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On the Particular Commonalities of Compositional Approach in the Works of the St. Petersburg Classics

This article presents an analysis of the commonalities of compositional approach in Igor Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*, Sergei Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky* cantata, and Dmitri Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 7*. The features of the St. Petersburg Classics' object-oriented creative method are examined by means of conceptual pairing of morpheme and morph. A description is provided of the morpheme of the event, and its morph of the prayer ritual, in the first and third movements of the *Symphony of Psalms*. A comparison is drawn between the morph of the prayer ritual and the morph of the enemy invasion in "The Battle on the Ice" from *Alexander Nevsky* and in the invasion episode from the first movement of *Symphony No. 7*. In the "Crusaders in Pskov" section of *Alexander Nevsky*, the textual realization of the morpheme of the environment has been traced, in the form of the morph of the Teutonic yoke.

The melodic, rhythmic, and textural resources in the morphic implementation of the morphemes of space, motion, and dissonance, and the Janus morpheme, are revealed. Common approaches to choral and orchestral writing are identified, as are similarities in melody and rhythm, which bond together these three masterpieces of 20th-century musical culture.

Keywords: Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, *Symphony of Psalms*, *Alexander Nevsky* cantata, *Symphony No. 7*, morphological analysis, morph and morpheme in music.

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О некоторых общих композиционных приёмах в произведениях Санкт-петербургских классиков

Статья посвящена анализу общих композиционных приёмов в «Симфонии псалмов» Игоря Стравинского, кантате «Александр Невский» Сергея Прокофьева и Седьмой симфонии Дмитрия Шостаковича. Особенности объектно-изобразительного творческого метода Санкт-петербургских классиков рассмотрены на основе понятийной пары «морфема-морф». Дана характеристика морфеме события и её морфа молитвенного ритуала в крайних частях «Симфонии псалмов». Проведено сравнение морфа молитвенного ритуала с морфом вражеского нашествия в «Ледовом побоище» из кантаты «Александр Невский», в эпизоде нашествия I части Седьмой симфонии. Текстовая реализация морфемы среды в виде морфа тевтонского ига прослежена в «Крестоносцах во Пскове» из «Александра Невского».

Выявлены мелодические, ритмические, фактурные средства морфной реализации морфем пространства, движения, диссонанса, Януса. Обнаружены общие приёмы хорового и оркестрового письма, сходства в мелодике и ритмике, сближающие три шедевра музыкальной культуры XX века.

Ключевые слова: Игорь Стравинский, Сергей Прокофьев, Дмитрий Шостакович, «Симфония псалмов», кантата «Александр Невский», Седьмая симфония, морфологический анализ, морф и морфема в музыке.

Stravinsky, Prokofiev and Shostakovich have a similar perception of the world as a multipolar, multilayered, multicultural continuum with features that are constantly changing.¹ These three St. Petersburg Classics base their artistic incarnation of the actuality surrounding them, as an accumulation of interacting realities, on their observations of phenomena which exist externally to them, as a variety of characteristic features and properties. The emotional response arising in this process provides the foundation for the profound psychologism of their work. The musical imagery of Stravinsky's, Prokofiev's and Shostakovich's compositions is inherently descriptive, plastic and flexible, spatial, and focused on the image-associative potential of human perception. Almost every one of their musical statements is tightly tied to the potential, with which they are imbued, from the start, for substantive interpretation by the listener. Each of the three great St. Petersburg composers possessed a unique individuality based, in large part, on the dissimilarity of the phenomena they artistically recreated. At the same time, they are connected by their devotion to a creative method grounded in the multilayered associativity of genre and style as well as psychologically enriched tone painting. For more detailed description of the creative methods of Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich, I have introduced for use in musicology the conceptual pair of the "morpheme" and "morph" [5; 6].

Having been borrowed from the field of linguistic morphology, the concept of the morpheme in music signifies a certain *construction* of sounds, crafted in terms of rhythm, timbre, and tessitura in their horizontal sequence and vertical combinations. In mediating its physical (sound) nature in a musical image resulting from the aesthetic mastering of the surrounding environment, the morpheme is essentially an object combining within it both material and spiritual initial points. The transformation of the morpheme into a basic conceptual unit of the musical language is based on one of its inalienable properties: namely, innate conceptuality. Perceived instantly by the ear, but difficult to define verbally, this property is directly connected with the associative and figurative possibilities of aural perception. For example, the *morpheme of the environment* and the *morpheme of the event* are based on the interactions of two or more sound progressions, very often temporally atactic. In structural contrast to one another, these

