



WRITING ABOUT SHOSTAKOVICH

Yevgeny Dolmatovsky

Rabbi Hillel taught: Do not judge your fellow until you have stood in his place.
Pirkei Avot 2:5.

Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's ...
Matthew 22:21

by Sam Silverman

Yevgeny Dolmatovsky wrote many of the texts which were set to music by Shostakovich. Most of these were either patriotic songs, or songs reflecting and eulogising the Communist Party propaganda positions. Because of these latter poems he has been described and known as a second or third rate poet, and as a loyal party hack. The truth, however, is more complex, and one must look deeper into his history to understand him.

Transliteration of names from the Cyrillic Russian alphabet can lead to variations. In this paper I have used “Dolmatovsky” and “Dolmatovskii” interchangeably for the Russian “Долматовский”. In one case, that of the doctoral thesis, in German, of Yevgeny’s father, the transliteration into German becomes “Dolmatowsky.”

Early Years

Yevgeny Aronovich Dolmatovsky was born in Moscow on May 5, 1915 (Obituary, *The Independent* (London), November 17, 1994, hereinafter “Obituary”), the son of a famous Moscow lawyer who was later executed as an “enemy of the people” (Vaksberg, p. 262). Dolmatovsky died in Moscow on September 10, 1994 (Obituary, *loc. cit.*). His poems were very popular, and the royalties from the poems and from films had provided him with millions of roubles (Obituary, *loc. cit.*).

His parents were Aron Moiseevich and Adel Dolmatovsky (*International Who's Who*, see, e.g., volumes for 1989–1992). His father was born in Rostov-on-Don on 13 November 1880, the son of a merchant, Moisei [Moses] and his wife, Theodosia. (Dolmatowsky, 1907, following p. 46). After graduating with distinction (a silver medal) in 1899 from the Gymnasium, Aron Dolmatovsky spent three semesters at the legal faculty of the University of Kharkov. In 1901 he enrolled in the philosophical faculty of Heidelberg University in Germany, where he studied for five semesters, with a half-year interruption. He then enrolled at the University of Strassburg[sic], studied there for two semesters, and returned to Heidelberg University in the winter semester of 1905/6 (*Ibid.*). He received the Doctorate from Heidelberg on 28 October 1907 (Jellinek, 1907, p. 65) for a dissertation on the parliamentary theories of the liberal Swiss-French political theorist of the early nineteenth century, Benjamin Constant (Dolmatowsky, 1907), which is still being cited in recent decades. Aron Moiseevich was also the author of books on laws and decrees relating to the cooperative movement in Russia (Dolmatovskii, 1924), an update of this book (1925) and a book on warehouse legislation (Dolmatovskii, 1927).

Yevgeny’s father was probably the same Aron Dolmatovsky who was a Social Democrat and the Governor of Moscow during the short-lived Kerensky government of 1917 (Carter, p. 63). These two facts would be sufficient to explain his later execution in one of the purges of the 1930s.

His father was 35 years old when Yevgeny was born. When Yevgeny was in his last year at the Literary Institute (1937 or 1938) his father was arrested and accused of being involved in the organisation of a counter-revolutionary conspiracy, and subsequently executed in 1939. But Yevgeny did not learn of all of these facts until after the death of Stalin. (See web site: <http://aarticles.net/culture-art-history/13618-evgenij-dolmatovskij-kak-syn-vraga-naroda-stal-narodnym-poyetom.html>)



Judging by the father's name and patronymic, Aaron the son of Moses, the family may very well have been Kohanim; traditionally, priests directly descended in the male line from the Biblical Aaron, the brother of Moses. [This is the case in my family – my father's name having been Moshe [Moses] Aaron, and my son having been named after him. These days we have the advantage of DNA evidence to support the tradition: about half of Kohanim, from whatever background, share certain markers, compared to about 5% of the general Jewish population. Being a Kohen added status in traditional Jewish communities, and the names could signify this. (On names as status symbols, see, for example, Silverman, 2009).] Yevgeny's father, however, judging from his career, had clearly left traditional Judaism behind.



The family name is likely to be derived from one of the many towns in Russia named "Dolmatova." The website, 'ShtetlSeeker', lists 19 of these towns, but none of these is listed as having a Jewish community in *ca.* 1900 (web site: 'JewishGen Communities Database'). This is not particularly surprising since many towns had only a very few Jewish families. Family names were required in the Russian Empire around the turn of the nineteenth century, and a name derived from the town of residence was often adopted.

To complete the genealogy, Yevgeny's first wife was Sofa Mazo (Markish, p. 113). His wife in 1978 was an art historian (Refregier, p. 128).

Dolmatovsky, then, came from a politically liberal, assimilated, bourgeois Jewish family. He followed the pattern of indoctrination into Communist values and discipline introduced after the revolution. As a child he was a member of the Pioneer organisation, taught to be hard-working, disciplined and obedient, and to put the Party before parents, friends, family and everything else. This was followed, for Dolmatovsky, by entry into the Komsomol in 1930, whose principles included unquestioning loyalty to the Communist Party. When he was once reprimanded on admission for arriving late, and told his father about this, his father told him, "They are watching you, and you must prove that you are ready to give yourself to them." (Figes, p. 29 – the facts in this paragraph are mostly taken from Figes).

In 1931 a new journal *Rost* became a centre for recruiting beginner writers who would become propagandists for the Soviet regime. Among these was Dolmatovsky. *Rost* ceased publication in 1934 and a new journal, *Literaturnaia ucheba*, was founded. It was in this journal that Dolmatovsky, among other writers who subsequently became famous, received his first favourable reviews. (Dobrenko, 2001, pp. 325, 330).

In 1933 he became a Komsomol activist, following graduation from a teaching school, and worked on the first section of the Moscow metro system, then being constructed. His first book of poetry was published in 1934 (*Lirika, Moskva : Zhurnal'no-gazetnoe ob'edinenie*, 1934). In 1936 we find him enrolled at the Gorky Literary Institute, ranked second in excellence, with seventh-ranked Konstantin Simonov as a classmate. Simonov would later become a whole-hearted Stalinist. (Figes, p. 199).

This was the period of the great terror. Stalin was not content with the forced confessions and executions of old Bolsheviks – their families also had to be eliminated, and that in spite of Stalin's personal assurances. The son of Lev Kamenev (Bolshevik revolutionary and briefly head of state in 1917) was shot in 1939 and a younger son sent to an orphanage with his name changed. His wife was sent to penal exile in 1935, re-tried in 1938 and shot in 1941. Zinoviev's son (Grigori Zinoviev was also a Bolshevik revolutionary) was shot in 1937, his sister sent to a labour camp and later shot. Those not shot were sent to the camps, as happened to three other sisters of Zinoviev, two nephews, a niece, a cousin and a brother-in-law. The reach of the Secret Police, the NKVD, extended beyond the borders of Soviet Russia: among those murdered were Trotsky's brother, his sister, his first wife, his two sons, and both husbands of his daughter, who had committed suicide before these murders (Figes, p. 248.) Trotsky, himself was murdered by a Soviet agent in Mexico in 1940. One can only imagine the impact on the young of that generation – not only could one be arrested oneself, imprisoned and/or executed, but your entire family could suffer such consequences.

