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## Mourning Themes in the Music of Dmitri Shostakovich

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*The thematic invention is one of the main categories of musical knowledge and theory of musical composition. Complexity and multifacetedness of this notion being the summary of many themes provides various ways of considering it. The primary importance of thematic invention in the musical composition is determined by a complex of functions, which this compositional element fulfills. Moreover, to understand the themes of the music work it is necessary to study their semantics, genre and style models.*

*In this article we use the themes with mourning semantics represented in the instrumental chamber music of Dmitri Shostakovich. We analyze the thematic invention on the Fig. of the genre model of the funeral march numerously implemented by the composer in pure instrumental music, as well as in the music written for theatre performances and films. Special attention is paid to the themes of the Quartet cycles of the composer.*

*Keywords: Dmitri Shostakovich, thematic invention, Quartets, funeral march.*

Instrumental chamber music of Dmitri Shostakovich represents one of the important areas of the composer's work. In this regard, the Quartet cycles that the author was creating throughout his life are especially notable. During the period from 1938 to 1975, he wrote fifteen such ensembles in total.

Themes of Shostakovich Quartets are varied in terms of genre models they contain, which are enshrined in the historical memory (historical memory issues are discussed in the article by O.A. Bozhchenko) (Bozhchenko, 2012). The composer uses primary genres as the basis: song, romance, sarabande, waltz, baroque aria, polka, gallop, serenade, march, and genres that have

emerged in the professional works: humoresque, scherzo, nocturne, elegy.

Among genre pre-images of the String Quartets' thematism, the funeral march is especially important.

As pointed out in N.M. Naiko's book (Naiko, 2012: 79), Shostakovich's life circumstances contributed to the fact that the theme of death entered his mind early and became if not the central one, nevertheless a very important and very attractive one.

The composer chooses certain genre models to implement the images of death that act for him as the carriers of mourning semantics (the funeral march, chant, elegy and ancient dances of Spanish

origin: sarabande, chaconne, passacaglia). This article discusses the implementation of the funeral march's features in the Quartets.

In the music encyclopedia, the funeral march is defined as a kind of a march (from *marche* (French) – walking, marching), music of solemnly mournful character in the rhythm of a steady, slow step<sup>1</sup>.

One of the first creative experiments of D. Shostakovich referred to the age period of 9-11 years is “The funeral march in the memory of the victims of the revolution” for piano, in which the impressions of the author about participation in the funeral procession are reflected (Khentova, 1985 : 82-83). “Thus, children Funeral March opens a list of compositions and episodes of the funeral music that Shostakovich was replenishing during his entire creative life. Hardly any of the composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has a longer list of such music samples. It covers many genres in Shostakovich works: piano miniatures, symphonies and string quartets, pieces of music for theater productions and films” (Naiko, 2012: 79)).

Shostakovich funeral marches are presented in music for the films “Golden Mountains” (1931), “Hamlet” (1932) and “The Great Citizen” (1938-39). There, the composer follows the tradition of marches devoted to the hero's death (analogue – *Marce funebre* of Beethoven's Third Symphony and the Second Sonata by Chopin).

In the Aphorisms for piano, the Eleventh Symphony g-moll of 1905, Composition 103 (1957) and Shostakovich Quartets, the genre model of the funeral march is implemented in an indirect manner. The chamber instrumental cycles of this group include: the theme of the central group of the 4<sup>th</sup> variation of the Third Quartet, the first and second episodes of the 4<sup>th</sup> part of the Eighth Quartet (n. 54-56 and 58-61, respectively), the second theme of the episode in the development of the second part of the Twelfth

Quartet, which first appears in n. 46, the first and second themes of the 5<sup>th</sup> part (with the title the “Funeral March”) of the Fifteenth Quartet. The themes of the quartets' parts with the genre designation “Elegy” are adjacent to them by meaning, namely the first and the second themes of the 6<sup>th</sup> part of the Eleventh Quartet, as well as the second theme of the first part of the Fifteenth Quartet.

The themes reflecting the typical features of a funeral march in the works of Shostakovich are characterized by the use of metric definition, selection of a quadruple meter, a minor key and a slow tempo. In the melody (most often it evolves in a small register), there are fanfare moves per quarte combined with rounded motives with “flagging” endings. Dotted rhythmic formulas are introduced in the theme. With regard to the structure of the melody, square, syntactically equal structures get a prevailing value. In the harmony, the guiding principle becomes smooth voicing, in the bass the main harmonic functions are highlighted (T-D, T-S).

