. Kosygin, K. T. Mazurov, V. P. Mzhavanadze, M. G. Pervukhin, N. T. Kalchenko, D. S. Korochenko. Everywhere one hears Russian and Ukrainian speech. Now and then one hears the foreign speech of representatives of progressive humanity, who have come to Odessa to congratulate the Odessans on their great holiday. I walked around and, unable to contain my joy, returned to the hotel and decided to describe to you, as best I can, the nationwide celebration in Odessa.

And here is the commentary: 'Shostakovich ridicules the false rejoicing of the crowd of city-dwellers filling the streets of Odessa. The repetition, or in musical terms the recapitulation, powerfully reinforces the humorous effect.'³

Did we really need to be told? Did Glikman really think we did? He seems so eager to point out what we could never miss that he passes over, or maybe has not noticed, a joke that really is worth calling attention to. It was only because I had put myself to the trouble of transcribing the whole farrago word for word that I found the names Kirilenko and Kirichenko interchanged the second time around, identifying the pair as the Ukrainian nomenklatura's Dobchinsky and Bobchinsky, the Tweedledee–Tweedledum bureaucrats in Gogol's farce, *The Inspector General*. Since I got to tell about it, I feel my time was rewarded. But what was Glikman's reward? What was the point of instructing us that the letter contained a global irony so transparent and unsubtle?

One's first assumption is that the old Soviet habits die hard. Anyone who has worked with Soviet editions of primary sources such as composers' letters will recall similar schoolmasterly interventions—intrusive, mistrustful of the reader, seemingly needless, often verging on the comic in their own right. One that has been stuck in my memory now for over twenty years, owing to what I have to call its grotesque typicality, is the editor's prim retort, in a volume of selected articles by Cesar Cui, the nineteenth-century composer and critic, to a passing remark Cui made in polemic with his perennial antagonist Hermann Laroche. Cui wrote that 'unevenness in the work of artists who are devoid of critical

³ *Pis'ma k drugu: Pis'ma D.D. Shostakovicha k I.D. Glikmanu*, ed. I. D. Glikman (Moscow and St Petersburg, 1993), 135–6. The commentaries have been somewhat abridged and conflated.

discernment, like Rubinstein or Tchaikovsky, can be startling'. The editor, writing in the wake of the so-called 'Zhdanovshchina' (after Andrey Zhdanov, the Politburo member who directed the post-war reimposition of strict Stalinist conformism in the arts), jumps in on Laroche's side—on the side, that is, of nineteenth-century Russia's most conservative critic—to caution the reader, in a footnote, that 'if this assertion can to some extent be justified in the case of A. Rubinstein, it is completely mistaken in the case of P. Tchaikovsky'.⁴

It often happened that the footnotes in Soviet publications kept up a sort of running feud with the text; a famous tragicomic instance was the hardliner musicologist Yury Keldysh's 1935 edition of some challenging memoirs by the ostensibly 'populist' composer Modest Musorgsky's aristocratic companion and probable lover, Count Arseny Golenishchev-Kutuzov.⁵ Altogether painful was the footnote in which the editors—the Jewish editors, I note regretfully—of a 1971 edition of Musorgsky's letters sought to soften the impact of one of the composer's harsher attacks on the Jews: 'In spite of what might seem the blatant anti-Semitic character of these lines', they wrote, 'in the light of Musorgsky's world-view, as well as his personal friendships and his creative interests, this sally is to be explained not by any chauvinistic outlook on the part of the composer, but by a general aversion to the bourgeoisie and to the mercenary element.'⁶ Leaving aside the part about some of the composer's best friends, could the editors have believed that their exculpatory equation of Jewishness with moneygrubbing was any the less blatantly an anti-Semitic slur than anything Musorgsky had to offer?

No, of course not; but one understands the need for all of these intrusions. They were the price of publication; the only alternative, under the conditions of Soviet censorship, was expurgation. (Indeed, the anti-Semitic passage from Musorgsky is expurgated not only in previous, but also in subsequent Russian editions of his correspondence.) But that does not explain Glikman's commentaries, which were written under no such constraints. Nor have we taken their full measure. For the problem of irony can cut the other way, too. People can be schooled and then overschooled in irony, as the boy who cried wolf found out some time ago. So just as often Glikman felt called upon to step in and explain that Shostakovich, you see, was not making a joke. In one of the earlier letters in the book, Shostakovich writes, 'I'm working a lot, but not composing anything.' As Glikman explains, this meant that Shostakovich was doing a lot of film-scoring, which he did not take seriously as creative work. Then

⁴ Cesar Antonovich Cui, *Izbrannye stat'i*, ed. Izrail Lazarevich Gusin (Leningrad, 1952), 238, 592.

⁵ A. A. Golenishchev-Kutuzov, 'Vospominaniya o M.P. Musorgskom', ed. Y. V. Keldish, in M. V. Ivanov-Boretsky, ed., *Muzikal'noe nasledstvo: Sbornik materialov po istorii muzykal'noi kul'turi v Rossii*, vol. i (Moscow, 1935), 5–49. For an analysis of the commentary see R. Taruskin, *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue* (Princeton, 1993), 26–34.

⁶ M. P. Musorgsky, *Literaturnoe nasledie*, ed. A. Orlova and M. Pekelis, vol. i (Moscow, 1971), 354. The passage glossed is on p. 245.

Shostakovich writes, 'I hope that these are only temporary setbacks for my modest and insignificant talent.' Glikman insists that we take this literally: 'These words are not by any means a pose; he did not like posing.' And yet a great deal in the letter would seem to contradict this interpretation. For one thing, Shostakovich himself appears to mock the sentence in question, observing immediately afterwards that 'modesty becomes a person'. For another, the sentence parodies an earlier one in the letter, in which Shostakovich sympathizes with Glikman's reported illness by saying, 'I hope that these are only temporary setbacks for your mighty organism.'⁷

In any case, as revealed in the letters Glikman has made public, Shostakovich's modesty did not extend to self-denigration. One of the most moving letters of all, for me, and the one that if pressed I would single out as the most significant in the book, is the letter that ends with the following paragraph:

During my illness, or rather my illnesses, I picked up the score of one of my works. I looked through it from beginning to end. I was astonished at its quality. It seemed to me that having created such a thing I can be proud and serene. It was devastating to think that it was I who composed this composition.⁸

Glikman speculates that the composition in question was the Eighth Symphony, one of the works that were under a tacit but official ban (or 'idling', as the expression went) at the time of writing. 'And then one fine day,' he writes in his commentary, 'on the eve of the new year, there arose in [Shostakovich] the need somehow, in a letter to me, to answer his persecutors, tell them what he thought of their judgement, their verdicts and sentences, and what he thought about himself.'⁹ What made the letter so moving—for Glikman, too, I would hazard a guess (though for some reason he does not say so), as well as for me—is not so much what is said within it as the date that stands above it. The 'one fine day' on which Shostakovich wrote with such intensity about the value of his work was in fact a day of days: 21 December 1949, Stalin's seventieth birthday, the grand apotheosis to which Solzhenitsyn devoted a whole surrealist chapter in *The First Circle*, a day that was bloated up from end to end of the Soviet Union in an unprecedented discharge of bellowed, orchestrated lies.

This letter opens out into a much broader, more important interpretive terrain than the special, relatively (ahem) straightforward case of irony. I mean the general terrain of subtexts and multivalent meaning (what literary theorists like to call 'polysemy'). This is the interpretive space in which, for at least half a century, the vast majority of Shostakovich readings have taken place. As in the case of the letter I have just quoted, knowing the dates of things can be terribly important. Knowing, for example, that the first performance of the Fifth Symphony took place in November 1937, at the very height of the so-called 'Yezhovshchina' (after Nikolay Yezhov, the 'iron commissar' of internal affairs),

⁷ *Pis'ma k drugu*, 72–3.

⁸ *Ibid.* 85.

⁹ *Ibid.* 86.

perhaps the bloodiest political terror the world had ever seen, provides an indispensable subtext for comprehending the palpable funereal imagery in the slow movement. Even if it should turn out that Shostakovich never intended any such thing (though I have no idea how such a fact could be established), perceiving the connection is essential to understanding the way in which the symphony was received—as all reports agree, the slow movement provoked a wave of open weeping in the hall—and why Shostakovich's music was valued the way it was.

That social value, which made Shostakovich's music as controversial outside Russia as it was precious inside, was precisely the result of the play of subtexts—the uncontrollable play of subtexts, I should add. It was one of the very few things the totalitarian regime was powerless to control short of banning the music, which it occasionally did. And that made it precious. 'I always sensed intuitively in it a protest against the regime,' says Solomon Volkov, the author of that shameless best-seller *Testimony*, a book that falsely purported to be Shostakovich's transcribed oral memoirs. (Its ruses were exposed a dozen years ago by the American Shostakovich biographer Laurel E. Fay.) But this time Volkov was speaking in his own voice, rather than through his little puppet Mitya, and we can believe him.¹⁰ And we can agree: of course he sensed protest in Shostakovich's music, along with millions of his countrymen. They needed to sense such a thing; and music, with its blessed polysemy, afforded them a consolation no other art could provide under conditions of Soviet thought control.

