Songs of Stagnation

Vocal Cycles from the Soviet Union, 1964–1985

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the ways in which the aftershock of an apparent crisis in Soviet identity after the death of Stalin in 1953 can be detected in selected musical-literary works of the Stagnation era (1964–1985). Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalinism in his ‘Secret Speech’ of 1956 brought with it the impossibility of the revival of an effectual utopian Soviet master-narrative and a consequent decline in the effectiveness of Marxist-Leninist ideology to unite citizens under a single ‘Soviet’ identity. This was expressed culturally by a drive towards pluralism, escapism, a desire for autonomy and self-expression, and an increasing alienation from the State-endorsed narrative of Soviet reality during the Brezhnev years. This thesis seeks to illuminate this underexplored period of Soviet musical history through an examination of vocal cycles by three prolific contributors to the genre drawn from successive generations: Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok, Op. 127 (1966–1967) by Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975); Russia Cast Adrift (1977) by Georgy Sviridov (1915–1998); and Stupeni (1981–1982; 1997) by Valentin Silvestrov (b. 1937).

Chapter 1 introduces the main research aims, provides some initial historical context, and outlines the methodological and theoretical framework of the thesis. Chapter 2 adopts Alexei Yurchak’s concepts of svoy and vnye to explore the ways in which Shostakovich’s compositional processes and musical peculiarities have the potential to parallel certain overarching sociological concepts applied to late-Soviet society, and answer questions about his conflicted personal and artistic identity as he entered his final decade. Chapter 3 explores how Sviridov chose to engage with the emergent Russian nationalist movement of the post-Stalinist era, expressing a thoroughly ‘Russian’ as opposed to ‘Soviet’ identity through his setting of Sergei Esenin’s poetry and his dialogue with pre-revolutionary cultures. Chapter 4 looks at the ways in which Silvestrov’s musical aesthetic embraced and reflected many aspects of Soviet culture and society in the years immediately preceding Perestroika at a time when, for many of the younger ‘Unofficial’ generation of Soviet composers to which Silvestrov belonged, political disinterestedness led to a focus on metaphysical, spiritual, surreal, and otherworldly themes. Chapter 5 concludes the thesis with a summary of the findings and suggestions for further research.
DECLARATION

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Finally, this thesis is dedicated to Tadcu (1921–1984), who I never met but who loved music.
A NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

This thesis uses the New Grove system for the transliteration of Cyrillic characters. Exceptions are made in the following instances: in direct quotations from sources using an alternative transliteration system; in the titles of books or articles using an alternative transliteration system. In these cases, the original transliteration is preserved.

Quotations from Russian-language sources including books, articles, diaries, and so on, appearing in the body of the text are generally translated into English with a transliteration of the original Russian appearing either in brackets or in a footnote. In order to facilitate an accurate discussion of the poems and songs, musical examples and poetry extracts are generally not transliterated, and instead preserve the original Cyrillic. The poetry has been translated to preserve word order and structure as far as possible, rather than metre, rhyme or poetic rhythm.

All translations are my own, except where otherwise specified.
1. Introduction

The history of the Soviet Union from 1964 to 1985 is typically referred to as the period of ‘Stagnation’, or Zastoy in Russian.\(^1\) It is often characterised in contrast to the preceding ‘Thaw’ period (Ottepel)\(^2\) following the death of Stalin in 1953, and to the subsequent six years of decline and collapse somewhat ideally known as ‘Restructuring’ (‘Perestroika’, derived from perestroit ‘to rebuild’). English-language musicological studies of Soviet music history have tended to focus on the first five decades of the Soviet Union, encompassing the periods of Revolutionary avant-gardism, the repressive decades of Stalin’s cult of personality, and, more recently, the Thaw, with studies of Soviet music post-1970 being relatively scarce. Yet the two decades between the Thaw and Perestroika constitute arguably the most paradoxical and imperfectly understood period of Soviet history, in terms of politics, society and culture. The current thesis seeks to illuminate this underexplored period of Soviet musical history through an examination of songs and vocal cycles by three prolific contributors to the genre, each drawn from a different generation: Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975), Georgy Sviridov (1915–1998), and Valentin Silvestrov (b. 1937).

The research framework in the current thesis is indebted to Alexei Yurchak’s 2005 monograph, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, which remains one of the most thorough sociological or anthropological explorations of late-Soviet society, culture, and modes of behaviour.\(^3\) One of the focal points indebted to Yurchak’s work is the ways in which the three composers under consideration managed to

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1. The term was coined by Mikhail Gorbachev and applied to what he considered the increasing economic, social, and political inertia under Leonid Brezhnev.
2. Taken from Ilya Ehrenberg’s 1954 novel of the same name.
construct and maintain personal and artistic identities that were neither supportive of nor oppositional to the ideal ‘Soviet’ identity projected by the state. This notion relies heavily on Yurchak’s concepts of svoi and vnye, both of which will be outlined in greater detail below. In addition to Yurchak, the discussion of the social, cultural and political environment of the Stagnation period has been informed by Yitzhak M. Brudny’s study of Russian nationalist movements in the post-war Soviet Union,\textsuperscript{4} by Kenneth Jowitt’s theory of political trends in Marxist-Leninist regimes,\textsuperscript{5} and by Vladislav Zubok’s examination of the post-Stalinist Russian intelligentsia.\textsuperscript{6} Both Richard Sakwa’s \textit{Soviet Politics in Perspective} and Jeremy Smith’s \textit{Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR} have been useful in providing additional political and social context.\textsuperscript{7}

In terms of English-language musicological texts, recent research by Peter J. Schmelz and Philip Ross Bullock has been invaluable, particularly on the subjects of Sviridov and Silvestrov. Schmelz’s 2009 monograph, \textit{Such Freedom if Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music During the Thaw}\textsuperscript{8} has explored how what he terms the ‘Unofficial’ generation of composers (to which Silvestrov, Schnittke, Gubaidulina and Denisov belonged) was exposed to ideas, techniques and values associated with Western modernism during the period of Khrushchevian liberalism in the late 1950s and early 1960s. By contrast, this thesis seeks to explore how Soviet composers from different generations sought to cope with the growing


A glance at the table of contents of Hakobian’s survey shows that he rejects the familiar periodisation of post-war Soviet history into ‘Thaw’, ‘Stagnation’, and ‘Perestroika’ in favour of terminology that has more in common with the history of Russian literature, characterising the whole period instead as ‘The year 1953 and after: The “Bronze Age”’. This reflects the common use of the term ‘Silver Age’ to refer to Russian poetry of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, suggesting not only a form of cultural or artistic continuity that transcends the dividing point of 1917, but also a sense of finality or conclusion, perhaps even decay, with which Soviet art of this ‘Bronze Age’ might be imbued. Indeed, Hakobian has spoken of Russian music after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 as not having survived its own liberation, stating, ‘[i]n 1987–88, with the institution of Gorbachëv’s *glasnost’* (‘openness’ [commonly ‘transparency’]) […] the cultural history of the Soviet system came to

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10 Tamara Levaya (ed.), *Istoriya otchestvennoy muziki vtoroy polovinii XX veka* (Saint Petersburg, Kompozitor, 2005).
its conclusion.” Whether Russian music and culture is destined to flourish in some post-
Bronze Age environment is yet to be determined, but both the notion of a transcendent
continuity with the culture, society, politics, literature and artworks of other epochs, and the
eschatological postmodernist concern with finality, lateness, quotation and the ending of
things, are central to the subject-matter of this thesis.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that Hakobian divides his ‘Bronze Age’ into five
subcategories, the first three of which loosely correspond to the structural organisation of this
thesis: ‘Shostakovich in 1953–75’, ‘Shostakovich’s disciples’ (including a subsection
dedicated to Sviridov), and ‘The Avant-garde of Moscow: The “great three” and other major
figures’. Hakobian’s discussion of Valentin Silvestrov actually appears in a further
subcategory entitled ‘Innovative tendencies outside Russia’, but the present thesis follows
Schmelz and others in categorising Silvestrov with Schnittke, Denisov and Gubaidulina along
generational rather than geographical lines.

1.1 Singing Stagnation: Historical Context

Despite the obvious limitations of ‘grand narrative’ approaches to history, this thesis preserves
the standard periodisation of Soviet historiography, but with the acknowledgement that all
history is infinitely more fluid than such periodisation suggests. Ironically, the Soviet regime
itself, from Stalin to Gorbachev, was quite content to describe itself and its own history in
terms of the grand master-narrative of revolutionary Marxism. This master-narrative was, of
course, often at odds with the underlying realities of life in the Soviet Union, and, indeed, this

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13 Hakobian, Music of the Soviet Era, 203.
14 Ibid., xi.
dislocation between narrative and reality is a significant topic addressed in this thesis. Thus, I retain the use of the terms ‘Stalinism’, ‘Thaw’, ‘Stagnation’, and ‘Perestroika’, mostly out of convenience and familiarity, though the focus of this thesis is perhaps better described as an examination of the incremental and continuous metamorphosis of Soviet society and culture that was both defined by, yet also transcended the Soviet master-narrative of history.

As a point of departure, Figure 1.1 shows, in very broad terms, how one might begin to understand Soviet cultural history in terms of a fluctuation between periods of relative liberalism and pluralism characterised by increased artistic and intellectual freedom (the first post-revolutionary decade and the post-Stalinist period) on the one hand, and the long intervening period of conservatism characterised by censorship, suppression of individuality, and heavily (violently) enforced ‘Official’ ideology (high Stalinism) on the other. The horizontal lines that contract and expand from left to right represent the oscillation between cultural, social, political hegemony and heterogeneity, along with the incompatibility of these two states of being, and the correlation of the former (hegemony) with stability and of the latter (heterogeneity) with disintegration leading to the eventual collapse of the regime. They also represent the correlation of these two states with the suppression of the voice of the individual (Stalinism and ‘Consolidation’), and its liberation and ascendancy (Thaw, Stagnation, Perestroika and ‘Inclusion’).
Writing in 1975, Kenneth Jowitt described three typical stages of development within what he termed ‘Leninist regimes’. The first stage is ‘transformation of the old society’ and is described as an attempt by the Party to ‘decisively eliminate the political and military capacity of opposition elites’ accompanied and defined by ‘a highly turbulent [social and political] environment’. A further characteristic of this societal transformation is the conflict between gaining support for the regime on the one hand, and attempting to control that support on the other. The ‘social and organizational turbulence’ engendered by transformation ‘in turn makes it difficult for the regime simply to command support from social groups’ resulting in the need

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for a certain degree of compromise on the part of the regime. In the case of the Soviet Union,\textsuperscript{16} this first developmental stage most obviously relates to the Revolutions of 1917, the murder of the Romanov family in 1918, the Russian Civil War of 1917-1922, and the accompanying economic collapse and implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) between 1921 and 1928. Culturally and artistically, this period was characterised by almost unbridled (though by no means immune to criticism) experimentalism across most media, and allowed for the development and expression of various contrasting and competitive aesthetics and art movements, including Futurism, Constructivism, Surrealism, and Modernism. The aesthetic values of many of these movements were spun as being compatible with the regime’s initial ‘transformation task’ (to use Jowitt’s terminology) which necessitated the destruction of pre-Revolutionary traditions and institutions in the name of revolution and modernity. This meant that radical and inflammatory statements such as Vladimir Mayakovsky’s emphatic, ‘We are shooting the old generals! Why not Pushkin?’\textsuperscript{17} and ‘Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy etc., etc., from the steamship of Modernity’,\textsuperscript{18} were considered, for the time being, appropriately revolutionary and therefore acceptably Soviet.

Jowitt’s next developmental stage is the ‘consolidation of the revolutionary regime,’ which is characterised by the regime’s move to set up ‘the nucleus of a new political system and community in a setting that is designed to prevent existing […] social and cultural forces from exercising any uncontrolled and undesired influence over the development and definitions of the institutions, values, and practices favored by the party’, accompanied by ‘attempts to

\textsuperscript{16} Although the Soviet Union was not formerly created until 1922, the name is used here and throughout as a shorthand to refer to Russia and its satellites between 1917 and 1991.

\textsuperscript{17} Quoted in David Hoffman, ‘Was There a “Great Retreat” from Soviet Socialism? Stalinist Culture Reconsidered’, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 5/4 (Fall 2004), 664.

maximise its *insulation* from society*.19 Applied to the Soviet Union, these characteristics reflect the conservatised trajectory of the Stalinist period, manifested in its mildest form by public criticism and censorship, and in its worst by the indiscriminate, paranoid and brutal cruelty of the Great Purges. In terms of musical culture, the effects of this ‘consolidation’ are perhaps best observed in the dissolving of various independent artistic institutions such as the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM) and the Association of Contemporary Music (ACM)20 in 1932, and the subsequent establishing of centralised artistic Unions. Perhaps the most famous (or infamous) indication of the impact ‘consolidation’ had on the musical life of composers themselves came with Pravda’s notorious attack on Shostakovich’s second and last completed opera *The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District* in 1936, though this was just one amongst many such lamentable incidents that testify to the increasing cultural and political hegemony imposed by the State across all aspects of society throughout the 1930s and ’40s. Zubok describes this period as being characterised by the ‘collapse’ of both the Polish and Russian intelligentsia ‘as a result of the repression, violence, and mass massacres during World War II and the Stalinist period.’21 While certain members of the cultural elite, such as Shostakovich and the poet Anna Akhmatova, survived with relatively few physical (if not psychological) scars, many of their contemporaries, including Osip Mandelstam, Varlam Shalamov, Marina Tsvetayeva, and Vsevolod Meyerhold suffered the assorted horrors of imprisonment, forced labour, execution of family members, suicide or murder as Stalinism ‘did everything to extinguish the spectre of cultural autonomy and freethinking.’22

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20 The ACM, to which Shostakovich and Aleksandr Mosolov at one stage belonged, was founded in 1923 by Nikolai Roslavets (1881 [N.S.]–1944), perhaps the most posthumously abused of all Soviet composers.
22 Ibid.
However, in the face of (and partly resulting from) this violent suppression of individuality and ideological pluralism, a rather bizarre feature of the ‘consolidation’ stage of development was the rehabilitation and ‘Sovietisation’ of certain pre-revolutionary figures and traditions. Once the radical avant-gardism of the first post-Revolutionary decade had been purged into submissive conservatism, popular 19th-century cultural icons such as Tchaikovsky, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, who had been so ignominiously ‘thrown overboard’ during the preceding decade, could be safely rehabilitated, sanitised, Sovietised, and hauled into the 20th century.23 Perhaps most significant to the rendering of art-song and lyric poetry into acceptable genres was the rehabilitation of Pushkin in time for the 1937 centenary of his death, which has been closely examined by Philip Bullock.24 Bullock links the Pushkin centenary celebrations with the establishment of a single mass ‘Culture’ or Kul’turnost’, which he defines as, ‘an array of behavioural models and cultural practices that stressed not only the ideological consciousness of the Soviet working class, but also its social and aesthetic savoir faire.’25 The production of this ‘Culture’ on an ideologically acceptable, mass-reproducible scale was one of the major tenets of Socialist Realism, which, however imprecisely defined, became official policy in 1934 and contributed to the inexorable ascendency of state-imposed hegemony and the decline of political, ideological and cultural heterogeneity, and, consequently, to the suppression of the individual, autonomous voice for the sake of the ultimate Marxist-Leninist goal: social unification under the banner of Communism.26 It is within this context of the rejection of avant-gardism in favour of the revival of pre-revolutionary models that the young

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25 Ibid., 43. Emphasis in original.
Georgy Sviridov found his voice with his 1935 set of six romances on texts by Pushkin. This also perhaps explains the origins of what Gerard McBurney has described as Sviridov’s ‘drift [...] towards a self-consciously reactionary and would-be Slavophile musical idiom,’ 27 which eventually developed into what Sviridov himself described, with reference to his own melodic and harmonic language in his 1977 vocal cycle Russia Cast Adrift [Otechelivshaya Rus’], as ‘truly Russian [N.B. not ‘Soviet’] music – of a new, bright, crystal-clear style.’ 28

The third stage outlined by Jowitt is ‘inclusion’, defined as ‘attempts by the party elite to expand the internal boundaries of the regime’s political, productive, and decision-making systems, to integrate itself with the non-official sectors of society rather than insulate itself from them.’ 29 The motivation behind this shift in policy was manifold, and in no small part due to the internal instability of the regime after 1953. 30 In the wake of the official denunciation of Stalinist atrocities in Khrushchev’s so-called ‘Secret Speech’ at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in 1956 and the liberalising trends of the second phase of the Thaw that followed shortly thereafter, a sense of (or at least desire for) cultural plurality and social autonomy gradually began to emerge. According to Zubok, one of the major events of the period that contributed to the post-Stalinist cultural rejuvenation was the World Youth Festival that took place in Moscow in 1957. 31 The festival exposed Soviet Russians to foreign cultures for the first time in decades, and, perhaps more importantly, allowed previously marginalised

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28 Vot uzh poistinu russkaya muzika – novaya, svetlaya, kristal'no-chistogo stilya’; see Georgy Sviridov, Muzika kak sud'ba [Music as Destiny], (Moscow, Molodaya gvardiya, 2002), 336.
30 Perhaps most immediate was the issue of succession after Stalin's death, which led to conflicts over and reassessments of economic, cultural, social, agricultural and foreign policies. For an overview of the issues arising after Stalin’s death, see Sakwa, Soviet Politics in Perspective, 50-65.
31 See Zubok, Zhivago’s Children, 100-111.
aspects of Russian culture to emerge, bringing about the return of ‘the idea of a multiplicity of cultures, and cultural pluralism, which had been excluded by socialist realism’.\textsuperscript{32}

The crisis in Soviet identity caused by the denunciation of Stalinism was complex and multifaceted. Optimism and an almost euphoric belief in the positive power of socialism came in tandem with an increase in public criticism of various aspects of state policy (particularly agricultural policy, a perennial thorn in the flesh for the Soviet regime)\textsuperscript{33} accompanied by calls for reform. However, by the end of the 1960s, the cultural and political landscape of the Soviet Union had changed dramatically. Sakwa suggests that, ‘by 1964, having consolidated the role of the party and the existence of the bureaucratic system, Khrushchev became expendable.’\textsuperscript{34}

And, indeed, he was duly removed from office in October 1964, allowing Leonid Brezhnev’s regime to pursue a partial return to pre-Thaw conservatism. This was partly an attempt to shore-up the authority of the State following Khrushchev’s somewhat chaotic stint at the helm, and partly an attempt to pacify an increasingly vociferous neo-Stalinist faction within the CPSU itself.\textsuperscript{35} The arrest of the writers Yuli Daniel and Andrei Sinyavsky in September 1965 and the ensuing trial of 1966\textsuperscript{36} is often cited as a defining moment in this shift away from cultural liberalism, as is the suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968. There followed a gradual and almost inevitable decline in the effectiveness of Marxist-Leninist ideology – indeed, Sakwa goes as far as to suggest that, ‘[i]n many respects the Brezhnev years saw the extinction of Marxism-Leninism as a meaningful philosophy in the Soviet Union and Eastern

\textsuperscript{32} Zubok, \textit{Zhivago’s Children}, 105.
\textsuperscript{33} Stalin’s catastrophic neglect of agriculture was almost matched by Khrushchev’s impulsive ineptitude – for example, Khrushchev at one point decided to force farms to cultivate maize ‘irrespective of local conditions’ because he had been impressed by its use as a fodder crop to feed livestock on a visit to Iowa in 1959 (see Sakwa, \textit{Soviet Politics in Perspective}, 57).
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 69.
\textsuperscript{36} Perhaps presaged by the trial of Joseph Brodsky in 1964. See Zubok, \textit{Zhivago’s Children}, 221-222.
Europe. This was accompanied by what Zubok describes as ‘a reaction against the gap between the letter of Soviet law and the state’s punitive practices’ that allowed for the emergence of a ‘movement for human rights, which would openly and publicly challenge the Soviet authorities over the interpretation of constitutional rights.’ The drive towards pluralism, the desire for individual autonomy, and the calls for reform remained (and arguably intensified), but the euphoria and optimism of the late 1950s had faded. There emerged a desire for alternatives to fill the gap left by a political dogma that ‘no longer appeared to have any explanatory power.’

The problem facing Brezhnev and his right-hand man, Mikhail Suslov (Second Secretary of the CPSU after 1965), was that acknowledging the need for reform essentially undermined the legitimacy of the state, yet completely ignoring it would likely result in a general migration of the intellectual elite. This resulted in an ill-fated attempt by the Brezhnev regime to extricate itself from this self-inflicted Catch-22 by surreptitiously preserving the status quo whilst simultaneously attempting to appease outspoken or critical members of the intelligentsia by permitting them a public platform for their grievances and even showering them with state prizes, as was the case with Sviridov and many other members of the Russian nationalist movement. This is what Sakwa refers to as the ‘managerial approach’ to encouraging the rejuvenation of mass political participation in the post-Stalinist period, ‘adopted by Malenkov and practiced by Brezhnev, channelling participation into safe paths which would not threaten the political and bureaucratic prerogatives of Soviet officials’.

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37 Sakwa, Soviet Politics in Perspective, 206.
38 Zubok, Zhivago’s Children, 259.
40 For a detailed study of Russian nationalism in literature and literary journals, see Brudny, Reinventing Russia.
41 Sakwa, Soviet Politics in Perspective, 60.
regime, this approach turned out to be ineffectual because it had been undermined before it was even adopted by what Sakwa describes as Khrushchev’s ‘populist’ approach, that allowed the authority of the State to be challenged and ‘expose[d] bureaucrats to effective criticism.’

Once the flood gates had been opened it became increasingly difficult to hold back the deluge. Though ultimately a failure, the Brezhnev regime’s policy of inclusion seems to have been born out of a recognition that it was fundamentally impossible simultaneously to acquiesce to demands for reform and to maintain the type of pervasive state-hegemony of the pre-Thaw period. Therefore, in addition to displaying the shifts between cultural, ideological heterogeneity and hegemony across the various stages of development of the Soviet Union, Figure 1.1 (above) also highlights the relationship between ideological and cultural pluralism and the stability of the state: the more effectively the individual voice was suppressed, the more stable the regime (as represented by the contraction to a single line in Fig. 1.1). Conversely, the more diverse and prominent the individual voice, the more unstable the regime’s control over the cultural, social, even political environment became, and the more desperate its attempts to preserve its ascendancy (as represented by the expansion into multiple lines in Fig. 1.1). Where Stalin had ‘succeeded’ through imperative brute force, Brezhnev and Suslov failed. This was largely because, as a result of the liberalising trends of the Thaw, the Brezhnev regime was unable (and most likely genuinely unwilling) to return wholesale to Stalinist methods of suppression. The regime therefore had to seek subtler methods of self-preservation, namely an attempt to maintain state hegemony behind a flimsy façade of ideological heterogeneity. The irony of the failure of inclusion as a policy designed

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43 This is also a crucial feature of what Yurchak describes as the ‘performative shift’ that took place in late Soviet society. For a more detailed explanation, see Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever* (particularly Chapter 2, ‘Hegemony of Form’) and Chapter 4 of the present thesis.
to preserve the ascendancy of the state is that, more than anything else, it actually appears to have accelerated the decline of the regime, leading directly towards Perestroika, glasnost’, and ultimately to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

In this sense, Jowitt’s three-stage model (as applied to the Soviet Union) can be updated into a more complete four-stage format in which ‘Inclusion’ leads into a final stage that might be termed ‘Decline and Collapse of the Revolutionary Regime’ (or ‘Decline’ as it appears in Fig. 1.1 and hereafter). The years 1964–1985 encompass the shift from Jowitt’s period of ‘Inclusion’ to the final period of Perestroika and the collapse of the USSR, and it is perhaps worth restating that, though this thesis generally preserves the loose conceptual boundaries of ‘Thaw’ and ‘Stagnation’, the epoch under consideration also corresponds somewhat to Hakobian’s temporal definition of the ‘Bronze Age’ of Soviet music mentioned above. In addition to the general dearth of English-language studies covering this complex period of Soviet musical history, one of the fundamental reasons for considering the Stagnation era in particular is to shed some light on the artistic and cultural processes which both influenced and were influenced by this gradual shift from ‘Inclusion’ to ‘Decline’, the most intriguing of which appears to have been the increased drive towards the forging of an autonomous ideological and artistic identity distinct from that prescribed by the regime.

1.2 Howling Wolves: Theory and Methodology

A common Russian proverb runs: S volkami zhit’, po volch’i višt’. A direct translation would be ‘to live with wolves means to howl like the wolf’; ⁴⁴ a more familiar English-language

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⁴⁴ Thanks to Levon Hakobian for drawing my attention to this proverb and its resonance in the Soviet context.
equivalent might be: ‘when in Rome, do as the Romans do’. In essence, the broad implication of each is that it is necessary or favourable, perhaps even unavoidable, to conform to the rules, customs, regulations and accepted behaviour of the society in which one finds oneself, even if that behaviour is repugnant. This is a crucial aspect of Yurchak’s theory of Soviet society, and it helps in comprehending two of his most essential concepts, namely svoy and vnye.

Following both Schmelz’s and Bullock’s use of certain aspects of Yurchak’s theory, this thesis adopts these concepts of svoy and vnye as a central part of its theoretical framework.

Yurchak describes svoy [literally: ‘one’s own’] as having been: ‘a kind of sociality that differed from those represented in authoritative discourse [i.e. official state rhetoric in newspapers, speeches or reports etc.] as the “Soviet people,” “Soviet toilers,” and so forth’, but which, crucially, ‘should not be reduced to a binary scheme of “us” versus “them” or “common people” versus “the state,” which has been a rather common differentiation in many analyses of Soviet society’. The concept may be summarised as a recognition of the distinction of the ‘self’ (and those like oneself) from the ‘other’ or the ne svoy, resulting in an adapted behavioural pattern that allows one to exist and function both within the context of a wider, mass society, and on a more intimate, meaningful level with those considered svoy, which transcends that wider environment.

This results in a state of suspension, described by Yurchak as ‘being vnye’, which is neither supportive of nor opposed to the ‘authoritative rituals’ of the regime. ‘Being’ or ‘becoming vnye’ is a useful concept for describing the process of attaining ideological and artistic

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46 Terminology derived from Bakhtin, where ‘vnye’ means ‘outside’ (see Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, Chapter 4).
autonomy within an ideologically prescriptive environment. Yurchak employs the term *vnye* to describe a way of living in a particular context or environment whilst being simultaneously removed from it, for example, ‘being within a context while remaining oblivious to it,’ or ‘being simultaneously a part of the system and yet not following certain of its parameters.’ This also appears to be what Sakwa is referring to in his description of an emergent ‘alternative society’ that was ‘not so much counterposed to the official world but rather ignored it.’ Being *vnye*, according to Yurchak, is a ‘suspended’ way of living in which ‘[o]ne employs discursive means that do not quite fit the pro/anti dichotomy in relation to authoritative discourse and cannot be quite articulated within the parameters of that discourse.’ As Schmelz points out, ‘[b]y concentrating on this quality of “suspension,” Yurchak’s work provides a much-needed revision to those binary views of the Soviet state that emphasize […] oppositions.’ Thus it provides an excellent framework around which to structure a balanced and objective investigation of Stagnation culture.

As will be explored in detail over the following three chapters, the underlying aesthetic of many cultural products of the Stagnation period appears to parallel what Yurchak identifies as the ‘value’ of social and cultural practices in late-Soviet society, which ‘included the production of particular worlds that were spatially, temporally, thematically, and meaningfully *vnye* the regime of Soviet authoritative discourse.’ He goes on to describe what he terms ‘distant topics’ (i.e., topics unrelated to ‘Sovietness’ or state politics) such as ‘ancient history and foreign literature, pre-Soviet architecture, and Russian Silver Age (early twentieth-

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52 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 150.
century) poetry, theoretical physics and botany, archaeology and Western rock music,

Buddhist philosophy and religion’ as being, ‘interesting not only in themselves but because
they “injected” various temporal, spatial, semantic, linguistic, scientific, biologic and other
“elsewheres” into the here-and-now of one’s personal life, producing the intense relation of
“being vnye” the Soviet universe.’

This thesis suggests that the concept of these meaningful ‘elsewheres’ can be directly applied
to much of the art music composed during the Stagnation era, not only by Silvestrov and the
‘Unofficial’ generation, or shestidesyatniki (literally: ‘the sixtiers’, meaning the generation
who came of age in the 1960s), as has been suggested by Schmelz, but also by Soviet
composers of preceding generations such as Shostakovich and Sviridov. Moreover, vocal
cycles and song are a particularly fruitful genre when considering this concept in music, since
the confluence of poetry and music, poet and composer generate a vastly heterogeneous
cultural product that has the potential to unite and transcend a variety of narrative voices,
historical contexts, and locations.

The arguments presented in the following chapters seek to follow Philip Bullock’s lead in
exploring vocal music in a synthesised, interdisciplinary manner, giving roughly equal
consideration to music and literature. This approach will be all the more conducive to
exploring the complex function of music within the kaleidoscopic cultural environment of the
Stagnation era. Poetic texts, their interaction with music, and of course composers’ choices of
which texts to set, can in themselves convey information about certain cultural currents and

53 Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, 150-151. Emphasis and transliteration as in original.
54 In particular, see Bullock, ‘Intimacy and Distance: Valentin Sil’vestrov’s Tikhie pesni’, Slavonic and East
European Review, 92/3 (July 2014), 401-429, and Bullock, ‘The Poet’s Echo, The Composer’s Voice: Monologic
Verse or Dialogic Song?’ in Pauline Fairclough (ed.), Shostakovich Studies 2 (Cambridge, Cambridge University
Press, 2010), 207-227.
expectations such as nationalism, patriotism, religion, mysticism, Orthodoxy, intimacy, formality, symbolism, escapism, alternative perceptions of historical narrative, and, most pertinently, the attempts by composers to construct from these some form of personal identity and to struggle towards their own artistic, ideological autonomy from a regime that was regressing into gerontocratic inertia.

The decision to focus this study on Shostakovich, Sviridov and Silvestrov has two main reasons. Firstly, they are arguably the three most prolific composers of vocal cycles during the period under consideration. Alongside a number of smaller vocal cycles, Shostakovich produced three large works in the genre between 1965 and 1975: Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok, Op. 127, Six Poems of Marina Tsvetaeva, Op. 143, and Suite on Verses of Michelangelo Buonarotti, Op. 145, not to mention his Symphony No. 14, Op. 135, which may reasonably be described as a (semi-)symphonic vocal cycle.55 Erstwhile student of Shostakovich, Georgy Sviridov, was one of the most prolific and popular composers of vocal music in the Soviet Union, producing settings of over twenty of Aleksandr Blok’s poems in various cycles and collections between 1961 and 1980 alone, the 1977 vocal cycle on twelve poems by Sergei Esenin, Russia Cast Adrift (mentioned above), as well as numerous cantatas, choruses and oratorios. And of the ‘Unofficial’ generation of Soviet composers who came of age in the 1950s and ’60s, Valentin Silvestrov was (and remains) the most prolific composer of vocal music, his contribution to the genre including two major cycles: the colossal (almost two hours in duration) 24-song cycle Quiet Songs [Tikhie pesni] composed between 1974 and 1977, and

55 Shostakovich initially referred to the work as an ‘oratorio for soprano, bass and chamber orchestra’, but later rejected this designation, writing ‘[i]t cannot really be called an oratorio, since an oratorio is supposed to have a chorus, and mine doesn’t […] It shouldn’t really be called a symphony either. For the first time in my life, I really do not know what to call one of my compositions’. See Isaak Glikman (trans. Anthony Phillips), Story of a Friendship: The Letters of Dmitri Shostakovich to Isaak Glikman 1941–1975 (London, Faber, 2001), 158-159.
Steps [Stupeni] (1981–1982; 1997), along with numerous other smaller song collections, cantatas and choruses setting a diverse range of poets of diverse periods and nationalities, from Osip Mandelstam to John Keats.

Secondly, these three composers are representative of three distinct generations who were all forced to confront the same ideological, cultural and existentialist issues that intensified after Brezhnev’s partial return to pre-Thaw conservatism. Being from three distinct generational backgrounds, the composers under consideration reacted to these issues in diverse ways. They followed different ideological paths parallel to the prismatic disintegration of the Soviet regime after the denunciation of Stalinist policies in 1956, which led to an increasing fissiparousness of cultural and ideological identities, and ultimately initiated a period in Soviet history which, above all, saw the ascendancy of the individual voice (see Fig. 1.1).

1.3 Chapter Summary

The research in this thesis is presented in three main chapters (2, 3, and 4), dedicated to each of the above three composers in turn. The discussion in each case is focused on the contextualisation and analysis of a particular vocal cycle, whilst the order of the chapters is chronologically determined by both the date of birth of the composer considered, and the date of composition of the vocal cycle analysed.

Chapter 2 addresses Shostakovich’s conflicted personal and artistic identity as he crossed the threshold into his enigmatic late style. This is considered through the lens of his 1966/7 vocal

\footnote{Also sometimes referred to by its German title, Stufen. The work will hereafter be referred to primarily by its Russian title, Stupeni, as the Russian word contains more nuance (also meaning ‘stages’, ‘rungs’ or ‘levels’) than the more mundane English ‘steps’, for which Russian also has ‘shagi’ [‘шаги’].}
cycle for soprano and piano trio, the *Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok*, Op. 127. Shostakovich had already survived the drastic swing from permissive liberalism to conservatism 30 years earlier when the atmosphere of Futurism-tinged experimentalism of the first post-revolutionary decade gradually sank into the quagmire of doctrinaire Stalinism. From around the time of his first denunciation in 1936, Shostakovich’s somewhat schizophrenic relationship with the State meant that he occupied an awkward position between being held up as a figurehead of the Soviet musical establishment on the one hand, whilst simultaneously falling under suspicion of ideological treason from the party’s cultural ideologues on the other. After an effective truce during the war years, this position intensified, in particular after his second denunciation in 1948, and it culminated in a personal crisis surrounding his decision to become a member of the CPSU in 1960 – a decision apparently completely at odds with his desire to support and identify with the younger ‘Unofficial’ generation of composers (of which Silvestrov was one). Chapter 2 contends that this struggle for identity, or perhaps between two contradictory identities, accompanied and influenced the development of his increasingly introverted late style over the last fifteen years of his life.

In order to explore this conflict between identities, this chapter adopts Yurchak’s concept of *svoy* as a means of elucidating the processes through which Shostakovich found ways of identifying or communicating with cultures, artists and artworks external to those defined or interpreted through a Soviet lens, whilst simultaneously occupying an official position within the Soviet Union. A point of particular interest is Aleksandr Blok’s own use of the terms ‘ours’ [*svoy*] and ‘not ours’ [*ne svoyo*] to describe the poetic synthesis of the personal and
what might be termed the ‘supra-personal’ in the voice of the poet (or, indeed, any artist). The terms imply both a conflict and a synthesis, and, along with the echoes of Hegelian dialectics, are strikingly similar to Yurchak’s conceptualisation of svoi. The chapter seeks to analyse and interpret Shostakovich’s Blok cycle based upon these concepts, exploring the ways in which conflicting aspects of the personal and supra-personal may eventually synthesise over the course of the cycle, and how Shostakovich’s artistic processes and musical peculiarities have the potential to parallel certain overarching sociological concepts applied to late-Soviet society.

By the beginning of the Stagnation period, Sviridov, like Shostakovich, began to occupy an awkward, somewhat paradoxical position as a member of what Jowitt describes as an ‘articulated audience’ which was able to be openly critical of the contemporary Soviet regime, but only because the regime allowed it to be so. The state’s method of regulating public opposition (in this case, the Russian nationalist movement) by granting it a voice in public discourse whilst preventing that opposition from boiling over into widespread public protest or even revolution is a central feature of both Jowitt’s ‘Inclusionary politics’ and Sakwa’s ‘managerial approach’ outlined above, which, throughout the 1960s and ’70s, allowed for ‘greater individual autonomy […] as long as it did not pass beyond the bounds and become an open challenge to the regime’. This meant that Sviridov managed to be simultaneously critical of the Soviet regime through his identification with Russian (N.B. not

57 ‘Supra-personal’ is derived from Vasina-Grossman’s term ‘vnyelichnity’, the prefix ‘vnye’ implying more than just ‘impersonal’ [nelychni]. See Vasina-Grossman, Mastera sovetskogo romansa, 241, and also Chapter 2 of the present thesis.
58 The word used by Blok, cane, pronounced ‘sya-yó’, is the nominative neuter form of the word employed by Yurchak, svoi [svoi].
60 Sakwa, Soviet Politics in Perspective, 69.
Soviet) nationalist ideology, but was also regularly showered with state accolades; he was part of an intellectual, nationalist opposition to the Soviet state which was, in reality, mobilised and articulated by the State itself as part of the doomed policy of inclusion.

Chapter 3 explores Sviridov’s engagement with Russian nationalism through an analytical examination of his 1977 vocal cycle, Russia Cast Adrift. The cycle features twelve settings of poems by Sergei Esenin (1895–1925), all of which feature a strongly nationalistic mingling of natural imagery, religious symbolism and Russian patriotism, expressive of Esenin’s own reactionary inability to cope with what he appears to have regarded as the Bolshevik apotheosis of industrialisation and technological advance. It is suggested that Sviridov’s identification with Esenin’s rose-tinted evocation of ‘Wooden Russia’ aligns him with the nascent Russian nationalist movements of the 1950s and ’60s, particularly with one of the major literary movements that was emerging concurrently known as ‘Village Prose’ [Derevenskaya proza], which Brudny has described as a ‘distinct group of social critics’ who became ‘the voice of Russian nationalist sentiment and a starting point for the development of the Russian nationalist movement.’

From its origins in the Village Prose movement, post-Stalin Russian nationalism became strongly associated with the criticism of the Soviet Union’s consistently shambolic agricultural policies and rural Russian life in general. For many intellectuals of the war generation who, like Sviridov, had come from conservative rural backgrounds before moving to urban centres, Russian nationalism became a form of identity by which they could define themselves and even obtain some form of intellectual, political, and ideological autonomy from the regime.

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61 Brudny, Reinventing Russia, 47.
The chapter presents a close analysis of selected songs from *Russia Cast Adrift* to explore the ways in which the cycle can be understood as both a musical analogue to, and a cultural product of, this new Russian nationalist movement. The analysis delves into the specifics of Sviridov’s musical treatment of Esenin’s texts, and seeks to show how the cycle may be understood as being expressive of the same preoccupations that interested other members of the nationalist intelligentsia.

Chapter 4 looks at the way in which Valentin Silvestrov, as a member of the younger, ‘Unofficial’ generation, came to terms with the increasingly fissiparous nature of society and culture in the 1970s and early ’80s as the Soviet Union ground towards Perestroika, and eventually collapse. Members of Silvestrov’s generation received their education in the post-Stalinist period when censorship was beginning to relax and ideas were seeping in from the West, with composers and musicians including ‘Leonard Bernstein, Glenn Gould, Boulez, Stravinsky, Nadia Boulanger, Nicolas Slonimsky, and Otto Luening and Vladimir Ussachevsky all [making] influential journeys behind the Iron Curtain over the course of the late 1950s and early 1960s.’

By the onset of Stagnation, this younger generation seems to have rejected both Western modernism and Soviet cultural ideologies, concentrating instead on developing very personal, individualist forms of musical autonomy. Yurchak describes writer Sergei Dolvatov’s assessment of an attitude which emerged in the mid-1960s, ‘in which people did not evaluate Soviet life as moral or immoral, because they considered the events and facts of Soviet life around them to be relatively irrelevant compared to “deep truths.”’

By 1970, for many of the younger generation of Soviet composers to which Silvestrov

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63 Yurchak *Everything was Forever*, 126-127.
belonged, political disinterestedness (if not outright apathy) led to a focus on metaphysical, spiritual, religious and transcendental themes, which had the potential to be used as a means of expressing a personal, individualistic identity, distinct from their officially ‘Soviet’ identity. This corresponds to the prismatic disintegration of hegemonic cultural discourse shown in Fig. 1.1 (above), and to the social shifts explored by Yurchak.

In order to contextualise Silvestrov within the wider cultural environment of the period, this chapter briefly explores a number of other cultural products and movements of the 1970s and ‘80s that pursue a similarly otherworldly, escapist, if not postmodernist aesthetic. This discussion takes examples from Soviet cinema, namely the existentially broken characters that drift deliriously through the borderlands of Andrei Tarkovsky’s films of the 1970s, Solaris [Solyaris] (1972), The Mirror [Zerkalo] (1975), and Stalker [Stalker] (1979), and also considers the surrealist performance art group known as The Necrorealists that emerged in the late 1970s.64 The discussion then turns to Silvestrov’s music, presenting a detailed analysis of selected songs from his vocal cycle Stupeni, composed concurrently with the better-known Symphony No. 5 between 1981 and 1982 (with the exception of the first song, ‘Dedication’ [Posvyashchenie], which was added in 1997 after the death of Silvestrov’s wife). Curiously Stupeni has received little or no attention in either English- or Russian-language musicological studies; nor is it mentioned in a recent volume dedicated to interviews and lectures given by Silvestrov about his own compositions.65 As with Shostakovich and Sviridov, the analysis examines the musical peculiarities of Silvestrov’s vocal cycle, connects them to the cultural

64 So called because of their fascination with the process of death and decay. See Yurchak, ‘Necro-Utopia: The Politics of Indistinction and the Aesthetics of the Non-Soviet’, Current Anthropology, 49/2 (April 2008), 199-224, and Chapter 4 of the present thesis.

environment in which the cycle was produced, and seeks to explore how the music may relate
to overarching sociological concepts, again taken primarily from Yurchak. It was hoped that
direct contact with Silvestrov himself might have been possible, but this particular venture
unfortunately bore no fruit. In the absence of first-hand material, information has been drawn
from various interviews Silvestrov has given over the past three decades, notably with
Svetlana Savenko, Tatiana Frumis, and Peter Schmelz.

*     *     *

Despite Sviridov’s proximity to Shostakovich as one of his pupils at the Leningrad
Conservatoire during the late 1930s and early ’40s, a much stronger parallel arguably emerges
between Shostakovich and Silvestrov. While it is contended that all three composers
considered in this thesis are united by an impulse to construct personal and artistic identities
increasingly distinct from that projected as ‘Soviet’ by the state, Sviridov appears to have been
the only one of the three to have located this alternative identity within the contemporaneous
socio-political environment. Despite a tendency to gaze backwards to a highly romanticised
pre-revolutionary Russia – an idealised rural existence founded on ‘Orthodoxy, Autocracy,
and Nationhood’66 – Sviridov’s identification as a Russian nationalist rendered him an active
participant in the critical public debate about various aspects of the Soviet Union that began to
take place from the mid-1950s onwards. In contrast, Shostakovich and Silvestrov seem to have
pursued alternatives to ‘Sovietness’ in a far more personal realm. Nonetheless, it is suggested
that a significant parallel between the three composers is that, to varying degrees, they all
appear to have reached out to alternate realities, be they historical, rose-tinted, nostalgic, real

66 Pravoslaviye, samoderzhaviye, narodnost’ – Tsar Nicholas I’s answer to ‘Liberté, égalité, fraternité’.
or imagined, to form the basis of their artistic identities. As such, this thesis ultimately suggests that, between 1964 and 1985, Shostakovich, Sviridov, and Silvestrov each produced vocal cycles that reflected their own personal desire and impulse to transcend their immediate social and political environment by engaging with various ‘elsewheres’, alternative cultures, and historical epochs. Furthermore, it is suggested that, in doing so, they reflect a wide-ranging cultural response to a crisis in Soviet identity that followed the denunciation of Stalinism in 1956 by creating personal, artistic, and in some cases, political identities for themselves that were distinct from (vnye), if not necessarily in direct opposition to, an ideologically defined ‘Soviet’ identity.
2. Stepping over the Threshold: Shostakovich’s Blok Cycle

2.1 Introduction to an Ending

The *Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok*, Op. 127 were composed during the winter of 1966/7, around the same time as a number of significant works in various genres that form a gateway into Shostakovich’s late style, and which illustrate a developmental transition towards the characteristically bleak and enigmatic musical language of his final decade. These works include the String Quartets Nos. 11 in F minor, Op. 122 and 12 in D flat, Op. 133 (1966 and 1968 respectively), the Cello Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op. 126 (1966), the Violin Concerto No. 2, Op. 129 (1967), the Violin Sonata, Op. 134 (1968), and the unremittingly dark Symphony No. 14, Op. 135 (1969), understood by Levon Hakobian as being ‘a vocal cycle rather than a symphony in the usual sense.’\(^67\) The Blok settings were officially published as a ‘Vocal-instrumental Suite for Soprano, Violin, Cello and Piano’, though in correspondence from around the time the work was written, Shostakovich often referred to them as ‘a vocal cycle’, or ‘romances’, and there is a suggestion from an interview in 1967 that he intended simply to name the work ‘[“Music”], since it was written to very musical words...’\(^68\)

The work consists of seven of Blok’s early poems written within the space of four years between September 1898 and December 1902, set to music in their complete forms and intended to be performed (according to Shostakovich’s performance note at the bottom of the first page of the score) ‘completely and without interruptions.’\(^69\) The songs, in their published


\(^{68}\) Manashir Iakubov, *New Collected Works*, Vol. 91 (Moscow, DSCH Publishers, 2010), 173. The fact that he titled the final song of the cycle ‘Music’ no doubt also influenced this consideration.

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 109.
order, are ‘Song of Ophelia’ [Pesnya Ofelii], ‘Gamayun, Bird of Prophecy’ [Gamayun, ptitsa veshchaya], ‘We Were Together’ [Më bli vnest], ‘The City Sleeps’ [Gorod spirt], ‘The Storm’ [Burya], ‘Secret Signs’ [Taynë znaki], and ‘Music’ [Muzika], the last three flowing seamlessly into one another, linked by attacca markings. The most obvious structural principle at work is the permutations offered to Shostakovich by the constituent instrumental forces of a piano trio with voice, resulting in three duos (cello and voice; piano and voice; violin and voice), three trios (cello, piano and voice; violin, piano and voice; and violin, cello and voice), and finally the full ensemble of piano trio and voice. Although it is possible to identify various other structural principles at work in the formal organization of the Blok cycle, assessing the dramaturgical trajectory and the psychological, ideological, and perhaps even eschatological content of the work proves problematic, as is often the case with Shostakovich’s music, especially as he moves into his late period.

One of the major difficulties in approaching Shostakovich is the vast amount of often contradictory writing about his music, life and identity. In contrast to both Sviridov and Silvestrov (who have garnered comparatively little attention, at least in the West), Shostakovich was an object of intense curiosity and fascination for audiences, critics, musicologists and performers since long before his death in 1975. His habitually ambiguous and enigmatic stance when talking about his own music and life, combined with the extraordinary social, cultural and political history of the Soviet Union, has contributed to a kaleidoscopic variety of interpretations and evaluations of both his music and his ideological orientation. To this may be added the almost pathological desire of some contemporaries (not to mention subsequent critics, performers and academics) to prove that it was they who knew, understood, or correctly interpreted his ‘true’ voice. The question of whether he was a loyal
Communist, a courageous and principled staunch dissident, a convinced apathetic, a Holy Fool, a troubled Hamlet, or any other familiar character-paradigm has resulted in a substantial muddying of the waters of an already muddled discussion. Indeed, does it even make sense to search for a single answer?

A proclivity to evaluate Shostakovich’s musical, political and ideological identity through often speculative hermeneutical and semiotic readings of his music, influenced by partially mythologised biographical details, has persisted, it seems, for decades. The mythological Shostakovich of Volkovian folklore, so palatable to Western consumption for so long, remains popular despite the efforts of scholars (notably Laurel Fay who led the charge in 1980 with her *Russian Review* article ‘Shostakovich -vs- Volk: Whose Testimony?’70) to challenge the seductive yet two-dimensional characterisation of the composer so often evoked in books, journals, concert programmes, radio and television broadcasts, newspaper articles and CD liner notes. For all its titillatory capacity, this caricature has contributed little to (and probably rather detracts from) our understanding of the composer, his music and his epoch.

A contributing factor to the often exasperating obsession with deciphering messages in this music is the acute development of psychological narrative that Shostakovich achieves, both in individual movements as well as over the course of whole works, and, indeed, arguably across his entire compositional output. There are a number of parameters that contribute to this long-range psychological development and lend the music its highly rhetorical tone. These can be observed on various structural and temporal levels, and include (though are by no means

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70 This article was reprinted in Malcolm Brown (ed.), *A Shostakovich Casebook* (Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 2004), 11-22, along with a letter to the editor of *Literaturnaya gazeta* from 1979 entitled ‘A Pitiful Fake: About the So-Called “Memoirs” of D. D. Shostakovich’ that was written as an immediate response to the publication of Volkov’s book and signed by a number of Shostakovich’s close friends and associates including Mieczysław Weinberg and Karen Khachatryan (ibid., 80-83).
limited to): melodic fragments repeated in varying contexts; salient rhythmic gestures such as
the ubiquitous repeated-note anapaest and dactyl (which have direct rhetorical association with
the rhythms of poetic metre); significant intervalllic relationships such as oscillating semitones
and open fourths which become increasingly prevalent in the composer’s last compositions;
musical quotations or references and self-quotation. There are also formal signifiers such as
the use of passacaglia at moments of intensity or gravity (as in the Piano Trio No. 2 in E
minor, Op. 67), or the large-scale form of the suite, explored early on in works such as the
Aphorisms, Op. 13 and the String Quartet No. 2, Op. 68, but which takes on a particular
importance in the last decade of the composer’s life as a structuring principle for vocal
compositions.

In his brief but influential article of 1974, Malcolm Brown introduces Boris Asafiev’s
concepts of ‘intonazia’ and ‘musical imagery’ as the principal theoretical tools employed by
Soviet composers and musicologists in their attempt to ‘correlate music with the phenomenal
world […] locating its proximity to the precepts of socialist-realist doctrine.’

Brown splits
the associative and symbolic properties of these ‘intonazias’ into three (non-exhaustive)
categories: those ‘whose associations with life are perceived immediately,’ those ‘which arise
from music’s correlation with other art forms,’ and those which ‘are established through
purely musical references.’ It is the various rhythmic, melodic, thematic parameters or
‘intonazias’, developed over the course of Shostakovich’s life, combined with an aptitude for
constantly evolving long-range, dramaturgically suggestive formal structures of the sort

Quarterly 60/4 (October 1974), 558.
72 Ibid., 559-560.
explored by David Fanning in his chapter in *Shostakovich Studies 2*, not to mention the extraordinary historical context in which his works were composed and performed, which invites (almost forces) the listener to attach extra-musical significance or literal meaning to Shostakovich’s music (and conversely, renders it almost impossible to divorce such ‘meaning’ from the music once articulated). But it is not necessarily the ‘intonazias’ in themselves, nor their myriad subjective associations, that create or develop meaning. Rather it is the ways in which Shostakovich treats, reformulates, warps, and makes them interact over the course of a given movement or work that holds key rhetorical significance for the psychological narrative trajectory of that work, independent of any actual semantic (text-associated) content. To distill the idea even further, tracing a developmental process of thematic dialogue and synthesis taking place through time (across the duration of a musical work) has the potential to reveal more about the trajectory of a work than merely speculating at a supposed *literal meaning* behind the work. The process of dramaturgical development becomes particularly acute in the genre of the vocal cycle and the structural form of the suite because of the added layer of the literary content of the texts and the cultural and social associations of recognisable structural forms (notably the passacaglia in the case of the Blok cycle). Considering the way musical and literary themes, gestures, and images intertwine and develop can reveal much about the psychological, dramaturgical process of a vocal cycle, about the creative process behind the work, and about the personal and artistic identity of the composer, without resorting to what Francis Maes has described as ‘reductive literalism’.