progressions also diverge in terms of tessitura and timbre, which allows them to generate, in the listener's associative perception, an image of a sort of space-time continuum. In contrast to the *morpheme of the environment*, the *morpheme of the event* always includes an ostinato, personifying the temporal process. The *morpheme of space*, as a rule, consists of two elements. The reverberating pedal-tone background is associated with endless distances, while the melodic relief which pours over it creates the impression of something visibly within reach. The sound construction that is the *morpheme of motion* is based on the contrasting combination of two or more horizontals, one of which is manifested as rhythmically uniform, personifying regularity and rest, and the other of which – rhythmically variegated – personifies irregularity and motion. The *morpheme of dissonance* implies the opposition of consonance and dissonance. In European music this opposition has become a sort of acoustic equivalent to the figurative contrast between Love and Hate, Good and Evil, Life and Death. At its foundation lies a sound construction the constituent parts of which form dissonant (minor second, major seventh, or tritone) friction. The *Janus morpheme* (with the metaphorical similarity to the two-faced god Janus) is my appellation for the sound constructions with features which preclude an unambiguous interpretation, either in terms of modal and harmonic organization, formal structure and compositional functionality, or, in the end, in terms of the imagery and its meaning. All these morphemes interact dynamically with one another. Their alternations and interpenetrations are what makes the musical fabric *polymorphic*.

Serving as the textual realization of the morpheme, the morph endows it with genre-related and stylistic "flesh and blood," both in the form of chords and in the form of a more or less unfolded sound construction. The morpheme and the morph have the same relationship as an invariant and a variant. For example, the *morpheme of the event* appears in the first and third movements of Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* as variants of the morph of the prayer ritual. In "The Battle on the Ice" in Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky*, and in the invasion episode from the first movement of Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 7*, it is embodied in the form of the morph of the enemy invasion. The *morpheme of the environment* lies at the foundation of "The Crusaders in Pskov" in the cantata *Alexander Nevsky*, and its morph personifies the Teutonic

yoke. A comparative analysis of the morphemes and morphs used by the St. Petersburg Classics permits us not only to identify the individually characteristic features of their artistic ideas, but also to find points of similarity between them.

The imagery in the three movements of Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* is based on the biblical text of the Psalms of David.² In the first movement, the initial phrase of the chorus, *Exaudi orationum meam, Domine* ("Lord, hear my prayer") plays a key role. Stravinsky crafts the text of this appeal to God in a manner equipped with clear similarities to a Gregorian chant.³ In scholarly literature dedicated to the composer, opinions on the topic differ. For instance, G. Alfeyevskaya describes the signs of the genre of Gregorian chant in the main choral melody of the first movement as "chimerical." She believes that the free declamation and irregular rhythms of this melody, which are incompatible with the aesthetics of Gregorian chant, are especially perceptible against the background of the unchanging rhythmic pulse of the orchestra [2, pp. 255–256]. In reality, the rhythm in the choral part is quite regular. Its quantitative nature and lack of rhythmic syncopation within the measure clearly indicate this to be so. The fact that Stravinsky periodically uses rhythmic expansions in the ostinato repetitions of the melodic minor second $e^1 - f^1$ is evidence that the composer strives to use them to emphasize the boundaries of the choral phrases (Example 1). Equally debatable is G. Alfeyevskaya's assertion about free declamation. A mirror-like symmetry is evident enough in the choral introduction of the first movement. The only deviation from a perfect reflection in the choral melody in measures 1 to 3 and 4 to 7 is the rhythmic enlargement of its two last sounds in measures 5 to 7. Comparison of Stravinsky's melody to Gregorian chant confirms the phenomenon that notwithstanding all the stylistic differences, the Russian master fully brings to life the main aesthetic dogma of the archaic prototype: the idea of cantus planus, plainsong, "smooth" or "even" singing.

The orchestral and choral fragment "Lord, hear my prayer" differs in the fact that its texture is multi-layered. The upper layer is the choral part, doubled by the first and third oboes. The middle layer is populated by the ostinato pair of melodic minor thirds $b - d^1 \Rightarrow b\text{-flat} - d\text{-flat}^1$, formed by the overlapping lines of the second and fourth oboes and English horn. G. Alfeyevskaya interprets this combination as the ringing of bells [2, p. 256]. As

a matter of fact, its role is akin to the "beating" of the four-sound structure $d\text{-flat}^1 - b\text{-flat} - e\text{-flat}^1 - b\text{-flat}$ in the English horn from "Danses des adolescentes" in *The Rite of Spring*. In both cases, the ostinato four-pitch structures personify the counting of time, and act similarly to the ticking of a timepiece.⁴ The most dynamic part of the texture is its lower layer, which is based on the ostinato turns of ascending and descending unison figures in the bassoons, varying in performing technique (Example 2).