A specific feature of the applied march embodied also in the works of Shostakovich, is sounding of the percussion instruments – the bass drum, timpani. It is clearly observed in the funeral march from the movie “The Great Citizen”, where the timpani are used (Fig. 1).

The revolutionary march-song “Tormented to death by a heavy captivity”<sup>2</sup> is chosen as a pre-image of the theme. The composer turns to it in other works as well: Symphony No. 11 (the third part) and the Eighth Quartet (the fourth part).

In the original (Fig. 2) the song sounds quietly in the medium register (at some points the register gets wider with transition to head tones). The most significant melodic turns are: step to the triad and descending motives in the range from thirds to sevenths finishing the syntactic structures. The march features make an impact on the rhythmic framing of the theme: the initial

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

anticipated moves<sup>3</sup> and dotted rhythm should be noted.

The March from the film “The Great Citizen” (see Fig. 1) is outlined by a high degree of summarizing (it sounds in a quiet dynamics, in tonical dominant pedal point). The following texture plans are determined in it: melody (first violin), which is in the sphere of diatonicism for a long time, and accompaniment (general in terms of rhythm for strings and individual for timpani). In the part of the latter, the composer uses two methods of playing the drums typical for marching music. The first method is the tremolo of timpani, which is implemented by alteration of the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> degrees in bass. The second method is rolling. This figure is presented in the form of a formula in triplet rhythm, the sounds of which are

at one pitch of the tone and then alternate quickly (see sections 5-9 of the Example).

In the theme of the abovementioned movie, such sound quality as lyricism is emphasized. This happens due to smooth melodic lines and instrumentation (the melody is entrusted to the group of stringed instruments). However, attention is drawn to long holding of the tonic pedal point (the tone “c” in the c-moll tone), symbolizing the stop of the time. Later on, Shostakovich introduces such expressive means in his instrumental chamber cycles.

In the second episode of the 4<sup>th</sup> part of the Quartet No. 8 (Fig. 3), the version of the march-song closest in the intonation appearance to the original source is formed (it sounds in the quiet dynamics – *pp* and the slow tempo – *Largo*). The

composer reconsiders the original model of the genre model changing the meter, significantly slowing the tempo, eliminating any signs of marching in the melody (such as the dotted rhythm, accented melodic and rhythmic formulas), and leaving only the initial step to the fourth in the upbeat. This theme sounds concentrated and sad.

Herewith, Shostakovich introduces the chromatic descending rhetoric figure *passus duriusculus* into the melody of the second violin. It is given as rhythmic increasing, thus emphasizing its function of a sign. Let us remember, that *passus duriusculus* (hard step) is a type of melodic figures, the function of which is to deliver emotions. In the Baroque epoch *passus duriusculus* was used to intensify the expressiveness of the words “to suffer”, “to die”, “sorrow” and “death”. Thus, it supposes either ascending or descending semitone steps, as well as the steps to small chromatic intervals: a diminished third or a diminished fourth.

Moreover, like in the theme of the Funeral March in “The Great Citizen”, in the 4<sup>th</sup> part of the Eighth Quartet the background of “the time standing still” appears due to the absent changes in the harmonic functions and due to the prolongation of the “cis” tone in the parts of viola and violoncello (tonic pedal point is held for 30 bar-lines).

As a result of the abovementioned factors, in this version of the funeral march the specific dramaturgic function is emphasized and the plan of the author’s interpretation appears in the theme.

In the third part of the Eleventh Symphony (Fig. 4) the song melody sounds *con sord.* on the background of the violoncello and contrabass, the voices of which are magadizing. The texture of the theme in this part is especially moderate and concentrated, while it combines only two lines. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of the Symphony, the components of the funeral march model are not fully implemented (for

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

example, there are no accented rhythmic formulas and no reflection of drumming). In the melodic line of the accompanying part, the descending steps to minor seconds appear at the end of the triad. The melody is based on typical formulas, the pattern of the melody line is “straight” and has a generalized nature. Shostakovich uses the minor key with lower degrees: 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. The determined melodic and harmonic peculiarities of the theme contribute to creation of a funeral mood.

The pithiness of the texture and unchangeable theme contribute to the fact, that it gets the sign function generally implementing the idea of inescapable deep sorrow (indicated by the title of the part: “Imperishable Memory”).

In quartets, the composer uses stringed instruments to recreate the drumming: drum rolling. For example, it is presented in the second theme of the Funeral March from the Fifteenth Quartet in the lower voice as steps to fourths and fifths. In the context of the fifth part of the cycle it gets a different length (from one-two bars, as in lines 21, 22, 23, 44, 47-48 to four bars – in lines 17-20, 49-52 – Fig. 5). The increase of the measure happens due to the motive repetition. On the one hand, in this formula the timpani sound is modeled, on the other hand, due to the violoncello tone, it is also possible to hear voice expression.