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Neither first nor last amongst those who have fallen into this trap is Ian MacDonald, whose attempt at uncovering the ‘true’ identity of Shostakovich by evaluating his music through its chameleonic historical context amounts to little more than locating and decoding secret messages in Shostakovich’s musical language, most of them imaginary. Applied ad nauseam to almost every single work in the composer’s oeuvre, these musical codes are then used to prove the veracity of the Volkovian ‘New’ Shostakovich, though, in essence, the practice is one of putting messages in bottles and then claiming that Shostakovich wrote them. But however misguided MacDonald’s enthusiasm may have been, it is interesting that he seems generally to shy away from any interpretation of Shostakovich’s highly significant late vocal cycles, possibly due to the fact there is very little mention of them (if any at all) in *Testimony*. Aside from some predictable assertions about ‘pieces like *Poet and Tsar* from *Six Romances on Poems by Marina Tsvetayeva*, Opus 143, and The Zaporozhian Cossacks’ Answer in the Fourteenth Symphony’ being expressions of ‘fury directed at [Shostakovich’s] country’s political leadership’, 75 or the Michelangelo cycle being ‘explicit’ in expressing ‘the anger of Shostakovich’s old age […] expended on those “working to make our era cynical”’, 76 MacDonald generally avoids engaging with these cycles in any detail, and apparently never considers the actual texts or poets being set worthy of deeper investigation, though this may be due to his not having been familiar with the Russian language. Despite his quite reasonable call for the Blok cycle to be understood as one of three archetypal works that introduce the ‘basic elements’ of Shostakovich’s late style, 77 nothing more is said about the work, apart

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77 MacDonald, *The New Shostakovich*, 235. The other two archetypal works are identified as the String Quartet No. 11 and the Cello Concerto No. 2.
from some nebulous remarks about its being ‘cosmically oracular’, with an occurrence of what is described (without explanation or musical example) as, ‘the three-note figure and the “betrayal” motif’ in its third song (‘We Were Together’) which implies, according to MacDonald, ‘that to be human is to be shallow and undependable’.\textsuperscript{78}

Though significantly less elliptical and fanciful in her reading of Shostakovich’s vocal cycles and songs than MacDonald, Dorothea Redepenning also seems to lose her way in Maes’s maze of ‘reductive literalism’, insisting from the very first paragraph of her chapter in \textit{Shostakovich Studies} that, ‘in the more intimate genres of songs and string quartets [Shostakovich] discovered the possibility of a non-coded means of artistic expression, as it were.’\textsuperscript{79} From the very outset, Redepenning’s dichotomisation of artistic expression into the black-and-white schema of ‘coded’ or ‘non-coded’ further entrenches the beguiling obsession with messages and codes that has long plagued the exploration of Shostakovich’s music (both vocal and instrumental), and seems to correlate neatly with Maes’s description of ‘a tendency, especially in the West, to approach [Shostakovich’s] songs mainly with a desire for unequivocal answers to vexing questions of meaning in Shostakovich’s music as a whole, based on the tacit belief that words should provide a stable conceptual framework that is lacking in instrumental music.’\textsuperscript{80}

This dichromic view of Shostakovich’s means of artistic expression (as well as his life and identity in general) is rooted in what Alexei Yurchak has described as

\textsuperscript{78} MacDonald, \textit{The New Shostakovich}, 236-237.
\textsuperscript{80} Maes, ‘Between Reality and Transcendence’, 231-232.
problematic assumptions about Soviet socialism, which are implicitly and explicitly reproduced in much academic and journalistic writing today […] manifest […] in the use of binary categories to describe Soviet reality such as oppression and resistance, repression and freedom, the state and the people, official economy and second economy, official culture and counterculture, totalitarian language and counterlanguage, public self and private self, truth and lie, reality and dissimulation, morality and corruption, and so on.\(^1\)

This list of binary oppositions testifies to the long-familiar rhetoric used in both Russia and the West (itself an ideological, as well as geographical, binary) to describe and understand many aspects of Shostakovich’s life and music: public works, opinions, and writings vs. private works, hidden messages, confessions, and so on. Indeed, it seems apparent that a study of Shostakovich’s vocal cycles (and perhaps the field of Shostakovich studies in general) would benefit immeasurably from responding to Yurchak’s call for the rejection of binary oppositions as the primary method of understanding late Soviet society in favour of a complex and more nuanced approach that recognises and embraces the chameleonic, occasionally desultory, and often seemingly paradoxical nature of post-Thaw Soviet society, politics and culture. Simply stated, a more nuanced understanding of late Soviet society as advocated by Yurchak may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Shostakovich’s creative output and artistic identity (or indeed that of any artist working within that context), and vice versa. This seems to be what Maes is grasping for in his admonition directed at certain scholars’ recourse to ‘reductive literalism’ when approaching Shostakovich’s music in general, and

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songs in particular. Maes’s assertion that ‘song criticism that focuses on unequivocal meaning […] denies the defining quality of the genre’ appears reasonable, and his subsequent point—that ‘meaning in song is multidimensional by nature, resulting as it does from a subtle interplay between two discrete, autonomous modes of expression, whose combined content is always hard to paraphrase and partly elusive’—is potentially perceptive if not particularly conclusive (incidentally coming very close to Philip Bullock’s far more nuanced exploration of the multidimensional nature of expression in his chapter in Shostakovitch Studies 2). But while the admonition of literalism makes for a promising mission-statement at the head of his article, Maes fails to deliver quite as much as he demands, in essence offering little more than slightly-less-subjective-than-usual interpretations of Shostakovitch’s vocal works. Though certainly less ‘reductively literal’ than those criticised earlier in the article, Maes nonetheless occasionally lapses into banal literary criticism and superficial interpretation, with little attempt at any of the analytical integration of the ‘two discrete, autonomous modes of expression’ for which he identifies a need. Despite his initial criticism of the ‘tacit belief that words should provide a stable conceptual framework that is lacking in instrumental music’, he goes on to claim that, ‘[i]n the Blok cycle, Shostakovitch found words to make explicit a spiritual thread that runs through his output,’ and, furthermore, that the Blok cycle, ‘makes explicit the fact that Shostakovitch valued the idea of music’s spiritual potential.’ These statements are in themselves by no means void of insight. Indeed, Maes’s ruminations on spirituality, for example, are particularly intriguing when considered in conjunction with the

85 Ibid., 232.
86 Ibid., 249, emphases added.
parallels between the Theosophical undercurrent of the Symbolist movement to which Blok belonged and the increasing interest in religion and spirituality in the Stagnation period. However, these statements about finding words to ‘make explicit’ some sort of meaning do, regrettably, serve to undermine the methodological framework Maes himself proposes at the outset; his contradictory (if not slightly hypocritical) method of reading things into Shostakovich’s songs deflates his actual interpretation.

Looking eastwards, Soviet and Russian evaluations, as Maes points out, are themselves neither totally free from ‘reductive literalism’, nor innocent of generalised, quasi-philosophical interpretations and statements. Tamara Levaya, for instance, has described Shostakovich’s Blok cycle as signifying the beginning of a “period of farewell” [period proshchaniya],\(^{87}\) though, understandably given the scope of her survey, she skips somewhat lightly over the work itself, dedicating only two paragraphs to a brief summary of the seven settings. After describing the selection of texts by Shostakovich as preserving the ‘motives of loneliness [odinochestvo], internal discord [vnutrenniy razlad], disturbing premonitions [trevozhniy predchuvstvie], and terrible omens [grozniy predznamenovanie]’,\(^{88}\) which run throughout Blok’s poetry (though, significantly, not how or why this is done), Levaya outlines her idea of the thematic content of the cycle:

The ‘Song of Ophelia’ presents a symbol of doom, and the almost childlike helplessness of people in the face of worldly brutality. The sinister prophesy of the ‘bird of paradise’ Gamayun and ‘The Storm’ are the embodiment of evil human power and the elements [respectively]. ‘The City Sleeps’ and ‘Secret Signs’ are the portents of the ‘dreary days’ and the ‘impending preordained end’. ‘We Were Together’ is

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\(^{87}\) Tamara Levaya, *Istoriya otechestvennoy muziki vtoroy polovini XX veka* [History of Native [Russian] Music of the Second Half of the Twentieth Century], (St Petersburg, Kompozitor, 2005), 59.

\(^{88}\) Ibid., 59.
the image of ghostly, ephemeral happiness and fragile tenderness. The exceptionally varied and paradoxical musical interpretation of the final poem, ‘Music’, conveys the idea of the high mission of Art. The Blok-ian enthusiasm [blokovskaya vostorzhennost’] is here ‘extinguished’ [gasitsya] by the breath of the ‘austere muse’ [surovoy nuzi] of Shostakovich himself.⁸⁹

Being but a small passage in a broad historical survey, Levaya’s summary of the Blok cycle is brief and contains no reference to the music other than the high-flown assertion at the end. It offers only two references to the actual texts set, and is, for the most part, subjective and unsubstantiated, without any attempt to explore the motivation or method behind the work. This tendency towards vague, often unsubstantiated interpretations and aphoristic philosophising is symptomatic of a certain attitude in Russian musicology that is at odds with the current Western practice of incorporating a significant amount of sociological or political context into its methodology. This was somewhat blithely expressed by Sviridov’s nephew, Aleksandr Sergeevich Belonenko, as follows: ‘[Musicologists] in [the] USA and UK repeat our mistakes today [by] consider[ing] art through a prism of policy and official ideology. Listen [instead] to music [with your] heart and own ear’⁹⁰ But though her actual interpretations themselves lack analytical support, Levaya begins to hint at potential thematic links between Shostakovich’s settings which are certainly important to understanding the dramaturgical trajectory of the work and how it might function as a cycle – or indeed as a ‘vocal-instrumental suite’. In the passage cited, Levaya clearly associates the vehemence of the fifth song, ‘The Storm’, with the violent imagery of the prophecy in the second song ‘Gamayun’ (and perhaps also invites some comparison of the potentially destructive and opposing forces of humanity and nature). She also groups together the quietly portentous

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⁸⁹ Ibid., 59-60.
⁹⁰ Personal correspondence, 5 January 2016.
fourth and sixth songs (‘The City Sleeps’ and ‘Secret Signs’), and there is an implied linking of the first and third songs (‘Song of Ophelia’ and ‘We Were Together’). The final song in the cycle, ‘Music’, is treated as standing alone as a sort of cathartic postlude.

Writing two and a half decades earlier, and with slightly more analytical detail in her approach than Levaya, Soviet musicologist Vera Vasina-Grossman hears the ‘dramaturgy of the cycle’ as being ‘determined by the development and interweaving of two contrasting lines’, though she never fully explores exactly how or why Shostakovich attempts this. The first of these thematic lines, encapsulated in ‘Song of Ophelia’, is supposedly representative of the 19th-century concept of the Eternal Feminine, while the second stems from ‘Gamayun’, and is described as being ‘full of anxiety and rebellion.’ According to Vasina-Grossman, it is the ‘contrast postulated in these first two episodes [which] becomes the foundation for the development of the whole cycle’ and she goes on to emphasise that ‘the expressive foundation [osnova virazitel'nosti] of this music is in the principle of contrast [kontrastnost’].’ In terms of the overarching structure, she seems to hear the ‘Song of Ophelia’ as a prologue, with ‘Gamayun’ being the real start of the cycle, and, in the same way, she treats ‘Music’ (like Levaya) as a postlude, with ‘Secret Signs’ being the ‘logical conclusion’ of the cycle by virtue of its joining together of the two distinct thematic ideas represented by ‘Song of Ophelia’ and ‘Gamayun’ respectively (though, again, she does not illustrate precisely how this is achieved).

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92 Ibid., 242. Levon Hakobian also observes thematic references to the Eternal Feminine, as well as the use of ‘direct contrast’ between adjacent movements as a dramaturgical tool in Shostakovich’s Fourteenth Symphony (Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Era*, 222).
94 Ibid., 244.
Moving away from more analytical, formal, dramaturgical considerations and turning to the evaluation of interpretation and expression, Vasina-Grossman quotes Blok himself as expressing the idea that:

‘In the poetic world [oshchushchenii, lit. ‘sensation, feeling’] of the lyrics there is no gap between the personal and the general; the more sensitive a poet, the more inseparable is his experience of “ours” [svoyo] and “not ours” [ne svoyo], and therefore, in an epoch of storms and terror the gentlest aspirations of a poet’s soul are also brimming over [preispolnyayutsya] with storms and terror.’

Vasina-Grossman continues, ‘this we hear in the music. In the poetic material, which at first glance may appear heterogeneous [raznorodniý], the composer heard a deep connection of the personal [licheniý] and supra-personal [vnyelicheniý] and that is why the seven verses became united in the cycle, welded very firmly, with clearly identified functions in each of the movements.’ The language used in these last two quotations, in particular Blok’s references to ‘ours’ and ‘not ours’ and Vasina-Grossman’s ‘personal’ and ‘supra-personal’ sparks a potential association with that employed by Yurchak in his examination of late-socialist society in the Soviet Union, specifically his various discussions of the concepts of ‘vnye’, ‘svoy’ and ‘obshchenie’ [(personal) communication/interaction]. This connection is particularly intriguing, as Yurchak’s evaluation of these concepts in terms of performative behaviour (in relation to authoritative discourse) in Soviet culture and society of the 1970s and

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96 The prefix vnye [outside, beyond] implies more than simply ‘impersonal’ [nelicheniý].
98 Blok’s usage of the word, svoyo [svoi], pronounced ‘svo-yo’, is the nominative neuter form of svoi [svoi], which is used as a possessive when referring to the subject of a sentence as the owner, thus translating as ‘his/her/their/our/one’s (own)’. 
'80s has the potential to further nuance Vasina-Grossman’s interpretation of Shostakovich’s practice with regard to the setting, interpreting, expressing and communicating of Blok’s poetry in his vocal cycle. More importantly, this approach has the potential to explore motivations without insisting on binary oppositions (which are already dissolving in Blok’s muddling of svoyo and ne svoyo in artistic expression), and without searching for coded (or non-coded) messages. It also assists in evaluating the music within its historical context without searching for explicit commentary on that context (see section 2.2 ‘Intersections of Svoj, Vnye, and Artistic Utterance’ below).

The question of expression and communication is linked closely to what Vasina-Grossman describes as ‘one of the composer’s best-loved devices: the monologues and dialogues of [and between?] soloists and instrumental forces’ which she hears as being developed in the Blok cycle, continuing, ‘[a]most the whole cycle is built precisely thus: the voice and the instruments (solo or ensemble) united not by the principle of a soloist with an accompaniment, but by the principle of dialogue.’ So saying, Vasina-Grossman makes an implicit link between the type of musical dialogue occurring in the Blok cycle and the ‘moments of lyrical reflection in [Shostakovich’s] symphonies and quartets’, though she stops short of suggesting that this might be a way of grafting some form of literal meaning from the vocal cycles onto instrumental works. This contrasts with Redepenning, who permits us to ‘assume that the composer used words in order unequivocally [!] to express his moral-ethical position, perhaps also, by the harnessing of word and music, to give a key to the understanding of his instrumental works’. This idea, if pursued to its not-so-logical conclusion, might terminate

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100 Ibid., 242.
101 Redepenning, “‘And art made tongue-tied by authority’”, 211.
in the type of reductionist understanding of Shostakovich’s music and identity peddled by Ian MacDonald, though, admittedly, there are exceptions which, treated carefully, might yield some insight into motive and meaning behind the music. One such exception might be the ‘Preface to the Complete Edition of my Works and Thoughts and a Short Reflection apropos this Preface’, Op. 123 (composed several months before the Blok cycle, in March 1966), in which Shostakovich does at least offer an unequivocal conformation of the meaning behind his musical monogram (Ex. 2.1a), as well as extending this same technique of what may be reluctantly termed ‘codifying’ letters in musical notation by setting the initials of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) to the notes D (Re), E flat (S), F, E flat (S), D (Re) (Ex. 2.1b).\footnote{Maes, ‘Between Reality and Transcendence’, 246.}


Despite the evident ‘literal meaning’ of these examples from the ‘Preface’, it is worth reiterating Maes’s caveat. Although these types of musical ‘message’ undoubtedly do exist in Shostakovich’s music, they must be approached and handled with extreme care, and it would certainly be reductive and misleading to assume that every melodic motif or recurrent rhythmic gesture contained within itself some form of literal meaning, waiting to be decoded or grafted onto other works that feature similar musical rhetoric (as is the case, for example, with Malcolm MacDonald’s rather unconvincing parallel between the ‘Preface’ and a reference to Tolstoy in the last movement of the Symphony No. 13, Op. 113). 103 The path to using the symbiosis of words and music in Shostakovich’s vocal works as a tool for elucidating aspects of the composer’s complex artistic and personal identity is treacherous, and, though paved with good intentions, it may easily terminate in mythology at best, sensationalism at worst.

The question of monologue and dialogue remains a pertinent one. Moreover, it is a question that has inspired a refreshing approach to Shostakovich’s vocal music on the part of Philip Bullock, who has cast the idea adrift from its moorings in musical practice and compositional form and relocated it in a more rigorous theoretical realm, employing Bakhtinian literary theory to investigate aspects of dialogue and monologue in lyric forms.\textsuperscript{104} Despite the theoretical complexity of Bakhtinian theory, Bullock’s application of these concepts to Shostakovich’s vocal compositions begins to tackle some pertinent questions about the composer’s identity in relation to his artworks, to the artworks of others, and to Shostakovich himself and his environment, whilst also making the argument against simply hearing and understanding Shostakovich’s vocal works as ‘objects of tempting hermeneutical exegesis’.\textsuperscript{105} Instead these works become a platform for exploring the monologic or dialogic expressive potential of an artwork across multiple temporal and physical locations – between poet, reader, composer, performer and audience. This aspect of Bullock’s application of Bakhtinian theory seems to speak acutely to Blok’s own evaluation of the self and the other (or ‘svoyo’ and ‘ne svoyo’) quoted by Vasina-Grossman, and may have the capacity to synthesise well with Yurchak’s approach to late-socialist society (particularly his concepts of svoi and vnye) to produce a powerful methodological, theoretical framework for evaluating the process and function of Shostakovich’s late vocal cycles, as well as the ways in which these ‘artistic utterances’ (to adopt Bullock’s terminology)\textsuperscript{106} might (or might not) be intimately reflective of Shostakovich’s own artistic, personal, existential identity within the elusive cultural environment of the Stagnation era. The central question to be addressed remains: how can the

\textsuperscript{104} Bullock ‘The Poet’s Echo’, 207-227.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 210.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 209.
Blok cycle be understood, and be used as a tool to understand both the context of its production and its author’s position within that context? This breaks down into a series of smaller questions: what was the motivation and process behind the cycle’s creation; how might it function on formal, aesthetic, expressive, communicative and exegetic levels; and what (if anything) might this reveal about Shostakovich’s identity, role or behaviour in terms of his relation to himself, his music, and his environment? These questions will be considered through the discussion and analyses presented below (see sections 2.2 and 2.3).

2.2 Intersections of Svoi, Vnye, and Artistic Utterance

Yurchak’s conceptualisation of svoi considers the way in which Soviet citizens identified with one another in terms of social groups or communities that functioned within Soviet society but were also simultaneously outside (though not necessarily opposed to) the social discourse fostered by the regime. He describes svoi as having been ‘a kind of sociality that differed from those represented in authoritative discourse [i.e. official state rhetoric in newspapers, speeches or reports etc.] as the “Soviet people,” “Soviet toilers,” and so forth’, but which, crucially, ‘should not be reduced to a binary scheme of “us” versus “them” or “common people” versus “the state,” which has been a rather common differentiation in many analyses of Soviet society’. Yurchak’s concept of svoi can be summarised as a recognition of the distinction of the ‘self’ (and those like oneself) from the ‘other’ or the ne svoi, resulting in an adapted behavioural pattern that allows one to exist and function both within the context of a wider, mass society, and on a more intimate, meaningful level with those considered svoi, which

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107 Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, 103.
transcends that wider environment. This results in a state of suspension, described by Yurchak (deriving his terminology from Bakhtin) as ‘being vnye’, which is neither supportive of nor opposed to the ‘authoritative rituals’ of the regime. Though the focus of Yurchak’s study is on the last Soviet generation, who were born in the 1950s and 1960s, he does make the point that this ‘public’ of svoj, which located itself outside the authoritative discourse of the regime, ‘was not invented by the last Soviet generation’ but was in fact ‘inherent in […]’ [Claude] Lefort’s paradox of Soviet ideology\footnote{Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 131.} — namely ‘achieving the full liberation of the society and individual […] by means of subsuming that society and individual under full party control.’\footnote{Ibid., 11.} It seems justifiable on this basis to attempt to adapt and expand Yurchak’s conceptualisation and application of svoj and vnye to explore multiple levels of Soviet society and history, embracing not only the last Soviet generation, but also members of other generations (as Peter Schmelz has done for the ‘Unofficial’ generation of composers in the 1950s and 60s\footnote{Peter J. Schmelz, *Such Freedom If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music During the Thaw* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), passim.}). Indeed, these concepts could be applied not only to social groups, but also to the personal identity and artistic expression of an individual, as well as the function of individual artworks and cultural products.

According to the quotation appearing in Vasina-Grossman (see above), Aleksandr Blok conceptualised the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ as being difficult to distinguish at times. In the moment or process of artistic, poetic, lyrical utterance, the voice of the self, the individual, the svoj, becomes synthesised with, and indistinguishable from, the voice of the other, the mass, the *not svoj*. This seems to be what Blok is describing when he says that there is no gap between what Vasina-Grossman refers to as the ‘personal’ and the ‘supra-personal’ in the

\footnote{Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 131.}
\footnote{Ibid., 11.}
\footnote{Peter J. Schmelz, *Such Freedom If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music During the Thaw* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), passim.}
lyrical utterance of a poet, and that ‘therefore, in an epoch of storms and terror, the gentle aspirations of a poet’s heart are also filled with storms and terror.’\textsuperscript{111} The implication here appears to be that, in the creative act, the artist is uncontrollably receptive to, and therefore necessarily representative of, the thoughts and feelings of his era. Moreover, this would also seem to imply that, for Blok (or at least so far as he claims for himself), existence and artistic utterance are mutually reflective, indistinguishable processes, both governed by some force outside the artist’s control. Or, at the risk of rhetorical cliché: for the true artist(e), to exist is to create, and vice versa. This undoubtedly highly romanticised understanding of artistic creation has been gleefully (sometimes naïvely, sometimes cynically) promulgated by artists, critics and consumers alike, at the very least since the early decades of the 19th century, with the notional figure of the romantic hero-creator inspired by Beethovenian monumentalism and Byronic lyrical melodrama.

But once this romantic phantasm of heroic, spontaneous genius is divorced from the notion of creativity and existence, there is a valuable concept at its core, namely, that if an artwork is taken to be understood as a form of expression which seeks to make sense of reality, identity, emotion, existence and other such impalpable concepts, it must necessarily engage on some level with the environment(s) in which it is produced in a process of mutual exchange that is both active and reactive, synthesising the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, whilst maintaining a recognisable sense of distinction or autonomy. In other words, an artistic utterance that is produced and exists within a society is both motivated by, and has a reciprocal effect upon, its contemporaneous social, cultural, political, artistic environment, but also has the potential to function and have meaning independent of that environment, similar in some ways to the

behavioural modus operandi of social groups and communities in Yurchak’s concepts of svoy and vnje. In addition to this, the vocal genre’s synthesis of words and music, those ‘two discrete, autonomous modes of expression’,\textsuperscript{112} has the potential to allow artworks to transcend their respective environments and to open up a dialogue between multiple different societies, artists, identities, emotional states, and so on.

In a similar way, the identity and role of an artist or composer can be understood to function on various levels of constant mutual exchange with its contemporaneous environment or society, but also to have an autonomous, distinguishable ‘self’ which is able to operate outside that environment or society, or perhaps (in the context of the Soviet Union) outside the vision of society as defined by a political regime. In this manner, a composer or artist is not only fully integrated into his or her contemporaneous society but also has the potential to transcend it, or operate outside it, through their own artworks and through their dialogue with artworks and artists of other mediums, societies, and epochs, thus achieving an autonomous personal identity which is both operational within, yet distinct from (or vnje), their own environment. Put analogously, Shostakovich was not simply a two-dimensional character existing in isolation within the physical and temporal limits of a play or film (or within the notional limits of an audience’s imagination), in the same way that the Soviet Union was not simply a flimsy stage-set created to frame a cast of two-dimensional heroes and villains. Rather, like any human being, he was a multifaceted entity with a complex, shifting, conflicting, constantly developing perception of himself, his role as an artist, and his environment, and therefore, in a

\textsuperscript{112} Maes, ‘Between Reality and Transcendence’, 233.
sort of Bakhtinian sense, he should be approached and understood as the Author, not the Hero, of his own musical-literary works.

At this point it is possible to begin coordinating a more nuanced reading of the process behind the composition of the Blok cycle in response to Vasina-Grossman’s potentially useful (if also rather nebulous) suggestion that Shostakovich chose to set these specific Blok poems simply because he ‘heard [in them] a deep connection of the personal [личнiй] and supra-personal [выключiщий],’\textsuperscript{113} which united them as a cycle. Vasina-Grossman’s idea that the binary opposition of ‘personal’ and ‘supra-personal’ was connected and unified by Shostakovich in the Blok cycle lays the foundation for a set of parallels which may help to reconcile the reality of Shostakovich’s life and music with the theoretical concepts of свой, вnyе and artistic utterance.

\section*{2.3 The Blok Cycle}

In many ways, the \textit{Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok} is a difficult opus to approach and evaluate analytically. This is partly due to the dense mystical symbolism inherent in Blok’s poetry, particularly in poems of his earlier period from which Shostakovich selected the seven texts set in the cycle. This may also be why many scholars, both literary and musical, who have been drawn to Shostakovich’s late vocal compositions seem to have skimmed over the Blok cycle somewhat, concentrating instead on the more readily comprehensible Tsvetaeva, Michelangelo and Lebyadkin cycles (Op. 143, Op. 145 and Op. 146 respectively). The Blok cycle has little of the dedicatory, literary commentary of the Tsvetaeva cycle, explored by

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{113} Vasina-Grossman, \textit{Mastera sovetskogo romansa}, 241.}
Caryl Emerson.\textsuperscript{114} Nor does it have the more obvious musical references, or tantalising semi-autobiographical ruminations on life, love and death that many have found in the Michelangelo cycle, including Shostakovich himself, who wrote to his loyal friend Isaak Glikman in August 1975: ‘I find it hard to make any judgement about Michelangelo, but it does appear to me that the essence has come through. And by the essence of these sonnets, I had in mind: Wisdom, Love, Creation, Death, Immortality.’\textsuperscript{115} Instead, the focus of the poetry set in the Blok cycle is altogether more obscure, metaphysical and symbolist, featuring multifaceted reflections on separation, compassion, suffering, love and art, alongside prophecies of doom, fire, war, ‘bleak wonders’ and ‘black dreams’, all shrouded in gloom, mist, ghostly slumbering cityscapes, and populated by such heady images as the ‘Bird of Prophecy’, ‘blue chimeras’, the ‘Ruler of the Universe’, Tartar executioners and tearful humanity. In many ways, it is a truly apocalyptic work.\textsuperscript{116}

Though the poems might at first seem relatively obscure, and the musical settings somewhat unrelated, a close analysis of Shostakovich’s elusive yet seemingly rhetorical (or perhaps even Symbolist) musical language reveals some intensely subtle processes at work beneath the surface of the Blok cycle. The way in which Shostakovich manages the intertwining of melodic lines, motivic gestures, psychological development and narrative trajectory appears to be more subtly integrated than in any of his previous compositions for voice, buried far deeper within the work itself. Indeed, it may even be tentatively suggested that the subtlety of the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{116} Blok’s conceptualisation of some form of transcendental synthesis through theurgic art has distinctly apocalyptic overtones. See Avril Pyman, ‘Alexander Blok: the Tragedy of the Two Truths’, in Walter N. Vickery and Bogdan B. Sagatov (eds), \textit{Aleksander Blok Centennial Conference} (Columbus, Ohio, Slavica, 1984), 9-23.
\end{flushright}
formal, conceptual, musical and literary synthesis achieved in the Blok cycle is unique amongst Shostakovich’s vocal compositions.

The musical elements that are used as a primary driving force behind the technique of long-range musical, structural, and psychological development found in many of Shostakovich’s symphonic and chamber works, are initially deceptive and difficult to pinpoint in the Blok cycle, partially because of their fragmentary nature. It is the internal resonances of the selected poems across the cycle that can be discerned more accurately at first than the musical resonances, despite the transparent lucidity of much of the musical language. Yet there is an intimate and subtle development of musical ideas that permeates Blok’s texts and fully underpins and draws out the internal poetic resonances, resulting in a work that presents itself as a fully integrated whole.

2.3.1 Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok Nos. 1–4: Thesis and Antithesis

The cycle opens with ‘Song of Ophelia’, a short lamentation on separation for voice and cello that sets a three-stanza poem dating from 8 February 1899 in its entirety:

Песня Офелии

Разлучаясь с девой милой,  Parting from your maiden fair,
Друг, ты клялся мне любить!.. Friend, you swore to love me!..
Уезжая в край постылый, Leaving for that hateful land,
Клятву данную хранить!.. The vows you gave, to keep!..
Там, за Данией счастливой,
Берега твои во мгле…
Вал сердитый, говорливый
Моет слезы на скале…

There, far from happy Denmark,
Your shore [shrouded] in mist…
The waves, angry and garrulous
Wash tears over the rock…

Милый воин не вернется,
Весь одетый в серебро…
В гробе тяжко всколыхнется
Бант и черное перо…

The fair warrior will not return,
All dressed in silver…
In the tomb gravely shall rise
The ribbon and the black quill…

Originally conceived in response to a request from Rostropovich for a vocalise for voice and cello to perform with his wife, Galina Vishnevskaya, this short opening song introduces a number of ideas and themes central to the cycle as a whole, including those of isolation, separation, love and dedication, as well as the imagery of water, waves, tears and mist which are frequently encountered. The ominous presence of the sepulchral ‘ribbon and the black quill’†117 [‘бант и черное перо’] in the final two lines also hints at the unsettling themes of prophecy, doom and suffering which emerge more fully in the second song of the cycle, ‘Gamayun, Bird of Prophecy’.

Apparent in the musical setting from the outset is the sense of dialogue between the independent melodic lines of the solo cello and the voice, which intertwine organically and fluidly. The song opens with a short five-bar cello introduction characterised by a

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†117 The word ‘перо’ has been translated as ‘pen’ by Tim and Jesse Langen in their chapter, ‘Music and Poetry: The Case of Shostakovich and Blok’ in Andrew Wachtel (ed.), Intersections and Transpositions (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1998), 142-143. The word sounds archaic in Russian and can also be used to refer to a bird’s feather; hence the alternative translation of ‘quill’ offered here (though it might also be translated accurately as ‘plume’). The Oxford Russian Dictionary (fourth edition) renders it as ‘(ptiisti) feather’, and ‘(hist) quill; (stal’noe) nib’.
fragmentary, almost cadential motif, which will appear a total of four times throughout the short song. Contained within this cadential fragment are a number of important motivic and thematic markers, most prevalent among them being the non-diatonic D flat, which inflects and arguably helps to destabilise the tonal centre of C minor. This, along with another non-diatonic inflection, namely the G flat introduced by the cello in the sixth bar, serves to create a slippery semitonal disruption – a melodic/harmonic device frequently employed by Shostakovich to create expressive tension that may be unsettling, sometimes even threatening, particularly in the late works (consider the languorous, sighing semitones of the cello’s gloom-ridden opening monologue in the Cello Concerto No. 2, Op. 126, or the menacing C vs. D flat opposition that underpins the Viola Sonata, Op. 147). This tonal conflict relies on the imposition of minor seconds and diminished fifths on the surrounding diatony, and these intrusive intervals will play a crucial part in the development of the cycle, melodically, harmonically, and thematically.

Aside from introducing this semitonal conflict, which will play an important role in the narrative trajectory of the cycle, the intervallic contours of this cadential motif also help to encapsulate the central theme of separation, expanding by increments from a semitone (C/D flat) to a sixth (G/E flat) in bars 3 and 4, and immediately punctuated by the first word of the poem, ‘разлучаясь’, from the verb ‘разлучиться’ (‘to part, to be separated from’) (Ex. 2.2a).
This creates an almost kinetic sense of separation, one that is heard and experienced as it takes place in time. The repetitions of this cadential motif begin to warp slightly as the song proceeds, becoming lost in the undulating waves of the cello line, and, rather than creating the feeling of a separation that is still being experienced, a sense begins to emerge of an obsessive idea being replayed and progressively distorted in the mind, eventually becoming confused with the images of death and prophecy it introduces (Ex. 2.2b).
Example 2.2b Shostakovich, *Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok*, ‘Song of Ophelia’, permutations of ‘cadential motif’.

\[ \text{Moderato} \quad = \quad 66 \]

Bars 3-6

Violoncello

Bars 18-21

Violoncello

Bars 26-30

Violoncello

Bars 33-35

Violoncello

This sense of progressive destabilisation is aided by the persistent and unsettling G flats in the cello part, which begin to assert a seductive, almost corrupting influence on the vocal line that can be observed developing over the course of the song. Despite the initial appearance of these G flats in bars 6-8, where they are associated with the imagery of separation, the cello line then reverts to a D natural in the ninth bar before meeting the voice on a consonant, diatonic, unison G natural. This reversion to diatonic harmony and melodic consonance very pertinently highlights the phrase ‘you swore to love me!’ [‘ты клялся мне любить!’] (Ex. 2.3).

**Moderato • = 66**

However, as the song progresses to darker ruminations, the G flats begin to creep back in, reappearing to punctuate the word ‘hateful’ [‘постылый’] in the twelfth bar, and again with more insistence in bars 14-15 (Ex. 2.4).


**Moderato • = 66**

69
Despite the cello’s semitonal pull, the vocal line resists, rising to a *forte* G natural, marking the melodic and dynamic climax of the song and highlighting the line ‘(you swore) the vows you gave, to keep!’ [‘кляту данную хранить!’]. To have a climax point this early in a song (barely a third of the way through) might perhaps seem unusual, but it demonstrates Shostakovich’s intimate musical response to the narrative development of Blok’s poem, which, from this point onwards becomes progressively gloomier in its tone, more introspective in its psychology, and more obscure in its symbolistic imagery. It is also worth noting that the cello’s expanding cadential motif (outlined in Ex. 2.2b) occurs with greater insistency in the latter half of the song, driving home the theme of separation and distance in accordance with the poetic text. Through his setting, Shostakovich locates the emotional epicentre of the poem in the reference to the keeping of sworn vows, which carries with it an implicit focus on associated themes of fidelity, unity, and togetherness, even if the subsequent passages seem to speak more of the fleeting ephemerality of such concepts.

It is from this point that it becomes possible to discern the emergence of two distinct psychological personalities or identities, and it seems almost as though this climactic phrase in the vocal line, with its forcefully declaimed G natural, is trying to drive away the creeping doubt injected by the cello’s non-diatonic notes. The invidious lure of the G flat begins to drag the vocal line down with it, and actually succeeds between bars 24 and 28, corresponding to the end of the poem’s second stanza and the phrase ‘the waves, angry and garrulous / wash tears over the rock’ [‘вал сердитый, говорливый / моет слёзы на скале’] (Ex. 2.5).

**Moderato** = 66

As before, the vocal line initially attempts to resist the pull of the G flats, but this results in a painful unprepared minor-second clash in bar 24 on the word ‘angry’ [‘сердитый’], which contrasts sharply with the previous consonance of ‘to love me!’ [‘мне любить!’] in bar 9 (cf. Ex. 2.3). In the following phrase, it is as if the vocal line has become psychologically exhausted by its previous attempts to maintain stability, and resigns itself to the seduction of the G flat, for the first time, and in a most symbolic fashion, on the word ‘tears’ [‘слёзы’]. Shostakovich’s musical setting manages to encapsulate and permeate the psychological dramaturgy of Blok’s poetry, which drifts from love, fidelity, and memory, to creeping doubt, to resistance, to collapse, and finally to resignation and delirium. Aside from anything else, this psychological trajectory certainly fits well with the character of Ophelia, and the subject
of *Hamlet* in general – a play permeated with ghosts, memories, and madness (not to mention the rhetorical contrast between dialogue and monologue).

The setting of the final stanza finds the vocal part resigned and subdued, singing similar melodic material to the opening stanza, but now *pianissimo*, marking the song’s dynamic nadir, and starting a fourth lower (a highly significant intervallic relationship in the cycle and, indeed, in many compositions of Shostakovich’s last decade). Though the last two lines are not obviously related to the rest of the poem, and though the symbolism of the black quill remains obscure, there is a palindromic cadential resonance with the end of the first verse in the vocal part, connecting (or directly reflecting?) the faithful keeping of vows and the sepulchral rising of the quill (Ex. 2.6).

**Example 2.6** Shostakovich, *Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok*, ‘Song of Ophelia’, ‘palindromic’ cadence.

![Musical notation](image)

Underneath the final utterance in bars 38-40, the cello line reasserts its G flats (which have not featured since the end of the previous verse) in a near reprise of the melodic and rhythmic
material first heard underpinning the vocal part in bars 14 and 15, further emphasising some sort of communicative bridge between the end of the first and third stanzas (Ex. 2.7, cf. cello part in Ex. 2.4).

**Example 2.7** Shostakovitch, *Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok*, ‘Song of Ophelia’, bars 35-43.

Various aspects of Blok’s short poem are mingled in this final cadence; associations of faithfulness, dedication, love, anger, tears and the intimacy of memory are brought together and synthesised through Shostakovitch’s musical setting. The minor second in bar 38 is reminiscent of the semitoneal clash which sharply highlighted the word ‘angry’ in bar 24, yet this time it is rendered less potent by virtue of having been prepared. In terms of the
psychological dramaturgy of the song, this perhaps suggests a process of reconciliation taking place over time, a return to unity, and ultimately the transcendence of love and memory over the grave – an interpretation (one of many) that is only rendered possible through Shostakovich’s musical treatment of the text.

One of the most important things to note about this final cadence is the cello’s answer to the voice in the last two bars. The rising fifth of the vocal part is answered by a falling fourth in the cello line, representing an intervallic contraction which seems to answer the intervallic expansion of the recurring ‘cadential’ motif shown in Ex. 2.2b. More important still is to observe that this intervallic contour of a rising fifth contracting into (or immediately followed by) a falling fourth becomes a prominent gestural feature across the cycle. Located in direct opposition to the separation evoked by the progressively expanding intervals of the cello’s recurring cadential motif first heard at the start of ‘Song of Ophelia’, these contracting intervallic contours settling on a perfect fourth, here, and elsewhere in the cycle, might point towards resolution, tranquillity, togetherness, intimacy, even transcendence, all of which have also been closely associated with the scalically cascading perfect fourths in the last movement of the Viola Sonata, Op. 147.118 In light of this, it may not be such a coincidence that this contracting contour appears particularly frequently in the third song ‘We Were Together’, the most ostensibly optimistic and joyful (or perhaps least pessimistic and gloomy) song of the whole cycle.

Though they have none of the readily identifiable consistency of Shostakovich’s more familiar motivic signifiers – the anapaest/dactyl rhythms, the D-S-C-H motif, and so on – the instances

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of these contracting intervallic contours all share a pattern common or consistent enough to allow them to be understood as bearing a single motivic role (namely, the movement from a perfect fifth to a perfect fourth). Moreover, this motivic gesture is one that has not previously been identified as characteristic of Shostakovich. Ex. 2.8 presents instances of this intervallic motif in its fullest form ([a] and [b]), in a more contracted form ([c], [d] and [e]), and one instance of a more oblique form ([f]).


[a] ‘Song of Ophelia’, bars 39-43

![Soprano and Violoncello](image)

[b] ‘We Were Together’, bars 28-30
[c] ‘We Were Together’, bars 17-18

[d] ‘Music’, bars 12-14

[e] ‘Music’, bars 51-53

[f] ‘Secret Signs’, bars 8-11
With the exception of the somewhat attenuated occurrence in ‘Secret Signs’ ([f]), these five main instances of the contracting interval motif are all associated to some extent with the notions of togetherness, intimacy, memory, love, respite, and tranquility – all of which might be tentatively suggested as aspects of the personal (or lichniy in Vasina-Grossman’s wordage), the self, svoy. This invites suggestions of a parallel or a conflict with the supra-personal (vnelichniy), the other, the ne svoy as a structural principle, represented, as shall be explored below, by the more violent or alienating songs of the cycle, in particular by ‘Gamayun, Bird of Prophecy’ and ‘The City Sleeps’ (the second and fourth songs, respectively). In light of this, it is possible to propose a structural, thematic, narrative framework that has its origins in the ‘principle of contrast’ suggested by Vasina-Grossman, but which proceeds to develop through a gradual process of synthesis (in which the fifth and sixth songs, ‘The Storm’ and ‘Secret Signs’, play a crucial role), culminating in the final song in the cycle, ‘Music’, where all of the key thematic ideas are distilled to their essence and seamlessly amalgamated in a mystical, symbolist evocation of the transcendent potential of art.

Following the introspective reflection of ‘Song of Ophelia’, and positing the first highly contrasting, ‘ne svoy’ episode of the cycle, is the thunderous depiction of ‘Gamayun, Bird of Prophecy’. Blok marks the date of completion of ‘Gamayun’ as 23 February 1899, just two weeks after ‘Song of Ophelia’. The poem is set by Shostakovich, as was generally his custom, in its entirety:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Гамаюн, птица вещая</th>
<th>Gamayun, Bird of Prophecy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>На гладях бескочечных вод,</td>
<td>On the surface of endless waters,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Закатом в пурпур облечённых,</td>
<td>By sunset in purple clad,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Она вещает и поет,</td>
<td>She prophesies and sings,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Не в силах крыл поднять смятенных...</td>
<td>Unable to raise her wings distraught…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Вещает иго злых татар,</td>
<td>She prophesies the yoke of evil Tartars,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Вещает казней ряд кровавых,</td>
<td>Prophesies the swath of bloody executions,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>И трус, и голод, и пожар,</td>
<td>The cowardice, the hunger, the fire,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Злодеев силу, гибель правых...</td>
<td>The power of evildoers, the doom of the righteous…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Предвечным ужасом объят,</td>
<td>With eternal horror filled,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Прекрасный лик горит любовью,</td>
<td>Her beautiful face burns with love,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Но вещей правдою звучат</td>
<td>But the righteous prophecy resounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Уста, запекшиеся кровью!..</td>
<td>From her mouth, clotted with blood!..</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both Blok’s original poem and Shostakovich’s score bear the subtitle ‘V. Vasnetsov’s Picture’ [‘Картина В. Васнецова’],\(^\text{119}\) which presumably refers to a painting of 1897 by the Russian Revivalist, Folklorist and Symbolist painter Viktor Vasnetsov (Figure 2.1). Viktor Vasnetsov was closely associated with the Russian Symbolist movement, as was Blok himself. It is worth noting that Aleksandr Scriabin, who became very interested in the theurgical and mystical branches of the Symbolist movement and sought to associate himself with what Simon Morrison calls the ‘mystic’ Symbolists,\(^\text{120}\) at one point came very close to Blok’s conceptualisation of of ‘svoyo’ and ‘ne svoyo’, speculating ‘that he had to surmount his “ya”

\(^{120}\) This was a particular branch of the Symbolist movement that ‘called for collective creation, the collaborative attempt to create a bridge between artistic form and events in the real world.’ See Simon Morrison, *Russian Opera and the Symbolist Movement* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002), 184.
(“I”) for his “ne-ya” (“not I”), the Ego for the non-Ego, the individual Will for the Cosmic Will.”\textsuperscript{121} Though the extent to which Scriabin was familiar with Blok and Vasnetsov remains in the realm of conjecture, this commonality of thought does convey a certain cultural or philosophical zeitgeist in Russia at the dawn of the twentieth century that quite possibly coalesced in response to the rationalism, materialism, and high-realism that immediately preceded it.\textsuperscript{122}

\textbf{Figure 2.1} Viktor Mikhaylovich Vasnetsov, \textit{Gumayun, Bird of Prophecy}, oil on canvas, 1897.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure2.1.png}
\caption{Viktor Mikhaylovich Vasnetsov, \textit{Gumayun, Bird of Prophecy}, oil on canvas, 1897.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{121} Morrison, \textit{Russian Opera}, 188.
\textsuperscript{122} For one interpretation of the origins of Russian Symbolism, and its relation to other movements and ideologies of the late nineteenth century, see Avril Pyman, \textit{A History of Russian Symbolism} (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1-16.
Despite sharing the same metronome marking as ‘Song of Ophelia’, ‘Gamayun’ posits an immediate contrast, not only with the preceding song, as has been noted by Vasina-Grossman, but also between the voice and piano, which are tonally at odds for much of the song. This is well illustrated at the very opening, where the piano ploughs ahead with its rigid, crotchet-dominated rhythmic pattern, stringently outlining E minor against the B minor triad outlined in the voice (Ex. 2.9).

**Example 2.9** Shostakovich, *Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok*, ‘Gamayun, Bird of Prophecy’, bars 1-5.

An immediate sense of discord and disunity is stimulated as the piano’s inexorable mechanistic drive continues to ignore the tonality and melodic contours of the vocal part, in direct contrast to the intimacy of dialogue established in ‘Song of Ophelia’. Moreover, the timbral contrast between the pianissimo cello at the end of ‘Song of Ophelia’ and the violent

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fortissimo piano at the outset of ‘Gamayun’ could hardly be more pronounced. This sense of dislocation continues, the tonality becoming more and more obscure and unstable as the piano begins to transform its E minor tonality into the quasi-octatonic, hyper-minor modal language so characteristic of Shostakovich, through the insistent appearance of B flats (respelled from the A sharps of bars 3 and 4) shortly before R5, and the subsequent appearance of E flats in the vocal line, implying some sort of semitonal E/E flat conflict latent in the tonality, as well as hinting at the C minor tonality that both precedes and concludes ‘Gamayun’ (Ex. 2.10).


The disunity of piano and voice is only momentarily relieved in bars 17 and 18, where they unite on an unlikely fortissimo C sharp major tonality, highlighting the word ‘distraught’ ['смятённых’]. Yet despite the momentary harmonic consonance between the musical voices,
there is still a broader sense of semantic discord, even cognitive dissonance, generated by the unexpectedly bright and triumphant musical illustration of the word ‘distraught’.

Between R6 and R8, there is a descent into mechanistic chaos, accompanied by a sustained and relentless acceleration on a truly symphonic scale, achieved primarily through rhythmic diminution in the piano part. The predominating crotchet pulse of the opening 16 bars first accelerates into quavers in bar 17, then to triplets, punctuated by semiquavers at increasingly shorter intervals, until the triplets eventually give way entirely to semiquavers and quavers in bar 29, which also marks the first appearance of Shostakovich’s signature dactylic rhythmic gesture easily associated with mechanistic drive (Ex. 2.11 [a]-[d]).


[a] ‘Gamayun’, bars 16-18

\[\textbf{Adagio} \quad \cdot \quad 66\]

124 Not dissimilar to episodes in the Tenth Quartet’s Allegretto furioso second movement, composed a few years previously in 1964.
[b] ‘Gamayun’, bars 19-20

**Adagio = 66**

Piano

[c] ‘Gamayun’, bars 24-25

**Adagio = 66**

Piano

[d] ‘Gamayun’, bars 29-30

**Adagio = 66**

Piano
From bar 31, the insistent dactylic rhythms appear in tandem with a pedal point on a G natural, clashing against minor seconds and augmented fourths, which further increases the tension and underpins the words of the terrifying prophecy, ‘the cowardice, the hunger, the fire’ ['н трус, и голод, и пожар'] (Ex. 2.12).


*Adagio* = 66

The superimposition of minor seconds and diminished fifths against a prevailing tonality is fundamental to much of the musical language of the *Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok*. First
introduced in ‘Song of Ophelia’, where these intervals were most strongly associated with
‘anger’ and ‘tears’ (cf. Ex. 2.4 and Ex. 2.5), here and elsewhere they are associated with
suffering, fear, and prophecy. They will return with a particularly startling poignancy at the
end of ‘Gamayun’, in ‘The Storm’, and again at the very close of the cycle.

The final point of acceleration starts in bar 35, where the dactylic rhythmic gesture collapses
into semiquavers, underpinned by a slowly ascending pattern in octaves in the bass,
reminiscent of the piano’s opening bars, above which the voice reaches its dynamic climax on
a high A flat, declaring the power of evildoers and the ‘doom of the righteous’ [‘гибель
правых’]. At this moment, the irresistible surge collapses and slowly grinds to a halt between
bars 42 and 47, coming to a complete standstill by R8 — a gigantic mechanism running out of
steam (Ex. 2.13).

Adagio \( \cdot = 66 \)

The unrelenting mechanistic drive of this 28-bar episode points to the unstoppable wave of human suffering described by the prophecy in Blok’s poem – to the ‘yoke of evil Tartars […] the swath of bloody executions’ – and also perhaps implies the ineluctable and otherworldly nature of the prophecy itself, while reinforcing the conflict between the personal and the supra-personal, between *svoy* and *ne svoy*, that functions as the main structural principle behind the first four songs of the cycle. Throughout, the vocal melody soars high above the chaotic piano part in an almost palpable representation of Blok and Vasnetsov’s mystical bird bearing witness to the destruction taking place beneath her.
The last part of the song after R8 concerns the setting of the last four lines of Blok’s poem. The vocal melody partially reprises the B minor melodic line with which it opened the song, but now with more tonal conformation provided by the piano, which, despite some semitonal fluctuations and melismatic decorations, largely preserves an open fifth drone on B and F sharp (Ex. 2.14).


At this point there is a drifting away into a dream-like delirium on the phrase ‘her beautiful face burns with love’, characterised by a harmonic slide from B minor to E flat major. The E flat tonality and lilting compound rhythm that half-emerge at this moment even offer a glimpse forwards to the musical language of the final song in the cycle, ‘Music’, which is intimately connected to ‘Gamayun’, as shall be determined in detail in due course.
From R9 there is a sort of coda which reprises the restless, advancing bass line of the opening, now *piano* and *legato*, maintaining the sense of disorientation engendered by the previous phrase. This figuration’s association with prophecy is augmented by the words it underpins: ‘But the righteous prophecy resounds / from her mouth, clotted with blood!’, which is conspicuous by virtue of its strangely subdued musical setting: *piano* and towards the lower end of the soprano’s register. This, combined with the piano’s ceaseless tread, creates an almost hypnotic, delirious and thoroughly unsettled sense of calm. The voice’s melodic insistence on F sharp above middle C functions as an enharmonic echo (in the same register) of the G flats which disrupted the tonality of ‘Song of Ophelia’. Indeed, the serpentine D flat / G flat pull which planted the first seeds of doubt in ‘Song of Ophelia’ becomes the very focal point of the ‘eternal horror’ and declamation of ‘righteous prophecy’ at the end of ‘Gamayun’ as they are enharmonically re-spelled to F sharp and C sharp and hammered out with horrifying brutality against a *fortissimo* C minor chord in a sort of delayed musical reaction to the text. Where the disquieting semitonal lilt of ‘Song of Ophelia’ merely unsettled the musical flow, here it brutally assaulsts, jolting the narrator, the audience, and the performers from the hypnotic music of the preceding bars back to the horror of the prophesy and the poetic text (Ex. 2.15).