By 1937 denunciations of others; friends, family, whomever, had emerged as a commonplace method of self-preservation and the Gorky Literary Institute was not immune from such methods. An example emanates from Konstantin Simonov, Dolmatovsky's classmate and friend, at an open meeting of the Institute (Figes, p. 269) on May 16 (1937):





Often there are conversations where people only speak about themselves. In particular, I recall having to listen to a disgusting speech by Comrade Dolmatovsky at a meeting of the fourth class. He did not say, 'the institute' and 'we', but rather, 'I and my institute.' His position was: 'The institute does not pay enough attention to individuals like me. The institute was founded to educate two or three talents, like me, Dolmatovsky, and only that justifies its existence. For talents like me – Dolmatovsky – the institute should lay on the best of everything, even at the expense of the rest of the students.'

Simonov at least did not accuse him of counter-revolutionary activity, or of Trotskyism, or of any political offence – such an accusation could have resulted in his being arrested and shot – but simply of individualism. The punishment was relatively mild: after graduating in 1938 he was sent to work in the Far East as a journalist. Dolmatovsky and Simonov remained friends. (Figes, p. 270) His Far Eastern assignment resulted in *Far Eastern Poems* (1937) (Slonim, 1977, p. 290; 1953, p. 417).

The War Years

In September of 1939 World War II began with the German invasion of Poland, followed by the partition of Poland, by prior agreement, between Germany and the Soviet Union. This was followed by the Winter War of the Soviet Union against Finland. Dolmatovsky now became a war correspondent. He covered both the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland and the Soviet – Finnish war (Obituary, *loc. cit.*). With the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June, 1941 he again acted as a war correspondent, but also wrote several patriotic poems, which were widely distributed. Several were put to music by various composers. A collection of twelve of these patriotic songs was published in a pocket size edition by the newspaper of the south-western section of the front (*New York Times*, November 22, 1942).

Dolmatovsky was with the troops soon after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. A Soviet army veteran, Ozerov, described the situation (Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, May 31, 2004 – 'Press conference with military experts and veterans on the Allied victory in the Second World War RIA Novosti, 14:10, May 31, 2004'):

I served with the heavy artillery, but in the early days of the war there was no air force, it had all been destroyed; there was no anti-tank artillery and we used 152 mm guns to fight tanks breaking out of one encirclement only to find ourselves in another. The 12th and 6th armies were surrounded by Vinnitsa and Kirovograd, that's Uman. Dolmatovsky was there too. And he said that only 1,500 men broke out of encirclement and the rest died or were taken prisoner.

Ehrenburg (p. 40) reported:

One evening the poet Dolmatovsky came to see me. He told me he had been caught in an encirclement by the Germans and had witnessed their atrocities. He said: 'I feel as if I were a corpse, or as if I had never been alive'. He had managed to escape. He recited his poem about water: how he yearned for a mouthful of water when they would not give him anything to drink. He described to me what had happened when he reached our lines: he was warmly welcomed, then taken to HQ and interrogated at length. He had to prove his identity, for encirclement is encirclement. He stayed with me till four in the morning.

It was presumably this situation that Dolmatovsky later described to a reporter, "he had been wounded, captured and had then fled from a prison camp. When he crossed the front line and reported at the first Red Army post, saying he was the poet Dolmatovsky, they did not believe him because there had been a report that Dolmatovsky had been killed in battle. The poet started to recite from his own writings, poems which were known to men at the post, and they gave him an ovation and sent him to the rear." (Robert Magidoff, *New York Times*, July 1, 1945).

One of Dolmatovsky's songs was cited by Nikita Khrushchev in his memoirs, describing the counter-attack across the Dnieper: "We began to make preparations for the crossing of the Dnieper. Meanwhile we walked along the river, gazed at it, and simply rejoiced. We sang a beautiful song, which I still love very much. I have a tape recording of it. The poet Dolmatovsky wrote the words. Its title was 'O, Dnipro, Dnipro.' It's an excellent song. During the most difficult times



of our retreats and defeats and our abandonment of Ukraine, many Ukrainians drew from this song the hope that we would some day return to the Dnieper. And here we had returned to this river sacred to the Ukrainian people.” (Khrushchev, p. 565). The English translation of the words and music (by M. Fradkin) of the *Song of the Dnieper* are given in Porter and Jones (1987). The first verse reads:



By the reeds of the steepbanked river,
There we grew, and there we loved.
River Dnieper strong and wide
The cranes are flying overhead.

And the last verse:

Our river will flow with the fascists' blood,
They won't take our Soviet land.
Like the Dnieper in spring, they'll be washed away
By our people and by our Army.

Rothstein (1995, p. 89) notes: “According to the author of the text, Evgenii Dolmatovskii, the first rehearsal of the song, with an ensemble performing for the southwestern front, was difficult because every time the singers began, they began to cry.”

Dolmatovsky wrote the texts of other songs which became very popular during the war. One of them, *The Song of the Avengers*, with music by the composer Kabalevsky, became one of the most popular partisan songs during the war. It was written in the forests around Moscow one night while both were serving with a partisan detachment. Kabalevsky wrote the music, while Dolmatovsky quickly put down some words, and an accordionist added the harmonies, “and the others gathered around to sing, ‘in a whisper’, since the Germans were so close.” The words are (Porter and Jones, 1987):

Blue mists surround our forest, our travelling home.
Sing a song, partisans, so our friends can hear!
Let the stars in the sky shine bright,
We cannot guess our fate.
Why so sad, Olya? Are you dreaming of Kiev?

Don't be sad, we'll be there soon.
We'll warm our hearts by the Dnieper,
We'll avenge the enemy for our blood and grief.
Not for nothing we're called 'the Avengers'.
Now we sing in a whisper, so the enemy cannot hear.

The song is listed as Opus 36 in Kabalevsky's works.

By 1944 the Soviet armies were advancing into eastern Europe. For Soviet poets, including Dolmatovsky, Moscow became “the ultimate source of truth, light and reality.” (Hodgson, 1996, p. 104). Dolmatovsky offered “mild, though ideologically impeccable criticism of social inequalities in the capitalist world, perhaps in an attempt to remind Soviet troops that their country's supposed moral riches are superior to foreign material wealth.” (*Id.*, p. 105). In 1945, as the armies progressed further into Europe, Dolmatovsky could only see foreign countries through the prism of his wartime experiences. In one poem he wrote (translation by Hodgson, *ibid.*, p. 111): “I wanted to write about the Balkans, about cool Romanian wine, about the churches beyond the Visla, about the countries we passed through in smoke and fire. But on the white pages of my notebook other places rise up – that shattered dug-out in Stalingrad where my youth ended, and the crooked little town on Novozybkov, where I once had to spend the night. There a mother was either singing or crying over a tiny cradle until dawn.” (Stalingrad recurs throughout Dolmatovsky's post-war work.) In another poem Dolmatovsky “describes East Prussia as a nameless, alien and apparently godless country...: The devil thought up such a country, not named in any atlases of the world.” (*ibid.*, p.112). Only Soviet soldiers are noted in the poem, and no mention is made of atrocities committed by the Soviet armies.





Dolmatovsky was present at the fall of Berlin: “Out on the streets, many of the Soviet soldiers were holding their own late May Day celebrations. In Pariserplatz, beside the Brandenburg gate, they sang and danced and roasted an ox, while the poet Dolmatovsky declaimed patriotic verse.” (Read and Fisher, p. 465). Yevgeny Khaldei, the Russian photographer, described the scene on May 2, 1945 (Brian Moynahan, *The Independent* (London), June 3, 1995): “In the early morning light, he noticed a crowd of Russian troops at the Brandenburg Gate being addressed by the poet and war correspondent Yevgeny Dolmatovsky, who told them that Hitler was dead – “The troops were cursing, shouting ‘son of a bitch’, because they’d hoped to catch him.” Khaldei knew from his Baedeker that a circular staircase led to the bronze horses on the top of the gate. He began to climb. The horses and chariots were bullet-scarred. Khaldei unwrapped the second tablecloth, attached it to a statue, and photographed it ... Khaldei returned to the Brandenburg Gate. He met up with Dolmatovsky and with Roman Carmen, a cameraman famous for sequences of the Spanish Civil War. All three were Jews, and Khaldei got an officer to take a photograph of them. “We called the picture The Three Yids who Liberated Berlin,” says Khaldei. “We thought that would get seriously up Hitler’s nose.” A photograph of Dolmatovsky in Berlin can be found in Khaldei’s book (Khaldei, *et al.*, p. 64).

