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## The last Beethoven

Lavinia-Nadiana Simonis

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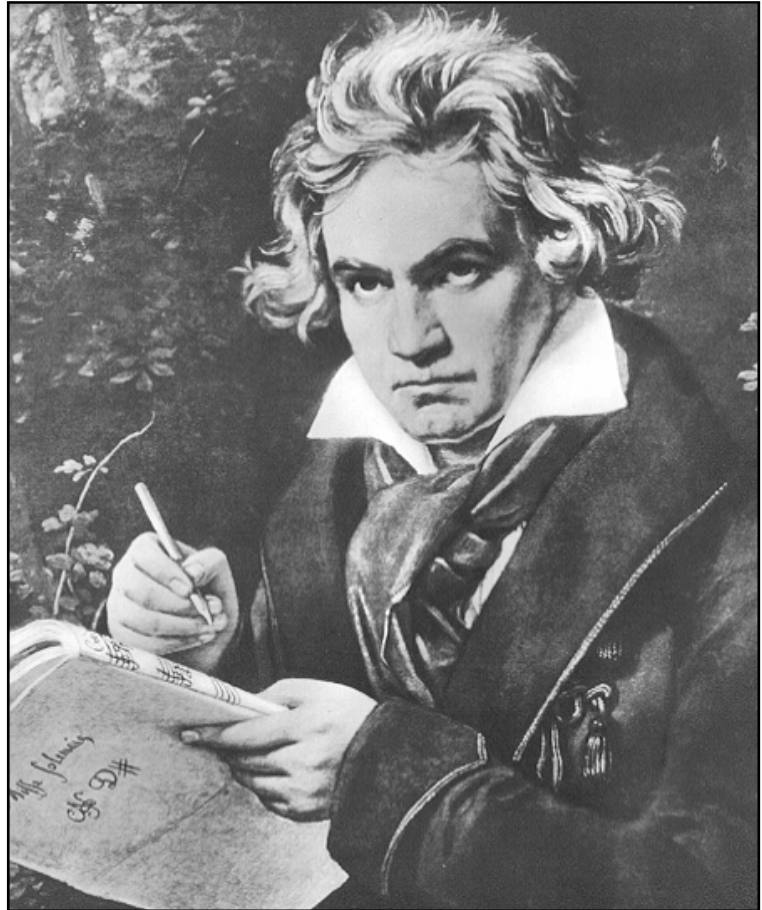
## The Last Beethoven

*Beethoven, deaf, working on the manuscript of the Missa Solemnis*

*(painting by Josef Karl Stieler, 1819)*

### Overture

This study is, above all, the outcome of a long-lasting personal concern that goes back to the period of my first music lessons and my attempts to play Beethoven's music on the piano. My passion for certain musical compositions, the care to interpret them in the way, with the sensitivity and in keeping with their creator's intentions might be



translated as follows: I wish to perform as if he could hear me and could recognize himself in the music I performed. I was filled, at a very early age, with the desire to know as much as possible about his personality, his life, the events and the circumstances that led to the birth of his work. It is obvious and easy to prove, based on Beethoven's own notes and the testimonies of those who have written about him for nearly two hundred years, that there were external triggers, such as social and even historical events or happenings, which activated certain musical themes that his genius and sensitivity gave expression in the form known to us today. In this study, I will speak, at the appropriate time, about situations, contexts and events of this kind: family problems, like the affair involving his nephew Karl,

or sentimental issues, like the “Immortal Beloved” (*Der Unsterbliche Geliebte*), the drama entailed by hearing loss, the evolution of event on the European stage during the Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic periods, etc.

It may be noted, also by way of a personal observation, that an artistic interpretative exercise we embark on for a longer period in life may also have, in addition to the effect of acquiring certain artistic skills, another result, which is by no means negligible. The music we play forms us just like, if the comparison does not seem unlikely, prayers form those who are dedicated to spiritual life practice. To some extent, we play music in order to become the beings we aspire to be. We play music to crystallize our personality according to the artistic ideal we acquired at a particular point in time, through one of those intimate visions that reveals to us, through the exalted lens of adolescence, the sublime face of destiny. My suggestion that musical exercise and religious practice are somehow related is, I hope, not far-fetched, and while the similarity in question may not be generally valid, it certainly has personal relevance. I believe that at least two of the classical figures I am familiar with endorse this similarity: Bach and Beethoven. Who could dispute that Bach’s music is simultaneously a hymn, a prayer and a work for the glorification of God? Or who could have countered Beethoven’s belief that music is a revelation above metaphysics and religion, the primary revelation of the Absolute?

Step by step, the composer whose music you perform over the course of many years devoted to a pianistic career becomes a form of your own sensitivity and, without understanding exactly how, he turns into an element and a measure of your artistic personality. This situation is probably also valid on a broader, general level. Without ever clarifying its nature, the performer’s relation to the music of a particular composer becomes personal, because each and every time, the former resurrects, gives life to the latter through the very act of interpretation. The forms of the creator’s sensitivity, his inner pace, his

architecture of sound, the vision incorporated into his work act slowly but surely on the performer, refining and, perhaps, converting him. Beyond technical ability and interpretative sensibility, I think that what is at stake is certain mystical fusion between a good musician and the music he aspires to instantiate. I use this term because it appears to be more relevant. When one of Beethoven's sonatas or Bach's fugues is performed, for example, what happens is more than the mere transposition into sound of a music score: a musical universe is literally instantiated into being. In this sense, the musician must take upon himself, at a profound and genuine level, the character, the spirit, the personality of the music he performs so that its translation into sound may exude the atmosphere of a mystical initiation. Through its very substance and character, music lends itself more than any other art to analogies with religious practice, even with what is known as ecstasy. In fact, initiations, incantations, chants and liturgies all have a musical background and a mystical purpose. Let us not be afraid of this term: there is nothing suspect about the mystical character of music, even of secular music, for the term essentially amounts to a simple fact – communion, fusion, participation. What else is music but the communion between composer, performer and listener? These three entities coexist at the level of experience in the mystical space created by music, in a space where limitations dwindle away and individualities dissolve unto the horizon of sound like the scent of lilac melts into the odor of commonality.

Unlike other artistic products that have material consistency, such as painting, sculpture, photography, film, literature, etc., music cannot be congealed in a material support, since it exists only insofar as it is made, that is, interpreted. The canvas on which sounds are woven is the very canvas of time, and this is fluid, flowing. Passage is its very condition, for music is, effectively, each and every time, the action that shapes transition in sonorous form, providing audible support to the silent flow of time. The fact that it is composed in writing, entrenched in a music score simply means that there is a system of graphic signs that we, as



artists, can turn it into a music performance, but for this instrumentalists and musical instruments are needed. In other words, we must constantly produce and reproduce music, which always comes down to reforging a personal relationship with the composer. We must recreate the music he created in order to have a world in common. We may leave aside the fact that in reality, music can now be stored on various media and that it can technically be reproduced as many times as we wish and in however many places in the world simultaneously. The problem remains the same: someone or something must set into motion an entire audible edifice that we, listeners, with our auditive structures and predispositions, interpret as a music system.