Also shown in Ex. 2.15 is a very strong overtone that reverberates as a B flat above middle C and emerges after the repeated hammering of the prophetic perfect fourth. This could be a further, subtle, ghostly premonition of the open fifth B flat / E flat ending of the last song, ‘Music’ – a type of over-tonal prophecy of itself which contains within it a pre-echo of the ominous restatement of the prophecy that finishes the work. Admittedly, it is impossible to say whether Shostakovich was sensitive to the overtone, but at the very least its acoustical reality does help to project a very powerful sense of unity right to the end of the final song of the cycle. In this sense, ‘Gamayun’ is dramaturgically one of the most important songs of the cycle, as it simultaneously casts a dispassionate glance back to certain thematic features of ‘Song of Ophelia’ yet also forcefully projects its prophetic language forwards all the way through to the very last bars of the whole work; temporally and musically it represents both the past (beginning) and the future (end), and, in doing so it also speaks to the eschatological preoccupations of much of Blok’s poetry and the Symbolist movement to which he belonged.
The third song, ‘We Were Together’, stands out as a particularly translucent episode in the cycle. It plays an important role in the evolution of both the psychological trajectory and the thematic development of key ideas, most notably the association of diminishing intervallic contours with the notion of togetherness and unity, first hinted at in ‘Song of Ophelia’. The poem dates from 9 March 1899, and the references to the sound of singing violins supply the most obvious reason for Shostakovich’s choice to set this poem with solo violin accompaniment:

Мы были вместе

We Were Together

Мы были вместе, помню я...
We were together, I remember...
Ночь волновалась, скрипка пела...
The night was vibrant, a violin sang...
Ты в эти дни была — моя,
You, in those days, were mine,
Ты с каждым часом хорошела...
You, with every hour, grew more beautiful...
Сквозь тихое жужжанье струй,
Through the quiet murmur of a brook,
Сквозь тайну женственной улыбки
Through the mystery of a woman’s smile
К устам просился поцелуй,
Were kisses called to my lips,
Просились в сердце звуки скрипки...
To my heart the sound of violins...

The poem touches upon the themes of memory and separation (slightly more implicitly in this instance), but the general mood is here one of fond, nostalgic reminiscence and intimacy, in contrast to the more obscure and confused ruminations encountered in ‘Song of Ophelia’. There is certainly no ostensible reference, musical or literary, to ‘betrayal’, as claimed by
MacDonald. Conversely, in fact, the ascendancy of the contracting interval motif is confirmed here by its numerous conspicuous appearances in the first half of the song, both in the violin accompaniment (Ex. 2.8 [c]) and, more importantly in the voice (Ex. 2.8 [b]) where it punctuates the line ‘You, in those days, were mine’ [‘Ты в эти дни была – моя’], further confirming its association with memory, togetherness, and intimacy. Aside from this significant instance of the contracting interval motif, the most salient aspect of the vocal line is that it remains relatively static compared to the first two songs, creating an almost psalmodic tranquillity that looks forwards to the sense of calm and austere stasis that eventually comes to permeate the final song in the cycle, ‘Music’. This type of melodically and rhythmically static vocal melody will also appear at various moments of intense introspective thought, most notably in ‘The City Sleeps’, ‘The Storm’, and ‘Secret Signs’ (as well as in ‘Music’), though it arguably has its origins in a far earlier work composed when Shostakovich was in his late twenties, namely the Six Romances on Texts by Japanese Poets, Op. 21. Dedicated to Nina Vazar, and primarily devoted to themes of love, memory and death, the Six Romances on Texts by Japanese Poets, are conspicuous amongst Shostakovich’s early works in their prescience of his late period. The most illuminating aspect of the austere, psalmodic vocal line in the sixth song of the cycle, ‘Death’, is its recurrence on every repetition of the line ‘I die…’ [‘Я умираю…’] (Ex. 2.16 [a]-[c]).

125 MacDonald, The New Shostakovich, 237.

[a] bars 1-10
The pervasive, almost obsessive rumination on death constantly pulls the melodic line back to this monotonous repeated-note motif in a truly operatic fashion. For a particularly striking
operatic precedent for such a device, recall Monterone’s monotone cry of ‘O, may you both be
cursed!’ [‘O, siate entrambi voi maledetti!’] in Act I scene i of Verdi’s Rigoletto, which in the
following scene returns as Rigoletto turns the same idea over and over in his mind: ‘That old
man cursed me!’ [‘Quel vecchio maledivami!’]. This monotone melodic line returns with
the full force of prophetic fulfilment at the very end of the opera (now aptly falling into a final
perfect cadence), after one of the cruellest examples of dramatic irony in the genre.

This is by no means to suggest any explicit narrative link to either Verdi’s tragedy or
Shostakovich’s early opus. To use the presence of similar melodic material as proof that the
Blok cycle is ‘about’ tragic death or suicide would be banal. The point is rather that
Shostakovich uses this monotone, almost monosyllabic, declamatory melodic trope to hone
the psychological development across his cycle in a similarly operatic, quasi-recitative-like
manner (in terms of the musical dramaturgy rather than literal narrative). After its first
emergence in ‘We Were Together’, this monotone vocal motif appears throughout the cycle,
evolving into something less capricious and altogether more austere. In all four remaining
songs, it becomes an attention-focusing device, rendering the words it highlights conspicuous
because of the repetition and the monotony. In all of these instances, it is associated (either
directly, or by the poetic context) very strongly with memory and moments of deep
introspective thought and resolve; the focused monotony of the repeated pitches helps to
sharpen the sense of introspective conviction, resolution, and inevitability in the texts they
underpin.

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126 This in turn has echoes of the sepulchral pronouncements of the Commendatore’s statue in Act II scene iii of
Mozart’s Don Giovanni: ‘You will laugh your last come the dawn!’ [‘Di rider finirai pria dell’aurora!’].
The violin part in ‘We Were Together’ is galvanic by contrast, and its primary function appears to be in responding as precisely as possible to the imagery in the poem. As suggested, Shostakovich’s use of solo violin accompaniment in response to Blok’s references to violins is about as literal an evocation of the text as is possible. The narrator’s recollection of the sounds of violins is brought into an audible reality in a way that begins to blur the boundaries of the diegetic and non-diegetic, and even takes on a sort of bemused associative memory as the violin begins to mimic the ‘quiet murmur of a brook’, anticipating some of the musical imagery later encountered in the violin part of ‘The Storm’ (Ex. 2.17).
Furthermore, this evocative dialogue supports the notion mooted in connection with ‘Song of Ophelia’: that the solo string accompaniment actually transcends its role as mere accompanist and becomes synthesised with the narrative voice, functioning, in both a dramaturgical and musical sense, as a facet of the narrator’s being, memory, or consciousness. It is also significant that in both ‘Song of Ophelia’ and ‘We Were Together’, which both feature
ruminations on intimacy, memory and togetherness (albeit with slightly differing emotional states), Shostakovich utilises stringed instruments, with all their timbral similarities to the human voice, reserving the more percussive action of the piano for the cold, mechanistic disconnect experienced in ‘Gamayun’.

Extraneous to its internal resonances in the *Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok*, the fluttering demiquavers shown in Ex. 2.17 are actually an extremely significant texture in late Shostakovich, and bear comparison to the last movement ‘Epilogue’ of the oppressive Fifteenth Quartet, Op. 144, and to the fourth movement ‘Etude’ of the Eleventh Quartet, Op. 122.\(^{127}\) The latter provides a particularly intriguing point of comparison due to its proximity to the Blok cycle (composed in early 1966), not to mention its cyclical, suite-like form in seven movements.

The fourth song in the cycle, entitled ‘The City Sleeps’, sets a poem dating from 23 August 1899:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Город спит</th>
<th>The City Sleeps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Город спит, окутан мглою,</td>
<td>The city sleeps, shrouded in mist,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Чуть мерцают фонари…</td>
<td>Street lamps flicker a little…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Там далёко, за Невою,</td>
<td>There in the distance, beyond the Neva,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Вижу отблески зари.</td>
<td>I see the gleam of dawn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>В этом дальнем отраженьи,</td>
<td>In this distant reflection,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>В этих отблесках огня</td>
<td>In these gleaming flames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Пританлось пробужденье</td>
<td>Lurked the awakening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Дней тоскивых для меня…</td>
<td>Of days, so dreary for me…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{127}\) Here it appears as semi-quavers at a speed of crotchet = 80.
The song stands out in formal terms as a modified passacaglia in which the passacaglia theme repeats three times before being interrupted by a middle episode, then finally re-establishes itself for a fourth repeat to close the song. According to Eric Roseberry, ‘Shostakovich, taking his cue from Bach, reserved [the passacaglia form] almost invariably for the expression of high seriousness’, and he goes on to cite ‘The City Sleeps’ as ‘a grave example of [the form’s] importance […] where […] the calm undertow of the ground becomes an image of the sadness of Peter the Great’s canal city of the North.’\textsuperscript{128} Again, without much contextualisation or analysis, Roseberry’s comment on ‘The City Sleeps’ is somewhat unfulfilling, though his suggestion that Shostakovich uses the passacaglia for the ‘expression of high seriousness’ is certainly hard to contest. Indeed, there is much precedent in Shostakovich’s music for the association of the genre with sadness, loneliness, alienation, death (murder) and funereal solemnity, not least in the penultimate movements of the Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor, Op. 67 and the Symphony No. 8 in C minor, Op. 65. Blok’s poetic imagery of sleep, shrouds, loneliness, mists and gloom in ‘The City Sleeps’ feeds into these associations. The correspondence is reinforced in ‘The City Sleeps’ as hints of the returning passacaglia theme begin to creep in at R20 underneath the final two lines of the poem, where the narrative voice discerns in the ‘distant reflection’ of dawn and the ‘gleaming flames’ of the street lamps ‘the awakening / Of days, so dreary for me…’.

Perhaps more hermeneutically suggestive is a possible link to Shostakovich’s first great popular success in the Soviet Union, \textit{The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District}, later revised as \textit{Katerina Izmailova}, where the situating of the passacaglia entr’acte between Act II scenes iv

\textsuperscript{128} Roseberry, ‘Shostakovich and his Late-Period Recognition of Britten’, in Fanning (ed.), \textit{Shostakovich Studies}, 241. For more on the cultural significance of the city of Saint Petersburg itself in the early decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, see Katerina Clark, \textit{Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution} (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1996).
and v is dramatically and psychologically crucial. The passacaglia appears at the tipping point between Katerina’s first murder (that of her father-in-law, Boris Timofeyevich) and her second (of her husband Zinoviy Borisovich), and can be understood dramaturgically as highlighting the inexorability both of her actions and of her consequent fate: Katerina is locked in an inescapable cycle, forced into acting the way she does by her circumstances, which, in turn, inevitably leads her to her doom.¹²⁹ This is not at all dissimilar to the dramatic function of the passacaglia in the Blok cycle, as it is, in part, the dreary inexorability of the passacaglia in ‘The City Sleeps’ that creates internal resonance with the chaos and doom of ‘Gamayun’. Although the two songs might not seem related on first hearing, there are in fact numerous thematic links, both literary and musical, that firmly bind them together, such as the pace, rhythmic movement and octave doubling of the piano’s bass ostinato, which is highly reminiscent of the advancing piano line that drives much of ‘Gamayun’ (Ex. 2.18).

¹²⁹ Lyn Henderson interprets this episode as associating ‘the unremitting tread of a baroque idiom with the inexorably unfolding consequences of the main character’s sexual passion.’ See Henderson, ‘Shostakovich and the Passacaglia: Old Grounds or New?’, The Musical Times 141/1870 (Spring 2000), 53.

‘The City Sleeps’, passacaglia theme, bars 1-9

\[ \text{Largo } = 50 \]

\[ \text{Adagio } = 66 \]

Though significantly less violent and crushing than ‘Gamayun’, the repetitive bass ostinato (and, for that matter, the whining cello line) of ‘The City Sleeps’ evokes a similar mechanical tread, perhaps more industrial or urban in its connotations than warlike in this instance, but nonetheless similarly indifferent in its grinding repetitiveness, acting as a sort of musical signifier of the inescapable nature of prophecy. In addition, the affinity between these piano configurations supports a number of literary associations that link the two songs. Foremost in terms of imagery appears to be the association in both poems of the liminal stage before night, before dawn, or, in more basic terms, between light and dark, with premonition and prophecy. The flames of the distant semi-submerged sun appear to contain within them some omen of suffering or loss – the ‘gleam of dawn’ over the river Neva and the ‘gleaming flames’ in
which ‘lurked the awakening / of days so dreary’ described in ‘The City Sleeps’, reflect the
apocalyptic prophecy of ‘Gamayun’, where the bird of prophecy sings out her terrible vision:
‘Over the surface of endless waters / by sunset in purple clad’. The literary and musical
similarities render the dramaturgical bridge between the poems bilateral – the blood-soaked
prophetic sunset of ‘Gamayun’ projects its associative weight forwards to the dreary, gloom-
shrouded sunrise and flickering street lamps of ‘The City Sleeps’, and the narrative voice of
the latter appears to detect within these a lurking memory of the suffering projected by the
former. Dramatically, the passacaglia form, as in Lady Macbeth, points towards a cyclic
inevitability; thematically, too, the atmosphere of loneliness and alienation is palpable in both
works.

It is also worth taking a moment here to draw attention to a subtle semantic feature of Blok’s
language in ‘The City Sleeps’. The imperfective form of the verb ‘притаиться’ (‘to lurk,
hide’), is ‘таиться’. The word has a deeper nuance that connotes something lying concealed
within – an invisible presence of something that is not outwardly evident.¹³⁰ Within the
context of the cycle, this helps to establish a further, almost subcutaneous association with
‘Gamayun’ – the fire and the horror of the prophecy now lies concealed within the ‘gleaming
flames’ of the street lamps, buried in the memory of the narrative voice. This also suggests a
high degree of sensitivity in Shostakovich’s attitude towards selecting and ordering texts on
the basis of subcutaneous affinities.

The sense of loneliness and alienation of Blok’s poem, highlighted musically by the total
absence of the contracting interval motif so abundant in the preceding song, is strengthened by

¹³⁰ My thanks to Elena Simms for clarifying this nuance to me.
a further parallel with Shostakovich’s heroine in _Lady Macbeth_. This is first suggested in bar 30 (just before R19) as the passacaglia theme momentarily breaks off into a short middle episode, where the predominant F major tonality slithers conspicuously up a semitone into F sharp minor (note also the ‘Gamayun’-like ‘steps’ in the piano part leading towards the new key), underlying the phrase ‘In this distant reflection’ [‘В этом дальнем отражении’] (Ex. 2.19).

**Example 2.19** Shostakovich, _Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok_, ‘The City Sleeps’, bars 27-33.
The key of F sharp minor (and F sharp major to some extent) appears to have been of particular significance to Shostakovich, even from very early on in his life (see for example his very first opus, the Tchaikovskian Scherzo in F sharp minor for orchestra, written in 1919). Here, in ‘The City Sleeps’, the key is clearly associated with themes of memory, loneliness, loss and alienation, and these speak to many other instances of the key across Shostakovich’s output, not least his Op. 6 Suite in F sharp minor for two pianos which, according to Elizabeth Wilson, served ‘as an outlet for the grief felt at his father’s recent death [in February 1922]’. If one chooses to accept Wilson’s suggestion, the Op. 6 Suite has the potential to associate not only the key of F sharp minor with death and loss, but also the fixation on perfect fourths (exhibited here for the first time) that will feature with such salience throughout Shostakovich’s late works, including the Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok. Further to this, the key of F sharp minor points towards the strange lonely delirium and impotent suppressed rage of the String Quartet No. 7, Op. 108, completed in March 1960 and dedicated to the memory of Shostakovich’s first wife, while in ‘The City Sleeps’, there are thematic, as well as melodic similarities to Katerina’s famous Act I scene iii reflection on loneliness and longing.

In the dramaturgical schematic of the Blok cycle, ‘The City Sleeps’ is strongly evocative of loneliness, alienation, loss, longing and memory because of its formal, tonal, thematic and literary content, thanks to its resonances both internal and external to the work. Though it has elements that link it to both ‘Song of Ophelia’ and ‘We Were Together’, ‘The City Sleeps’ seems to be located more in the realm of ‘Gamayun’, by virtue of its mechanical piano ostinato, its absence of the contracting interval motif, and its concentration on the more desperate and hopeless aspects of loss, as opposed to a trajectory towards togetherness and

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131 Elizabeth Wilson, Shostakovich, A Life Remembered (London, Faber, 2006), 37.
unity. This is arguably supported by special quality of the cello’s double-stops, which
engender a sense of strained tension that is mostly absent in the prevailing tranquil atmosphere
of the violin line in the preceding song (‘We Were Together’).

At this point some initial observations about the broad structural framework of the cycle are in
order. Some commentators, including Redepenning and Vasina-Grossman, have detected a
strong unity between the two opening songs, ‘Song of Ophelia’ and ‘Gamayun’. Redepenning
describes the two songs as ‘introduction and first movement’,\(^{132}\) attempting, in a rather forced
way, to claim that the cycle ‘shows signs of a four-movement symphony.’\(^ {133}\) This line of
thought is, in some ways, similar to Hakopian’s evaluation of Shostakovitch’s Symphony No.
14 as a sort of anti-liturgy, a colour negative of Britten’s War Requiem, grouping the
symphony’s eleven movements into six ‘movements of higher order’ that correspond to the
‘structure of the Catholic Mass for the dead’.\(^ {134}\) While there are undoubtedly strong links
between ‘Song of Ophelia’ and ‘Gamayun’ (as, indeed, there are between all seven songs in
the cycle), reducing the cycle’s uneven seven-movement structure to the more familiar
structural paradigm of a four-movement symphony in an attempt to understand its trajectory is
to downplay the scope of dramaturgical and psychological development across each of the
seven songs, as well as to negate the work’s exceptionally integrated, cyclical nature at the
level of thematic and textural typology. It is certainly unhelpful to reduce the dramatic,
psychological, narrative trajectory of Shostakovitch’s Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok by such
Procrustean means. Indeed, the large-scale design of the Seven Poems is complex, elusive, far
from paradigmatic, and must be approached on its own terms.

\(^{132}\) Redepenning, “And art made tongue-tied by authority”, 216.
\(^{133}\) Ibid.
\(^{134}\) Hakopian, Music of the Soviet Era, 222-223.
As the preceding analysis has begun to suggest, there seems to be a strong connection between the first and third songs, ‘Song of Ophelia’ and ‘We Were Together’, which are united by a number of significant elements – solo string accompaniment, intensely integrated dialogue between instrument and voice, thematic content focused on the memory of intimacy, love, togetherness, the self, the personal, and the essence of svoj – all emphasised by the contracting interval motif. These songs are placed in direct contrast to the intermediary second and fourth songs, ‘Gamayun’ and ‘The City Sleeps’, which, though ostensibly less related to each other, both feature the piano in instrumental accompaniments that are to varying degrees mechanistic, or at least indifferent to the voice, their thematic content being riddled with discord, disunity, alienation, death, loneliness, the other, the supra-personal (the essence of ne svoj), and the complete absence of the contracting interval motif. In terms of psychological, dramaturgical structure, this posits a thematic binary that governs the relationship of the first four songs of the cycle to one another (Figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.2** Thematic structuring in the first four songs of Shostakovich, *Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok*, Op. 127.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self, Personal, Svoj</th>
<th>Other, Supra-personal, Ne Svoj</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ‘Song of Ophelia’</td>
<td>2. ‘Gamayun, Bird of Prophecy’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Cello, Voice)</td>
<td>(Piano, Voice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ‘We Were Together’</td>
<td>4. ‘The City Sleeps’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Violin, Voice)</td>
<td>(Cello, Piano, Voice)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This division implies the segmentation of the cycle along a couple of different lines. First, there is the split between the *svoy* and the *ne svoy*, presented by the binary opposition governing the opening four songs shown in Figure 2.2; secondly, there is the split between those first four songs and the remaining three: ‘The Storm’, ‘Secret Signs’ and ‘Music’. It is in these last three songs of the cycle that the task of synthesising all the thematic elements and binaries presented by the first four is taken up, and it is significant that these last three songs are all directed to be performed *attacca*. This structural principle has precedent in Shostakovich’s output, notably in the Symphony No. 8, Op. 65, in which the first and second movements remain relatively self-contained, before the third, fourth and fifth begin to blend into one another. A similar formal structure can also be found at work in the Symphony No. 9, Op. 70 (Figure 2.3).

*Figure 2.3* Usage of *attacca* as a structuring principle.
2.3.2 Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok Nos. 5, 6 & 7: Synthesis

As hinted at by Levaya, the fifth song in the cycle, ‘The Storm’, functions as a partner to ‘Gamayun’. The main parallel that Levaya draws is between the destructive forces of humans and nature respectively, and while there is no real reason to dispute this interpretation there is another, perhaps more pertinent parallel, namely between the human capacity for brutal indifference described in ‘Gamayun’ and for compassionate empathy in ‘The Storm’. The latter title was itself assigned by Shostakovich – Blok’s original text, dated 24 August 1899, is untitled, and is usually referred to simply by its first line. The poem describes the almost irrepressible urge of the narrator to share the fate of the unfortunate by subjecting him/herself to the same suffering out of a sense of empathy and compassion:

[Буря] [The Storm]

О, как безумно за окном
O, how madly outside the window
Roars, rages the evil storm,

Ревет, бушует буря злая,
The galloping clouds, pouring rain,

Несутся тучи, льют дождем,
And the wind roaring, breathless!

И ветер веет, замирая!
Terrible night! On such a night

Ужасна ночь! В такую ночь
I pity those people, deprived of shelter,

Мне жаль людей, лишенных крови,
And compassion drives me out –

И сожаленье гонит прочь –
Into the arms of the cold damp!..

В объятья холода сырого!..
To struggle with the darkness and the rain,

Бороться с мраком и дождем,
In the sufferers’ fate to share…

Страдальцев участь разделяя…
O, how madly outside the window

О, как безумно за окном
Rages the wind, languishing!

Бушует ветер, изнывая!
Up to this point, the poems have alternated between introspective ruminations on togetherness and intimacy on the one hand, and brutal indifference, alienation and loss on the other. ‘The Storm’ is the first poem in the cycle to attempt to reach across this divide between the personal and the supra-personal by positioning the narrative voice as a sort of intermediary between the indifference of the natural world and the suffering of humanity. In the broader context of the thematic and narrative trajectory of the cycle, ‘The Storm’ also acts as intermediary between the thematic binary presented by the first four songs as shown in Figure 2.2, musically as well as textually.

Throughout, the violin and piano parts are wholly evocative of the natural imagery in Blok’s poem, and in some respects they carry forward the thematic and narrative line started in ‘We Were Together’, where the solo violin’s highly chromatic fluttering demiquavers described the ‘quiet murmur of a brook’. However, the distinct change in mood from the gentle brook of ‘We Were Together’ is obvious, effected by a number of factors. Firstly, the use of sul ponticello throughout lends the violin a colder, more spiteful tone than in ‘We Were Together’, and the addition of the piano, often playing in minor seconds (or ninths) with the violin, adds an underlying aggressive and percussive edge to the timbre. The balmy tranquil natural world experienced in ‘We Were Together’ has developed into the ‘evil storm’ (Ex. 2.20, cf. Ex. 2.17).

**Allegro \( \cdot = 108 \)**
Textural similarities with ‘We Were Together’ again point towards external resonances with the String Quartets Nos. 11 and 15, but here, because of the subject matter and natural imagery, also with ‘Winter’, the eighth song in Shostakovich’s *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, Op. 78. The developmental line which can be drawn from ‘We Were Together’ through to ‘The Storm’ serves to delineate a form of teleological narrative trajectory, as well as a sense psychological development through the cycle. In this light, it is worth considering ‘The Storm’ as the first step in a struggle towards the synthesis of the *svoy–ne svoy* dichotomy set up by the first four songs, and towards the uniting of the personal and supra-personal: empathy appears here as a mediator between indifference and introversion.

The vocal writing in ‘The Storm’ bears a passing resemblance to that of ‘Gamayun’, and this is likely what has led Levaya to detect a strong thematic parallel between the two songs. However, as with the instrumental parts, there are a number of equally strong parallels with the vocal writing in ‘We Were Together’, notably between R26 and R27 where instrumental parts die down and the voice adopts a static, almost chant-like tone as the narrator utters the lines, ‘To struggle with the darkness and the rain / In the sufferers’ fate to share…’ [‘Бороться с мраком и дождем, / Страдальцев участь разделяя…’]. For the first time in the cycle, the narrator here directly and explicitly confronts the necessity of empathy, unity and togetherness. This has its origins in the opening vocal melody of ‘We Were Together’, there, too, associated with similar sentiments, though with a slightly more lighthearted tone (Ex. 2.21).
Example 2.21 Shostakovich, *Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok*, melodic parallels between ‘We Were Together’ and ‘The Storm’.

‘We Were Together’, vocal melody, bars 13-17

*Allegretto* \( \cdot = 100 \)

\[
\text{Me byli vme-ste, pom - no ja...}
\]

‘The Storm’, vocal melody, bars 34-41

*Allegro* \( \cdot = 108 \)

\[
\text{Bo - rot' - sy smra - kom i doj - dem},
\]

\[
\text{stra-dal' - nye u - chast' raz - de - ly - ja...}
\]

This austere, psalmodic, somewhat ominous voice actually begins to emerge slightly earlier on in the song, first appearing at the climax of the song from R23 onwards, as the voice reaches its melodic and dynamic high point on a *fortissimo* A flat with the words ‘Terrible night!’ [‘Ужасна ночь!’] and, in the following phrase, ‘On such a night / I pity those people, deprived of shelter’ [‘В такую ночь / Мне жаль людей, лишенных кровя’]. This is in contrast to the extreme activity in the instrumental parts, which underpin the vocal line with a marked insistence on minor seconds and diminished fifths – a distant musical recollection from both ‘Song of Ophelia’ and ‘Gamayun’, where the highly significant non-diatonic pitches are also a
minor second and a diminished fifth. An analytical reduction of ‘The Storm’ helps to highlight this diminished fifth conflict between D and A flat that works as the fundamental driving force of the song’s relatively static harmonic structure (Figure 2.4 [a]-[c]).

Figure 2.4 Shostakovich, Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok, ‘The Storm’, analytical reduction.

[a] Foreground

[b] Middleground
This use of a diminished fifth as a primary driving force also suggests a potential interpretation of the role of ‘The Storm’ in the psychological and narrative development of the cycle. As previously observed, ‘Ophelia’ and ‘We Were Together’ feature the melodic gesture of a fifth contracting into a fourth. ‘Gamayun’ and ‘The City Sleeps’ do not – instead, the former places the oscillating fourth sharply against the final chord at the interval of a diminished fifth and a minor second, and the latter does not feature any such gesture, though harmonically it shifts through semitones, and finishes with a falling perfect fifth. It is possible, then, to understand the obsessive diminished fifth struggle in ‘The Storm’ as being half-way between the structural and dramaturgical binary posited by the first four songs. In the context of the standard octave division in tonal music, it is literally stuck between a perfect fifth and a perfect fourth. In terms of thematic typology and psychological development, it hovers between togetherness and separation, between alienation and empathy, between svoy and ne svoy.

Significantly, this conflict remains totally unresolved at the end of the song, and serves as the starting point for the next song. Indeed, it is a sustained low D natural in the cello, at the interval of a diminished fifth from the piano and violin’s emphatic A flats, that seamlessly
joins ‘The Storm’ with ‘Secret Signs’ – arguably the most complex and obscure song in the whole cycle, both in musical and literary terms (and the most difficult to translate accurately). Blok’s untitled poem dates from October 1902, and, as with ‘The Storm’, the appellation ‘Secret Signs’ was supplied by Shostakovich:

[Тайные знаки]  [Secret Signs]

Разгораются тайные знаки  Secret signs begin to burn
На глухой, непробудной стене  Upon the deaf, unwaking wall
Золотые и красные маки  Golden and crimson poppies
Надо мной тяготеют во сне  Loom above me in my dreams

Укрываюсь в ночные пещеры  I hide in the caves of night
И не помню суровых чудес.  And remember not those bleak wonders.
На заре – голубые химеры  At dawn – blue chimeras
Смотрят в зеркале ярких небес.  Stare into the mirror of the bright heavens.

Убегаю в прошедшие миги,  I flee to these bygone moments,
Закрываю от страха глаза,  Shutting my eyes from fear,
На листах холодеющей книги –  On the pages of a book growing cold –
Золотая девичья коса.  A golden girlish braid.

Надо мной небосвод уже низок,  Above me the welkin is already low,
Черный сон тяготеет в груди.  Black dreams loom upon my breast.
Мой конец предназначенный близок,  My end, preordained, is nigh,
И война, и пожар – впереди.  Both war, and fire – lie ahead.
Taking what is presumably an oblique reference to the fifth chapter of the Book of Daniel\(^ {135} \) as a starting point, Blok’s poem proceeds through a series of obscure and richly symbolist images, and it is perhaps not surprising that Shostakovich reserves his most unstable, twelve-note musical language for the setting of this arcane text. Yet despite the potential obscurity of Blok’s symbolism, Shostakovich’s setting of it within the context of the previous five songs in the cycle renders its symbolistic imagery (or at least Shostakovich’s interpretation of it) far more coherent than it appears in isolation. The references to visions, dreams, intimate memories, dawn, and particularly the fateful prophecy of the final two lines, are fully contextualised by what has come before, while the musical language features multiple fragmentary echoes of the preceding five songs. The process of thematic unity and synthesis initiated in ‘The Storm’ is taken up and furthered in ‘Secret Signs’; where the former appears to be more focused on collating the musical elements of the first four songs, the latter now begins to distil and synthesise these musical fragments, while also initiating the process of gathering the literary, textual imageries and themes.

Peter Schmelz has described the twelve-note row in ‘Secret Signs’ as being representative of ‘one aspect of Shostakovich’s use of twelve-tone rows: as a catalyst of harmonic instability and atonality’, though he does also make the observation that ‘the “row” retains its identity as a single unchanging melodic figure, not at all consistent with “traditional” Schoenbergian twelve-tone writing’.\(^ {136} \) Schmelz also suggests that Shostakovich would only rarely use rows harmonically, and, while this is largely indisputable, it should be noted that the row in ‘Secret

\(^{135}\) In which a hand appears before the carousing Belshazzar to write strange symbols on the palace wall that are eventually deciphered by Daniel as meaning ‘God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it […] Thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting […] Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians’ (see Daniel, 5:25-28). The apocalyptic implications of the reference are hard to ignore, and resonate with imagery in many of other poems set in the cycle, particularly ‘Gamayun’.

Signs’ (Ex. 2.22) does have an important function in preparing a harmonic shift from the unstable D minor of ‘The Storm’ to the tranquil, suspended, unison F sharps that eventually lead into the final song, ‘Music’.


As Schmelz points out, the initial purpose of this twelve-note row is to completely destabilise any remnants of harmonic and melodic language. In a sense, Shostakovich uses this dodecaphonic language as a means of creating a type of ‘neutral’ musical ground, a harmonic and melodic no-man’s-land in which the motivic ideas of the cycle can be fragmented, purged, synthesised and transformed into the musical world of the final song. Thematic fragments, both musical and literary, emerge and dissolve out of the restless, wandering texture, and, although quite different in terms of compositional process and sound world, there is a certain similarity in aesthetic to Valentin Silvestrov’s eschatological vocal works of the 1970s and
early '80s, in which half-remembered, half-heard thematic fragments drift past like distant echoes of music history, as if heard through a wall.\footnote{See Chapter 4 in the present thesis.}

The passage given in Ex. 2.22 prepares the ground for the musical language of the final song. As suggested, the trajectory from D to F sharp encapsulates the tortuous tonal path from ‘The Storm’ to ‘Music’, and the lilting, compound rhythmic pattern that takes over from bar 4 both prepares the predominant rhythmic pattern of ‘Music’, and also casts a glance back to the aggressively dotted rhythms of ‘The Storm’, further acknowledging and predicting the process of transformation. However, where in ‘The Storm’ and, indeed, in many other instances throughout the cycle, there was a preponderance of minor seconds, minor ninths and diminished fifths, this opening monologue in the cello begins to edulcorate the vitriol of these intervallic relationships by presenting major seconds, perfect fourths and perfect fifths; from this point onwards, the major and the perfect will begin to transcend the minor and the diminished.

As the voice enters at R30, there is an obvious textural resonance with ‘Song of Ophelia’ (the soprano singing in mid-range, the cello in the tenor clef). But there is also a psychological, thematic resonance as well, namely a trajectory towards unity, and this manifests itself primarily at the level of dialogue between the vocal and cello lines. Schmelz describes the cello line in bar 7 as preparing the vocal entry, which it no doubt does, but the register in which it comes to rest is also important, since it not only facilitates a monophonic unison with the entrance of the voice at R30 but also allows the cello to follow the vocal line through the
rest of the subsequent passage, oscillating between F sharp and G sharp in an attempt at consonance and unison (Ex. 2.23).

**Example 2.23** Shostakovich, *Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok*, ‘Secret Signs’, bars 8-16.

The instrumentation, texture, timbre, and tessitura of the passage in Ex. 2.23 resonate with the opening song of the cycle, particularly the instances of unison between the parts, which bear comparison to bar 9 of ‘Song of Ophelia’ (cf. Ex. 2.3). Furthermore, the trajectory towards
unison or unity between bars 19 and 25, manifest as it is in the contracting contrary-motion between the cello and the voice, is almost as palpable as the separation evoked by the expanding intervals in the first bars of ‘Song of Ophelia’ (Ex. 2.24, cf. Ex. 2.2a and Ex. 2.2b).


The unison G sharp is disturbed by the entrance of the twelve-note row in the violin, and this reintroduces the element of instability just at the moment the cello and voice seem to have established some sense of tonal steadfastness. The following passage, which sets the second stanza of Blok’s poem, sees another attempt at unison between voice and accompaniment, and this time the monotone psalmodic melodic line in the voice is more concentrated and more pronounced, interspersed with a curious new thematic fragment in the violin (derived from the twelve-note row) that will become conspicuous by its persistence in this passage, as well as its transformed appearance in the following song (marked x, Ex. 2.25). A couple of bars later the
violin repeats its curious row-derived motif a fifth higher, and, although not ostensibly relevant in the present context, this does carry some significance, because it further prepares the ground for the occurrence of a slightly altered version of this fragment in the next song, where it will be heard first in perfect fifths, then in perfect fourths – a significant intervallic trajectory, as signposted throughout the cycle.

The tense fixedness of the vocal line creates a somewhat eerie sense of the narrator speaking with absolutely no natural cadences, stresses or expression, as if in some sort of trance, and this is heightened by an instance of mismatch between the vocal melody and the text where the musical phrase overruns the full stop, ending awkwardly in the middle of the next line of text (marked y, Ex. 2.25). Aside from anything else, this is wholly appropriate to the potent Symbolist imagery and prophetic tone of Blok’s poem, particularly, in this instance, as a response to the mention of ‘bleak wonders’ ['суховьых чудес']. The vocal melody does eventually break the tension, proceeding to digress in an unusual modal direction in the second half of the stanza with the lines ‘Blue chimeras / Stare into the mirror of the bright heavens’ ['голубые химеры / смотрят в зеркале ярких небес'] (Ex. 2.26).

Example 2.26 Shostakovich, Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok, ‘Secret Signs’, vocal melody, bars 41-44.

\[ \text{Largo} \; \cdot \; = \; 72 \]

The modal language, the rhythmic footfalls, the step-wise ascent of this passage, the arrival at an implied C sharp chord, and the Symbolistic reference to mystical creatures (with an implicit reference to flames and fire in the image of the chimera) all carry faint echoes of ‘Gamayun’ (cf. Ex. 2.26, Ex. 2.10 and Ex. 2.11). At this moment the cello joins the ensemble, shadowing the vocal line two octaves below; the addition of this creeping bass line confirms the musical
reference to ‘Gamayun’, while the words seem to recall the mystical bird’s prophecy of doom and terror: ‘I flee to these bygone moments, / Shutting my eyes from fear,’ (Ex. 2.27).


Largo = 72

As the cello line recalls the piano part of ‘Gamayun’ (and arguably ‘The City Sleeps’ by association), the violin’s alternatingly syncopated, dotted, lilting interplay resembles a synthesis of the accompaniment lines in ‘Song of Ophelia’ and ‘We Were Together’. A more
significant and certainly more obvious reference to ‘Ophelia’ comes in the vocal line in bars 57-62, where, in the form of a sort of thematic memory, the opening vocal melody of the whole cycle returns to illustrate the line ‘a golden girlish braid’ [‘золотая девичья коса’]. This feeds the sense of narrative trajectory, as the image of the golden braid is explicitly linked to the sense of separation (literally to the word ‘разлучаясь’, meaning ‘to part, to be separated from’) and the ‘fair maiden’ [‘(с) девой милой’] of the opening song by virtue of the musical reference (marked z, Ex. 2.28, cf. Ex. 2.2a). The subsequent ascent to the G sharp is also reminiscent of ‘Gamayun’ (especially in conjunction with the rhythmic pattern in the strings in bars 62-63 which recall the piano line in bars 16-18 of ‘Gamayun’).


The voice returns to its concentrated monotone, now emphasised by a *rit.* and a *pianissimo* dynamic marking, to iterate the final line of the poem: ‘and war, and fire – lie ahead’ [‘и война, и пожар – впереди’]. This has particularly strong resonances with ‘Gamayun’, and is contextualised by the preceding line of text ‘My end, preordained, is nigh’ [‘Мой конец предназначенный близок’], which, needless to say, also has blatant resonances with the themes of prophecy, doom, memory and ineluctable fate that have permeated the cycle. However, psychologically and musically the context is slightly different here: where in
'Gamayun’ there was a sense of intensity, chaos, and exhilarating terror, here in ‘Secret Signs’, the subdued and concentrated nature of the musical setting speaks more of acceptance, resolution, perhaps resignation. This is emphasised musically by a moment of relatively traditional diatonic harmonic movement as the accompanying strings articulate a semi-formed cadential six-four progression in G sharp (Ex. 2.29).

This harmonic feature is relatively conspicuous in the otherwise primarily modal, sometimes atonal musical language of the song, and has the echo (or generic ‘intonazia’ to follow Brown and Asafiev) of the closing phrases of a recitative, looking both backwards to works such as the String Quartet No. 2, Op. 68 (second movement), and forwards to the Symphony No. 14, Op. 135 and the Suite on Verses by Michelangelo Buonarotti, Op. 145 (memorably so in the case of the latter’s second song, ‘Morning’). Indeed, parallels between the musical language of the Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok and the Symphony No. 14 abound, and it could be worth considering the former as being a sort of prototype for the latter. As Shostakovich’s ‘symphonic impulse continued to shift away from symphonies to string quartets’,¹³⁸ so the Blok cycle could be considered as part of a process of expanding or elevating his vocal music onto an equally symphonic plane, at least in terms of long-range development and synthesis of thematic material if not necessarily instrumentation. The fact that Gerard McBurney has referred to the orchestrated version of the Michelangelo Suite as a ‘Sixteenth Symphony in all but name’ confirms this idea to a certain extent.¹³⁹

‘Secret Signs’ ends with a repetition of the twelve-note row in a stratified manner, first in the cello, then two bars later in the violin, before they both roll into a lilting compound time and gradually twine together, coming to rest on a consonant F sharp two octaves apart (an important textural spacing in late Shostakovich, possibly derived from Prokofiev, though the legacy may extend to Nikolai Tcherepnin and beyond). This final passage helps to complete the preparation for the musical language of the final song, enforcing the trajectory from ‘The

Storm’ to ‘Music’ (harmonically encapsulated as a movement from D to F sharp), and reiterating the new emphasis on major seconds, perfect fourths, and consonant intervals. Dramatically, ‘Secret Signs’, along with ‘Gamayun’, is one of the most important songs in the cycle because it sees the fragmenting, synthesising and condensing of all the salient musical and literary features of the cycle as a whole. Central themes of separation, togetherness, loneliness, unity, alienation, empathy, svoy and ne svoy, which were initially presented in the first four songs, before being thrown confrontationally together in ‘The Storm’, here undergo a process of fragmentation and distillation which gradually begins to reformulate into the austere musical language of the final song in the cycle, ‘Music’. The resulting musical language is sparse, and many of the thematic fragments, both musical and literary, that float past throughout this last song are semi-recognisable echoes of what has developed over the preceding six. The resultant sound world is paradoxically familiar yet distinct from what has come before, creating a somewhat otherworldly atmosphere and revealing Shostakovich’s acute sense of dramaturgical and psychological narrative. The ‘otherworldliness’ of the musical setting also demonstrates his sensitivity to his texts, chiming with the celestial subject matter of Blok’s untitled poem of September 1898:

[Музыка]                                                      [Music]

В ночи, когда уснет тревога,                                  At night, when anxiety sleeps,
И город скроется во мгле –                                    And the city disappears in mist –
О, сколько музыки у бога,                                      O, such music from God,
Какие звуки на земле!                                          Such sounds upon the earth!

Что буря жизни, если розы                                     What of the storms of life, when your
Твои цветут мне и горят!                                         Roses bloom for me and glow!
What of the tears of mankind,
Even a cursory glance at the text of Blok’s poem reveals how intimately it binds the selected poems together. Like ‘Secret Signs’, it appears to speak directly to key thematic imagery in all the preceding poems, showing how sensitive Shostakovich was to dramatic narrative and psychological development when selecting and ordering his texts. Shostakovich invests Blok’s poem with a powerful contextual meaning by placing it at the end of the cycle, allowing it to speak to and synthesise (both in terms of music and text) all six preceding poems which would otherwise remain relatively diffuse in their original literary context. Indeed, Shostakovich’s musical language in ‘Music’ works almost semantically in terms of its thematic derivation and summation: in the same way that the text has many linguistic echoes and reprises multiple imageries from the preceding poetry – night, anxiety, sleep, cities, mists, storms, flowers blooming, tears of humanity, sunsets, blood, torment, etc. – without ever directly or explicitly quoting from another poem, so the music is built out of various key thematic materials that are developed over the course of the cycle, fragmented, synthesised and distilled into a ascetic, almost psalmodic language. The exception to this rule is the setting of the somewhat manic last stanza of Blok’s poem, for which Shostakovich reverts to a more frenzied, unsettling musical idiom.
The sense of synthesis is evident from the outset in formal terms, the held F sharps of the cello and violin linking ‘Secret Signs’ to ‘Music’ even more intimately than the cello’s low held D natural linking ‘The Storm’ to ‘Secret Signs’. This is in part due to fact that the F sharps are the apex of a fundamental thematic idea in ‘Secret Signs’, namely the note row, which draws the attention in a far more concentrated manner than the cello’s D natural which emerges gradually out of the pedal A flats at the end of ‘The Storm’. As the piano enters, it outlines F sharp minor, previously hinted at in ‘The City Sleeps’, before coming to rest in an implied tonality of B minor. The lilting minim-crotchet rhythm (prepared in ‘Secret Signs’, but also reminiscent of the particular passage in ‘Gamayun’, from 4 bars before R9), combined with the pianissimo and legato markings divests the piano of the mechanistic restlessness and violent percussiveness previously associated with it in ‘Gamayun’, ‘The Storm’, and, to some extent, in ‘The City Sleeps’, blending it instead with the softer, more vocalistic and ‘natural’ timbre of the strings, uniting all three instruments for the first time in the cycle. The first vocal entry, also pianissimo, is not entirely dissimilar in its contours and sense of melodic spaciousness to ‘We Were Together’. It is built primarily out of fourths and features a compacted version of the contracting interval motif first heard in ‘Song of Ophelia’ and again with more insistence in ‘We Were Together’ (bracketed, Ex. 2.30; see also Ex. 2.8 [a]-[f]).


\[ \text{Example 2.30} \text{ Shostakovich, Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok, ‘Music’, vocal melody, bars 9-15.} \]
As suggested on a number of occasions above, the trajectory from a perfect fifth to a perfect fourth is significant throughout the cycle. In a typological sense, it carries with it intimations of a trajectory towards unity, togetherness, and *svoy*. But in addition to this contracting interval motif, there are a number of other elements of Shostakovich’s musical language in ‘Music’, some prepared in ‘Secret Signs’, others originating earlier in the cycle, that also suggest a typological, psychological reading in the same vein, and this is well illustrated between R40 and R41 (Ex. 2.31).

**Largo** = 96

\( \textit{p espr. maestoso} \)

О, сколько музыки у Бога,
The textural sparseness of the passage is immediately visually evident in the score, and this contributes to a pervading sense of austere tranquillity, space and light, primarily rendered by the purging of minor and diminished intervals in favour of major and perfect ones. Gone are the slippery diminished fifths, minor seconds, and minor ninths that have been repeatedly associated with loss, separation, suffering, fear, terror and doom throughout the cycle, replaced by perfect fifths, perfect fourths, and major seconds, the last of which are conspicuous in the vocal melody due to the duplets, and also provide (in an inverted form) the foundation of the accompaniment in the piano. In terms of instrumentation and dialogue, there is a distinct sense that the instrumental forces are all listening to and following the voice for the first time in the cycle: the piano is sensitive to the harmony implied by the melodic line, its dip from E flat to D flat in bars 28 and 32-33 creating the impression of some sort of plagal IV-I movement in A flat, while the strings (now in unison) appear to follow the voice, at the distance of one bar, up to E flat in bar 26, before also responding to the implied IV-I harmonic movement by oscillating a perfect fourth between A flats and E flats in conjunction with the piano. The sense of communication and space generated in this passage is characteristic of the melodic, harmonic, textural language in ‘Music’ (excluding R44-R46), and was initially prepared in ‘Secret Signs’ (cf. Ex. 2.23), though, as discussed above, it has potential origins in various of the preceding songs, particularly ‘Song of Ophelia’ and ‘We Were Together’. The musical language is nonetheless quite distinct from its origins, and the dominance of the major and perfect intervals allows the music (and perhaps the performers and the audience…) to breathe, almost for the first time in the cycle.

From R42, which sees the setting of the second stanza of Blok’s poem, much of the musical material is very similar to the setting of the first stanza: the long-held pedals in the
instrumental parts, the lilting minim-crotchet rhythms in the voice and later strings. However, there are some salient differences to be highlighted. Most noticeable is the bass movement (and consequently the implied harmonic movement) in the piano, which, instead of rising to an F sharp and outlining a B minor triad before sliding towards a sort of A flat tonality, is now content to oscillate between B and E, outlining a perfect fourth (Ex. 2.32).

Largo = 96

Soprano

Violin

Violoncello

Piano

Что бу-ря жиз-ни, ес-ли ро-зь тво-

и цве-гут мне и го-рят!

133
It should be noted from Ex. 2.32 that the ominous semitonal slipperiness has not been completely purged from the musical language. The process is one that has been struggling forward since the beginning of the cycle, and though ‘Secret Signs’ saw a significant step towards unravelling and ironing out the unsettling dissonances and diminished intervallic relationships, the process is still very much ongoing at this point in the cycle, albeit much closer to its destination. Indeed, in the bars immediately following those given in Ex. 2.32, there is a painful tritonal chord as the voice leaps up from a B to an F natural, illustrating the word ‘tears’ ['слёзы']. Because of the general shift towards major and perfect intervals, this diminished fifth sticks out all the more sharply in the surrounding texture, and is strongly reminiscent of the moment in ‘Song of Ophelia’ where the voice slips down a semitone into E flat minor (including a tritone between the cello’s held C and the G flat in the voice) for the line ‘wash tears over the rock…’ ['моет слёзы на скале…'] (Ex. 2.33, cf. Ex. 2.5).
The idea that the process of purification is ongoing is further reinforced two bars later in bar 65, where the F natural in bar 62 illustrating the ‘tears of humanity’ is sharpened, letting a significant amount of light back into the harmonic structure of the passage. This, along with the chromatically altered D and G sharps at the end of the phrase, implies a B major tonality with a slight tinge of G sharp minor, illustrating the image of a glowing sunset ['румянится закат!']. The imagery of the tears of humanity and the glowing sunset has obvious connections to ‘Gamayun’, ‘The City Sleeps’, and to some extent also to ‘The Storm’, though here it has been recast in a tranquil and nostalgic atmosphere by virtue of the tonality and surrounding texture. This could bear several interpretations, but suffice to say that on a very
general typological and narrative level this recasting of past struggles in an atmosphere of meditative calmness blends naturally into the general trajectory towards acceptance, resignation, resolution and transcendence.

However, the attempt at establishing this calm and contemplative atmosphere is interrupted by a bizarrely aggressive, tense and appropriately obscure interlude to which the text of Blok’s somewhat manic last stanza is set. The inscrutable, highly Symbolistic text is characterised by extreme musical instability: harsh tremolo textures in the strings, clashing semitones and diminished intervals in the piano, and a vocal melody that is, at times, completely wayward. There are a number of important thematic fragments swept up in this chaotic interlude, though some are, by this stage of thematic decomposition, largely gestural. One such example might be the piano part between bars 85 and 89, which, though not directly referential, is audibly similar in its rhythmic and melodic gestures to certain passages in ‘The Storm’, though it (or both) may also potentially derive from elsewhere in the cycle – from certain melodic fragments in ‘Song of Ophelia’, for example (Ex. 2.34 [a]-[c]).

**Example 2.34** Shostakovich, *Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok*, derivation of thematic fragments.

[a] ‘Music’, bars 85-89

Largo \( \cdot = 96 \)

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{Piano} & \\
\text{\quad legato} & \end{align*} \]
[b] 'The Storm', bars 6-8

Allegro $= 108$

[c] 'Song of Ophelia', bars 21-25

Moderato $= 66$

Там, за Данией счастливою, берег твои во мгле...

вал сердитый, говорящий
It should also be noted that there is a linguistic echo of ‘We Were Together’ in this passage, specifically the repeated use of the word ‘сквозь’, which is translatable in different ways depending on context, but might be generally rendered as ‘through’. In ‘We Were Together’, the narrator talks of kisses set upon the lips by ‘Through the quiet murmur of a brook, / Through the mystery of a woman’s smile’ [‘Сквозь тихое жуramento струй, / сквозь тайну женственной улыбки’ (emphasis added)], whereas in the final stanza of ‘Music’, this has been transplanted into the midst of a terrible blood-offering to an all-powerful entity: ‘Through blood, through torment, through the grave’ [‘сквозь кровь, сквозь муки, сквозь гроба’ (emphasis added)]. (The reference to the ‘grave’, or ‘tomb’ [‘гроба’] might also ring a distant bell with the last lines of ‘Song of Ophelia’: ‘In the tomb [в гробе] gravely shall rise / the ribbon and the black quill’). Though generally small and often fleeting, such references are important, because they enable a sense of progression through time across the whole cycle. Whether this progression is regarded as teleological, eschatological, linear, cyclical, or simultaneously all of the above is ambiguous, but it is certainly a process which runs on a deep psychological, typological, and narrative level, allowing the work to be experienced and understood as something more cohesive than simply a collection of songs.

Perhaps the most important thematic references in this moment of chaotic ritual are those that have their origins in ‘Gamayun’. The constant oscillation between B and C in the piano part between bars 77 and 83 can be traced back to the same gesture in ‘Gamayun’ bars 48-52 (see Ex. 2.14), but more obvious (and more dramaturgically significant) is the return of the creeping, ascending ‘steps’ that acted as a ghostly signifier of ‘Gamayun’ and as the prophecy of encroaching suffering and doom throughout the cycle, most notably in ‘The City Sleeps’, and ‘Secret Signs’ (see Ex. 2.18-2.19 and Ex. 2.26 respectively). They return here for the final
time to underpin the last utterance of the voice part: ‘from your unworthy slave!’ [‘от недостойного раба!’] (Ex. 2.35).


**Largo • = 96**

It is possible to detect a further reference to the end of ‘Gamayun’ in the strings’ oscillation between F sharp and G, which harks back to the last word of the vocal part in ‘Gamayun’ (bars 67-70). There too, the music also deliberates between an F sharp and G before settling on the former; it also happens that this last vocal utterance in ‘Gamayun’ is the word ‘blood’
[‘корвьо’], which sets up a parallel with the passage discussed above (‘through blood, through torment, through the grave’).

This is the final utterance of the voice part in the whole cycle, and it could even be considered the death of the narrative voice, in dramaturgical terms. However, from R46 to the end of the cycle, there is a rather lengthy instrumental postlude. As if purged by the cathartic, perhaps self-sacrificial encounter, which removed the narrative voice from the ensemble, the instrumental forces pick up where they left off at R44 and resume the trajectory towards unity, synthesis, and resolution. The final passage moves once again towards major and perfect intervals, consonance and unison. Between bars 106 and 115, the violin and cello share out the vocal melody first heard in bars 24-34, and the altered bassline now implies more of an enharmonic B major tonality (instead of A flat minor) drifting calmly towards E flat (the same tonal/harmonic shift that underpinned the setting of the words ‘her beautiful face burns with love’ in ‘Gamayun’). Moreover, all of the harmonic and melodic movement begins to contract from fifths to fourths. Instrumental in this process is a small thematic fragment which appears in ‘Music’ in fifths between the first and second stanzas (Ex. 2.36).


