

## Shostakovich's Topics: A Study on Representative Musical Topics

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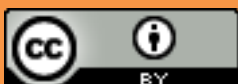
**Abstract:** The study of musical signification constitutes an important key for the comprehension of Shostakovich's music. This becomes particularly evident when one observes that social and political background plays an important role in his compositional process through the configuration of specific musical topics on structural positions of his music. These specific topics have arisen after cultural and social events during the establishment of the Soviet Union and became typical elements of the Soviet Music. This paper aims to show the function of these elements as compositional roots in the creative concept of Shostakovich's music. The rising of the concept of musical topic after Leonard Ratner (1980) has opened new paths for a consistent comprehension of the musical discourse, identifying social and cultural signs that may articulate ideas which go beyond the music itself: ideology, criticism and politics became elements of musical expression, composing a new soundscape of music in Revolutionary Russia.

**Keywords:** Musical topics; Soviet music; Socialist realism; Musical semiotics; Revolutionary music.

### TÍTULO: TÓPICAS DE SHOSTAKOVICH: UM ESTUDO SOBRE TÓPICAS MUSICAIS REPRESENTATIVOS

**Resumo:** O estudo da significação musical constitui uma chave importante para a compreensão da música de Shostakovich. Isso torna-se particularmente evidente quando se observa a importância do contexto social e político em seu processo composicional através da configuração de tópicos musicais específicas em posições estruturais de sua música. Essas tópicos musicais específicas surgiram após eventos culturais e sociais durante o estabelecimento da União Soviética e tornaram-se elementos típicos da música soviética. Este artigo tem por objetivo demonstrar a função destes elementos como raízes composicionais no conceito criativo da música de Shostakovich. O estabelecimento do conceito de tópica musical por Leonard Ratner (1980) abriu novos caminhos para uma compreensão musical consistente do discurso musical, identificando signos culturais e sociais que articulam ideias que transcendem a dimensão musical: ideologia, crítica e política tornam-se elementos de expressão musical, compondo uma nova paisagem sonora da Rússia revolucionária.

**Palavras-chave:** Tópicos musicais; Música soviética; Realismo socialista; Semiótica musical; Música revolucionária.



# Shostakovich's Topics: A Study on Representative Musical Topics

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## 1. Topic Theory and the Music of Shostakovich

The music of Dmitri Shostakovich has been studied in various analytical ways, and in all these studies it is mentioned that his music is somehow linked to politics. The composer himself acknowledged this in an interview for the *New York Times* in 1931:

There can be no music without an ideology. The old composers, whether they knew it or not, were upholding a political theory. Most of them, of course, were bolstering the rule of upper classes. Only Beethoven was a forerunner of the revolutionary movement. If you read his letters, you will see how often he wrote to his friends that he wished to give new ideas to the public and rouse it to revolt against his masters. (*New York Times*, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1931)

This declaration unequivocally shows how the musical understanding of the composer relates to ideology. But the question is how could it be possible to identify ideological traces in his musical structure, particularly in his instrumental music? How could it be possible to develop a semiotic approach capable of distinguishing shaping bias of musical discourse? Answering this question is a requirement for understanding the ironical processes mentioned in many studies about the music of Shostakovich, but rarely satisfactorily clarified.

Confronting the aspects remarked in the speech of the composer with Mikhail Bakhtin's postulate that "Everything ideological possesses *meaning*: it represents, depicts, or stands for something lying outside of itself. In other words, it is a *sign*. *Without signs there is no ideology*" (Voloshinov 1986, 9), it is possible to conceive a way using the semiotic approach to the music of Shostakovich aiming to clarify the issue of links between music and politics that are known to most scholars, but not clearly explained in terms of musical discourse.