Second, this study represents a strictly theoretical undertaking. I wish to present, according to my own understanding, the connections formed throughout the nearly three decades of disease between Beethoven's hearing impairment and his musical creation. Beyond the medical situation that he responded to with understandable panic, with a mixture of helplessness, tremor and depression, which brought him close to the brink of suicide in around the year 1803, the loss of hearing opened an agonizing horizon in the composer's existence, a horizon against which he waged his battle with destiny. This is the theme, his perception, which led him to take on the image and role of a Hero, of a Titan, strained under the bleak attempts of the divine machinations that he met with courage and, sometimes, even with defiance. It was from these strains that some of his most complex, powerful, expressive and innovative works gushed forth, from his *Third* and *Ninth Symphonies* to the piano sonatas and several other compositions for strings.

The heroic model he adopted certainly saved him. This circumstance of titanic emulation helped Beethoven to carry so far, in the creative sense, his difficult and somewhat ironic impairment. Still, we have to admit that outside of this romantic model of approaching

destiny by recourse to the Heroic and Titanic figures – grandiose epitomes of classical Greek culture – we may find it very difficult to ascertain the composer’s relationship with God in the Christian sense, the way in which he integrated his vision, his sense of life predicated thereupon. Of course, the *Missa Solemnis* in D major Op. 123, the Ninth Symphony and several other works or parts thereof confirm our view that like Bach, his model and favorite master, Beethoven composed music for the glorification and exaltation of God. And if this is entirely true, then our mission to understand his transitioning through such different cultural and religious models becomes even more difficult. Speaking strictly from a musicological standpoint, this may be of lesser importance, but in any case we must admit that Beethoven’s work, to which we shall refer in aesthetic terms, is the creation of a concrete individual with idiosyncrasies, ideals ambitions, values and life choices, revised sometimes with anguish, with diverse and constant crises and sufferings throughout his life, with passions, loves, disillusionments and frustrations, sedimented, layer by layer, in his intricate personality, from which masterpieces could suddenly erupt at the most unexpected of times.

The relationship with the Absolute, whether or not we call it God, was a constant feature in Beethoven’s evolution as a creator and, if we read the themes of his major creations, we may infer that this was a living relationship, on a purely personal level, assumed as a steering force in life and as a form of embracing destiny. Even though, at times, he may appear to have been struck by destiny and engaged in a struggle against God, this merely confirms the resilience of his taut relation with the divine. After all, you cannot resist, you cannot stand face to face with someone you do not believe in, whom you cannot glance at questioningly, whom you cannot challenge in any way. A Titan will always rise against unjust, illegitimate or unbearable authority. As we shall see, Beethoven had a major problem with authority throughout his life, and this constantly fuelled the crystallization of his personality in keeping with the *titanic archetype*.

The circumstances surrounding Beethoven's loss of hearing will be regarded as a point of caesura in this analysis and will be taken as the focal element around which the construction of ideas in this study will revolve. In the German composer's biography, the gradual loss of hearing – which began when he was only twenty-six years old, that is, before he defined his own style and wrote the works that individualized him in the history of Western music – was a regrettable and incurable clinical situation, but in time it was converted into the very effigy of his destiny, which he assumed by creatively sublimating it in an exemplary manner. Perhaps it would be difficult to find a more abrupt and overwhelming illustration of the romantic hero in the entire European culture: Beethoven was the most eloquent and, at various moments, also the most popular musical genius of his time, despite the fact that he deprived of his sense of hearing, without which music cannot be produce or understood. There can be no better example than Beethoven to illustrate the romantic way of judging the destiny of a genius, which represented an even broader theme than that of the hero. It is on this assumption that I will rely in upholding the thesis that *he has become a universal paradigm of the romantic artist*, whom suffering impels to perpetually mold and remold himself through creation, eventually taking artistic expression to the height of a messianic ideal.

A genuine romantic artist is saved through his creation, which enables him to express his vision of the Absolute, fleshing it out through artistic language. In his singular and unique way, through the caesura caused by the loss of his hearing, Beethoven ascended, through his creation, to the heights of expressing the Absolute. Of course, his genius is reason enough to imagine that he would have reached certain forms of expressing the same supreme reality even if he had not experienced the aforementioned caesura, but there is no knowing what those forms might have been. For this reason, his achievements in the sphere of music impel

us to relate them, again and again, to that which occasioned or triggered them, in other words, to what the artist had to suffer or to what he lost in real life. In the first part of the thesis, I will provide a biographical overview of the impact this caesura exerted on the artist, the way in which he assumed it and the consequences it entailed, at the individual level, for his interpersonal and social relations, as well as on the level of his creation.

The tragic aspect is inevitably involved in the making of a hero, be he romantic or of any other kind. In Beethoven's life, the loss of hearing functioned as a constant torsional force exerted by destiny. We could even use the term torture, but the connotations of a willfully and systematically organized violence would be a little too obvious, which is why we should leave it at the level of a suggestion. In any case, the effects in his concrete life, the way in which this torture was perceived and apprehended amounted to a feeling that he was constantly tortured by an invisible hand. This incomprehensible power that he could not oppose in any way was the transcendent authority that maintained Beethoven's individual destiny entrapped in a tragic formula. Let it be well understood, this is not a question about the concrete cases of deafness, whose details I will discuss at the appropriate time, but about the inevitable and insurmountable nature of this process, which ravaged the composer's private life with the force of fatality.

Fatality is the invisible force of destiny and the tragic is its inevitable consequence. It is this diagram of the forces of nature, the universe or the divine, depending on which term we prefer, that the romantic hero belongs to and evolves within. The difference comes entirely from his ability to develop a personal project against the background of this fatality, through which he can save and, to some extent, liberate himself. In fact, Beethoven's loss of hearing was a matter of fatality, but the composition of the *Eroica* Symphony, the Symphony of Destiny, the *Missa Solemnis*, the Ninth Symphony and other outstanding works exceeded the bounds of fatality. They are Beethoven's works, the achievements of an individual struck by

the hand of destiny in the most precious and necessary sense for the development of his musical career. And yet, despite or even because of this fatality condition, his music was, indeed, composed, and its effect on the artistic level could be called, without fear of being wrong, a revolution. Its hero was no Napoleon, triumphant on his whirling horse before the troops seized by martial frenzy, but the deaf composer himself, frustrated, complexed, misanthropic and miserable, who travelled to Vienna – the European center of classical music – from Bonn, the provincial borough by the Rhine, leaving behind a broken family that he would always be ashamed of and which he would sometimes even try to disavow. It was from these complexes and the bitterness of an ingrate legacy that Beethoven's heroic personal myth was to gain contours in a tumultuous and violent period, in an aristocratic society that was generous to geniuses, but xenophobic and contemptuous of the lower classes.