Music was special. Music *is* special. Nothing could prevent Volkov and many other intellectuals—as he reports in the introduction to *Testimony*, again written in his own voice—from associating the violent music to the second movement of Shostakovich's Eleventh Symphony not with the events of 'Bloody Sunday' in 1905, as the Symphony's official programme stated, but with the more recent bloody events in Budapest, where Soviet troops had lawlessly put down the Hungarian rebellion. ('Never mind,' an ex-Soviet musicologist of Volkov's generation has assured me, 'we *knew* what it meant.') For Volkov, for my friend, and for many others, assembling in a concert hall and listening together to Shostakovich's music gave them an otherwise unavailable sense of solidarity in protest.

Did the composer intend it? The question, I submit, is irrelevant. A hundred years earlier, radical students had loved to foregather in the balcony of St Petersburg's old Great Stone Theatre to cheer Italian singers who reached their high notes in Rossini on words like *libertà*. There was nothing Tsar Nikolay I could do to prevent it. Does it matter whether Rossini intended it? Sometimes the composer's intention is manifestly irrelevant to the meaning of his work,

¹⁰ 'Zdes' chelovek sgorel', *Muzykal'naya akademiya*, 3 (1992), 6. On *Testimony*, see Laurel Fay, 'Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose Testimony?', *Russian Review*, 39 (1980), 484–93.

and insistence on limiting meaning to original intention only, and obviously, impoverishes it. The veteran Russian scholar Daniel Zhitomirsky recently called attention to a gripping instance of this sort of contingency involving the song cycle 'From Jewish Folk Poetry', long regarded as being, quite intentionally, one of Shostakovich's riskiest compositions.¹¹ Once again, knowing the date crucially affects not just interpretation but our direct apprehension of the work. 'From Jewish Folk Poetry' was written during the black year 1948. That was the year of the Zhdanovshchina, and of the Communist Party's infamous 'Resolution on Music', a document that subjected Shostakovich to his second bout of official persecution. It was also the year in which for the first time anti-Semitism, under the guise of a campaign against 'cosmopolitanism', became official government policy in the Soviet Union. The actor Solomon Mikhoels was murdered in Minsk. The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was liquidated and its leadership arrested. Over the next five years, practically every Jewish cultural activist in the country would be executed. Shostakovich's song cycle was the most demonstrative of his several appropriations of Jewish thematic and subject-matter, and when you connect the various events of 1948, even when Stalin's cynical recognition of the infant state of Israel that year and the triumphant arrival of Golda Meir (then Myerson), the Israeli ambassador, just in time for the High Holidays are weighed in the balance, it seems more convincing than ever to associate that appropriation of Jewish folklore with the composer's wish covertly to affirm solidarity with the persecuted. Indeed, it was a way of identifying himself and his colleagues, creative artists in Stalin's Russia, with another oppressed minority.

Obviously, at the time of writing this composition could not be performed except clandestinely (which, according to recent reports, it was, more than once, to tearful gatherings of Jews and artists). It was written 'for the drawer' as one said then, along with the Violin Concerto, whose Scherzo contains another Jewish theme in direct conjunction with the first tentative and somewhat ambiguous occurrence in Shostakovich's work of his musical monogram, DSCH (D, E flat, C, and B, as they are named in German), that would haunt his music from then on with increasing frequency. Yet even for the drawer, Shostakovich took precautions. He changed the words of one song, as the ex-Soviet Israeli musicologist Joachim Braun has pointed out, to name the Tsar explicitly as the force behind a Jewish father's exile to Siberia. And he followed the first eight songs, which paint a uniformly bleak picture of Jewish life in Russia, with a final optimistic trio depicting life in the 'Sovietische Heymland' (to recall the name of that egregious showcase of a Yiddish journal that appeared briefly during the Khrushchev years).

Braun calls these last three songs 'tribute money', and tries, wishfully in my opinion, to portray them as a veiled, deliberate parody of the authentic Jewish

¹¹ See D. Zhitomirsky, 'Shostakovich', *Muzykal'naya akademiya*, 3 (1993), 29.

style elsewhere embraced in the cycle.¹² Whether or not a parody, the optimistic songs are definitely an emollient. Even so, the last of them, the exultant song of a Jewish mother about her children's prospects in the land of the Soviets, makes for a rousing, if conventional, finale.

That, at least, seems to have been Shostakovich's intention. But between 1948, when the songs were written, and 1955, when they were first publicly performed in the early days of the 'thaw', a great many events had taken place. Among them was the so-called Doctor's Plot, the loudly publicized arrest of six prominent Jewish doctors (plus two token Russians and a Ukrainian) on charges of murdering the Politburo members Zhdanov and Shcherbakov at the behest of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (identified by *Pravda*, in the paranoiac jargon of the day, as an 'international Jewish bourgeois national organization'), and plotting to wipe out the rest of 'the leading cadres of the Soviet Union'. This was widely, and one can only think plausibly, read as a *provokatsiya* intended to justify the wholesale deportation or destruction of the Jews of European Russia, from which only Stalin's providential death a few weeks later saved them. (Among those briefly arrested in the immediate aftermath of the Doctor's Plot was one of Shostakovich's close friends, the Jewish composer Moisey Vainberg, who had fled to the USSR from Poland in the wake of the Nazi-Soviet invasion of 1939. Vainberg was arrested not because he was involved in any organized Jewish activities, but because he had the misfortune of being related by marriage both to Mikhoels and to Professor Miron Vovsi, one of the accused medical assassins.)

Thus, by the time Shostakovich's song cycle reached its first public culmination, its concluding words—'Our sons have become doctors! A star shines over our heads!'—had taken on a new and chilling meaning the composer never foresaw. They now pointed, with excruciating irony, to the utter betrayal of the hopes an oppressed people had once vested in the Russian Revolution. And the star! Instead of the red star atop the Kremlin one now thought of the stars sewn on the garments of the German Jews.

It is clear, I should think, that Shostakovich could never have intended this particular irony, which is now perhaps the most potent jolt his song cycle can administer to the appropriately attuned listener. It is equally clear, I hope, that it is now as much, and as legitimately, a part of the experience of the music as anything he did intend, and that he could only have welcomed it, if one may put it so, and the contribution it made to the effect of his work on the consciousness of its hearers, and to its value as testimony. As contexts change, subtext accumulates. What made Shostakovich's music the secret diary of a nation was not only what he put into it, but what it allowed listeners to draw out.

¹² Joachim Braun, 'The Double Meaning of Jewish Elements in Dimitri Shostakovich's Music', *Musical Quarterly*, 71 (1985), 74–5.

Glikman's book, like Zhitomirsky's article, contains many moving, indeed wrenching moments, and a wealth of biographical revelation, some of it directly relevant, as we have seen, to the apprehension of Shostakovich's works. And yet there is—I won't say a flaw because it arises out of such honourable circumstances—a pervading predicament about its commentaries to which I have already drawn perhaps ungrateful attention, but which I nevertheless feel I must pursue because it has such a bearing on our business not only as scholars and as critics, but as listeners to Shostakovich.

The power of the book, as well as its dilemma, is summarized when, taking leave of the reader, Glikman confesses that the memory of Shostakovich is sacred to him.¹³ It was in order to protect the memory of his most cherished friend, and protect what *he* knew to be the meaning of his friend's words, that the editor felt called upon to interpose himself so often between the reader and the text. Irony, which is to say contradictions between the manifest sense of an utterance and its latent sense, inevitably became the primary object of his ministrations. In all cases, and regardless of which level of meaning he saw fit to espouse in a given case, his object was the same: to adjudicate and resolve the contradiction.

Like the Soviet readings to which I have compared them, Glikman's was thus an attempt to take possession of the meaning of the text, or perhaps, in his own view, to return possession to the rightful owner. It was an attempt to contain meaning and foreclose interpretation. In that sense it was an old Soviet habit, as I have suggested—or rather, it was an attempt to fight Soviet methods of appropriation with Soviet methods. What Glikman tried to do was to carry out a sort of pre-emptive strike not only against the old, opportunistic official view of Shostakovich, to which the reflexes of a lifetime had understandably rendered him permanently sensitive, but also against the equally opportunistic habits of secret nonconformist interpretation in which he knew his readers, in reaction to the very same coercive official construction, had been thoroughly trained.

But the efforts to resolve every contradiction and eliminate every ambiguity or multivalence inevitably produces inconsistencies and contradictions of its own. And the price of certainty is always reduction—reduction not only in meaning, but in interest and value. Glikman's presentation of Shostakovich's letters thus crystallizes in a microcosm, and with relatively unproblematic texts, the difficulties and the fascination that have always haunted the experience of Shostakovich's musical works, those vastly problematical texts, and our relationship to them—the problem, if you will, of 'Shostakovich and Us'.