One of the most important paths for a consistent semiotic approach in music is the Topic Theory. Developed from Leonard Ratner's work (1980, 09), this theory states topics as subjects of musical discourse, initially divided into types (dances and marches) and styles (including Turkish, military or hunting). In studies of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Music, the structural combination of types and styles in a musical work produces cross-referential processes which can be understood as sources of musical meaning, and which can be intersubjectivity verified (Mirka 2014, 01). Topic theory was developed from Ratner's idea especially by Wie Allanbrook, Kofi Agawu, Robert Hatten, Raymond Monelle and others, who recognised the theory as an important tool for

musical analysis, especially for the analysis of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century music. These studies gave rise to the publication of *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, edited by Danuta Mirka in 2014, which is a collection of studies on the Topic Theory from its origins until more recent musical research.

Most studies in which the topic theory is applied are focused on classical music and the music of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in general (Monelle 2006, 08). The music of Romanticism and of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has just recently been studied from the perspective of topical character. There have been controversial discussions about the pertinence or significance of Topic Theory for the music of these periods. My Doctoral Thesis (Camargo 2017) broadly discusses that Topic Theory is not only pertinent, but in some cases is essential to the understanding of form and meaning in music, regardless of the time of its composition. The analysis of Shostakovich's *10<sup>th</sup> Symphony* is a clear example of it. This paper presents the specific results of this point of the research, discussing the characteristic topics found in the work of the Soviet composer.

The music of Dmitri Shostakovich has some particular features that distinguish its singularity. They may be understood as musical topics despite the music's intrinsic characteristics: the military topic is recurrent, but not in the traditional way of the classic period. In his music, the noble deeds representative of its origins are turned into a violent and oppressive expression. The Slavonic Orthodox Church Chorus, a characteristic feature of Russian music largely observed since the music of Mikhail Glinka, rises in the music of Shostakovich, transformed into a particular style of revolutionary chorus. The topic music of machines, an uncommon and almost exotic topic in the classical and romantic eras, becomes a structural feature, originating the *zavod* topic, a kind of "multiple-machines" or "engine" topic (Camargo 2013). The figure of the *Iurodivyi* – a Russian religious phenomenon of the "sacred fool" found in musical references in works of Mussorgsky – was absorbed into the music of Shostakovich. He developed in different ways the combination of humorous expression and serious imprint, producing ironical effects that can be recognized as a new identified topic. The discursive articulation of these new topical elements, when considered in their aesthetic relation to the traditional ones, can reveal the essential soundscape of the music of the Soviet Era. This makes possible a broad discussion about the contradictions of Socialist Realism aesthetics, since these features are also recurrent in the music of other composers of the period, including Prokofiev, Khachaturian, Kabalevsky and Shebalin.

## 2. The Fearful Military Topic

Military evocations in music constitute a complex topic. Found in music since at least the baroque period, the two main features of this topic can be identified by the military march and the trumpet call. According to Raymond Monelle (2006, 113), "the image of a band on foot, playing for a squadron of troops marching in step, is our idea of the march. The march tells of heroism and victory". Confronting this idea with the realistic knowledge of contemporary and ancient soldiers, the military topic shows how idealized is the picture of the military combatant, since mostly march tunes were not played in time with marching troops, but originally played as ceremonial pieces. The high nobleness of the military image probably comes from its identification with the literary chivalry values widespread in ancient Knight stories. Another view of the march is the drum rhythm beaten as a command to soldiers, configuring a *signal* rather than a type. Percussion instruments were introduced into concert music especially by the influence of Turkish music, which is a characteristic style in and of itself. However, the development of the use of trumpet and drum calls in concert music developed on its own, remarkably after Haydn's *Symphony no. 100*, called "*Military*".

The vigorous sonority of march tunes and rousing trumpet calls suggest grandiosity and majesty. According to Monelle (2006, 142), "the intuitive signification of this topic is mostly euphoric, manly, heroic, adventurous, evocative of noble deeds and reckless courage". This idea is directly linked to the ancient chivalry images of courage, generosity, and good manners, which lead to the notion of a high social rank or nobility. This is the most evident meaning of the military topic occurring since the baroque era, and not by chance is found in monumental sacred works like Bach's *Mass in B minor* and *Magnificat*, as well Handel's *Messiah* and *Coronation Anthems*, and secular heroic works such as Beethoven's *9<sup>th</sup> Symphony*.

