

## Review-Article

# FACTS, FANTASIES, AND FICTIONS: RECENT SHOSTAKOVICH STUDIES

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COMPOSER MYTHOLOGIES are not a new phenomenon. We need only a moment's reflection to think of several figures who have caught the public imagination: Beethoven, Mozart, and Tchaikovsky among the most obvious ones. Almost as soon as each of these composers died (in Beethoven's case, even before his death) the mythologizing process swung into action; in each case, the results were so successful that it is only comparatively recently that we have felt the need to begin challenging them. And, in the main, the long and painstaking process of dismantling them occurs within the confines of academe, where scholars with the necessary expertise in languages, music, and historiography can read and interpret old documents. Imagine, then, a scenario where a scholar at work on the first ever—in any language—documentary biography of such a composer is repeatedly reviled in public: wilfully misrepresented in radio broadcasts, in a popular journal devoted to that composer, on websites, in major broadsheet newspapers, and in a book (Allan Ho and Dmitri Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (London, 1998)). The torrent of vilification that was levelled at Laurel Fay during the late 1990s by a small but vitriolic band of music journalists (mainly based in the UK, but boosted by the American lawyer Dmitri Feofanov and the American musicologist Allan Ho) is absolutely unprecedented in the history of Western musicology.

Since his death in 1975, Shostakovich has been in the invidious position of being the twentieth century's most mythologized composer. Until the publication of *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dimitri Shostakovich as Related to and Edited by Solomon Volkov* (New York, 1979), Western observers and music-lovers were, to greater or lesser degrees, familiar with his 'Soviet persona'. They had read extracts from his official speeches; his interview with the American journalist Rose Lee in the *New York Times* in 1931 was widely quoted in programme notes throughout the Western world, as was—naturally enough—the famous subtitle of his Fifth Symphony, 'A Soviet Artist's Practical Creative Response to Just Criticism'. They knew him as the composer of the 'Leningrad' Symphony; as the composer who was publicly rebuked in 1948 (Alexander Werth's 1949 book *Musical Uproar in Moscow*, which printed generous chunks of the transcript from those infamous proceedings, was also widely known and cited); and as the composer of several other symphonies and of quartets and concertos. After the onset of the Cold War, suspicion that all was not entirely straightforward in the world of Soviet music was freely voiced, and Werth's book was a key document of that period. It was not unusual to find cautionary words applied to reports of Shostakovich's official statements, and even to read that he composed some of his music to please the Soviet authorities. Certainly, no writer

on music I have been able to trace ever claimed that Shostakovich was a loyal Stalinist. But at the same time, the notion that he was actually a dissident was never mooted. The fact that he might personally have been unhappy with some aspects of Soviet cultural policy was conceded; but his high status within that system excluded him from the ranks of dissidents such as Andrei Sakharov and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Boris Schwarz's *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917–1970* (London and New York, 1972) played an invaluable role in increasing Western understanding of Soviet cultural politics and of Shostakovich's extraordinary career. Ambivalent about the Soviet status quo he may have been; hugely successful within it he certainly was.

UK-based writers about music between about 1940 (when Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony was first performed in London) and 1979 tended to take the line of greatest neutrality, with sometimes comically impassive results. If Shostakovich used a monogram in his Tenth Symphony, there was no reason to get overexcited about it and start delving for secret programmes—after all, Bach and Schumann had done this first. His Fourth Symphony was withdrawn on the eve of its premiere, it is true—but then, one could hardly deny that the Fifth was a vast improvement on the Second and Third, so perhaps the 'just criticism' was timely. If he was reprimanded in 1936 and 1948, that was just the way the Soviet Union worked; if his music tended to be a bit gloomy, then that too was only to be expected from a Russian composer.