The fact is that no one owns the meaning of the music, which has always supported—nay invited; nay compelled—multiple opportunistic and contradictory readings, and no one can ever own it. Under the old Soviet dispensation, of course, the Party claimed exclusive rights to it. Attempts by Volkov or

¹³ *Pis'ma k drugu*, 311.

Glikman, among many others, to return exclusive ownership to the composer are futile at best, dishonest at worst. The ‘Shostakovich’ to whom ownership is returned is an *ex post facto* construction—as he would remain even if the authenticity of *Testimony* were confirmed—through which latter-day interpreters, potentially including the composer, assert their own authority. Imagine Edgar Bergen making himself very small and trying to sit on Charlie McCarthy’s lap.¹⁴

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. No other music—indeed, no other body of texts—so radically forces engagement with the most fundamental issues of interpretation. No other body of texts so compellingly demonstrates that meaning is never wholly immanent but arises out of a process of interaction between subject and object, so that interpretation is never wholly subjective or wholly objective to the exclusion of the other. And no other body of texts so fully convinces us that the meaning of an art work, indeed of any communication, is never wholly stable, but is the product of its history, a history that only begins with its creation. (Otherwise, one could maintain, the United States national anthem is not a patriotic song but only a drinking song.)

Add to all of this the incredibly high stakes of the creative and interpretive game as played within the frontiers, both temporal and geographical, of a brutal political tyranny. Whether viewed internally or externally, whether in terms of their content or their context, Shostakovich’s works are fraught with horrific subtexts that can never be ignored. That is why they have always been, and will always be, objects of furious and manifold contention. We can never merely receive its messages; we are always implicated in their making, and therefore we can never be indifferent to them. It is never just Shostakovich. It is always Shostakovich and us.

II

The fact that not even Shostakovich’s devoted confidant can entirely succeed in determining for us the extent to which the composer’s texts contain irony, or even when they do, is all the evidence we need that irony, along with every other aspect of meaning, is not something that texts merely ‘contain’. Irony, as Stanley Fish so pithily puts it, ‘is neither the property of works nor the creation of an unfettered imagination, but a way of reading’.¹⁵ I quote Fish because he is the soul of quotability, not because his view of irony is a new one, still less

¹⁴ Edgar Bergen was a popular American ventriloquist whose most famous dummy was called Charlie McCarthy [ed.].

¹⁵ Stanley Fish, ‘Short People Got No Reason to Live: Reading Irony’, in *Doing What Comes Naturally* (Durham, NC, and London, 1989), 194.

because it is the invention of recent literary theory. It may be new to formalized theory, but it is, and has always been, a standard aspect of informal critical practice. I mean the practice of ordinary, non-professional readers and, in the particular and especially pertinent case of music, listeners.

The familiarity of the notion is attested by any number of old jokes, like the one about the two Jews who meet in the Warsaw railway station. 'Where are you going?' asks one. 'To Minsk,' answers the other. 'Ha!', says the first, 'You say you are going to Minsk so that I should think you're going to Pinsk, but I happen to know you *are* going to Minsk, so what's the point of lying?' Or the one about the two psychoanalysts. 'Hello,' says the first. 'Hmmm,' thinks the second, 'what did he mean by that?' Of course it is no accident that these jokes are peopled by Jews and psychoanalysts, representatives of distinguished gnostic traditions—two traditions (or is it only one?) that radically distinguish between manifest and latent content and radically privilege the truth-value of the latent. Many such traditions—the mythographic, the symbolist, the occult—lurk in the background of modern art. Nor let us forget an occult science that used to be practice until quite recently, that of kremlinology, along with its sister discipline, 'Aesopian' discourse. All Soviet texts—regardless of their provenance, whether public or private, official or underground, whether the latest photo of the Politburo line-up atop the Lenin mausoleum or the latest tape of clandestine 'guitar poetry'—have always been doggedly scrutinized for their latent content. The assumptions have always been that such content is there, that it will contradict the manifest content, and that it is the true content. Armed with such assumptions, who could fail to find it? Thus it is no accident, either, that the theoretical literature on irony, such as it is, overlaps as much as it does with the literature on censorship and its complicated interactions with artistic expression. True hermeneuticists, though often confused with exegetes who merely investigate and defend 'original intention', have long been subversive readers who have realized the necessarily arbitrary nature of the choice between manifest and latent content. Hans-Georg Gadamer, for one, long in advance of post-structuralist or reader-response theory, recognized (in *Truth and Method*, his classic treatise on interpretation) that hidden meanings are as much the creation of the reader as of the writer.¹⁶

All of this is quite apart from the special status, and the special attributes, of music—especially music in the post-Beethovenian symphonic tradition of which Shostakovich was such a master. This type of music was perhaps the most potent medium of artistic expression ever devised. It was equipped with a sophisticated and highly ramified practice of melodic elaboration and directed harmony, which enabled it both to forecast and to delay points of melodic and harmonic arrival. Since by means of these techniques it was always portending its own future and recalling its own past, it could be said to possess a powerful

¹⁶ See *Truth and Method* (1960; anon., trans. New York, 1982), 488.

internal sign-system—an introversive semiotic, Russian formalists would say—that enabled it to represent enormous tensions and cathartic releases that elicited corresponding affective responses in the hearer: responses that were controlled and directed more precisely, hence more powerfully, than those brought about by any other art medium. At the same time symphonic music was often laden with ‘extroversive’ symbols and portents as well. By Beethoven’s time there were already many conventions for representing the wider world and its contents, all the way from primitive onomatopoeia to sophisticated ‘intertextual’ allusion. The repertoire of such devices grew rapidly over the next hundred years, with Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich’s countryman and predecessor, making a signal contribution to its development. But—and this may be the key to its uncanny efficacy—such music resolutely eschewed the establishment within itself of any stable code by which its signs were to be read.

Thus, while its unfolding could simulate the manner and produce the effects of a drama or a narrative, music eluded conclusive paraphrase. Its inescapable assault on the senses and its dynamism, governed by a compelling syntax but unmediated by any established semantic canon, seemed to present and to evoke emotional intensity in a primal, inchoate fashion. ‘Music’, Schopenhauer was prompted thus to write, ‘gives the innermost kernel preceding all form, or the heart of things.’¹⁷ Wagner, under its (and Schopenhauer’s) spell, called music that appeared to do this ‘absolute music’, and the name has stuck. But as originally conceived, the idea of absolute music did not imply abstraction, still less formalism. It meant something uncanny and sublime—something that names no names, and was therefore unattached to objects, but that was supremely attached to subjects, to the point where it could seem to take over its beholders’ sentient lives for the duration, giving knowledge of a reality that went beyond the bounds of the sensory or phenomenal world, into the realm of gnosis or ‘intuition’.

What this amounts to, in interpretive terms, is an overwhelmingly fraught surface or manifest content, consisting of the dynamically unfolding sound shapes with all their clamour of introversive and extroversive significance, but a symbology whose referents had to be sought in the realm of latent content. This gave rise to a persistent, heated, and fruitless debate that still rages on and off both in and out of the academy. On the one hand are those who would prefer to simplify matters, denying the very existence of a latent content, and claiming for music the status of an inherently or ideally non-referential medium, unattached to the wider world and beatifically exempt from its vicissitudes. Their outstanding nineteenth-century spokesman was Eduard Hanslick, on whom Wagner modelled the figure of Beckmesser, the eternal pedant in *Die Meistersinger*. The outstanding twentieth-century representative of this position

¹⁷ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (1819), trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York, 1969), i. 263.

was the uprooted Russian nobleman and White émigré Igor Stravinsky, and in so identifying him I have identified the motivation for his aesthetic stance. In retrospect, it seems only predictable that the autonomist or formalist position should have achieved its completest ascendancy in the West during the cold war.

On the other hand were those who not only acknowledged the immanence of a latent musical content, but sought, or presumed, to define it, to fix it, to make it manifest, to have it name names and propound propositions, to subject it to paraphrase, which means subjecting it to limitation and ultimately to control. It is not difficult to see the political subtext informing this debate, or why the so-called referentialist side of the argument should have reached ascendancy in the twentieth-century totalitarian states at the same time that the autonomist position triumphed in the liberal democracies. But both of these extreme positions are impoverishing. The position that would eliminate a whole level of meaning from music impoverishes it literally and obviously. But the other side is hardly better. When fixed and paraphrased, the latent becomes blatant. And when the latent becomes wholly manifest, the manifest becomes superfluous.