The concept of *socialist realism* arose for the first time in an article of the journal *Literaturnaya Gazeta* of May 23, 1932, in an article without authorship but attributed to Stalin himself. In the realm of literature, the doctrine was largely developed by Maxim Gorki and officially presented at the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, instructing artists to portray the people's life as heroic and realistic, as a contemplation of the communist utopia under construction (Camargo 2012, 177). Nothing was written about music itself, but every Soviet composer understood from those guidelines that the expression of the military topic would perfectly fit into what could be considered *socialist realism* in music. On the other hand, the long Civil War that followed the revolution raised an identification with the Bolshevik Movement and the Red Army, emphasizing the "military" identity of the revolutionaries. All these factors helped determine that military expression should be the one of the most proper features of Soviet music. But as happened in literature, the contradictions of the doctrine could not be hidden in music.

In his study about the military topic in the music of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Monelle (2006, 175) remarks about ironic and dysphoric dimensions of military topic. The main dysphoria is indicated by "quantitative exaggeration, which leads to a caricatured effect of military march" (Sheinberg 2000, 120). It seems not to detach from its original sense, despite the possibility of an ironic intention. By observing the music of Mahler, the author associates the military topic to the tragic tune as a dysphoric derivative of the military topic (Monelle 2006, 178). Going beyond this interpretation, it is possible to understand the combination of the military topic with tragic tunes, especially the ones written in minor tonalities, as a *funeral march topic*. The funeral march despite its akin features to the military topic, has a completely different meaning arising from a different musical expression.

The *funeral march topic* has in common with the military topic its ceremonial nature, especially its processional feature, but also has an essential difference. While the processional ceremonies evoke nobility and grandiosity as an eulogistic gesture, the funeral march evokes rather a meditative character, expressing melancholy or pathetic resignation, particularly as in Beethoven's Second Movement of *Symphony no. 3 "Eroica"*. Other instances in different contexts can be found in Wagner's *Götterdämmerung (Siegfried's Funeral March)* and the well-known Chopin's *Piano Sonata no. 2 op. 35 (3<sup>rd</sup> movement)*. Indeed, this topic is recurrent in the music of Mahler, but he began to develop this topic slightly accomplishing the funeral march with choleric elements, converting this feature into a more violent and menacing expression, as in the beginning of *Symphonies nos. 3 and 5*. Tchaikovsky also has remarkable examples of "fearful" funeral marches, like the beginning of the *Symphony no. 4*. The threatening expression of this feature convey a frightening atmosphere rather than any pathetic commotion. Shostakovich also has assimilated this expression and has led it to a radical level: it is not about melancholy or resignation at all, but about frightening and terror, a musical expression that can be conceived as a completely new topic: the ***fearful military topic***.

The *fearful military topic* constitutes an extreme distortion of the original meaning of the *military topic*, that could be understood as the exact opposite. Instead of nobility, courage, and heroism, it suggests oppression and violence. This character is a key for the understanding of Shostakovich's music, because the military topic, as noted, is one of the most important features of Soviet music. Whereas the Soviet State was politically established after the civil war, the association of the revolution conquests with military triumph was elaborated in the cultural Soviet imaginary: mostly in the revolutionary character of the soldier figure. Considered from this perspective, the metamorphosis of the military topic to a *fearful military topic* reveals the ambiguity of significance in Shostakovich's music. The combination of expressions of pure military topic and fearful military topic suggests that strength and power are not only matter of pride, but also of haughtiness and oppression. This ambiguous character is one of the most important singularities of Shostakovich's music, particularly recognizable by the topical analysis of musical discourse. The articulation of this ambiguity configures one of the composer's many speech devices for setting the ironical register in his musical discourse.