Few would argue that there was considerable scope for expanding this view of Shostakovich, which now seems both deeply patronizing and quite astonishingly insensitive. And, as is now well known, it was Shostakovich's 'memoirs' in the form of Volkov's *Testimony* that sought to explode one well-established myth: Shostakovich the passively loyal Soviet servant. Although Volkov's working methods were quickly questioned, the message of *Testimony* sank deep into the public consciousness, with the result that the later popular picture of him became an exact photographic negative of the former. According to Volkov, Shostakovich was not the composer we had imagined him to be. He was not the humble vassal of the Soviet state but an embittered dissident. All those happy endings (which critics had almost unanimously found absolutely convincing) weren't there to be enjoyed after all; they were to be reacted against, taken as evidence of more dissidence. Of course, these views did not spring up overnight in 1979. They took years of steady fostering from orchestral marketing strategists, radio programmers, CD reviewers, programme note writers, and journalists. By the time Ian MacDonald penned *The New Shostakovich* a decade later, the 'new' myth of Shostakovich had already subsumed the old.

The tale of the 'Shostakovich Wars' of the 1990s is a singularly inglorious one, and a rather dull one at that. There would be no point in recycling it here. But it is, perhaps, important to state outright that its central *raison d'être* was from the first a red herring, set in place, I suspect, for no other reason than to discredit Laurel Fay, the scholar who had uncovered the plagiarized passages in *Testimony* and cast doubt on Volkov's story. That red herring was the claim—entirely false—that Fay, along with Malcolm Hamrick Brown and Richard Taruskin, maintained that Shostakovich was never anything other than a loyal Communist without a dissenting note to his name. More or less the same charge is levelled at them (if less directly) in Volkov's latest book, *Shostakovich and Stalin* (see below). This childishly reductive, not to say slanderous, claim has been advanced against the 'counter-position' that he was, on the contrary, a heroic dissident whose music spoke (for those—naturally—intelligent and sensitive enough to hear it) the language of subversion, dissidence, and rage.

It is not hard to see where these polemics might be leading. Eventually, we will surely come to accept the notion that Shostakovich might just conceivably have been many

seemingly contradictory things: a believer in socialist principles; a composer who genuinely tried to write music that could reach as wide an audience as possible; a man who loathed Stalin and Stalinism, as did many of his contemporaries; a composer who had genuine doubts about some aspects of the post-war European avant-garde; a composer who was cruelly humiliated by being forced publicly to denigrate Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and others; a member of the Communist Party who took his civic duties seriously; a man who would sign official statements without reading them to get rid of the petty officials he detested. It is just a terrible shame that we have wasted so much time and energy gazing at the mythical, insultingly one-dimensional image projected by *Testimony* for the last twenty-five years.

As this fuller picture of Shostakovich becomes clearer, thanks to new publications of letters, reminiscences, and archival documents, *Testimony* will become just one more document like many of Shostakovich's public statements—a document that we cannot take at face value but which in places seems to ring true. In fact, this process is already well under way. The obsessive defence of it to be found in Ho and Feofanov's *Shostakovich Reconsidered* is already redundant, because no one who has seen the results of Laurel Fay's latest research could now believe Volkov's original story. Presented in English for the first time in *A Shostakovich Casebook*, edited by Malcolm Hamrick Brown,<sup>1</sup> her work has comprehensively torn to shreds the already very tenuous case for *Testimony*'s authenticity. Following on from her original 1980 article in *Russian Review*, which pointed out alarming instances of plagiarism, Fay's 2002 article resolves all the questions that Volkov has declined to answer. The pages that Shostakovich allegedly read and signed contained *only* material that had already been published; Volkov's claim that he had signed the first page of each chapter (some of which contained extremely politically sensitive material) is proved conclusively to have been false. From her examination of the original Russian typescript, Fay saw immediately that, for those chapters, what Volkov had done was to insert extra pages *before* the ones that Shostakovich signed. Shostakovich neither read nor signed anything that was remotely contentious. And, thanks to Fay's presentation of facsimiles of those pages that had been tampered with—pasting over sections of text, changing the pagination—we are not asked to take any of this on trust, as we have constantly been exhorted to do by Volkov and his disciples. In place of a proper defence, they have relied entirely on attempts to discredit the 'opposition' as they perceived it, even to the point of questioning the integrity of the composer's widow and his closest friends. Irina Shostakovich was accused of resenting the fact that Volkov was the only person to receive royalties from *Testimony*; Russians such as Rostropovich and Maxim Shostakovich who have criticized *Testimony* were accused of not being able to read English well enough to offer valid comments. As for those American scholars who had the gall to cast doubt on Volkov's integrity—well, they were simply representatives of the Last Bastion of Communism (otherwise known as US academia) that hadn't bothered to read up on Soviet history.