For his service as a war reporter in World War II Dolmatovsky received nine decorations (Struve, p. 294).

The war years had a lasting impact on Dolmatovsky and his work. References to Stalingrad appear in many of his later poems. A novel in the form of a poem (the role model is that of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*) published in 1956, *Dobrovolsky*, used as its theme the story of several volunteers who worked on the Moscow metro system and fought in the war. Hodgson (1986, p. 282) provides a negative evaluation of this work: It “cannot be described as a modern *Iliad*, as it lacks depth and is stylistically monotonous, a recitation of standard motifs.” This evaluation of Dolmatovsky’s poetry appears to have become common within the ranks of sophisticated literary critics in general.

Over the years Dolmatovsky wrote many poems which were set to music by a variety of composers. Among these, for example, were *Graduate’s March*, music by N. Bogoslavsky (1939); *To the Far East*, music by Dm. and Dan. Pokrass (1939); *Ballad of the Siberian Land*, music by Nicolai Kryukov (1947); *Farewell, Accordionist*, music by Y. Milyutin (1948); *School Years*, music by D. Kabalevsky (1953); *We Enter New Life*, music by M. Blanter (1954); *If the Guys All Over the World*, music by V. Solovyov-Sedoy (1957); *Komsomol Volunteers*, music by M. Fradkin (1957); *Komsomol Pass*, music by A. Pakhmutova (1980). The song *School Years* was learned by nearly all students in Soviet schools in the last half of the twentieth century (Megré, p. 175, n. 3).

More substantial musical works with texts by Dolmatovsky, other than those by Shostakovich, are Kabalevsky’s cantata, *The Leninists*, 1958–1959, opus 63, and Prokofiev’s 1947 work, *Flourish, Mighty Homeland*, cantata for the thirtieth anniversary of the October Revolution, opus 114.

Post War and the Fifties

Shostakovich’s use of Dolmatovsky lyrics can be found as early as 1943, at the time of a competition for a national, and nationalistic, anthem to replace *The Internationale*, which had been in use since 1917. Shostakovich, one of almost 200 competitors, submitted several entries, including one to a text by Dolmatovsky (Fay, p. 139). Subsequently he set poems by Dolmatovsky in *Victorious Spring*, composed for the NKVD Song and Dance Ensemble (1946) (Fay, p. 348, MacDonald, p. 409, n.31) and as part of the scores for the films *Meeting on the Elbe* (1948) and *The Fall of Berlin* (1949) (MacDonald, *loc. cit.*).

When Shostakovich first met Dolmatovsky is not known with certitude. At the latest it was during the making of the movie *Meeting on the Elbe* in 1948 (Dolmatovsky, in Fairclough, p. 261). The Zhdanov decree of 1948 along with the intense and vicious criticism that followed, coupled with a severe loss of earnings, put much pressure on Shostakovich to produce compositions accessible to the public (meaning simple, melodious harmonies) and conforming to the mode of “socialist realism” (more or less understood as being joyous and happy thanks to the success of communist policies). Fay (p. 174) presents the perhaps apocryphal story of Shostakovich’s chance meeting with Dolmatovsky on the train from Moscow to Leningrad in the spring of 1949. On the ride Dolmatovsky spoke to Shostakovich about Stalin’s plan for afforestation of lands denuded in the war. The appeal of such a composition to Shostakovich as a way of appeasing the

criticism he had been facing – a work set to a patriotic poem by a nationally known writer of patriotic poems, coupled with fulsome praise of Stalin – would have been self-evident. The meeting resulted in their first real collaboration, through the *Song of the Forests*, op. 81, completed on August 15, 1949 and premiered in Leningrad on November 15. The composition was successful. The *New York Times*, (November 21, 1949) reported that the work was “warmly greeted at [its] first performance in Leningrad.” The *Los Angeles Times* (November 28, 1949) added that “Izvestia commented: ‘The composer strives sincerely to answer the demands of the party and people, entering on the path of the idealful art of Socialist realism.’ The oratorio received a Stalin Prize (category 1) in December 1950.



There is also the story of Stalin’s phone call, which preceded that composition, at the end of February or beginning of March 1949, when Shostakovich declined to travel to the United States as part of a Soviet delegation. In one account by Yuri Levitin (Wilson, p. 212–213) Stalin asks Shostakovich why he can’t go, Shostakovich says, how can he go when his symphonies are played there, but not here; Stalin says it’s all a mistake, and the decree forbidding performances by Shostakovich and the other composers is revoked on March 16. Shostakovich joined the delegation. Not long after this the composition of the *Song of the Forests* began on around July 29 (letter to Glikman of that date, p. 37). Glikman adds the comment (p. 247, n. 29): “He was not particularly fond of it, and had a particular aversion to the verses that mentioned Stalin.” After Stalin’s death in 1953, and after the Khrushchev speech discrediting Stalin in 1956, Dolmatovsky, with Shostakovich’s permission, revised the text to eliminate all mention of Stalin (see, e.g. Fay, p. 176).

The *Song of the Forests* was followed in 1951 by *Four Songs on Texts of Yevgeny Dolmatovsky*, op. 86. This work has the distinction that the first song, *The Motherland Hears*, was the first song sung in space, as Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space sang it in his space ship. “For many decades, the song’s tune was the theme of the All-Union Radio: several times a day, the entire Soviet populace heard this clear and pure melody, not suspecting for a moment that it was composed by the author of complex symphonies and string quartets.” (Yuri Serov, programme notes to volume 1 of Shostakovich: Complete Songs, Delos, DE 3304, 2002).

Dolmatovsky’s poems continued to be mentioned. The *New York Times* (August 20, 1952) notes his poem on the earthquake in Ashkhabad, and cites a portion describing the damage, in what is almost journalistic writing:

The body of the earth stood on end and settled down thunderingly,
Turning buildings into bits of broken brick.
Trees pitched groaning to the ground.
Where are the streets?
Here there are no streets *** only darkness, only death.
The earth is insane, tossing about cornices, stones and sand.
Chunks of buildings everywhere bury those who were sleeping in the course of quarter minutes.
Factories and institutes were wrecked by a push from nowhere.

The *Times* notes a previous poem on a Soviet atomic explosion. This latter presumably refers to a poem by Dolmatovsky in July 1949 on the blasting of a granite mountain in Siberia with an explosive “more powerful than dynamite” (Shulman, 1963). Again, the work is more journalism than poetry. It begins with a father comforting his baby daughter (English translation given in Kramish, 1959, p.133–135), then continues:

There stands a granite mountain
Which is barring our way.
Long, long ago it should have been turned upside down,
...
At that place there lived a group of geologists
In frost and heat.
Twelve months long
They were crawling around on the mountain.

Then there came an airplane full of professors to that place
and then a platoon of army engineers,
First class lads, and their young commander





– and the work continues with the explosion, the levelling of the mountain, and finally a warning to “our enemies.”