The fearful military topic comprises the same sanguineous character of the military topic: fast tempo, rhythmic constitution in *marcato* articulation by brass section tones in loud dynamic. The most striking difference, though, is the steady use of dissonances, minor keys or Doric/Phrygian scales, which seem to evoke some explosive features of the *Sturm und Drang* ("Storm and stress") expression. The fearful military topic also differs from the usual funeral marches in its persistence in harmonic dissonances and moved tempo instead of the meditative and melancholic slower motion of funeral marches. The latter normally end in harmonic resolutions of minor tonalities - a resignation sign that does not exist in the fearful military topic at all. A remarkable example of the fearful military topic in the music of Shostakovich is the beginning of the development section (bar 120) of the first movement of the *Symphony no. 5* (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Fearful Military Topic – Shostakovich's *Symphony no. 5* – Movement I – Bars 120-137.

### 3. The *Zavod* Topic and Music of Machines Topic

The representation of the noises of machines in music through *ostinato* motions dates back to the 17th century, since the first musical idea of *moto perpetuo*. Handel's *Suite no. 5 in E minor for cembalo* (called "The Harmonious Blacksmith") is a remarkable example of musical expression constituted by continuous motion in the baroque period. Haydn's *Symphony no. 101 "The clock"* and Paganini's *Moto Perpetuo op. 11 for violin* are also clear examples of this form of representation in different contexts in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>



century. *Music of machines* may be considered a topic in itself, but there is a considerable number of subcategories of this expression that can split the topic in different ways – *moto perpetuo* and *clock music* are only two of those possibilities.

In the composition *Pacific 231 – Mouvement Symphonique* (1923) Arthur Honneger opened a path for composers of the first decades of the 20th century to develop this expression in music, stimulated by the sense that industrialization was the image of progress and the future. This expression was later included in another subcategory of the topic music of machines, the *locomotive music topic*<sup>1</sup>. In its time, Honneger's music inspired Alexander Mosolov, a prominent composer of the early Soviet era, to write a piece of music called *Zavod op. 19* (known in English as "*Iron Foundry*") in the years 1926-1927, which can be regarded as the paradigmatic example of the specific expression that *music of machines* has acquired in the Soviet music. It represents in detail the noises of multiple machines inside a factory. However, the characteristics of this expression transcend the mere compilation of onomatopoeic sounds and delineated a particular character of musical expression that became a distinctive trait of the musical language of Soviet time. Musical textures were created based in overlapped *ostinato* motions, and such textures have reached a development independent of the intention to represent sound of machines. This expression, understood as a subcategory of the *music of machines*, is called *Zavod Topic* (Camargo 2013).

Figure 2 – The Zavod Topic - Alexander Mosolov's *Zavod (Iron Foundry)* op. 19 – bars 1-8.

<sup>1</sup> The locomotive music topic is also found in the famous *Toccata "The Little Train of the Brazilian Countryman"* from Heitor Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras no. 2*, articulated in a completely different way, configuring nostalgic landscape reminiscences rather than pointing the power of the machine itself.

The origin of the word "zavod" (transliteration of the original "завод") is Russian, and it means "factory". The recurrence of the evocation of factories in pictures in revolutionary Russian visual and performative arts as an important feature of socialist realism aesthetics, justifies its use in the original Russian term rather than "factory" in English. Particularly considering the meaning and importance of industrialization in the Soviet state relating to its role in the discourse of Soviet ideological propaganda, and the divergence of meaning in occurrences of music of machines topic in the repertoire of western cultures.

The main characteristics of the *zavod* topic may be recognized in the overlap of *ostinato* motions in polyrhythm: lines constructed with atonal or chromatic material, in a linear development, avoiding the use of chords (except for pedal clusters); the use of continuous pedal sounds in percussion instruments like drums, bass drums or cymbals; abrupt or precipitated sparse events, like hoots, bangs and clashes, played by the brass section or percussion instruments in *sforzato* articulations, in clusters or dissonances; the combination of melodic figurations in rhythmic antinomy; distortions of tone like *frullati* in wind instruments and *sul ponticello* in the strings, or the use of mute in the brass or strings; the repetition of dynamic patterns like sequences of figurations in *piano crescendo* in each bar or in each count; casual proportional relations between simultaneous *ostinato* movements like augmentation or diminution of rhythmic values, imitating the proportional relations of gear motions (Camargo 2013, 02).