For an astoundingly sustained demonstration of that blatancy, consider Ian MacDonald's book *The New Shostakovich*. Although published long after its subject's death, this travesty received its most trenchant critique from Shostakovich himself: 'When a critic, in *Worker and Theater* or *The Evening Red Gazette*, writes that in such-and-such a symphony Soviet civil servants are represented by the oboe and the clarinet, and Red Army men by the brass section, you want to scream!' That is what the composer said at a symposium, 'Soviet Music Criticism Is Lagging', held at the Union of Soviet Composers in 1933, and reported in its official organ, three years before he and all his colleagues were muzzled.¹⁸ And here is what Ian MacDonald has written about a passage in Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony: 'Over the thrumming rhythm, flute and horn now converse in a major-key transposition of the second subject: two dazed delegates agreeing that the rally had been splendid and the leader marvelous.'¹⁹

There is MacDonald's book in a nutshell. The author musters all the methods of Soviet music criticism at its most lagging, vulgar, and biased in order to prove that Shostakovich was a 'scornful dissident' and that his creative achievement amounted to nothing less, and nothing more, than an obsessively sustained invective against the Soviet regime and against Stalin personally. The methods are familiar. There is trivializing literary or pictorial paraphrase: an ascending scale to a climax in the first movement of the Fourth Symphony depicts the imagined arrival chez Shostakovich of the NKVD, 'audibly climbing the stairs . . .

¹⁸ 'Sovetskaya muzykal'naya kritika otstaet', *Sovetskaya muzyka*, 3 (1933), 121.

¹⁹ Ian MacDonald, *The New Shostakovich* (Boston, 1990), 130.

and bursting in through the door on a triumphant crescendo [*sic*].'²⁰ There is baby 'semiotics': every two-note motif says 'STA-LIN' (even when iambic) and every descending anapest means 'betrayal'. There is guilt by association: in defence of his thesis that Shostakovich was dissident from birth, MacDonald names a few anti-Utopian writers of the 1920s (Zamyatin, Olesha, Bulgakov, Zoshchenko) and points out that 'Shostakovich knew these writers personally . . . and socialized with them'.²¹ There is the shifting burden of proof ('There is nothing to suggest that the composer . . . opposed the non-Party writers.') There is 'verificationism' or confirmation bias: evidence in support of preconceived conclusions is selectively culled and marshalled; contrary evidence is suppressed or damned. And there is pervasive browbeating: 'There can be absolutely no doubt' of the author's readings; all others are 'palpably ridiculous'. At their most triumphant and peremptory, MacDonald's exegeses might have served as confessions to be shoved under Shostakovich's nose by the State Procurator, Vyshinsky, together with a pen.

III

Where latent musical meaning is neither negated nor successfully administered—where, in other words, it is acknowledged but contested—the value of its vessel is much enhanced. Nietzsche grasped this truth better than anyone when he wrote, 'Music reaches its high-water mark only among men who have not the ability or the right to argue.'²² The whole history of the arts in Russia (not just the Soviet Union), and the whole story of Shostakovich's life, are encapsulated in that sentence. In few countries have the arts ever mattered so much, and in few countries have they been subjected to more terrible stress, to a more terrible contest for ownership. As the pre-eminent modern master of the post-Beethovenian rhetoric (a rhetoric that declined in the West as the autonomist aesthetic triumphed) Shostakovich was willy-nilly the most important artist in the country where the arts were most important—and the most watchdogged, precisely because his was the medium with the most potential slippage between its manifest and its latent content. Because of this, Shostakovich was the one and only Soviet artist to be claimed equally by the official culture and the dissident culture.

He managed this feat, of course, by leaving interpretation to others. Not explaining his music—or any music—except under pressure, in the vaguest terms, became the Shostakovich defence, and a rule that he carried over even into his private life. That his letters to Glikman contained little about his music

²⁰ Ibid. 112.

²¹ Letter to the Editor, *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 Sept. 1990, p. 1.

²² Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Wanderer and His Shadow' (1880), in *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, ed. Geoffrey Clive (New York, 1965), 303.

beyond what Glikman calls 'statistics'—number of movements, timings, keys—might have been expected; Soviet letters, after all, were public documents whether or not they were published. But he was just as tight-lipped in conversation. A much-repeated anecdote (prized because it brings together two leading figures whose meetings were few) reproduces some summer shop talk between Prokofiev and Shostakovich overheard by the musicologist Grigory Shneyerson at Ivanovo, the Composers' Union retreat, immediately after the war:

Prokofiev: You know, I'm really going to get down to work on my Sixth Symphony. I've written the first movement [here follows a detailed description of its form], and now I'm writing the second, with three themes; the third movement will probably be in sonata form. I feel the need to compensate for the absence of sonata form in the previous movements.

Shostakovich: So, is the weather here always like this?²³

The later portions of Glikman's book, given over to a Boswellian or Robert-Crafty chronicle of Shostakovich's last years, show the composer growing more and more noncommittal even as circumstances seemed to favour the lowering of his guard. On 24 February 1974, less than half a year before his death, having listened to a symphony by his former pupil Boris Tishchenko and said little, Shostakovich offered a sort of apology that might be taken as his Aesopian credo:

I am generally close-mouthed. I have neither the wish nor the ability to analyse or discuss the pieces I hear. I just listen to the music people give me to listen to. Either I like it or I don't. That's all.²⁴

Well, that's not quite all. There is more here than the doer's quarrel with the talker, more than the artist's familiar insistence on sensory immediacy and pleasure over secondary, rationalized response—though in this over-analytical age of ours it's a hint we might do well to consider at times. There is simply too much in Shostakovich's instrumental music that is strongly marked—too much that resonates, like Beethoven's or Tchaikovsky's music, with characteristic and functional genres, with the conventional iconicity of emotion, with intertextual allusion, with sheer violence—for us to doubt that at bottom he shared his society's faith in the reality of the latent content. Yet unlike the socialist-realist critics who tried to catalogue and thus circumscribe his 'imagery' and 'intonations',²⁵ and unlike the more recent biographical paraphrasts (including

²³ Quoted in Zhitomirsky, 'Shostakovich', 26–7.

²⁴ *Pis'ma k drugu*, 306.

²⁵ For explication of these actually quite useful terms, which go back to Boris Asafiev ('Muzykal'naya forma kak protsess', 1930), and whose meanings are actually disguised by their English cognates, see Malcolm H. Brown, 'The Soviet Russian Concepts of "Intonazia" and "Musical Imagery"', *Musical Quarterly*, 60 (1974), 557–67. (Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony furnishes the practical illustrations.)

the one who scandalously appropriates his name), Shostakovich insisted on keeping the latent content latent—and keeping it labile.

And there is more to that insistence than a mere wish to preserve what Admiral Poindexter notoriously called 'deniability'. As long as music is left to 'speak for itself', it can only speak truth. Janet Malcolm's study of Sylvia Plath's contending biographers contains a passage that cuts remarkably near to the Shostakovichian quick. Whereas 'the facts of imaginative literature are as hard as the stone that Dr. Johnson kicked', the author writes, there is always 'epistemological insecurity' in works of non-fiction, precisely because it is aiming at a whole truth that is inevitably beyond its grasp.²⁶ The aspiration to literal truth brings always with it the possibility, indeed the virtual certainty, of falsehood.

Just so, paraphrasts of Shostakovich's symphonies and quartets, who strive to reconcile the latent content of the works with the literal truth of lived experience (the composer's, the people's, their own), but who lack an omniscience that not even the composer could fairly claim, cannot hope to achieve a perfect fit, and hence, to the extent that they profess certainty, will always lie. For the composer's perfect silence we substitute a Babel of partial truths. History has decreed that this particular composer's works are fated to be read in part—but never impartially—as non-fiction. That is what accounts for the moral stature they, and he, have achieved—uniquely achieved, I think it is fair to say—in the annals of twentieth-century music. But there is tremendous irony in this, because it is a fate and a stature that Shostakovich could never have sought, but that were conferred on him—thrust upon him—by the powers that tormented him, and by the way in which he responded to his tribulations. There was no inkling as of 1936, when he was first denounced and humiliated (and, let us not forget, mortally threatened), that Shostakovich would be a composer primarily associated with the concert genres, that his reputation would rest chiefly on his symphonies and, even more improbably, on his string quartets. (Except for his cello sonata, by 1936 he had not yet written any important chamber music.) The infamous *Pravda* editorial that marked the clampdown, 'Muddle Instead of Music', was provoked by an opera, the extravagantly successful *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. It was the 29-year-old composer's second opera, and the first in a planned Wagnerian (or anti-Wagnerian) tetralogy. It was clear that the stage was Shostakovich's chosen medium, as it had been for most Russian composers.

Lady Macbeth, the critic of the *New Yorker* dryly observed in 1935, was 'no great exercise in restraint',²⁷ and it was no great act of moral witness, either, though it posed as one. Like many operas in the 'new-objective' Weimar orbit, it contained a violent, voyeuristic, and utterly un-erotic sex scene, and it embodied a grotesque, if sincerely motivated, moral inversion that, I have

²⁶ Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman* (New York, 1994), 154–5.

²⁷ 'Musical Events', *New Yorker*, 21 Oct. 1935, p. 116.

argued elsewhere,²⁸ is alarmingly consistent with Stalinist ethics: the one character in the opera presented as positive or even human—that is, the title character—is the one that brutally murders all the others. (Having garnered my share of brickbats for expressing such an unpopular opinion about this much-mythologized work, I was cheered to find my impressions confirmed by Professor Zhitomirsky in the post-Soviet press.) For Shostakovich, though, there would be no more operas. He never dared risk another. His prudence was borne out of course, in 1948, when it was another opera, Vano Muradeli's *The Great Friendship*, that served the Zhdanovshchina as pretext and sacrificial lamb. But Shostakovich's sacrifice of what would surely have been one of the great operatic careers was a terrible loss, not only to him but to us.