The next collaboration with Shostakovich was *The Sun Shines Over Our Motherland*, op. 90, another patriotic work, first performed in Moscow on November 6, 1952. According to Wilson (p. 247) Dolmatovsky had by then become Shostakovich’s official Party-approved librettist. Presumably they had every right to expect a reception of this patriotic cantata equal to that received by the *Song of the Forests* and the *Four Songs*. This expectation was realised for Shostakovich. Three months after the first performance, *Pravda*, on February 5, 1953 takes note of the composition. Harrison E. Salisbury, writing in the *New York Times* (February 6, 1953) notes: “‘Pravda also approved [in addition to Prokofiev’s Seventh Symphony] the newest creation of Dmitri Shostakovich, a cantata entitled ‘The Sun Is Shining Over Our Homeland.’ ... Shostakovich’s work was described as very lyric and realistic. It is ‘beautiful, emotional music majestically orchestrated. / Shostakovich dedicated his cantata to the nineteenth congress of the Communist party. *Pravda* said his work was marked by an ‘energetic revolutionary’ spirit ‘glorifying homeland and glorifying party.’”

But February 1953 also marks the would-be culmination of Stalin’s plan for arresting, trying, and deporting to the far parts of the Soviet empire the bulk of the Jewish population (for this history see Vaksberg, *loc. cit.*). The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, set up during the war to obtain Jewish support in the United States had been disbanded, and 24 or 25 Jewish writers, poets and others, had been executed in August 1952. The anti-Semitic campaign had been extended beyond the borders of the Soviet Union to the satellite states of Czechoslovakia and Romania, where Jewish Communist leaders had been tried and executed in 1952 (see, for example, Wistrich, Chapter 3). The arrests of a number of Jewish doctors, eventually to be charged with planning to poison Stalin, had begun in the early summer of 1952 (Vaksberg, p. 243). By February 1953 barracks had been built in Siberia for the Jews who were to be deported. Freight trains for transport had been collected. A letter had been prepared to be signed by eminent Jews, condemning the doctors and asking that the Jewish population be deported for re-education. But Dolmatovsky refused to sign. “Without demagoguery but not without reason, he noted that everyone knew him as a Russian poet, and only as a Russian poet. His verses set to music had become Russian songs. He was a proponent of assimilation and considered himself a member of a new nation: the Soviet people.” (Vaksberg, p. 262) Whether it was because of this refusal or not, *Pravda*, as cited in the *New York Times* (February 6, 1953) said about the cantata: “However, the newspaper sharply criticised the words of the cantata written by the poet Evgen [sic] Dolmatovsky.” For one who had been writing patriotic Soviet verse since the mid-Thirties, and one of whose poems was taught to every school child, another of whose poems had been the first sung in space, this could only mean one thing. Dolmatovsky was to be shortly arrested, perhaps tried and executed, perhaps simply to be deported, solely on the basis that he was Jewish. The Nazis could not have done better.

I have not been able to determine whether he was actually arrested or not. Certainly Shostakovich’s close friend and musical colleague, Mieczyslaw Weinberg (Moisei Vainberg), was arrested on February 7, 1953. In any event publication of the letter was delayed, possibly because of a direct appeal by Ilya Ehrenburg to Stalin. Then Stalin died on March 5 and the plans were stopped. Shostakovich appealed to Beria for Weinberg’s release, Weinberg was rehabilitated in the press in April, and released shortly thereafter (Natalya Vovsi-Mikhoels, Weinberg’s then wife, Wilson, p. 231–232). Molotov’s Jewish wife, Polina, who had been arrested in December 1948, was released in March. She and her husband nevertheless remained unrepentant Stalinists for the remainder of their lives.

A brief description of Stalin’s plan is given by Markish (p. 236):

On March 6, 1953, the trial of the “doctor-assassins” would open in the Hall of Columns of the House of the Trade Unions. The “assassins,” condemned by the entire Soviet nation, including all honest Jews, would, of course, by an overwhelming majority, be sentenced to hang publicly. This public execution would be a new, important contribution to Soviet legal theory and the penal system. But then the discovery would be made that the Zionists had not desisted from their plotting after all: they had enlisted musicians, artists and the like who were bent on poisoning Soviet culture. A new trial would therefore be scheduled for the beginning of May, once again in the Hall of Columns. And once again the evildoers would be sentenced to hang, but this time the people (not the mob, but the people!) would express their righteous indignation, snatch the condemned from the hands of their guards and lynch them on the spot.

The next step in the scenario would be a second letter addressed by the Jews to *Pravda*'s editorial office, the gist of which would be that the wrath of the Soviet people was justified and uncontrollable, but insofar as the overwhelming majority of Jews were true Soviet patriots who must be protected, leading representatives of the Jewish people request the Party and the government to take measures to ensure that Soviet Jews are placed in conditions of security. (The fact is that while Stalin was still alive, the Soviets began building barracks in Magadan province.)



Markish includes Dolmatovsky as a signer of a letter, possibly the same one, calling for the death penalty of the “doctor-assassins” (p. 235) but does not give a source – it may be simply based on a number of rumours circulating around the Jewish community. I would accept Vaksberg’s account as being more thoroughly researched.

Dolmatovsky survived the events of February 1953, but it is not difficult to imagine the impact of these events on him. In 1954, after Stalin’s death, he and Shostakovich again collaborated, on *Five Songs* to lyrics by E. Dolmatovsky, op. 98. Unlike all the previous collaborations, where the poems were of a patriotic nature, these poems are love poems. This composition has generally been negatively regarded, largely because of Flora Litvinova’s report (Wilson, p. 269–270) of a conversation with Shostakovich. She told him that she didn’t like the songs, and the words were terrible. He agreed that the songs were extremely bad. “Why then, did you write them, she asked. Shostakovich answered: ‘One day I will write my autobiography, and there I will explain everything, and why I had to compose all this.’ He spoke with some discomfort, and a feeling of awkwardness arose between us.” At first glance, one thinks that the music must be fine, and they are bad solely because of the texts. But this isn’t what is being said, which is, that both music and words are bad. What is really bothering Shostakovich? I believe we can gain some insight by noting two other compositions about which Shostakovich felt apologetic. Yakov Milkis reports (Wilson, p. 314–315): “There were of course the occasional weak works in his output, such as *The Song of the Forests* and the operetta *Moscow-Cheryomushki*. But those works were written under particular circumstances as occasional pieces and they can be discounted. Dmitri Dmitriyevich didn’t care to talk about them.” He does not state what those particular circumstances were. Similarly, Glikman (p. 79) reports that Shostakovich wrote to him not to bother seeing *Moscow-Cheryomushki*, it was “boring, unimaginative, stupid.”

A common element in these works appears to be one of coercion. A good example is *The Song of the Forests*. Though this was written a few months after Stalin had arranged the revocation of the 1948 Zhdanov decree forbidding the performance of Shostakovich’s works, *Song of the Forests* still appears as a venture designed to maintain a ‘safe’ position within the Stalin regime, with Dolmatovsky’s cooperation and help.

Moscow-Cheryomushki, according to Glikman (p. 269–270, n. 105) was “somewhat grudgingly written in response to insistent requests by the director of the Moscow Operetta Theatre, G. A. Stolyarov.” And Opus 98, I suggest, was written to help Dolmatovsky at a time when Stalin’s plan for the deportation of Jews was still not fully cancelled. One should remember, in this connection, that the songs were written between July and September 1954 (Hulme, p. 393), and the collection of Jewish passports occurred in August 1954. Shostakovich may well have felt that the music was not what he would have written except for the “particular circumstances,” as Milkis phrased it.