The musical score for bars 1-12 of Shostakovich's Symphony no. 2, op. 14 "To the October" is presented in a multi-staff format. The tempo is marked "Largo" with a quarter note equal to 46 beats. The score includes parts for Violins I and II, Violas, Violoncelles, Double basses, and Bass drum. The music is characterized by repetitive, chromatic patterns and triplets, with a dynamic marking of "ppp con sord." (pianissimo con sordina). The bass drum part features a continuous, low-frequency pattern. The string parts consist of overlapping, rhythmic lines with frequent triplets, creating a complex, industrial texture.

Figure 3 – The Zavod Topic - Shostakovich's *Symphony no. 2 op. 14 "To the October"* – bars 1-12.

In the music of Shostakovich, the *zavod* topic arises in its original feature in his early works of the 1920's, such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Symphony op. 14 "To the October"* (Figure 3), composed in 1927. After the persecutions and purges promoted by the official policy for the arts in the 1930's, the atonal and noisy features of the original *zavod* topic were rejected and accused of degenerated formalism. Consequently, they were avoided by most composers, including Shostakovich. In this context the musical expression of the *zavod* topic survived as a transfiguration of overlapped *ostinato* motions, constituting a more proper musical texture than an onomatopoeic representation which can be found in different contexts in almost all Shostakovich's symphonies, and also in the music of many composers of his time, including Prokofiev and Khachaturian.

#### 4. The Slavonic Orthodox Church Chorus Topic

One of the distinctive traits of Russian operas of 19<sup>th</sup> century is the recurrence of historical epic plots. Since the advent of Glinka's operas *A Life for the Tsar* and *Ruslan and Ludmila*, and especially in the operas of the *Mighty-Five*<sup>2</sup> Group, stories of ancient tsars are the usual subjects of their librettos. This common character has led to the development of a musical sign to express the presence of the crowd on stage: the Slavonic Orthodox Church chorus. In operas such as Glinka's *Ruslan and Ludmilla*, Borodin's *Prince Igor* and Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, people on stage acclaiming the monarch are repeatedly singing in Slavonic Orthodox Church chorus style. Considering the divine nature attributed to monarchic power, as something given by God, original chants from the Orthodox Church of Slavonic tradition, like the *Spassi Gospodi*, a traditional *Troparion* of the Russian Orthodox Liturgy, reinforce this idea, and is used as a form of calling to the defence of the fatherland:

##### **Troparion of the Holy Cross** (Russian Orthodox Liturgy)

Спаси, Господи, люди твоя	Save, oh Lord, Your people,
И благослови достояние твое	And bless Your inheritance
Победы борющимся	Victory to those who fight
за веру правую	For the orthodox faith
и за святую Русь	And for the Holy Russia
На сопротивные даруя	Against the enemies
И твое сохраняя крестом	And protecting with Your cross
твоим жительство	Giving Your life.

This *Troparion* is known in Russian music especially by the quotation at the beginning of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture op. 49*, but the presence of Orthodox chants in Russian music is so wide that it is possible to say that the Orthodox Church Chorus Style is one of the most representative features of Russian music still in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Camargo 2012, 24). In the same way in which the Lutheran Choral became a feature of German symphonic music, present in many Romantic symphonies (Mendelssohn, Schumann and Brahms, for example), the Slavonic Orthodox Church Choral, in its own way, became a remarkable topic in the Russian symphonic repertoire. The main features of the Slavonic Orthodox Church Choral style are homophony, with restricted use of non-chord tones; church modalism with predominance of Aeolian, Doric and Phrygian scales; repetition of notes (or chords) as result of declamatory church style; eventual use of unison or parallel

<sup>2</sup>Mily Balakirev, Cesar Cui, Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Borodin and Modest Mussorgsky.



movements (instead the strict voice-leading rules of western music); rhythmic irregularity, with alternation of binary and ternary accents as result both from declamatory style and influence of Russian popular styles.