The entire fragment of the choral invocation to God in the first movement of the *Symphony of Psalms* is connected with the **morpheme of the event**. Its morphic implementation recreates a prayer ritual, combining within itself the externally apparent restraint of the ritual act (the choral line), the experience of the real pulse of time (the ostinato-thirds element in the second and fourth oboe and English horn), and the ecstatic quality of the inner emotional state (the bassoon figures). The **morpheme of motion** appears in this fragment as the contrast between the rhythmically variegated choral part and the rhythmically uniform orchestral part: in making its point, the prayer also organically contains within it the passionate anticipation of a revelation from God. Not coincidentally, Stravinsky himself noted that he composed the first movement "in a state of religious and musical ebullience" [19, p. 77]. When the morph of the prayer ritual repeats in reh. 7–8, the musical fabric is also enriched with the **morpheme of dissonance**. The morphic representation of the latter is shaped as a tritone, rhythmically enlarged doubling of the line with ostinato-thirds in the second and fourth oboes and the English horn by the cellos and double basses. Combining all three morphemes endows the sound with greater spatial volume and active advancement through time.

In the third movement of the *Symphony of Psalms*, new features may be discerned in the implementation of the **morpheme of the event** as the morph of the prayer ritual. Each of the six verses of Psalm 150, underlying the text of the final movement, includes the word *Laudate* ("Praise"). Among the various forms of praise for God inspired by the Biblical text, the orchestral texture deserves special attention. It consists of chordal repetitions by the horn quartet, doubled in the initial passages by the bassoon quartet (Example 3). Its high level of energy is based in the interpenetration of the **morphemes of space, motion and dissonance**.

The spatial morpheme is implemented as the opposite of the intermittent repetitions of the *C major* chord in the horns and the poly-ostinato layer of the trumpet, harp, bassoons and low strings. The irregularity of the first and the regularity (ostinato) of the second is contributed by the morpheme of motion. The morpheme of dissonance reveals itself in the tritone friction arising between the tonic of the *C major* chord and the initial tone of the three-tone *F-sharp – G – A-flat* ostinato motive in the bassoons and lower strings. The other ostinato motive – the pair of melodic thirds, *g¹ – b-flat¹* => *a-flat¹ – c²* in the trumpet and harp – forms an intonational arc with the “ticking” element of the morph of the prayer ritual from the first movement of the work.⁵

As it gradually develops, the orchestral prayer-ritual morph in the finale to the *Symphony of Psalms* is enriched with striking new intonational details. For example, at the culminating point in the wave (reh. 5, mm. 3–4) it is brought down in the form of a descending chromatic progression, known in baroque musical rhetoric as *passus duriusculus* (literally “harsh passage”).⁶ In the concluding morphic passage (two measures before reh. 15 and afterwards) the horns’ chordal repetitions are also doubled by the chorus. I must note that the orchestral and choral repetition method acts as the main dynamic factor in the musical development. The powerful textural and dynamic growth it inspires provide the morph of the prayer ritual with features diametrically opposed to the contemplative mood of the slow sections. Regardless of how Stravinsky himself explained such a dualism of imagery,⁷ it is possible that it was that dualism which attracted Prokofiev’s attention and, ultimately, exerted a palpable influence on the conception and incarnation of “The Crusaders in Pskov” and “The Battle on the Ice” in *Alexander Nevsky*.

It is a documented fact that Prokofiev knew Stravinsky’s *Symphony of Psalms* well. For example, in a letter to Myaskovsky dated November 9, 1930, we encounter the following lines: “I have seen the proofs for Stravinsky’s new psalm-song symphony: stern, dry, technically interesting. It seems closest of all to Oedipus in origin, but, thank God, without the diminished seventh chords” [13, p. 347]. In an interview published by the newspaper *Sovetskoe iskustvo* [Soviet Art] on April 26, 1933, Prokofiev mentions the *Symphony of Psalms* as being among the scores which he brought to use to introduce Soviet composers to contemporary

Western music [14, p. 122]. Prokofiev’s connection to the *Symphony of Psalms* might also be evident in his use of the Latin text in the Teutonic choral part of *Alexander Nevsky*. Here, the Latin sounds to the Russian ear (and to others as well) like a collection of incomprehensible, unknown words.⁸ Prokofiev grouped them into equally sized couplets chanted in 4/4 time, with phonetics that confer upon the image of the enemy a striking touch of characterization. The structure of the couplets, with equal numbers of syllables in each line, permits a double accent:

Trochee: / - / - / - / - / - / - / - / - / -
Peregrinus, expectavi, / Pe des meos in cimbali

Third peon: - - / - - - / - - - / - - - / -
Peregrinus, expectavi, / Pedes meos in cimbali

A literal translation would be: *peregrinus* – stranger, wanderer; *expectavi* – fearful expectation; *pedes meos* – walking; *in cimbali* – in cymbals. A semantically precise translation is possible: Fear of stranger, walking and beating cymbals.⁹

In contrast to the *Symphony of Psalms*, which is dedicated to man’s relationship with the world and with God, the historical, heroic, patriotic film by Sergei Eisenstein, as well as the cantata *Alexander Nevsky* which Prokofiev composed from the music for that film, are based on the eternal theme of the battle between Good and Evil. The highly conflictual manifestation of this theme in Eisenstein’s film, and the extreme figurative polarization between the opposing sides, are reinforced by Prokofiev’s music. What can be portrayed mostly by visual effects in cinema is much more difficult to portray in music, a sound-based form of art. In Prokofiev, the sharp contrast between the types of vocal intonation plays the decisive role in the polarization of the Russian and Teutonic camps, specifically the opposition between the *songlike* Russian melodies and the Teutonic *choral psalmody* with Latin text. The latter is connected with those fragments from the *Symphony of Psalms* which are shaped by the morph of the prayer ritual in the first and third movements. Essentially, in *Alexander Nevsky* the composer took the same approach as that found in the *Symphony of Psalms*, which Stravinsky often used in his dialogue with musical objects of the past and present.

Prokofiev’s handling of the choral psalmody with Latin text is extremely paradoxical. Whereas in the *Symphony of Psalms* there is a serious approach to the spiritual genre and its ritual texts of

prayer, in *Alexander Nevsky* the genre itself seems to have been turned inside out, and Church Latin is used in a grotesque, satirical tone to characterize the image of absolute Evil. It seems unexpected, outside the boundaries of existing concepts, even intentionally impudent, that the idea of *cantus planus*, “smooth” or “even” singing as a component of the Catholic service, is transformed by Prokofiev into its complete opposite, into a symbol of a merciless, mortally dangerous phenomenon. The great Russian composer interprets the conflict between Good and Evil in *Alexander Nevsky* as a conflict between various cultures and even between different civilizations. How opportunely such an interpretation might prove today! As a genius of musical portraiture, Prokofiev highlights the most characteristic features of the phenomenon he recreates, strengthening and exaggerating them, until he achieves a completely new quality of musical imagery. The melodic smoothness and evenness of Gregorian chant, recreated in the first movement of the *Symphony of Psalms*, is transformed by Prokofiev into almost lifeless, mechanical repetitiveness.

In the cantata *Alexander Nevsky* the Teutonic figurative domain is presented both statically, as the morph of the Teutonic yoke (“The Crusaders in Pskov”), and dynamically, as the morph of the enemy invasion (“The Battle on the Ice”). The figurative nature of both morphs is determined by the interaction between two system-defining elements: the intonational embryo in the brass instruments, and the “Peregrinus” chorus itself. The embryo, the initial measure of “The Crusaders in Pskov” (Example 4), includes a rolled-up form of the intonational ideas for several other elements. The rhythmic syncopation inside the measure in the first trombone and two of the horns presents a hint of the Sarabande in the “The Crusaders,” and in the rhythmically intensified version, it enters into a military, signal-like completion of the central element in both morphs: the enemy’s melody-signal (Example 5). The chromatic “slide” down in the trombone and trumpet grows into a *passus durisculus* (*c-sharp – c – b – b-flat – a – g-sharp – f-double sharp*) in the woodwinds and strings (see reh. 17) and provides the rhythmic foundation for the three-tone motive, a sort of leitmotif for all of the cantata’s Teutonic music (Example 6). The minor-second friction formed by the tonic *c-sharp minor* triad and the harmonic leading tone *b-sharp* indicate the presence of the

morpheme of dissonance. In terms of imagery, this is the main factor giving rise to the “mortal fear” evoked by the initial vertical chord structure in “The Crusaders in Pskov.” In “The Battle on the Ice,” this material transforms into an ostinato harmonic layer, formed by successions of the minor third and diminished fourth in the violas and the perfect fifth and tritone in the cellos and double basses. The overall musical fabric, here, is perceived as a chain of consonant harmonies in the *c-sharp-minor* triad and an acutely dissonant *b-sharp – e – f-sharp* chord based on the tritone (Example 7). The role of this harmonic complex is twofold: with its imitation of an unstopping clockwork mechanism, it recreates a genuine temporal process, but it also produces the spatial effect of an approaching object (in this case, the Teutonic cavalry “swine”). As a required element of the **morpheme of the event**, Prokofiev’s ostinato is provided as a succession of compact *harmonic verticals*. In Stravinsky, it is the result of polyphonic combination of *melodic horizontals*.