There are no further musical collaborations until the last one, in 1970, *Loyalty*, op. 136, a set of verses exalting Lenin. Lenin had previously been the subject of a cantata with words by Dolmatovsky and music by Kabalevsky, op. 63, in 1958. In 1956 Dolmatovsky published a novel in verse, returning to the subject of the Metro construction workers, with whom he had worked in 1933 as a Komsomol activist.

The Sixties and After

From 1958, for the next 25 years, Dolmatovsky held a powerful position as member of the Board of the Soviet Union of Writers, as well as the equivalent organisation of the Russian Federation. He was a staff writer at *Literaturnaya Gazeta* and as a correspondent for them visited Africa and other parts of the Third World. His reports from those travels were mainly propaganda pieces. (Obituary, *loc.cit.*) Lloyd Garrison reported for the *New York Times* (May 1, 1966) on a joint poetry recital in Dakar, Senegal by Dolmatovsky and Yevgeny Yevtushenko. He described Dolmatovsky as “an engaging man with tired but friendly eyes, [who] exudes neither energy nor youthful enthusiasm.” Dolmatovsky’s verses, he said, “were mainly about Africa and were studded with clichés.” In 1969 Dolmatovsky complained that some broadcasts intended for soldiers had too many sad and gloomy songs. He said that “the aim of military-patriotic education should be to steel the spirit and not to soften it.” (*New York Times*, February 23, 1969).





The period following the humiliating defeat of the Arabs in their attempt to destroy Israel in June of 1967 (see, e.g., Oren, 2002), using Soviet equipment, training, and military doctrines, had been a period of intensified anti-Israeli activity by the Soviets under Brezhnev. This was, of course, accompanied by increased anti-Semitism (see, for example, Wistrich, p. 149) generally and, as in 1952–1953 specifically in satellite countries. In Poland in the early 1960s a full card index (a census listing) of Polish Jews was prepared by government officials. By 1963 the Polish Politburo had an operational plan in place for the complete removal of Jews from all positions of influence. This culminated in an anti-Zionist crusade in 1967–1968 (Wistrich, p. 135), which resulted in the emigration of many Polish communists of Jewish origin.

I met one of these in Copenhagen not long after. He had been an editor of a satirical magazine, and had been on a cruise when the 1967 war broke out. He immediately recognised what was coming, and emigrated. His children discovered, for the first time, that they were Jews. It is not difficult to imagine the impact these events must have had on Soviet Jewry.

In March 1970 the Brezhnev regime held a large rally intended to demonstrate Jewish support for the Soviet anti-Israel policy. As in the Stalin years a statement was issued, signed by eminent Jews, supporting the policy and arguing that there was no discrimination against Jews in place in the USSR. Dolmatovsky was among the signatories (Bernard Gwertzman, *New York Times*, March 5, 1970).

One can speculate that it was Dolmatovsky's memories of 1953 and the increasing repression of the Brezhnev regime that led to the collaboration with Shostakovich on a work extolling Lenin, *Loyalty*, op. 136, completed in April 1970 and premiered in December 1970.

Dolmatovsky's collected works were published in the late 1970s (Obituary, *loc.cit.*), and on several occasions until 1989. In the late 1980s he appears as a senior member of Soviet Peace delegations in TV interviews and in trips to Cyprus and Greece. (*Tass*, September 11, 1987; June 6, 1988; March 11, 1989). He died in Moscow on September 10, 1994 at the age of 79 (Obituary, *loc. cit.*).

Dolmatovsky's interaction with Shostakovich was not entirely absent during the period from 1954 to 1970 (see, for example, the entries in Shostakovich's appointment diary, showing dates from 1954 to 1958, and again from 1969 to 1971, Fairclough, p. 252).

Shostakovich's wife Nina died in 1954 and his mother in 1955. He felt keenly the need of a spouse. In June of 1956 Shostakovich was on the jury as a judge of songs for a Komsomol contest. There he noticed a young woman, Margarita Kainova, a Komsomol activist and instructor. He was drawn to her and looked for help in meeting her. According to Khentova he asked Dolmatovsky (who did not attach much importance to the request) to arrange the introduction (Lebedinsky claims that he was the one who introduced them.) (Fay, p. 197; *DSCH Journal*, No. 25, July 2006, p. 46–47). In any event the two were married the following month, July (Wilson, p. 266). The marriage was a disaster and ended in divorce in 1959.

Some time in 1960 or afterwards, when Shostakovich was Chairman of the Union of Russian Composers (he became head on April 9, 1960, (Fay, p. 216)) one of his followers, whose work he had promoted, spoke out against him. Shostakovich, though deeply offended, did not defend himself in an official speech. In fact, he named the offender as being very successful. Dolmatovsky, hearing this, was indignant, and told Shostakovich he should not have praised the offender. Shostakovich replied: "He was one of my best followers, so I haven't got the right to change my opinion of his talent on account of his tactlessness. I was elected Chairman of the Composer's Union because I would never settle old scores." (Ardov, p. 150–151, citing Khentova; see also Fairclough, citing Dolmatovsky's memoir, p. 259; Fairclough, p. 315, n. 35, cites Olga Digonskaya that the offending follower was probably Georgiy Sviridov). The story says something about the character of both Shostakovich and Dolmatovsky.

In 1970 we have the curious incident regarding the collaboration of Shostakovich and Dolmatovsky on a cantata in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Lenin's death; *Loyalty*, op. 136. Shostakovich's physical health had deteriorated considerably by this time, and almost all his compositions during the period related to a preoccupation with death.

By then Shostakovich had acquired a considerable reputation from both within and outside the Soviet Union, and had received many honours, both domestic and foreign and he no longer needed to protect himself from governmental pressures. Dolmatovsky, on the other hand, as noted above, was faced with the rising anti-Semitism of the time, and the increased repression under Brezhnev. He did need, or at least must have felt the need, despite his lifetime record of loyalty to the system and the Party, for increased protection. Shostakovich could have provided some degree of shelter and hence this composition exalting Lenin, indicating a degree of loyalty to the system which could not be faulted.



Dolmatovsky's memoir cites a meeting with Shostakovich which must have occurred during the latter's 1974 composition of the songs to words of Michelangelo (Fairclough, p. 252, 260). Though Dolmatovsky speaks of this as his last meeting with Shostakovich, we hear of one more meeting between the two, in 1975, shortly before Shostakovich's death. The first real collaboration between them had been in 1949, in the oratorio, *Song of the Forests* and, as mentioned earlier, Dolmatovsky's oratorio text was about the afforestation of the countryside devastated by World War II. Dolmatovsky recalled that in this chance meeting in 1975, Shostakovich had said: "You know, *The Song of the Forests* was really about protecting the environment – a subject the whole world is talking about now. We hit the nail on the head!" (Dmitri & Ludmilla Sollertinsky, p. 128).

The impact of politics on Dolmatovsky's poetry

The impact of politics on Dolmatovsky shows up clearly in his poetry. Dolmatovsky attempts to protect himself by invoking the names of Stalin and Lenin at certain periods more frequently than at others. I have looked in some detail at volumes published in 1948, 1952, 1955 and 1959. More generally I have looked at the frequencies of the words for Stalin, Сталин and Сталина; Lenin, Ленин and Ленина; and Stalingrad, Сталинград and Сталинграда. Although Russian has many suffixes reflecting various cases. I have used only these two forms, but believe nevertheless that the results represent real trends. I was able to obtain statistics by the use of the Hathitrust Digital Library, which allows for searches of the pages on which a particular word appears in the forty-odd volumes of Dolmatovsky's works included in the Library. For copyright reasons the texts themselves cannot be accessed. For the four volumes mentioned above I have used the Harvard Widener Library.