It has been a truly ugly story, quite possibly one of the most unpleasant in the history of any composer's reception. Volkov's defenders are still active; a reprint of *Shostakovich Reconsidered* is planned (in paperback, so as to reach that wider community of music-lovers that seems to be the authors' main target), and Ian MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich* will be out soon in a revised version, with his numerous score-reading and factual errors and misquotations posthumously corrected. Volkov himself has ostensibly kept a low profile, though in fact Feofanov—now probably the most aggressive of the pro-*Testimony*

<sup>1</sup> *A Shostakovich Casebook*. Ed. by Malcolm Hamrick Brown. pp. xvi + 408. (Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2004, \$39.95. ISBN 0-253-34364-X.)

lobby—is his lawyer. As for the hapless MacDonald (who committed suicide in 2003), he had initially accepted Fay’s cautionary approach to *Testimony* in his 1990 book. On later acquaintance with Feofanov and Volkov, he became a passionate defender of *Testimony* and was both vicious and slanderous in his attacks on Shostakovich scholars, above all Laurel Fay. Just how ‘low’ Volkov’s profile has really been in all this remains to be discovered one day.

So what is the purpose of *A Shostakovich Casebook*? It demonstrates to a wide readership that *Testimony* is not what Volkov said it was (and is still saying it was): the dictated memoirs of Shostakovich, read, sanctioned, and signed by him. It does not deny that Volkov spent some time with Shostakovich (no one has ever claimed that they never talked), nor does it claim that there is nothing in *Testimony* that could have come from Shostakovich. No one has ever claimed that either. And no one—least of all Shostakovich’s now much-maligned friends and family—has ever claimed that he did not loathe and despise Stalin and his reign of fear and oppression. But the *Casebook* does more than prove Volkov’s dishonesty. In reprinting the various Russian responses to *Testimony*—both those published during the Soviet period and some more recent ones—we are presented with the nuanced intelligence of Shostakovich’s contemporaries: scholars and musicians whose voices have been drowned out for so long in the West. The roll-call of distinguished names includes the musicologists Marina Sabinina and Genrikh Orlov, the composer Boris Tishchenko, Rostropovich, and Elena Basner, daughter of Veniamin Basner, one of Shostakovich’s closest friends. Effectively, their dislike of *Testimony* is founded on its crude portrayal of Shostakovich, its placing into the composer’s mouth rancour and malice that they had never seen: a monologue full of, as Russians put it, ‘kitchen talk’ and spiteful gossip. What they objected to was not the overall portrayal of the aging Shostakovich as a wounded, embittered person, who spent many dark hours reflecting on the tragic fate of those who were crushed in the Stalin years. All those who knew Shostakovich well knew that he never, for example, got over the shock of what happened to the famous theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold, who told the world how he was cruelly beaten in prison before being taken back there from the courtroom to be shot in the winter of 1940.