The second system-defining element of the morphs of the enemy yoke and enemy invasion, the “Peregrinus” chorus, is delivered in “The Crusaders in Pskov” in a manner similar to the chordal repetitions in the orchestral and choral parts in the finale of the *Symphony of Psalms*. Its first five measures consist of a *c-sharp minor* triad, formed by mutually complementary melodic lines in different groups of the chorus. The **morpheme of motion** is used here as a contrast to the rhythmic uniformity in the tenors and the rhythmic variability in the altos and basses. The groups in the chorus intone the beginning choral line at varying tempos, which prevents the Latin text from being properly perceived. With that, Prokofiev achieves its complete semantic devaluation: not only are the words sung incomprehensibly in meaning, the text itself is syntactically blurred by its polyphonic arrangement into two versions with different tempos. Such an interpretation of the Latin in the “Peregrinus” chorus was a completely intentional idea on the part of the composer. Especially meaningful in terms of working with the Latin text is the central fragment of the cantata, the scene depicting the duel between the Teutonic and Russian soldiers in “The Battle on the Ice.” At the moment the enemy camps clash, the Teutonic camp is represented by the heart-rending shouting in the chorus, chanting the sole intelligible phrase: “*Vincant arma crucifera! Hostis pereat!*” (“Victory to the arms that bear the cross! Death to

the enemies!”) The *d – e – f* diatonic cluster in the chorus is heard clearly in the multilayer sonorant, coloristic texture of the whole, as the result of its rhythmically even, swift repetition (Example 8). It is in this tense sonic moment that the textural similarity between Prokofiev’s and Stravinsky’s scores is most evident.

The orchestral and choral variations on differently repeated melodies in the altos and basses of the chorus during the exposition to “The Crusaders in Pskov” prepare the ground for the appearance of a new signal-like melody (Example 5). This is the main, central morphic element of Teutonic imagery in the composition. Its melodic contour resembles the choral introduction to the first movement of Stravinsky’s *Symphony of Psalms*. Prokofiev’s and Stravinsky’s melodies have an *intonational evenness and structural symmetry* in common. Their intonational evenness is based on a repetition of seconds which descends, historically, from Gregorian chant. In Stravinsky, we can draw an imaginary line of symmetry between mm. 3 and 4; in Prokofiev – between mm. 2 and 3. Stravinsky’s symmetry rests on exact melodic repetition with asymmetrical rhythmic enlargements. Prokofiev achieves the effect of symmetry as the result of intervallic counteremotion,¹⁰ joining the first and second melodic pairs of measures into a single whole. The second half of Prokofiev’s melody, including its final military signal-like ascending leap by a fifth, can be considered a melody *prototype* for the morph of the enemy invasion from Shostakovich’s *Symphony No. 7* (Example 9).

In “The Battle on the Ice” the Teutonic imagery is enhanced with new features. *Passus duriusculus* transforms into a chain of descending choral seconds (see reh. 36 and 41). The main signal-like melody is compressed down to its second set of two measures, anticipating a tirata (Example 10). The internal repetition makes the greater part of this melodic transformation into almost a quotation of the choral melody from the first movement of the *Symphony of Psalms*. I must emphasize that Prokofiev’s use of baroque musical rhetoric accessories is more justified by the context than is Stravinsky’s. For instance, the *passus duriusculus* as a symbol of sorrow makes more complex the imagery and semantic context of the third movement of the *Symphony of Psalms*, lifting up praise to the Lord. In Prokofiev, the use of the *passus duriusculus* is directly connected to the role of Evil in the cantata’s artistic concept. The

same can be said about the tirata as an embodiment of the image of the arrow or the shot, and about the descending, sorrowful trochaic seconds in the chorus.