Dolmatovsky's poetry, from the 1930s on, consists basically of two genres: one patriotic, the other lyrical. The patriotic verses express hope for the future, and exhort the people to work towards this future, with communist ideals as the basis, and the party in a leadership role. His verses during the war express the difficulties and hardships faced, and the certainty that in the end the people will prevail.

The collections of poetry in the four volumes listed above give the dates of composition of the poems, and include many from the pre-war period, three from 1933 on, and one from 1937 on. In this paragraph I limit myself to the dates of composition. Stalin's name does not appear at all in the pre-war period. Lenin's name appears only in 1938, and then not again until 1947, and, until 1955, only for 1947–1949. There are, in any event, few references. This was a period when Stalin was consolidating his power, and eliminating entire categories of potential enemies. The cult of personality had not yet flowered.

During the war years, 1939–1945, Stalin's name appears in three poems, two in 1942 and one in 1945. Lenin's name does not appear at all. The build-up of Stalinist repression beginning in 1947 is reflected in the frequencies. Stalin is mentioned in the 1948 volume three times for poems written in 1947, Lenin only once in a 1947 poem. In the 1952 volume Stalin is mentioned five times for the period 1947–1949, Lenin seven times for 1947–1949, four of them in conjunction with Stalin. More interesting is that in 1949 one of the poems is titled *Glory of Stalin*. It seems that following the Zhdanov 1948 decree one had to protect himself by glorifying Stalin. This is also the year that Dolmatovsky and Shostakovich joined in the cantata *Song of the Forests*, also glorifying Stalin. By 1955 Stalin was dead, but Khrushchev's 1956 speech and the de-Stalinisation campaign had not yet begun. In the volume published in that year Stalin is now mentioned four times, Lenin three times. It is still dangerous not to mention Stalin – perhaps he, or least Stalinism, will be resurrected. But the effects of Khrushchev's 1956 speech become apparent in the volume published in 1959. Stalin is not mentioned at all – he has become taboo. Lenin is now barely mentioned – in a poem composed in 1938, and twice in the novel in verse, *Dobrovolsky*, which focuses on socialist construction and the war effort.





The impact of the Khrushchev 1956 speech and the subsequent campaign of de-Stalinisation can be illustrated by the history of the poem *Communist*. In the volumes published in 1952 and 1955 the last four lines read:

Да, Мы Ленина, Сталина премя,
Да, Мы завтрашних всходов зерно,
И недаром грядущее время
В нашем имени заключено!

The first of these four lines may be translated as: “Yes, we are the tribe of Lenin, of Stalin.” In the 1959 volume, the last four lines become:

Да, Мы Ленинской партии премя,
Да, Мы завтрашних всходов зерно,
И недаром грядущее время
В нашем имени заключено!

Only the first of these lines is changed. Now it reads (in translation): “Yes, we are the tribe of the Leninist party.”

If we now look at the frequencies without reference to the years in which the poems were composed, we find that Stalin disappears from the books of poetry from 1956 until the third volume of his collected works in 1989, except for two mentions in 1964, two mentions in the first of three volumes in 1978, and one mention in 1986. He is, however, mentioned several times in the volumes of memoirs published in 1973, 1975 and 1988. In these final years before the end of the Soviet era in 1991 and his death in 1994 Dolmatovsky again feels free to mention Stalin, though he does not resurrect him in his poems.

Looked at from the point of view of overall frequencies, Stalin is hardly mentioned until 1948: once in 1946, twice in 1947. But then the mentions increase: 5 times in 1948; five times in 1951; 11 times in 1952; and 6 times in 1955. These frequencies track the growth of the Stalinist cult of personality, and the perceived need to glorify him in order to stay alive.

Lenin is mentioned through all the years. Before 1956 he is often mentioned together with Stalin. There is, as with Stalin, a peak in 1952. This is likely to be due to at least two factors. First, Dolmatovsky’s background was that of a liberal, bourgeois family; his father had been executed as an “enemy of the people.” Secondly, despite Dolmatovsky’s efforts to be seen as a Russian poet, and only a Russian poet, the increasing Stalinist anti-semitism, soon to reach a climax just before Stalin’s death, labelled him as a Jew, with all the disabilities that came with that designation. As with the Nazis, it was the “racial” origin that mattered. Dolmatovsky tried to counter this and provide some safety by emphasising his commitment to the Soviet system through the references to Lenin. The same approach can be seen as regards the cantata *The Sun Shines Over our Motherland*, opus 90, of 1952. Although the numbers are too small to be definitive, the same attempt seems to be at work in later years whenever Soviet anti-Semitic programs become more intense. The number of references to Lenin; two in 1956 and one in 1958, rises to five in 1961, dropping to two in 1964, one in 1965, and none in 1967 and 1968. The campaign of the early 1960s was signalled by Bulganin’s warning in November 1956 to the Israeli government that the very existence of Israel was in jeopardy (Wistrich, p. 138). Soon after, in the early 1960s, the Polish government, under Gomulka, ordered a survey of senior government officials of Jewish origin, and by 1963 a plan for the complete purge of Jews from all positions of influence was ready (Wistrich, p. 135). Such actions in the satellite states were usually precursors to similar actions in the Soviet Union. There the campaign continued, and a book reminiscent of the infamous forgery, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, was published in the Soviet Union in 1963 by Kichko, *Judaism without Embellishment*, alleging a universal Jewish conspiracy. The anti-Semitic campaign intensified after the Israeli victories over the Soviet-supplied and trained Arab nations in 1967. “Between 1967 and 1973, the USSR greatly intensified its domestic and foreign propaganda against Zionism, which rose to new heights of vituperation.” (Wistrich, p. 143). Compare these dates with Dolmatovsky’s mentions of Lenin: 1964, 2; 1965, 1; 1967, none; 1968, none; 1970, 5; 1971, volume 1, 5; 1971, volume 2, 6; 1973, 7; 1974, 2. There appears to be a clear correlation, and an attempt by Dolmatovsky to bolster his “Russian” and “Soviet” credentials. During this same period he collaborates with Shostakovich again on the new cantata, *Loyalty*, in 1970 devoted to Lenin.

Finally, it is worth noting that Stalin and Lenin never form more than a small part of the total number of pages. The maximum percentage of pages on which they appear is in *Stikhi i Pesni* of 1952, where, out of a total of 159 pages, Stalin's and Lenin's names each appear on 8 pages. In 1955, in *Izbrannoe*, with 478 pages, Stalin appears on 6 pages and Lenin on 5 pages. By 1959, in *Izbrannoe*, with 494 pages, Stalin does not appear at all, and Lenin is present on only 3 pages.



Clearly Dolmatovsky's focus is not on personalities, but on ideals and issues.

Discussion

How could someone like Shostakovich, opposed to the repressive practices of the regime, have maintained a friendship with an apparently loyal party hack like Dolmatovsky?

We need to look first at Dolmatovsky's background and its effects on his actions. He was the son of a prominent lawyer, thus a bourgeois; his father was a Social Democrat, holding office in the Kerensky government which preceded the Soviet takeover, thus, *prima facie*, a counter-revolutionary, and executed as such in 1939; and he was Jewish, in a virulent anti-Semitic traditional culture, and, at least from about 1943, an equally vicious anti-Semitic Soviet government. How does one deal with these factors, any one of which could easily lead to arrest, imprisonment and/or death? Dolmatovsky, apparently believing in the ideals of the revolution, chose, as a survival mechanism, what is aptly described, in another context, being "more Catholic than the Pope." He created numerous patriotic poems – these would be, not Communist, but rather nationalistic, identifying him as Russian. But he did not deny his Jewish background, and the government, despite his efforts, identified him not as a Russian, but as a Jew.