Largo * = 96
This possibly has its origins in a thematic fragment first encountered in ‘Secret Signs’; though there is certainly no direct quotation, the melodic contours and modality of the gestures are similar enough to stimulate some feeling that one derives from the other (see x, Ex. 2.25). The most important thing to note is that the strings are playing in fifths, and that the interval shrinks to a fourth as the cello rises to an E flat in the final bar of the extract (also naturalising the C flat on the way).

This fragment is not heard again until well into the instrumental postlude that closes the cycle. This time it is played twice over, first in fifths, then in fourths, before the violin’s final upwards leap of a fifth is answered by a final descent of a perfect fourth in the piano, and a final ascent of a fourth in the cello, ostensibly ending the work on an open E flat tonality, perhaps with E flat major implied by the harmonic overtones (Ex. 2.37: parallel movement in strings bracketed, intervallvic movement between parts shown with arrows).

However, before the cycle finally dies away to nothing, a darkly ominous *pianissimo*
restatement of the alternating perfect fourths, originally brutally hammerd out at the end of
‘Gamayun’, is heard rumbling at the bottom of the texture (Ex. 2.38, cf. Ex. 2.15).

Largo  \( \cdot = 96 \)

Violin

Violoncello

Piano

morendo

morendo
Returning finally to the issue of the overarching dramaturgical structure of the cycle, ‘The Storm’, ‘Secret Signs’ and ‘Music’, joined as they are by Shostakovich’s *attacca* markings, can be understood as three parts of an ongoing process of thematic development and transformation: confrontation, fragmentation/distillation, and final synthesis of the prominent musical and literary themes presented on dichotomously opposing terms in the first four songs. It should be noted that this process also takes place at an instrumental or ensemble level, expanding from solo instrumental accompaniments, to duets, to the full piano trio. Figure 2.5 presents a more evolved picture of the broad structure of the cycle initially presented in Figure 2.2.

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**Figure 2.5 Overarching Structural Principles in Shostakovich, *Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok*, Op. 127.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thesis and Antithesis (Presentation of Musical and Literary Materials)</th>
<th>Self, Personal, <em>Svoy</em></th>
<th>Other, Supra-personal, <em>Ne Svoy</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. ‘Song of Ophelia’ (Cello, Voice)</td>
<td>2. ‘Gamayun, Bird of Prophecy’ (Piano, Voice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. ‘We Were Together’ (Violin, Voice)</td>
<td>4. ‘The City Sleeps’ (Cello, Piano, Voice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. ‘Music’ (Violin, Cello, Piano, Voice)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.4 Transcendence and Conclusions

To paraphrase the Russian proverb quoted in the Introduction to the present thesis (see Chapter 1, section 1.2 ‘Howling Wolves: Theory and Methodology’), a perennial issue in Shostakovich studies is that the field has been frustrated by a circular argument concerning the extent to which Shostakovich was prepared to ‘howl like the wolf’. This results in the sort of tired binary assessment of Shostakovich’s music and identity (usually with a focus on the latter at the expense of the former) decried at the outset of this chapter. The application of Yurchak’s theory of late Soviet society, including the concepts of svoi and vnye, to the analysis of the Blok cycle begins to dissolve these tired binaries by accepting the potential coexistence of conflicting identities and behavioural patterns within the same individual, that may begin to take on multiple meanings within the same social context. This is essentially what lies behind Yurchak’s use of the terms ‘constative’ and ‘performative’, which he considers to be ‘coexistent’ rather than opposed, and describes thus:

> From the perspective of this coexistence, the act of voting in the conventional context of a meeting does two things at once: it states one’s opinion (the constative dimension) and binds the vote within the system of rules and norms where it is recognized as a legitimate vote (the performative dimension).\(^\text{140}\)

Essentially, a single act can have a ‘constative’ dimension that has personal meaning for an individual, and a ‘performative’ dimension that has a less personal meaning within a wider context. When the performative dimension is emphasised, its meaning becomes diminished and the individual becomes isolated from it, allowing the constative dimension to take on a

\(^{140}\) Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 23.
new, personal importance – a process that Yurchak defines as the ‘performative shift’ that characterised existence in late Soviet Society.\textsuperscript{141} It is this new significance of the ‘constative’ dimension, which, crucially, coexists with the ‘performative’ dimension, that allows for a more nuanced understanding of Shostakovich’s music and identity.

The creation of an artwork such as the Blok cycle constructs an alternative, meaningful reality that transcends the relative meaninglessness of the environment in which it was created, despite the author’s performative role in the latter. How the author chooses to create constative meaning might also reveal certain truths about their own personal values and concept of identity within their environment. In terms of Shostakovich and the \textit{Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok}, salient themes such as the struggle towards unity, togetherness, and the transcendent potential of art are contrasted with those of alienation, loss, and suffering. Yet ultimately, elements of the latter, \textit{ne svoy} half of the thematic binary, though assimilated and tempered somewhat, are never fully purged from the musical process. It is this that, on a typological level, offers an artistic correlate to certain existential realities of the Soviet Union in the Stagnation era – namely the idea that, though the reality of mundanity, alienation, and increasingly meaningless performative actions (such as making official speeches, signing official documents, writing ‘official’ compositions) might never be fully escapable, there is at least the potential to transcend this reality (or at least mollify its attrition) through one’s own personal, meaningful, \textit{svoy} reality, created through music and art. This allows Shostakovich, or any member of late-Soviet society, to be understood as functioning both within and outside, or \textit{vnye}, their social environment.

\textsuperscript{141} Yurchak, \textit{Everything Was Forever}, 24-26.
Indeed, in a very Yurchakian sense, the Blok cycle is a work that reveals Shostakovich’s ability to function on both of these levels (and even ‘vnye’ his role as creator or author in a Barthesian or Bakhtinian sense, by virtue of his dialogue with Blok). Thus, the Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok opens a window into the nature of Shostakovich’s personal identity as he entered his final creative period, perhaps even more so than the Tsvetaeva and Michelangelo cycles which, though masterful in their own right, appear somewhat less intimate. It is worth noting, for instance, the deeply personal nature of the Blok cycle in terms of Shostakovich’s own circumstances – he intended it to be a work for himself to perform with his closest friends, Vishnevskaya, Rostropovich, and Oistrakh, people with whom he had deep, meaningful, personal communication.\textsuperscript{142} Moreover, composed in hospital after his first serious heart attack, it was a work that Shostakovich seems to have associated with recovery and regeneration, or, at the very least, regarded as somehow liberating from personal worries. Writing to another close friend, Isaak Glikman, Shostakovich related how: ‘The [first] rehearsal [of the Blok cycle] gave me much joy, and for a time I stopped experiencing acutely painful feelings about all kinds of acutely painful events.’\textsuperscript{143}

In a practical sense the cycle reveals much about Shostakovich’s approach to the selecting, ordering and setting of texts, not to mention his discerning ear for long-range, often intensely subtle psychological development and thematic manipulation. In terms of interpretation and reception, despite the fact that commentators have traditionally detected sorrow, tragedy, darkness, despair and death in the bleak torpor of Shostakovich’s late style, the Seven Poems

\textsuperscript{142} Indeed, when ill health prevented Shostakovich from taking part in the premiere, it was to an even closer friend, Mieczyslaw Weinberg, that he entrusted the role of pianist.

\textsuperscript{143} Glikman, \textit{Story of a Friendship}, 144. In his footnote to this letter from 14 June 1967, Glikman gives his own impression of the Blok cycle: ‘In them, it seemed to me, Shostakovich had written his confession, maintaining hope and belief in the future despite his sufferings’, (\textit{Story of a Friendship}, 298, fn. 24).
of Aleksandr Blok also potentially reveal a different trajectory in late Shostakovich: here, and in many other late works, perhaps most poignantly in the Viola Sonata, Op. 147, we are confronted by cascades of sorrow that by necessity and internal design point towards togetherness, hope, light, transcendence and rebirth, and it is this trajectory, in effect towards svoy, that feeds into the social context of the cycle’s composition. In a more sociological and theoretical sense, it provides a lens through which to view and attempt to interpret Shostakovich’s often contradictory, seemingly Janus-faced personality and behaviour. The identifying of the svoy–ne svoy binary that underpins Yurchak’s theory of late socialist society, and more importantly the Blokian artistic synthesising of the binary – the reconciliation of the personal and the supra-personal, and the acceptance of the self and the other within one coherent, self-contained entity – are indicative of underlying, subconscious social attitudes and behavioural models during the decades of Stagnation in the Soviet Union.

Through his selection of and engagement with the seven poems set in the Blok cycle, Shostakovich created a work that recognises and responds to Blok’s synthesis of the svoyo and ne svoyo, and thereby opens up parallels between the ‘personal’ and the ‘supra-personal’, between poet and composer, and between the 1890s and 1960s. But most importantly, it transcends the boundaries between all these binary oppositions, subsuming them into an artwork that represents them in one cohesive whole.
3. Georgy Sviridov and the Soviet Betrayal of Rus’

3.1 Introduction

Georgy Sviridov is a name seldom heard in the West. However, he was immensely successful in his lifetime, receiving multiple state awards including the Order of Lenin (the Soviet Union’s highest order of distinction), and he remains popular in Russia today. Born in 1915, Sviridov first gained a reputation in Russia with his set of Pushkin Romances, composed in 1935 in anticipation of the 1937 centenary celebrations of Pushkin’s death in 1837.\(^{144}\) According to Philip Bullock, ‘the Pushkin anniversary did much to establish a discourse that would see lyric poetry and song as appropriately Soviet and even revolutionary.’\(^{145}\) Chief among those whose work embodied this discourse was Sviridov, who, from his very first compositions, embraced the newly-rehabilitated art-song genre, and remained a prolific composer of songs and vocal music throughout his career until his death in 1998.

Sviridov presents an interesting case study for the understanding of vocal music during the Stagnation period in Russia because he belongs neither to the ‘old guard’ of Soviet composers such as Prokofiev, Shebalin, or Shostakovich, nor to the younger generation of ‘Unofficial’ composers that included Silvestrov, Schnittke, Pärt and Gubaidulina. As yet, almost nothing has been written about him in the field of Western musicology, despite his, for some commentators, inexplicably high status in Russia. What follows is a consideration of Sviridov’s 1977 vocal cycle *Russia Cast Adrift [Otchalivshaya Rus’]*,\(^{146}\) its ideological and

\(^{144}\) For more on these celebrations see Philip Bullock, ‘The Pushkin Anniversary of 1937 and Russian Art-Song in the Soviet Union’, *Slavenica*, 13/1 (April 2007), 39-56.

\(^{145}\) Ibid., 53.

\(^{146}\) Variously translated as ‘Russia Adrift,’ ‘Russia Cast Off,’ and even ‘Russia off Her Mooring.’ The Russian word *otchalivshaya* comes from the verb *otchalivat’* meaning ‘to cast off,’ often used within a nautical context, here giving the sense of Russia as a lost ship, aimlessly adrift.
thematic content, reception, and context within the vague cultural environment of 1970s Soviet Russia, and its interface with Russian nationalist ideology through Sviridov’s selection and musical treatment of Segei Esenin’s poetry. The first part of the chapter is given over to a discussion of a number of cultural, social, and political developments in the Soviet Union over the four decades between the Pushkin anniversary of 1937 and the composition of *Russia Cast Adrift* in 1977 which variously contributed to the establishing of vocal music as an ‘appropriately Soviet’ genre, and to the creation of an environment in which identification with and expression of nationalist ideology was not only permitted but even encouraged by the regime.

### 3.2 Rendering Lyric Poetry, Song, and Nationalism ‘ Appropriately Soviet’

The discourse established by the 1937 Pushkin anniversary, which Bullock identifies as contributing to the integration of lyric poetry and song into Soviet culture, was part of a wider cultural shift within the developing Soviet Union. Amongst other things and for numerous reasons, it saw the rehabilitation and Sovietisation of many aspects of pre-revolutionary, 19th-century Russian culture, including a renewed emphasis on nationalism and national culture. This cultural-political shift has been described by Nicholas Timasheff (slightly misleadingly according to recent scholars\(^\text{147}\) as the ‘Great Retreat’. Timasheff posited the idea that, as a result of various internal and external influences, including encroaching Nazi fascism, Soviet leaders made a decision to retreat from hard-line socialism and to restore traditional

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\(^{147}\) See David Hoffman, ‘Was There a “Great Retreat” from Soviet Socialism? Stalinist Culture Reconsidered’ *Kritika* 5/4 (Fall 2004), 651-674.
institutions and culture in order to galvanise popular support.\textsuperscript{148} The argument against Timasheff’s terminology is that what occurred was not a ‘retreat’ from socialism, but rather a co-opting of certain pre-revolutionary traditions and institutions to help strengthen and enforce socialism within the Soviet Union, the crucial point being that, in the wake of the 17\textsuperscript{th} Party Congress in 1934, which had declared the success of socialism in Russia, ‘the achievement of socialism permitted the use of traditional institutions and culture to support and further the new order.’\textsuperscript{149}

Once it had been decided and proclaimed that all remnants of the old bourgeois, capitalist, Tsarist society had been vanquished, it was no longer necessary to hate or destroy all the cultures and traditions, or even the political figures associated with the pre-revolutionary era. Instead, many could now safely be rehabilitated, sanitised, celebrated, and utilised for the furthering of socialism. Once content was rendered ‘appropriately Soviet’, form became irrelevant, meaning that, for example, despite the fact that Pushkin was in reality part of the serf-owning landed gentry (not to mention his official post in the Tsarist court), he gradually came to be transformed into a revolutionary socialist poet of the people.\textsuperscript{150} As God made man (or perhaps, as man made God) in his own image, so the Communist Party of the Soviet Union made Pushkin in theirs.

Much the same may be said for the concurrent appropriation of folklore and nationalism, the latter taking on particular emphasis in the lead-up to and waging of the Great Patriotic War (for obvious reasons). In light of the fact that these shifts were taking place in the 1930s during Sviridov’s late teenage years, it seems reasonable to suggest that the trajectory his musical

\textsuperscript{148} Hoffman, “Was There a “Great Retreat””, 651.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 653.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 664-65.
language and personal ideological development took throughout his life – towards a simplistic, pandiatonic, neo-romantic style, coupled with an ideological identification with Esenin’s folkish peasant-poetry and later with the Russian nationalist movements emerging in the post-Stalinist era – was directly influenced by the cultural environment in which he came of age as a composer. Certainly, the process of Sviridov’s artistic maturation ran in parallel to the process of rehabilitating and appropriating pre-revolutionary cultures and traditions that had become the defining discourse of Soviet culture during his formative years.

The Sovietising of Pushkin during the 1937 anniversary celebrations brought with it a focus on composers who had been Pushkin’s contemporaries, effectively opening up a critical dialogue between the song composers of the 1830s and those of the 1930s. The so-called ‘dilettante’ composers of Pushkin’s generation, including the four Aleksandrs (Varlamov, Gurilyov, Alyabyev and Verstovsky), even became valued as role-models for aspiring Soviet song composers. This dialogue, which brought Soviet composers into direct contact with their centennial counterparts, took on a somewhat bizarre, school-report style tone that assessed composers (of both centuries) according to their ability to engage successfully with Pushkin’s verse. Mikhail Glinka came in for particular criticism for being too easily seduced by Pushkin’s more sybaritic side and failing to engage with his civic and philosophical content. In contrast, the lesser-knowns mentioned above, by virtue of their engagement with a more diverse range of Pushkin’s oeuvre, were elevated to a level of near equivalence to Pushkin as ‘founders of a native song tradition in Russia’. Contemporary Soviet composers were consequently judged on both their aptitude for astute engagement with Pushkin’s verse, and on

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153 Ibid.
their ability to emulate and reinterpret the newly rehabilitated song composers of the 1830s. As Bullock points out, this was a thin and relatively arbitrary line to tread. If composers adopted a style deemed too conservative, words like ‘banality’ and ‘derivative’ could be applied; if too experimental, then accusations of formalism might ensue. This resulted in a climate of critical reception that at times amounted to little more than a patronising ‘attendance was good; must try harder’ model of feedback which took many years to disappear from Soviet discourse, if, indeed, it ever did.\textsuperscript{154}

With its Sovietising of pre-revolutionary culture, ‘folk’ music, and nationalism, and the adoption of Pushkin and the consequent elevation of the Aleksandrs from ‘dilettantes’ to ‘founders of a native song tradition,’ the 1937 Pushkin anniversary was in many ways symptomatic of the cultural shift occurring during the period. But the implications are far more wide-ranging than simply Sovietising a famous Russian. The process was indicative of an emerging discourse for reinventing or reinterpreting Marxist doctrine in order to justify or condemn whichever aspects of national culture and history it was believed could help preserve the ascendancy of the regime, creating a distinctly Soviet narrative for past, present and future. When pure Marxist communism seemed to be struggling in its attempt to unite the ‘Proletarier aller Ländcher’, old-fashioned nationalism and familiar 19th-century classics could be made acceptable and figures like Pushkin or Varlamov could be turned into Dantean virtuous pagans. Meanwhile Glinka, despite his oft-celebrated role as the progenitor of a national Russian tradition of music, was considered worthy of damnation by virtue of his being the ‘epitome of indolent nobility.’\textsuperscript{155} Indeed, though probably apocryphal, the story of Glinka’s

\textsuperscript{154} See Bullock, ‘The Pushkin Anniversary’, 48-50 for examples.

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 46.
emigration from Russia at the end of his life, in which he reportedly got down from his carriage at the border crossing specifically to spit on Russian soil as his final gesture, provides a convenient theoretical example of how the Soviet habit of ideological cherry-picking could work. Depending on whether or not the regime considered Glinka to be a useful role-model, he could either have been displaying a reprehensible bourgeois contempt for the motherland, or, just as easily, expressing a socially-minded disdain for the corrupt Tsarist regime. He could then either be held up as a warning to, or paraded as a role-model for, contemporary Soviet citizens. This process allowed the regime to engineer appropriately Soviet models for many aspects of life, be it social behaviour, cultural products, or political ideology.

With the 1935 Pushkin Romances – his first composition for voice and piano – the twenty-year-old Sviridov rejected the more experimental stylistic traits of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries in the song genre, among them Prokofiev, Shostakovich and Aleksandr Mosolov, who had developed their respective musical languages during the decades of experimental avant-gardism, when Expressionism, Constructivism and Futurism were considered appropriately revolutionary and pre-revolutionary traditions were violently denigrated as corrupt and bourgeois.\(^{156}\) Instead, Sviridov immediately turned to a self-consciously retrospective neo-romantic musical language which owed much to the recently rehabilitated pre-revolutionary Russian vocal tradition of the 19th century, drawing heavily on Tchaikovsky, Musorgsky, Medtner, and above all Sergei Rachmaninoff, all of whose songs

\(^{156}\) In light of what has been said about the Soviet adoption of Pushkin, it is worth remembering Mayakovsky’s words, typical of the vitriolic catechising discourse of the revolutionary period, ‘We are shooting the old generals! Why not Pushkin?’ (quoted in Hoffman, ‘Was There a “Great Retreat”?’, 664). See also the Russian Futurists’ manifesto, signed by Mayakovsky and others, which states: ‘The Academy and Pushkin are as unintelligible as hieroglyphics. Throw Pushkin, Dostoevskii, Tolstoi etc., etc., from the steamship of Modernity’, David Burliuik et al., ‘A Slap in The Face of Public Taste’ [*Poshchechitva obschestvennomu vkusu*] (1912), <http://www.futurism.ru/a-z/manifest/slap.htm> [accessed 21 July 2017].
were composed between 1890 and 1916. General stylistic traits carried over from this tradition into Sviridov’s own works for voice include emphatic vocal declamation (with frequent performance directions such as: *molto espressivo, molto tenuto, portamento*, and even ‘maximum expressiveness!’ [*Maksimum vîrazitel’nosti!*]), rich chord voicings in the piano, emotive melody and accompaniment, moments of reflective lyricism, and a healthy amount of what Bullock describes as the ‘sombre fatalism reminiscent of Segei Rachmaninov and even Nikolai Metner (Medtner).’157 Sviridov’s later vocal compositions maintain many of these stylistic traits whilst introducing elements of pandiatonicism, coupled with a deliberate simplicity reminiscent of the heavily stylised, largely spurious interpretations of Russian folk traditions stemming from Varlamov et al., and the originators of the art-song genre in Russia during the first decades of the 19th century, whose music Sviridov had most likely been exposed to during the 1930s. These composers appear a number of times throughout his diaries. On one notable occasion, Sviridov describes ‘composers such as Alyabyev, Varlamov, Gurilyov, and Vertovsky’ as ‘having opened the path for a whole pleiad [*pleyade*] of Russian lyricists’, and goes on to declare: ‘I would compare this precious field [*dragotsennyyu vetv’*] of our music to Russian lyric poetry in the richness and depth of its emotional expression, in the subtlety and originality of its world-view [*postizheniya mira*], in the beauty of its ideals and the power of its influence.’158

Indeed, with its conservative, 19th-century musical pedigree and the selection of passionate and patriotic verses by Sergei Esenin, *Russia Cast Adrift* can easily be considered a work of neo-romantic nationalism that looks nostalgically backwards from its position in the Soviet

158 Georgy Sviridov, *Muzika kak sud’ba [Music as Destiny]* (Moscow, Molodaya gvardiya, 2002), 297 (see also 112 and 173).
Union of the 1970s to the era of pre-revolutionary Slavophilia, *narodnost*, and *pochvennichestvo*. Even the title itself, ‘Russia Cast Adrift,’ implies a critical attitude to what the Soviet Union had become by 1977. The selection of poetry by Esenin, which largely contains patriotic evocations of rural Russia and eulogies to the ‘native land’ mixed with religious symbolism, hints at Sviridov’s own retrospective nationalist (and perhaps slightly myopic) views, the seeds of which had been sown during the partial co-option of nationalist thought during 1930s, and was motivated, in the words of Gerard McBurney, ‘by a simple desire to retreat from the present.’ However, much like Timasheff’s ‘Great Retreat’, McBurney’s use of the word ‘retreat’ in this context might also be misleading. As shall be discussed in detail below, Sviridov’s musical nationalism can arguably be understood as an engagement with contemporaneous politics and society and not a ‘retreat’ at all.

Given the emerging nationalist narrative of Sviridov’s music, what may initially seem puzzling is the question of how and why a work such as *Russia Cast Adrift*, with its rose-tinted nostalgia for pre-revolutionary Russia, at times amounting to barely-concealed criticism of the Soviet regime, was permitted to be published or performed. Or, for that matter, how a nationalist member of the intellectual elite like Sviridov, whose ideology was by no means entirely aligned with official State ideology, came to be regularly showered with accolades including ‘Hero of Socialist Labour’, ‘People’s Artist of the USSR’, the Lenin Prize, the Stalin Prize, the USSR State Prize (twice), and, on no less than four occasions, the ‘Order of Lenin’ (the highest accolade offered by the Soviet Union). An initial examination of the socio-

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159 *Narodnost* refers to national character; national traits. *Pochvennichestvo* comes from the word *pochva*, meaning soil, ground or earth, and is the name given to one of the many ideologically nationalist movements in late 19th-century Russia.

political environment of the Brezhnev regime and its impact on cultural policy will serve to unravel this apparent paradox.

3.3 State ‘Inclusion’ of Nationalist Ideology, 1953–1982

Writing in 1975, Kenneth Jowitt described three stages of development in ‘Leninist regimes’: transformation of the old society, consolidation of the revolutionary regime, and inclusion, defining the last of these as ‘attempts by the party elite to expand the internal boundaries of the regime’s political, productive, and decision-making systems, to integrate itself with the non-official (i.e., non-apparatchik) sectors of society rather than insulate itself from them.’

The shifts between these three developmental stages naturally impact upon the ideological narrative of the regime in question. The inevitable decline in the effectiveness of Marxist-Leninist ideology as a result of the ‘consolidation’ (read: Stalinist) stage of development in the Soviet Union, combined with increasing ideological pluralism during the Thaw, gave rise to a need for the ‘inclusion’ of new ideologies which would galvanise patriotic support within Russia without challenging the legitimacy of the State. In other words, the transition from ‘consolidation’ to ‘inclusion’, or to be more specific to the Soviet Union, from Stalinism to post-Stalinism, had a huge and lasting impact upon the country’s cultural, social, political and ideological environment.

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161 Kenneth Jowitt, ‘Inclusion and Mobilization in European Leninist Regimes’ World Politics 21/1 (Oct., 1975), 69. Though relatively jargon-heavy, Jowitt’s article provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding the large-scale ideological/political shifts which were taking place in various eastern European countries in the post-war period. For an overview of all of Jowitt’s proposed stages of development, see section 1.1 ‘Singing Stagnation: Historical Context’ in the Introduction to the present thesis.

162 This was not dissimilar from the Stalinist policy of Druzhba narodov, which sought to co-opt national traditions that were not ethnically Russian in order to pacify those minorities by making them feel as though they had a voice in the new Soviet Union. See Richard Taruskin, ‘The Imperium and the Ghetto’, in Russian Music at Home and Abroad: New Essays (Oakland, University of California Press, 2016), 233-302.
The steps taken by the Khrushchev regime after the official denunciation of Stalinist policies in the Secret Speech delivered at the Twentieth Party Congress of the CPSU in 1956, contributed to a general relaxation of censorship in the Soviet Union, and helped to usher in the second phase of the so-called ‘Thaw’ in relations with the West. The Thaw had an immediate impact on musical and literary culture during the late 1950s and early ’60s, as well as some significantly farther-reaching consequences. In many ways, the policies initiated by Khrushchev in the 1950s continued to directly influence the Brezhnev regime’s cultural policies right into the 1970s and early ’80s, despite its best efforts to renege on the political, economic and cultural liberalisation of the Thaw. As Peter J. Schmelz has examined in his invaluable study of musical culture during the Thaw, the relaxation of censorship had a crucial impact on the development of what he describes as the ‘Unofficial’ generation of composers who received their musical education during the late 1950s.\(^\text{163}\) Similar freedoms began to open up in the field of literature. Indeed, one of the major literary movements to emerge from this period was known as Village Prose [*Derevenskaya proza*], which began to coalesce from 1953 onwards, taking as its primary focus Soviet agriculture and, more generally, rural Russia.\(^\text{164}\) Yitzhak M. Brudny describes this ‘distinct group of social critics’ as becoming ‘the voice of Russian [N.B. not *Soviet*] nationalist sentiment and a starting point for the development of the Russian nationalist movement.’\(^\text{165}\) Brudny directly associates the combined force of Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalinism, his agricultural reforms, and his ‘great personal

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\(^{164}\) Perhaps one of the best-known examples of this movement is Solzhenitsyn’s *Matryona’s House [Matryonin dvor]* published in 1963 which combines all the hallmarks of Village Prose: idealisation of the traditional Russian peasantry, criticism of Stalinist agricultural policy, elevation of traditional Orthodoxy, and so on. See Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State 1953-1991* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1998), 47-53. 

\(^{165}\) Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 47.
interest in agriculture" with the emergence of public debate on the subject of failing agricultural policies and their impact on the Soviet Union’s rural communities in the mid-1950s. From its nascent origins in the Village Prose movement, Russian nationalism became ineluctably associated with the issues surrounding Soviet agriculture and rural Russian life. According to Brudny, these trends continued to develop in the wake of the Twentieth Party Congress, leading to ‘a strengthening of the link joining Russian nationalism, Russian national identity, and rural Russia’. For many intellectuals of the war generation who, like Sviridov, had come from conservative rural backgrounds before moving to urban centres (in Sviridov’s case, from Fatezh and Kursk to Leningrad), Russian nationalism became a form of identity by which this group could define itself and even obtain some form of intellectual, political, and ideological autonomy from the regime. Or, to use Alexei Yurchak’s terminology that was applied to the discussion of Shostakovich in Chapter 2, it created a public of svoj that allowed these people to occupy themselves with social and cultural concerns other than those projected as ‘Soviet’ by the state.

Eventually, and somewhat inevitably, this focus on agricultural issues and rural lifestyle led towards an idealisation of pre-revolutionary, traditional Russian values and morals, often exemplified by a number of typical imageries: the rural Russian village, the Russian landscape, the traditional Russian peasantry, and, of course, the Orthodox Church. In the wake of a mass urbanisation of the Russian population during the 1950s and ’60s, partly as a result of disastrous agricultural policies, combined with aggressive social and cultural policies over

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166 Brudny, Reinventing Russia, 46.
167 Ibid., 49-50.
the previous four decades (including the destruction of pre-revolutionary buildings and churches\textsuperscript{169}), a distinct notion began to coalesce that the Soviet regime was directly responsible for the dismantling of Russian traditions, and had, in a sense, morally corrupted the Russian national spirit. This is well-exemplified in many works by the aforementioned Village Prose writers, by the nationalist paintings of Ilya Glazunov (who, in 1962, called for the rebuilding of the cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow that had been destroyed in 1931\textsuperscript{170} to make way for Stalin’s ludicrous Tower of Babel known as the ‘Palace of the Soviets’), and by the somewhat conflicted character of the poet and editor of \textit{Noviy Mir}, Aleksandr Tvardovsky for whom ‘the tragedy of the Russian Revolution and the destruction of the Russian peasantry loomed as the primary focus’\textsuperscript{171}. This is precisely the cultural context, or ‘milieu’\textsuperscript{172} in which Sviridov produced \textit{Russia Cast Adrift}. Although Brudny relies solely on literary publications and journals to support his study of the Russian nationalist movement, a vast amount of Sviridov’s artistic output from this period can and arguably should (given its explicit engagement with rural, religious, pre-revolutionary ideas) also be understood as representative of a directly analogous movement in music – a musical equivalent to the burgeoning Russian nationalist movement that was emerging in literary journals such as \textit{Nash sovremennik} and \textit{Molodaya gvardiya}. Through his identifying with nationalist preoccupations, Sviridov, like his literary counterparts, created his own cultural identity and a sense of both personal and artistic autonomy from the Soviet regime. In \textit{Russia Cast Adrift}, Sviridov uses the compound entity of his music and Esenin’s poetry to establish his own autonomous

\textsuperscript{169} Both Stalin and Khrushchev had initiated strongly atheist, anti-religious campaigns from 1929–1932 and 1959–1964 respectively (Brudny, \textit{Reinventing Russia}, 44).


\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 247.

\textsuperscript{172} See Yurchak, \textit{Everything Was Forever}, especially 126-158.
ideological identity, or, as Richard Taruskin might put it, to define his own version of Russia or ‘Russianness’ which is distinct from the official state narrative of ‘Russianness’ and even more so from what might be termed ‘Sovietness’.

The reasons why this form of public ‘opposition’ to the state began to be not only permitted but also actively encouraged during this period are intricately interwoven. Disentwining them holds the key to understanding the context in which Sviridov was composing Russia Cast Adrift, and, arguably, some of his associated stylistic and compositional decisions. The Brezhnev regime wanted to avoid any radical form of social, political or economic reform at all costs, because they feared (quite legitimately, as Gorbachev would discover two decades later) that extensive reform would ultimately undermine the ascendancy of the Soviet State. The problem facing Brezhnev and his right-hand man, Mikhail Suslov, was that because of the liberalising trends set in motion by Khrushchev that encouraged public discussion of certain aspects of state policy, they could not simply go back to quietly preserving the status quo without upsetting members of the intelligentsia, liberal reformists and nationalists alike. This forced the regime to devise ways in which they could simultaneously prevent an exodus of intellectuals from the system en masse, yet also furtively avoid implementing any actual reform.

The regime decided to co-opt the nationalist-minded members of the intelligentsia in particular because they not only provided a tacit public support for Brezhnev’s economic prioritisation of agriculture and the military, but were also, broadly speaking, ideologically pro-Russia and anti-West, thereby paradoxically legitimising the ascendancy of the Soviet state despite their various criticisms and calls for reform. This sufficiently distinguished the nationalists from the liberal reformists who were largely ideologically open to the West and as a result were
considered to be implicitly undermining the legitimacy of the state, although they too were permitted a public voice, if to a slightly lesser extent.\textsuperscript{173} A related, if slightly more sinister, reason for Brezhnev’s co-opting of nationalist intellectuals in particular was that they were generally preoccupied with the elevation and preservation of traditions belonging to the ethnically Russian population of the Soviet Union, which served to legitimise the State’s growing discomfort over other nationalist movements that began to emerge after the collapse of Stalinism, most notably in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968.\textsuperscript{174} Indeed, Richard Sakwa suggests that the “‘Soviet way of life’ [during the Brezhnev years] was a mixture of patriotic xenophobia and self-praise, which combined a contempt for ‘Western’ (liberal-democratic) values with an aggressive nationalism and a submission to paternalistic authority.”\textsuperscript{175} This strong association of Russian nationalism with racial prejudice and xenophobia (which still persists today) may well be one of the reasons that has led Gerard McBurney to detect in Sviridov’s music ‘unsavoury suggestions of racial intolerance and isolationism’,\textsuperscript{176} motivated Philip Bullock to describe Sviridov as being ‘contemptuous of [Osip Mandelstam’s] Jewishness’,\textsuperscript{177} and prompted Levon Hakobian, in his recently revised survey of Soviet music, to describe Sviridov’s world outlook as ‘strongly chauvinistic and xenophobic.’\textsuperscript{178} These accusations are certainly not unfounded – Sviridov’s hatred of

\textsuperscript{173} Personal conversation with Levon Hakobian, Moscow, 17 December 2015.
\textsuperscript{174} However, as Jeremy Smith makes clear, ‘instances of large-scale unrest were rare’, and, ‘for the most part, Brezhnev maintained a tacitful neutrality on the national question’. For an extended discussion of (non-Russian) nationalism in the Soviet republics during Brezhnev’s premiership see Jeremy Smith, \textit{Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR} (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), 216-255.
\textsuperscript{176} McBurney, ‘Soviet Music After the Death of Stalin’, 137.
Mandelstam, for example, is unconcealed in his published memoirs. The potentially provocative issue of racial intolerance in Sviridov’s music arguably deserves a more nuanced treatment than it has received in the past, and it needs to be considered critically within, though of course absolutely not justified by, the context of the socio-political environment of the time.

The implementation of ‘inclusionary politics’ as Brudny describes it, deriving his terminology from Jowitt’s more general ‘inclusion’, resulted in nationalist intellectuals being permitted to ‘articulate their ideas with unprecedented freedom’ during the late 1960s and early 70s, while the liberal reformist members of the intellectual elite were, to a certain extent, squeezed out. By the beginning of the Stagnation period, Sviridov had begun to occupy a somewhat paradoxical position as a member of this particular group of dissatisfied nationalist intellectuals which the state decided to co-opt in an attempt to regulate public opposition to the regime, permitting (even encouraging) them to publicly discuss their opinions on a diverse range of contemporary issues, from agricultural reforms to the preservation of pre-revolutionary traditions. They were able to be openly critical of the Soviet regime, but only because the regime allowed them to be so. Sviridov was thus part of an intellectual, nationalist opposition to the Soviet State which was, whether he knew it or not, mobilised by the State itself in an attempt to avoid any reform that might have the potential to undermine its ascendancy.

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179 Sviridov, Muzika kak sud’ba, 371 (referenced by Bullock, ‘Intimacy and Distance’, 26). Sviridov’s particular choice of word for Mandelstam is ‘говнюк’ or ‘shit-bag’; clearly this word in itself does not have inherently anti-Semitic connotations.

180 For a discussion of the links between Orthodoxy, Russian nationalism, and antisemitism within the Soviet intelligentsia see Zubok, Zhivago’s Children, 226-258.

181 Brudny, Reinventing Russia, 57.
3.4 Russia Cast Adrift

In Russia Cast Adrift Sviridov set a selection of twelve poems by Sergei Esenin, dating variously from between 1914 and 1920. Described as ‘the self-styled “last poet of Wooden Russia,” whose dual image – that of a devout and simple peasant singer and that of a rowdy and blasphemous exhibitionist – reflects his tragic maladjustment to the changing world of the revolutionary era’,\(^{182}\) Esenin enjoyed immense popularity during his short lifetime (1895–1925). Common subjects in his poetry include rural Russia, the Russian peasantry, Russian Orthodoxy and mysticism, the evils of industrialisation, and the elevation of what he described as ‘Wooden Russia’, i.e. traditional, pre-industrial Russia before the Bolshevik worship of iron, steel, and electricity. Though initially an enthusiastic supporter of the revolution, Esenin gradually became disillusioned with the Soviet regime and, in the wake of his suicide in 1925, fell into relative obscurity after the banning of his works during the Stalinist period. His reputation began to be revived after the collapse of Stalinism, with a number of new editions of his poems appearing after 1956, followed eventually by the republishing of his complete works in a five-volume collection between 1966 and 1968. These fluctuations in his reputation are not particularly surprising considering the thematic content of his poetry and the cultural shifts that were paving the way for the Russian nationalist movement after Stalin’s death. Indeed, it should not be particularly contentious to suggest that Esenin may be understood as a direct forerunner of the Village Prose movement, considering the ideological locus of his work. This might also shine a light on why the nationalist-minded Sviridov had such an affinity for Esenin’s work, in contrast to the other, less nationalistic contributors to the vocal

\(^{182}\) Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopaedia of Literature (Springfield, Massachusetts, Merriam Webster, 1995), 1223.
genre considered in this thesis, namely Shostakovich (who never set a single line of Esenin’s poetry) and Silvestrov (who has to date set a grand total of four Esenin poems).[^183]

Seven of the songs in *Russia Cast Adrift* are settings of short poems in their entirety (with occasional minor alterations by Sviridov) while the remaining five are derived from longer poems, edited down to fit into short song structures. All twelve poems were published independently of each other over a period of six years and were not originally conceived as part of any larger cycle by Esenin. There are, however, strong thematic and symbolic links between them, particularly in their intermingling of pastoral and religious imagery, suggesting that Sviridov chose them carefully in order to serve his own nationalist aesthetic. Figure 3.1 shows Esenin’s poems set by Sviridov in the order in which they appear in *Russia Cast Adrift*.

**Figure 3.1** Table of song titles and poems featured in *Russia Cast Adrift*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Song</th>
<th>Title/First Line of Poem</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ‘Autumn’ [<em>Osen’</em>]</td>
<td><em>Osen’</em></td>
<td>1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ‘I Left the Paternal Home’ [<em>Ya pokinul rodimiy dom...</em>]</td>
<td><em>Ya pokinul rodimiy dom...</em></td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ‘Open For Me, Guardian Beyond the Clouds’ [<em>Otvori mne, strazh zaoblachniy...</em>]</td>
<td><em>Otvori mne, strazh zaoblachniy...</em></td>
<td>1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ‘The Silvery Path’ [<em>Serebristaya doroga...</em>]</td>
<td><em>Serebristaya doroga</em></td>
<td>1917</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[^183]: Three of these appear in Silvestrov’s vocal cycle *Quiet Songs* [*Tikhie pesni*], composed 1974–1977, including a setting of Esenin’s ‘Swamps and Marshes’ [*Topi da bolota*], which Sviridov also set to music in his 1964 cantata for solo tenor and male chorus *Wooden Russia* [*Derevyannaya Rus’*].
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Song Title</th>
<th>Choir Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>‘Russia Cast Adrift’ <em>Otechalivshaya Rus’</em></td>
<td>‘Dove of Jordan’ <em>Iordanskaya golubitsa</em> (Excerpt)</td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>‘Simon, Peter, Where Are You? Come to Me’ <em>Simone, Petr... Gde ti? Pridi...</em></td>
<td>‘Advent’ <em>Pristhestvie</em> (Excerpt)</td>
<td>1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>‘Where, Where Are You, Paternal Home’ <em>Gde ti, gde ti, otchiy dom...</em></td>
<td><em>Gde ti, gde ti, otchiy dom...</em></td>
<td>1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>‘There, Beyond the Milky Hills’ <em>Tam, za mlechnymi kholmami...</em></td>
<td>‘Pantocrator’ <em>Pantokrator</em> (Excerpt)</td>
<td>1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>‘It Sounds, It Sounds, the Fateful Horn!’ <em>Trubit, trubit pogibyel’niy rog!</em></td>
<td>‘Prayers for the Dead’ <em>Sorokouist</em> (Excerpt)</td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>‘In Autumn’ <em>Po-osennemu...</em></td>
<td>‘In Autumn the Owl Calls’ <em>Po-osennemu kichet sova...</em></td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>‘Oh I Believe, I Believe, There is Happiness!’ <em>O veryu, veryu, schast’e est!</em></td>
<td><em>O veryu, veryu, schast’e est!</em></td>
<td>1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>‘O Motherland, Happy and Irredeemable Hour!’ <em>O rodina, schastlivyi i neiskhodnyi chas!</em></td>
<td>‘Octoechos’ <em>Oktoikh</em> (Excerpt)</td>
<td>1917</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following analysis is presented in four main sections. The first provides detailed analyses of the first and third songs in the cycle; the second focuses on the fourth and fifth songs; the third examines the sixth, seventh and ninth songs; and the fourth covers the eighth, eleventh, and twelfth songs. These songs provide particularly clear examples of Sviridov’s engagement
with Russian nationalist preoccupations in his music. The analysis has been divided in such a way as to best explore the emergence and development of two parallel thematic strands across the cycle, namely that of betrayal and suffering on the one hand, and that of resurrection, faith and transcendence on the other.

The edition used in the analysis is the version for tenor and piano published in Moscow in 1979. The cycle has also been recorded in versions for mezzo soprano (notably a live recording by Elena Obraztsova accompanied by Sviridov himself at the piano), and for baritone (by Dmitri Hvorostovsky with Mikhail Arkadiev, who worked closely with the composer in the 1980s and ’90s). Between these recordings and editions there is a great variation in key signatures. Figure 3.2 shows the keys of the songs in recordings by Obraztsova and Hvorostovsky alongside those designated in the edition for tenor, premiered by Vladislav Piavko in 1982.

**Figure 3.2** Variation in keys in *Russia Cast Adrift.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Mezzo Soprano (Obraztsova)</th>
<th>Tenor (Piavko)</th>
<th>Baritone (Hvorostovsky)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Autumn’</td>
<td>E flat minor</td>
<td>E minor</td>
<td>C minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I Have Left the Paternal Home’</td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>D minor</td>
<td>A minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Open For Me’</td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>D minor</td>
<td>C minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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184 The second and tenth songs are absent from the discussion for no other reason than to avoid redundant repetition – their salient musical and lyrical features are exhibited by the cycle as a whole.  
185 Because Sviridov’s harmonic language is largely pandiatonic, these keys designate the most strongly defined tonality of each song. In instances where the song modulates, the key in which the song ends is shown in brackets.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Key 1</th>
<th>Key 2</th>
<th>Key 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘The Silvery Path’</td>
<td>D minor (F major)</td>
<td>E minor (G major)</td>
<td>C sharp minor (E major)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Russia Cast Adrift’</td>
<td>C sharp major</td>
<td>D major</td>
<td>C major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Simon, Peter’</td>
<td>G minor (A minor)</td>
<td>G minor (A minor)</td>
<td>F sharp minor (G sharp minor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Where Are You, Paternal Home’</td>
<td>F sharp minor</td>
<td>G minor</td>
<td>F minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘There, Beyond the Milky Hills’</td>
<td>D major</td>
<td>E major</td>
<td>C major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘It Sounds, The Fateful Horn!’</td>
<td>C sharp minor</td>
<td>C sharp minor</td>
<td>B flat minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘In Autumn’</td>
<td>F sharp minor</td>
<td>G sharp minor</td>
<td>F minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Oh I Believe, There is Happiness!’</td>
<td>F sharp minor</td>
<td>G sharp minor</td>
<td>F minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘O Motherland’</td>
<td>B minor</td>
<td>C sharp minor</td>
<td>B flat minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a small degree of similarity in the relative relationships of the keys (for example, the last three songs share the same relation of a fourth in all three instances), but, generally speaking, the variations seem to be arbitrary and are presumably based on the range of the singers performing. This suggests that Sviridov may have had a relatively free, Puccini-esque approach to key signatures, in that he was prepared to allow alterations for practical reasons. Beyond the differences in tessitura and alterations in key signature, there is little or nothing that differentiates these versions in terms of the notes on the page, though, for some reason, Sviridov described the version for tenor in less than flattering terms as ‘the edition most hated
by the composer [nenavistnogo redaktsii kompozitora]. According to the composer’s nephew, Aleksandr Sergeevich Belonenko, there are, at the time of writing, plans to publish a new edition of the work.

3.4.1 Nos. 1 & 3: The Pastoral-Religious

The first song in the cycle, ‘Autumn’, is a tranquil, reflective setting of a short poem of the same name composed by Esenin in 1914 and published in 1917. Sviridov remains largely faithful in his setting of the original text, with only one very minor alteration in at the beginning of the third stanza (shown in italics):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Осень (Esenin)</th>
<th>Осень (Sviridov)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Тихо в чаше можжевеля по обрыву.</td>
<td>Тихо в чаше можжевеля по обрыву.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Осень — рыжая кобыла — чешет гриву.</td>
<td>Осень — рыжая кобыла — чешет гриву.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Над речным покровом берегов</td>
<td>Над речным покровом берегов</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Слышен синий лязг её подков.</td>
<td>Слышен синий лязг её подков.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Схимник-ветер шагом осторожным</td>
<td>Ветер-схиимник шагом осторожным</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Мнёт листву по выступам дорожным</td>
<td>Мнёт листву по выступам дорожным</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>И целует на рябиновом кусту</td>
<td>И целует на рябиновом кусту</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Язывы красные незримому Христу.</td>
<td>Язывы красные незримому Христу.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

186 Sviridov, Muzika kak sud’ba, 399.
187 Personal correspondence, 8 August 2017.
Autumn

How quiet it is amongst the juniper thicket along the cliff
Autumn – a red mare – shakes her mane.

Above the shaded banks of the river
Is heard the blue clatter of her shoes.

The wind, like a monk with cautious steps
Blows the leaves across the ruts in the road

And kisses on the rowan shrubs
The red sores of the invisible Christ.

This minor alteration does nothing to alter the trochaic 6/5 metre\textsuperscript{188} of Esenin’s original, the stresses on the words ‘monk’ ['священник']\textsuperscript{189} and ‘wind’ ['ветер'] both being on the first syllable in Russian. Elsewhere in the cycle, changes to Esenin’s verse elicit a footnote in the score containing the original words, and the lack of footnote for this particular change is probably due to its negligible effect on both the metre and meaning of the original. The term ‘Священник-ветер’ is a cumbersome compound which literally translates as ‘monk-wind’ and might be more idiomatically rendered as ‘The wind, like a monk’. While the meaning is the same regardless of the order in which the words fall, this reversal does take on an expressive

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\textsuperscript{188} A common metre in 20\textsuperscript{th}-century Russian poetry which mixes pentameter and hexameter.
\textsuperscript{189} Specifically, a monk who has taken the vows of schema [skhima], the strictest monastic rule in the Orthodox Church.
significance which will be explored in due course. As expected, Sviridov’s setting of the text is responsive to the natural word stresses and metre of the poetry, though not to such an obsessive degree found in the majority of Silvestrov’s settings as will be demonstrated in Chapter 4.\textsuperscript{190} In general, Sviridov’s approach to text setting is somewhat freer, evidently less considered, and certainly less idiosyncratic than Silvestrov’s, but his settings do nonetheless make some attempt to reflect the poetic rhythms of the original texts.

Of greater significance is Sviridov’s harmonic and melodic language, which helps to establish some of the predominant ideological narrative features of the cycle as a whole by engaging with various 19\textsuperscript{th}-century Russian nationalist musical tropes, whilst simultaneously responding to Esenin’s symbolistic poetic imagery, and utilising it to create a somewhat messianic image of Russia by musically merging the pastoral with the religious. By engaging with the musical tropes he picked up from Rachmaninov, Glinka, and the dilettantes, Sviridov responds to one of the main concerns of the Russian nationalist movement of the 1960s and ’70s which lay in the public discussion of pre-revolutionary nationalist ideals such as \textit{narodnost’}, \textit{pochvennichestvo} and the Slavophile legacy. Through his response to Esenin’s pastoral-religious imagery, he also engages with another significant contemporary nationalist preoccupation: the depiction of traditional rural life in Russia and the nostalgic elevation of the Orthodox Church.\textsuperscript{191} Yet by his very choice of poet and subject matter, Sviridov is also opening a dialogue with the cultural environment of fin-de-siècle Russia, wherein mysticism, spiritualism and Symbolism were beginning to assert themselves against the dominance of Realism. The particular selection of Esenin poems found in \textit{Russia Cast Adrift}, reflects, at

\textsuperscript{190} In particular, see Chapter 4, section 4.3.5.

\textsuperscript{191} These themes are evident in works by various artists and writers of Sviridov’s generation including Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr Tvardovsky, and Ilya Glazunov. See Brudny, \textit{Reinventing Russia}, passim (but particularly 70-76), and Zabok, \textit{Zhitvago’s Children}, 241-247.
least to some extent (even if unconsciously), other non-nationalist cultural shifts in the Soviet Union during the 1970s, when interest in religion, and particularly Eastern spiritualism, was increasing. In other words, by virtue of his synthesised musical-literary engagement with both 19th- and 20th-century cultural paradigms in *Russia Cast Adrift*, Sviridov appears, consciously or otherwise, to highlight parallels between various social, cultural, artistic, and religious environments, or ‘elsewheres’ of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The harmonic language throughout the cycle is neo-romantic and predominantly pandiatonic, making use of brightly coloured cluster chords that often revolve around a pedal note or notes, and that usually develop out of single notes, perfect fourths or fifths, or consonant diatonic chords. This creates a shimmering, ever-expanding, somewhat tintinnabular effect, as if the initial note(s) or consonant harmonies progressively acquire more overtones as a result of repeated striking. This musical evocation of bells and chimes – the direction ‘bell-like’ [kolokol’no] appears more than once in the cycle – is crucial when considered alongside the overt religious references, often in direct conjunction with pastoral imagery, found in the poems set, as will be demonstrated in the analysis below.

In ‘Autumn’, Sviridov’s harmony does much to capture the static atmosphere and quasi-religious pastoral imagery of Esenin’s short poem (as well as adding its own emphasis to certain words and phrases). It achieves this through a number of means. In the first bar an open fifth is established by the piano, oscillating between an E and a B, and this can be

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192 Zubok describes ‘a strange longing for spiritual values’ that could not be found ‘in the tomes of the materialistic, atheistic revolutionaries’ (Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children*, 252). See also comments made by Silvestrov about a connection between his musical aesthetic and the philosophy of zen in Chapter 4 of this thesis).

193 See Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 150, and section 1.2 in the Introduction to the present thesis. Similarly, Zubok refers to the notion of ‘different “usable past[s],”’ from before and beyond the Soviet revolutionary experience’ that various members of the intelligentsia could turn to in the ‘frantic search for group cultural identity’ that was taking place during the slide from Thaw to Stagnation. See Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children*, 225.
perceived constantly ringing throughout the song. The primacy of this open fifth lends an almost naïve purity to the song, responding to Esenin’s conscientiously constructed poetic persona of the ‘devout and simple peasant singer’, and is crucial in setting up the narrative tone of the whole cycle, which oscillates between tranquil reflective nostalgia and overwrought (and in certain recordings of the work, arguably contrived) passion. Bright cluster chords gradually develop from and revolve around the initial oscillating E and B, first introducing 7ths and 4ths, before reaching the first semi-recognisable ‘diatonic’ harmony by introducing a C and G in the sixth bar; a first inversion A minor chord is implied, but the harmony remains pandiatonic by virtue of the persistent B, as well as a G, which appear in the piano accompaniment’s cluster, simultaneously preserving the E minor tonality of the song (Ex. 3.1).