The instrumental works Shostakovich had produced up to the year of his denunciation, including his first three symphonies, were all written against rather than in emulation of the canonical symphonic tradition, once again in the debunking spirit of the 'new objectivity' that had emanated in the 1920s from Germany. The first of Shostakovich's works to fit the canonical heroic-classical mould and the high ethical tone with which he is now so firmly identified was the Fifth Symphony, which was received by the powers as an act of contrition, and saddled by them with a quasi-autobiographical subtext, first enunciated in a review by the novelist Alexey Tolstoy that appeared in the newspaper *Izvestiya*, and soon thereafter echoed in an article that appeared in the newspaper *Vechernyaya Moskva* over the composer's name.²⁹ From that point on, two things were firmly established that would last until the end of Shostakovich's life, and continue to this day: first, the persistent tension between official and subversive readings; and second, the tendency for both official and subversive readings to take the form of biographical—which is to say, ventriloquistically autobiographical—narratives.

At first, contention was between the print and the oral media. In the beginning, for example, only the official interpretation of the Fifth Symphony—the he-loved-Big-Brother version dubbed by Alexey Tolstoy as the exemplary Soviet *Bildungsroman* ('personality-formation' narrative) in tones—could be published and circulated in writing. Other readings, rife from the start (especially as regards the grotesque march in the first movement and the stentorian finale), had to circulate as folk tradition. It is a fascinating study to trace the gradual emergence of counter-narratives in print—a study that amounts to a shadow history of Soviet, anti-Soviet, and post-Soviet historiographical revisionism.³⁰

²⁸ In an essay that originally appeared in the *New Republic*, 20 Mar. 1989; an expanded and updated version in *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton, 1997).

³⁰ See Alexey Tolstoy, 'Pyataya simfoniya Shostakovicha', *Izvestiya*, 28 Dec. 1937, p. 5; D. D. Shostakovich, 'Moi tvorcheskii otvet', *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 25 Jan. 1938, p. 30.

³¹ See R. Taruskin, 'Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth: Interpreting Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony', in D. Fanning, ed., *Shostakovich Studies* (Cambridge, 1995), 17–56.

IV

The thickest aura and the loudest Babel—a true international Babel this time, in many tongues—have surrounded the Seventh ('Leningrad') Symphony, ever since the composer's autograph score was microfilmed and flown to New York by way of Teheran and Cairo in a great fever of war-hysterical publicity, for performance under Arturo Toscanini. (That autograph has been recently issued in facsimile by a Japanese publisher, with a provocative introductory note by Manashir Yakubov, the archivist of the Shostakovich family estate.) Toscanini's performance was broadcast on 19 July 1942 to an audience of millions, including Mr and Mrs Stravinsky of Hollywood, who, we learn from Mrs Stravinsky's posthumously published diary, stayed at home in order to listen in.³¹ Aura attached in those days far more to the work and its circumstances than to the composer's person. As Toscanini put it in a letter to Stokowski, whom he had to fight for first-performance rights, 'I admire Shostakovich music but I don't feel such a frenzied love for it like you.'³² Stravinsky's regard for Shostakovich likewise fell short of frenzied love, as he lost no opportunity to remind his legions of interlocutors. Yet the very fact that a composer of Stravinsky's stature felt compelled to position himself insistently and repeatedly *vis-à-vis* a composer universally accorded a lesser stature during Stravinsky's lifetime already suggests something of Shostakovich's emblematic status, and that of the Seventh Symphony among his works. Nor was Bartók immune—else why should he have been so enraged by the symphony that he went to the trouble of parodying its notorious 'invasion' theme? (There really can be no doubt about that, despite Bartók's wan claim, when pressed, that he was quoting 'Da geh' ich zu Maxim' from Lehár's *Merry Widow*, the tune that may in fact have served as Shostakovich's model for caricaturing the Nazis; the passages in question from Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra* are in Shostakovich's key, not Lehár's, and follow Shostakovich's exact note sequence.) What has made composer and work into icons, and the symphony from the very first (though there has been little agreement as to what it is an icon of), is the way their careers have forced critical confrontation with so many cherished assumptions about art music, its values, and its relationship to the world.

Shostakovich, by turns abused and adulated by a totalitarian state to a degree that lies at both extremes beyond the power of his benignly neglected Western counterparts to imagine, was in the 1940s a vastly ambivalent emblem. Was he toady or victim? Secret voice of conscience or accomplice to deception? Nation's darling or party-propped demagogue? Keeper of the Beethovenian flame or cynical manipulator of clichés? He aroused pity and annoyance, envy and

³¹ See *Dearest Bubushkin*, ed. Robert Craft (New York, 1985), 125.

³² See Harvey Sachs, *Toscanini* (Philadelphia, 1978), 279.

condescension, admiration and scorn—but never inhabited the limbo of public disregard that has by and large been the fate of the modernist generations in the West. He lacked the freedoms of his counterparts in *laissez-faire* states, including the freedom to be indifferent and the freedom to be marginal. He accepted the civic obligations that were thrust upon him and the rewards that followed.

While now it is easy enough to see that he had little say in the matter, in the 1940s this was not so clear. Arnold Schoenberg (again: what compelled his avid notice?) reproached Shostakovich for having ‘allowed politics to influence his compositorial style’, finally exonerating him on terms that today can only seem callous: ‘Heroes can be composers and vice versa, but you cannot require it.’³³ Yet having established which of them was the hero, Schoenberg could allow himself a certain *noblesse-oblige* generosity towards the Soviet composer that contrasted with Bartók’s and Stravinsky’s furious rejection. Linking Shostakovich with Sibelius after the habit of contemporary reviewers such as Olin Downes (who cried them up) and Virgil Thomson (who cried them down), Schoenberg made a pronouncement—‘I feel they have the breath [did he mean breadth?] of symphonists’—that has been pounced upon ever since by writers eager to issue Shostakovich or Sibelius a passport to academic respectability.³⁴ And yet Shostakovich’s relationship to the public, both at home and abroad, was at once a seeming vindication of the ostensible ideals of socialist realism and paradigmatic violation of one of Schoenberg’s fundamental postulates: ‘If it is art, it is not for everybody, and if it is for everybody, it is not art.’³⁵

The Seventh brought it all to a head. This hulking programmatic symphony, this bombastic anachronism replete with onomatopoetical battle music and cyclic thematic dramaturgy, emerged like some sort of woolly mammoth out of the Stalinist deep freeze. Its rhetoric was shamelessly inflated: by a veritable stage band in its outer movements, by a theatrical travesty of Bach in its protracted Adagio (Passion chorales, massed violins soliloquizing a chaconne). Its path to grandiose affirmation opportunistically replayed Beethoven’s Napoleonic scenario, and the crass methods by which its message was mongered assaulted fastidious taste just as brutishly as the invaders could be heard assaulting Russia with a mind-numbing march that brazenly appropriated the surefire formula of Ravel’s *Bolero* (even down to the snare drum ostinato and surprise modulation at the end), the very cynosure of the middlebrow. Glikman’s Shostakovich defiantly confirms the resemblance: ‘I don’t know what will become of this piece,’ Glikman reports his friend saying after playing through the newly composed first movement in August, 1941. ‘Idle critics will surely rebuke me for imitating *Bolero*. Well, let them; that is how I hear the war.’³⁶

³³ Arnold Schoenberg, *Letters*, ed. Erwin Stein (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), 219.

³⁴ Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984), 136.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 124.

³⁶ *Pis'ma k drugu*, 22.

The war. This debasement of musical values was being carried out in the name of the same holy humanitarian cause that dominated the daily headlines. Shostakovich's symphony was riding both cause's and headlines' coat-tails to worldwide acclaim. In fact it was making headlines of its own. Its performances, both at home and abroad, were as much political events as musical ones. Was music serving politics or was politics serving music? Was music exploiting politics or was politics exploiting music? Or, worst of all, was the very distinction between the two being undermined?

Toscanini's powerful advocacy of the music was at least partly due to its political implications. 'I was deeply taken', he wrote to Stokowski, 'by its beauty and its anti-Fascist meanings, and I have to confess to you, by the greatest desire to perform it. . . . Don't you think, my dear Stokowski, it would be very interesting for everybody, and yourself, too, to hear the old Italian conductor (one of the first artists who strenuously fought against Fascism) to play this work of a young Russian anti-Nazi composer.'³⁷ Performing the work would be another anti-Fascist credential for a conductor who, in America, was trading heavily on his political commitments. That 'extramusical' appeal was accounting for the symphony's success; and that 'extramusical' freight was what conditioned not only 'the special meaning of this Symphony', as Toscanini called it, and its special privileges, but also its very special blatancy.