## Part one: A biographical sketch

*“Beethoven was one of the great disruptive  
forces in the history of music.  
After him, nothing could ever be the same again;  
he had opened the gateway to a new world.”*  
Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music*,  
New York, 1960

### 1. The early years

Donald J. Grout was not the only one who considered that Beethoven was one of the greatest forces of nature, which unleashed itself in the sphere of music and permanently changed the destiny of this art in the Western world, at first, and then at universal level. Grout is one of a very long series of authors who believe that the evolution of modern music, as we know and have it today, would be unthinkable without the innovations Beethoven introduced. Still, before adopting such glowing superlative terms, rightly deserved, in all likelihood, let us see who Beethoven was, how he lived, and what this unparalleled composer’s daily life was truly like. Those who listen to his music or play it without knowing anything about how he lived, what his roots were, what his legacy was, what he had to go through and what difficulties he was confronted with risks living with an illusion, with an inadequate picture. However much this may aggrieve us, sometimes we have to admit that geniuses have short, tragic or pathetic lives, that they sometimes achieve public recognition and are crowned with success, but that at other times they may be faced with mockery and relegated to anonymity. Novalis, Hölderlin, Byron, Heym, Trakl, Nietzsche, Mozart, Baudelaire, Weininger, van Gogh, Egon Schiele, to name just a few, composed their works in their brief lives as well as

they could, afflicted by suffering and removed from the stage after incurring madness or premature death. Among the historians, biographers and musicologists that I resorted to in reconstructing the image of Beethoven's life and personality, the most important are Anton Schindler, Romain Rolland, Tia DeNora, Vincent D'Indy, Maynard Solomon and Robert Greenberg, who will often be mentioned or cited hereinbelow.

Ludwig van Beethoven was born on 15 or 16 December – there is still no incontrovertible proof concerning the exact date of his birth – and he was baptized in Bonn on 17 December 1770, in a family with an important artistic heritage and great behavioral problems. In Greenberg's crude terms, it was “dysfunctional family with an abusive and alcoholic father and a depressed mother.”<sup>1</sup> The legacy of the alcoholic father came directly from his own mother, Ludwig's grandmother Maria Josepha Poll, who spent the last fifteen years of her life locked up in a monastery annex intended for the sick, the helpless and the irrecoverable. The grandfather, Maria Josepha Poll's husband was born in Belgium in 1712 and for most of his active life he was a musician, a conductor, an opera singer and a Kapellmeister at the Electorate in Bonn, during the time of Clemens August. He was a strong, authoritative and respectable man, and even though he died when Ludwig van Beethoven was only three years old, he left an indelible mark on his life. After his effective separation from his alcoholic wife, Beethoven's grandfather lived alone, dedicating his entire life to music and to his only son, Johann van Beethoven, born in 1739 (or 1740), Ludwig's father. A weak, unstable and inconsistent character by his very nature, Johann inherited his father's ambition rather than his musical talent and his mother's unbridled passion for alcoholic escapades. Therefore, despite the fact that he was employed as a professor of music and as a tenor at the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Greenberg – *Great Masters: Beethoven, His Life and Music*, The Teaching Company, 2001, p. 1

Electorate in Bonn, he remained a petty character, weak, timid and irresponsible to his family, with the complex of his father's authority continuously hounding him.

According to data provided by researchers and historians, Johann's father was a truly possessive and authoritarian character, who complexed his son throughout his entire life, up to the point of depersonalization, but it is equally true that the latter lacked the necessary stock for emerging as a vigorous and independent personality. It may be assumed that living in the shadow of his authoritarian and much more talented father, Johann became prone to immaturity and characterial weakness, but beyond that it is clear that such dependency affected his behavior throughout his life, even after his father's death. In the terms of Freudian psychoanalysis, the father figure was his superego, who, indeed, frustrated and continually censored him, offering him, at the same time, protection and guarantees. Real psychological and physical dependence on the figure of the superego is sometimes accompanied by a game of rebellion and opposition, which only rarely constitutes what Freud referred to as the Oedipus complex. In the case of Johann, because he was very unstable, vulnerable and weak by nature, his rebelliousness, consumed at an inner level, in soul ruminations troubled by the fumes of alcohol, could not lead him too far. He had neither the making of a rebel, nor a practical project for his own family, independent of the authority of his father. This is also why, after he defied his father through a unique – in his life – and inexplicable gesture of courage, marrying the widow Maria Magdalena Keverich Leym in 1767, he never managed to depart from his father's house more than a few streets or live away from him. Only the tavern was witness to his rebellious effusions and only his drunken companions could read, in his murky eyes at night, his cowardly impotence, which kept him away from his family and from his responsibilities as a husband and a father. This irresponsible bohemian style and his euphoric vagabondage in the streets of Bonn at



nighttime buried his wife in unhappiness and depression for the rest of her life,<sup>2</sup> and drew his son Ludwig's definitive hatred and contempt. His was, indeed, a genuine Oedipus complex.

In the life of Ludwig van Beethoven, the first among the three children who survived of the seven born in his family, the grandfather, the father and the mother began to emerge as paradigmatic figures whose model and influence he was never to overcome completely. The grandfather was the wise old man, venerable, authoritarian, of course, but respectable and worthy to follow. Three years of his life as a child in the company of his grandfather, Ludwig Senior, from whom he inherited his name, sufficed to assume him definitively as a spiritual father and a model. His father, however, was always an abusive, unstable and weak figure, whose addictions were merely worsened by alcoholism and whose personality was annulled thereby. Inhibited and complexed by his father, Ludwig's father was to avenge his shortcomings by adopting an authoritarian stand in relation to his children, a situation that often degenerated into abuse. The fear of his father held him captive in a frustrated pettiness and alcohol gave him courage to give vent to bouts of authority, which were all the more frequent and radical as the figure of his parent, who had crushed him inwardly, exerted an eruptive effect upon him, catalyzing his complexes. In fact, his crises of authority could be interpreted as attempts – failed, of course – to recuperate his masculine self-image and his self-esteem. A psychological schema that might characterize the Beethoven family would be the *complex of fear converted into violence through the game of generations*. In other words, the tensions amassed in the relationship with his father were transferred, in an aggressive form, into his relation to his own son, out of an unhealthy need for balance in the relationship

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<sup>2</sup> “Maria Magdalena van Beethoven played the role of the suffering and righteous wife of a worthless, footloose drunk. She complained constantly about her husband's drinking and debts, but she did not seem to have actively discouraged his drinking,” R. Greenberg, *idem*, p. 12.

with himself. Thus, as can be seen, a chain of evil was perpetuated through the rings of many individuals, across generations.