Shostakovich had lost many beloved friends and respected colleagues, had been forced to play official roles that humiliated him, and had seen how the younger generation of Soviet composers lost respect for him as his official honours accumulated. None of his friends believed that he was an ‘honest Communist’ with no axes to grind. No, what they objected to was the one-dimensionality of Volkov’s Shostakovich—the blatant marketing of him as a dissident for the benefit of a Western readership only too happy to believe it. Tishchenko is more damning than most, rejecting *Testimony* as a book ‘not even a book by Volkov about Shostakovich, but a book by Volkov about Volkov’ (p. 136). Elena Basner gets to the heart of it in her short essay ‘The Regime and Vulgarity’ when she concludes: ‘I feel sorry for everyone involved—for Volkov . . . and for those poor naive Americans—for whom this new bit of a book was so obviously intended: just think, to believe for so many years that “Shostakovich loved the Soviet regime” and suddenly to discover that “Shostakovich did not love the Soviet regime” . . . Well, if you take all this seriously as scientific fact, I can only repeat yet again, I feel very sorry for you all’ (p. 140). The musicologist Levon Hakobian is equally direct: ‘It is a pity that Westerners need Volkov to realise that the “true” Shostakovich was strikingly different from his outward . . . persona’ (p. 225). Ouch.

So how revelatory was *Testimony*, and why should we care about its dishonest presentation if its overall picture of a disillusioned, politically cynical Shostakovich was broadly

accurate? As Brown observes, with such a potentially invaluable resource it is vital to know whether it is exactly what it claims to be: the dictated memoirs of Shostakovich, using his own words, arranged into paragraphs and chapters by Volkov, read and signed by Shostakovich on the condition that they were published only after his death. Just as we know that Anton Schindler was not a reliable biographer of Beethoven, argues Brown, we now know that Volkov was not a reliable memoirist. It may very well be that there is more Shostakovich in *Testimony* than Tishchenko, for example, is prepared to recognize. That appears to be the view of Marina Sabinina and some others, including Shostakovich's daughter. The crucial point is that we just do not know where Shostakovich's voice ends and Volkov's begins; and unless Volkov one day produces the shorthand notes he claims are missing, we shall never know. Regarding its impact: as Orlov notes, politically speaking it contained very little that would have surprised anyone who had read Boris Schwarz's (or, for that matter, Werth's) book, let alone Robert Conquest's study of the Stalin purges *The Great Terror*, published over ten years before *Testimony* in 1968. *Testimony* certainly made very little difference to scholars who were already familiar with the Soviet context: Schwarz, Fay, Brown, and Taruskin had lived in the Soviet Union as research students before it was published, and did not need either Volkov or MacDonald to teach them about Soviet history or to tell them that Shostakovich had a difficult relationship with the Soviet authorities. Every concert-goer who ever read a programme note on the Fifth, Eighth, or Tenth Symphonies knew that much.

What *Testimony* did do, sadly—and *The New Shostakovich* did if anything even more damage—was present to the Western public a cardboard image of Shostakovich and a stultifyingly limited view of his music. It will be a tough image to deconstruct. Relatively few readers outside academia will ever read *A Shostakovich Casebook*, while the 'populist' *Testimony* (recently reissued with a Preface by Vladimir Ashkenazy) and *The New Shostakovich* were best-sellers. Programme and CD liner notes on the Tenth Symphony still maintain that its scherzo is a 'musical portrait of Stalin'; those on the Fifth Symphony will, it seems, forever recycle the line that its ending was 'forced, created under threat'. Attempts to challenge the party line in the domain of programme notes and reviews can even be removed or 'corrected' by those who have swallowed it unthinkingly: I once had a newspaper review of the Second and Third Symphonies altered by a sub-editor who assumed that my positive words about the symphonies were mistakes. The 'general truth' of *Testimony* with regard to Shostakovich's political views was, before 1979, emerging piece by piece as the result of patient research, intelligent programme notes, broadcasts, and personal reports: Volkov's dubious achievement was to sweep all that aside in favour of an instantly gratifying—and fantastically remunerative—political sensation.