He wrote many poems extolling the Communist Party and system, and eulogised, in particular, Lenin. This is more a question of "rendering unto Caesar" his due. In this he was not alone. Shostakovich made a similar bargain: an occasional "official" work, but allowing him to express his individuality in his other works. But Shostakovich also showed his opposition to governmental practices, to the lack of freedom, the insistence on conformity to Party directives, through his choice of texts for many of his works; to ambiguous interpretations of his symphonies (e.g., in the Seventh, was the tread of the dictator in the first movement that of Hitler or Stalin, or both?), or in his quartets (e.g., the Eighth: dedicated to the victims of the war and fascism – did that include Soviet repression as well as Nazi, or both?). Akhmatova preserved her individuality in her poetry, but wrote an ode to Stalin. Prokofiev wrote a cantata in 1937 with text taken from Marx and Lenin, including, originally, some text by Stalin (Raymond Ericson, *New York Times*, 1971 February 21, 1971). This was the price that many paid for survival. Dolmatovsky was not alone.

But was Dolmatovsky really a convinced supporter of Communism as practiced in the Soviet Union? I would answer this with a "no". Shostakovich compartmentalised his life. He also rendered unto Caesar, not only with the occasional musical composition, but in signing, without reading them, anti-Western articles and other Soviet propaganda pieces which had been written by Party hacks, and by publicly stating his support of Party criticism and policies. But he maintained a separate part of himself independent of government and Party, by way of his family, his friends, and, especially, his music. This latter became his safe haven, to which he could retreat and maintain his individuality. As Galina Vishnevskaya put it (cited in Ho and Feofanov, p. 65–66): "His only real life was his art, and into it he admitted no one. It was his temple: when he entered it, he threw off his mask and was what he was."

Dolmatovsky's safe haven was poetry of a different genre than those destined for the eyes of party officials. What is generally overlooked is that Dolmatovsky wrote a group of other poems, love lyrics, these works going back to the 1930s. As one critic put it (Slonim, 1953, p. 417), Dolmatovsky "revealed in his *Far Eastern Poems* (1937) that a young Communist can easily alternate patriotic verse with love lyrics." In 1946, in the *Literary Gazette* issue of April 26, a critic notes signs of "depression" in Dolmatovsky, amongst others, and takes them to task for seeking refuge in "love and Russia" (Reavey, p. 145). In 1954, after Stalin's death, Shostakovich put to music (opus 98) five love poems by Dolmatovsky. As has already been discussed, much of Dolmatovsky's poetry is of a patriotic nature, is nationalistic and has no connection to Communist ideology – here we have, as the *Literary Gazette* critic noted, a refuge as a Russian patriot. Shostakovich was a great composer, of a kind that comes along perhaps once in a century. His faults, if they were indeed faults, could be put in the shadow of his greatness. Dolmatovsky was not a great poet, he was at best, as Shostakovich once put it to Glikman, a "talented poet," (Glikman, p. 37) or, as Glikman interpreted it, "a professional versifier" (Glikman, p. 247, n. 29). He did not have greatness as a cover for his survivalist writings.





Dolmatovsky was not one to denounce others, except as one of many signatories to a letter. Such letters were a common method used by the Soviet would-be moulders of public opinion. As noted in Ho and Feofanov (p. 64–65): “It is well known, however, that denunciations were a common practice in the Soviet Union, and often the signers neither read nor agreed with that which they had ‘endorsed.’ ... Alas, even Shostakovich signed many such documents, including a letter denouncing Andrey Sakharov, which also had been ‘approved’ by Kabalevsky, Khachaturian, Khrennikov, Shchedrin and Sviridov.” Shostakovich told Rostropovich that he never read these things. To Yuri Lyubimov he said: “I’d sign anything even if they hand it to me upside down. All I want is to be left alone.” (Ho and Feofanov, p. 65). Shostakovich felt no animosity for those who denounced him, but rather understood why they felt they had to do it. Isaak Schwartz, the son of an “enemy of the people” who had been arrested in 1936 and died in prison the following year, relates that during the anti-formalist campaign in the late 1940s, he had been called into the office of the secretary of the Party organisation of the Composer’s Faculty, where he was a student, and ordered to denounce Shostakovich as a bad teacher. Schwartz refused, saying that Shostakovich was an excellent teacher. Later Shostakovich berated him for this refusal: “‘I am most displeased by your behaviour. You had no right to act like that. You have a family, a wife, small children. You should think about them, and not about me. If I am criticised, then let them criticise me – that’s my affair.’ But I saw in his eyes such a penetrating look of sympathy and affection for me, and such compassion! I think that it was something Shostakovich never forgot, after all his response was completely spontaneous and heartfelt.” (Wilson, p. 221–222) But Shostakovich could not forgive or forget those who had turned away from him for opportunistic reasons. The incident also demonstrates that loyalty was important to him, as well as family. Dolmatovsky, as far as we know, never abandoned him. On the contrary, he added his name and reputation as a loyal Party man as a shield for Shostakovich by collaborating with him not long after his fall from grace in the Zhdanov period after 1948.

Dolmatovsky was constantly threatened with arrest, imprisonment, exile or death because of his Jewish origins. In February 1953, when Stalin’s anti-Semitic plan was to take full effect, he had received notice from the criticism in *Pravda* that he was to be included in the list of victims. Stalin’s death did not mean a total end to his plan. Markish (p. 231), writes, that on returning to Moscow in August 1954, “I learned that all the wives and children of Jewish writers had had their passports withdrawn and had been notified by the ‘militia’ (police) that they could not reside in Moscow. Furthermore, Leningrad, the capitals of the Union Republics, the ‘heroic cities,’ and the coastal cities were also declared off-limits. This left no doubt that the stage was being set for our second exile, and this time it would be for life.”

It seems to me that this may well have been the reason for Shostakovich’s setting Dolmatovsky’s poems to music, that it was done to provide some shelter to him from the anti-Semitic tide about to overwhelm him. Similarly, “[t]he Soviet anti-Israel campaign in February–March 1970 surpassed by its vehemence and calumny all previous Soviet attacks on Zionism.” (*The New Middle East*, issues 16–39, 1970, p. 46). Again, I believe, Shostakovich came to help Dolmatovsky. At a time when almost every other composition by Shostakovich reflected his pre-occupation with death, he composed *Loyalty*, op. 136, with texts extolling, with exaggerated praise, Lenin. Dolmatovsky, after the events of 1953–1954, must have been tremendously frightened – that would explain his need to demonstrate his loyalty, most readily shown by such praise of Lenin, and the absence of merely patriotic statements.

We need also to consider Shostakovich’s relationships with members of governmental organisations, particularly with women. His second wife, Margarita Kainova, whom he married almost immediately after seeing her for the first time, was employed by the Komsomol (Young Communist League). He had, in the 1930s, had a liaison with Galina Serebryakova, a writer and a convinced Marxist. She was arrested in 1937 and spent about 20 years in the Gulag. Despite this her belief in Communism remained unshaken.

How does one explain these connections?