Shostakovich knew Stravinsky’s music well. This is confirmed not only by his participation in the legendary performance of “Les Noces” in 1926 [11, p. 362–363], but also by the four-hand piano arrangement of the *Symphony of Psalms* which he completed in the mid-1930s.¹¹ In a letter to Prokofiev about *Alexander Nevsky*, dated January 14, 1941, Shostakovich notes: “Despite a whole array of impressive moments, as a whole, I did not like this composition. It seems to me that it violates certain artistic norms. There is too much there that is physically loud, illustrative music. In particular, it seemed to me that many movements of the cantata end right at the beginning. The beginning of the battle and the entire song for the lower voice made a strong impression on me. Those movements are truly ingenious. Unfortunately, I cannot speak so about all the rest” [10, p. 109]. Shostakovich’s point of view certainly requires commentary. What was said is striking, but so is the manner in which it was done. The chosen tone of the letter inevitably draws us into the realm of the personal relationship between the two great Russian composers, which falls outside of the thematic bounds of this article. A substantive analysis of Shostakovich’s criticism permits us to divide the assessments into a negative and a positive group. The negative group includes some general aesthetic remarks (“violates certain artistic norms,” “too much ... physically loud, illustrative music”) and one comment on the compositional technique (“many movements of the cantata end right at the beginning”). The positive assessment has to do with particular sections in the work which Shostakovich recognizes as “truly ingenious.” When commenting on his remark about the compositional lack of development in certain sections, we must keep in mind the profound difference between the creative identities of the two contemporaries. To abstract in the extreme from the details of the specific musical texts, I would emphasize that Prokofiev’s musical imagery, due to the substantive and semantic certitude it displays from the start, demands smaller expanses of time for its development than does Shostakovich’s internally contradictory, ambivalent imagery. What ends when it has barely begun, in a different aesthetic paradigm, presents itself as an artistically self-sufficient whole. Shostakovich’s rebuke

regarding an excess of physically loud, illustrative music appears paradoxical if we consider his own experience in composing *Symphony No. 7*. Clearly, in *Alexander Nevsky* and in the episode of invasion from the first movement of *Symphony No. 7*, both Russian geniuses solve a similar artistic problem. Taking the *morpheme of the event* as their foundation, they recreate the universal Evil in the form of the morph of the enemy invasion. In both cases, illustrative elements, sound descriptiveness (or, more broadly, psychologically enriched tone painting), and also physical power and an unusually loud volume of sound provide the necessary conditions for achieving the desired artistic result.

In the positive portion of his assessment, Shostakovich mentions a fragment from the cantata *Alexander Nevsky* which exerted a direct influence on the invasion episode in *Symphony No. 7*. That is the final four measures of the introduction to “The Battle on the Ice.” Here, the main Teutonic signal-like melody sounds from a distance, in the muted trombones and English horn. In Prokofiev, the *morpheme of space* appears as a morph formed out of melodic contours (trombones and English horn) and a background pedal in the strings, the intonational foundation of which is the introductory chord from “The Crusaders in Pskov.” The transformation of this pedal into the ostinato “clock” element that is required by the *morpheme of the event* (*Moderato*, reh. 34) is a convincing example of the *polymorphic* musical fabric in Prokofiev.

Comparing the final measure and a half in Prokofiev’s main Teutonic melody and the initial two measures in Shostakovich’s melody for the invasion episode (Examples 5 and 9) reveals their obvious intonational kinship. By reducing the repetition of seconds to a minimum, Shostakovich provides his melody with a greater amount of forward motion. In terms of structure, it is a complexly organized, multi-element musical organism. It has three fundamental elements: the melodic second, representing the Gregorian elements perceptible in Prokofiev and Stravinsky; the military-signal fifth from the Prokofiev cantata’s main Teutonic melody; and the spondaic ending, related genetically to the repetitions in *Symphony of Psalms* and *Alexander Nevsky*. In mm. 6–8, a descending melodic motion over the range of a sixth is added to these elements. Its contextual role is to complete the previous melodic leap, based on expanding the military signal element to the interval of the sixth. Shostakovich

interprets in his own way the typical “leap-filling” approach to melodic development: the filling-in begins with the tone a third above the uppermost note in the leap.

The view of the intonational basis in the melody of the invasion episode I propose adds a new line to the existing picture.¹² The episode itself presents a classic example of the *morpheme of the event*, executed in the form of the morph of the enemy invasion. At its foundation there are two elements: a unison melody (performed by various strokes) in the orchestral strings and an ostinato rhythmic formula in the military drum.¹³ As the basis for a large-scale cycle of variations, both elements boast internal structural flexibility, an ambiguity that allows them to interact dynamically with each other. The eight-beat foundation in the military drum’s ostinato, even given its apparently square, march-like image, is internally mobile due to the rhythmic accents on weak beats. The main melody of the invasion episode is polymorphic in its nature. Its four intonational elements, as they interact with each other, shape new variants which are reflected as mirror images, reversed in terms of interval, structurally expanded, and truncated. Worthy of special attention is its chorale-like chordal closure, which L. Akopyan views as making a travesty of the texture in Bach chorales (?) [1, p. 206]. There can be no doubt about its origins. Moreover, it symbolizes the shift from what could figuratively be called the “individual” to the “collective,” the transition from the solo to the choral. Being theatrical in its nature, this shift reproduces in a small format the macro-shift in the dramaturgy of the entire invasion episode: the clash with the *melody of the obstacle* in reh. 45.¹⁴