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194 *Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopaedia of Literature*, 1223. This also has parallels with the concept of the *yurodivy* or ‘holy fool’ and the practice of asceticism within Eastern Orthodoxy.
This first instance of diatonic colour in the sixth bar, breaking the predominantly modal flavour of the introduction, draws attention to the image of the ‘red mare shak[ing] her mane’ ['рыжая кобыла – чешет гриву'], thereby musically highlighting the first physical disturbance in the poem’s pervasive tranquil atmosphere, interrupting the quiet of the juniper thicket in the first line ['Тихо в чаще можжевеля’]. On a formal level, it also delineates the end of the first stanza of the poem within the non-strophic structure of the song.
The next notable moment of harmonic colour appears at the beginning of the third ‘verse’ (bar 11), corresponding to the beginning of the third stanza of the poem, where a C sharp is introduced. This is the first altered melodic degree to appear in the song, and as such it adds considerable weight to the word ‘monk’ [‘схимник’] which it underpins, as well as starkly demarcating the break between the second and third stanzas of the poem. It is also at this point in the song that the piano accompaniment’s chords begin to be underscored with tenuto markings. From here the song gradually ascends to its moment of catharsis (bar 18), emphasising the imagery of ‘the red sores of the invisible Christ’ [‘Язвы красные незримому Христу’] (Ex. 3.2).

(Mедленно $\text{d}=72$)

(под)ков. Ве- тер- сихий ша- гом о- сто- ро- ж ным, млет лист- ву по вы- сту- лым до-

poco allargando

рож ным ицелу- ет на ря- би- но- вом хус- ту язы- 

крас- ные не-зри- мо- му Хрис- ту.
The heightened harmonic colour which accompanies the third and fourth stanzas (in particular the tensive interaction between C sharp and C natural) disrupts the initially modal, almost pentatonic harmony of the first and second stanzas, and invests the latter half of the song with a degree of harmonic colour appropriately highlighting the sense of mysticism generated by Esenin’s quasi-religious imagery. This may go some way towards explaining the seemingly innocuous alteration Sviridov makes to the original text, which, in the context of its musical setting, ensures that attention is now drawn to the word ‘схииник’ rather than ‘ветер’, thereby emphasising the significance of the religious imagery.

It should also be noted that despite the increasing richness of the chord clusters, the E and B remain omnipresent. By the final bars, they are the only remaining notes, closing the short song precisely as it opened. A reduction of the harmonic structure of ‘Autumn’ shows plainly how this open fifth pervades the entire song (Figure 3.3).

*Figure 3.3* Sviridov, *Russia Cast Adrift*, ‘Autumn’, harmonic reduction.

It seems reasonable to interpret this continuous open fifth from which the chord clusters develop as being evocative of chiming bells, particularly since the direction ‘bell-
like'\textit{kolokol'no} appears directly associated with an open fifth at the beginning of the third song in the cycle. But it is also indicative of the underlying drone, which is a standard signifier of the folk idiom, as in the repeated open fifth of Schubert’s organ grinder in the concluding song of \textit{Winterreise}. Further folkish allusions are embodied in the oscillating chord clusters which, in addition to their evocation of bells and chimes, are also redolent of the traditional Russian bayan or squeezebox, the oscillation between two chords with shared pitches echoing the inhale-exhale wheezing of a bellows-operated free-reed aerophone. At times this harmonic language is specifically reminiscent of some of the folkish elements in Stravinsky’s \textit{Petrushka} with its bright chord clusters and drone-like pedals, and this is particularly noticeable in the fifth song from which the cycle derives its title, ‘Russia Cast Adrift’ (see section 3.4.2 below).

The three most conspicuous instances of harmonic colour in ‘Autumn’ highlighted in Figure 3.3 provide a convenient example of how Sviridov achieves his synthesis of pastoral symbolism and religious or spiritual references. They also help highlight a further (if somewhat less consistent) feature of the cycle, namely an idiosyncratic tendency to attach particular harmonic significance to imagery concerning light and colour – notably silver, gold, but also occasionally blue, and, in the case of ‘Autumn’, red. Sviridov exhibits sensitivity to the internal resonances of Esenin’s poetry, associating the image of the ‘red mare shak[ing] her mane’ with the image of the ‘red sores of the invisible Christ’ through his use of harmony, the setting of the latter phrase being an expanded version of the harmonic progression underpinning the former (Ex. 3.3a and Ex. 3.3b).

Example 3.3b Sviridov, *Russia Cast Adrift*, ‘Autumn’, bars 17-23.
This harmonic linking of the two images associates Esenin’s rural-symbolic personification of autumn as the red mare with the overt reference to the crucifixion. Combined with the harmonic colour given to the anthropomorphising of the wind into a monk in the third verse, this helps to invest the natural features of the Russian country itself with an innately spiritual, messianic quality. The ‘red sores’ at the climax of the song explicitly refer to Christ’s wounds, but can also be understood as a reference to the rowan shrubs in the previous line, which bear scarlet pomes in autumn, further suggesting a latent spirituality or mysticism within the Russian land and associating it with Christ and the stigmata. Within the context of the extra-musical concerns of the cycle as a whole, the connotations of martyrdom, betrayal, sacrifice and rebirth associated with any references to the Christian gospels should be carefully considered. By associating folk traditions, rural imagery, overt religious metaphors and a distinctly 19th-century (read: non-Soviet) brand of nationalist patriotism, Sviridov creates a work that is simultaneously a nostalgic, rose-tinted eulogy of what Russia once was and a polemical critique of what Russia had become during the Soviet era. Interpreting the cycle as an analogy of Russia as the beaten and betrayed figure of Christ (with the added implication of a potential resurrection to former glory) is tantalising, as it plays into a number of contemporaneous discussions revolving around religion, nationhood and the future of the Soviet political system. This allegorical narrative gains weight as the cycle progresses, and the trajectory from betrayal and death towards resurrection and transfiguration becomes an important feature of Russia Cast Adrift.

One further point to be made about the instances of harmonic interest highlighted in Figure 3.3 is that they all depend upon the introduction or manipulation of the sixth degree of the scale – in the case of the prevailing E minor modality of ‘Autumn’, C and C sharp. Richard Taruskin
discusses the significance of the sixth in Russian music, specifically in reference to
Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin*, describing it as ‘the interval that more than any other defines
the idiom of the bòtovoy romans, the Russian domestic or household romance of the early
nineteenth century.’ With his use of sixths (albeit concealed in cluster chords) at moments
of particular harmonic interest, Sviridov engages with various cultural preoccupations of the
19th century, from the early attempts at detecting, documenting and fostering a distinctly
Russian form of narodnaya pesnya or folk song (which Taruskin believes ultimately
prefigured the idiom of the bòtovoy romans), to attempts by composers in the latter half of
the century (most obviously Balakirev and his associates) to promote what they believed to be
an ‘authentic’ national Russian sound. In the process he also affiliates himself with various
pre-Soviet nationalist ideologies associated with the period of slavophilic nationalism.

Sviridov’s musical response to the text evokes and integrates the religious references and the
pastoral imagery employed by Esenin arguably more tangibly than the poetry manages by
itself; in the original poem, rural and religious images act as symbols and metaphors for one
another, but through their musical setting they become synthesised into a single entity: two
heavily symbolic sides of the same coin. This synthesis of the religious and the pastoral lies at
the core of *Russia Cast Adrift* and its nationalistic, 19th-century tinged eulogising of pre-Soviet
Russia.

The vocal part in ‘Autumn’ is indicative of the melodic writing throughout *Russia Cast Adrift*,
which is predominantly modal and with barely a single instance of melisma in the whole
cycle. Melodies often feature oscillating intervals, and there is a conspicuous dominance of

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196 Ibid., 17.
perfect fourths and fifths, in particular the falling fourth,\textsuperscript{197} which makes its initial appearance at the very first entry of the voice at the beginning of ‘Autumn’ and regularly reappears at moments of heightened intensity, often with added \textit{portamento}. The falling fourth is particularly prominent in the first, third, fourth, sixth, seventh and ninth songs. As shall be explored in more detail below, these songs contain more overt references to Christianity and, to a greater or lesser extent, deal with themes of betrayal, loss, suffering, apocalypse, and death. The songs not to feature this emphatic falling fourth with any particular insistency are the second, fifth, eighth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth. In contrast, they more commonly feature rising fourths (sometimes rising fifths) at moments of ecstatic emotion, or climactic resolution, and tend towards the themes of transfiguration, resurrection, and faith in Russia itself.

After their initial establishment in ‘Autumn’, the best place to continue the exploration of these harmonic and melodic traits in \textit{Russia Cast Adrift} is in the third song of the cycle, ‘Open For Me, Guardian Beyond the Clouds’ [\textit{Otvori mne, strazh zaoblchnyi}...]. The song is an unaltered setting of a short Esenin poem of the same name written in 1917:

\begin{center}
egin{tabular}{l l}
\textbf{Отвори мне, страж заоблачный} & \textbf{Open For Me, Guardian Beyond the Clouds}  \\
Отвори мне, страж заоблачный, & Open for me, guardian beyond the clouds,  \\
Голубые двери дня. & The blue gates of day.  \\
Белый ангел этой полночью & A white angel this midnight  \\
Моего увёл коня. & Took from me my horse.  \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{197} According to Taruskin, Glinka described the leap from the 4\textsuperscript{th} scale-degree to the tonic as ‘the soul of Russian music’ (see Taruskin, \textit{Defining Russia Musically}, 503).
Богу лишнего не надобно,  God has no need of him,
Конь мой – мощь моя и крепь.  My horse – My power and strength.
Слышиу я, как ржёт он жалобно,  I hear him neighing mournfully,
Закусив златую цепь.  Biting at his golden bit,

Вижу, как он бьётся, мечется,  I see him thrashing, tossing about,
Теребя тугой аркан,  Pulling at his tight halter
И летит с него, как с месяца,  And flying from him, as if from the moon,
Шерсть буланая в туман.  His dun hair into the mist.

Sviridov’s harmony in ‘Open For Me’ is modal throughout, avoiding any secondary
dominants or chromaticisms and achieving what Boris Gasparov has described as an
‘amorphous looseness’ of harmony characteristic of the Russian chorale (as opposed to
familiar Western harmonisations with raised sevenths and so on).198 Sviridov’s harmony is
based predominantly around the modal scale-degrees I, III, IV and VI, with E naturals
appearing to add colour and occasionally imply a vague sense of a dominant. With the
exception of the tonic (D minor) Sviridov rarely uses any of these chords in their pure triadic,
diatonic form, instead choosing to expand the harmonies into ringing clusters by combining
two or more chords for each harmony. This results in a pandiatonic re-imagining of
Gasparov’s Russian chorale which somehow manages to be even more amorphous and loose,
yet at the same time, paradoxically, completely immutable in terms of modulation. This is
because the constant appearance of at least two or more notes of the tonic triad in any given

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198 Boris Gasparov, *Five Operas and a Symphony: Word and Music in Russian Culture* (New Haven, Yale
combination of chords I, III, IV and VI (particularly the D and A) means that, despite any harmonies that might be implied, the song can never really modulate anywhere, and it becomes reduced, in the same way as ‘Autumn’, to an embellishment of an open fifth which is established by the piano in the first bar. This once more evokes ringing bells and all the associated symbolism, even more explicitly here because of the marking ‘bell-like’ [kolokol’no]. The opening vocal melody features a characteristic upward leap of a sixth which is a staple of the bitovoy romans (as well as of subsequent nationalist evocations of ‘folk’ traditions).\textsuperscript{199} The accompanying harmony shadows the voice in thirds as well as maintaining its tonic pedal, further helping to preserve the ringing open fifth from the previous bar (Ex. 3.4).

\textbf{Example 3.4} Sviridov, Russia Cast Adrift, ‘Open For Me’, bars 1-2.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example.png}
\end{figure}

Although the interval of a falling fourth has not yet been prominently featured, the bass line of the piano accompaniment moves with the vocal line in fourths, while in the accompaniment’s

\textsuperscript{199} See Taruskin, \textit{Defining Russia Musically} and Gasparov, \textit{Five Operas and a Symphony}, passim.
middle range, the dominant interval is the emphatically repeated fourth between A and D. This type of harmonic texture, with its insistent middle-voice drone, is again reminiscent of *Petrushka*, despite its more reflective mood (Ex. 3.5a and Ex. 3.5b).

**Example 3.5a** Sviridov, *Russia Cast Adrift*, ‘Open For Me’, piano accompaniment, bar 2.

![Example 3.5a](image)

**Example 3.5b** Stravinsky, *Petrushka*, First Tableau, R5-R5⁴.

(Vivace \( \cdot \approx 138 \))

![Example 3.5b](image)

The first emphatic appearance of a falling fourth comes in the fifth bar of the song, falling on a strong D minor tonic, dispelling the uncertainty of the previous bar generated by a tensive E natural, oscillating with an F natural, straining in conjunction with a pedal A, perhaps, to establish some sense of a dominant (Ex. 3.6).
Example 3.6 Sviridov, Russia Cast Adrift, ‘Open For Me’, bars 4-7.

The falling fourth in bar five is reminiscent of the falling fourth that features in ‘Autumn’, complete with portamento, and, furthermore, accompanies the words ‘my horse’ [‘конь мой’] (the subject of the poem), providing a strong symbolic resonance with the ‘red mare’ [‘рыжая кобыла’] and its various pastoral and religious associations established in the first song. With reference to this third song in a diary entry from 1983, Sviridov writes of, ‘the important symbol of the horse. The horse – the fabled, legendary horse, the symbol of poetic creation.’

This hints at a particularly tantalising interpretation of the song as being representative of the death of the poet as a result of his creative strength having been stolen, abused and destroyed.

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by a greater power – a narrative with strong parallels to Sviridov’s own notions about
Esenin.\footnote{See Bullock, ‘Intimacy and Distance’, 25-27, and Sviridov, Mužika kak sud'ba, 371.}

The powerful chord progression towards the relative major, and the emphatic subito forte in
bar 5 is madrigalian in its response to Esenin’s poetry, highlighting the ‘power’ ['мощь'] and
‘strength’ ['крепь'] which the poet draws from his horse, in contrast to the unsettled, worried
mood of bars 4 and 6-7, where oscillating E naturals help to undermine the tonality by
attempting to establish a dominant open fifth against the prevailing tonic minor. It is also
worth noting the ‘sixthiness’\footnote{Taruskin’s neologism for the Russian sekstovost’ (see Defining Russia Musically, 55).} of bar 5, which features an upward leap of a sixth in the vocal
part illustrating the word ‘power’ and a stepwise descent of a sixth in the accompaniment’s
middle voice and bass (derived from the opening melody), culminating in one of the only
intact relative-major harmonies to be found in the whole cycle, illustrating the word ‘strength’.

The song becomes more agitated as it progresses, Sviridov presumably seeking to portray the
increasing desperation of the poet as, devoid of strength or power, he hears, sees and, by virtue
of the musical setting, viscerally experiences the agonising, desperate struggle of his horse in a
way that can only be inferred from the poetry alone. The falling fourth is restated (again with
portamento) in the eighth bar, this time combined with the upward leap and stepwise descent
of a sixth, effectively expanding and combining melodic and harmonic material drawn from
bars 2 and 5 to illustrate the image of the horse thrashing and tossing about (Ex. 3.7). The
increasing agitation of the poet is also reflected by the molto espressivo e tenuto marking in
bar 8, along with the direction ‘with the same character, but with slightly more movement’
['В том же характере, но чуть-чуть с движением'].

\footnote{See Bullock, ‘Intimacy and Distance’, 25-27, and Sviridov, Mužika kak sud'ba, 371.}
\footnote{Taruskin’s neologism for the Russian sekstovost’ (see Defining Russia Musically, 55).}
Example 3.7 Sviridov, *Russia Cast Adrift*, ‘Open For Me’, bar 8-end.

\[ \text{Vi - ju, как он бьет-ся, мечт-ся, теребя ту-} \]

\[ \text{гой ар-кан, и летит с него, как с мес-ся-} \]

\[ \text{ца, шерсть була-на-я в туман.} \]
Harmonically this latter half of the song is intensified by the introduction of some conspicuous non-diatonic notes, in particular the B natural which underpins the point at which the vocal melody emphatically introduces the interval of a rising fifth at the melodic apex of the song (Ex. 3.7, second stave), imposing an E minor chord against the prevailing D minor – essentially a tonic D minor triad built on a ii₆₄ chord (E minor with a B natural in the bass). In the final part of the song, the melodic line consists exclusively of repeated rising fifths while the piano accompaniment features repeatedly struck – and sufficiently bell-like, given their ringing pandiatonic overtones – E naturals and B flats (marked *sempre marcato*) which undermine the tonic. The song ultimately ends in harmonic ambiguity, a sort of unstable combination of chords I (D minor) and VI (B flat major) with the E naturals relentless to the end.

In terms of the relationship between harmony and poetic imagery in ‘Open For Me’, Sviridov uses his strongest, most stable harmonies to illustrate the power and strength the poet apparently draws from his horse. The most unstable, passionate or ambiguous harmonies are associated with the increasing agony of the poet in the wake of his steed’s abduction as he bears witness to (and apparently telesthetically experiences) its suffering. It is worth reiterating that Sviridov’s musical interpretation of Esenin’s verse lends an extra dimension to how various sentiments of the poetry may be experienced by a reader or audience member. By interpreting and rendering explicit emotional and psychological content that was only inferable from the original poem, Sviridov, by virtue of his harmonic and melodic language, can portray the increasing agony of the poet in a more tangible way than the text itself. Significantly, this also allows Sviridov to advocate his own interpretation (or reinterpretation) of the original poetry and appropriate it to serve within the context of his own narrative
trajectory, thereby creating a work that is somehow both founded upon, yet also independent from, its literary origins.

Given the musical and symbolic resonance with the ‘red mare’ of the first song and all its associations with pastoral Russia mingled with religious connotations of betrayal and suffering, it requires only a small leap of imagination to understand Sviridov’s setting of ‘Open For Me’ within the emerging narrative context of Russia Cast Adrift as an allegorical portrayal of what he, and many other nationalist intellectuals like him, regarded as Russia’s suffering under the yoke of the Soviet Union. Indeed, the very notion of Russia being ‘cast adrift’ is not dissimilar in terms of its symbolism to Gogol’s iconic symbolic image of Russia as a troika flying precipitously along country roads, hurtling recklessly into the unknown. 203

In light of this, it is worth taking a brief moment here to return to Philip Bullock’s observation that ‘the Pushkin anniversary did much to establish a discourse that would see lyric poetry and song as appropriately Soviet and even revolutionary’. 204 It is possible to argue that, while this assertion may be unproblematic when applied to works produced in the immediate wake of the 1937 Pushkin anniversary celebrations, the genre had, at least in the case of Sviridov, apparently become paradoxically Soviet by the onset of the Stagnation. As a result of the implementation of ‘inclusionary politics’ and the co-opting of nationalist intellectuals by the State, vocal cycles or ‘song’ as a genre in general could be, implicitly or explicitly, consciously or otherwise, both critical of and complementary to the interests of the regime,

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203 ‘Is it not like that that you too, Russia, are speeding along like a spirited troika that nothing can overtake? […] What is the meaning of this terrifying motion? […] Russia, where are you flying to? Answer! She gives no answer’, Nikolai Gogol (trans. David Magarshack), Dead Souls, (London, Penguin Classics, 1961), 259.

regardless of where exactly their content or their composer’s ideological convictions lay in relation to official ideology.

3.4.2 Nos. 4 & 5: The Forking Paths

Following ‘Open For Me’ are four songs linked by attacca markings: ‘The Silvery Path’ [Serebristaya doroga], ‘Russia Cast Adrift’ [Otchalivshaya Rus’], ‘Simon, Peter… Where Are You? Come to Me’ [Simonye, Pyotr... Gdye tì? Pridì], and ‘Where Are You, Where Are You, Paternal Home?’ [Gdye tì, gdye tì, otchiy dom]. Though they are all linked by the attacca markings, the latter two of these, ‘Simon, Peter’ and ‘Where Are You, Paternal Home?’, are strongly linked by their musical and literary associations with betrayal and loss, and, as such, will be explored in conjunction with the ninth song of the cycle, ‘It Sounds, It Sounds, the Fateful Horn!’ [Trubit, trubit pogibyel'niu rog’], which also shares these thematic tropes (see section 3.4.3 below).

In the same diary extract of 1983 in which he describes the image of the horse in ‘Open For Me’ as a ‘symbol of poetic creativity’, Sviridov also outlines his thoughts on all twelve songs of Russia Cast Adrift. The outlines he provides are brief, some negligible – the first two songs are simply described as ‘landscape and poetry [peyzazh i lirika]’, while ‘Simon, Peter’ is summarised in three words as ‘a fragment of an ancient legend [otrivok drevney legendi]’. Others receive more substantial, if at times somewhat evasive, interpretation. The fourth song of the cycle, ‘The Silvery Path’, is described as ‘the eternal path of the artist, the path of the human being [izvechniıy put' khudozhnika, put' cheloveka]’. A relatively sparse and static

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205 Sviridov, Muzika kak sud’ba, 335. Alternatively, in a more grandiose sense, the last clause might be translated as, ‘the path of mankind’.
setting of Esenin’s short poem of 1917, its free, improvisatory structure is emphasised by the performance direction, ‘freely, like a cadenza [Svobodno, kak kadentsiya]’:

Серебристая дорога

Серебристая дорога,  
Ты зовёшь меня куда?  
Свечкой чисточетерговой  
Над тобой [надо мной] горит звезда.

The Silvery Path

Silvery path,  
Whither do you call me?  
Like a candle lit in Holy Week,  
Above you [above me] shines a star.

Грусть ты или радость теплишь?  
Иль к безумью правишь бег?  
Помоги мне сердцем вешним  
Долюбити твой жёсткий снег.

Is it with sorrow or joy that you glow?  
Or do you lead headlong into madness?  
Help me, with a vernal heart,  
To fully love your cruel snow.

Дай ты мне зарю на дровни,  
Ветку вербы на узду.  
Может быть, к вратам Господним  
Сам себя я приведу.

Bring me the dawn on a wood-sledge,  
A willow branch in the horse’s bridle,  
To the Gates of Heaven  
I, perhaps, could lead myself.

Sviridov makes a minor alteration to the original (shown above in italics). The shift from ‘above you’ ['над тобой'] to ‘above me’ ['надо мной'] does slightly change the narrative content of the line, as it redirects the focus of the narrative voice towards itself. In Esenin’s poem, the star shines above the silvery path down which the narrative ‘I’ is being led; in Sviridov’s interpretation, it is directly upon the narrative ‘I’ that the star shines. This has the opposite of a universalising effect, bringing the focus very much upon the individual.
Much like ‘Autumn’ and ‘Open For Me’, Sviridov’s harmony is pandiatonic, and the tonality hovers ambiguously somewhere between E minor and G major, aptly capturing the uncertainty of the narrative voice as it asks, ‘Silvery path / Whither do you call me?’. The sense of uncertainty, of a lack of control or direction, is certainly a thematic trope throughout Russia Cast Adrift, and has a particularly strong resonance with the respectively hesitant and despairing questioning tones of the sixth and seventh songs, ‘Simon, Peter… Where Are You?’, and ‘Where Are You, Paternal Home?’. Given Sviridov’s nationalist wont of idolising pre-revolutionary Russia and lamenting the demise of a patriarchal rural existence (and thereby implicitly criticising the Soviet existence that replaced it), it is perhaps significant that eleven out of the twelve Esenin poems set were written during the turbulent period of social upheaval and political change between 1917 and 1920.206 Such turbulence breeds uncertainty, and though Sviridov describes ‘The Silvery Path’ as representing the ‘eternal path of the artist’, it is also easily interpreted as a path into an unpredictable, and thus unstable, future at the crossroads of revolution. The narrative voice, violently deprived of its strength and power in ‘Open For Me’, now becomes hesitant and cautious, in the second stanza asking the guiding star that shines above the road: ‘Is it with sorrow or joy that you glow? / Or do you lead headlong into madness?’ (Ex. 3.8).

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206 The exception is the first poem of the cycle, ‘Autumn’, dated 1914.
The star is another image with religious connotations (confirmed by the preceding line, ‘Like a candle lit in Holy Week’) that evokes the traditional role of the Russian Orthodox Church as a guiding principle. Yet within the Soviet context it could also be taken to signify the golden star that hovers above the hammer and sickle on the Communist flag, representing the guiding light of the Communist Party shining over the workers and peasants of Russia. Given the locus of Sviridov’s nationalist ideology and the context of the poem within the cycle, the questions posed in the second stanza become retrospective and rhetorical, expressing the Russian nationalists’ critical stance towards Stalinism and, more generally, the Soviet Union – Russia led astray, or rather ‘cast adrift’, ‘headlong into madness’, by Lenin, Stalin, and the CPSU.

Following ‘The Silvery Path’ is a setting of an extract from a longer poem entitled, ‘The Dove of Jordan’ [Iordanskaya golubitsa] from which the song (and the whole cycle) derives the title ‘Russia Cast Adrift’. Esenin’s poem, composed in late June 1918, is divided into five parts: parts 1-3 comprised of four stanzas apiece, part 4 comprised of three stanzas, and part 5 of five
stanzas. Sviridov sets the first of these parts with minimal alteration and an additional line of his own to end the song (shown in italics):

[Отчалившая Русь]       [Russia Cast Adrift]

Земля моя златая!         My golden earth!
Осенний светлый храм!      Radiant autumn temple!
Гусей крикливых стая        A flock of clamorous geese
Несется к облакам.         Rushes to the clouds.

То душ преображенных       An innumerable host
Несчислимая рать,           Of transfigured souls,
С озер поднявшись сонных,   Rising from the drowsy lakes,
Летит в небесный сад.       Flies into the heavenly garden.

А впереди их лебедь.       And at their head a swan.
В глазах, как роща, грусть. In its eyes, like a grove, lies Grief.
‘Не ты ли так плачешь’ в небе, Is it not you crying in the heavens,
Отчалившая Русь?           Russia Cast Adrift?

Лети, лети, не бейся,       Fly, fly, do not worry,
Всему есть час и брег.        Everything has its time and place,
Ветра стекают в песню,       The winds flow into a song,
А песня канет в век.         A song that echoes through the centuries.

[Лети, лети, лети, Златая Русь!]       [Fly, fly, fly, Golden Rus!]

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207 Sviridov changes the wording here from ‘Не ты ли так плачешь’ to ‘Не ты ли плачешь’. This has a negligible effect on the meaning and simply makes the phrase easier to sing because of the alternation between consonants and syllables in the latter (as opposed to the consecutive consonants of the former).
'Russia Cast Adrift', is one of the clearest examples of Sviridov’s pandiatonic language. The piano accompaniment is entirely formed of bright, resonant cluster chords. As suggested above, these clusters, which ripple outwards from an initial consonance, are highly evocative of the multiple overtones generated by a repeatedly-struck bell, and the rhythmic percussiveness of the piano accompaniment (along with the jangling tenuto chromatic clusters) serves to strengthen this association (Ex. 3.9).

Example 3.9 Sviridov, Russia Cast Adrift, ‘Russia Cast Adrift’, bars 1-4.

The folk-inflected harmonic language of Stravinsky’s Petrushka has already been suggested as a precedent for the type of pandiatonicism employed by Sviridov, and a further point of

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208 Sviridov’s ‘clusters’ differ from those that might be found in works by Alfred Schnittke or Henry Cowell for example: they decorate and embellish the harmonic language rather than obfuscating and disrupting it.
comparison is the bell-like material played by an ensemble of four pianos, tubular bells and crotales in the mesmerising closing section of Les Noces (Ex. 3.10). It is perhaps also worth noting that Sviridov considered orchestrating Russia Cast Adrift for an ensemble with similar textural and timbral qualities: (chamber) strings, piano, harp, celeste, tam-tam, glockenspiel, bells and vibraphone.²⁰⁹

Example 3.10 Stravinsky, Les Noces, ⁶R135-R135.

²⁰⁹ Sviridov, Muzika kak suđba, 351. Shortly before his death in November 2017, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, who worked closely with Sviridov, released a recording of Russia Cast Adrift in an orchestral arrangement by Evgeny Stetsyuk (Delos, DE1631, 2017).
Though Stravinsky may seem like the most obvious musical precedent, the association of bells and chimes with traditional, pre-revolutionary Russian (and generally Eastern European) Orthodoxy and rural society has been long established. Indeed, many musical depictions of bells and chimes date from what might be termed the ‘first wave’ of Russian nationalism during the 1860s and ’70s, which might provide a more appropriate point of comparison given Sviridov’s own musical aesthetic and ideology. Consider, for example, the overwhelming passage of music that introduces the coronation of Boris in scene ii of the Prologue to Musorgsky’s Boris Godunov, or the final movement of his Pictures from an Exhibition, ‘The Bogatyr Gates’, which mimics the sound of bells ringing out over Kiev (Ex. 3.11).\footnote{For further discussion about the evocation of bells in compositions by Musorgsky and Rimsky-Koraskov, see Marina Frolova-Walker, \textit{Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin} (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2007), particularly 181-182.}
A further melodic characteristic of ‘Russia Cast Adrift’ is the conspicuous appearance of galloping, rising fourths which stand in contrast to the falling fourths, often accentuated with portamento, encountered in ‘Autumn’, ‘Open For Me’, and ‘The Silvery Path’. As has been suggested, early in the cycle the falling fourth is associated with both rural Russia and imagery with religious connotations. But it will also take on strong associations with betrayal and apocalypse, as will be shown below in the discussion and analysis of Nos. 6, 7, and 9. In contrast, the rising fourth (and sometimes a rising fifth), introduced in ‘Russia Cast Adrift’, is associated, throughout the cycle, with a number of key words and images: rising, flying, shining, gold, ringing bells, and transcendence. In the case of ‘Russia Cast Adrift’, it appears most insistently in the melodic setting of the first and second lines of the second and fourth
stanzas: ‘An innumerable host / Of transfigured souls’ [‘То душ преобращенных / Несчислимая рать’] and ‘Fly, fly, do not worry, / Everything has its time and place’ [‘Лети, лети, не бейся, / Всему есть час и брег’] respectively (see Ex. 3.12a and Ex. 3.12b).

Example 3.12a Sviridov, *Russia Cast Adrift*, ‘Russia Cast Adrift’, bars 11-12.

(с движением \( \cdot = 76 \))

With the emphasis on the rising fourth, ‘Russia Cast Adrift’ marks the emergence of a typological counter-narrative: henceforth the rising fourth is strongly associated with flying, rising, ringing, and shining, contrasting with the falling fourth, which is increasingly associated with betrayal, loss, and apocalypse. In terms of the religious allegory suggested above, which saw Russia under Soviet rule as represented by the abused Christ, so the dialogue between the falling and rising fourths might be seen as being representative of betrayal and death versus resurrection and transfiguration. This melodic inversion in ‘Russia
Cast Adrift’, responds, for the first time, to the implication of resurrection to former glory suggested in ‘Autumn’ (see section 3.4.1 above), and this new thematic trope gains weight in the second half of the cycle (see section 3.4.4 below).

3.4.3 Nos. 6, 7 & 9: The Betrayal

The most direct reference to Christian doctrine appears in the sixth song, ‘Simon, Peter… Where Are You? Come to Me’. The song, which marks the mid-point of the cycle, contains some important internal resonances that help to crystallise many of the salient themes and images established in the preceding songs, particularly ‘Autumn’ and ‘Open For Me’, as will be shown below. Sviridov’s lyrics are taken from a longer poem entitled ‘The Advent’ [Prishestviye] that dates from 1917. The poem is divided into seven parts (perhaps symbolic given the poem’s religious thematic content), and Sviridov’s song is a setting of four out of the five stanzas that constitute Part 5 of Esenin’s poem (the omitted stanza is given in italics for reference):

[Cимоне, Петр... Где ты? Приди...] [Simon, Peter… Where are You?]

Симоне, Петр...
Где ты? Приди.
Вздрогнули ветлы:
"Там, впереди!"

Simon, Peter…
Where are you? Come to me.
The willows quivered:
“There, ahead!”

Симоне, Петр...
Где ты? Зову!
Шепчется кто-то:
"Кричи в синеву!"

Simon, Peter…
Where are you? I call!
Someone whispers:
“Call into the blue!”
Крикнул - и громко I called – and loudly
Вздыбился мрак. Swelled the gloom.
Вышел с котомкой With a knapsack out came
Рыжий рыбак. A red-haired fisherman.

"Друг... Ты откуда?" “Friend… Where are you from?”
"Шёл за тобой..." “I followed you…”
"Кто ты?" - "Иуда!" - “Who are you?” – “Judas!”
Шамкнул прибой Mumbled the surf.

[Рухнули гнёзда [And then was rent the nest
Облачных риз. Of holy vestments.
Ласточки-звёзды The swallow-stars
Канули вниз.] Sank downwards.]

The omitted stanza is presumably a reference to a moment in the gospel, shortly after Judas’s betrayal of Christ, where the high priest Caiaphas tears his vestments in an accusation of blasphemy. Its omission is of little significance, though one possible reason for it is that discarding the more obscure symbolist imagery of the final stanza allowed Sviridov to emphasise the explicit reference to Judas, giving it pride of place as the concluding statement of the short song. This helps to establish the theme of betrayal as one of the cycle’s central narrative concerns. More specifically, the overt biblical reference provides further support for the idea, suggested above, that in Russia Cast Adrift, Sviridov turns to the story of Christ’s betrayal as an allegory for the Soviet ‘betrayal’ of Russia. These thematic references are

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211 See Matthew, 26:65. It could also refer to the rending of the veil of the temple and the other occurrences following Christ’s death on the cross (see Matthew, 27:50-54).
supported internally, both linguistically and musically. Perhaps the most obvious linguistic resonance is with the use of the word ‘red(-haired)’ [‘рыжий’] that associates the ‘red-haired fisherman’ with the ‘red mare’ [‘рыжая кобыла’] and consequently to the ‘red sores of the invisible Christ’ of the first song, ‘Autumn’.

As found in many of the preceding songs, falling portamento-laden intervals are particularly prominent. Of greatest significance is the setting of the line ‘I called – and loudly / Swelled the gloom’ [‘Крикнул - и громко / Вздымился мрак’]. Its salience lies not only in the fact that it marks the emotional acme of the musical setting (emphasised by the poco accelerando, the subito fortissimo dynamic, and the instruction ‘A little more movement’ [chut podvizhyeye]), but also in its harmonic and melodic resonance with material found in ‘Open For Me’, with which it shares the emphatic fourth falling from D to A in the voice and a diatonic descending bass line (Ex. 3.13, cf. Ex. 3.6).

Not only is the slowly expanding pandiatonic harmony once more evocative of accumulative tinntinnabular overtones, the insistently repeated perfect fourth also resonates with many other instances throughout the cycle. Further to Taruskin’s claim that Glinka viewed the interval of a falling fourth as ‘the soul or Russian music’, it is worth noting that a number of other composers who concerned themselves with folk materials considered the interval of a fourth to be an intrinsic stylistic trait of peasant music, perhaps most notably Béla Bartók. Indeed, in reference to the finale to his first string quartet of 1908/9 – a work in which the late-romantic nationalism of his early years was beginning to evolve into his more abrasive, angular folk-inflected mature style – Bartók makes use of a particular method of creating chords out of stacked perfect fourths. He described this as being derived from old Hungarian melodies that contain “frequent occurrences of the skip of a perfect fourth.”

The final chord of ‘Simon, Peter’ is likewise built out of an aggregation of perfect fourths, and this, in addition to the insistent fourths in the melodic line, helps to confirm the evocation of folk and peasant music (Ex. 3.14 and Ex. 3.15).


\( \text{Più mosso} \quad \dot{z} = 100 \)


\( J = 40 \)

pp  \quad mf

“Кто ты?”  \quad “И — у — Аа!”

pp  \quad ppp

шам-кнул  \quad при-бой.

morendo
In addition to signifying folk and peasant idioms, these perfect fourths serve to underscore musical-literary resonances across the whole cycle. The link to ‘Open For Me’ has already been suggested, but there is also a strong echo from the first song of the cycle, ‘Autumn’, which is framed by repeated falling fourths (see Ex. 3.1 and Ex. 3.2). As has been established, ‘Autumn’ strongly links the natural characteristics of the Russian landscape to religious symbols – to the Orthodox church, to Christ, and to the stigmata. In addition to musical similarities, linguistic features also bind ‘Autumn’ to ‘Open For Me’, particularly the reference to the ‘red mare’ [‘рыжая кобыла’] in the former, and to ‘my horse’ [‘конь мой’] in the latter. In ‘Autumn’ the mare is a symbol of the autumnal Russian landscape, and that landscape itself is invested with messianic qualities. In ‘Open For Me’, the horse is associated with ‘strength’ and ‘power’, and by Sviridov himself in his diaries with poetic creativity. What emerges is a composite symbol of nature, religion, orthodoxy, tradition, culture, strength, and power – ultimately an evocation of pre-revolutionary rural Russia that is redolent of the rhetoric employed by various literary products of the contemporaneous Russian nationalist movement. In ‘Simon, Peter’, both ‘Autumn’ and ‘Open For Me’, with all their associated symbolism and imagery, are now explicitly linked to the betrayal of Christ through both musical and literary resonances, and this is particularly evident in Sviridov’s setting of the word ‘Judas’ [‘Иуда’] to an oscillating perfect fourth (see Ex. 3.15). There is also the aforementioned linguistic echo between ‘Autumn’ and ‘Simon, Peter’ in the use of the word ‘red(-haired)’ [‘рыжий’]: as Christ is indelibly linked to Judas in the gospel, so the ‘red mare’ of ‘Autumn’ is linked to the ‘red-haired fisherman’ [‘рыжий рыбак’] of ‘Simon, Peter’. In a broader conceptual sense, this perhaps suggests a link between Autumn and betrayal, compounded in the October Revolution. Thus, two interlocked narratives emerge: a
symbolistic pastoral-religious retelling of the betrayal of Christ in the gospels, and an allegorical polemic in which the betrayal of Christ is associated with the systematic destruction of the traditional patriarchal Orthodox society of rural Russia during the Soviet era.

After their association with Judas and betrayal in ‘Simon, Peter’, Sviridov’s characteristic falling fourths subsequently appear most prominently in the seventh and ninth songs of the cycle: ‘Where Are You, Where Are You, Paternal Home…’ [Gdye tï, gdye tï, otchïy dom...] and ‘It Sounds, It Sounds, the Fateful Horn!’ [Trubit, trubit pogibel’niy rog!], respectively. The former is a setting of a poem from 1917 in its entirety, with a couple of alterations to the final stanza of Esenin’s original:

Где ты, где ты, отчий дом
Where Are You, Paternal Home?

Где ты, где ты, отчий дом,
Where are you, where are you, paternal home,
Гревший спину под бугром?
Warming your back below the hill?
Синий, синий мой цветок,
Blue, blue, my flower,
Неприхоженный песок.
Untrodden sand.
Где ты, где ты, отчий дом?
Where are you, where are you, paternal home?

За рекой поет петух.
Beyond the river crows the cock.
Там стада стерег пастух,
There the flock guarded by a shepherd,
И светились из воды
And across the water shone
Три далекие звезды.
Three distant stars.
За рекой поет петух.
Beyond the river crows the cock.
Время — мельница с крылом  
Опускает за селом  
Месяц маятником в рожь  
Лить часов незримый дождь.  
Время — мельница с крылом.

Time — a mill with wings  
Swings behind the village  
The moon like a pendulum, into the rye  
Pouring hours like invisible rain.  
Time — A mill with wings.

Этот дождик с сонмом стрел  
В тучах дом мой завертел,  
Синий подкосил цветок,  
Золотой примял песок.  
Этот дождик с сонмом стрел.  
Где ты, где ты, отчий дом?

This rain, with a flight of arrows,  
Set my home spinning in the clouds,  
Mowed down my blue flower  
Flattened the golden sand.  
This rain, with a flight of arrows.  
Where are you, where are you, paternal home?

The alterations in the final stanza are relatively minor: the third-line alteration is most likely intended to improve the fit between the words and the rhythmic pattern of the melodic line, while the substitution of the final line of the original poem for the titular first line serves to balance the deletion in the first stanza, but also as a rhetorical device to round off the poem as it started. The themes of betrayal and loss are immediately evident in Esenin’s poem – in particular the reference to the crowing cock conjures up associations with Peter’s denial of Christ. Furthermore, Sviridov’s own comments in his diaries about this song help to confirm the emergent narrative of the cycle: “‘Where Are You, Paternal Home’ – a picture of revolutionary upheaval, the death of the native home.”

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213 Sviridov changes this to ‘голубой скосил’. The change is relatively negligible, though there is a small nuance in that ‘синий’ means ‘light blue’ as opposed to ‘голубой’ which means ‘dark blue’.
214 See Matthew, 26:69-75. Perhaps significantly, this passage in Matthew follows on directly from Caiaphas ripping his vestments (Matthew, 26:65) which is arguably alluded to in the previous song, ‘Simon, Peter’ (see above), further suggesting a subcutaneous continuity between these two songs.
215 “Гдев ти, отчий дом” – kartina revolyutsionnikh potyasenni, gibel' rodnogo doma’; see Sviridov, Muzika kak suđba, 335.
consequences of the 1917 revolutions to the ‘death’ of the old way of Russian life, and also, given the religious references here and throughout the cycle, to a sense of betrayal.

Musically, this narrative is bound to the rest of the cycle primarily by the falling fourth.

‘Where Are You, Paternal Home’ opens with a bold G minor statement of the falling fourth in the piano, marcato, with a fortissimo dynamic marking, and forcefully accented by a sharp dissonance provided by an F sharp in the bass which clashes against the G minor tonality. This is immediately followed by a further statement of the falling fourth in the voice, also loud with tenuto markings, to which the words, ‘Where are you, where are you, paternal home’ are set (Ex. 3.16).


Медленно, тяжело, драматичнLI = 40

The same melodic line falling a perfect fourth from G to D appears on another three occasions in the voice part with added portamento (bars 10, 18, and 33), further associating it with other
occurrences throughout the cycle. It appears again in the piano in bar 17, and is alluded to between bars 20 and 25, where it emerges in the guise of an accompanying open-fourth drone over vacillating chords. This texture again recalls the folkish associations of the bayan or squeezebox (Ex. 3.17).


(Медленно, тяжело, драматичн.)

![Piano score](image)

The ninth song of the cycle, ‘It Sounds, It Sounds, the Fateful Horn!’, sets an extract from a longer poem entitled ‘Prayers’ [*Sorokoust*] originally published in 1920, and dedicated to Anatoly Borisovich Marienhof [Mariengof] – a poet and friend of Esenin’s who had helped found the so-called ‘Imaginism’ movement in poetry in the early 1920s. Sviridov extracts his text from the first and fourth stanzas of the first part of the original poem, with the following alterations and repetitions (shown in italics):

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216 *Sorokoust* [Сорокоуст] might be more specifically translated as ‘Prayers for the Dead’ as it refers to an Orthodox practice of celebrating the Divine Liturgy for forty days (deriving from ‘копок’ [‘forty’]) during which prayers for the dead are delivered daily.

211
Esenin

[Трубит, трубит погибельный рог!]

Трубит, трубит погибельный рог!
Как же быть, как же быть теперь нам
На измызганных ляжках дорог?

[…]

Скоро заморозь известью выбелит
Тот посёлок и эти луга.
Никуда вам не скрыться от гибели,
Никуда не уйти от врага.
Вот он, вот он с железным брюхом,
Тянется к глоткам равнин пятью

[It Sounds, It Sounds, The Fateful Horn!]

It sounds, it sounds the fateful horn!
What are we to do, what are we to do now
On the muddy haunches of the road?

[…]

Soon the frost will whitewash and whiten
This village and these fields.
Nowhere can you hide from death,
Nowhere can you escape from the enemy.
There he is, there he is with his iron belly,
Stretching his fingers out towards the throat of the plains
Sviridov

Трубит, трубит погибельный рог!  It Sounds, It Sounds, The Fateful Horn!

Трубит, трубит погибельный рог!  It sounds, it sounds the fateful horn!
Как же быть, как же быть теперь нам  What are we to do, what are we to do now
На измызганных ляжках дорог?  On the muddy haunches of the road?

[...]  
Скоро заморозь известно выбрелит  Soon the frost will whitewash and whiten
Тот посёлок и эти луга.  This village and these fields.

Никуда не уйти вам от гибели,  Nowhere can you escape from death,
Никуда не уйти от врага.  Nowhere can you escape from the enemy.
Вот он, вот он с железным брюхом,  There he is, there he is with his iron belly,
Тянёт к глоткам равнин пятерно…  Stretching his fingers out towards the throat

Трубит, трубит погибельный рог!  It sounds, it sounds the fateful horn!

Sviridov’s alterations are, as usual, minor and have a relatively minimal impact on the original meaning of the text. The repetition of the opening line at the end of the song serves to expand the nine-line extract into a ten-line structure with a rhetorical re- emphasising of the initial imagery to bind the internal narrative of the song, similar to the substituted line at the end of ‘Where Are You, Paternal Home?’. As the titles of both the original poem and the song might suggest, the text is laden with religious references, mingled with contrasting imagery of nature and industry. The ‘fateful horn’ of Esenin’s poem can be perceived as an equation of the seven
trumpet calls that herald the destruction of the world\textsuperscript{217} with the encroaching steam whistle of industrialisation. With the explicit reference to the inescapable ‘enemy’ with his ‘iron belly, / stretching his fingers out towards the throat of the plains’, it seems reasonable to interpret this as an allusion to industrialisation slowly strangling the traditional Russian way of life – the old world of ‘Wooden Russia’ destroyed by the coming of a new, industrial world. This idea is also supported by some of Sviridov’s own observations in a diary entry from the early 1980s in which he refers to this particular song as, ‘a tragic monologue. A tragic feeling of the death of the patriarchal peasant way of life’\textsuperscript{218}.

As well as bringing the ideological locus of Esenin’s poetry from the early 1920s into direct communion with that of the Village Prose and Russian nationalist movements of the 1960s and ’70s, Sviridov’s description further develops the thematic narrative introduced in ‘Where Are You, Paternal Home?’, which he described in similar terms as the ‘death’ of the native home. In both instances, Sviridov uses the word ‘gibel’ (meaning ‘death’, but with further nuances incorporating ‘doom’, ‘destruction’, ‘ruin’, ‘loss’, and ‘downfall’) rather than ‘smert’ (meaning ‘death’ in the biological sense). The connection between the two songs is further fortified by the melodic content. After a short piano introduction – which, with its slow rhythmical solemnity, is perhaps more evocative of a funeral knell than a fateful horn – the voice enters with the now-familiar motivic gesture of the falling fourth with \textit{portamento}, exactly as in ‘Autumn’, ‘Open For Me’, ‘Simon, Peter’, ‘Where Are You Paternal Home?’ and

\textsuperscript{217} The Revelation of St John the Divine, 8:2-11:19. The use of this scriptural passage as a basis for composition has precedent in the Second, Sixth, and Seventh movements of Olivier Messiaen’s \textit{Quatuor pour la fin du temps}.
\textsuperscript{218} ‘Tragicheskii monolog. Tragicheskoye oshchushcheniye gibeli patriarchal’nogo krest’ianskogo ukhoda’; see Sviridov, \textit{Muzika kak sud’ba}, 335.
elsewhere in the cycle at moments of typological importance or emotional intensity (Ex. 3.18, cf. Exx. 3.1, 3.3a, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.13).

**Example 3.18** Sviridov, *Russia Cast Adrift*, ‘It Sounds, It Sounds the Fateful Horn!’, bars 1-6.

Sviridov is more responsive to Esenin’s imagery than to his metre or poetic rhythm, reacting to the religious, symbolist, apocalyptic imagery of the first three lines with further repetitions of the insistent knell in the piano accompaniment underpinned by the C sharp pedal low in the
bass. Then, in response to the pastoral images of the frosts, village and fields introduced in the fourth and fifth lines, Sviridov abandons the portentous solemnity of the opening and turns to the familiar oscillating squeeze-box harmonic texture associated with evocations of the folkish. This texture has been encountered throughout the cycle, but given the proximity of the two songs and their thematic resonance, here it strongly echoes a similar passage in ‘Where Are You, Paternal Home’ (Ex 3.19, cf. Ex 3.17).

As these oscillating chords become ever more expanded, the harmonic continuity increasingly dissolves into ringing dissonance. Coupled with the dynamics and the increasing tension of the vocal melody which rises a tone each bar, this serves to draw attention to the growing anxiety of the sixth and seventh lines of the extract: ‘Nowhere can you escape from death, / Nowhere escape from the enemy’ [‘Никуда не уйти вам от гибели, / Никуда не уйти от врага’]. These expanding chords are lent further momentum by the introduction of a chromatically descending bass line in the piano accompaniment which gradually increases the rhythmic intensity of the phrase. This ultimately leads to the climax of the song where the now drastically warped harmonies of Sviridov’s chord clusters collide headlong with the reintroduction of the piano’s ominous pedal note from the opening of the song, the two distinct harmonic, textural, motivic sections of the song combining in a madrigalian depiction of the clash between the industrial and the bucolic. The most expanded and intense chord voicings, with insistent tri-tones and clashing major sevenths, are reserved for this moment at the emotional centre of the short song, forcefully highlighting the penultimate lines of the extract, ‘There he is, there he is with his iron belly, / Stretching out his fingers towards the throat of the plains’. This is accompanied by the performance direction: ‘Broader, like the beginning. Maximum expressiveness!’ [Шире, как внёсёлые. Максимум виразительности!]. It is difficult to ignore the particularly vicious dissonance of the chord which underpins the word ‘throat’ [‘глотка’], which is built out of a tri-tone, a major seventh, and a minor ninth, Sviridov effectively choking all semblance of consonance from his harmonic language (Ex. 3.20).

Шире, как вначале. максимум выразительности! (р = 40)
(Example 3.20 cont.)

тя - нет к глот - кам рав - нию

ию...

Взять незаметно (как эхо!)
It is worth noting the curious performance direction that instructs the pianist to imperceptibly depress the keys to create an effect ‘like an echo!’ [kak ekho!]. The overtones that linger after the pedal is released mimic the dying resonance of a church bell, responding to both the pastoral and the religious imagery of the poem. Moreover, the imagery of the enemy ‘with his iron belly’ [‘с железным брюхом’] has a particular resonance within the social political environment of the Stagnation. For Esenin, writing in 1920, this inescapable iron-bellied enemy constituted a potentially prophetic, demonising reference to the capacity of industry to destroy rural peasant life. But transplanted by Sviridov into the 1970s and invested with a certain degree of hindsight as a result, the reference takes on an additional, more concrete nuance. It becomes a polemic addressed to the aggressive industrialisation and devastating agricultural policies of the Stalinist period which had become an approved subject for public criticism after 1956, thereby engaging with the contemporaneous nationalist intellectual debate. It also draws a direct parallel between Esenin’s fear of the corrupting influence of industrialisation in the 1920s, and the Village Prose and nationalist movements’ concern over the moral corruption of traditional Russian values in the wake of the mass urbanisation of Russia’s rural population through the late 1950s and 1960s.

3.4.4 Nos. 8, 11 & 12: The Resurrection and the Glory

There is also a counter-narrative, or perhaps a complementary narrative, that emerges in parallel with that of betrayal and loss – namely one of transcendence, transfiguration, resurrection, and faith in the glory of Sviridov’s messianic Rus’. This is evident on multiple levels: in the selection of Esenin’s lyrics, in the musical settings, and in Sviridov’s own commentary on the cycle in his diaries. After first being suggested in ‘Russia Cast Adrift’, this
contrasting narrative is most prominent in the eighth, eleventh and twelfth songs in the cycle, respectively titled ‘There Behind the Milky Hills’ [Tam, za Mlyechnimi kholmami...], ‘Oh I Believe, I Believe, There is Happiness!’ [O veryu, veryu, schast'ye yest’!], and ‘O Motherland, Happy and Irredeemable Hour!’ [O rodiva, schastliviy i neiskhodniy chas!].