The past thirty years have focused on whether Shostakovich was a loyal Communist or a secret dissident. I believe there can now be no doubt that he could not abide the practices of the Soviet government. But I also believe that ideology was of no interest to him. He did not join the Communist Party until 1960, and then only after being coerced to do so. One of his reasons for not joining, he said to the emissary sent to coerce him, was that he had never succeeded in properly grasping Marxism (Glikman, p. 92). There is, for example, the story of the need to give him special lessons in Marxist ideology (Ardov, p. 84). There is also the story of his passing a student on her Marxist learning when it was clear she was totally ignorant of the theory (Ardov, p. 87–88). So ideology was of no interest to him. What was of interest was the

freedom of the individual to be himself, and to develop in his own way. Also loyalty to family and friends was of value to him. The Soviet system was opposed to both of these values, emphasising the complete submission of the individual to the system, negating both individual freedom and loyalty to family and friends. And this is what he was opposed to. Had he lived in the United States I have no doubt he would have been opposed to discrimination against Jews and Blacks, to an unequal distribution of wealth, to anything which acted to repress the individual's capacity to develop his own potential in his own way.



Shostakovich had maintained friendly relations with Dolmatovsky since at least the late 1940s. Their musical collaboration, except for the one instance in 1970, ended in 1954. But we have reports of Dolmatovsky's introducing him to his second wife in 1956, of his responding to an action of Shostakovich at a Union of Russian Composers in 1960, of intervening with Ilizarov to admit Shostakovich for treatment in 1970, and of a meeting with him in 1975, shortly before his death. Clearly the relationship between them was not merely confined to a professional collaboration.

My view then is that Shostakovich saw in Dolmatovsky a kindred spirit, at least to the extent of belief in social justice, and respect for individuality. Both had made their peace with the system by paying the price of contributing in various ways to the propaganda mechanisms of the government, and both had reserved some individuality through their art. But both also believed in the principles of helping people to gain freedom from governmental oppression. Dolmatovsky's lyrics, generally, emphasise the bringing of freedom and a better life to mankind. And, as MacDonald (p. 222) points out, Dolmatovsky was a genuine war hero. Shostakovich had not been allowed to go to the front in Leningrad during the siege – his student Fleischmann had gone, and had been killed in the fighting. Shostakovich had been evacuated. There seems little doubt that Shostakovich would have a great deal of respect for Dolmatovsky's war record.

As is well known, Shostakovich also had a considerable affinity for Jews – he was aware of their suffering through discrimination in the Soviet Union, of the Holocaust by the Germans, and that consequently they were unable to be themselves, or to develop their potential. He could understand this. Coming from a bourgeois family, the son of an executed “counter-revolutionary,” and as a Jew, Dolmatovsky inevitably brought out Shostakovich's sympathy and compassion. But the poet was also someone who strove to help the composer in the dark days following the Zhdanov decree of 1948 and who had facilitated Shostakovich's admission into Ilizarov's clinic in 1970 when he had given up hope of any treatment for his deteriorating condition. Dolmatovsky, then, was a friend he could trust. It would then be no surprise if he would help Dolmatovsky when he was threatened with arrest and the possibility of execution.

To summarise: Yevgeny Dolmatovsky came from a secularised Jewish family with traditional roots, in a viciously anti-Semitic milieu. Timothy Jackson (in Ho and Feofanov, p. 607), though writing about Shostakovich, notes the “distinctly ‘Jewish’ longing for an ideal state of being, the same Messianism that made loyal Communists of many Jews in the 1910s and ‘20s.” Dolmatovsky, judging by his writings, in his early years, shared this passion for social justice and freedom. Disillusionment about Soviet practice, however, must have set in by the mid-1930s; Dolmatovsky maintained his individuality then through his love poems, and his idealism by focusing largely on nationalistic, rather than any fundamental support of Party policies. For Dolmatovsky, principles did not rise to the level of martyrdom, and he also wrote what he believed would keep him safe in the Soviet system. During this period where he could be considered almost as unofficial poet-laureate of the government, he did what he safely could to help Shostakovich after the Zhdanov decrees.

But in February of 1953 Dolmatovsky discovered that as far as the government was concerned (like the Nazis) his primary characterisation was that as Jew, subject to all the possible disabilities of that status. Thereafter he entered a survivalist mode, doing what was necessary to remain alive with reasonable material comforts. As Shostakovich became more immune to governmental attack and suppression, the roles were reversed, and he now became a protector of Dolmatovsky. Shostakovich could appreciate his ideals, his appreciation of individuality, and his loyalty. Dolmatovsky had never joined the Party-inspired attacks on Shostakovich, had helped where he could, as in sponsoring him for Ilizarov's clinic. Their relationship, then, could be seen as greater than casual, albeit less than close.





A summing up

Dolmatovsky appears as a basically decent man trying to survive in a totalitarian society, with a constant fear of arrest and the possibility of harm to his family. He was born in 1915 in the repressive Czarist days, with an omnipresent secret police, a Jew in a strongly, vicious anti-Semitic atmosphere, with restrictions on education, and where one could settle.

The situation in the Western world through the 1930s was also replete with racist and anti-Semitic feelings, often enacted into Law. Sweden, for example, created an institute for racial biology in 1921 to maintain Nordic purity. British anti-Semitism was of a softer kind, characterised by the images of a Jew in Shakespeare's Shylock, and Dickens Fagin. Britain's colonial empire was justified on the racist basis of the "white man's burden" to civilise primitive indigenous peoples. The United States disenfranchised the Negro population in the South, Harvard devised means to keep the Jewish student population low, and in 1923 the United States adopted a quota system for immigrants designed to maintain the existing ethnic mix. Poland, in the 1930s, passed legislation to undermine Jewish economic strength, and popular movements attempted to convince Jews to migrate elsewhere. Eastern Europe still maintained several authoritarian governments. Role models for democracy as we understand it today did not exist. It is not surprising that the expressed Communist ideals may well have appealed to the victims of oppression, and that the oppressive practice of the government could be rationalised as a necessary, but temporary, means to the accomplishment of those goals..

His family was politically liberal, clearly affluent economically, assimilationist. The 1917 revolutions brought the hope of liberation, of freedom from the restrictions of the pervasive anti-Semitism. Communist ideals (though not the practice) called for equality for all peoples, allowing for people to develop their own individuality in their own culture. These ideals he shared with Shostakovich, especially the right of the individual to develop his potential. Neither looked with favour on the return of a Czar in a new guise.

Despite the disillusionments of the Stalin years Dolmatovsky, like many of his generation, continued to believe in the ideals expressed in communism. As Fairclough (2010) puts it: "Born in 1915, Dolmatovskiy was a true believer in the Soviet state and he never publicly changed his view. This was not in itself unusual: neither did the distinguished poet Ol'ga Berggol'ts, or the writer Galina Serebryakova, both of whom were incarcerated in the purges of the 1930s and released, in Berggol'ts's case, a year later and, in Serebryakova's case, twenty years later." To these names can be added those of Yevgenia Ginzburg, who remained loyal to the party after 18 years in the Gulag, and Polina Molotov, who remained an unrepentant Stalinist after several years in the camps. The dilemma that these individuals faced was how to reconcile the expressed ideals of communism with the practice of communism in the Soviet Union, which presented a total negation of the ideals, and, furthermore, how to survive and protect one's family in such a situation.

Thus, finally, we can see Dolmatovsky as one who believed in the freedom of the individual to develop his potential, for equality for all; who saw himself as an assimilated Russian but could not escape being characterised and treated as a Jew; and a man who used his literary talents in the service of survival in the face of a repressive government.

Note: After the completion of the initial draft of this paper Fairclough (2010) published a paper on the relationship of Dolmatovsky to Shostakovich, including a translation of Dolmatovsky's 1981 memoir and reminiscences of Shostakovich. Fairclough provides a kinder and more understanding portrait of Dolmatovsky and his work than has been the rule. I have incorporated only a few facts from her paper into the present one. I am much indebted to Alan Mercer for providing me with a copy of her chapter, as well as for many helpful discussions, and who pushed for a discussion of Dolmatovsky's poetry to be added.



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