With these rather depressing thoughts in mind, it is hugely refreshing to read Laurel Fay's first edited volume of documents and essays in Princeton's Bard Music series.<sup>2</sup> There have been several such fine Shostakovich collections, both in English and Russian, in the last ten years; this latest one brings together archival materials including Shostakovich's letters to Stalin (with commentary by Leonid Maximenkov), those to his mother (Rosa Sadykhova), and documents concerning Shostakovich reception in the USA (Christopher Gibbs). The seven commissioned articles cover exciting new ground: the staging and choreography of *The Bolt* (Simon Morrison), Shostakovich's relationship with the younger generation and twelve-note composition (David Fanning, Peter Schmeltz), and connections between *The Nose* and the Fourteenth Symphony (Levon Hakobian) and

<sup>2</sup> *Shostakovich and his World*. Ed. by Laurel L. Fay. pp. xvii + 405. Bard Music. (Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2004, £35.95/£12.95. ISBN 0-691-12068-4/-12069-2.)

*Moscow, Cheryomushki* (Gerard McBurney). Particularly heartening is the growing rapprochement in Shostakovich studies between Western and Soviet musicology; to this end, Schmeltz presents an immensely useful distillation of Yuri Kholopov's theory of twelve-note composition in the Soviet Union. In view of the West's perennially patronizing gibes at Soviet composers in relation to the post-war avant-garde, accusing them of lagging behind, missing the point, or even just getting it wrong, Schmeltz's corrective is very welcome indeed. I especially liked his idea of Soviet twelve-note writing as a 'signifier' and as structural fabric rather than merely as a technique, comparable to the once prevalent Soviet use of C major or quotations from familiar works in terms of symbolic significance. Both here and in Fanning's chapter, discussion of contemporary Soviet practice proves an illuminating lens through which to view Shostakovich's use of twelve-note techniques and quotation: invariably, his own methods tended towards blending new techniques with old rather than setting up the kind of stark oppositions found in the early works of Arvo Pärt (Second Symphony and *Credo*) and Boris Chaikovsky (Second Symphony).

A highlight of Fay's volume is Caryl Emerson's chapter exploring 'literariness' in Shostakovich's operas and song cycles. Her underlying point is that texted works are not necessarily best understood as authorial commentaries, however suggestive they may appear. It is this 'suggestive' quality in Shostakovich's music, with its disruptive narrative surfaces and 'parodying energy' (p. 220) that so many have sensed and tried to interpret as authorial statements. Emerson is surely right to say that it was the fractured narratives of Gogol and Dostoevsky, with their unresolvable contradictions, 'faulty narrators', and challenges to literary convention, that appealed to Shostakovich, as they did to many of his literary contemporaries. It is in this disruptive tradition that we can perceive classic artistic innovations of the 1920s and 1930s—montage, circusization, defamiliarization—as operating in Shostakovich's music. If we view them through this lens, it becomes clear that use of such techniques need not necessarily be sourced to a specific ironic intention or social comment on the author's part. We need not just take Emerson's word for it; she has an eloquent supporter in Marina Tsvetaeva, whose moving essay of 1933–4 on Goethe, Tolstoy, Gogol, and Mayakovsky, 'Art in the Light of Conscience', reminds us that the foremost responsibility of an artist, regardless of his or her personal world-view, is to create. Tolstoy, argues Tsvetaeva, created in Anna Karenina a sympathetic heroine despite his own opinion of her actions; Mayakovsky the poet was overwhelmed by his political persona, setting in motion the fatal trajectory towards his suicide (as Tsvetaeva put it, 'the poet rose up and killed the man with a lyrical shot'). For Tsvetaeva, an artist can be *either* a poet *or* a preacher, but cannot strive to be both. The crucial point here, as ever, is authorial intention. As Emerson notes, the mature Gogol and Dostoevsky were both decidedly authoritarian in their political views, but that did not prevent them from writing devastating social satire. If Shostakovich's natural orientation was, as Emerson says, 'a commitment to infinite irony', that tells us nothing whatever about his politics. If we start hypothesizing along political lines, we quickly find ourselves in the discredited realm of guilt (or virtue) by association.