The first of these three, ‘There Behind the Milky Hill’, features a high-tempo, upward-whirling, semiquaver texture that blends into a mass of euphonious glittering overtones, and is suitably evocative of much of Esenin’s poetic imagery:

Там, за млечными холмами

| Там, за млечными холмами, | There, behind milky Hills, |
| Средь небесных тополей, | Among the heavenly poplars |
| Опрокинулся над нами | Tumbling over us |
| Сребристо-руйный Водолей. | Silver-stringed Aquarius. |

Он Медведицей с лазури –

| Он Медведицей с лазури – | He scooped the Great Bear\(^{219}\) from the azure – |
| Как из бочки черпаком. | As from a water barrel. |
| В небо вспрыгнувшия буря | Leaping into the sky a storm |
| Села месяцу верхом. | Sat astride the moon. |

В вихре снится сонм умерших,

| В вихре снится сонм умерших, | In the whirlwind I dream of the dead, |
| Молоко дымящий сад, | A garden steaming like milk. |
| Вижу, дед мой тянет вершей | I see, my grandfather holds in a net |
| Солнце с полдня на закат. | The sun, from noon to sunset. |

\(^{219}\) In Russian, ‘Большая Медведица’, meaning ‘Great Bear’, is the name for the constellation ‘Ursa major’ known commonly in English as ‘The Plough’. 
A cursory glance at the text reveals many parallels with the imagery and language encountered in ‘Russia Cast Adrift’: clouds, sky, flying, rising, leaping, surging upwards, radiance, exhilaration, and bright colours (gold, silver). In many ways, both musically and in its narrative themes, ‘There, Behind the Milky Hill’ functions as a counterpart to ‘Russia Cast Adrift’, and helps to further establish a narrative that depicts Russia as a soaring, cosmic, spiritual entity that will ultimately outlive and transcend all historical abuses.

However, it is in the final two songs of the cycle, ‘Oh I Believe’ and ‘O Motherland’, that the theme of never-ending faith in old Russia, and indeed, the sense of resurrection to former glory, is really brought to the fore. Sviridov considers these two songs together in his summary of Russia Cast Adrift, and devotes far more space to describing them than he does the other ten songs of the cycle:

The two last parts of the work have a solemn, hymnal character [torzhestvennyi, gimnicheskii karakter]. They are filled with faith in the motherland, in her powerful, spiritual, creative forces. This music is of a solemn, pure [svetlo], hymnal character, similar to the ancient hymns. The broad, hymn-like melody [Shirokaya melodiya gimnicheskogo napveya] is accompanied by a developing piano part, towards the end of the work reaching a grandiose resounding [grandioznogo zvuchaniya] of the pure, solemn ringing of bells [kolokol'nosti].220

This passage emphasises some of the central thematic tropes of Russia Cast Adrift – the ringing of bells, the solemnity of tradition and orthodoxy, and a quasi-religious faith in which a passionate undying belief in the native Russian land takes the place of devotion to God. It

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220 Sviridov, Muzika kak sud'ba, 335-336.
takes no leap of the imagination to understand Sviridov’s *Rus’* as an analogue to Christ: a
divine entity betrayed, denied, abused, imminently to resurrect and transcend. These two last
songs embrace this narrative through their literary and musical peculiarities, and in some
thematic resonances with ‘Russia Cast Adrift’ and ‘There Behind the Milky Hill’.

The penultimate song, ‘Oh I Believe’, returns to the pastoral-spiritual imagery encountered in
many of the Esenin poems set in *Russia Cast Adrift*. It is a setting of a short poem from 1917
with one minor alteration: each of Esenin’s five-line stanzas ends with a repetition of the
opening line, and Sviridov simply omits these repetitions, resulting in more conventional four-
line stanzas:

О верю, верю, счастье есть!  
О верю, верю, счастье есть!  
О верю, верю, счастье есть!  
О верю, верю, счастье есть!  
О верю, верю, счастье есть!

О I believe, I believe, there is happiness!
The sun has not yet faded.
Dawn, like a scarlet prayer book
Prophesies the happy news.
Oh I believe, I believe, there is happiness!

Звени, звени, златая Русь,
Волны, неумный ветер!
Блажен, кто радостью отметил
Твою пастушескую грусть.
Звени, звени, златая Русь.

Ring out, ring out golden Russia,
Surge, indefatigable wind!
Blessed is the one who with joy noticed
Your pastoral melancholy.
Ring out, ring out, golden Russia!

Люблю я ропот буйных вод
И на воле звезды сиянье.
Благословенное страданье,
Благословляющий народ.
Люблю я ропот буйных вод.

I love the murmur of wild waters,
And upon the wave the shining stars.
Blessed suffering,
Benedictory peoples.
I love the murmur of wild waters.
In terms of their imagery and structure, the stanzas follow a relatively consistent pattern: with Esenin's fifth repeated line deleted, the stanzas are now formed out of two sentences, each split over two lines. The first two lines of each evoke joy and exhilaration at the natural beauty of Russia, while the second two always contain a religious allusion.

The musical setting is similarly transparent for the most part, and reflects the dual theme of the pastoral and the religious that is central throughout Russia Cast Adrift. The first half of each stanza is set to limpid, pandiatonic cluster chords (by now a well-established textural and harmonic feature of Sviridov’s musical language) that underpin a melodic line that is almost entirely constructed out of rising fourths (Ex. 3.21).

The first two lines of the second stanza are set to music identical to that shown in Ex. 3.21, as is the vocal melody of the first two lines of the final stanza (though the piano accompaniment is modified very slightly for the sake of variety). A similarity to the vocal melody of ‘Russia Cast Adrift’ is immediately apparent (cf. Ex. 3.12a), and this is strengthened by the poetic language, particularly in the line ‘Ring out, ring out golden Russia / Surge indefatigable, wind!’ ['Звени, звени, златая Русь, / Волнуйся, неуемный ветер!'] at the start of the second stanza, which echoes Esenin’s ‘Fly, fly, do not worry’ (cf. Ex. 3.12b), and Sviridov’s
additional ‘Fly, fly, fly, Golden Russia!’ [‘Лети, лети, лети, Златая Русь!’], appended to the end of ‘Russia Cast Adrift’. Thus, the musical and lyrical parallels with ‘Russia Cast Adrift’ help to emphasise the association of the rising fourth motif with an allegorical ‘resurrection’ of a messianic Russia, or, in Sviridov’s own words, with ‘faith in the motherland, in her powerful, spiritual, creative forces’,\(^{221}\) as opposed to betrayal and doom associated with the falling fourth.

The ‘solemn, hymnal character’ that Sviridov speaks of is manifest in the settings of the second half of each stanza, where the poetic imagery becomes more explicitly religious with references to the prayer book, to blessing and benediction, and to suffering. The musical setting of these sections becomes sparse and modal, its unison texture almost reminiscent of plainchant (Ex. 3.22).

\(^{221}\) Sviridov, *Muzïka kak sud'ba*, 335-336.

Though this passage is not a direct quotation of any particular folk melody, it does have the modal structure that is characteristic of old Slavic calendar songs, which contained a mixture of Christian and secular traditions and were sung to mark various occasions throughout the year such as Yuletide, Epiphany, Shrovetide [Maslenitsa], harvest and so on. The modal language, the call and answer phrase structure, and the relatively small melodic range (typically no more than a perfect fifth) are all standard features of calendar songs.222 This

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222 My thanks to Ksenya Suponitskaya for providing me with this information (personal correspondence, 16 August 2017).
certainly seems to support Sviridov’s assertion that these final two songs have a ‘hymnal character, similar to the ancient hymns’. But though the use of such textures, modes, and structures is, for Sviridov, associated with the evocation of a more ancient Russian tradition, it also situates his practice within the broad heritage of folk revival in Russia, from the dilettante composers of the 1820s, to the Slavophiles and nationalists of the 1860s and ’70s, to the collectors, arrangers and revivers of folk materials in the 1930s and ’40s, and ultimately to the twentieth-century Russian nationalists of the 1960s and ’70s. Thus, though it was largely enabled by the Soviet regime in the post-Stalinist period, Sviridov’s practice is part of a much larger history that transcends the Soviet system, having far more in common with the nineteenth than the twentieth century.

The last two lines of the poem are set to new material which breaks away from the melodic line established in the previous stanzas (see Ex. 3.20), but nonetheless preserves the ‘hymnal character’, introducing a chorale-like interlude which is firmly within the Musorgskian Russian chorale style,\(^{223}\) and which also contains hints of what is to follow in the final song (Ex. 3.23).

\(^{223}\) Gasparov, *Five Operas and a Symphony*, 3.
Though the last two songs are not marked *attacca*, the harmonic content of this short chorale-like section prepares the ground for the final song, ‘O Motherland’. In his summary of the cycle, Sviridov rather confusingly refers to this last song as ‘Ring Out, Golden Russia!’ [*Zveni, zlataya Rus’!*], which is in fact a line from the previous song. Given the fact that ‘O Motherland’ is a setting of an extract from a longer poem of 1917 entitled ‘Ochtoechos’ [*Oktoikh*], and that he distinguishes between the title ‘Ring Out, Golden Russia!’ and ‘Oh I Believe, I Believe, There Is Happiness’, it is quite possible that ‘Ring Out, Golden Russia!’
was simply an alternative title for the song. At any rate, Sviridov describes the song in very familiar terms to those used above, as ‘endless faith in the Motherland, in her superior, spiritual, creative powers. A solemn hymn crowning the work. Faith in embracing the Motherland [Vera v priobreteniye Rodinu]. The translation of the final sentence is complicated by Sviridov’s use of the word priobreteniya [приобретения], which would more literally be translated as ‘acquisition’, but within the context could also convey the idea of ‘(re)gaining possession of’, ‘claiming’, or ‘reclaiming’ the Motherland. Sviridov’s choice of poetry was evidently motivated by his desire to produce a finale for the Russia Cast Adrift that was suitably solemn and triumphant:

[O родина]  [O Motherland]

О родина, счастливый
И неисходный час!
Нет лучше, нет красивей
Твоих коровьих глаз.

O Motherland, happy
And irredeemable hour!
There is nothing better or more beautiful
Than your cow-eyes.

Тебе, твоим туманам
И овцам на полях,
Несу, как сноп овсяный,
Я солнце на руках.

To you, your mists
And your sheep in the fields,
I carry, like a sheaf of oats
The sun upon my hands

[Несу, как сноп овсяный,
Я солнце на руках.]

[I carry, like a sheaf of oats
The sun upon my hands.]

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224 Sviridov, Muzika kak sud’ba, 335.
Святись преполовеньем
И рождеством святись,
Чтоб жаждущие бденья
Извечьем [бессмертьем] написись.
Be blessed by the Pentecost
And by Christ’s birth be blessed,
Let the thirsting vigils
Drink their fill of Eternity [of Immortality].

[Тебе, твоим туманам
И овцам на полях,
Несу, как сноп овсяный,
Я солнце на руках.
Несу, как сноп овсяный,
Я солнце на руках.]
[To you, your mists
And your sheep in the fields,
I carry, like a sheaf of oats,
The sun upon my hands.
I carry, like a sheaf of oats,
The sun upon my hands.]

И ни единый камень,
Через пращу и лук,
Не подобьёт над нами
Подъятье Божьих рук.
And not one single stone
From either sling or bow
Can reach God’s arms
Outstretched above us.

[Тебе, твоим туманам
И овцам на полях,
Несу, как сноп овсяный,
Я солнце на руках.
Несу, как сноп овсяный,
Я солнце на руках.]
[To you, your mists
And your sheep in the fields,
I carry, like a sheaf of oats,
The sun upon my hands.
I carry, like a sheaf of oats,
The sun upon my hands.]

The changes to the poem are mainly structural – Sviridov essentially creates a refrain out of
Esenin’s second stanza (elongated by an added repetition of the final two lines) and inserts it
between the other verses. This creates a simple, almost strophic structure, in which the same
material (essentially verse and chorus) is repeated three times with minimal variation in either
piano or voice. In the third stanza, Sviridov replaces the word ‘eternity’ [‘Извечьем’] with the word ‘immortality’ [‘бессмертьем’]. Both words undoubtedly have religious overtones, but the latter arguably has a stronger association with the death and resurrection of Christ, and as such appears to better fit the underlying allegorical narrative of the cycle as a whole.

‘O Motherland’ is certainly ‘solemn’, with a strong modal minor (though still pandiatonic) harmony and tonality that has its origins in the chorale-like material which closed ‘Oh I Believe’. The Rachmaninovian ‘sombre fatalism’, aptly described as such by Bullock in relation to Sviridov’s songs of the 1930s, is here in abundance, complete with a relatively intact descending tetrachord and cadence in the bass (Ex. 3.24).

\[225\] Bullock, ‘The Pushkin Anniversary’ 41.
As well as the ringing cluster chords and descending bass of the accompaniment, the extract shown in Ex. 3.24 also illustrates the abundance of perfect fourths in the melodic line, as well as a good illustration in bar 15 of the melodic ‘sixthiness’ (sekvost) of the sort that, according to Richard Taruskin, has a strong heritage in Russian music.\(^\text{226}\) Sviridov’s often melodramatic and emotionally wrought compositional language (particularly in ‘O Motherland’, but also throughout the cycle in general) at times hardly seems to have evolved

\(^{226}\) Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, 55-58.
since his 1935 set of Pushkin Romances. Indeed, ‘O Motherland’ bears comparison to the fourth song of that early vocal cycle, a setting of Pushkin’s ‘A Winter’s Evening’.\(^{227}\) Though texturally slightly different, both songs are full of a brooding, fatalistic, yet somehow triumphant nostalgia for a moment lost in time. Despite the tintinnabular pandiatonicism that became a feature of Sviridov’s mature style, the early Pushkin setting shares a predilection for modal minor harmonies, melodic ‘sixthiness’, and a pervasive solemn grandiosity that is also prominent in _Russia Cast Adrift._

The similarity between the two settings, one from the very beginning of Sviridov’s career, the other relatively near the end, emphasises the sheer impact the partial revival of nationalism during the ‘Great Retreat’ of the early Stalinist years had upon the development of his musical language, and on his identity as a specifically Russian (ethnically, ideologically, and, for him, spiritually), as opposed to a Soviet or socialist artist. Thus, in some ways, much like Sviridov’s career as a composer, this chapter finishes where it began, with the Pushkin Anniversary of 1937. Bullock is certainly astute in his assessment of the Anniversary’s importance, because, along with other contemporaneous initiatives that incentivised a focus on various aspects of ethnic nationalism such as Stalin’s expediently named ‘Friendship of Nations’ [*Druzhba narodov*],\(^ {228}\) it appears to have had a major impact, not only on Sviridov’s development as a composer, and not only on lyric poetry and song, but on the cultural identity of the Soviet Union for decades to come.

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\(^{227}\) Valentin Silvestrov also set this famous Pushkin poem to music in his vocal cycle _Quiet Songs_ [*Tikhie pesni*] (1974–1977). The contrast between the two settings could hardly be more pronounced.

\(^{228}\) See Taruskin ‘The Imperium and the Ghetto’ in _Russian Music at Home and Abroad_, 233-302.
3.5 Conclusion: Sviridov’s ‘Great Retreat’ from the Present?

In *Russia Cast Adrift*, Sviridov created an artwork which, through its use of religious allegory, is a polemical critique of its contemporary political system and of the negative legacy of the Revolution (the Soviet ‘betrayal’ of *Rus’*), but which is also simultaneously an evocation of *Rus’* itself – a bucolic, patriarchal, traditional Russian way of life which will resurrect and outlive all political regimes, because it is alive in the land itself – in the rivers, forests, fields, crops, birds, people, in the very soil of Sviridov’s *Rus’*.

Gerard McBurney, it seems, is right in this sense: that Sviridov not only adopts a neo-romantic musical language, but fully shrouds himself in 19th-century culture and ideology. This may easily be seen as a self-imposed exile into the previous century. But to say that he was motivated by a ‘simple desire to retreat from the present’ is severely to downplay Sviridov’s engagement with the Russian nationalist movement of his own era, and, in particular, with what nationalist intellectuals increasingly viewed as a sort of Soviet betrayal of Russia. McBurney’s assertion of ‘retreating’ is in fact quite opposite to what Sviridov seems to have been attempting: namely a thorough critical engagement with contemporary Soviet policies and ideologies.

As is the case with Shostakovich’s *Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok*, the musical peculiarities and tropological features of Sviridov’s *Russia Cast Adrift* can be understood as representative of certain cultural currents and underlying realities of life in the post-Thaw Soviet Union. Both composers turn to what Yurchak has described as ‘elsewheres’ – alternative epochs, cultures, localities and so on – to create an intricately synthesised musical-literary artwork that is expressive of an identity distinct from that projected as ‘Soviet’ by the State: while Shostakovich reached out to the apocalyptic and transcendental lyrics of Blok’s early
symbolist poems, Sviridov employed Esenin’s pastoral-religious imagery. Indeed, there are arguably thematic parallels between the two composers’ choice of poetry. In a very general sense, both are apocalyptic in tone (although Esenin’s poetry is much more explicit in its religious, specifically Christian, references than Blok’s). Both contrast moments of reflection or nostalgia with depictions of encroaching destruction (compare, for example, the fatalistic tone of Shostakovich’s setting of ‘Gamayun, Bird of Prophecy’, discussed in the previous chapter, with Sviridov’s setting of ‘It Sounds, It Sounds, the Fatal Horn!’, examined above). And not only does this general air of apocalypse link Shostakovich to Sviridov, it also resonates with the eschatological preoccupations and dissolving musical structures of Silvestrov’s vocal cycle Steps [Stupeni], examined in detail in the following chapter.

Nevertheless, as has already been suggested in the introduction to this thesis, despite these parallels, there is a crucial difference in the manner in which Sviridov pursued his alternative, nationalist identity that sets him apart from Shostakovich and Silvestrov. While Shostakovich seems to have located an alternative to Soviet reality in an artistic realm that was more thoroughly ‘vnye’ his social-political environment, Sviridov’s attempt to evoke an idealised version of a patriarchal, rural Russia (that may never have existed in reality but was nonetheless an important and potent symbol of traditional, read: pre-revolutionary, values), functioned as a direct critical response to the convoluted Soviet discourse of the Stagnation era. The parallels and differences between the two composers can be expressed in terms of ends, means and motivations. Both Shostakovich and Sviridov sought to develop an identity or artistic voice that was autonomous from the State, and that would render their existences, meaningful in a way that Marxist-Leninist ideology was failing to do. Both achieved this through reaching out to alternative realities, epochs, cultures, or ‘elsewheres’, that had a
personal resonance and value no longer contained in increasingly stale Marxist-Leninist ideology. But while Shostakovich seems to have been motivated by a struggle between two opposing identities and a desire ultimately to transcend or escape his social, cultural and political environment through the redemptive catharsis of Blokian synthesis, Sviridov, far from retreating, desired to make a conscious effort to involve himself in contemporary social-political discourse through the medium of his art.

It may be true that Russia Cast Adrift is steeped in 19th-century tradition, and, as a result, may be seen as something of an anachronism given its publication in 1977. But there emerges a strong counter-argument to McBurney’s accusation of ‘retreat’, namely that Sviridov engaged with pre-Soviet tropes and traditions in direct response to contemporaneous social shifts and cultural movements. In doing so, Russia Cast Adrift presents itself as a polemical critique of the Soviet Union, in much the same way as the Village Prose writers achieved in the field of literature. In this sense, Sviridov, despite his popularity and official status in the Soviet Union, was not simply a two-dimensional, reactionary party-line-toer, nor an anachronistic escapist seeking to bury his head in the previous century, but was actually fully engaged with his cultural-social environment, and just as critical (if not more overtly so) of the Soviet regime as so many fetishists have wanted Shostakovich to be. The crucial difference is that Sviridov chose to express his criticism with a far more unsavoury, nationalistic, potentially even chauvinistic voice, which dissociates him from the more ‘attractive’ cosmopolitan voices of Silvestrov and his generation, who, conversely, were motivated by engagement with fissiparous cultures outside the Soviet Union, and not just ethnically Slavic ones. This could also partially explain Sviridov’s relative obscurity in Western Europe and the United States,
which, since the end of the Second World War, have had a tendency to hero-worship the cosmopolite over the nationalist, at least until very recently.
4. Eschatological Tenderness: Valentin Silvestrov’s *Stupeni*

4.1 Introduction: Birth of the Subject

In 1941, the Argentine writer and essayist Jorge Luis Borges published a collection of short stories entitled *The Garden of the Forking Paths (El jardín de senderos que bifurcan)*, subsequently re-published in 1944 in an expanded collection under the more familiar title of *Fictions (Ficciones)*. In the first story of the collection, *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, Borges describes some of the existential, philosophical schools of thought in the fictional world of Tlön, one of which, ‘declares that all time has already transpired and that our life is only the crepuscular and no doubt falsified and mutilated memory or reflection of an irrecoverable process.’²²⁹ Those familiar with Valentin Silvestrov’s musical language of the 1970s and ’80s, after what he specifically described as a ‘transition’ *[perekhod]* as opposed to a ‘breaking away’ *[perelom]* from his early avant-garde period,²³⁰ might recognise a certain communality between Silvestrov’s musical aesthetic and the philosophers of Tlön. Moreover, this passage from *Fictions*, innocuous enough in its original context, also holds strong parallels to certain characteristics of society, politics, and daily life in the apparently monolithic Soviet system during the 1970s and early 1980s, as it lumbered towards Perestroika and ultimately collapse.

In recent years, Silvestrov’s music has increasingly attracted attention. His rising popularity in the West is in no small part due to the work of English-language scholars, notably Philip Bullock and Peter J. Schmelz, both of whom have recently published articles exploring

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²³⁰ Tat’yana Frumkis and Valentin Sil’vestrov, ‘Sokhranyat’ dostoinstvo…’, *Sovetskaya muzika*, 4 (1990), 12.
Silvestrov’s musical aesthetics of the 1970s and ’80s. In the East, too, his name seems to be increasingly familiar, helped in part by the publication of a series of interviews and essays under the title Waiting for Music [Dozhdat’sya muzïka] in which Silvestrov discusses his own music, and also by his vociferousness in response to the Ukrainian revolution and Crimean Crisis of 2014 and the subsequent on-going conflict with Russia. Testimony to his growing reputation is also found in the increased level of publications he now enjoys, with a number of volumes of his works recently being issued by Schott, and several more currently in preparation for publication. This shows a significant development in his reputation since the early 1990s, when, speaking to Gerard McBurney, he declared, ‘even now [1994] there are no publications. I was very rarely published, and still I have a problem. I only have manuscript’.

But despite growing interest in his music, scholarly studies of Silvestrov’s music nevertheless remain thin on the ground by comparison with a number of his contemporaries. Schmelz has made the modernist, Webernian idiom that preoccupied Silvestrov and others of his generation after the great flood of Western ideas and techniques into the Soviet Union during the 1950s the subject of his 2009 monograph, *Such Freedom If Only Musical* – a thorough examination of the ‘Unofficial’ generation from their exposure to Western modernist techniques during their student days in the 1950s through to the end of the Thaw. But the subsequent musical

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233 Some of these formerly published by Belaieff before its takeover by Schott.
234 Silvestrov interview with Gerard McBurney (July, 1994). My thanks to David Fanning for allowing me to see a transcript of this interview.
developments of this generation, and what might be considered a general shift towards a Soviet brand of musical postmodernism that began to take place in the following decades, has remained relatively untouched by Western musicologists, particularly in the case of Silvestrov, whose reputation as a composer, at least until more recently, has been occluded by a greater focus on Schnittke in the 1990s and more recently on Gubaidulina.²³⁵ It comes as relatively small surprise that a monograph or edited volume dedicated to a study of Silvestrov’s music of the sort that has long since appeared (and continues to appear) for Schnittke²³⁶ is yet to materialise for Silvestrov. Nor has a study trained more generally on the later developments of the ‘Unofficial’ generation throughout the 1970s and 1980s yet appeared, although there is a suggestion in a footnote in Schmelz’s 2014 article ‘Valentin Silvestrov and the Echoes of Music History’ that he has a ‘book in progress’ dedicated to exactly that topic, to be entitled *Sonic Overload: Polystylistism as Cultural Practice in the Late USSR.*²³⁷

Silvestrov has been (and continues to be) a prolific composer of songs and vocal cycles. Indeed, some of his most recent compositions were two short settings of Taras Shevchenko’s poetry in memory of the twenty-year-old activist Sergei Nigoyan, who was murdered on the Maidan Square in the revolution of 2014.²³⁸ Silvestrov’s best-known vocal work is arguably the cycle *Quiet Songs [Tikhie pesni]*, a collection of 24 songs composed between 1974 and 1977 comprising a metastasized *Schwanengesang* of soporose Soviet postmodernism that lasts

²³⁵ At least in terms of concert and radio programming, if not in academic studies of her music.
²³⁸ One of the songs is a setting of an extract from Shevchenko’s 1845 poem *The Caucasus [Kavkaz]*, which Nigoyan was filmed reciting a few days before he was killed. The songs remain unpublished, but recordings of Silvestrov performing them himself can be found online: <http://dub-i-litera.com/pamyati-serhiya-nihoyana-novitvory-valentyna-sylvestrova/> [Accessed 8 August 2017].

Not only is *Stupeni* Silvestrov’s most substantial cycle for voice and piano since *Quiet Songs*, it also arguably exhibits his mature post-avant-garde compositional language in a more complete form than the earlier cycle, which, in many ways, was still a transitional work. Indeed, despite sharing a genre with *Quiet Songs*, *Stupeni* almost has more in common with Silvestrov’s best-known orchestral work, the Symphony No. 5, composed concurrently with *Stupeni* between 1980 and 1982. Yet unlike *Quiet Songs* or the Symphony No. 5, *Stupeni* has received almost no attention from Western or Russian scholars. Beyond some cursory mentions in a handful of articles and interviews from the late 1980s and early 1990s, the only substantial material on *Stupeni* appears in the accompanying booklets to two extant CD releases: one by Svetlana Savenko accompanied by Yuri Polubelov,\(^{240}\) the other by Iana Ivanilova accompanied by Aleksei Lyubimov.\(^{241}\) Curiously, despite its broad scope, *Stupeni*


\(^{240}\) Moscow State Conservatoire, SMC CD 0095 (2007).

\(^{241}\) *Valentin Silvestrov: Stufen* (Megadisc Classics MDC7832, 2000), liner notes by Tatiana Frumkis.
barely appears in the above-mentioned collection of interviews, *Waiting for Music*, although the accompanying audio CD does feature the Ivanilova–Lyubimov recording.\(^\text{242}\)

*Stupeni* boasts a further idiosyncrasphy in that each of the eleven songs is dedicated to a separate individual. In addition, the fact that the first song was appended to the cycle in 1997 after the death of Silvestrov’s wife, Larissa Bondarenko, implies that, even a decade and a half after its completion, the cycle retained a certain intimate significance for the composer, which the lack of critical and scholarly attention belies. Thus the cycle stands out as a substantial work that currently remains unexamined in the Silvestrov literature, and provides an excellent case-study for an examination of his artistic identity during the last years of Stagnation.

What follows is an analytical examination of *Stupeni*, contextualised by a discussion of the ways in which Silvestrov and other artists of his generation reacted to the increasing inertia of the social-cultural environment of the Soviet Union during the 1970s and 1980s, as Marxist-Leninist ideology (not to mention Soviet politics and economics) began to stagnate under Brezhnev. The first part of the chapter returns to Alexei Yurchak, whose concepts of *svoy* and *vnye* underpinned the discussion of Shostakovich’s *Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok* in Chapter 2, to establish a theoretical framework for the discussion. It then evaluates Silvestrov’s eschatological, otherworldly musical language alongside a number of other cultural figures and movements of the 1970s and ’80s, among them the so-called ‘Necrorealists’, and the film director Andrei Tarkovsky. Similar to Silvestrov, these artists concerned themselves with themes such as memory, identity, existence, apocalypse, and the shifting perception of reality through time. These topics are all characteristic of a general postmodernist movement that

\(^{242}\) The accompanying CD features over 200 tracks including some recordings of Silvestrov performing his own compositions, which testifies to both the composer’s rising status and, by negation, to the relative lack of critical or popular interest on behalf of publishers, performers and audiences heretofore.
emerged world-wide during the 1970s, but they take on a particular piquancy when considered in the Soviet context, emerging as they did parallel to the decline and fall of the USSR in the post-Thaw era, at a time when for many citizens of the Soviet bloc history seemed to be approaching an inevitable, and almost literal, conclusion.

4.2 Faith in the Time of Cruel Miracles: Social-Cultural Context

One of Yurchak’s central arguments in *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More* is that, in the post-war and particularly post-Thaw periods, meaning or substance gradually dropped out of everyday manifestations of Marxist-Leninist doctrine, but that the performance of the attendant everyday rituals persisted, devoid of their original meaning. As Yurchak suggests:

> This emphasis on the performative dimension took place in most contexts where authoritative discourse was reproduced or circulated: in votes, speeches, reports, slogans, meetings, parades, elections, various institutional practices, and so on. It became increasingly more important to participate in the reproduction of the *form* of these ritualized acts of authoritative discourse than to engage with their constative meanings.\(^\text{243}\)

The crucial caveat that Yurchak is at pains to stress is that the continued, repeated performance of such ‘ritualized acts’ did not render them meaningless or empty, but that, ‘[o]n the contrary, the performative reproduction of the form of rituals and speech acts actually *enabled* the emergence of diverse, multiple, and unpredictable meanings in everyday life.’\(^\text{244}\)


\(^{244}\) Ibid., emphasis in original.
The death of the original meaning did not preclude new meanings from emerging, with the result that a somewhat surreal environment began to emerge in which daily life was occupied with the reproducing of actions or activities that had previously had some original significance or meaning but from which they were now almost completely severed. This was partly due to a near total homogenisation of almost all aspects of culture, politics, society from the 1950s onwards. Architecture, visual art (such as portraits of party members), newsreels, authoritative language, newspaper articles, speeches, reports, posters, examinations, and even to a certain extent music, thanks to the Zhdanovshchina of 1948, all became increasingly centralised and consequently standardised, predictable, and relatively immutable on the level of form and process. In an interview with Yurchak, the documentary filmmaker Yurii Zanin recalled that ‘throughout the 1970s all winter newsreels from Leningrad incorporated identical footage filmed during the 1970 New Year celebration’.245 This anecdote works as a neat microcosmic analogy for late Soviet society in general: so long as it looked right on a representational level, it was irrelevant where or when the actual footage came from.

Familiarity, in this case, appears to have bred apathy rather than contempt. In the same way that the constant repetition of the same word deprives that word of its actual (or what Yurchak might refer to as its ‘constative’) meaning, so the gradual centralisation, homogenisation, and reproduction of many aspects of the ideal Soviet society and identity projected by official ideology led to a decline in the actual/constative dimension of that ideology. While the performed actions of daily life had continued to maintain the façade of revolutionary Marxist-Leninist social ideology on a more procedural, representational level (Yurchak’s ‘performative’ dimension), the façade was in fact no longer structurally sound, because its

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ideological foundations had long since crumbled away and shifted into something quite unrelated and, for Yurchak, unpredictable. Richard Sakwa appears to be making a very similar point to Yurchak in his description of a ‘sharp decline in ideological enthusiasm’ during the Brezhnev years, going on to suggest that, though the concept of Communism as a social-political goal remained, by the 1970s it ‘appeared to fulfil the function of filling discursive space rather than having any substantive content or influence on the day-to-day practices of the regime.’ To adopt the phraseology of the Borges passage quoted in the introduction to this chapter, by the 1970s and ’80s, many of the performed actions of day-to-day life can be understood as being nothing more than the ‘crepuscular and no doubt falsified and mutilated memory of an irrecoverable process’; these performed aspects of life in the crepuscular Soviet Union were simply a distorted shadow of the original Revolutionary vision, a falsified and mutilated memory of the falsified and mutilated utopianism of Marx, Lenin and Stalin, that was repeated and restated ad infinitum, but was simultaneously devoid of all its original meaning.

This homogenisation (or ‘normalization’ in Yurchak’s terminology) of almost all aspects of culture, politics, and society in general, combined with the increasing impotence of Marxist-Leninist ideology to galvanise public support in the post-Stalin era, unsurprisingly had a major impact on Stagnation-era society and the cultural products produced therein. One of the common features of the studies by Yurchak, Yitzhak M. Brudny, and Kenneth Jowitt, all of which have been central to this thesis, is the observation that growing familiarity with and consequent decline of interest in Marxist-Leninist philosophy, theory, social doctrine and so

246 Indeed, this seems to have been apparent to Brezhnev and Suslov, who identified the waning power of Marxist-Leninist doctrine to galvanise public support in the wake of Khrushchev’s reforms and consequently sought to permit alternate voices to the hegemonic state voice (see discussion in Chapter 3 above).
on, and its increasing inability to motivate or mean anything to Soviet citizens led to a
dislocation between ideology and daily life.\footnote{This is also hinted at by Sakwa who describes Stagnation policy as being ‘undermined by faltering economic performance and social alienation’, and the Stagnation era in general as seeing ‘the gradual disengagement of the population from enthusiastic involvement in the procedures of Soviet democracy’ (see Sakwa, Soviet Politics in Perspective, 67 and 209).} In his study of the Russian intelligentsia during
the post-Stalinist era, Vladislav Zubok also writes of a declining belief ‘in the Marxist version
of historically determined progress’ and the demoralising impact of ‘the loss of positive common guidelines and goals in the new political and social reality.’\footnote{Vladislav Zubok, Zhivago’s Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia (Cambridge, Massachusetts, First Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 299. See also Zubok’s discussion of the younger generation of Soviet intellectuals, for whom ‘the notion of an intellectual vanguard was replaced by a sense of the irrelevance of any public action’, while ‘their common identity was one of intense alienation from the absurd and tedious routine of the Brezhnev years’ (320).} One of Yurchak’s interviewees, simply referred to as Andrei, recalls that, ‘he “believed in the actual [communist] idea” (verit’ samu ideiu) but felt alienated from the “senseless” (bessmyslennyi) formalism in which it tended to be framed’.\footnote{Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, 94-95. Transliteration as given in original.} One major consequence of this dislocation seems to have been an increasing desire (and also opportunity) to express or embrace an alternative identity to that projected by the State in newspapers, newsreels, posters and so on as ‘Soviet’. Several factors helped to facilitate this, not least the increasing willingness of the State to allow oppositional, or at least alternative, voices in public, social and political discourse after the denunciation of Stalinism in 1956.\footnote{This is discussed in detail by Brudny and Jowitt, both of whose commentaries underpin the discussion of Georgy Sviridov’s Russia Cast Adrift in Chapter 3 of the present thesis.} Indeed, another of Yurchak’s interviewees, Inna, states:

We were different from [dissidents and activists]. We were different because for us they were simply a change from plus to minus [znaki meniaiusia] – the pro-system and anti-system types – they were all just Soviet people, and I never thought of myself
as a Soviet person. We were *organically* different [*my organicheski otlchalisl’*]. This is true. We were simply *vnye*.\(^{252}\)

There are several cultural consequences of this emerging desire to seek alternative, meaningful ways in which to express personal and artistic identity. Indeed, using terms close in essence to those used by Brudny in his discussion of the emergence of nationalist movements during the Thaw, Yurchak describes the period of late socialism as becoming marked by an explosion of various styles of living that were simultaneously inside and outside the system [that] can be characterized as ‘being *vnye*’. These styles of living generated multiple new temporalities, spatialities, social relations, and meanings that were not anticipated or controlled by the state, although they were fully made possible by it.\(^{253}\)

Perhaps the most obvious instance of these newly-possible *vnye* ‘styles of living’ considered thus far was the revival of Russian nationalist movements during the 1950s and 60s that attracted Sviridov to their cause. As discussed in Chapter 3, the nationalist movement was, in many ways, ‘not anticipated or controlled by the state’, whilst simultaneously being ‘fully made possible by it’.\(^{254}\) But there were numerous other ways in which the dislocated and somewhat distorted social and political environment of the post-Thaw period spawned cultural products that exhibited alternative, and often surreal or escapist characteristics that allowed for the exploration of identities and realities separate to those projected as ‘Soviet’.


\(^{253}\) Ibid., 128.

Of Silvestrov’s generation of composers (and, indeed, of Shostakovich to some extent, though less so of Sviridov) it can certainly be said that a distinct shift began to occur in the late 1960s that directly parallels the ‘performative shift’ observed by Yurchak resulting from the homogenisation or ‘normalization’ of Soviet culture, politics, and society. After their experimentation with serialism in the 1950s and ’60s (during which, ironically, they produced relatively homogeneous music), Silvestrov’s generation began to develop unapologetically individualistic musical voices. Like a beam of light passing through a prism, the uniformity of their Webernian serialism, long disparaged and discouraged by the ultracrepidarian old guard of the Composers’ Union, refracted and diversified into multiple idiosyncratic styles that are immediately distinguishable.

For many composers of this generation, the shift appears to have occurred gradually over a period of about four years between 1967 and 1971, coinciding with a number of historical events, including the 50th anniversary of the Revolution in October 1967 and the brutal repression of the Czechoslovak uprising in 1968. Many see the latter as a turning point from the relative political and social freedom of the Thaw to the partial return to dogmatic state control, which was paradoxically accompanied by the gradual ascendancy of the individual voice that characterised the period of Stagnation. The shift towards an individualistic compositional language for each composer can be observed in Schnittke’s cultivation of ‘polystylistism’ (perhaps best illustrated by his colossal First Symphony composed between 1969 and 1974); in Arvo Pärt’s increasing interest in religion and spirituality, and the development of his ‘tintinnabuli’ style after a period of silence between 1968 and 1971.

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255 See Figure 1.1 in the Introduction to the present thesis. This shift was, to a large extent, tied to a growing intellectual disillusionment with the possibility of social and political reform. Zubok, for example, suggests that the ‘myth of a socially engaged and morally potent intelligentsia collapsed in August 1968, smashed by the brutal force of the authoritarian state’ (Zubok, Zhivago’s Children, 293).
(arguably initiated by his somewhat transitional Third Symphony of 1971 and fully established by 1976/7 with the composition of several works including *Für Alina, Variazionen zur Gesundung von Arinuschka*, and the *Cantus in Memorian Benjamin Britten*); and in the establishment of Silvestrov’s so-called ‘post’, ‘kitsch’, or ‘metaphorical’ styles in several works dating from around 1970, including *Drama* for violin, cello and piano (1970-71) and the Piano Sonata No. 1 (1972). Even Denisov’s serial language became paradoxically individualistic by virtue of his being the only one of that generation to hold on to the technique with such recalcitrant tenacity.\(^{256}\)

Schmelz has described much of Silvestrov’s music written in the 1970s and early 1980s as a ‘meditation on time passing’.\(^{257}\) Schmelz’s choice of the word ‘meditation’ is significant as it helps to further locate Silvestrov’s musical aesthetic within precisely the type of late-socialist context Yurchak is attempting to describe in his study. Yurchak’s interviewee, Inna (who earlier described her sense of being ‘organically different’ from and ‘simply vnye’ those actively engaged in political or ‘authoritative’ discourse), elsewhere describes the importance of independent intellectual thought, stating, “‘[i]t was very important […] that everyone developed in his own direction and no one stood in the way of another’s thinking and feeling his own way. That was very important…. It was like meditation’”.\(^{258}\) Not only does this comment help to contextualise the drift towards individualistic, idiosyncratic approaches to compositional language that characterised Silvestrov’s generation from about 1970 onwards within the broader social-cultural context of the Soviet Union, it also helps to conceptualise

\(^{256}\) Shostakovich also began the shift towards his enigmatic and often bleak late style around this time, as explored in Chapter 2.

\(^{257}\) Schmelz, ‘Echoes of Music History’, 243

Silvestrov’s music in particular as a form of vnye music for a vnye society. Commenting on Inna’s reflection, Yurchak continues:

The metaphor of meditation captures well the experience of living in deterritorialized worlds of friendship, poetry, and neverending discussions in the contexts of nature, bonfires, and hiking. The practice of meditation also stands for a particular relationship to the world – one stays acutely present in the world and yet uninvolved in its concerns, which is synonymous with the relationship of being vnye.  

Statements by Silvestrov himself in an interview with Tatiana Frumkis appear to correspond to much of Yurchak’s theory. At one point in particular, Silvestrov appears to allude to what Yurchak might describe as the ‘normalization’, and ‘deterritorialization’ of Soviet society – or in less jargonistic terms, social homogenisation and a resulting impulse towards alternative forms of living – stating: ‘my generation acted in a zone of musts, of required forms […]. It became boring for me in that zone of musts. […] I started to fumble for my own type of aesthetic of the echo, somehow connected with the philosophy of Zen.’

Beyond its meditative qualities, Silvestrov’s music is deeply concerned with memory, history, and the perception (and distortion) of time and reality. Many of these themes feature prominently in the cultural output of the Soviet Union during the Stagnation. To find expression of an aesthetic similar to Silvestrov’s in, for example, Soviet cinema (arguably one of the most important cultural mediums in the Soviet Union), one need only consider three of Andrei Tarkovsky’s most famous films, Solaris [Solyaris] (1972), The Mirror [Zerkalo] (1974), and Stalker [Stalker] (1979), the first and third of which are based respectively on

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259 Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, 138.
seminal works of science-fiction by the Polish author Stanisław Lem (*Solaris*, 1961) and by the primarily Leningrad-based brothers Arkady and Boris Strugatsky (*Roadside Picnic [Piknik na obochinye],* 1971). Described by Robert Bird as ‘a bell-weather of the social mood and an outlet for the intelligentsia’s inchoate creative and spiritual yearnings’, these three films represent something of a high-water mark in Tarkovsky’s career. Many of his films feature broken or disillusioned characters who are searching for some existential alternative in familiar yet simultaneously alien environments. In *Stalker*, three characters who, significantly, remain nameless (being identified only by impersonal, descriptive titles as ‘the writer’, ‘the professor’, and ‘the stalker’), travel through a landscape referred to as ‘the Zone’ [*Zona*] – a deceptive environment that, on the surface, has a semblance of normality and familiarity, but within which reality has become distorted, unpredictable, and volatile. In *Solaris*, reality is similarly ruptured as the inhabitants of a space station orbiting an unfathomable ocean planet known as Solaris are gradually driven insane by hallucinations and nightmares that become indistinguishable from reality. And in *The Mirror*, reality, memory, and non-reality are fused even more directly by the incorporating of elements of Tarkovsky’s own biography. The house in which the film’s protagonist, Alexei (presumably a self-portrait of Tarkovsky), grows up is a reconstruction of Tarkovsky’s childhood home; Tarkovsky’s real mother, Maria Vishnyakova, plays the role of Alexei’s mother as an old woman, while memory and reality become warped (and somewhat Oedipal) with the casting of Tarkovsky’s wife, Larisa

261 The Strugatsky brothers were seemingly quite heavily influenced by Lem. See Ursula K. Le Guin, ‘A New Book by the Strugatskys’, *Science Fiction Studies*, 4/2 (July 1977), 157-159.
263 Though Tarkovsky’s last two films, *Nostalgia* [*Nostalghia*] (1983) and *The Sacrifice* [*Offeret*] (1986), were made concurrently with both the emergent Necrorealist movement and *Stupeni*, they appeared during Tarkovsky’s self-imposed exile from the Soviet Union and consequently are not considered here.
264 This was presumably a decision taken by Tarkovsky: in the Strugatsky brothers’ novel, the Stalker is named Redrick Schuhart. In many ways the film diverges from the novel’s plot.
Tarkovskaya, in the role of Alexei’s mother as a young woman. Added to this, Tarkovsky’s father, the poet Arseniy Tarkovsky, punctuates the soundtrack with recitations of extracts of his own poetry. The result is both a true yet also a false memory, the real and the imagined seeming to bleed into one another deliriously and uncomfortably.

The films are often extremely static, with long takes that favour panning over cutting, and distorted chronologies that render it unclear what has already happened, what is yet to come, and, indeed, what is actually happening in the present and what is not. In all three films the unfamiliar is clad in the guise of the familiar, while the perception of time, memory and reality is blurred. Parallels with Silvestrov’s static, deceptive musical language are not hard to draw, and Schmelz has done exactly that in using Vsevolod Zaderatsky’s response in 1987 to Silvestrov’s Symphony No. 5 as a springboard for discussing the parallels between Solaris and Silvestrov’s music.265 As Schmelz makes clear, Zaderatsky’s description of the symphony as being ‘associated with the figure of a certain “planet of ideas” rotating in an ocean of boundless cosmic secrets’ is referring to Lem’s Solaris rather than Tarkovsky’s, and he builds upon Zaderatsky’s idea, stating:

[...], Lem illuminates Silvestrov’s aesthetics. Like Solaris’s unnamed inhabitant, the Symphony no. 5 engages in a type of ‘psychic dissection,’ plumbing the idealized memories of past music and reconstructing them. Zaderatsky does not pursue the reference to Lem in great detail, but the novel’s themes—eternity, prolonged dying, nostalgia, the hope of redemption—find parallels with the discussions surrounding the Symphony no. 5, both Silvestrov’s stated intentions and his listeners’ responses.266

266 Ibid., 260.
However, it is perhaps not so much that Lem (or Tarkovsky for that matter) illuminate Silvestrov’s aesthetics, but rather that their respective (and undoubtedly similar) aesthetics illuminate certain thematic and formal trends in the cultural environment of the Soviet Union during the Stagnation era that were influenced by political and social shifts of the sort examined by Yurchak, Brudny, Jowitt, and others. Indeed, thematic tropes of nostalgia, time, memory, (non-)reality, stasis, inertia, suspension, and particularly ‘prolonged dying’ are central to many works of art, literature and music from across the Eastern bloc during the Stagnation era. To Lem, Tarkovsky, and Silvestrov could be added, for example, the Hungarian novelist László Krasznahorkai, whose 1985 debut novel *Sátántangó* relates a series delirious and incoherent events in the lives of the pálinka-sodden inhabitants of an abandoned agricultural estate in a politically and economically unstable Hungary that was rapidly sliding towards regime change. Krasznahorkai’s compatriot, the film director Béla Tarr, is also worth considering. Tarr’s extraordinarily static direction and characteristic use of long takes betray a Tarkovskian influence taken to the extreme – in 1994, relatively soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, he directed a film adaptation of Krasznahorkai’s *Sátántangó* which runs for a cruel seven hours twenty minutes. The static pace, the dreamlike, almost other-worldly quality, and particularly the exhausting duration of the film find aesthetic parallels in Silvestrov’s music of the 1970s and ’80s including *Quiet Songs* and the Symphony No. 5, which, according to Schmelz, Silvestrov described as featuring ‘the freezing of time’.  

One of the lesser-known yet stranger phenomena of the period was the performance art movement that emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s that became known as

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267 Schmelz, ‘Echoes of Music History’, 246. Schmelz takes issue with this idea, stating, ‘[…] these readings are one-sided. In the Symphony no. 5, time does not freeze’ (Schmelz, ‘Echoes of Music History’, 247).
‘Necrorealism’ [Nekrorealizm], and was started by a group of Leningrad teenagers, including film-maker Evgeniy Yufit who became the ‘leader’ of the group (and who passed away aged 55 in December 2016).\textsuperscript{268} According to Yurchak, ‘central to [the Necrorealist] aesthetic was a refusal of clear-cut boundaries between reality and performance, common sense and absurdity’.\textsuperscript{269} Indeed, many of the group’s public performance acts, or ‘Provocations’ [Provokatsii], were ultimately intended to create a sense of disruption in reality by blurring the real and the unreal, engendering confusion in the beholder coupled with an inability to understand what was actually happening, or why.\textsuperscript{270} As the term ‘Necrorealism’ suggests, the group became fascinated by macabre themes and images including dead bodies, corporeal mutilation, suicide, decay, and particularly the liminal state of suspension between life and death that Vladimir Kustov (friend of Yufit and early member of the Necrorealist group) later described as ‘absolute dying’ (Figure 4.1).\textsuperscript{271}

\textbf{Figure 4.1} Vladimir Kustov, ‘Necromethod’, 1989.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{necromethod.png}
\caption{Lifespan of the Necromethod.}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushleft}
1. \textit{Birth of the Object}
2. \textit{Beginning of Absolute Dying}
3. \textit{End of Absolute Dying}
4. \textit{Loss of Form by the Object}
\end{flushleft}

\textsuperscript{269} Yurchak, \textit{Everything Was Forever}, 244.
\textsuperscript{270} For accounts of Necrorealist activities, see Yurchak, \textit{Everything Was Forever}, 245-247, and Yurchak, ‘Necro-Utopia’, passim.
\textsuperscript{271} Figure 4.1 is reproduced from Yurchak, ‘Necro-Utopia’, 211. The original appears in Kustov’s Necrorealist manifesto of 1989 which, according to Yurchak, ‘exists only in manuscript’ (Yurchak, ‘Necro-Utopia’, 210).
In his discussion, Yurchak refers to the area between ‘2’ and ‘3’ on Kustov’s diagram as an ‘intervening zone’, in which ‘the subject is neither a person nor a corpse but is in a transitory stage in between’,\textsuperscript{272} thus emphasising the preoccupation with liminality in the aesthetics of the Necrorealists. This has strong parallels with many of the themes encountered in Tarkovsky’s films. In particular, Yurchak’s presumably coincidental use of the word ‘zone’ echoes the mysterious ‘Zone’ of Tarkovsky’s Stalker. The characters who travel though this ‘zone’ in the film are passing through a similarly liminal, transitory state where time and reality appear to be suspended. But the use of the word ‘zone’ here also has a stark resonance with the language used by Silvestrov himself, not only in his reference to life in a ‘zone of musts’ cited above, but also in an earlier interview with Tatiana Frumkis. Asking whether there is an ‘eschatological motif [eskhatologicheskogo motiva]’ running through his music, Frumkis quotes Svetlana Savenko’s description of Silvestrov’s Symphony No. 5 (in thoroughly, though presumably unwittingly Necrorealist terms) as being in, “[…] that critical zone, where life fades into death [zhizn’ ugastaet v smerti] and is born again into new being”\textsuperscript{273}. Silvestrov’s response not only articulates his conceptualisation of the ‘zone of the coda’, but also parallels the Necrorealist’s specific focus on the ongoing process of ‘absolute dying’, rather than with the closed finality of death itself:

In fact, it is not the end of music as an art form [konets muziki kak iskusstva], but an ending of music, in which it might prevail [prebivat’] for a very long time. Exactly in the zone of the coda a gigantic life is possible.\textsuperscript{274}

\textsuperscript{272} Yurchak, ‘Necro-Utopia’, 211.
\textsuperscript{273} Svetlana Savenko, as quoted in Tatiana Frumkis, ‘Sokhranyat dostoinstvo…’, Sovetskaya muzika, 4 (1990), 16 (emphasis added).
\textsuperscript{274} Frumkis, ‘Sokhranyat’ dostoinstvo…’, 16.
This idea of the ‘zone of the coda’ is intimately connected to Silvestrov’s conceptualisation of the postlude, and its importance to the aesthetic of his ‘post’-style. He describes the forms of his postludes as being ‘like the traces of a moment that is apparently dying out.’ The implicit distinction in this statement between ‘dying’ as an active process, rather than ‘death’ as a closed, irreversible state helps to contextualise Silvestrov’s musical aesthetic of the late 1970s and 1980s within its contemporaneous cultural environment and can be understood as analogous to Kustov’s zone of ‘absolute dying’. Indeed, Schmelz summarises Silvestrov’s attitude towards his own music in the following terms, which help to strengthen the parallel with Kustov: ‘the tradition had not yet ended, it was still ending, and would do so for a long time, ringing noiselessly in the ears even after it had concluded, if it ever did.’ Much like the Necrorealists, Tarkovsky’s characters in Stalker and Solaris, or the feverish drunken unfortunates that populate Krasznahorkai’s Sátántangó, Silvestrov’s music inhabits a liminal ‘zone’ of indistinction which is less concerned with the notion of ‘end’ than with the process of ‘ending’.