Indeed, Beethoven's father "excelled" at nothing but mediocrity and he had no other "strength" but aggressiveness. Complexed by his own artistic mediocrity, crushed by the authority of his father, Johann van Beethoven found nothing more ingenious to do than to force his little son, Ludwig, to comply with the myth of Mozart, the child prodigy. As though he was displeased with his son's talent, which began to make itself visible in his performances on the viola, the cello, the organ and the piano when he was 4-5 years old, the father forged his birth certificate, claiming that he was two years younger so that the child's precociousness could be more striking. When, at the age of 7, in March 1778, little Ludwig had his first public concert, on the advertising posters his father contended again that his child was one year younger. In his father's manic obsessions, little Ludwig was bound to be the new Mozart, which never happened, despite the talent and tenacity with which the young child devoted himself to music. His incarnation as an avatar of Mozart failed to occur, but beyond his father's disappointment, this served to define Ludwig van Beethoven as a unique personality, both in terms of his interpretative technique – on the organ, on the harpsichord, on the spinet and then on the piano – and, later, as regards his style of composition. Perhaps if this Mozartian mimicry had been constantly practiced, it would have detracted from the vigor of his originality.

His alcoholic father was no more lenient and gentle towards his wife, Ludwig's mother, who was always described by contemporaries<sup>3</sup> as an unhappy, serious and severe

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<sup>3</sup> "Maria Magdalena assumed the role of the pained, suffering, righteous wife of a ne'er-do-well drunkard and played it in high, tragic style. Cecilia Fischer could not remember ever having seen Frau van Beethoven laugh ('She was always serious'), and the widow Karth described her as "a quiet, suffering woman," Greenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

woman, on whose face no one had ever seen the glow of a smile. A martyr of the matrimonial situation, she buried her destiny in a mute suffering that her countenance, always shrouded in the veil of sadness, brought into stark relief. Until her premature demise from consumption in 1787, Maria Magdalena carried her fate with tragic resignation, these elements marking her son's sensitivity for good. After Ludwig, other children came into the world, including two boys who survived, Casper Anton Carl being three years and a half and Nikolaus Johann being six years younger than him. According to R. Greenberg's opinion, these elements synthesized the role of the family legacy in the life of Ludwig van Beethoven: *the grandfather was the paternal figure* that he was to adopt as a model for the rest of his life; *the father was a rejected and detested authority* that he was to eschew all his life, and *the mother was the martyr* that he was to sympathize with and whose miserable matrimonial experience he would strive to avoid repeating. To what extent this loneliness, the inability to maintain a couple relationship and make a family – regardless of the intensity of his sentimental effusions and the romantic frenzy of his professions of love – were due to this legacy is difficult to assess, but it is clear that they had an influence throughout all the stages in Ludwig's life.

The one who introduced little Ludwig to music may, indeed, have been his father, but the systematic lessons he received during his first artistic years came from a conductor and oboist of great talent, Tobias Pfeiffer. When he was ten or eleven, Ludwig was fortunate to have Christian Gottlob Neefe as a music teacher. Born in Chemnitz, near Leipzig, Neefe arrived in Bonn in 1779. In February 1781, he was hired as an organist at the Electoral court. A complex musician, Neefe had learned, at Leipzig, the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, whom he considered the greatest German composer of all time, and he was right to do so. Very soon after he began working with Beethoven, Professor Neefe realized that this was a

remarkable talent, whom he strove to instruct in the best way possible and whose career he quickly made his own personal pursuit. Between the two there arose a close friendship that lasted until Beethoven's departure to Vienna twelve years later. During all this time, they had worked together, both on performance and on composition. Neefe also taught him to play the organ and to conduct. In fact, this was the only professor Beethoven had really been taught by, his apprenticeship with Neefe being tantamount, in his education, to attending the music academy. Against the grain of the new current that had gained adherence in German music since the mid-eighteenth century – classicism, dominated by clarity, beauty and, sometimes, even the charming simplicity of Haydn's and Mozart's styles – Professor Neefe initiated Beethoven into the Baroque style and, especially, into the music of Bach. Beethoven quickly managed to know from memory and perform on the organ most of Bach's Fugues. In fact, as he was to say this himself and as it was revealed towards the end of his career, Beethoven had acquired his musical training with Bach and was to return to the latter's music more often than to that of any other composer. Bach was, from the beginning, and he would forever remain his absolute model<sup>4</sup> in the artistic sphere and the spiritual depth, religious gravity and sophisticated refinement of the melodic line became hallmarks that Beethoven ever more compellingly applied in his own works, as he approached his creative maturity.

Impressed by Beethoven's talent and his musical progress, Professor Neefe began to cultivate his image in the influential artistic milieu, presenting him as the great promise of German music. He helped Beethoven to publish several compositions created when he was twelve years old and he himself wrote an article about Beethoven the child genius in a review

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<sup>4</sup> "The infinite spirituality and depth of feeling, absolute precision and compactness of means, and extraordinary craft of Bach's music, were indelibly printed in Beethoven's hands and mind ... No composer of his generation was more profoundly influenced by the music of Bach than Beethoven ... That influence became more and more apparent as Beethoven grew older. By the end of his life, Beethoven's music aimed for an expressive depth and polyphonic clarity that was more closely related to Bach than to classicism," R. Greenberg, *idem*, pp. 14-15.

entitled *Magazin der Musik*. The didactic relationship between the two followed an impressive trajectory. After only three years of work, Beethoven had already composed three piano sonatas, three quartets for the piano and strings, and one piano concerto. Officially, at around the age of fifteen, he was publicly acknowledged as a virtuoso of the piano and the organ. The opportunity to perform J. S. Bach's *Fantasy* and the *Fugue in G minor* on the organ of the Electoral Court came to confirm, in 1785, the young Beethoven's full mastery of his art.

On the other plan, the life of Beethoven's family had developed in a less promising direction. Quite on the contrary. His father had indulged in his Bacchic passions to the point where he had turned into an alcoholic who behaved irresponsible towards the family. As such, Ludwig was put in a position to increasingly assume providing for the family, even as regards food and maintenance. In fact, at the age of eleven he had been accepted as assistant organist at the court, and when he was thirteen and a half he was hired as an organist at the same institution with a salary of 150 florins. His recognition as an artist and the opportunity to contribute to the family income gave him self-confidence and, on another level, ensured his independence from and pride before his father. He was an artist of the Court and a man on his own feet, so he would no longer accept humiliation, disrespect and abuse from his father. He would stand before him dignified and defiant, look into his eyes without blinking and despise him. Between 1785 and 1790 he worked on multiple levels, filling the positions of organist at the court, of violinist with the orchestra and the theater of the Electoral Court, of music teacher and concert pianist. No wonder that the composition activity decreased during those years. The more his responsibilities towards the family increased, as he assumed them completely and maturely to the extent possible, his revulsion and disdain for his father, drenched hopelessly in the pathetic pettiness of alcoholism, grew proportionately. Slowly but surely, Ludwig, who was the main member responsible for the family income, substituted the

father's role in the lives of his two younger brothers, as they still needed maintenance. This situation explains, to some extent, the possessive attachment, the jealousy and the authoritarian bouts that were to mark their relationship until the end of his father's life.