Emerson's central case study, Shostakovich's transformation of Leskov's anti-heroine Katerina in his opera *Lady Macbeth*, tackles what has become a heated issue in the Shostakovich debates. With immense delicacy and authority, she challenges the precedence that scholars (both Russian and Western) have given to Leskov's novella as the core text. This is of critical importance, since if Leskov's Katerina is regarded as the 'real' character, then Shostakovich's transformations of her from murderer to tragic victim take on immense political significance, as Taruskin has powerfully argued. The counter-position

was first forcefully posited in 2000 by Vadim Shakhov, who upheld Shostakovich's libretto, not Leskov's novella, as the core text against which any other Katerina prototypes (Ostrovsky's Katerina Kabanova, Zamiatin's Marfa Ivanovna, Leskov's Katerina) may be compared. Shostakovich's Katerina, Shakhov insists, is a new character in her own right. Faced with a warm, passionate operatic heroine, we view events (originally so drily narrated by Leskov's impassive witness) through Katerina's eyes, much (as Emerson argues) as we do with Tchaikovsky's Tatiana. Allowing for Shakhov's assertion that Shostakovich's Katerina is an independent character, Emerson also accepts that her ancestry is nevertheless traceable to such diverse sources as Ostrovsky and Zamiatin, though given a new Soviet 'feminist' twist.

Turning finally to Volkov's *Shostakovich and Stalin*,<sup>3</sup> some positive observations are in order. It performs the undeniably useful purpose of translating for the first time many anecdotes about Shostakovich and Soviet culture in general that many non-Russian speakers will never have come across. In that sense, *Shostakovich and Stalin* achieves what *Testimony* also sought to do: it provides glimpses into the world of Soviet 'kitchen talk', patched together from a range of sources including published diaries, reminiscences, biographies, and recently published excerpts from NKVD reports. Thus we learn about the fascinating development of Pasternak's relationship with Stalin after the suicide of his second wife, Nadezhda Alliluyeva; of the NKVD reports presented to Stalin after the First Writers' Congress of 1934; of the cruel way Stalin bought Bulgakov's loyalty while preventing his best work from being performed; of the conversation between Stalin and his in-house film buff, Boris Shumiatsky, on the 'song of the Counterplan' that may have saved Shostakovich's life.

But does it achieve anything else? The purpose of the book is characteristically ambitious. At its heart is Volkov's hypothesis, first mooted in *Testimony* and enlarged considerably here, that Shostakovich took on a self-appointed role as a *yurodivy*—the Holy Fool of Pushkin and Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. That role would give him the right to speak 'dangerous truths' to authority without punishment. It's an attractive idea, and one that has appealed to people in exactly the same way as *Testimony* did: it feeds the same romantic image of Shostakovich (heroic composer) versus Stalin (evil dictator). But Volkov's expansion of his theory now has Shostakovich taking on no fewer than three personae from the Pushkin–Musorgsky epic: Yurodivy, Chronicler (the scribe Pimen), and Pretender (the false Tsarevich Dmitri). The notion of Shostakovich as Chronicler is the most convincing of the three, but this certainly isn't an original concept; the notion goes back to the 1980s, when the idea of Shostakovich as 'Pimen nashego vremeni' (the Pimen of our time) was widespread in Russia. Least sustainable of all is the notion of Shostakovich as a 'False Dmitri', of which very little is said after the Preface. Meanwhile, the much vaunted *yurodivy* archetype runs into hot water with predictable speed. As Shostakovich's donning of an official, 'neutral' persona is diametrically opposed to the behaviour of the Pushkin–Musorgsky *yurodivy*, Volkov contrives to explain that Shostakovich was in this respect the 'fool' of the intelligentsia, breaking with the traditions of his own class (p. 151).