Critics took revenge. Virgil Thomson launched his review in the *New York Herald Tribune* with a really memorable salvo: 'Whether one is able to listen without mind-wandering to the Seventh Symphony of Dmitri Shostakovich probably depends on the rapidity of one's musical perceptions. It seems to have been written for the slow-witted, the not very musical and the distracted.' And he ended by accusing the composer of cynicism: 'That he has so deliberately diluted his matter, adapted it, by both excessive simplification and excessive repetition, to the comprehension of a child of eight, indicates that he is willing to write down to a real or fictitious psychology of mass consumption in a way that may eventually disqualify him for consideration as a serious composer.'³⁸

B. H. Haggin, less verbally astute but further out on a limb because he was writing for the *Nation*, then a Stalinist publication, hauled out all his doughtiest pejoratives: derivative, eclectic, unresourceful, crude, pretentious, and of course 'trashy'. What was particularly galling was the barbarization of musical values in the name of humanitarian ones, paradoxically embodied in 'an hour-and-a-quarter-long symphony concerned with the struggle and final victory of humanity over barbarism'. The Russians, Haggin warned, not very realistically, 'can escape this difficulty only by recognizing the unimportance of those external conditions [that is, the unimportance of the war against Fascism] in

³⁷ Sachs, *Toscanini*, 279.

³⁸ 18 Oct. 1942; repr. in Virgil Thomson, *The Musical Scene* (New York, 1945), pp. 101, 104.

relation to the greatness we are aware of in some music, the importance instead of the composer's personal and musical resources'.³⁹

Aesthetics were thus pitted irreconcilably against ethics; transcendence against commitment; quality against currency; art for the sake of art against art for the sake of people. For so crystallizing the terms of the endless and fruitless debate, Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony surely deserves its status as icon, though again it is a status the composer could hardly have sought.

The debate has not been helped by its latest phase, carried out since Shostakovich's death. The objective has been a dual one: to show, first of all, that the blatant manifest content of these works was a protective screen camouflaging a hidden truth that only a musical or moral connoisseur could discern (so much for populism); and to show, second, that the hidden meaning was of a sort that would allow precisely the claim Schoenberg denied, namely the claim of heroism—or rather, in the Soviet context, that of dissidence.

In Volkov's *Testimony*, the first-person narrative included the startling assertion that 'the Seventh Symphony had been planned before the war and consequently it simply cannot be seen as a reaction to Hitler's attack. The "invasion theme" has nothing to do with the attack. I was thinking of other enemies of humanity when I composed the theme.'⁴⁰ From this evidence, Ian MacDonald has dependably managed to read the whole symphony ironically, as 'a poker-faced send-up of Socialist Realist symphonism' that satirizes precisely what it was formerly perceived as glorifying. By relating the march theme in the first movement not to Lehár (or to *Deutschland über alles*) but (fleetingly) to Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, MacDonald identifies it as 'Russian rather than German', hence—like every other work of Shostakovich that MacDonald interprets—a mockery of Stalin, not Hitler.⁴¹ (The resemblance to Tchaikovsky is as demonstrable as the others, but the asserted coincidence of keys is the product of MacDonald's inability to read an orchestral score.)

Like most *parti-pris* interpretations this one has to ignore many salient features of the object interpreted. To uphold the view of the Seventh as exclusively anti-Stalinist one has to disregard the imagery of actual battle, as well as that of repulsion (the horripilating climax of the first movement), and finally of victory (the cyclic return at the end of the finale, which reinstates in glory a theme that MacDonald wants to read as satirically insipid). These musical events can hardly be read out of the context of the war and its immediate, overriding urgencies, conditions that could not have been foreseen when Volkov's Shostakovich claimed to have had his first thoughts of the Seventh.

But of course there is something much larger at stake. The Volkov/MacDonald reading merely substitutes one limited and limiting paraphrase

³⁹ B. H. Haggin, *Music in the Nation* (New York, 1949), 109, 113.

⁴⁰ *Testimony*, 155.

⁴¹ *The New Shostakovich*, 160.

for another, in the face of the multivalence that has always been the most special, most valuable property of symphonic music. In a very late Soviet contribution to the Shostakovich debates, the distinguished music theorist Lev Mazel likens this multivalence to that of algebra, wherein a formula containing several unknowns can have various arithmetic solutions.⁴² It is an analogy that arises naturally out of Russian historical conditions. 'The life experiences that serve as impulse toward the creation of an artwork', Mazel valuably reminds us, 'are not tantamount to its content'; nor does 'the objective result of an artist's work necessarily conform to its original plan'. Whatever Shostakovich may have thought he was signifying by means of his invasion theme, this means, wartime listeners were justified in hearing a representation of Nazis, and we are justified now, if we are still interested in anti-Soviet revisionism, in hearing a representation of Bolsheviks. Such a change in signification, Mazel contends, 'is nothing special: life itself had rearranged the emphasis within a generalized and compounded image'. (The veteran analyst complicates that image further by demonstrating in detail the derivation—one he does not venture to interpret, but is content 'to state as fact'—of the invasion theme not from Lehár, not from Tchaikovsky, but from the E flat major episode in the finale of Beethoven's piano sonata, Op. 10 No. 1.)

Yet so ingrained is the practice of hermeneutic ventriloquism that even Mazel, in seeming contradiction of his own enlightened premisses, resorts to documentation in order to invest his interpretation of Shostakovich's 'generalized and compounded image' with the composer's *ex post facto* authority. He reports that upon evacuation to Samara (then Kuibyshev), where he completed the Seventh in the late autumn of 1941, Shostakovich and his wife made friends with their neighbour Flora Yasinovskaya, a biologist who was the daughter-in-law of Maxim Litvinov, the early Soviet foreign minister (and the mother of Pavel Litvinov, a prominent dissident of the 1960s). In unpublished notes she made at the time, later made available to Mazel, Yasinovskaya recorded some comments Shostakovich made to her alone, late at night, after he had played the symphony through to an audience of fellow evacuees: 'Fascism, yes, but music, real music is never tied literally to any theme. Fascism is not simply national socialism, and this is music about terror, slavery, spiritual exhaustion.' Later, her notes relate, Shostakovich took her even more fully into his confidence: 'the Seventh (and also the Fifth) is not only about Fascism, but about our system as well, about any tyranny or totalitarianism in general.'⁴³ Thus, Mazel suggests, the varying readings of the Seventh may be harmonized. Within this broadened documentary purview all readings may be authenticated. The putative original identification of the invasion theme with Stalin does not preclude its later use as a symbol for the Nazi aggression. The two ideas are

⁴² L. Mazel, 'K sporam o Shostakoviche', *Sovetskaya muzyka*, 5 (1991), 30–5.

⁴³ See also Elizabeth Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* (London, 1994), 159.

not necessarily in conflict; the same algebraic formula can support either arithmetic solution, or both.

In its allowance for a certain multivalence, and in its refusal to reduce the meaning of the symphony to the meaning of a single theme, or of both to a particular verbal paraphrase, Mazel's view of the Seventh is a distinct improvement over old-line Soviet readings and over the simplistic revisionism of the present day. And yet even it remains ultimately unsatisfactory, because like the other interpretations it insists on identifying meaning, whether of the theme or of the symphony, with the composer's explicit designs, and only admits multivalence in so far as the composer's intention may be so represented. The genetic fallacy remains in place.

V

However 'monologically' Shostakovich's works were read by the regime (to borrow an appropriate word from the vocabulary of the Soviet critic Mikhail Bakhtin), however passively the silent composer appeared to acquiesce in the readings thus imposed, and however great the consequent propaganda yield, the regime could never fully ignore the power of music (and Shostakovich's music above all) to harbour potentially anarchic folk hermeneutics. The issue was finally brought to a head in 1948, during the Zhdanovshchina. The Party stooges who were now recruited to vilify Shostakovich—mainly Vladimir Zakharov, the leader of the Pyatnitsky Folk Choir, who inveighed against Shostakovich at the open hearings, and the composer Marian Koval, who did so in a series of calumnious articles in the journal *Sovetskaya muzyka*, the organ of the Union of Soviet Composers—did so by attacking the monumental instrumental genres that Shostakovich now employed.⁴⁴ The overt, quasi-'Tolstoyan' charge now made against him was that such genres, being inaccessible to the broad public and thus élitist, were divisive of society, hence uncommunitarian, hence anti-Soviet. The covert motive, transparent enough but now documented through the recent efforts of the archivist Leonid Maksimenkov, among others, was to discourage genres that in their wordlessness were less than ideally subject to ideological control. As Maksimenkov writes, 'the ideologues from Agitprop demanded texted music, which could be submitted to censorship on a par with movies, literature and programmatic, socialist-realist painting.'⁴⁵

Early drafts of the Central Committee's Resolution on Music contained

⁴⁴ For Zakharov's deposition, see *Soveshchaniya deyatelei sovetsoi muzyki v TsK VKP (b)* (Moscow, 1948), 20–4; for excerpts in English trans., see Alexander Werth, *Musical Uproar in Moscow* (London, 1949; repr., Westport, Conn., 1973), 53–5. For Koval's denunciations, see M. Koval, 'Tvorcheskii put' D. Shostakovicha', *Sovetskaya muzyka* (1948), nos. 2–4.