Because he was already well known and may have actually been the pride of Bonn, the authorities of the Electoral Court thought of sending him, in 1787, on a scholarship to Vienna, first to have his musical skills and interpretive virtuosity tested there and then, possibly, to study with Mozart. The operation, which came through in the early summer, was not successful because of a tragic reason. Like in many crucial moments of his life, Beethoven was hounded by misfortunes. This time, less than two weeks after arriving in the capital of world music, he received news that his mother was dying. The terminal phase of consumption hastened his mother's death when she was under forty-two years old. Beethoven returned home as fast as he could, without the chance of having accomplished anything artistic in Vienna, leaving behind only debts, as the Elector of Bonn complained in a letter to Haydn. Depressed because of the death of his mother and having to cater for his younger siblings, Beethoven did not return to Vienna at that time. The conflict with his father was escalating. It was clear that the entire responsibility of raising his brothers fell upon his shoulders, and for that he tried to use the influence he had gained and ask the Court that half of the family maintenance alimony should be given not to his father, but directly to him and his brothers Casper and Johann, and that their irresponsible father should be exiled from Bonn. This petition was made about two years after his mother's death, during which time he had dedicated himself to music and to his brothers.

In his revulsion towards his father, Ludwig van Beethoven even came to invent a false origin, motivated by what in Freudian psychoanalysis amounts to the *symbolic slaying* of the father, in the so-called Oedipus complex. On the one hand, at a purely emotional level, Beethoven had always considered his grandfather as his real father. On the other hand, the

conflict with his father worsened, the more Ludwig sought to invent a false origin in which had started to believe, substituting his biological father with a phantasmal one of noble origin and with sublime attributes. Otto Rank, Freud's psychoanalyst disciple, considered that this is a typical behavior of unhappy children, who tend to replace one or both parents with another person that takes over their function. The person concerned could be a grandparent, a relative, a well-known public person, a king or even a fairy tale character. What is important is that symbolically *the child transfers all the parental attributes onto an individual* who is different from his parents and behaves towards the new parent as if s/he were the true one. By his late teens, not only had Ludwig van Beethoven begun to exclude Johann from his heart, but he also ceased to publicly avow him, claiming that he was not his real father. His true father, whom he would always support and whose image he would uphold throughout his Viennese period was actually uncertain, but of royal blood in any case. His identity oscillated from Frederick Wilhelm II (1744-1797) the King of Prussia, to his uncle, the musician King Frederick the Great (1712-1786). To a large extent, the favorable reception of the Viennese aristocracy and his relations with the most influential people in the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire rested on this publicly accepted mystification. Of course, his artistic genius was his undeniable advantage, but still, his image as a royal bastard helped him considerably in his socialization process with the influential aristocracy of the music salons, boosting his image and even his career, despite his well-known gaucheness and misanthropic character.

From the moment they remained without a mother and cast the drunken, brutal and irresponsible father away from their life, there developed a complex set of relations between the Beethoven brothers, with ambiguous long-term effects. On the one hand, Ludwig was the oldest and had the reputation of an accomplished musician, and this allowed him to perform diverse artistic jobs, enabling him to earn money for his family's maintenance. Hence, he

virtually became the parent, the guardian and the provider for his siblings. However, this responsibility, which he fulfilled with maturity and even with dedication, gradually cultivated a form of possessiveness over his brothers, the feeling that they were in his care and had to accept his authority forever. As time passed, when the brothers matured and wanted to make a family and a life of their own, Ludwig felt very much aggrieved, pushed aside, furious and jealous in a way that bordered on hysteria. He could not bear the idea that his brothers were getting married and, as that meant their liberation from his authority, he perceived their wives as his personal enemies, guilty of undermining his fraternal authority.<sup>5</sup>

A characteristic of his personality became increasingly felt at this time. Psychologically speaking, this characteristic was very ambiguous, contradictory even, but in Ludwig van Beethoven's existence, such behavior was to become less and less surprising. This concerned his *relation with authority*, which was a family inheritance along the paternal line. We may recall that his paternal grandfather was very authoritarian and possessive with his son, whom he always humiliatingly discussed in public, considering him incapable of any achievement worthy of being taken into account. He evinced the same idiosyncratic jealousy when his son got married and wanted to liberate himself from his authority. Beethoven's father was in turn possessive, but his mediocrity, weak nature and vicious behavior deprived him of any real authority, which is why he showed his false authority over his wife and children through violence and abuse. His retreat into alcohol and abuse were, for Johann, unsuccessful attempts to free himself from the domination of his father. Ludwig had opposed himself, with all his being, to this pathetic, caricatural outpouring of false authority ever since

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<sup>5</sup> "On one hand, Beethoven remained irrationally possessive toward his brothers and, conversely, implacably hostile toward their wives, Johanna (Casper's wife) and Therese (Johann's wife) ... On the other hand, he was terribly jealous of both his brothers, who managed to have sustained relationships with women. At times, Beethoven's behavior toward his brothers was intrusive and ridiculous," R. Greenberg, *idem*, p. 16.



adolescence, developing a conflict with the father, which actually never died out. But, and here is the interesting aspect, he also subconsciously and unwittingly adopted the authoritarian behavior of his grandfather, manifesting himself as such towards his brothers, their wives and, later, towards his nephew. His real revolt against all forms of authority, manifested, as we shall see later, in his art, in the composition of the *Eroica* Symphony, did not prevent him from being authoritarian in turn, abusive when he had the opportunity, sometimes degenerating into pathology. We could qualify this behavior as the *unconscious circuit of authority*, because its main feature consists in someone who apparently opposes authority developing, unawares, new authoritarian forms of versions that he is not conscious of and that, in any case, he does not repress. In short, *the flight from authoritarian force acquires the aspect of a new form of authority*. We shall see when the time comes that such an attitude can sometimes lead to catastrophic events, which will actually be the case. Still, for now, let us keep the string of events to the moment we find ourselves in, 1789.

In the meticulous analysis through which Professor Robert Greenberg approaches Beethoven's life and work, he notes an interesting phenomenon. The trajectory of Beethoven's career as a composer encompassed three crucial moments, amounting to as many "rebirths" as an artist, preceded immediately by very bleak periods in his personal life. The interesting feature of these rebirths is that they became the spectacular expression of an existential catharsis in the creative sphere. Something dramatic happened, there was a difficult time personally, but in its aftermath, through a deep, decisive but not too obvious causal link, a new stylistic and thematic stage broke out on the musical level. The first such revival was recorded in 1789. During this period, Beethoven composed five sets of variations for the piano, ballet music, chamber music for the piano and wind instruments, arias, cantatas for choir and orchestra, among which the well-known *Funeral Cantata on the Death of Emperor Joseph II* for solo voice, chorus and orchestra from 1790. In the atmosphere of a

relatively quiet life, Beethoven also dedicated the next two years to composition and to improving his musical interpretation skills. However, Bonn was not an important artistic center at that time. For a leap forward in its development and for a better alignment with the influential personalities of classical music that prevailed in the period, it needed Vienna. His first contact with the Austro-Hungarian capital had been too brief and had left no trace on him. Meanwhile something unexpected had happened. Mozart had passed away on 5 December 1791, at the age of just thirty-five years. The legendary Viennese composer that Beethoven had intended to study with was no longer there.