Three themes of the quartets (the first theme of the fourth part of the Eleventh Quartet, the second theme of the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the Twelfth Quartet and the first theme of the 5<sup>th</sup> part of the Fifteenth Quartet) are laconic and textured. These themes are generalized to the maximum:

leveled in intonation, rhythmic and dynamic relation (are held in the constant dynamics). This is also confirmed by small-scale structures (from two to nine bars) and preserving of the basic characteristics (in the statements following the exposition texture, the choral constitution with monorhythmic movement of the voices, instrumentation and plan of harmonic functions are preserved). As a result of the abovementioned features, these themes are also elevated to the grade of a sign. In general, they can be interpreted as a symbol of fateful predestination, inevitability of death.

In the initial theme of the 5<sup>th</sup> part of the Fifteenth Quartet the signs of the funeral march are maximally exposed (Fig. 6). Its melody is laconic, generalized, presented in the form of a concise formula of three sounds in the dotted rhythm. For each instrument it is formed as a motive at a constant tone. Herewith, a tonic triad (es-moll) is formed vertically, the sounds of which are distributed among all members of the ensemble. The theme sounds in the loud dynamics (*f*) and is perceived as a threatening sign of an immutable external start, inevitable fate.

In the texture of the second theme of the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the Quartet No. 12 (Fig. 7) the mute in a very quiet dynamics (*pp*) is used. Despite the fact that it contains the funeral march genre characteristics (meter, dotted formula, slow tempo), due to harmonizing the melody by minor triads (g-as-gb-as-g-as-d<sup>4</sup>), moving parallelly, associations with another genre appear, namely with chorale. The mournful nature of the theme is emphasized by the Phrygian mode (in the g-moll key the 2<sup>nd</sup> low degree appears). The above-

Adagio molto ♩ = 60

Cello

49 *f* *dim.*

Квартет № 15.  
У часть, Траурный марш, 2 элемент

Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

mentioned conditions allow to interpret this Chorale as a sign of the funeral.

In the first theme of the 6<sup>th</sup> part (Elegy) of the Eleventh Quartet, despite the ternary meter, the model of the funeral march can be clearly identified. It represents itself in equal steps, in an upbeat beginning of the motives and dotted rhythmic formulas that emphasize mainly the weak beat (second or third). This creates a certain artistic effect and causes a particular type of the movement in the representation: the alternation of steps and stops typical for processions. The melody is given at *ff* in the octave by viola and violoncello, the trihord melodies are leading here (in the thirds and the quart).

The theme is exhibited in the cis-moll key with the low 2<sup>nd</sup> degree, thus leading to the

formation of the Phrygian mode intensifying the gloomy mood. Lowering the 4<sup>th</sup> degree leads to narrowing of the range of the motives to the minor fourth, which adds the hint of tension to the melody (Fig. 8).

The theme of the first episode of the 6<sup>th</sup> part of the Eighth Quartet (n. 54-56, Fig. 9) has a similar solution as the above theme of the Eleventh Quartet, which is manifested in the choice of loud dynamics (*ff*) and instrumentation (three instruments – the second violin, viola and violoncello – perform the melody by magadizing). Just as in the previous one, in this theme the composer uses the cis-moll key with alternated steps – low 2<sup>nd</sup> (a sign of the Phrygian mode), 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and high 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>.

83 Adagio ♩ = 69

Квартет № 11.  
VI часть, Элегия, 1 тема

V-no II

V-la

V-c.

Fig. 8

54 Largo ♩ = 138

Квартет № 8. Соч. 110.  
IV часть, 1 эпизод

55 *senza sord.*

*ff espress.*

*ff espress.*

Fig. 9

This theme is similar to the theme of the second episode of the 4<sup>th</sup> part of the Eighth Quartet being analyzed, basing on the revolutionary song “Tormented to death by a heavy captivity”. In particular, they have a common genre nature, one measure, and contain similar rhythmic figures. Features of the song appear through chanting intervals, the leading value of which belongs to conjunct steps to seconds, and through the

rhythmic freedom (in the process of development the rhythmic component is constantly updated). Along with this, some other features typical for the funeral march can be noted: slow tempo, minor mode, repetition of figures leading to recreation of the effect of the step. However, the composer in the theme of the first episode of the 4<sup>th</sup> part of the Eighth Quartet modifies the marching model by changing the measure to ternary, resulting in

Афоризмы.  
Похоронный марш (№ 5)

*mp*

*tenebroso legato*

*ppp*

*3 sempre*

*marcato*

*ppp*


*8<sup>vb</sup>*

Fig. 10

the fact that this genre model is embodied in a veiled, “blurred” form.