In the music of Shostakovich, it is not common to find the Slavonic Orthodox Church Chorus Topic in its original form, but many melodic lines are clearly based on its features. Furthermore, this style is the main root of a derivative musical expression of remarkable recurrence in his music that may be called *revolutionary chorus topic*, as well as the *lurodivyi* topic, another musical expression related to the Orthodox musicality, which will be discussed below.

## 5. The Revolutionary Chorus Topic

The Russian Revolution gave rise to new features for the music in the Soviet Era, but the image of the people singing as "the voice of the folk" has remained in its original character. Many songs in praise of the Revolution were written, and even when these songs were influenced by military tunes, they were systematically based in the Orthodox Church Chorus style. The creation of the Alexandrov Ensemble (known as *Red Army Choir*), a male choir that gathers soldier and folk tunes with liturgical choral harmonization in male voices, has stimulated the consolidation of the style.

This fusion of the Slavonic Orthodox Church choral style and the military topic is present in the music of Shostakovich, and can be observed in choral works like the *3<sup>rd</sup> Symphony "May 1<sup>st</sup>"* op. 20, *The Song of the Forests* op. 81 and *The Execution of Stepan Razin* op. 119. However, the use of this expression is not restricted to choral works, where it occurs as stylized quotes of its original form. It constitutes a new topic in Shostakovich's symphonic and instrumental music, which arises regularly as a reference to its origins, and it may be called **Revolutionary Chorus Topic**. In Figure 4 it is possible to observe in the orchestral section of the *3<sup>rd</sup> Symphony "May 1<sup>st</sup>"* op. 20 a typical characterization of the revolutionary chorus topic. The parallel choral movement in minor scale on the Strings and Woodwinds is combined with a martial movement on Horns and high Trombones.

608 Strings/Woodwinds  
*ff espress.*

Horns / Trombones  
*marcatissimo*

Bassoons / Tuba / Doublebasses  
*f*

Figure 4 – Revolutionary Chorus Topic – Shostakovich's *Symphony no. 3* – Bars 608-616.

It is important to note that not all the characteristics of the Slavonic Orthodox Church Chorus are always present in the revolutionary chorus topic, but most of them are recurrent, like features in major key, also present in the liturgy chants. The use as soloists of low-middle-voice instruments like horns, bassoons and trombones also characterize the revolutionary chorus topic, being a way to emulate the sound of male choir voices.

## 6. The *Iurodivyi* Topic

In the book *Testimony*<sup>3</sup>, which is supposed to be a report of Shostakovich's memories, Solomon Volkov presents him as an *Iurodivyi* composer (2006, xxv). *Iurodivyi* is a Russian socio-cultural phenomenon arising from the religious type of ancient "Holy Foolishness for Christ's Sake", an early form of Christian asceticism. Its practitioners "feign madness in order to provide the public with spiritual guidance yet shun praise for their saintliness and attract abuse in imitation of the suffering Christ" (Kobets 2011, 15)<sup>4</sup>. Following the formation process of the *Iurodivyi* phenomenon in Russia, Svitlana Kobets explains that

While holy foolishness as a behavioural paradigm and hagiographical ideal evolved in Byzantium, it was in medieval and modern Russia that the holy fool's cult and impact on culture reached unprecedented scope and intensity. (...) In the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries, the term *Iurodivyi* became a byword designating a type of secular behaviour, which derived its traits (e.g., presumed hidden holiness, grotesque self-humiliation, play-acting) from the behavioural paradigm of holy foolish asceticism and the model of saintliness. The secular and ascetic designations of the term have existed side by side. Such famous figures as Tsar Ivan IV Groznyi, Grigorii Rasputin, (...) as well as authors such as Fiodor Dostoevsky (...) to mention just a few, employed this playful cum subversive model in their behaviours, lifestyles, rhetoric and works (2011, 15-16)