Supported by the Electoral Court of Bonn, Beethoven went to Vienna in the autumn of 1792 in order to study with Joseph Haydn. A fortunate event caused the two to meet in the spring of 1792 when, during his passage through Bonn, the Viennese classic wanted to become acquainted with the local musical talents. The young Beethoven impressed him deeply, which convinced him to attempt to obtain a scholarship for the young musician from the Elector, hired to be his teacher. Since Haydn was then the most respected and prestigious German musician, his request was not denied and therefore, all the conditions were met for Beethoven's departure for Vienna. Count Ferdinand Waldstein, perhaps Beethoven's first important patron and financial supporter, friend and admirer in Bonn, predicted that the latter would have a fulminant career in the capital of music. Loyal to his employer, Beethoven dedicated to him one of his splendid later compositions, the *Piano Sonata in C major, Op. 53*, in 1802, remaining entrenched in history as the *Waldstein Sonata*. Alongside Mozart and probably before him, Haydn had been the father of German classical music. His style and compositions were known and played throughout Europe, and he had acquired prestige across the continent, having emulators, disciples and concerts in many European centers.

When he departed from Bonn, Beethoven left behind a place that he would never return to. He was not to see his father again, for he was suffering from heart disease at that

time and he died within a mere six weeks after his son's arrival in Vienna. Here, the young musician started a new life. Above all, he was known and recognized as a performer musician, albeit less so as a composer. In fact, in the very center of classical music where Haydn lived and where Mozart had just died, it was unlikely that the musical ventures of a provincial from the Rhine who had recently arrived there for training would be of interest to anyone. Provincial, anonymous, hardly agreeable or likeable in society, on the contrary, provocative and shocking rather than pleasant, the young man with long, disheveled hair, which gave him the appearance of a wildling compared to the Viennese dandies with their blond, powder-covered wigs, had one sole advantage that would soon win over the fine aristocratic society – the virtuosity of his piano performance – and a secret will to conquer the world through music, which was to impose itself with the force of a geological phenomenon. At that time in Vienna, which had a population of 120,000 inhabitants, there were about 6,000 students playing the piano and over 300 professionals, and given the reputation of the Viennese artistic center and the level of music performed there, it was clear that some of the best pianists in the world could be found in this city. This was undoubtedly the ideal place where an aspiring and ambitious young musician could try his forces and Beethoven would not hesitate to do so for one moment.

With Christian Gottlob Neefe he had studied the organ more than the piano and he had had no other instructor besides him. When he arrived in Vienna, he knew close to nothing about counterpoint and the theory of harmony, according to the biographer Schindler. In reality, Beethoven was self-taught in piano study, which, according to Professor Greenberg, earned him an important advantage for the rest of his career, both as a performer and as a composer. The advantage was that the piano could become the tool through which he would express himself as a personality, through which he felt and composed music, his body and his orchestra. Given this intimacy, the piano literally becoming his musical body, he developed

by himself techniques of interpretation that no professor was aware of and, as such, no student could learn. Therefore, in the society of the Viennese piano players, Beethoven's appearance had the effect of a maelstrom. It should be noted that at the time, the pianoforte version of the keyboard instrument had just been invented and that it was an instrument awaiting its masters. Impetuous, almost demoniacal, sometimes refining sounds with sublime effects, stunning in improvisation and adroit to the point of confusion in triggering rhythm breaks, Beethoven appeared to be challenging the piano to expressions which the latter was incapable of conveying, or to be intent on wresting music from it for which there was no appropriate instrument in the world yet.<sup>6</sup> In reality it was not so, there did not exist yet and there would never be a piano throughout Beethoven's entire life that might have allowed the expression of his inner music and his compositions. In many of his recitals or in public competitions, because they were exerted beyond their powers of expression, the strings of instruments would snap. Possessed by the effervescence of his thunderous music, the pianos could look downright devastated after his recitals. It was becoming clear to any skilled listener that Beethoven was capable of producing more music than the existing instruments could express. The music erupting from him needed an entire technical history and a progressive, state-of-the-art set of instruments to be produced. This was to be, among others, one of the secrets why Beethoven's music lasted in time: the fact that it takes new generations of instruments to provide his music with the form he envisaged.

As expected, Beethoven had assumed with verve, with conceit even, the role of a competitor in the salon events, since he mastered his technique, evincing strength of

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<sup>6</sup> The characterization R. Greenberg makes here is enlightening: "The Viennese had never heard anybody play the piano like Beethoven. Accustomed to the fluent harpsichord-derived technique of Mozart and Clementi, the Viennese found Beethoven's playing something of a revelation and a disaster for the lightweight pianos themselves. Beethoven, hands held high, smashed every piano he touched, aiming always for more volume, more resonance, more expressive power," *op. cit.*, p. 20.

emotional expression and improvisation ability. As it is known, winners always take prizes, and Beethoven came very quickly to conquer the hearts of the Viennese music lovers, making friends among the most generous patrons, who were proud to support him financially and bury him in presents. Confirmed by public success, Haydn's recent student never made too much effort to be exemplary in the work with his professor. He did not even strive to be honest, which represents an aspect of his personality that is much discussed by his biographers. In fact Haydn was already rather old, tired and unsystematic in his lessons with Beethoven. The latter had even noticed some mistakes in the master's notation of the counterpoint lessons. The recent death of his best friend, Mozart, and of his beloved of just thirty-eight years Marianne Genzinger had deeply depressed him, bereaving him of much of his artistic and pedagogical propensity. Understanding, within a rather short time span, that he did not have much to learn, Beethoven began approaching the lessons with Haydn and his professor with indifference and even with hypocrisy. But there is more. In aesthetic terms, Haydn was an authority, probably the highest artistic figure of the moment, at least in the German space. Instead of this leading to a deferential and admiring attitude on Beethoven's part, he was, quite on the contrary, annoyed, not to say bothered by this situation. His problem, inherited from the family and never surpassed was always the same, the relationship to authority. In any case, Haydn was, whatever one might say, an authority. Hence, both consciously and unconsciously, Beethoven wanted to stay away from him, to escape, and his psychological and emotional mechanisms were successfully deployed, albeit too abruptly, in this direction. Professor R. Greenberg clearly states this: "Beethoven had a persecution complex and a pathologic dislike of anything or anyone he perceived as an "authority figure."<sup>7</sup> Moreover, his relation to Haydn revealed just a few of the attributes of young Beethoven's personality and behavior, depicted by Greenberg in the following words:

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<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

arrogant, reckless, fearless, egocentric, supremely individualistic, independent and disrespectful.