The invasion episode as a compositional whole has been examined in terms of its genetic ties with the variations in the finale of Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony* and Ravel’s *Bolero*. Artistic assessments of the episode have been far from unanimous. L. Akopyan, for example, describes the twelve variations of the invasion episode as a “series of exercises or etudes on elementary composition, which gradually grow more complicated, each solving a different technical problem” [1, p. 204]. In actuality, the gradual, stepwise textural-polyphonic and timbre-dynamic complexities and the growth of the musical fabric present the most striking and impressive way in which the invasion episode develops, but it is by no means the only way. From the point of view of the evolving imagery of the

whole, the gradual maturation of the antagonistic elements within it, which finally lead to its collapse, is of special interest. What grows from the nutritional medium of the simplest two-, three-, or four-tone ostinato motives as counterpoint to the melody of the invasion in variations 1 through 9 is the first forebear of the melody of the obstacle (Example 11). The two rhythmic variants in the leap of a fourth, filled in by a figure remarkably similar in its intonation to the chromatic “slide” down in the intonational embryo of “The Crusaders in Pskov” from *Alexander Nevsky* (Example 4), overlap contrapuntally with one another. The major seventh friction arising in the process presents a striking example of the morphic realization of the **morpheme of dissonance** in Shostakovich’s music. At the end of the tenth variation, the rhythmic variant of the leap filled in, which is almost identical to the melody of the obstacle, grows into its own initial phrase (see the horn line in the four measures prior to reh. 41). In the chorale-like concluding two measures of the eleventh and twelfth variations, the initial phrase of the melody of the obstacle is chanted by the high winds (see four measures before reh. 43 and three measures before reh. 45). Despite its intonational kinship with the melody of the invasion (the dotted rhythm, the spondaic endings), the melody of the obstacle is its structural opposite. The long four-measure monolithic phrases, uninterrupted by pauses and repeated precisely, enter into a conflictual dialogue with the melody of the invasion and destroy it from within. The initial execution of the melody of the obstacle is presented against the background of the chanted repetition of an *A-major* chord in the

greater part of the orchestra. The use of chordal repetition at the juncture, the moment of transition in the development of the form as a whole, brings the invasion episode closer to “The Battle on the Ice” and the fast episodes of the third movement of the *Symphony of Psalms*.

In terms of creative influence, the invasion episode from *Symphony No. 7* presents evidence that, after taking into account Stravinsky’s and Prokofiev’s musical endeavors, Shostakovich came up with an original artistic solution. The figuratively contrasting elements in the morph of the prayer ritual from the *Symphony of Psalms*, predicated on the conflictual interaction between the Russian and the Teutonic elements in *Alexander Nevsky*, appear in the invasion episode of *Symphony No. 7* as an internal contradiction, a polymorphic whole, based on the interpenetration of the **morpheme of the event** and the **Janus morpheme**.

The comparative morphological analysis taken up in this article is intended to expose those elements in a musical text which can lead to a more precise interpretation of its content. Sound constructions and their innate conceptuality which is associatively connected with human understanding of time and space, motion and events, play a crucial role in this attempt. Bringing into play the conceptual pair of “morph-morpheme” from linguistics helps make the verbal characterization of the musical imagery more flexible and natural. The subjectivity, and the tendency to fall short of the truth, which are inherent in any evaluative statement about music, are partially overcome as the result of the morpheme-morph “bridge” between the world of sounds and the world of words.

EXAMPLES

Example 1 Stravinsky, *Symphony of Psalms*.
Movement I, reh. 4, mm. 1–7, alto part



Example 2

Stravinsky, *Symphony of Psalms*.
Movement I, reh. 4, mm. 2–6

Tempo ♩ = 92



Example 3 Stravinsky, *Symphony of Psalms*.
Movement III, reh. 3, mm. 1–8

Example 5 Prokofiev, *Alexander Nevsky*.
“The Crusaders in Pskov,” reh. 16, mm. 9–12

Example 6 Prokofiev, *Alexander Nevsky*.
“The Crusaders in Pskov,” reh. 17, m. 1

Example 7 Prokofiev, *Alexander Nevsky*.
“The Battle on the Ice,” reh. 34, mm. 1–2