In the same text, Kobets continues her analysis about the Russian *Iurodivyi* character stating that "the whole of Russian culture, as well as the Russian people's collective sense of self, has been markedly influenced by this phenomenon" (2011, 16). Playing the role of fool, the *Iurodivyi* points out evil and injustice while flouting conventions of moral and social behaviour and, "instead of going into hermetic or monastic seclusion, becomes a part of profane life and, moreover, a public figure" (Kobets 2002, 1). Living in close proximity to the Russian royalty and due to his ambiguous but also respectful character, an *Iurodivyi* could say to the Tsars uncomfortable truths that counsellors would not dare to say. The *Iurodivyi* as a Russian cultural stereotype can be observed in its appearance in Russian opera<sup>5</sup>, where its relevant role in the culture emerges and its character provides musical features for the establishment of a musical type, that can be identified as a distinctive mark in the music of Shostakovich and also in the Russian music in general.

Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* is identified as an historical portrait of Russian culture. The principal characters of the opera are markedly influenced by *Iurodivyi* behaviour. There is even a role called "*Iurodivyi*" himself with a short appearance, but the main *Iurodivyi* characteristics can be also identified in the two itinerant

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<sup>3</sup>The book is called *Testimony – The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich as Related to and Edited by Solomon Volkov*. First published in 1979, the book relates the content of interviews made by the author with the composer in his last years of life. Severely criticized by scholars, the book constitutes a very controversial source, even as to being an authentic transcription of Shostakovich's declarations, because the edition of the text and its first-person speech. Concerning the issues on *Testimony*, see *A Shostakovich casebook*, edited by Malcolm Hamrick Brown (2004).

<sup>4</sup> *Lice in the Iron Cap: Holy Foolishness in Perspective* (Hunt; Kobets 2011, 15-39).

<sup>5</sup> Svitlana Kobets states that "Karamzin's and then Pushkin's textualizations of the *Iurodivyi* for the first time in Russian literary history brought this figure to the purview of educated, secular Russian readership and later on Musorgskii's operatic masterpiece introduced *Iurodivyi* to the West." (2002, 01)

monks Varlaam and Misail and the chronicler anchorite Pimen. These characters observe the cruel acts of the Tsar Boris, and each one makes apparently senseless comments on the fate carried out by such acts. The extravagant *Varlaam Song* in the second scene of Act I is a prototypical example of what could be considered a musical *iurodivyi* expression: the main melody is directly based in the Slavonic Orthodox Church Choral Topic, while the orchestral accompaniment plays gallop expressions with high woodwind and percussion interventions, recalling a sort of circus music<sup>6</sup>. The conjunction of circus tones with the orthodox religious chant composes an exact musical picture of the expression of the *iurodivyi* (Figure 5).

The musical score for Figure 5 is for the 'Iurodivyi' topic in Mussorgsky's 'Varlaam's Song'. It is written in 2/4 time and marked 'Allegro'. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes staves for Violins/Woodwinds (marked 'f'), Trumpets (marked 'f'), Bassoons/Tuba/Lower Strings (marked 'f'), and Piatti/Cassa (marked 'f'). The second system includes staves for Violins (marked 'p'), the vocal line for VARLAAM (marked 'p'), and Bassoons/Lower Strings (marked 'p'). The vocal line has the Russian lyrics: 'Как во го-ро-де бы-ло во Ка-за-ни,'. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Figure 5 – The *iurodivyi* Topic – Mussorgsky's *Varlaam's Song*, from *Boris Godunov*, act I scene 2

In the music for Eisenstein's Film *Ivan the Terrible* Prokofiev also typifies the *iurodivyi* expression in music in a section called *iurodivyi* (no. 7 in the *oratorio* version by A. L. Stasevich). It is also an *Allegro tempostoso* (*sic*) gallop, with strong marks of woodwind and percussion, while the main melodic theme is clearly derived from Slavonic Orthodox Church Choral features (Figure 6).

The recurrence of this musical picture of the *iurodivyi* has consolidated a musical expression which goes beyond the representation of the character in the opera, film, or oratorio. Detached from its original context, this expression has become a remarkable feature of Shostakovich's music, and could for reference and use be properly called *iurodivyi Topic*.