Herewith, the melodic figures are introduced to the musical texture, which fulfill the function of the author’s understanding. This can be seen in the part of the first violin joining the ensemble in n. 55. Its line placed in the middle layer of the texture (due to the placement in the middle register), forms a counterpoint in a form of a “sorrowful” sign written out by increased time values – the figure of the cross, the introduction of which points to the manifestation of the Author’s plan, direct experience of the events by the author. As a result, a monumental austere image appears in the theme, on the one hand, striking with its restraint, and on the other hand by personal attitude (it is also indicated by the introduction of “dragging” intonations – turns including the steps to the minor fourth).

Among Shostakovich marches, the Funeral March from “The Aphorisms” for piano (1927, Fig. 10) is especially notable, which is a type of major Funeral March. Shostakovich complicates the original *C-dur* tone by changing some degrees (higher 1<sup>st</sup>, higher 4<sup>th</sup> is the sign of the Lydian, and lower 7<sup>th</sup> the sign of the Mixolydian modes), and possibly simultaneous combination of high 4<sup>th</sup> and low 7<sup>th</sup> (see the 13<sup>th</sup> bar line of

the example), or the basic and higher version of one degree (bar lines 5, 6, 7, 13 – *f-fis*, bar line 14 – *h-b*). The theme of the piece contains fanfare steps to wide intervals (triton, steps to a perfect and diminished octave) and motives at one sound. The peculiarity of this march is obtained due to: texture organization (all voices are melodized, resulting in a polyphonic texture, where each voice is independent), variable meter (binary-ternary) and measure, which persists until the end of the music piece, frequent change of registers. In the analyzed “Funeral March” the composer recreates drumming. The “formula of the snare drum” appears due to constant repetition of the pitched tone in the rhythm . Despite the fact that the “Funeral March” from “The Aphorisms” implements the basic elements that are typical for the genre, it does not become a genre scene embodying the movement of the funeral procession. Due to various factors described above (specific themes, mode and texture, the prevalence of quiet dynamics) it enhances the author’s understanding, refracted reflection of the events described.

In Shostakovich quartets the genre model of the funeral march is normally presented immediately upon exposure of the theme (or several themes). The only exception is the 4<sup>th</sup> part



79 Adagio  $\text{♩} = 80$   
 p *espress.*  
 Квартет № 3  
 IV часть.  
 pp  
 pp  
 40pp  
 44  
 mp

Fig. 11

of the Quartet No. 3 (Fig. 11), where the actual funeral march features are manifested since the medial group of variations (it remains in the recapitulation group). Both main themes in the initial setting were performed alternately in the part of the violin. The first theme was performed by three lower instruments of the Quartet and sounding initially at *ff* with octave magadizing. It is a pathetic recitative full of anger and bitterness. It immediately showed the signs of genre diffusion due to the simultaneous combination of the features of the march, declamation and chanting<sup>5</sup>. The second theme is an allusion to the main motive *Andante* of the second string quartet by P. Tchaikovsky. In this theme combining chanting and voice expressiveness, the flagging ends of the motives provide its sound with pathetic, mournful questioning hints.

In the middle of the form, the themes follow each other, forming a horizontal combination, the second of which appears as a continuation of the first arising from its end (the final tone of the first theme «gis» becomes the initial tone of the second theme). Both themes are held against the background of an accentuated rhythmic formula in a dotted rhythm typical for the funeral march (three other members of the quartet ensemble: first – in bar lines 40-44, 48-52, 68-82, the second – in bar lines 45-47). As the result of this synthesis of genre models, the genre polyphony is formed. During the interaction of genres, the

genre memory mechanism “starts working”, when “the musical material in the minds of listeners, artists and participants of communication comes in strong association with the genre situation. And then, in other circumstances and conditions, and sometimes in a different historical context, it begins to act as a reminder of the previous situation and causes some specific aesthetic experiences coloured with memories” (Nazaikinskii, 2003: 107).

The genre diffusion is also found in the second theme of the 6th part of the Eleventh Quartet (n. 37, Fig. 12), while it contains the features of both the romance song and the march.

The song melody is played by the first violin on the background of the tone held in the “cis” bass (violoncello and viola). Due to the high pitch, wide range and delimitation of other instruments, its sound is particularly expressive and “flying”. Its basic intonations are abysmal lamento tertian motives (also the steps to thirds appear frequently). In the medium voice of the second violin, the initial theme of the part gets further development, from which it gets the rhythmic formula emphasizing the second beat of the measure typical for the sarabande genre. Such combination of models leads to the phenomenon of the genre polyphony.