Taking advantage of the master's credulity, Beethoven had secretly hired another professor, named Johann Shenk, whom he asked to do the homework he received from Haydn, which he then transcribed and presented them as his own exercises. It took Haydn a year to discover, in late 1793, the trick of his pupil. In addition to this, a new circumstance was to bring to light the dishonest game his student had drawn him into. The situation was the following. Beethoven sometimes borrowed money from his professor, complaining that the 500 florins received from the Electorate in Bonn were insufficient for his life in Vienna. From time to time, he also presented his new Viennese compositions to Haydn, which the professor seemed pleased with. Haydn expressed all these details in a letter to the Elector in Bonn, Maximilian Franz, showing himself to be very proud of his student's remarkable progress. However, from the reply to his letter, he learned altogether different things from what he knew. Namely, those "new" musical compositions that Haydn was so proud of had, in fact, been composed by Beethoven in Bonn years before and they had even been performed by the musician at the Electoral Court, to the delight of music lovers; in addition to this, the amount of money received by the student in Vienna was not 500, but 900 florins. Faced with this evidence revealed to him by the elector, Haydn, the naïve classic, was simply devastated. Beethoven had abused his good faith and had systematically lied to him about his revenue and musical activity. As of that moment, the artistic collaboration between the two ceased abruptly, but thanks to his wise bonhomie, Haydn was to forgive Beethoven after a while. The latter, on his part, had no thought of returning to Bonn. Shortly after the fall-off with Haydn, he began to take lessons with the less classical Johann Albrechtsberger and Antonio Salieri, with the only notable result that after a while he realized their uselessness. According to the subsequent testimony of Beethoven's friend, Ferdinand Ries, these

professors also became convinced that in his stubbornness, Beethoven was more willing to learn by himself from the bitter experiences of life than from instructors during lessons. The rebel student from Bonn remained an autodidact in Vienna, too. That is why it is very difficult to know, outside those lessons from childhood and adolescence with the composer and conductor Christian Neefe, who ever taught Beethoven anything else of essential import in music.

## 2. Networks of prestige; the lobby orchestra

In Vienna, it was not very easy to legitimize yourself as an artist, to make yourself known or to draw attention to yourself unless you had access to an available, benevolent and influential network among the high aristocracy and the high officials. Music was an integral, assumed part of the social game played by the rich and noble families, and composers and performers were supported, maintained and sometimes controlled by their patrons. An artist's position, status, image and, sometimes, career could be decided in salon negotiations, just like musical style or the aesthetic canon could be produced by influential authorities in these private salons of Vienna. In its highest, classical sense, art was not yet a public good, but a good of the elites. Every composition was first tested in private concerts, which could be attended, by way of invitation, solely by the nobiliary cream of the crop; if the composition was considered to have odds of success, concerts would also be scheduled in public institutions.

To understand young Beethoven's trajectory after his arrival in Vienna, we should what his links were with various influential personalities and officials from Germany and Austria-Hungary, who supported, endorsed and cultivated him and who developed, at certain times, what might be called a *network of influence*, designed to promote his artistic image, using its capital of authority, financial resources and means of persuasion. Beethoven had not come to Vienna by chance and he did not succeed, first as a performer and then as a composer, exclusively by force of his astounding genius. Without favorable social circumstances<sup>8</sup> and

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<sup>8</sup> Tia DeNora explains, through a laborious and extremely well-articulated and well-argued analysis, the creation and early legitimation, in the Viennese society, of the image of Beethoven's genius and place alongside the classics: "The social resources that make the identity of genius possible (beyond practical and material



the backing of institutions of influence and prestige, the work of any genius risks passing unnoticed, misunderstood and unvalorized indefinitely. This is all the more the case in music, where creation needs immediate public attention and sensitivity, and where public taste and education can uphold, exalt or bury certain works in oblivion. Indeed, not all creations are fortunate to have a ready audience and a guaranteed aesthetic market at any moment. From this point of view, Beethoven had a privileged situation, at the beginning of his career, at least. The venues where he played and the individuals who listened to him largely decided his pathway as an artist, his image among his contemporaries, and his place in the pantheon of the classics.<sup>9</sup> Tia DeNora contends that Beethoven's image as a great artist, heir to the legacy of Mozart's spirit, was produced in the salons of the Viennese aristocracy, whence he very quickly imposed his prestige at the level of the public opinion. We shall attempt to illustrate this statement with data and arguments.

Beethoven's patron in Bonn had been Count Ferdinand Waldstein, who was related, through his mother, to the Prince of Liechtenstein, through his grandmother, to Prince Trauttmansdorf, and through his sister, to Prince Dietrichstein. The three princes were part of the artistic ensemble founded and patronized in Vienna by Gottfried van Swieten. Through

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conditions) include such factors as *what an audience will accept as legitimate*, and *when and from whom it will accept certain types of work*. To ignore these issues is to mystify genius, to take it out of its historical and interactional contexts. Moreover, to decontextualize genius is to elide the moral and political character of many or most quarrels over what counts as 'valuable' work-to preclude, in this case, a sociological consideration of aesthetics and of art forms, their social uses and social consequences," Tia DeNora, *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius: Musical Politics in Vienna, 1792-1803*, University of California Press, 1995, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> "Vienna was the first European city where a contemporary and youthful composer could be viewed as the heir to a canonic tradition that included not only Haydn and Mozart, but also J. S. Bach and Haendel. The manner in which Beethoven was celebrated by his contemporaries thus helped to formulate an understanding of the musical canon that was, during the early years of the nineteenth century, unique to Vienna," Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

his uncles and aunts, Count Waldstein was related to Prince Kinsky, Count Palfy von Erdödy, Prince Lobkovitz and several other most influential noble families. The Elector of Bonn, Max Franz, who had hired Beethoven as a musician at his court when the artist was just 14 years old, was Emperor Joseph's brother and uncle to the two emperors that followed him, Leopold II (1790-1792) and Franz II (1792-1806). From his position as employee of the Elector, Beethoven made the acquaintance of Neefe, Abbé Sterkel (a famous composer and pianist at the electoral court in Mainz), Carl Ludwig Junker (Chaplain at Kirchberg and musician of Prince Hohenlohe), Count Waldstein and even Haydn. With the image of personal pianist and former employee of the emperor's uncle, the Elector of Bonn, known by some of the Viennese nobles from their visits to the electorate, recommended by Count Waldstein and accepted as a student by Haydn, Beethoven made his entry into the capital of the Empire under most favorable auspices.<sup>10</sup>

In Bonn, Beethoven had come to be admired, appreciated as an artist, even loved by important people, who at the time of his impending departure to study in Vienna, deemed it necessary to organize a beautiful farewell ceremony. As the custom was, some of the participants wrote their wishes and compliments in an album, expressing their most personal and relevant thoughts at that time. The message written by Count Waldstein was both a warm compliment and a prophecy: "Dear Beethoven. You are going to Vienna in fulfillment of your long-frustrated wishes. The Genius of Mozart is still mourning and weeping the death of her pupil. She found a refuge but no occupation with the inexhaustible Haydn; through him she wishes once more to form a union with another. With the help of assiduous labor you