<sup>6</sup> An exactly academic definition for Circus Music is difficult to ascertain, but it is possible to understand the Circus Music Style as a specific kind of fast march with gallop features, typically played by wind instruments accompanied by percussion instruments such as triangles, cymbals and snare drums approaching the former Turkish Style. Beyond its common features to related styles, the distinctive element of Circus Music Style is the presence of humorous or ingenious elements like *glissandi* or chromatic ornaments emulating mistaken notes or distortions of tones like *frullatti*, as well as occasionally disruptive melody leading (Cf. Julius Fučík's *Entry of Gladiators*).

(Allegro tempestoso  $\text{♩} = 80$ )

Violins / Woodwinds / Horns

*ff*

Violas

Bassoons / Tuba / Lower Strings

*ff*

Figure 6 – The *Iurodiviyi* Topic - Prokofiev's *Ivan the Terrible* – 7. *Iurodiviyi* ("Simpleton") – 4 bars before cipher 4

Observing the previous examples, it is possible to deduce that the *iurodiviyi* expression is, for its nature, a paradoxical expression. The Slavonic Orthodox Church Choral is essentially a serious and melancholic expression, completely different from the circus music with its sanguineous and agitated character. This combination is one of the possibilities to build paradoxical musical meanings, one of the many ways to produce ironical effects in music.

Piccolo / Flutes

Oboe I

Clarinets

Bassoons

Timpani coperti

Triangle

Figure 7 – The *Iurodiviyi* Topic – Shostakovich's *Symphony no. 10* – Movement III – Bars 54-66

Many studies about Shostakovich's music mention its ironical aspect, but rarely is this irony exactly pointed out in the scores. If Mussorgsky has developed ironical expressions in music, much of them based on opera plots, Shostakovich has produced this effect in musical expression in the very structure of his symphonies. In Figure 7 it is possible to identify a stylized occurrence of the *iurodiviyi* topic in *Symphony no. 10*. The main melody is built on the octatonic scale, also known as Korsakovian scale, while the accompaniment of bassoons and clarinets follows awkwardly, together with timpani and triangle, thus characterizing a kind of

circus music. Furthermore, some rhythmic instabilities of the accompaniment emphasize the simpleton character expressed by the *Iurodivyi* Topic. Shostakovich does not use a melody with a typical orthodox character, but by using the octatonic scale, he produces a melodic distortion of a modal tune, which, in this particular case, is emphasized by the occurrence of the motif DSCH: a musical acronym of his name (in the German transliteration *Dmitri SChostakowitsch*), applied to the German music notes system D, eS, C, H, which produces a humoristic effect, related to the *Iurodivyi* character.

Irony constitutes one of the most complex phenomena of the human language. Many linguistics and semiotics studies are dedicated to the understanding how the same verbal signs have changed their significance, depending how they are uttered and the context of their utterance. Musical significance is far from a wide understanding of its processes by musicians and the public in general. Even the most basic signifier concepts are hardly applied to musical elements. Then how could be possible to identify an ironical register in the musical discourse? Is it possible at all? Topic Theory reveals itself to be a consistent part of this investigation.

## 7. Conclusion

The observation of typical topic recurrences in Shostakovich's music demonstrates a precise key to understand the construction of meaning in his instrumental works. New cultural or social manifestations have the property to evoke new cross-references, resulting in new topics. The ambiguity of musical signs and the overlap of different expressions produce ironical and antagonistic expressions, which constitute the more relevant features of Shostakovich's music. This also explains many conflicting interpretations of his works: in some situations, the composer insists in certain musical expressions just to show their exactly opposite, using the humorous principle of overstatement. For these reasons, the topical analysis should be regarded as a necessary tool for a wider understanding of the structural construction of Shostakovich's music, and also for the recognition of the aesthetic development processes of new musical topics (or new uses of traditional topics), and as such an analytical key for a rigorous evaluation of the uniqueness of his music.

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