Example 8 Prokofiev, *Alexander Nevsky*.
“The Battle on the Ice,” reh. 43, mm. 1–2

Example 4 Prokofiev, *Alexander Nevsky*.
“The Crusaders in Pskov,” reh. 14, mm. 1–2

Example 9 Shostakovich, *Symphony No. 7*.
Movement I, reh. 19, mm. 5–6

Example 10 Prokofiev, *Alexander Nevsky*.
“The Battle on the Ice,” reh. 35, mm. 1–5

Allegro moderato $\text{♩} = 112$

Example 11 Shostakovich. *Symphony No. 7*.
Movement I, reh. 38, m. 10

A tempo $\text{♩} = 128$

NOTES

¹ The concept of the St. Petersburg classic school was introduced in two prior publications [16; 17]. The initial idea for this article belongs to my teacher, Senior Doctor of Arts, Professor of the St. Petersburg State Conservatory Ivan Sergeyevich Fedoseyev. The active discussion of it was interrupted by the sudden death of my dear co-author in August, 2017.

² A detailed description of the biblical sources in the *Symphony of Psalms* is provided by Larisa Gerver [4, pp. 149–159].

³ The composer himself had this to say about the similarity: “I was not aware of Phrygian modes, Gregorian chants, Byzantinisms, or anything of the sort, while composing this music, though, of course, influences said to be denoted by such scriptwriters’ baggage-stickers may very well have been operative” [19, p. 77].

⁴ For more about the “ticking clock” image in Stravinsky and his contemporaries, see: [7, pp. 17–21].

⁵ One other textural element, the major second pedal *c – b-flat* in the cellos, is continued from the previous section.

⁶ On baroque rhetorical figures and their role in Stravinsky’s musical language, see: [8, pp. 100–115].

⁷ In his *Dialogues and a Diary*, Stravinsky declares: “The Psalms are poems of exaltation, but also of *anger, judgment, and even curse*. Although I regarded Psalm 150 as a song to be danced, as David danced before the Ark, I knew that I would have to treat it in an imperative way <...> The *Allegro* in Psalm 150 was inspired by a *vision of Elijah’s chariot* climbing towards the Heavens; never before had I written anything quite so literal as the triplets for horns and piano to suggest *the horses and chariot* [the emphasis is mine. – V. G.]” [19, pp. 76, 78].

⁸ As an aside, I want to note that in October 1994, the *Musical Times* magazine published a letter to the editor about a hypothesis by BBC Symphony Chorus soloist Morag Kerr regarding the origins of the text of “Peregrinus” in the cantata *Alexander Nevsky*. Kerr believes that Prokofiev inserted randomly selected words

from the Biblical text used in Stravinsky’s *Symphony of Psalms* into the initial choral phrase, which is repeated twice (later with small additions) [18, pp. 608–609].

⁹ I am grateful to Natalia Kuzmina for her assistance in the translation, interpretation and structural analysis of the initial stanza of the “Peregrinus” chorus. The idea she expressed, in a private conversation, that Prokofiev interprets this stanza as a simple folk verse (called in Russian a *chastushka*) certainly requires further elaboration.

¹⁰ Here, countermotion means the combination of retrograde motion and intervallic inversion.

¹¹ This arrangement was published in Vol. 114 of the *New Collected Works of Dmitri Shostakovich* (Moscow: DSCH, 2017).

¹² This has been examined in the extensive literature dedicated to *Symphony No. 7*: the preparation of the invasion melody in the exposition section of the first movement [3, p. 127 and on], and its possible external sources [1, pp. 205–206]. Figurative characterizations of the invasion melody are striking for their diverging points of view. These range from a “harmless, simple, slightly trite melody” (Alexander Dolzhansky), a march of mechanical dolls (Lev Danilevich), and a soldiers’ marching song (Marina Sabinina) to the direct opposite of Beethoven’s “theme of joy” (Levon Akopyan) and a symbol of German totalitarianism (Vera Valkova) (see: [12, p. 154; 15, p. 176; 1, p. 201; 3, p. 131 and on]).

¹³ Both elements have confused many Shostakovich researchers by to their outward unpretentiousness, bordering on simplicity. For example, Genrikh Orlov notices in the drum ostinato a “soulless, mechanical, even rhythm.” In his opinion, the melody in the strings, “meticulously beating on two-measure motifs <...> is curtailed by a crude, blunt, march-like chordal ending” [12, p. 153].

¹⁴ “One receives the impression that an avalanche rushing down a mountain slope at top speed has collided with an obstacle” [9, p. 87].



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