The result is a hushed, static, somnambulistic sound-world which is deceptively familiar yet also strangely, at times unsettlingly, alien, and, as a result, might well be described as exhibiting characteristics or engendering a feeling of the uncanny. In light of this, it is worth drawing a further parallel with the Necrorealists, who, according to Yurchak, ‘aimed to create an unexpected feeling of the uncanny within the ordinary, to dislocate the mundane everyday world, and to make the audience suspect that a whole other dimension might exist within that world that until that moment had been invisible or misrecognized.’ The notion of a

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276 Ibid.
277 Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, 247.
subcutaneous, invisible or misrecognised dimension is easily appropriated as a descriptor for Silvestrov’s musical aesthetic, and, as shall be explored in more detail in the analysis below, the word ‘misrecognized’ is particularly useful when considering Silvestrov’s music and its late socialist context.

4.3 Stupeni: The Beginning of Absolute Dying

Stupeni differs from the Shostakovich and Sviridov cycles already considered in this thesis in a number of ways, not least in the fact that despite at least two extant commercially available recordings (mentioned above) it remains unpublished, as is the case with a number of Silvestrov’s works, including Quiet Songs, which was reportedly also being readied for publication by Schott/Belaieff but is yet to materialise. Consequently, the analysis below is based on two unpublished sources: an editorial proof of the score being prepared for publication by Belaieff,278 and a copy of the composer’s manuscript, presumably dating from 1982.279

Further to this, the cycle’s title, Stupeni, meaning ‘steps’, is altogether more elusive than that of the Shostakovich and Sviridov cycles. It is neither explicitly descriptive nor thematically derived from the featured poetry. As such, it invites interpretation. In the absence of Silvestrov’s own commentary, the nearest thing to an explanation is provided by Svetlana Savenko:

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278 This was obtained in September 2014, but it is unclear whether Belaieff or Schott are still intending to publish it.
279 My thanks to Ksenya Suponitskaya for obtaining a copy of this manuscript for me.
The title has many meanings. The whole cycle is ascending steps from the terrestrial to the celestial, from existence to blissful disappearance. But the ascent is not direct, rather in spirals – downwards, upwards. In part this is to do with the chronology of the composition of the songs [...]. Aside from this, the concept of ascending is present in most of the poems in one form or another, and, accordingly, also in the music: in certain songs this concept seems to transcend the text.\(^{280}\)

In some aspects Savenko’s assessment is vague. For example, her claim that the cycle’s trajectory of ascending and descending spirals is ‘[i]n part to do with the chronology of the composition of the songs’ is far from self-explanatory. However, her interpretation of the underlying themes and concepts of *Stupeni* does seem to emphasise the notion of a transitional process which reflects the theme of liminality, or the suspension between two states of being, that underpins the discussion of Stagnation-era society and culture above (see section 4.2 ‘Faith in the Time of Cruel Miracles: Social-Cultural Context’). Indeed, the idea of the cycle encapsulating a transition from ‘existence’ to ‘disappearance’ bears close comparison to Kustov’s state of ‘absolute dying’, which focuses on the transitional state between ‘life’ and ‘death’.

Despite Savenko’s assertion that the cycle is about ‘ascending steps from the terrestrial to the celestial, from existence to blissful disappearance’, the ambiguity of sentiments expressed throughout the cycle means that it is not so easily reduced, as Savenko seems to suggest, to positive notions of transcendence and ascension. The clichéd notion of the bittersweet unknowability of nostalgia (often associated with Silvestrov’s music) might serve as a useful

\(^{280}\) Personal correspondence, 9 March 2015.
parallel in the sense that one finds it difficult not only to distinguish between happiness, sadness, anxiety, comfort, familiarity, unfamiliarity, grief, or joy, but also to determine what exactly stimulates these unspecifiable feelings – a sentiment well-expressed by Edward Thomas in a poem of 1914: ‘[I] try / Once more to think what it is I am remembering, / Always in vain […] // I have mislaid the key. I sniff the spray / And think of nothing; I see and I hear nothing; / Yet seem, too, to be listening, lying in wait / For what I should, yet never can, remember’. The notion of listening out for what one ‘should, yet never can, remember’ well describes the experience of listening to Silvestrov’s music, and recalls a performance direction specified by the composer in the preface to his 1977 work for solo piano Kitsch-Music [Kitsch-muzika], which states that the performer should ‘play with a very delicate, deeply introspective tone, allowing the music to cautiously touch the listener’s memory and resound in his mind’s ear, as if his memory itself were singing the music’, although it is perhaps equally the case that Silvestrov’s music deceives the memory of the listener. This is most clearly exemplified by the second movement of Kitsch-Music which makes reference to Chopin’s Prelude in E minor, Op. 24 No. 4 in its left-hand accompaniment figuration (Ex. 4.1a and Ex. 4.1b).

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Moderato \( \cdot = 104 \)

\[ \text{dolcissimo} \]

Example 4.1b Chopin, Prelude in E minor, Op. 28, No. 4, bars 1-6.

\[ \text{Largo} \]

Nowhere does Silvestrov actually quote Chopin’s Prelude. Unlike the more direct quotations and references in many of Shostakovich’s late works, or in Schnittke’s polystylistic compositions, Silvestrov’s half-allusions are increasingly void of definition or context, operating in a sort of musical limbo. Transferred into a different key and time signature,
adorned with an unrelated melody, and with a different harmonic rhythm (not to mention a slightly different harmonic progression), the passage arguably only alludes gently to Chopin. But because the identity of Chopin’s harmonic language is so strong (and so familiar to audiences and performers alike), this passage in *Kitsch-Music* resonates in the auditory memory of the listener. Furthermore, given that the Chopin Prelude is a pedagogical staple, it is not simply an auditory memory, but also, for some, a tactile one, giving rise to the uncanny sensation that one has not merely heard, but also felt and somehow inhabited this music before, accompanied by the suspicion that it is also simultaneously alien; a perfect introduction to the way in which Silvestrov’s music presents the unfamiliar in the guise of the familiar.

With the vocal genre, the introduction of the literary element provides even more scope for establishing this mode of perception. As Philip Bullock observes in relation to Silvestrov’s choice of poetry in *Quiet Songs*, ‘[the] highly canonical poets [set by Silvestrov] are […] represented by works that would be familiar to many readers and listeners through popular anthologies, school curricula, and the practice of memorization and recitation.’²⁸³ In the same way that an allusion to such a familiar piece as Chopin’s prelude stimulates both a tactile and an auditory memory, so the half-remembered words of a famous poem memorised in childhood rise to the lips each time that poem is subsequently heard or re-read.

Silvestrov fundamentally departs from Shostakovich and Sviridov in *Stupeni* in the wide range of poets of various nationalities and epochs he chooses to set. Unlike the Shostakovich and Sviridov cycles considered above, which set exclusively Aleksandr Blok and Sergei Esenin

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²⁸³ Bullock, ‘Intimacy and Distance’, 405.
respectively, *Stupeni* is comprised of eleven settings of poems by Blok, Fyodor Sologub, Fyodor Tyutchev, Yevgeny Baratynsky, Aleksandr Pushkin, Osip Mandelstam, and John Keats. As previously stated, each song is dedicated to a separate acquaintance of Silvestrov’s (see Figure 4.2).

**Figure 4.2** Table of songs, poets, dedicatees, and dates of composition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song Title</th>
<th>Poet</th>
<th>Dedicatee</th>
<th>Date of composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ‘Dedication’</td>
<td>Blok</td>
<td>Larissa Bondareko</td>
<td>23 September 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>[Posvyashcheniye]</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ‘Elegy’ <em>[Elegiya]</em></td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Sviatoslav Krutikov</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ‘My Soul’ <em>[Dusha moya]</em></td>
<td>Sologub</td>
<td>Oleg Kive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ‘The Blue-Grey Shadows Have Moved’</td>
<td>Tyutchev</td>
<td>Boris Buyevsky</td>
<td>10 April 1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>[Teni szie smesilis']</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ‘What Are You For, Days?’ <em>[Na chto vi, dni]</em></td>
<td>Baratynsky</td>
<td>Inna Alekseevna Barsova</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. ‘Elegy’ <em>[Elegiya]</em></td>
<td>Pushkin</td>
<td>Edison Denisov</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. ‘O My Prophetic Soul’</td>
<td>Tyutchev</td>
<td>Yakov Druskin</td>
<td>15 April 1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>[O veshchaya dusha moya]</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Sisters – Heaviness and Tenderness’ ['Sestri - tyazhest' i nezhnost']</td>
<td>Mandelstam</td>
<td>Svetlana Savenko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>‘Last Love’ ['Poslednyaya lyubov']</td>
<td>Tyutchev</td>
<td>Yuri Smirnov</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>‘I Have Forgotten the Word I Wanted to Say’ ['Ya slovo pozabîl, chto ya khotel skazat']</td>
<td>Mandelstam</td>
<td>Yuri Kon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The range and diversity of poems set is characteristic of Silvestrov’s output in general. This bears comparison to Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 14 (1969), which, unlike his Blok cycle (and many of his other late vocal works) features settings of a wide range of poets including Federico Lorca, Guillaume Apollinaire, Wilhelm Küchelbecker, and Rainer Maria Rilke. This suggests a broader, more outward-looking, internationalist impulse that seems largely absent from Sviridov’s vocal music, which generally features only ethnically Russian poets (typically Esenin and Blok, though also Mayakovsky, Pasternak, Pushkin, and others) with an eye turned firmly inwards towards Russia itself. There is also a structural parallel that draws Silvestrov’s cycle closer to Shostakovich’s legacy, namely the unusual division of the work into eleven
parts, resonating not only with Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 14, but also with the deeply existential Suite on Verses of Michelangelo Buonarroti, Op. 145. Though these two late works of Shostakovich’s are beyond the scope of this thesis, they consider themes that are close to Silvestrov’s own, including those of existence, death, love, memory, transcendence, and antiquity.

4.3.1 ‘Dedication’

In terms of the dates of composition, the main anomaly is the first song of the cycle, ‘Dedication’, which was composed in September 1997, fifteen years almost to the day after the rest of the cycle was completed in September 1982. The date, the dedicatee, and even the choice of poem, confirm that ‘Dedication’ was appended to the cycle after the death of Silvestrov’s wife, Larissa Bondarenko, in 1996. According to the composer’s manuscript, the original cycle started with what has become the second song, ‘Elegy’.

But the absence of ‘Dedication’ is not the most significant feature of the original manuscript. Of greater interest is the presence of a separate song – a setting of Osip Mandelstam’s ‘Sleeplessness. Homer. Taut Sails’ [Bessonitsa. Gomer. Tugiye parusa] – that is also dedicated to Bondarenko and was presumably composed in April 1981 to be included as the second song of the cycle, but which is entirely absent from the later version of Stupeni. This suggests that ‘Dedication’ was not merely appended to Stupeni after Bondarenko’s death, but actually composed specifically to replace the already extant song that had been dedicated to her while she was still alive. A substitution of such a specific nature reveals not only the essential intimacy of Stupeni, but also highlights the significance it held for Silvestrov.
Moreover, it renders the cycle’s proposed thematic concerns – ‘ascending steps from the
terrestrial to the celestial, from existence to blissful disappearance’ – all the more acute and
personal, particularly when considering the content of the Blok poem Silvestrov chose to
replace Mandelstam’s ‘Sleeplessness’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Posvyashcheniye</th>
<th>Dedication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Была ты всех ярче, верней и прелестней,</td>
<td>You were brighter, truer and more charming than all others,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Не кляни же меня, не кляни!</td>
<td>Don’t curse me, do not curse!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Мой поезд летит, как цыганская песня,</td>
<td>My train flies, like a gypsy song,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Как те невозвратные дни…</td>
<td>Like those irretrievable days…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Что было любимо – всё мимо, мимо,</td>
<td>What was loved – is all passed, passed,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Впереди – неизвестность пути…</td>
<td>Ahead – the unknown path…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Благословенно, неизгадимо,</td>
<td>Blessed, indelibly,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Невозвратимо… прости!</td>
<td>Irreversibly… forgive me!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Silvestrov’s score and in both the recordings mentioned above, there are a couple of
changes to the second stanza of Blok’s poem. The word ‘неизвестность’ (‘unknown’, or more
precisely ‘obscurity’) is replaced with ‘неизбежность’ (‘inevitability’). Though negligible in
terms of word stress and poetic rhythm, the substitution does slightly change the sentiment
being expressed – the inevitability of death is stressed rather than its inherent unknowability,
lending the song a somewhat fatalistic tone, but also ensuring greater internal resonance with
‘невозвратимо’ (‘irreversibly’) in the final line. Furthermore, in the penultimate line of the
poem ‘неизгадимо’ (‘indelibly’) is replaced with ‘неизъяснимо’ (‘inexplicably’ or
'indescribably'), shifting the focus from the finality of death to a contemplation of its unknowable nature.

Appropriate to the poem’s concerns with death, the harmonic structure of ‘Dedication’ follows a pattern of small ascents interspersed by longer descents within an overarching framework of a long descent over the course of the whole song (Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3** Silvestrov, *Stupeni*, ‘Dedication’, harmonic contours.

Similar contours are also embedded in the song’s melodic ideas which mostly involve ascending gestures which tend to sink lower and lower as they reappear, eventually shifting from the upward trajectory at the beginning of the first verse where the melodic line is formed out of ascending 7ths and 9ths, to a downward one in the postlude where a series of falling 7ths closes the song. This harmonic and melodic architecture is effective in opening up a complex of associations and meanings that are pertinent to the cycle as a whole. It works as a gateway for the descent into the drowsy musical netherworld the work inhabits, and creates an internal resonance, not only between the music and the texts, but also between the texts themselves, acting as a musical harbinger of imagery and themes recurrent in the cycle such as
nightfall, descent, sinking, darkness, the underworld, and the river Styx. In contrast to Savenko’s interpretation of the cycle as ‘ascending steps’, this hints at the reverse, namely ‘descending steps’, perhaps implying from the outset that, over the course of the cycle, the process is one of stepping downwards into a hypnagogic world of darkness and shadow. This does not negate Savenko’s notion of stepping from ‘existence to blissful disappearance’; nor is ‘descent’ necessarily more pessimistic than ‘ascent’ when considered in the context of Greek antiquity that is often alluded to in the poems selected by Silvestrov (as opposed to traditional Christian iconography that depicts Hell as ‘down’ and Heaven as ‘up’). It is in this (half-)light that the somewhat strange expression ‘Stygian tenderness’, appearing twice in the cycle, begins to make sense: the transition from life to death being one of bliss and tenderness, but perhaps also one of ‘tenderness and hopelessness’, as suggested in the final lines Tyutchev’s *Last Love* which was originally intended to end the cycle and is examined in greater detail below (see section 4.3.5).

Much of Silvestrov’s music from around 1970 onwards features shifting, fluid, deceptively simple musical structures, which constantly undermine the listener’s musical memory, resulting in a vague half-recognition of gestures. One way in which Silvestrov achieves this is by mutating musical gestures so that instead of an exact repeat of any recognisable thematic fragment what is actually heard is a slightly altered yet still familiar version of the original gesture. In ‘Dedication’, one such gesture occurs in the vocal melody between bars 12 and 14, acting as a type of cadential motif between sections of contrasting thematic material (Ex. 4.2). This appears three times in the vocal part, becoming increasingly drawn out and disconnected,

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284 For example, ‘evening sinks into the nocturnal darkness’ (Baratynsky); ‘life and movement have settled into the unsteady dusk’ (Tyutchev); ‘the blind swallow returns to her hall of shadows’ (Mandelstam).
with slight intervalllic and harmonic alterations that further interfere with the listener’s perception of the gesture as a recognisable thematic motif (Exx. 4.2-4.4). There is also a final appearance in the piano postlude between bars 50 and 52, so fully dissolved into the closing material as to be barely noticeable, and perhaps better described as a sort of echo of the original gesture, or, indeed, as a mutilated memory or reflection of it, in Borges’s phraseology (Ex. 4.5).


Example 4.4 Silvestrov, Stupen, ‘Dedication’, bars 31-35.
Example 4.5 Silvestrov, *Stupeni*, ‘Dedication’, final occurrence of the gesture (shown in bracket) in the piano part, bars 50-52.

The process of thematic/motivic disintegration shown in Exx. 4.2-4.5 is arguably the essential technique employed by Silvestrov in *Stupeni*. It is one of the primary means by which he ensures that his half-recognised sound-world suggests something tantalisingly out of reach.
Through the manipulation and incremental disintegration of identifiable motivic gestures and the dissolving of richly-voiced tonal harmonies into a sea of euphonious overtones, Silvestrov constructs an aural landscape that, like Tarkovsky’s depiction of the Strugatsky brothers’ Zone, is both familiar yet alien, shrouding the unfamiliar in the guise of the familiar.

Further to this musical resonance, there is a corresponding internal resonance in the poetry which is unlocked through the use of this musical gesture, and which is not necessarily obvious when studying the poetry alone. The lines set are the second, fourth, the last word (‘inexplicably’ [‘неизъяснимо’]) of the seventh, and the eighth lines of the poem, so it is clear that they do not all correspond to line breaks in the original poem. However, the sentiments they bring together have a clear internal reflection:

Не кляни же меня, не кляни!  Do not curse me, do not curse!

Как те невозвратные дни…  Like those irretrievable days…

[…] неизъяснимо,  […] inexplicably,
Невозвратимо… прости!  Irreversibly… forgive (me)!

The resonance (particularly in Russian) of the words ‘irretrievable’ [‘невозвратный’] and ‘irreversibly’ [‘невозвратимо’], and the mirror between the imperatives ‘do not curse’ [‘не кляни’] and ‘forgive’ [‘прости’] are of course present in Blok’s poem, but they are highlighted by Silvestrov’s musical treatment (see Exx. 4.3-4.5 above). There is a degree of poetic ambiguity here: the imperative form ‘прости’ [prostit] could refer to two separate infinitives, ‘простить’ [prostit’], meaning ‘to forgive’ or ‘to pardon’, and ‘проститься’
[prostit'sya], meaning ‘to say goodbye (to)’, or ‘to bid farewell (to)’. Given that Silvestrov appended this song to Stupeni in memory of his wife Larissa Bondarenko after her premature death, the sentiments of ‘forgiveness’ and ‘farewell’ are both eminently applicable, lending a new aura to the poem as a whole – what was masterful poetic ambiguity in Blok has taken on an inclusive meaning through its synthesis with Silvestrov’s music and his own personal circumstances.

The song originally dedicated to Bondarenko, a setting of Mandelstam’s ‘Sleeplessness. Homer. Tight Sails’, offers quite a different sentiment from the one found in Blok’s contemplative, mournful ‘Dedication’. It features the first and third stanzas of Mandelstam’s poem, omitting the second (given for reference in italics):

**Бессонница. Гомер. Тугие паруса**  
Бессонница. Гомер. Тугие паруса.  
Я список кораблей прочел до середины:  
Сей длинный выводок, сей поезд журавлиный,  
Что над Элладою когда-то поднялся.

**Sleeplessness. Homer. Taut sails**  
Sleeplessness. Homer. Taut sails.  
The list of ships I’ve read half way:  
This long flock, this train of cranes,  
That over Greece once rose.

**Как журавлинный клин в чужие рубежи**  
На головах царей божественная пена –  
Куда плывете вы? Когда бы не Елена,  
Что Троя вам, одна, ахейские мужи?

**Cranes like a wedge driven into foreign lands**  
Upon the head of kings a Godly foam –  
To where do you sail? If there was no Helen,  
What is Troy to you, alone, Achaean men?

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285 A similar play on these words occurs at the very end of Tolstoy’s Kreutzer Sonata [Kreytserova Sonata], as Pozdnyshev puns on the narrator’s ‘Proshchayte’ (from ‘proshchat'sya’, the imperfective verbal form of ‘prostit'sya’ meaning ‘to say goodbye’) by responding ‘Da, prostit’, meaning ‘Yes, forgive me’, but also ‘Yes, goodbye’; the Oxford Russian Dictionary (fourth edition) defines ‘prostit’ as ‘to forgive, pardon’, but also offers a definition of ‘prosti(te)!’ as an obsolete form of ‘goodbye’.
Silvestrov’s musical setting is also significantly different from the fragmentary, tremulous oscillating intervals found in ‘Dedication’, favouring arpeggiated triplet figures that cushion an expansive vocal melody in the richly-voiced harmonies they outline. Similar textures are found in almost all the other songs in the cycle, with the exception of the final song, a setting of another Mandelstam poem, ‘I Have Forgotten the Word that I Wanted to Say’, which has far greater textural similarities with ‘Dedication’.

4.3.2 ‘Elegy’

The second song of the cycle (originally the first), is one of two entitled ‘Elegy’ (Elegiya). The theme of death and mourning inherent in its title appears to follow on from the ruminations over separation in ‘Dedication’ and the focus on the death of a loved one emphasised by the dedicatee. It is a setting of an anonymous poem which, given its appearance alongside such a roster of canonised poets, contributes to the conflict between familiar and unfamiliar, recognised and misrecognised, that is central to Silvestrov’s practice. The poem itself contains imageries and themes typical of the cycle as a whole (repetitions added by Silvestrov are shown in italics):
The hushed, nocturnal dream-world created is characteristic of both the poetry set and the musical language employed by Silvestrov throughout the cycle. The references to antiquity are also a common characteristic, and phrase ‘stygian tenderness’ even appears again at the end of the cycle in the setting of Mandelstam’s ‘I Have Forgotten the Word I Wanted to Say’. Indeed, this linguistic resonance, coupled with the fact that both ‘Elegy’ and ‘I Have Forgotten the Word’ are in F minor, hint at the vestigial structure of the cycle before its alteration in the late 1990s. The parallels with the omitted setting of ‘Sleeplessness. Homer. Taught Sails’ are also apparent, particularly in the references to antiquity, ancient Greece, breaking waves, and the Black Sea (‘Colchis’ refers to an ancient region that corresponds to present-day Georgia’s Black Sea coast).

286 It must be noted, however, that in Silvestrov’s manuscript there appears a footnote stating ‘It is permitted to transpose this song up [but] only by half a tone’ (‘Vozmožno [sic.] transponirovat’ etu pesnu toľko na ½ tona vverkh’). Emphasis in original.
Further to the internal resonances of its poetic language and thematic imagery, ‘Elegy’ also features a number of compositional techniques that are crucial to Silvestrov’s illusory musical language. At the very outset, the piano introduction provides a good example of how Silvestrov slowly disintegrates his own musical language from an echo of textures and gestures that are generic to 19th-century romanticism, into a semi-decomposed sea of overtones and dissonances. Starting with a conventional arpeggiated outline of the tonic key, the introduction slowly dissolves, rhythmically and harmonically. By the eighth bar, all that is left is a relatively static, dissonant echo of the harmonic, rhythmic, and textural patterns that define the musical language of the opening bars (Ex. 4.6).
The arpeggic pattern that defines the opening bars is a textural trope familiar from any number of 19th-century salon pieces and lieder. As early as the second bar, its rhythmic identity begins to fragment along with the harmonic language, which is interrupted by the introduction of a non-diatomic D natural in the third bar. Both the arpeggic texture and the clear F minor tonality are almost totally dissolved, leaving only fragmentary traces of the original texture. The heavy use of sustaining pedal ensures that this process appears smooth and almost imperceptible. Rather than any abrupt rhythmic fragmentation or harsh harmonic dissonance, the effect is one of a gradual blurring of conventional gestures – a technique
Silvestrov had developed previously, and which is particularly well demonstrated in the opening of his String Quartet No. 1 of 1974.

In addition to this incremental dissolving of rhythmic and harmonic textures, the other main technique that Silvestrov uses to create his liminal sound-world involves minute alterations to melodic phrases and motifs, as in ‘Dedication’. Throughout Stupeni, songs which appear to have conventional strophic structures are in fact through-composed without exact repetition. While the gradual disintegration of the cadential phrase in ‘Dedication’ (see Exx. 4.2-4.5) served as a good introduction to Silvestrov’s musical language, ‘Elegy’ clearly illustrates how minute alterations to his phrases undermine the aural perception of the listener in a way that is almost imperceptible. The song is essentially split into two verses that correspond to the two stanzas of the original poem. Though each stanza is set to similar musical material, they are in fact not literally strophic at all. The most effective way of displaying the nature of these minute alterations is through a parallel presentation of the vocal melody of each of the two verses (Ex. 4.7).
Example 4.7 Silvestrov, ‘Elegy’, Stupeni, vocal melody of verses I and II.

(Moderato con moto \( \cdot = 104 \))

Verse I

Verse II

Где-то шепчутся волны прилива, где-то вторят ночныеми

И(с) стигийскую нежность замена умягчают полнчныеми

ка-дыш, взырываются с плеском и гремящим в ползунках

плы-ны. И в Колхиде безбежно зелёной мне ан-
As Ex. 4.7 shows, the two verses are far from identical and in no way strophic, although they do share enough material to be perceived as such. Even where the melodic lines are identical (as in the third or seventh bars of the extract), there are still discrepancies in dynamics, articulation, and in Silvestrov’s fastidiously notated fluctuations in tempo. The second verse is also a full bar longer than the first because the whole last line of the second stanza is repeated, rather than just the final word (as was the case in the previous verse) leaving the structure asymmetrical. As a result, the listener’s expectations are undermined, but since the extension
of the phrase is built on similar material to that heard previously, the disturbance remains unobtrusive, and it is difficult to pinpoint what exactly has shifted.

This is in no small part facilitated by the constantly mutating nature of the piano accompaniment. Indeed, the piano part shifts so constantly and minutely that it can be hard to illustrate without simply printing the entire score. Ex 4.8a and Ex 4.8b provide some demonstrable instances from the first lines of each verse, including some well-camouflaged harmonic substitutions, which pass relatively unnoticed. Besides the slightly modified vocal melody, harmonic substitutions in the piano part are highlighted in red, while alterations to texture and voicing are shown in blue.

Example 4.8b Silvestrov, Stupeni, ‘Elegy’, bars 30-36.

The shifts in texture and voicing are unobtrusive and, on a background level, fairly negligible, but they serve to constantly undermine aural memory and perception. Though the passage presented in Ex. 4.8b sounds familiar enough to be perceived as the same material, in reality it is entirely different in almost every aspect from the passage given in Ex. 4.8a. But because of the subtlety of the alterations, it becomes very difficult for a listener to accurately identify what exactly is different. What one hears and remembers is, upon closer examination, to use Borges’s words again, ‘a crepuscular and no doubt falsified and mutilated memory or reflection’, of the original passage. This is particularly well illustrated by the harmonic substitutions, which, when presented in tandem, are surprisingly divergent from one another (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4 Silvestrov, Stupeni, ‘Elegy’, harmonic substitutions bars 10-16 and 30-36.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bars 10-16</th>
<th>F minor</th>
<th>F minor 4/2</th>
<th>D flat</th>
<th>G flat</th>
<th>E flat 7</th>
<th>C 7</th>
<th>A minor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bars 30-36</td>
<td>D flat</td>
<td>F minor</td>
<td>D flat</td>
<td>G flat</td>
<td>C 7</td>
<td>D flat</td>
<td>A minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the seven-bar passages, three bars preserve the same harmonic structure, but, as shown in Ex. 4.8a and Ex. 4.8b, these bars exhibit variations in texture, chord voicing, and tempo fluctuations. To these two verses can be added the lengthy piano postlude that functions as a sort of imaginary third verse without text – a memory or echo of the song itself that disintegrates harmonically and motivically towards the final bars. The postlude is essentially a modified repetition of the expanded second verse, synthesised with certain elements from the first (Ex. 4.8c, cf. Exx. 4.8a and 4.8b).

Example 4.8c Silvestrov, Stupeni, ‘Elegy’, piano postlude, bars 52-58.

Again, harmonic alterations are shown in red and primarily textural ones are shown in blue. The progression from G flat to C major dominant ninth between bars 55 and 56 preserves the harmonic movement of the second verse, albeit with significant textural variation in the left hand. Of greater interest, however, are bars 53 and 57, as these synthesise harmonic elements from both verses. Bar 53 preserves the F minor of the second verse (bar 31), but also introduces an E flat in the bass, producing a passing echo of the F minor 4/2 chord that appeared in the first verse (bar 11). Bar 57 largely preserves the D flat major harmony of the
second verse (bar 35), but because of the prominent suspended C in the bass it also acts as a murky reflection of the C major dominant seventh chord that appeared in the first verse (bar 15). This results in a semi-familiar and somewhat hallucinogenic aural landscape which is constantly shifting and breathing, and can never be seen directly but only, as it were, peripherally.

In addition to the harmonic and textural variations highlighted, Exx. 4.8a, 4.8b, 4.8c and figure 4.4 also point to the somewhat bizarre nature of Silvestrov’s harmonic language. Though it sounds tonal, functional, diatonic and familiar, it is actually often unconventional and unpredictable. A comparison with Gabriel Fauré may be appropriate here, for both composers employ a complex, and in Fauré’s case, radical harmonic language that sounds deceptively simple, transparent and conventional by virtue of their impeccable voice-leading, which cushions any potentially disruptive harmonic shifts. Fauré’s Nocturne in F sharp minor, Op. 104, No. 1 provides a particularly extreme example of his use of harmony (see in particular bars 44–58), but perhaps a better illustration of the parallels with Silvestrov is provided by the closing bars of Fauré’s Nocturne No. 13, Op. 119, where what is ostensibly the same melodic fragment is unobtrusively reharmonised five times in a row (Ex. 4.9).\footnote{For more on Fauré’s elusive style, see Carlo Cabellero, \textit{Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics} (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), in particular Chapter 3, ‘Innovation, Tradition’, 57–76.}

(Andante \textit{\textunderscore} = 63)

Two further idiosyncrasies concerning the vocality of the singer appear at the end of the second verse. One of these is peculiar to ‘Elegy’, namely a rhythmically modified echo of the characteristic melodic fragment that has previously been heard at various pitches throughout the song and is directed to be sung ‘with a closed mouth’ [\textit{zakritim rtom}], or put simply, hummed (Ex. 4.10, bars 51-52).

This hummed vocal melody serves as a slightly distorted echo of the melodic line heard in the piano accompaniment in the preceding two bars (49-50), which is itself an echo of the same triplet-ornamented melodic gesture heard on a number of occasions in the voice, notably at the end of the first verse (cf. Ex. 4.7). The fact that a similar gesture has been heard several times
before at different pitches and with a slightly modified rhythmic pattern contributes to the
effect of the textless, hummed refrain, creating the sensation of a song half-remembered and
absent-mindedly recalled.

The other vocal idiosyncrasy present in Ex. 4.10 comes immediately before the hummed
refrain, at the end of the second verse. The soprano is required to descend to the lowest points
of the register, singing an F sharp and a G sharp below middle C,\textsuperscript{288} but is directed to do so
‘almost in a whisper’ [\textit{pochti shopotom} ([sic.], \textit{shepotom})]. Furthermore, there is a footnote
containing an instruction to the performer which states, ‘The deep notes, F sharp and G sharp,
shouldn’t be heard – they must be half-sung, supported by the doubling of the melodic line in
the piano part creating the illusion of very quiet singing [\textit{illyuziya tishayshego peniya}]’. This
type of half-sung, half-whispered vocality is not unusual in \textit{Stupeni}. Many of the songs contain
similar directions: in ‘Dedication’, for example, a footnote specifies ‘the song should be
performed as if it were not sung, but very intensely spoken’,\textsuperscript{289} while at one point in the
removed ‘Sleepless. Homer. Taught Sails’, the singer is directed to ‘inhale the air with a quiet
sound [\textit{s tikhim shumom vdomhnut' vozdukh}]’. Though these vocal directions are potentially
quite obscure, listening to recordings of Silvestrov singing his own songs and accompanying
himself at the piano (such as those mentioned above, cf. fn. 235) gives an insight into his
intentions, almost all of these home recordings being vocalised somewhere between
whispering and singing. In addition, almost every song is marked \textit{sotto voce}, the one exception
being the sixth in the cycle, another ‘Elegy’, this time on words by Pushkin, though given the

\textsuperscript{288} This is a potential explanation for Silvestrov’s direction that the song may be transposed up ‘only by half a
tone’, though it does not sufficiently explain the composer’s emphasis on the word ‘only’.

\textsuperscript{289} In the absence of a composer’s manuscript for this song, the direction is translated from the German as it
appears in the Belaiëff proof [‘das Lied wird so vorgetragen, als ob es nicht gesungen, sondern sehr intensiv
gesprochen wäre’].

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ubiquity of the direction, not only in *Stupeni* but also in *Quiet Songs* (where every song is marked *sotto voce* without exception) it is possible that this is merely an oversight. All these vocal idiosyncrasies create a hushed, semi-audible vocal sound that manifests as though half-whispered, half-sung, presumably in an attempt to enhance the sense of disorientation and to create the feeling that the music is taking place in some zone between reality and memory.

Finally, in a similar way to the end of ‘Dedication’ and a great number of the subsequent songs, the piano postlude that closes the song gradually disintegrates harmonically, melodically, and rhythmically, coming to rest after a series of dissonances and suspensions in E major – almost as far away from F minor as is conceivable in terms of the conventions of tonality. It is a fundamental feature of Silvestrov’s harmonic and tonal structures that they sound simplistic, at times even naïve, but are in fact quite unusual. Though the music almost always sounds tonal, it is often difficult to define precisely the key or the main tonal areas, or to predict the harmonic progressions. The ear is frustrated by what it cannot, yet feels as though it should be able to, recognise.

**4.3.3 ‘What Are You For, Days?’**

The fifth song of the cycle, a setting of Yevgeny Baratynsky’s ‘What Are You For, Days?’ [*Na chto vi, dni...*], provides a good point at which to continue the discussion of Silvestrov’s unusual harmonic and tonal language, and how this contributes to his aesthetic of illusion and distorted memory and reality. Silvestrov sets Baratynsky’s poem in its entirety, without any alterations. As expected, the text is firmly aligned with the other ten poems set in the cycle in terms of its thematic content and poetic imagery. It depicts the transitional stages between day
and night, between waking and dreaming, and, in a broader and more abstract sense, it
considers the intangible relationship between existence and meaning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>На что вы, дни!</th>
<th>What Are You For, Days?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>На что вы, дни! Юдольный мир явленья</td>
<td>What are you for, days! The vale of the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Свои не изменит!</td>
<td>Will never change its phenomena!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Все ведомы, и только повторенья</td>
<td>All of which are known, and the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Грядущее сулит.</td>
<td>Promises only repetition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Не даром ты металась и кипела,</td>
<td>Not for nothing did you toss about and seethe,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Развитием спеша,</td>
<td>Developing in haste,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Свой подвиг ты свершила прежде тела,</td>
<td>Your deed you achieved before the body,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Безумная душа!</td>
<td>Mad soul!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>И тесный круг подлунных впечатлений</td>
<td>And having long ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Сомкнувши давно,</td>
<td>Closed the tight circle of sublunary impressions,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Под веяньем возвратных сновидений</td>
<td>Under the breeze of recurring dreams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ты дремлешь; а оно</td>
<td>You sleep; but it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Бессмысленно глядит, как утро встанет</td>
<td>Meaninglessly watches, as morning wakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Без нужды ночь сменя;</td>
<td>Needlessly replacing night;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Как в мрак ночной бесплодный вечер канет,</td>
<td>As into the gloom of night barren evening sinks,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Венец пустого дня!</td>
<td>The crown of an empty day!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The formal, tonal, and harmonic architecture of ‘What Are You For, Days?’ is more
amorphous and consequently more complex than that of ‘Dedication’ or ‘Elegy’. Very loosely,
the overarching structure can be described as ABCB\textsuperscript{1}C\textsuperscript{1}. These divisions correspond to the

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musical settings of the four verses (ABCB\(^1\)) and the piano postlude (C\(^1\)). But Silvestrov’s compositional technique is far less rigid than this scheme suggests. As shall be demonstrated below, fragments and echoes of all the sections bleed into one another: elements of A are half-recalled in C, and many harmonic and melodic features of A, B and C are dissolved and subsumed in the postlude, C\(^1\). But although this structural shorthand does not fully do justice to the complexity of construction, it does begin to elucidate a form of internally cyclical construction that constantly echoes itself without ever presenting precise repetition.

Section A, despite being distinct from much of what follows, presents a number of harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic gestures in a static and fragmentary form. In the course of the song, these elements eventually coalesce and evolve into the main thematic content of sections B, B\(^1\), C and C\(^1\). Because of the elusiveness of Silvestrov’s harmony, the motivic fragments are immediately easier to trace. The first few phrases (containing the setting of the first two lines of the poem) are given in Ex. 4.11, with two salient motivic fragments highlighted (x and y).
Example 4.11 Silvestrov, Stupeni, ‘What Are You For, Days?’, bars 1-7.

Innocuous as they may seem, these motivic fragments are fundamental to the construction of the song. Motif $x$ is essentially an interval of a falling fifth preceded by a triplet-quaver upbeat, while $y$ is a stepwise descending pattern with a strong dotted rhythmic identity that then ascends an augmented fourth. A further motivic fragment follows in bars 9-11, but as it is essentially an expanded manifestation of $y$ (sharing the salient features of a dotted descending pattern culminating in an upward leap), it has been designated $y'$ rather than $z$ (Ex. 4.12).

Motif \( y' \) becomes the basis for the setting of the first two lines of the second and fourth verses (sections B and B' respectively). Rather than an ‘echo’, these passages are perhaps better described as a metamorphosis of the motivic fragments \( y \) and \( y' \). They preserve the characteristic dotted and triplet rhythmic patterns, the descending contour, and the upward leap that all have their genesis in \( y \) (Ex. 4.13a and Ex. 4.13b).
Example 4.13a Silvestrov, Stupeni, What Are You For, Days?, bars 12-14.
Motifs x and y then become bound together to form the closing phrases of the second and fourth verses (sections B and B¹ respectively), creating an echo not only of the opening lines but also of the passages that occur immediately before (see Ex. 4.13a and Ex. 4.13b). This ensures that all the key motivic fragments presented in section A resonate throughout the song (Ex. 4.13c and Ex. 4.13d).

Example 4.13d Silvestrov, *Stupeni*, ‘What Are You For, Days?’ bars 30-34.
As with ‘Elegy’, although both pairs of examples (4.13a and 4.13b, and 4.13c and 4.13d) share the same melodic contours, they differ fundamentally in many ways: in their shifting time signatures, their rhythmic values, their harmonic progressions, and not least their tonal setting – indeed Exx. 4.13b and 4.13d, despite ostensibly setting the same material as Exx. 4.13a and 4.13c respectively, are a semitone higher. While the technique of minute and almost imperceptible motivic and harmonic fluctuation is present in much the same way as it was in ‘Elegy’, this radical tonal displacement renders the uncanny feeling of a simultaneous similarity and disconnect between sections B and B¹ all the more intense.

Considering the first verse of Baratynsky’s poem and the late-socialist context into which it was transplanted by virtue of Silvestrov’s setting, these drastic tonal shifts, masked by an illusion of repetition, take on a tropological significance. It seems appropriate, if slightly ironic, that the motivic fragments y and y’ correspond respectively to the lines ‘will never change’ ['Свой не изменит!'] and ‘the future / Promises only repetition’ ['Только повторенья / Грядущее сулит']. The translation of Baratynsky’s first two lines given above does not convey the full semantic detail of the original Russian, skimming over the nuance of the word ‘явление’, a genitive plural form of the word ‘явление’, meaning ‘phenomenon’ or ‘occurrence’, but also used in the context of the theatre to describe a stage scene. Baratynsky’s poem essentially describes the contrast between the seemingly pointless repetitions of physical, phenomenal life, and the richness of the inner spiritual life. He uses the body and the soul as synecdochal representatives of the physical and the spiritual worlds. Underneath the meaninglessness of the visible, tangible and apparently immutable world there exists the possibility of an alternative, noumenal, intangible spiritual life. Silvestrov’s motivic, harmonic, and tonal alterations are similarly masked by an illusory veil of apparent repetition.
that belies the constant yet almost invisible evolution of the music. The setting thus reveals an extremely complex, possibly unconscious form of word-painting, if it can be so called. But it also acts as a strong parallel to Yurchak’s evaluation of late Soviet society in which a seeming immutability of form, promising only repetition, is undermined by a subcutaneous and unpredictable metamorphosis. As a cultural product of the late Stagnation, it both reflects and confirms this paradoxical state, and contributes to the vast social-cultural metamorphosis that was taking place in the 1970s and early 1980s, which eventually resulted in the collapse of the Soviet order.

One further trait that ‘What Are You For, Days?’ exhibits to a greater degree than either ‘Dedication’ or ‘Elegy’ (or, for that matter, any other song in the cycle) is a structuring technique that involves starting with large declamatory gestures and statements of motivic fragments that then go through a process of coagulation, forming more coherent motivic and harmonic entities, before being fragmented and dissolved into nothing. This principle became an important feature of Silvestrov’s compositions of the 1970s and early 1980s, and is perhaps best illustrated by the Symphony No. 5.

The symphony starts almost as if in the middle of a process of cacophonic upheaval. A series of fragmentary and unconnected thematic and rhythmic gestures emerge from a tensive soundscape of declamatory cluster chords in a manner not at all dissimilar to the portentous opening of Scriabin’s *Prometheus: Poem of Fire*, Op. 60. Indeed, a comparison of the opening clusters shows the commonality of the two composers’ expansive and unstable harmonic language at the opening of their respective symphonies – a sea of primordial overtones from which the symphonies emerge. The crucial difference is that Scriabin’s dramaturgical goal
tends towards transcendence and ecstasy, whereas Silvestrov’s music typically dissolves back into the nothingness from which it emerged.

The opening of Silvestrov’s symphony is perhaps analogous to a musical ‘big-bang’, where all the elements of the symphony erupt into being simultaneously and incoherently. Indeed, the cosmological analogy is quite appropriate, considering Silvestrov’s various references to some of his own works as ‘cosmic pastorals’, or as Schmelz renders it, ‘not just an imagined landscape, but an imagined landscape of epic, cosmic scope.’\(^{290}\) From this inchoate explosion of creative matter there gradually materialises a dream-like sound-world in which the fragments coalesce and develop into various themes. In their more developed, coherent forms, the themes of the symphony emerge as echoes of their initial fragmentary statements, responding to the opening cacophony before once again dissolving into the same mass of euphonious cluster chords that opened the symphony. Conceptually (at least for Silvestrov), the bulk of the symphony appears to take place in a zone between existence and non-existence. As such, it is possible to suggest a diagrammatic representation for Silvestrov’s musical process that ties it to the process described by Kustov to illustrate his ‘Necromethod’ (figure 4.5, cf. figure 4.1).

Figure 4.5 Adaptation of Kustov’s ‘Necromethod’ to Silvestrov’s ‘postlude’ compositions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIFE</th>
<th>ZONE of the CODA</th>
<th>DEATH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MUSIC</td>
<td></td>
<td>ECHO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Prelude
2. Beginning of Postlude
3. End of Postlude
4. Silence

This process, which lies at the heart of the trajectory of Silvestrov’s Fifth Symphony, is arguably a macrocosmic version of what occurs in ‘What Are You For, Days’. It is central to Silvestrov’s somewhat vaguely-defined ‘postlude’ style which Schmelz considers as emerging from 1980 onwards, and which he quotes Silvestrov variously describing as, ‘an answer to a text, musical or historical […] an echo’, as ‘responding to something already uttered’, as ‘like a collection of echoes, a form assuming the existence of a certain text that does not really enter into the given text, but is connected to it’, and as ‘open not to the end, as is more usual, but to the beginning’.²⁹¹

Composed concurrently with the Fifth Symphony – arguably Silvestrov’s most comprehensive ‘postlude’ composition – Stupeni is also imbued with the aesthetic of the postlude. Although the majority of the songs (with the exception of ‘What Are You For, Days?’) do not start with such declamatory gestures as the Fifth Symphony, many feature lengthy piano postludes that respond to the song that has just been sung while the singer remains tacit. Figure 4.6 shows the

proportions of these piano postludes in relation to the rest of the songs (the table includes the subsequently removed ‘Sleeplessness. Homer. Taut Sails’ for the sake of comparison).

**Figure 4.6** Silvestrov, *Stupeni*, length of piano postludes proportional to total song length (bars).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song Title</th>
<th>Total Length</th>
<th>Piano Postlude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ‘Dedication’</td>
<td>61 bars</td>
<td>25 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ‘Elegy’</td>
<td>83 bars</td>
<td>31 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[‘Sleeplessness. Homer. Taught Sails’]</td>
<td>[95 bars]</td>
<td>[38 bars]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ‘My Soul’</td>
<td>125 bars</td>
<td>37 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ‘The Blue-Grey Shadows Have Moved’</td>
<td>69 bars</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ‘What Are You For, Days?’</td>
<td>49 bars</td>
<td>15 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. ‘Elegy’</td>
<td>96 bars</td>
<td>20 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. ‘O My Prophetic Soul’</td>
<td>61 bars</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. ‘Sisters – Heaviness and Tenderness’</td>
<td>68 bars</td>
<td>17 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. ‘To Sleep’</td>
<td>143 bars</td>
<td>See analysis below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. ‘Last Love’</td>
<td>56 bars</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. ‘I Have Forgotten the Word I Wanted to Say’</td>
<td>195 bars</td>
<td>36 bars</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.6 shows that the majority of the songs in the cycle feature substantial piano postludes. The exceptions are the fourth, seventh, and tenth songs. Although these do contain shorter
closings phrases in which the piano accompaniment typically disintegrates and fades into nothing, they are not built on references to previously-stated thematic material, and are not substantial enough to be considered ‘postludes’. As suggested above, these piano postludes can be considered microcosmic illustrations of a fundamental aspect of Silvestrov’s aesthetic and compositional process, which was writ large in the Symphony No. 5. But because of the semantic content of the poetic texts, the postludes in Stupeni arguably bring Silvestrov’s aesthetic into sharper focus, because they respond not only to musical features but also to the vocalised textual element after it has fallen silent. The addition of this semantic layer renders the articulation of Silvestrov’s ‘postlude’ concept more acute than in his symphonic or instrumental compositions, as well as highlighting attendant conceptual concerns such as memory and the perception of reality over time.

4.3.4 ‘To Sleep’

Nowhere in the cycle is this better illustrated than in the ninth song, a setting of John Keats’s sonnet of 1817, ‘To Sleep’, rendered in Russian as ‘К сну’ [K snu], and thus often erroneously back-translated as ‘To the Dream’. The fact that the poem is a translation into Russian from another language renders ‘To Sleep’ unique within the context of Stupeni.292 The translation automatically alienates the poem from its origins, and this is reinforced by the fact that, unlike Pushkin, Baratynsky, Blok, Solugub, Tyutchev, or Mandelstam, Keats’s poetry is relatively unknown in Russia.

292 Though not within all of Silvestrov’s output – the same observations about the implications of translation can be made of his other notable setting of Keats in his 1983 cantata Ode to the Nightingale, or in his settings of Keats and Shelley in Quiet Songs.
This leads to a confusing listening and performing experience in which a well-known poem in the English language is transplanted into a context in which it is largely unknown. Furthermore, a large part of the poem is not set in Silvestrov’s song, and the lines which are uttered are estranged from their author by virtue of having been transplanted into another language, consequently rendering the poem alien also to those who know the original. This complicates the question of where exactly an authorial voice lies, if anywhere at all. In many ways, it is no longer Keats but a mutilated, fragmented echo of Keats: something uncannily similar to Keats, but not quite so. Thus, Silvestrov’s setting of ‘To Sleep’ presents audiences and performers with not only a temporal transplanting of a classic poem into the present, but also a linguistic metamorphosis, rendering the concept of memory and the perception of reality through time and space even more unstable. Such instability of perception has particularly stark parallels with the central thematic tropes that underpin Tarkovsky’s *The Mirror*.

To maintain continuity with the musical examples, the Russian translation of Keats’s sonnet set by Silvestrov is here back-translated into English, and consequently is essentially an unpoetic paraphrase of the English-language original:
As expected, Keats’s primary themes and images, including sleep, dreaming, darkness and anxiety reflect the overarching thematic concerns of the cycle. Silvestrov’s treatment of this poem is of particular interest because he presents the full poem, as above (including the italicisation), at the head of the score. The italicised segment denotes the lines of Keats’s sonnet that are not sung, and it is accompanied by footnote that states: ‘only a fragment of the poem is used; however, the performers must remember the omitted text (the seven lines marked), which, as if dissolving into the music, becomes its subtext’ [Ispol’zovan fragment
This type of unconventional performance direction perhaps has some distant kinship with
Scriabin’s bizarre notes to his performers, including ‘l’épouvante surgit, elle se mêle à la
danse délirante’ [‘a surging horror, melting into the delirious dance’], or ‘avec une douceur de
plus en plus caressante et empoisonnée’ [‘with a softness that grows ever more caressing and
poisonous’]. These directions are taken from Piano Sonatas Nos 6 and 9 respectively, which,
along with Sonatas Nos 7, 8, and 10, were ‘conceived as preliminary studies for
[Mysterium]’ – a titanic choral-symphonic work that was to be performed in the foothills of
the Himalayas. Though Mysterium was never completed (indeed, it had barely even been
started before Scriabin died of blood poisoning on 27 April [N.S.] 1915), the theosophical
trajectory of Scriabin’s late works is well established. This form of quasi-religious mysticism
is expressed through a number of parameters, not least in Scriabin’s striving towards the
extremes of harmonic comprehensibility, but also in performance directions such as the two
given above, which appear to encourage a performer (and possibly the listener too) to
transcend into some other, immaterial, spiritual state of being that is outside (or even ‘vnye’)
the phenomenal world of the senses. Though Silvestrov never abandons himself to the
delirious, manic zeal that is often so unsettling in Scriabin’s music, he certainly does strive to

293 It is also worth noting that, in the Belaieff editorial proof (where the directions are given in German), there is a
somewhat liberal translation of this direction: ‘The marked fragment of the text is left out of the song. However,
the musicians must know this passage by heart and play it through in their heads, as if these seven lines were
dissolved in the music, becoming an unspoken thought’ [‘Das markierte Fragment des Textes wird im Lied
ausgelassen. Die Musiker müssen jedoch diesen Abschnitt auswendig kennen und im Kopf abspielen, als würden
diese sieben in der Musik aufgelöst Zeilen zu einem unausgesprochenen Gedanken werden’].
294 Valentina Rubcova (ed.), Klaviersonate Nr. 10, Opus 70 (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 2010), iv.
295 On various occasions he spoke of the limitations of the tempered chromatic scale-system and wished to
explore the possibilities of quarter tones and microtonality (though, of course, he was certainly not alone in
considering these possibilities, as the 1924 set of Three Quarter-Tone Studies for Two Pianos by Charles Ives
attests).
create a similarly otherworldly experience. The crucial difference is that Scriabin’s trajectory tends to surge manically upwards into an unknown and indefinable state, whereas Silvestrov’s flows gently from the past, a tangled web of echoes and distorted memories. Silvestrov’s performance directions, which, like the poetry he chooses to set, often touch upon memory, consciousness, and psychological process, are a fundamental part of his aesthetic.

The particular direction in ‘To Sleep’, also has implications for the composer-performer-audience relationship. The extent to which the performers can communicate the ‘subtext’ of the missing lines through the music (seemingly by some act of psychological will-power), and consequently the extent to which an audience will be aware of it, is presumably somewhat limited. As with Scriabin’s directions, the implication seems to be that such a direction is aimed at the performers themselves; it is the effect on the individual performer’s state of mind that is of more importance than any precise communication with an audience, in this instance. This not only contributes to the cycle’s extraordinary sense of intimacy, but also expresses an emphasis on the personal and the individual that started to gain prominence in the wake of Khrushchev’s reforms, highlighting a growing disparity between a desire for personal autonomy and the standard depiction of Soviet ‘people’, ‘workers’, or ‘revolutionaries’ in the authoritative discourse of the regime, which, by its very ideological parameters, prioritised the collective over the individual.