Though Volkov's own claims for the originality of this book are extravagant, in all respects pertaining to Stalin's personality and interference in the arts it pales in comparison with other recent Stalin-centred studies such as Simon Sebag-Montefiore's *Court of the Red Tsar* (London, 2004) and Roman Brackman's *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin* (London, 2001). Anyone seriously interested in learning about Stalin's personality, his cultural

<sup>3</sup> *Shostakovich and Stalin: The Extraordinary Relationship between the Great Composer and the Brutal Dictator*. By Solomon Volkov. Trans. by Antonia W. Bouis. pp. xiii + 313. (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2004, \$30. ISBN 0-375-41082-1.)

tastes, his literary pretensions, and his obsessive interference in the arts would learn infinitely more from their wealth of original archival research than from Volkov's guesswork and hypothesizing. Since his research is confined only to published material already well known to scholars of Soviet culture, he never tells us anything new—he merely interprets what is already there, at times with alarming results. For example, although he faithfully reproduces anecdotes about Pasternak's and Bulgakov's relationships with Stalin, and retells Kondrashin's account of Shostakovich's meeting with Stalin (though without acknowledging his source), Volkov is too quick to come to the conclusion that Shostakovich and Stalin established a poet–Tsar relationship in the Nicholas I/ Pushkin mould. Such an analogy certainly occurred to Pasternak in relation to his own role, but there is no evidence whatever that it featured either in Shostakovich's thinking or in Stalin's attitude either to him or, for that matter, to Pasternak.

Similar forced comparisons with literary models arise elsewhere: Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* is alleged to be 'echoed' in Shostakovich's music (p. 95), though we're not told how; Zamiatin's essay 'I Am Afraid' was, we are told, the inspiration for Shostakovich's first opera, *The Nose*; Bakhtin's writings on carnival were supposedly the inspiration for his *Rayok*. But Bakhtin's ideas on carnival were not even in the early stages in his 1929 *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* and were fully developed only in his dissertation on Rabelais, begun in the 1930s and not completed until the 1960s. So how do we know whether they exerted any influence on Shostakovich? We are assured that 'there is no doubt' that Ivan Sollertinsky, Shostakovich's best friend and member of Bakhtin's literary/philosophical circle until (at the very latest) Bakhtin's arrest in 1928, discussed Bakhtin's ideas with Shostakovich. Never mind that we do not currently know whether or not Sollertinsky knew anything about Bakhtin's work on carnival, which may well have post-dated his attendance at Bakhtin's circle, still less whether Shostakovich did; never mind that when Bakhtin wrote about popular fairgrounds and the iconoclastic figures of the commedia dell'arte, he was talking about a deep-rooted part of European and Russian culture already tapped into by (among others) Musorgsky and Stravinsky, composers whom Shostakovich admired deeply. The spurious Bakhtin–Sollertinsky–Shostakovich link, however, is just one example among many. We don't know that Zamiatin's essay had anything to do with Shostakovich's choice of Gogol's story *The Nose* for his opera, but we are casually informed (p. 82) that 'we can assume' that Shostakovich took Zamiatin's criticisms of those who used revolutionary themes for financial gain as directed at himself, and then consciously wrote *The Nose* in imitation of Zamiatin's anti-authoritarian stance.

Volkov's exhortations to accept hypothesis as fact are a constant thread running through this book. And yet there is a surprising degree of inaccuracy in the simplest matters that reveals a distinctly careless attitude to his subject: Leskov's Katerina, we are told, murders her own baby (in fact, it is her 8-year-old nephew she smothers, with Sergei's assistance). More bizarrely, we are told that the unstable, downtrodden Katerina was partly modelled on Shostakovich's wife, Nina, about whom we know enough to be sure that she was neither unstable nor downtrodden. But never mind about that; we can 'safely presume that Katerina in many ways is a portrait of Shostakovich's wife, Nina' (p. 113). Elsewhere, we are told that Shostakovich began the finale of his Fourth Symphony after the *Pravda* articles were published. Hence it is 'no wonder' that the Mahlerian funeral march dominates it (p. 165). Yet it is well known that Shostakovich was already at work on the finale at the time the articles appeared. As for its Mahlerian topos, this was already firmly in place in the second movement.