Therefore, we can make the following conclusions. In the works of Dmitri Shostakovich, the funeral march genre was used as the means

37 Adagio ♩ = 69

Квартет № 11.  
VI часть, Элегия, 2 тема

*pp*

*pp sempre*

*mp*

*mp*

*dim.*

*dim.*

*pp sempre*

Fig. 12

with fixed mourning semantics. On the basis of this analysis, we have determined that the composer was actively working with the original model of the genre in various fields of his work. If in the music for theatrical performances and films, marches are closer to applied ones implementing the prototype genre situation, in the chamber instrumental cycles, symphonies and piano miniatures, the form of the funeral march is expressed indirectly. This is largely due to the assimilation of the genre with other genres bearing the funeral semantics, namely, the chorale, the sarabande, the revolutionary march-song with the relevant content. The combination of the elements of different genres both horizontally and vertically leads to the genre diffusion and

genre polyphony, underlining the complexity and ambiguity of the phenomenon being analyzed.

Unchangeable marching themes in the works of Shostakovich, as well as their brevity and pithiness allow to interpret them as signs, symbols with the fixed mourning sense (fatal predestination, the situation of death, grief).

The composer's work with this model in the genres of "pure" music is the inclusion of the theme of the Baroque rhetorical figures (catabasis, *passus duriusculus*) and the cross.

In general, the abovementioned methods of modifying the original model of the funeral march implemented by Dmitri Shostakovich, reflect the author's active position and lead to increased understanding of the author's ideas.

<sup>1</sup> Funeral marches originally were created specifically to accompany funeral processions (later music pieces - funeral marches of F.Zh. Gossec in the times of the French Revolution). In the next period of time the composers included funeral marches into oratorio ("Saul" by Handel), opera ("Twilight of the Gods" by Wagner), they began to function as a slow part of the cyclic instrumental works - symphonies, sonatas, created as separate pieces of music.

Examples of funeral marches are found in the music of the composers of various eras: in the works of Beethoven – "Funeral march on the death of the hero" of the Piano Sonata No. 12 comp. 26 and of the Third Symphony, Chopin - the second, b- moll Sonata comp. 35, Wagner - in the opera "Twilight of the Gods", Mahler - in the First Symphony (one of the parts is called "Funeral March in the manner of Callot"), Grieg - Funeral March in memory of Rikard Nordraak, Arensky - in

suite No. 3 (variations) C-major comp. 33 (No. 7 - Funeral March), Sviridov- in the "Suite", Anton Webern - in the Music Pieces, Op. 6 (No. 4).

<sup>2</sup> The author of the music is unknown, the text was written by G. Machtet.

<sup>3</sup> The turn to the fourth opens the theme of the second episode of the 4th part of the Quartet No.8; in the Funeral March from the movie and in the main theme of the 3rd part of the Symphony No. 11 the step to the fifth is chosen as the beginning.

<sup>4</sup> In the latter accord there is no tertian tone which contributes to the formation of the fifth-fourth chord.

<sup>5</sup> The notions "genre diffusion" and "genre polyphony" were developed by V.N. Kholopova in the book "Music as a Kind of Art". Herewith, the notion "genre diffusion" means "such interpenetration, entwining of specific features of different genres, when this or that element of the music texture manifests simultaneously features of two or more types of musical models". (like, for example, in Es-dur Prelude of Scriabin, where there are features of chorale, march and declamation). Kholopova calls the genre polyphony "a simultaneous development of two or more texturally different genre plans in uniform or contrast themes" [Kholopova, 2000: 214-215].

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## Траурные темы в сочинениях

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*Тематизм является одной из основных категорий музыкознания и теории музыкальной композиции. Сложность и многогранность данного понятия, выступающего суммой множества тем, обуславливают различные варианты его рассмотрения. Первостепенная значимость тематизма в музыкальном сочинении определяется комплексом функций, которые выполняет этот композиционный элемент. Кроме того, необходимым для понимания тем произведения становится исследование их семантики, жанровой и стилиевой модели.*

*Материалом для статьи выступают темы с траурной семантикой, воплощенные в камерно-инструментальном творчестве Д.Д. Шостаковича. В статье содержится анализ тематизма на примере жанровой модели траурного марша, неоднократно воплощаемой композитором в сфере чистой инструментальной музыки, а также в музыке к театральным спектаклям и кинофильмам. Особое внимание в статье получают темы квартетных циклов композитора.*

*Ключевые слова: Д. Шостакович, тематизм, квартеты, траурный марш.*

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