⁴⁵ L. Maksimenkov, 'Partiya—nash rulevoi', *Muzykal'naya zhizn'*, nos. 15–16 (1993), p. 9.

explicit formulations designed to render all musical genres safe for censorship—formulations that, had they been published, would have acquired the force of law. One read, ‘Resolved: to liquidate the one-sided, abnormal deviation in Soviet music towards textless instrumental works’. A revision substituted the somewhat less baleful verb *osudit’* (‘censure’ or ‘judge unfavourably’) for ‘liquidate’. Had these passed, one wonders what Shostakovich would have been left with. In the end, though, the formulation was vague and somewhat absurd; no specific genres were condemned, only the ‘formalist tendency in Soviet music’, which was ‘anti-people and conducive in fact to the liquidation of music’.⁴⁶ Maksimenkov comments that ‘the laconicism of the final version of the directive portion of the resolution bears Stalin’s indelible stamp’.⁴⁷ It should be added that there was good reason, from the administrative point of view, for imprecision. Specific directives, after all, can be complied with. Compliance can be a defence. There can be no defence against the ‘laconic’, inscrutable charge of formalism.

So Shostakovich went on writing symphonies, and, increasingly, quartets. And they continued to attract ventriloquists from all sides. More and more prevalently, Shostakovich’s post-Zhdanovshchina output was read as so many notes in a bottle. To some extent, the works obviously invited such a reading. Many of them contain signals that their latent content was private rather than public. The very shift, beginning in the 1950s, from symphony to quartet as the centre of gravity for Shostakovich’s output was such a hint. It was manifestly an anti-Soviet move of a sort, for, as both the Soviet government and its citizens knew long before it became a trendy slogan in the West, the personal is political. To concentrate on chamber music was not just un-Soviet activity, it was un-Russian. There was never much of a tradition in Russia for chamber music. Under the Soviets it was always vaguely suspect as aristocratic or genteel, and in 1948 it was openly denounced. The official list of Soviet genres, drawn up for official promulgation in one of the superseded resolution drafts, included symphonic, operatic, song, choral and dance genres only; the final text specifically rejected all styles and genres that appealed only to ‘narrow circles of specialists and musical epicures’.⁴⁸ There had never been a Russian composer before Shostakovich to concentrate the way he eventually did on quartets, or to write so many of them. (Nikolay Myaskovsky, another prolific composer who was frightened into abstraction, came closest, with thirteen; but since Myaskovsky wrote twenty-seven symphonies, the quartets do not bulk nearly as large in his output as they do in Shostakovich’s. Besides, Myaskovsky’s career

⁴⁶ Ibid. 9–10.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 10.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 9; for the text of the Resolution on Music (‘Ob opere “Velikaya družba” V. Muradeli, Postanovlenie Tsk VKP (b) ot 10 fevralya 1948g.’), see *Sovetskaya muzyka*, 1 (1948), 3–8. An English translation is included in Appendix B, in Andrey Olkhovsky, *Music under the Soviets: The Agony of an Art* (London, 1955), 280–5 (the passage on chamber music is on p. 282).

was practically over by 1948, while most of Shostakovich's quartet-writing lay ahead.)

There are other hints of politically fraught preoccupation with the private and the personal in Shostakovich's quartets, and his late music in general. They include slow, ruminative, fading finales; the simulation of recitative (often in a demonstratively broken or halting mode, reminiscent of the end of the funeral march in Beethoven's 'Eroica' Symphony); or contrariwise, the simulation of voicelessness (the tapping bows in the Thirteenth Quartet) or of screaming (the piercing unison crescendo at the end of the same quartet). The transfer of musical ideas like the screams, or of whole passages of music, from one work to another, suggesting that different works are chapters in an overarching narrative, also puts us in mind of biography, the most overarching narrative of all. The obsessional quotations and self-quotations add the prefix 'auto-' to the biographical gesture. And of course there is the increasingly resolute denial of optimism, of 'life-affirmation', which is to say denial of the *sine qua non* of Soviet art. (Here is where the late Shostakovich's surprising recourse to a few superficial trappings of twelve-tone technique, officially denounced for its decadence and pessimism, seems to find its rationale.) As Shostakovich, a world-renowned and much-revered figure, reached the stricken and debilitated end of his road, and as the Soviet state stumbled towards its own debilitated end, the composer could afford to lessen his guard, if ever so slightly. Whereas in the Yevtushenko-inspired Thirteenth Symphony he was still manifestly wrestling with Soviet authority, in the Fourteenth Symphony, a fully-texted and explicit death-affirmation, Shostakovich spat in its face. In the Fifteenth Quartet—a racking medley of Adagios—he fashioned his personal pain and his pessimism into a *tour de force*.

VI

I speak of hints within the works, but they are hints that we read in hindsight, and with ever-increasing knowledge of the events of the composer's life. Ultimately it is difficult—no, it is impossible—to know whether he is forcing his autobiography on us, or we are forcing it on him. We did not need complacent post-structuralists to tell us that autobiography, too, is a way of reading.⁴⁹

The first work of Shostakovich to end *morendo*, with the dying of the light, was the Fourth Symphony, on which the composer was at work at the time of his first denunciation, and which was withdrawn before its première (it is now known) not at Shostakovich's request but at the bidding of the Composers'

⁴⁹ See Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as Defacement', in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York, 1984), 67.

Union leadership.⁵⁰ This combination of circumstances made it inevitable that when the symphony was finally performed twenty-five years later, in 1961, it was received as the composer's first note-in-a-bottle. Reading the symphony as autobiography reached a predictable height of impertinence (that is, of trivial specificity) with MacDonald,⁵¹ but there is something about it that does seem naggingly to foreground the issue, namely the extremes within the symphony of inwardness and extroversion, and the manifestly ironic way in which these extremes are juxtaposed and even interchanged.

What I am calling the issue is the one that was framed by the doomed poet Osip Mandelstam, who in the 1920s argued that lyric poetry, the novel, and what he called 'psychological prose' were inappropriate for Soviet art because the historical epoch no longer had any 'interest in the human fate of the individual'.⁵² One could make a case that the young Shostakovich, the composer of those callous 'new-objective' early symphonies, operas, and ballets, shared that outlook, and it was an attitude by no means confined in those days to the Soviet state. But that was before Mandelstam discovered what, a couple of years later, Shostakovich, too, would learn: that when the Soviet state turned against you, you were indeed one man alone; and your individual fate mattered to you, if not to the epoch.

The last movement of Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony has two codas. The first, which seems a parody of the 'Gloria' chorus from Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, may be the most raucous and deafening passage of symphonic music ever composed. The muted, drawn-out whimper that trumps it, though, is what stays in the mind, deliberate echo that it is (right down to the harp and celesta) of Mahler, the most self-absorbed bourgeois neurotic subject of them all. This music, which was almost certainly composed post-denunciation, seems palpably to set the inner and the outer, the public and the private, the manic, turbulent collective and the human fate of the bruised individual, in blunt, easily read (indeed, as it turned out, too easily read) opposition.

But this simple message from the bottle seems foreshadowed—ambiguously, enigmatically, uncertainly, not at all easily—in the first movement, which has not such an obvious *ex post facto* relationship to the events of the composer's life. After a rude raspberry of an introductory leitmotif, the stomping first theme gets under way in a series of aggressively revolting parade-ground colours: an octave pairing of trumpet and tenor trombone is answered by one of bass trombone and tuba, and finally by a pair of tubas, doubled flatulently by the bassoon and contrabassoon. Though not without detours, the first thematic group continually gathers sonority and stridency until it fairly explodes in a

⁵⁰ I. Glikman, '... Ya vse ravno budu pisat' muzyku', *Sovetskaya muzyka*, no. 9 (1989), 47; *Pis'ma k drugu*, 12–13.

⁵¹ See *The New Shostakovich*, 109–17.

⁵² Quoted in Jane Gary Harris, editor's introduction to *Autobiographical Statements in Twentieth-Century Russian Literature* (Princeton, 1990), 13.

crazy squawking. After a general pause, the second group begins in the tiny voice of the solo bassoon, accompanied by isolated grunts from the cellos and basses, the harp finally entering to mark off the cadence. This is public versus private with a caricatural vengeance. No one could miss it. But when the themes are recapitulated at the other end of the movement, the smug stability of the dualism is undermined. The theme that had been given to the solo bassoon comes back in the paired (and now doubled) trumpet and trombone over the stomping chords, and the theme that had represented the blustery parade-ground follows, played *pianissimo* by the solo bassoon, accompanied by the same low strings, but now with the addition of a quietly insistent bass drum.

I cannot really say exactly what this disquieting exchange of roles means. I have no ready verbal paraphrase with which to replace it, and I have no ready answer to a friend of mine, a composer, who asked, 'Why couldn't he just have been experimenting?' (except maybe Varèse's answer: 'My experiments end up in the wastebasket, not the score'). But my uncertainty may be one reason why the movement haunts me the way it does. Maybe incertitude—irreducible multivalence—is essential to the experience of the symphony as a work of art. There is more to an art work, one has to think, than there is to a note in a bottle.