In structural terms, the exclusion of the central passage of the poem means that, in addition to a fairly long introduction and postlude that frame the song (23 bars and 33 bars respectively), there is also a lengthy piano interlude in the middle (26 bars in length, meaning that the voice

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296 Indeed, Scriabin said of Mysterium that ‘there will not be a single spectator. All will be participants.’ Quoted in Simon Morrison, Russian Opera and the Symbolist Movement (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002), 194.
remains unheard for well over half the song). Within the context of the performance direction considered above, this highlights the sense of flickering between memory and reality, sleeping and waking, by tampering with the narrative voice: at certain points it is a literal presence, uttered by the vocalist, while, at others, it exists only within the confines of the performers’ minds. This sense of dream-like incoherency is another example of the subtlety of Silvestrov’s response to his chosen texts. It is emphasised by the cascading, somnolent accompaniment which, despite its ostensibly tonal and functional characteristics, is in fact almost totally unpredictable, with its richly-voiced harmonies inconspicuously flowing in whichever direction the composer chooses. The unpredictable harmony is expressed through descending lines that disintegrate as they cascade downwards into a sea of sustained overtones. This creates a mood that is enticingly soporific, and simultaneously unstable and disturbing, reflecting perfectly the sense of drowsy anxiety so beautifully captured in Keats’s poem. Furthermore, the downward-spiralling triplets provide a clear musical expression of the ascending and descending spirals described by Savenko in her interpretation of the cycle’s title (see above), while also exhibiting a strong textural similarity to prominent helical triplet gestures occurring throughout the Symphony No. 5 (Ex. 4.14a and Ex. 4.14b).
4.3.5 ‘Last Love’ & ‘I Have Forgotten the Word I Wanted to Say’

To bring the analysis of Stupeni to a close, two further examples of Silvestrov’s approach to structural distortion will be considered. The first is provided by the penultimate song of the cycle, ‘Last Love’ [Poslednyaya lyubov’]. A cursory glance at the poetry set shows that it contains many of the thematic tropes and imageries that characterise Stupeni as a cycle – shadow, fading light, intimacy, tenderness, nostalgia, decline, decay and so on. The first consideration is that in introducing some repetition Silvestrov makes two minor changes to Tyutchev’s three-stanza poem (shown in italics):

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297 This texture and rhythmic figuration appears throughout the symphony, often cascading across the entire orchestra, but begins to emerge with some insistence from around bar 170.
Последняя любовь
О, как на склоне наших лет
Нежней мы любим и суеверней...
Сияй, сияй, прощальный свет
Любви последней, зари вечерней!

Полнеба обхватила тень,
Лишь там, на западе, бродит сиянье, —
Помедли, помедли, вечерний день,
Пролись, пролись, очарованье.
Помедли, помедли, вечерний день,
Пролись, пролись, очарованье.

Пуская скудеет в жилах кровь,
Но в сердце не скудеет нежность…
О ты, последняя любовь!
Ты и блаженство, и безнадежность.
блаженство, и безнадежность.

Last Love
O, how, in our declining years
More tenderly we love, more superstitiously…
Shine, shine, departing light
Of last love, of the setting sun!

Half the sky is shrouded in shadow
Only there, in the West, lingers the glow, –
Be slow, be slow, sunset,
Stay, stay, enchantment.
Be slow, be slow, sunset,
Stay, stay, enchantment.

Let the blood flow weak in the veins,
But in the heart tenderness will never grow weak...
O you, last love!
You are both bliss and hopelessness.
Bliss and hopelessness.

In a similar way to the alterations made to ‘Elegy’, these modifications immediately prohibit the song from being conventionally strophic by creating three entirely different verse structures: the first verse is unchanged from the original four lines; the second is transformed into a six-line structure by the repetition of the final two lines; and the third verse becomes an unusual four-and-a-half-line structure by repetition of the last three words, which also disrupts the original metre in a way that Sviridov was careful to avoid in his alterations to Esenin’s poetry (see Chapter 3).

This modest restructuring of the poetry serves as the initial basis for Silvestrov’s aesthetic of memory, misrecognition and nostalgia. Most obviously it renders a familiar poem somewhat
unfamiliar to the listener by transforming a predictable, formulaic, and easily recalled four-line verse structure into something slightly more mercurial and unpredictable, disrupting the listener’s recollection of the poem, and allowing Silvestrov to mix and dissolve his thematic fragments. It also enables him to highlight certain internal resonances in the poetry through thematic fragmentation and association, as he does in ‘Dedication’ (see discussion in section 4.3.1 and Exx. 4.2-4.5). For example, despite the structural modifications to Tyutchev’s poem, the last words of each verse are treated to the same thematic cadential idea, which serves both to associate the words ‘sunset’ [‘заря вечерней’, lit. ‘dawn of evening’], ‘enchantment’ [‘очарование’] and ‘bliss and hopelessness’ [‘блаженство и безнадежность’], and to re-introduce hints of strophic structuring, further obfuscating the listener’s sense of what exactly is being repeated or modified. The closing phrases of the first two verses are about as close to identical as Silvestrov typically manages, though they still feature some tiny modifications which undermine the sense of structural or musical memory: a slight rhythmic alteration in the vocal line, a minor extension of the phrase through a caesura and an extra beat in the piano part, and the further attenuation of dynamics from \( ppp \) to \( pp pp \), reflecting the word ‘enchantment’ [‘очарование’] (Ex. 4.15a and Ex. 4.15b).
Unlike these first two verses, which remain relatively similar, occurrences of this cadential phrase in the piano interlude and verse three are extended temporally and rhythmically. The piano also introduces a degree of ambiguity in bar 33 with shifts in time signature, and particularly through the flattening of the F sharp, which unsettles the predominantly tranquil
harmony of the song and both predicts and resonates with the repetition of the word ‘hopelessness’, which closes the song (Exx. 4.15c and 4.15d, cf. 4.15a and 4.15b).


![Image of Example 4.15c](image)


![Image of Example 4.15d](image)

The original poem was part of a cycle subsequently known as the Denisyeva Cycle, written in response to the illness and death of Tyutchev’s mistress Elena Denisyeva. These poems mostly concern themselves with conflicting notions of love and tragedy, or ‘bliss and hopelessness,’
in the case of ‘Last Love’, where Tyutchev reflects on the endurance of love in the face of old
age and death. One of Silvestrov’s responses to this is to use structural discontinuities to
dissolve the tonality of the song undemonstratively and incrementally. For example, the added
repetition of the final phrase, ‘bliss and hopelessness’, at the end of the song allows for a
creative musical response to this conflicted notion, which would not have been possible if the
original structure of the poem had been preserved. The first appearance of the phrase (bars 41-
43) is set in a relatively consonant, diatonic D major passing through familiar related keys (A
major, B minor, G major etc.) with a tonal melody, while the second appearance (bars 43-47)
is extended and set to an unsettled diminished harmony with the melody coloured by a
flattened second (as in Exx. 4.15c and 4.15d), in a somewhat madrigalian illustration of the
word ‘hopelessness’ ['безнадежность'] (Ex. 4.16). The musical drawing-out of
‘безнадежность’ also adds its own dimension to the poem, perhaps implying that
‘hopelessness’ associated with love in death ultimately overpowers, or at least lingers longer
than the ‘bliss’ ['блаженство'] also experienced by the poet.

*) Das Pedal nicht wechseln

20 December 1981
This instability, far from being dispelled in the piano’s final postlude (bars 48-56), is left unresolved. The piano passes from B minor, to G major, to an E minor seventh chord, before coming to a close on a B major chord. Though consonant, the progression is slightly unusual,\textsuperscript{298} and made all the more so by use of the sustaining pedal, which is to be held through the final three chords (this is doubly emphasised, not only with conventional pedal markings in the score, but also with a footnote before the final chord change from E minor to B major which states, ‘do not change the pedal – the new harmony must supersede the previous one’\textsuperscript{299}). The resulting effect of the sustaining pedal on the final chords is to create a horizontal build-up of clashing semitones (F sharp/natural, F sharp/G natural, D sharp/natural, D sharp/E natural, etc.). Although one hears the changes in harmony, the preceding overtones and harmonies linger and amalgamate to create a sort of euphonious bi-tonality which inscrutably blends tinges of major and minor tonalities (Ex. 4.17).


\textsuperscript{298} A similar and distinctly recognisable chord progression is found in the iconic first movement of Beethoven’s so-called ‘Moonlight’ Sonata, Op. 27 No. 2. This is not to suggest that Silvestrov is necessarily consciously attempting to evoke Beethoven (as Shostakovich does in his Viola Sonata Op. 147). Nonetheless, this shade of familiarity is likely to ‘cautiously touch the listener’s memory.’

\textsuperscript{299} ‘Pedal ne menyut’ – novaya garmoniya dolzhna sama vitesnit’ predidushchuyu’.

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This final dissolving of any potential resolution into a dense cloud of overtones and obscure
tonality is a common feature in Stupeni, as it is in many of Silvestrov’s works, and it is one of
the techniques employed to disrupt sound worlds that should be (and ostensibly are) familiar.
It ensures that there are no concrete end-points in much of Silvestrov’s music, but instead, a
gradual disintegration into space. This speaks directly to the composer’s own concept of the
‘zone of the coda’, and can be defined with reference to Kustov’s zone of ‘absolute dying’ as
representing an on-going process of decay that has no definite form but resides in a liminal
realm of neither living nor dead. Even the Tyutchev poem chosen by Sviridov considers a
process of decline rather the end result of such a process. Such aesthetic preoccupations in the
artistic and cultural produce of the generations who came of age in the 1950s and ’60s were
intimately connected to the political and social state of the Soviet Union during the Stagnation
era: a state of decline in which authoritative political discourse was not necessarily irrelevant,
yet also not particularly effectual; a state in which appearance superseded meaning, breeding a
sense of non-reality; a state of political and social absolute dying.

The final song in the cycle, a setting of Osip Mandelstam’s, ‘I Have Forgotten the Word I
Wanted to Say’ (also commonly referred to by the title ‘The Swallow’ [Lastochka]) is by far
the longest, running to almost twice the length of the next longest song. As such, it provides
the most sustained example of Silvestrov’s technique of structural and motivic distortion.
Unlike a number of the other songs, which only make use of fragments or extracts of the
poems set, Silvestrov here sets Mandelstam’s six-stanza poem in its entirety, without
alteration:
[Я слово позабыл]
Я слово позабыл, что я хотел сказать.
Слепая ласточка в чертог теней вернётся,
На крыльях срезанных, с прозрачными играть.
В беспамятстве ночная песнь поётся.

Не слышно птиц. Бессмертник не цветёт,
Прозрачны гривы табуна ночного.
В сухой реке пустой челнок плывёт,
Среди кузнецов беспамятствует слово.

И медленно растёт как бы шатёр иль храм,
То вдруг прокинется безумной Антигоной,
То мёртвой ласточкой бросается к ногам
С стигийской нежностью и веткою зеленой.

О, если бы вернуть и зрячих пальцев стыд,
И выпуклую радость узнаванья.
Я так боюсь рыданья Аонил,
Тумана, звона и зиянь.

А смертным власть дана любить и узнавать,
Для них и звук в персты прольётся,
Но я забыл, что я хочу сказать,
И мысль бесплотная в чертог теней вернётся.

Всё не о том прозрачна твердит,
Всё ласточка, подружка, Антигона...
А на губах, как чёрный лёд, горит
Стигийского воспоминанье звона.

[I Have Forgotten the Word]
I have forgotten the word I wanted to say.
The blind swallow returns to the hall of shadows,
Upon severed wings, with the shades to play.

Deliriously the night song sings.

No birds are heard. The immortelle wont bloom,
Translucent are the manes of the night herd.

On a dry river an empty boat sails,
Amidst the grasshoppers the word is lost.

And slowly growing, like a tent or temple,
Suddenly acting like mad Antigone,
Then like a dead swallow throwing itself at your feet
With Stygian tenderness and a branch of green.

O, to return the sighted fingers’ shame,
And the acute joy of recognition.
I am so afraid of the sobbing Aonides,
The mist, the sound and the ringing.

Yet to mortals power is given to love and recognise,
For them sound too through their fingers will flow,
But I have forgotten what I wanted to say,
And the thought returns to the hall of shadows.

Of other things the shade constantly speaks,
Always of the swallow, a friend, Antigone…
While upon the lips, like black ice, burns
The memory of Stygian ringing.

309 In other sources, including both the manuscript and the Beliaeff editorial proof, this is misspelt (?) as ‘прокинется’. 
With the relative length of the text being set, it is of little surprise that ‘I Have Forgotten the Word’ is the closest to being fully strophic (though, predictably, it still avoids exact repetition). Every verse has the same melodic contours and harmonic underpinning. Although they all have shared elements (isolated phrases, melodic fragments etc.), no two verses are identical; even where notation and rhythm coincide, dynamics and expression markings are often varied (Exx. 4.18a-4.18d).

Example 4.18a Silvestrov, Stupeni, ‘I Have Forgotten the Word’, vocal melody for the first line of each verse.

Verse I

Verse II

Verse III

Verse IV

Verse V

Verse VI
Example 4.18b Silvestrov, Stupeni, ‘I Have Forgotten the Word’, vocal melody for the second line of each verse.

(Verse I)

(Verse II)

(Verse III)

(Verse IV)

(Verse V)

(Verse VI)
Example 4.18c Silvestrov, Stupeni, ‘I Have Forgotten the Word’, vocal melody for the third line of each verse.

(Verse I)

на крыльях снеговых и прозрачных играй.

(Verse II)

в сухой речке пустой челнок пьет вет.

(Verse III)

tо зверь в лесной бросается к ногам.

(Verse IV)

я так боюсь рыдающего оленя.

(Verse V)

но я забыл, что хочу сказать.

(Verse VI)

А на губах как чёрный лед горяч.
Example 4.18d Silvestrov, *Stupeni*, ‘I Have Forgotten the Word’, vocal melody for the fourth line of each verse.

(Verse I)

(Verse II)

(Verse III)

(Verse IV)

(Verse V)

(Verse VI)

As with the other songs considered above, these minute changes help to destabilise the sense of musical memory and blur the perception of what is taking place. There are a number of practical as well as aesthetic reasons for these variations, in particular sensitivity to the nuances of Mandelstam’s text. As has been suggested in previous chapters, Silvestrov’s approach to setting poetry is fastidious to an almost obsessive degree. When constructing his
melodies, responding as faithfully as possible to the natural stresses of the Russian language appears to be of primary concern. This is in order to unlock the innate melody of the poetry – at least according to the composer himself who, in a simultaneously self-abnegating yet self-mythologising statement, has claimed that

Poetry is essentially music that has been transformed into words meant for eternity […] When music touches poetry, […] all that matters is the actual meeting between the two. Good verses are known to be laden with their very own kind of music and I merely respond to my need of submitting myself to these verses.\(^{301}\)

Similar claims have been reported by Svetlana Savenko in relation to *Quiet Songs*, a work which, for her, ‘seems to indicate that he confined himself to a very modest task – “to let poems sing,” to use the composer’s own words, i.e. to reveal in a poem its own inner melody’.\(^{302}\) Whether or not these statements of intent aid the understanding of Silvestrov’s music is debatable, and, much like György Ligeti’s famous spider-web dream, which supposedly informed the composition of his *Apparitions*,\(^{303}\) they tend to romanticise and mythologise the creative process rather than elucidate it. But it is certainly the case that Silvestrov appears to take utmost care in preserving or reflecting the contours of the Russian language in his musical settings. He does so to a far greater degree than either Shostakovich or Sviridov. However, Silvestrov’s obsessive approach to text-setting is more than merely a diverting curiosity – indeed, it is a crucial element that informs his process of minute alteration

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\(^{301}\) As quoted in Tatiana Frumkis’s accompanying notes to the Ivanilova-Lyubimov recording of *Stupeni* (Megadisc Classics MDC7832, 2000).


and the metamorphosis of motivic gestures in many of his vocal compositions. This is particularly clear in ‘I Have Forgotten the Word’.

Mandelstam’s poem is primarily in iambic hexameter. According to Michael Wachtel, ‘iambic hexameter with caesura after the third foot [was] a form Mandel'shtam used with insistent frequency in poems about antiquity. As in so much of his work, the primary focus is the continuity of tradition, but it is a tradition which is constantly remade.’

Silvestrov’s compositional language can be seen in a similar light as seeking some kind of ‘continuity of tradition’, which is being ‘constantly remade’, reimagined, and misremembered. This commonality of aesthetic may go some way to explaining Silvestrov’s affinity for Mandelstam’s poetry. Because of the way stress works in the Russian language, it is very rare to encounter strict iambic patterns in Russian poetry. As Wachtel explains, ‘In contrast to English (or German […]), Russian lacks secondary stress. This means that no matter how long a word is, it will contain only one stress’, which in turn leads to the common practice of allowing of pyrrhics (unstressed feet) to substitute for iambics. The small variations in the poem (syllabic content, word stresses, pyrrhic substitutions, and so forth) are paralleled in small melodic variations in the song. Consider for example the first lines of the first and fourth stanzas (stressed syllables marked in bold):

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305 Stupeni contains settings of two (originally three) Mandelstam poems. In the same year that he completed Stupeni, Silvestrov also wrote a short cycle entitled Four Songs on Words of Osip Mandelstam (1982).
306 Wachtel, Introduction to Russian Poetry, 19.
Я слово по-за-был, что я хо-тел ска-зать
О, ес-ли бы вер-нуть и зря-чих паль-цев стыд

Both lines contain twelve syllables in iambic hexameter, with five out of the six iambic stresses fully realised and falling in identical positions. Silvestrov’s musical setting preserves this rhythmic continuity of the poem, and responds to it with its own melodic continuity; the stressed and unstressed syllables of Mandelstam’s verse appear in the same position within the melodic framework (Ex. 4.19a).

Example 4.19a Silvestrov, Stupeni, ‘I Have Forgotten the Word’, vocal melody, first lines of first and fourth verses.

Verse I

Verse IV

As expected, there is still a degree of variation between these lines, but the relationship of stressed and unstressed syllables to pitch (and more or less to rhythm) is the same, creating the illusion of repetition where, in reality, none occurs. This can be further illustrated by considering the first lines of second and sixth stanzas, which, in contrast to the first and fourth, are not in hexameter, and feature a slightly more complex poetic rhythm:
The first thing to consider is that these lines are in iambic pentameter.\footnote{It could be possible to argue that, though there are only ten syllables, the sixth iambic foot is simply omitted for the sake of variation. Either way, the impact this has on the musical setting is the same.} It is also important to note that in the fourth stanza, Mandelstam inverts and disrupts the expected iambic rhythm by starting with an accented monosyllabic word followed by an unaccented word – a feature that Vladimir Nabokov, in his foray into prosody, would subsequently describe as a ‘tilt’.\footnote{Vladimir Nabokov, \textit{Notes on Prosody} (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1964), 17-27.} As a result, the opening melodic lines of Silvestrov’s second and fourth verses have quite different rhythmic attributes. Silvestrov’s musical response to the ‘tilt’ is to omit the usual upbeat, which, in the other verses, facilitated the initial unstressed syllable of the iambic foot. Though the melodic contours are familiar, this ensures that there is a greater degree of variation between verses two and six, and verses one and four than is apparent on first hearing (Ex. 4.19b, cf. Ex. 4.19a).
Example 4.19b Silvestrov, Stupeni, ‘I Have Forgotten the Word’, vocal melody, first lines of second and sixth verses.

Verse II

(pp) 

 accel. \( \quad \) rit. \( \quad \) \( \quad \) \( \quad \) \( \quad \) \( \quad \) \( \quad \) \( \quad \) \( \quad \) \( \quad \)

Не съяш-но птиц.
Бес-смерт-ник не ше-тёт.

Verse VI

(\( \quad \) \( \quad \) \( \quad \) \( \quad \) \( \quad \) \( \quad \) \( \quad \) \( \quad \))

Всё не о том прозрач-на-я твер-дит.

It is clear in this case that the minute melodic variations are caused, or at least influenced, by the differing rhythmic values of the poetry. However, poetic metre is evidently not the only motivation for melodic variance, since the first lines of the third, fifth stanzas, like the first and fourth, also contain twelve syllables in iambic hexameter:

И медленно рас-тёт как бы ша-тёр иль храм

А смерт-ным власть дака любить и у-зна-вать

Despite their shared metre, it is immediately clear that these opening lines of these stanzas differ from their counterparts in stanzas one and four in that there is far less correspondence between the positions of the pyrrhic substitutions. The rhythmic properties of Mandelstam’s lines are, as ever, obsessively adhered to in Silvestrov’s musical setting, but this does not explain the obvious alteration in vocal melody which opens these verses (Ex. 4.19c, cf. Exx. 4.19a-b).

**Verse III**

![Music notation for Verse III]

**Verse V**

![Music notation for Verse V]

The melody in these verses is initially more drawn out, and ascends to the C before making the familiar stepwise descent. In the case of the fifth verse, this allows for the musical realisation of the stressed fourth syllable, ‘власть’ (‘power’, or ‘strength’), which is naturally stressed in the Russian language, unlike the fourth syllables of the other hexameter lines which are all pyrrhic substitutions (cf. first, third and fourth verses); it would be impossible to highlight this stress musically using the rhythmic structures found in first and fourth verses. In the case of the third verse, this rising melody appears to be motivated more by a musical response to the phrase, ‘И медленно растёт’ [‘And slowly growing’], for which a slower rhythmic tempo and ascending melodic line seems more appropriate than the brisk descending melodic line that opens the other verses. Silvestrov’s response to the poetry, and his fastidious attempts at preserving the poetic rhythm thus inform many of the minute melodic and rhythmic alterations in his musical settings. Consequently, his self-proclaimed subordination to the inherent melody of the poetry itself (regardless of how plausible such a subordination is in practical terms) is an essential component of Silvestrov’s aesthetic. In recognising the fluid nature of
poetic structuring, it ensures that his musical settings are at once uncannily familiar, seemingly repetitive and immutable, yet also subtly dynamic and unpredictable.

4.4 Conclusion: Loss of Form by the Subject

It is a central contention of Yurchak’s that, as the Soviet Union lumbered through Stagnation towards Perestroika, its outwardly monolithic, immutable façade belied an unpredicted (and unpredictable) internal shift that eventually lead to the regime’s sudden and, for many, unanticipated collapse in 1991. It is in this sense that Borges’s conceptualisation, voiced through the philosophers of Tlön, of ‘our life’ (read: existence, perception of reality) as being nothing more than ‘the crepuscular and no doubt falsified and mutilated memory or reflection of an irrecoverable process’ poetically captures some central characteristics of the ‘hypernormalized’ and ‘deterritorialized’ society described by Yurchak. It also finds parallels in some central elements of Silvestrov’s musical aesthetic, which could fairly be described (with a few minor tweaks to Borges’s original) thus: that all music has already transpired, and that Silvestrov’s lingua musica is only the crepuscular and no doubt falsified and mutilated memory or reflection (or echo) of an irrecoverable process, with ‘process’ in this instance meaning the teleologically-conceived development and evolution of musical utterance through time. This also has parallels with a very revealing comment Silvestrov made in the 1990s shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when he declared in an interview with Marina Nestyeva that, ‘history has ended, and what remains is to be in the postlude’.\footnote{309 Quoted in Schmelz, ‘Echoes of Music History’, 241.} This, along with various other of Silvestrov’s statements about his ‘postlude’ concept, helps to confirm a

\footnote{309 Quoted in Schmelz, ‘Echoes of Music History’, 241.}
commonality not only with the Borges extract, but also with Kustov and the Necrorealists (see section 4.3.3 above). As suggested, Silvestrov’s ‘zone of the coda’, which informed many of his ‘postlude’ compositions as well as his obsession with the notion of ‘post-ness’, is conceptually very close to Kustov’s zone of ‘absolute dying’. Both represent liminal spaces where the perception of certain realities, be they physical, psychological, spiritual, geographical or existential, is subtly distorted. Alongside the activities of the Necrorealists, works of literature by Lem, Krasznahorkai and the Strugatsky brothers, and the films of Tarkovsky and Tarr, amongst others, Silvestrov’s musical aesthetic can be understood as encapsulating the simultaneous inertia and dynamism of late-Soviet culture and society – a notion well captured by Tatiana Frumkis’s assessment of the Fifth Symphony’s ‘musical fabric, [which] despite its seeming staticness, is full of internal movement.’

But perhaps more pertinently, his comments – specifically those about his music ‘responding to something already uttered’, its ‘assuming the existence of a certain text that does not really enter into the given text, but is connected to it’, and its being ‘open not the end […] but to the beginning’ – also reflect the State authoritative discourse in the Soviet Union which propagated a retrospective, revisionist attitude towards history, forever projecting backwards towards the utopianism of the Revolution. As such, Silvestrov’s ‘postlude’ compositions could be described as analogous to (or possibly even responding to) a political zeitgeist that was open only to its beginnings, constantly ‘responding to something already uttered’. Indeed, the notion of ‘responding to something already uttered’ – or, as Schmelz describes it in connection with Silvestrov’s Symphony No. 5, ‘the aesthetics of the echo’ – is laden with symbolic and

311 Ibid., 239-242.
312 Ibid., 240. The term derives from comments made by Silvestrov about his own compositional aesthetic.
mythological associations. Not least amongst these (especially considering Silvestrov’s affinity for classical literature) is the story of Echo in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. After being cursed by Juno, Echo is left unable to voice any thoughts of her own, capable only repeating the last words uttered to her in any given dialogue. After a humiliating encounter with Narcissus, she is left to watch him waste away over his own reflection. In turn, she herself wastes away to nothing, leaving only her petrified form and the echo of her voice.³¹³

As parables go, the story of Echo is quite effective for describing certain aspects of life in the Soviet Union, albeit somewhat stereotypical and negative ones: not being able to voice one’s own thoughts; the necessity of repeating something already uttered, regardless of the situation (to ‘howl like the wolf’); an unbreakable dedication to a single entity that wields authority. Echo’s fate also allegorically encapsulates something of the death-throes of the Soviet social-political system: a former utopianism that became capable only of meaningless repetition, before being withered and petrified by one man’s narcissistic cult of personality, leaving behind only the faintest echo of its original voice. If any aesthetic is appropriate for the declining Soviet state, it is arguably that of the echo.

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³¹³ ‘Her skin grew dried and shrivelled, the lovely bloom of her flesh / lost all its moisture; nothing remained but voice and bones; / then only voice, for her bones (so they say) were transformed to stone.’ See Publius Ovidius Naso (David Raeburn, trans.), *Metamorphoses*, (London, Penguin Books, 2004), 111.
5. Conclusion

5.1 Echoes and Repercussions

The reference to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* that closed the last chapter of this thesis was not an idle rhetorical one. The allegory extends beyond Silvestrov’s music to the broader cultural and social environment of the Stagnation era, and, indeed, to the Soviet Union as a whole. As has been considered throughout, despite the apparent ‘Stagnation’ or ‘petrification’ that was taking place on an economic and political level, intense creative activity was continually developing beneath the surface. The period of Stagnation might be considered a pupal stage where complete somatic re-arrangement results in a new and different form, despite the inactive appearance of the pupa itself. A deceptively static surface conceals a process of constant development and restructuring. It was only when Gorbachev attempted his own restructuring of the political system, and sought to introduce some sense of transparency to Soviet politics through his policy of *glasnost*’ (literally, ‘publicity’, usually translated as ‘openness’ or ‘transparency’) that the full irreversibility of the social and cultural metamorphoses set in motion after the denunciation of Stalinism in 1956 became apparent, leading, with hindsight, to the collapse of the Union in 1991.

It is possible to map the phases of the Soviet political system relative to social and cultural developments in several different ways. This thesis has preserved the familiar periodisation of ‘Stalinism’, ‘Thaw’, ‘Stagnation’ and ‘Perestroika’, whilst also introducing Kenneth Jowitt’s concepts of ‘Transformation’, ‘Consolidation’ and ‘Inclusion’, to which has been added a fourth phase: ‘Decline’. It has also been suggested that these phases run in parallel with a correlative relationship between enforced ‘Official’ ideology and State ascendancy on the one
hand, and individual voice, pluralism, and State disintegration on the other (see Figure 1.1 in the Introduction, section 1.1). The Stagnation era encompasses the gradual shift from ‘Inclusion’ to ‘Decline’. As suggested in the Introduction, the most intriguing aspects of this period were an increasing fissiparousness of identity, the ascendancy of the individual voice, and a drive towards the forging of an autonomous identity distinct from that traditionally projected as ‘Soviet’ by the State. This cultural shift can be seen as having evolved from the renewed drive towards individualism that emerged after Stalin’s death, or what Vladislav Zubok describes as ‘the search for new forms of cultural and personal self-expression’ during the late 1950s and early ’60s.314 A growing tendency to turn towards non-Soviet ‘elsewheres’ (that is, towards alternate identities, locations, epochs, and ideologies) is a core feature in Yurchak’s social theory of the late Soviet period, articulated primarily through his complementary concepts of svoj and vnje that have been central to this thesis (particularly in Chapters 2 and 4). It is also evident in Brudny’s examination of the emergence of post-Stalinist Russian nationalist movements that supported much of the discussion in Chapter 3. A fundamental reason for this is that many aspects of Soviet ideology, politics, culture and society became increasingly homogenised, or, in Yurchak’s terminology, ‘normalized’. Consequently, any form of ideological ‘master-narrative’ that spoke in authoritative Marxist-Leninist terms (and any related social and cultural activities) became impotent and irrelevant, resulting in a significant disconnect between what Yurchak classifies as the ‘performative’ and ‘constative’ dimensions of social (inter)actions. The purpose of my research was to illuminate the ways in which some of these underlying social and cultural processes manifested themselves in musical artworks produced between 1964 and 1985 – a period in Soviet history

when the tortuous relationship between State, politics, ideology, culture, and society was at its most convoluted.

All three song cycles considered above were composed during Jowitt’s ‘Inclusion’ phase, and they exemplify ways in which many of Yurchak’s social theories can be traced in the cultural products of the Stagnation era. The research presented above examines how, in these works, each composer reaches towards certain ‘elsewheres’, be they temporal, spiritual, physical, metaphysical, real, or imaginary, that both existed within and transcended the immediate Soviet context of their creation. The notion of ‘elsewheres’ is essentially the opposite of the doctrine of Socialist Realism, and is indicative of the cultural pluralism, self-expression, and increasingly escapism that characterised the Thaw and post-Thaw periods. Figure 5.1 presents an expanded version of Figure 1.1 (see Introduction, section 1.1 ‘Singing Stagnation: Historical Context’), designed to show how many of the aesthetic concepts considered throughout this thesis can be understood as analogous to the ebb and flow of culture and politics that accompanied and influenced the evolution of Soviet society.
These evolving currents can be observed and interpreted on multiple levels in the three vocal cycles considered above. But even before specific works are considered in detail, evidence of the drive towards cultural pluralism can be detected. On a general stylistic level, this is most clearly exemplified by Silvestrov and the ‘Unofficial’ generation’s turn from its initial flirtation with serial techniques in favour of more idiosyncratic, personalised musical voices. The shift from the relative homogeneity of their serial compositions of the 1950s and early ’60s to the stylistic plurality of their compositional styles from around 1970 onwards is immediately audible, and it is symptomatic of the broader shift towards pluralism and the emancipation of the individual voice from the hegemony of an increasingly stale State-
determined discourse in which Soviet ideology had decayed to the point of ‘dogmatic utterance’.

A distinct stylistic shift is also apparent in Shostakovich’s output from the late 1960s, heralded by works such as the String Quartet No. 11, Op. 122, the Violin Sonata, Op. 134, the Symphony No. 14, Op. 135, and, not least, the Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok, Op. 127 examined in Chapter 2. Indeed, Shostakovich’s own reservations about describing his Symphony No. 14 as a symphony at all are emblematic of this shift in his compositional language and artistic identity, with all its attendant uncertainties and equivocations. Along with the Symphony No. 14, the Blok cycle – another unconventional work in terms of its structure and instrumentation – contributes to an important strand of Shostakovich’s late style, namely a turn to the vocal cycle as a generic vehicle for some of his most poignant final artistic utterances.

Though certainly less abrupt than the ‘Unofficial’ generation’s rejection of serialism, there is also a distinct stylistic gulf between Sviridov’s compositions from the late 1960s onwards and those dating from the 1930s and ’40s, the latter being full of the type of Shostakovich-epigonism so unjustly levelled at Mieczysław Weinberg for so long. Not dissimilar to Shostakovich’s ruminations on his Fourteenth Symphony (though admittedly more self-aggrandising), Sviridov displays an awareness of a certain evolution in his compositional language, referring to his own style in Russia Cast Adrift as ‘truly Russian music – of a new,

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317 Consider, for example, Sviridov’s Piano Trio in A minor (1945), which is essentially a catalogue of textures, techniques, harmonies and motivic gestures found in Shostakovich’s Piano Quintet in G minor, Op. 57 (1940) and the Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor, Op. 67 (1944).
bright, crystal-clear style.\textsuperscript{318} Though elements of this ‘new style’ can be detected in many of Sviridov’s works, \textit{Russia Cast Adrift} is distinctive in its tintinnabular pandiatomicism. It is primarily this that sets it apart from earlier works such as the Pushkin Romances (1935) or the Burns songs (1955), from settings that immediately preceded it including the Saint Petersburg songs (1963), and even from subsequent works such as \textit{Petersburg, A Vocal Poem} (1995).\textsuperscript{319}

Shostakovich is easily the most intensely debated of the three composers considered above. His crisis of artistic and personal identity as he approached the final decade of his life, triggered in part by his decision to join the CPSU in 1960, has been the subject of much discussion and interpretation. Chapter 2 challenges familiar two-dimensional characterisations of Shostakovich by recognising and exemplifying the potential for the coexistence and synthesis of multiple conflicting identities and behavioural patterns within a single individual. The analysis of the Blok cycle has illuminated how elements of Yurchak’s social theories of \textit{svoy} and \textit{vnye} can be detected in Shostakovich’s selection of poetic texts and in the long-range psychological and musical processes that evolve throughout the cycle. In particular, it is the coexistence and synthesis of thematic elements representing the opposing concepts of \textit{svoy} (the self, the personal) and \textit{ne svoy} (the other, the supra-personal) that defines this work as a true product of its era, and that, furthermore, reveals Shostakovich’s sensitivity to the necessity of such a synthesis as expressed by Blok himself.\textsuperscript{320} Rather than a struggle \textit{for} an identity, the Blok cycle captures a struggle for a resolution between conflicting impulses.

\textsuperscript{318} Georgy Sviridov, \textit{Muzika kak sud’ba [Music as Destiny]}, (Moscow, Molodaya gvardiya, 2002), 336.
\textsuperscript{319} Although this was completed in 1995, the cycle is in fact a collection of songs that were composed throughout Sviridov’s career, some as far back as the early 1960s. See Cameron Pyke, ‘Petersburg: an English Perspective on Sviridov’s Engagement with Blok’, in Georgy Sviridov, \textit{Petersburg, Poem for voice and piano} (Helsinki, Ruslania, 2017), iii-v.
\textsuperscript{320} See Vera Vasina-Grossman, \textit{Mastera sovetskogo romansa} (Moscow, Muzika, 1980), 241; and Chapter 2 of the current thesis.
within the same individual. This insight contributes to a more nuanced understanding of both
Shostakovich and his music, whilst also offering a starting point for an analytical examination
of an underexplored yet hugely important part of his compositional output: the late vocal
cycles.

Chapter 3 has explored the development of Sviridov’s artistic and personal identity through
his active engagement with a nationalist alternative to Soviet ideology, and how this is
expressed in his music. It has attempted to shed light on the ideological motivations of a
composer under-represented in Western musicological studies, and provides an alternative to
the one-sided characterisation of him as a conservative cultural apparatchik. Indeed, the
analysis of *Russia Cast Adrift*, supported by extracts from Sviridov’s currently untranslated
diaries reveals that he was a member of a politically engaged nationalist branch of the
intelligentsia that was by no means fully aligned with the State in terms of social ideology. His
was a generation that came of age in an environment of increased nationalism engendered by
Stalin’s ‘Friendship of Nations’ [*Druzhba narodov*] and the Great Patriotic War, but who
forged and developed their own nationalist ideologies in the climate of de-Stalinisation in the
1950s and early ’60s. Where the ‘Friendship of Nations’ aimed to unify the diverse ethnic
nationalities of the Soviet Union under the banner of ‘Soviet People’, the emergent Russian
nationalists of the 1950s and ’60s became increasingly frustrated and disillusioned with the
regime, and chose instead to foster an alternative, in Sviridov’s case ethnically Russian, form
of national identity that was distinct from a collective ‘Soviet’ identity.

A fundamental aspect of this Russian nationalist branch of the intelligentsia was a sense of
shame, betrayal, outrage, and in some cases even guilt over the destruction of the traditional
Russian peasantry during the Stalinist period. Zubok describes the poet and editor of *Noviy
Mir Aleksandr Tvardovsky (a contemporary of Sviridov’s) as being haunted by the ‘tragic fate of the Russian peasantry and the death between 1929 and 1953 of the traditional Russian way of life’ – a sentiment that seemed to clash with his public role as a senior Soviet official and member of the Central Committee.321 Sviridov was an admirer of Tvardovsky’s poetry, placing him alongside Pushkin, Tyutchev, Lermontov, Nekrasov, Blok, and Esenin, and describing him in his diaries as being ‘completely (100%) free of authorial egoism [avtorskogo egoizma]’, and as ‘immersing [rastvorenie] himself in the folkish [v narodnoy stikhii], without restraint [bez ostatka].322 The examination of Russia Cast Adrift uncovers how similar Russian nationalist sentiments are encapsulated in Sviridov’s music, specifically in his selection and musical treatment of Esenin’s poetry. This is particularly evident in the mingling of religious and pastoral imagery, the musical evocations of bells and chimes long associated with the Orthodox church, and in the association of encroaching industrialisation with the apocalypse. These observations are supported by Sviridov’s own summary of the work in his diaries, where he expresses sentiments very similar to those attributed to Tvardovsky above, describing ‘revolutionary upheaval and the death of the native home’, and ‘the death of the patriarchal peasant way of life’.323

Throughout the course of the cycle, there emerges a distinct subtextual message that the Soviet regime was responsible for the dismantling of Russian traditions. This situates Russia Cast Adrift firmly within contemporaneous nationalist discourse, and allows it to be considered as a musical analogue to works of Russian nationalist literature by numerous essayists, poets and novelists including Tvardovsky, Solzhenitsyn, and members of the Village Prose

321 Zubok, Zhivago’s Children, 167.
322 See Sviridov, Muzika kak sud’ba, 128 and 214.
323 Ibid., 335.
movement. It also challenges the dismissal of Sviridov as a derivative, anachronistic hangover from the 19th century, and instead allows him to be considered as a conscientious and socially engaged Russian nationalist, who reacted to the post-Stalinist crisis in Soviet cultural identity by reaching towards an alternative, nationalist identity.

Chapter 4 explored the ways in which Silvestrov’s musical aesthetic embraced and reflected many aspects of Soviet culture and society in the years immediately preceding Perestroika. It has been shown that his concept of the ‘zone of the coda’ and what he has described as his ‘aesthetic of the echo’ parallel trends developing in numerous other cultural fields, notably in novels by Stanislaw Lem, the Strugatsky brothers, and Laszlo Krasznahorkai, in the films of Andrei Tarkovsky and Bela Tarr, and in the surrealist performance antics of the Necrorealists. In particular, the concept of the ‘zone of the coda’, bears strong similarities to Vladimir Kustov’s ‘zone of absolute dying’ in his so-called ‘Necromethod’ of 1989 (see Chapter 4, Figure 4.1, cf. Figure 4.5), that outlines the core aesthetic of the Necrorealists as being a fascination with process rather than with result. Both Silvestrov’s ‘zone of the coda’ and Kustov’s ‘zone of absolute dying’ represent the borderlands of perception, located between existence and non-existence, between life and death, between sound and silence, between ‘Inclusion’ and ‘Decline’, where reality can appear distorted. It is in this zone that it becomes possible to glimpse instances of internal activity beneath a static surface (the somatic rearrangement within the chrysalis). In this sense, Silvestrov’s musical aesthetic can be understood as encapsulating the simultaneous inertia and dynamism of late-Soviet culture, society, and politics, reflecting the slow petrification of a regime that was increasingly

retrospective and revisionist in its attitude towards history, ‘open not to [its] end […] but to [its] beginning’.\textsuperscript{325}

In addition to illuminating each composer’s approach to selecting and setting poetry, their compositional processes, and providing an analytical study of the intimate relationship between words and music, the research presented above has sought to shed light on the how certain realities of life in late socialist Russia manifested themselves in artworks of the period, giving equal consideration to music, literature, concepts of identity and psychology, and to the underlying social, cultural and political context. The analysis and interpretation of these vocal cycles provides a composite image of numerous trends and developments, variously contradictory and complementary, that were taking place in the Soviet Union during the decades between the onset of the Thaw and the implementation of Perestroika, offering interpretations for how these three composers of separate generations both reacted to, and thus contributed to the development of such trends.

In terms of the interrelationship between the three composers considered, stronger parallels have indeed emerged between Shostakovich and Silvestrov in the sense that their music appears to reflect the more introspective, psychological, and personal aspects of identity and existence during the post-Thaw period. By contrast, Sviridov’s engagement with Russian nationalist ideology in \textit{Russia Cast Adrift} comes far closer to an ideological and political identity that consciously and actively defined itself as distinct from (though not always necessarily opposed to) the regime. This comes across as a fundamentally Russian identity, yet one that is firmly neo-nationalistic and ethnocentric, which may go some way to explaining

the lack of attention his music has garnered in the West. Nonetheless, all three composers are united by their turn towards alternatives to the distorted version of reality projected by the Soviet State. Through the vocal cycles considered above, each composer reflects, in his own unique way, the struggle for identity and self-expression, the drive towards cultural pluralism, the liberation of the individual voice, and the ascendancy of dynamic socio-cultural heterogeneity over immutable political hegemony that characterised the period of Stagnation.

### 5.2 Future Research

The fact that a comprehensive analytical study of Shostakovich’s late vocal cycles has yet to appear is as surprising as it is unforgivable. The analysis of the *Seven Poems of Aleksandr Blok* presented above only scratches the surface of one of the richest areas of Shostakovich’s output. As such, there is enormous scope for expanding the research presented in Chapter 2 to produce a comprehensive interdisciplinary survey of Shostakovich’s late vocal music that would give equal consideration to music, literature, social theory, and historical context. Alongside the Blok cycle, the study would provide analysis, interpretation, and contextualisation of Shostakovich’s *Six Poems of Marina Tsvetaeva*, Op. 143 (1973), the *Suite on Verses by Michelangelo Buonarotti*, Op. 145 (1974), and the *Four Verses of Captain Lebyadkin*, Op. 146 (1975). In addition, the study could also incorporate an examination of the Symphony No. 14, Op. 135 and the orchestrated version of the Michelangelo suite (Op. 145a), both of which contribute to the erosion of generic boundaries separating vocal cycle and
symphony.\textsuperscript{326} This would make a significant contribution to a desperately neglected field of Shostakovich studies.

Of the three composers covered in this thesis, Sviridov is perhaps the least-known outside of Russia. With the recent exception of Philip Bullock, scholars in the West have seemed unwilling to develop a balanced critical approach to Sviridov’s musical aesthetic, and have appeared to struggle with his ambiguous and at times distasteful cultural legacy. Indeed, in the introduction to his recently revised \textit{Music in the Soviet Era: 1917–1991}, Levon Hakobian has suggested that ‘the outside world’s indifference towards [Sviridov’s] music is conditioned by its emphatically Russian character, as well as by the fact that his own world outlook was strongly chauvinistic and xenophobic (which is attested by his diaries, unwisely published after his death).’\textsuperscript{327} Though this may explain Western scholars’ reluctance to approach Sviridov, it does not provide an adequate reason for neglecting a composer whose musical and cultural legacy is fundamental to understanding the development of Russian culture during the 1960s and ’70s. As such, further research could usefully concentrate on nuancing surveys of Thaw and post-Thaw Soviet music such as Schmelz’s \textit{Such Freedom if Only Musical} that have tended to focus on the more ideologically palatable, cosmopolitan voices of Silvestrov and his generation. Sviridov’s cultural legacy also has implications that reach beyond the Soviet Union. In particular, the nature of his close association with the late Dmitri Hvorostovsky, whose repertoire prominently featured Sviridov’s music alongside works by Glinka, The Mighty Handful, and other composers associated with a distinctly Russian 19\textsuperscript{th}-century

\textsuperscript{326} Given the richness of these two works, it is possible that such an examination could provide enough material for an entire study of its own.

\textsuperscript{327} Levon Hakobian, \textit{Music of the Soviet Era: 1917–1991} (New York, Routledge, 2017), 14. Hakobian’s use of the word ‘unwise’ is mildly surprising – though it may damage Sviridov’s posthumous reputation with consumers and audiences, the publication of his diaries, no matter how unpalatable the content, is certainly illuminating from a musicological and historiographical stand point.
nationalist tradition, has the potential to shed light on the entrenchment of a populist, ethically Russian national culture that appears to be a feature of Putin’s Russia. This could be contextualised alongside considerations of Sviridov’s nationalist contemporaries, in particular Valery Gavrilin (1939–1999), who maintained a close association and friendship with Sviridov for much of his life.

As the only composer considered in this thesis who is still living and composing at the time of writing, Silvestrov provides a slightly different potential for continued research. Studies of his musical aesthetic and stylistic evolution from the 1950s to the 1980s are increasingly present in Western musicology, but there is also value in considering the impact recent political and social events have had on his outlook. As suggested in the introduction to Chapter 4, Silvestrov has begun to express an increasingly vociferous Ukrainian national identity, particularly in the wake of the Ukrainian Revolution of 2014, the subsequent conflict with Putin’s Russia, and the on-going social upheaval in eastern Ukraine. Alongside further research into the present-day implications of Sviridov’s cultural legacy suggested above, an examination of Silvestrov’s recent artistic output supported by a consideration of his political and ideological convictions would contribute to a wider-ranging study of music, politics, and society in the ex-Soviet states post-1991, that is only now becoming possible.

Contributions to the developing field of post-Soviet musical culture include three chapters respectively by Laurel Fay, William Quillen, and Lidia Ader that appear in Marina Frolova-Walker and Patrick Zuk’s recent edited volume, *Russian Music Since 1917: Reappraisal and Rediscovery*.328 Elena Dubinets’s chapter in the same collection is also useful for developing

the research presented above, given her focus on the ways in which many émigré composers have attempted to maintain some sense of Russian cultural identity in non-Russian, non-Soviet social environments after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and how this has had an impact on their compositional outputs. Dubinets suggests that the group of émigré composers under consideration might be more accurately described as a ‘guild’ rather than a ‘community’ because ‘it does not constitute a coherent, autonomous or homogenous society: it lacks political agency and a shared framework that would represent these composers’ interests.’

This contributes to an understanding of where the increasing pluralism and heightened desire for autonomous self-expression of the Stagnation era has left Russian composers in the post-Soviet era. Alexander Raskatov’s words, as quoted by Dubinets in her chapter, are extremely revealing in this light: “For me, it’s very important not to be in a group because in music everyone is responsible for themselves.” The continuing development of such opinions is fundamentally shaped by the shifts and trends considered throughout this thesis.

In addition to considering the development of Russian music in the post-Soviet era (an ‘Iron Age’ of Russian music, perhaps, by extrapolation backwards from Hakobian’s ‘Bronze Age’), the research presented in this thesis might also be expanded to include vocal cycles by other composers who were active in both the immediate pre- and post-Perestroika periods. Alongside many additional works by Silvestrov and Sviridov, this could include considerations of vocal cycles by Gavrilin, Sofia Gubaidulina (such as her Galgenlieder [Gallows Songs] of 1996), Sergei Slonimsky (whose compositional prolificity extends to over

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330 Ibid., 331.
331 Alexander Raskatov quoted in ibid., 331 (emphasis added).
30 separate collections of songs between 1953 and 2003),\(^{332}\) and Edison Denisov, in particular his cycle of 1981, *On the Snowy Bonfire* (sometimes translated as *The Bonfire of Snow*) – an enormous vocal cycle comprising twenty-four settings of Blok poems. As well as contributing to a study of Denisov’s compositional style, *On the Snowy Bonfire* provides a stark contrast and potentially fruitful point of comparison to Sviridov’s numerous settings of Blok’s poetry mentioned above.

Given the recent growth of scholarly interest in his life and music, there is scope for approaching the underexplored vocal cycles of Mieczysław Weinberg who, in addition to a number of cycles composed in the 1970s and ’80s (including Opp. 110, 116, 120, 125, 134, and 139), also composed a cycle based on Blok’s poetry as early as 1951 (Op. 50), the first song of which is a setting of the same poem that Shostakovich chose for the conclusion of his own Blok cycle. As a Polish Jew who fled to the Soviet Union in 1939, aged just 19, Weinberg could provide a particularly intriguing case for the exploration of personal and artistic identity, and a comprehensive study of his vocal cycles could make a significant contribution to the ever-expanding field of Weinberg studies.

The proposed future research could be structured in different ways: through the dedicated examination of individual composers (as has been suggested for Shostakovich above), of specific vocal works or genres (cantatas, cycles, chamber cycles, vocal symphonies), of specific epochs, along generational lines (as seems to be increasingly common), or a combination of these approaches. Yet the preponderance of Blok settings mentioned above could also allow for a more poet-centred approach: a comparative examination of various

\(^{332}\) See <https://www.remusik.org/sergey-slonimskiy> [accessed 29 December 2013].
composers’ approaches to one poet’s texts in particular. Such a survey could consider multiple 
generations ranging from Blok’s own (Arthur Lourié’s cantata of 1919, *Dans le sanctuaire 
d’un rêve doré*, for example) through to the present day, contributing to a wide-ranging, 
interdisciplinary project dedicated to the topic of Aleksandr Blok in music. Though there are 
some Russian-language studies of this subject from the Soviet era, notably by Tatiana 
Khoprova, few if any have been produced since 1991, and there are certainly no 
throughgoing English-language texts on the topic. Such research could address the 
conspicuous dearth of English-language research on one of Russia’s most renowned and 
intriguing poets, and provide a musical context for a body of poetry that is often discussed 
in terms of its unique lyrical and rhythmic musicality. A focus on the impact that Blok’s 
poetry has had on Soviet and post-Soviet musical culture could also encompass a 
consideration of the influence of the Symbolist movement on 20th-century Russian music and 
art in general, a significant element of which has maintained an interest in aspects of 
theosophy, theurgy, and transcendental mysticism similar to those explored by the Symbolists, 
despite the strictures of Socialist Realism and Russian nationalist populism.

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This thesis has attempted to trace the ways in which the aftershock of an apparent crisis in 
Soviet identity after the death of Stalin in 1953 can be detected in selected musical-literary 
works of the Stagnation era. The denunciation of the Red Tsar’s cult of personality in 1956

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334 Despite wide-ranging Russian evaluation of his work, comprehensive English-language studies (and even 
translations) of Blok’s poetry remain limited, though the field does include the two notable volumes of Avril 
brought with it the impossibility of the revival of a utopian Soviet master-narrative, and a consequent decline in the effectiveness of Marxist-Leninist ideology to unite citizens under a Soviet identity. This was expressed culturally by a drive towards pluralism, escapism, a desire for autonomy and self-expression, and an increasing alienation from the State-endorsed narrative of Soviet reality. As a final thought, it might be tentatively suggested that parallels with the shift from the cultural pluralism of the first post-Revolutionary decade to a centrally controlled, ideologically acceptable mass ‘Culture’ during the 1930s may be observed in the current socio-cultural climate of Putin’s Russia. Understanding the fluctuations in social and cultural identity of the sort explored throughout this thesis could help to construct a framework on which to base an initial assessment of artistic expression and the relationship between State and culture in post-Soviet Russia, and whether or not it is possible to detect, in the wake of the 2018 Russian Presidential Elections, the distant echo of howling wolves.
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