Yet it is when Volkov begins to discuss Shostakovich's music that he is on really shaky ground. Blatantly bolstering the tired *Testimony* cliché that the Tenth Symphony's

scherzo is a musical portrait of Stalin, he declares that the Fourth Symphony's finale portrays him too, in an alleged quotation from Stravinsky's *Firebird* (we aren't told where this quotation is, merely that it is 'obvious') (p. 166). His earlier discussion of the allusion to Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* is shamelessly pinched without acknowledgement from Taruskin's essay 'Shostakovich and the Inhuman: Shostakovich and Us' (in *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton, 1997), 493). In a resounding echo of *Testimony*, Volkov writes: 'Beginning with the Fourth Symphony, the great majority of his major opuses are more or less "autobiographical". The First Violin Concerto is also clearly autobiographical, and the voice of the violin makes the narrative subtext of the composition particularly poignant' (p. 265). Even more alarmingly, we read that in the Violin Concerto Shostakovich 'carried on an imaginary musical argument with Stalin... continued in Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony' (p. 309). Again, we aren't told how this 'musical argument with Stalin' can be discerned: we are simply expected to accept its presence as fact. Here, in a nutshell, is the source of all the banalities offered on the subject of codes, representations of Stalin, and autobiography since the publication of *Testimony*. If nothing else, at least Volkov is making a strong case for the hypothesis that he is the person responsible for those parts of *Testimony* that scholars and musicians have disliked the most—the reductive statements about Shostakovich's music. Elsewhere, we read that the third and fourth movements of the cantata *The Song of the Forests* have strong affinities with *Das Lied von der Erde* which 'for some reason [was] not noted before' (p. 290). This wasn't noted before for the very good reason that there is absolutely no resemblance between the two works. The fourth movement's orchestral introduction could have come from Rimsky-Korsakov's *Kitezh*, perhaps—but not from Mahler. In a last-ditch attempt to link the Tenth Symphony's scherzo to a concrete anti-authoritarian statement, Volkov claims that the Fourteenth Symphony's 'Response of the Zaporozhian Cossacks' is a 'grotesque portrait of Stalin', 'reminiscent of the "Stalin" scherzo from the Tenth Symphony' (p. 332). Again, the resemblance simply isn't there; only the vicious string chords recall the scherzo's opening bars.

It comes as no surprise to find frequent snide allusions to 'Western musicologists' throughout *Shostakovich and Stalin*. Nor is Volkov's misrepresentation of them anything other than wearily predictable: of the Fifth Symphony's finale, 'some Western musicologists to this day... prefer to see... sincere enthusiasm' (p. 177); 'some people [who, exactly?] now try to depict' Stalin as 'dumb', too uncultured to appreciate music (p. 131). Ironically, the biggest culprit of all in that particular respect has been none other than Volkov himself, in *Testimony*, as he tacitly acknowledges in his Preface (though shifting the blame neatly onto Shostakovich) (p. xii). Western musicologists are, he claims, also guilty of trying to consign 'Stalin's abuse [of Shostakovich] to the proverbial "dustbin of history"' (p. ix). Yet all that scholars—both Western and Russian—have done is point out that Volkov was not entirely straight with the world about how *Testimony* was written, and protested at the crassness with which Shostakovich's music was being discussed by writers like MacDonald (and, it would seem, by Volkov too). Eventually, as scholarship tells us more about Shostakovich, his music, and Soviet musical culture in general, the dull but popular image of Shostakovich that has held sway for the last quarter-century will deepen into the colourful, multi-faceted, brilliant, contradictory portrait that has been patiently waiting to be discovered. Laurel Fay's biography of Shostakovich (*Shostakovich: A Life* (Oxford, 2000)) will continue to be the chief resource of writers, scholars, and students, regardless of spiteful accusations that it is over-dry. We have had more than enough of the over-soggy fantasies of Cold War rhetoric; in the end, it is facts, not fictions, that will outlive us all.