I am pretty sure I do know what the Eighth Quartet is all about. Shostakovich has seen to that. This is the one composition of his that asks expressly to be read as autobiography, the one time Shostakovich did put an explicit note in a bottle. And, although my saying so may win me few friends, I believe that this melancholy, much admired work of 1960 reveals something beyond its intended message—something I, for one, would rather not believe. What it shows is that the need to communicate urgently and with specificity in an atmosphere of threat did at times shrink Shostakovich's creative options.

The wry relationship between the stated programme—a requiem for the 'victims of war and Fascism', allegedly prompted by the viewing of atrocity footage in Dresden—and the music, which consists almost wholly of the DSCH motif in thematic conjunction with allusions to Shostakovich's earlier works, the martyred *Lady Macbeth* especially prominent among them, was evident from the start. Shostakovich was clearly identifying himself as victim. The point is made over and over again. The motifs associated with the composer's musical monogram include a Jewish theme from the finale of the Second Piano Trio, which overlaps three of the four notes in DSCH, reinforcing the association Shostakovich had already proclaimed between his personal fate and that of the Jews, and also the first theme of the First Cello Concerto, which overlaps a different three of the four notes in the monogram. The Cello Concerto idea is confronted with a violent motif that had been associated in a film score, *The Young Guard*, with executions. In the final movement, the DSCH motif is played in exquisitely wrought dissonant counterpoint against the main continuity motif from the last scene of *Lady Macbeth*, which depicts a convoy of prisoners *en route* to Siberia.

All of this, as I say, is clear—and became clearer, in another instance of

changing contexts and accumulating subtexts, when *Lady Macbeth* was restored to the active repertoire a year after the Quartet's premiere, with an expanded final scene. And yet, by hooking this self-dramatizing quartet onto 'his' side's most hallowed and heavily exploited official propaganda motif of the cold war—namely, that it was the Soviet Union that had saved the world from fascism—Shostakovich forced the work's official acceptance despite the clarity of its latent message (not to mention the incoherence of the manifest one), and even its official promotion. This was, in its way, an impressive political coup.

The most searing page in Isaak Glikman's book is the one in which he describes the actual biographical subtext to the Eighth Quartet, corroborating previous reports by Galina Vishnevskaya and Vladimir Ashkenazy, among others, but adding a wealth of poignant detail.⁵³ Shostakovich was being pressured to join the Communist Party as a trophy, and had not found within himself the fortitude to resist. It was in an agony of humiliation and self-reproach, as much as an agony of revulsion at Fascist atrocities, that he conceived this work, and it was offered as an apologia, in the first instance to his own conscience.

The central strategy, it now seems clear, was to contrive the pointed conjunction, which takes place near the end of the fourth movement, between the DSCH motif and the one extensive quotation that does not come from one of Shostakovich's own works, namely the famous song of revolutionary martyrdom that begins with the words *Zamuchen tyazheloi nevolei*, which mean, literally, 'tortured by grievous unfreedom'. The citation was insulated from official suspicion by the fact, known to every Soviet schoolchild, that this was one of Lenin's favourite songs. Yet by appropriating it, Shostakovich was, as it were, giving his quartet not only a subtext but, literally, a text, proclaiming his unfreedom and disclaiming responsibility for what he judged in himself to be an act of cowardice, or rather, a craven failure to act.

The Eighth Quartet is thus a wrenching human document: wrenching the way Glikman's commentary to it is wrenching, or the way . . . well, the way a note in a bottle can be wrenching. But its explicitness exacts a price. The quotations are lengthy and literal, amounting in the crucial fourth movement to an inert medley; the thematic transformations are very demonstratively, perhaps over-demonstratively, elaborated; startling juxtapositions are reiterated till they become familiar. The work provides its own running paraphrase, and the paraphrase moves inevitably into the foreground of consciousness as the note patterns become predictable.

The compulsion to write in this virtually telegraphic or stenographic way was unquestionably an inner compulsion. Its sincerity compels a strong empathic response; and yet the work, I feel, is weakened by it nevertheless. I

⁵³ *Pis'ma k drugu*, 160–1; see also Jasper Parrott with Vladimir Ashkenazy, *Beyond Frontiers* (London, 1984), 55–6; and Galina Vishnevskaya, *Galina* (New York, 1984), 399–400.

do not find myself returning to it with renewed anticipation of discovery, and when I do find myself listening to it, I seem to be listening to it the way determined paraphrasts like Ian MacDonald evidently listen to every Shostakovich piece. MacDonald himself reveals the danger of such listening when he comes to evaluate the Ninth and Tenth Quartets, works to which the musical imagination—my musical imagination, at any rate—responds with less coercion and more imaginative energy. Finding in it nothing beyond the same anti-Stalinist programme he finds in every Shostakovich piece, MacDonald writes dismissively, ‘one can be forgiven for thinking that we have been over this ground once too often’.⁵⁴ Having ears only for the paraphrase, he is unable to distinguish one quartet from another, or distinguish his own hectoring, monotonous voice from Shostakovich’s.

Ultimately, what is wrong with MacDonald’s approach, for all that one may sympathize with readings that respect the reality of the latent content, is the same thing that was wrong with many of the radically revisionist readings of Shostakovich that emanated out of the Soviet Union during the *glasnost* years that now seem so long ago. In both cases, Shostakovich has been assimilated to inappropriate ready-made models. In the failing Soviet Union he was cast as a ‘dissident’ of a sort that simply did not exist during the better (or rather, the worse) part of his lifetime. In the West, he has been cast as an alienated modernist. Both moves reduce him to a stereotype.

To read in MacDonald’s book, for example, that the ‘Leningrad’ Symphony was just another exercise in sarcasm or mockery is painful. At a time when White émigrés like Stravinsky and Rachmaninov were raising funds and sending supplies for Russian war relief, and when even Anton Denikin, the White general who had led the attack on Moscow during the Russian Civil War, was calling upon the Allies to open up the ‘second front’ in support of the Soviet Union, Shostakovich is portrayed as heartlessly self-absorbed, obsessed with unassuageable feelings of personal resentment and disaffection.

It is here that Glikman’s book, and others like it, can offer the most valuable corrective. The mature Shostakovich was not a dissident. Nor was he a modernist. The mature Shostakovich was an *intelligent* (pronounced, Russian-style, with a hard g, and the stress on the last syllable), heir to a noble tradition of artistic and social thought—one that abhorred injustice and political repression, but also one that valued social commitment, participation in one’s community, and solidarity with people. Shostakovich’s mature idea of art, in contrast to the egoistic traditions of Western modernism, was based not on alienation but on service. He found a way of maintaining public service and personal integrity under unimaginably hard conditions. In this way he remained, in the time-honoured Russian if not exactly the Soviet sense of the word, a ‘civic’ artist.

⁵⁴ *The New Shostakovich*, 234.

That was the ultimate irony, and the ultimate victory. Like the silenced Akhmatova and the martyred Mandelstam, Shostakovich, as the American Slavist Clare Cavanagh so movingly suggested at the Ann Arbor Shostakovich conference in 1994, managed to bear witness 'against the state on behalf of its citizenry'. This was perhaps the most honourable civic use to which music has ever been put, a use in which the composer and his audience acted in collusion against authority. Music was the only art that could serve this purpose publicly. Never was its value more gloriously affirmed.

And that is why Shostakovich's music, while easy for advanced musicians in the West to deride, has always tugged at their conscience, making it necessary for them to deride it. The extreme social value placed on this music—by official ideology, to be sure, but also by disorderly, 'carnivalistic' folk tradition (to borrow once again from Bakhtin's rich vocabulary)—has made the overweening technical preoccupations of the West look frivolous. The present rash of opportunistic efforts—by Volkov, by MacDonald, even by Glikman—authoritatively to define the meaning of Shostakovich's work can only diminish that value and work against the interests of composer and audience alike. Definitive reading, especially biographical reading, locks the music in the past. Better let it remain supple, adaptable, ready to serve the future's needs.

The significance of Dmitry Dmitrievich Shostakovich in and for the history of twentieth-century music is immense, possibly unparalleled, and, above all, continuing. Anyone interested in that history or alive to the issues his work so dramatically embodies will listen to it (*pace* Virgil Thomson) without mind-wandering, unless musical perceptions are wholly divorced from moral perceptions. The fact that his work still looms in our consciousness, while that of so many once better-regarded figures has receded unregretted into Lethe, suggests that the divorce is not yet final. The fate of the music, of its composer, and of the society from which they both emerged, have made it, quite apart from its composer's designs or those of any critic, precisely into a bulwark against that divorce. Smug paraphrasts notwithstanding, it is unlikely that we who live in more favoured times and places can ever fully come to grips with such a legacy. Given our scholarly and critical interests, this may seem lamentable. In the context of our lives as we live them, it is something to rejoice in.