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<sup>10</sup> "At a time when aristocratic connections were still crucial to a musician's economic survival, Beethoven was exceptionally well placed. The aristocrats with whom he was associated were already receptive to the notion of musical greatness. In terms of his connections and position within the musical field, Beethoven was perhaps unique among the composers of his day." Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 61

shall receive Mozart's spirit from Haydn's hands. Your true friend, Waldstein."<sup>11</sup> The count's message reveals the image that young Beethoven had among music the connoisseurs, the degree of appreciation he had reached, but also a certain filiation with Mozart and Haydn, the most esteemed artists of the German space, by virtue of which his future career was envisaged to confirm all these expectations. Aware of Beethoven's genius, Count Waldstein had already placed him in the company of the greatest musicians while he was still very young and had not yet managed to create relevant works, but when it was easy to sense in him the ferment of creativity and the immeasurable willingness to assert himself.

The quasi-religious cult for Mozart imposed the need for a transmission, for a transfer from the master to the disciple. In the count's view, that meant that the musical genius that had dominated Mozart needed a new body in which to manifest itself, in the fullness of its creativity. Haydn did not rise to the level of Mozart, so he could not represent the abode of the latter's spirit/genius, but merely the bridge it could cross in its passageway to Beethoven, its transfer channel<sup>12</sup> or, perhaps more accurately, the officiating priest who ensured the religious transfer ceremony or the act of consecration. In other words, Beethoven was a *chosen* one, destined to continue the manifestation of Mozart's genius in musical forms. This genius was, as we understand it, an independent, free essence, which needed a human body in which to carry out its work. This was a mythical, religious conception of the genius, in the

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Tia DeNora, p. 84.

<sup>12</sup> "In this description, the notion of Beethoven's talent is aligned with the northern German concept of the sublime. With it, the idea that Haydn is to 'pass on' the tradition to Beethoven is elaborated through a discussion of how the 'master' (Haydn) has now intimated that the pupil is destined to surpass him. In this respect, Fischenich's version can be understood as elaborating Waldstein's observation that the spirit of Mozart found 'a refuge but no occupation' with Haydn. Haydn is, in other words, constituted in Waldstein's and Fischenich's accounts as a *medium* or *vessel through* which Beethoven's (implicitly superior) talent will be cultivated," Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

manner of ancient Greek-Latin thought, and not a modern, psychological understanding thereof. A musical genius was a spiritual, superior being that had taken possession of the body of Mozart, manifested itself during the artist's lifetime and was looking for another body after his demise. Now was time for Beethoven to serve as its abode, to host and offer it the possibility of manifestation. Count Waldstein's opinion was shared by other important figures of the time, who had sensed that the young man from Bonn could be Mozart's worthy successor. Probably the first among them was Christian Gottlob Neefe, who wrote in 1784 that Beethoven was a genius who could become the second Mozart *if he continued his education as he had begun it*. It sounds almost ironic, but they somehow confirmed the idiosyncrasy of Beethoven's father, who had ostentatiously displayed his talented child playing the role of the *new Mozart*. The fact is that since the moment of his departure for Vienna, Beethoven had been enveloped by a mythical aura. He was *the chosen one, the one who was to come, the only one*. There is no better, more efficient marketing strategy that could have a greater impact than mythification.<sup>13</sup> A mythical figure fascinates, enralls, vexes, repels, awakens fantasies, emotions, troubles the souls and minds of those with whom he comes into contact, leaves no one untouched.

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<sup>13</sup> "My purpose is to point out that the *telling and retelling of a story about Beethoven's potential was a condition of his eventual success*. The anecdote provided a particular type of publicity, and it created a resource for the subsequent favorable reception of Beethoven's works; recounting the story of Beethoven's talent, in other words, was a means of dramatizing Beethoven as someone who had received approval and acceptance from a famous teacher. Waldstein's entry in Beethoven's autograph book is significant because it is the first in a series of stories told about Beethoven's relationship with Haydn. In all of these anecdotes, Beethoven is portrayed as Haydn's prodigy, as receiving 'from Haydn's hands' the mantle of Mozart and, more broadly, the honorific of budding 'master' composer," Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

This was the case of a hagiographic campaign,<sup>14</sup> which resorted to a strategy of sublime mystification in order to promote Beethoven's personality, talent, genius and artistic mission. A good story is always a vehicle with a motion of unlimited duration. The story of the transmission of genius from Mozart to Beethoven represented such a narrative vehicle that the public sphere would ceaselessly fuel with its credulity, curiosity and fascination, thereby guaranteeing a very high motion speed to the heraldic young man who had come from Bonn. From what is known, Haydn did not uphold this myth about the succession of genius, but the fact that he was Beethoven's professor in Vienna inevitably placed him in circumstances surrounded by mythical radiation. From the outside, their relationship could be perceived as an episode in the *great drama of succession*, as part of a secret ritual leading to the reincarnation of Mozart's genius. In reality, things stood differently, but then reality and

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<sup>14</sup> "Telling the 'Haydn's hands' story was useful in a number of respects. First, it established a high-profile platform, a legitimate pretext for attention on which entitlements to future claims about Beethoven could be dramatized. In addition, because this story contained *prophetic dimensions*, it helped to organize perception and expectations about the musical future. The association with Haydn was a resource in two senses: it established a venue and it inaugurated a clarification of Beethoven as someone special, as someone of whom 'great things' were expected. Second, the 'Haydn's hands' story was a vehicle for the *creation of a qualitatively different type of publicity*. The narrative organized the music field (tellers, principle characters, addressed and nonaddressed recipients) according to new and more hierarchical lines. It highlighted the notion of a definitive and self-conscious tradition of 'greatness': Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven could be opposed in this discourse to the more workaday, ordinary musicians who came to be constituted as their lesser contemporaries. Although the narrative cleverly described the value of Mozart as if it had remained constant over time, we have seen that the notion of Mozart's 'greatness' (as opposed to his popularity) was an emerging and evolving phenomenon during the 1790s. *The conceptual resource of Mozart's spirit awaiting an heir was constructed and mobilized in the service of this larger story line*. The 'Haydn's hands' narrative helped to transform Mozart's reputation, it also affected Haydn's status, and, most important for the purposes of this study, *it helped to structure the ways Beethoven was perceived*," Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

myth have different rhythms, elements and processes of manifestation. In articulating a myth, fantasies, emotions and uncertainties have their own role to play, a role that is more important than concrete data. Once released into the collective mind, a myth will continue its motion<sup>15</sup> like a satellite launched into space, when gravity can no longer swerve it from its path. A satellite of Mozart in the beginning, the myth of Beethoven was to become a planet with an equally great force, trajectory and dignity of movement.

As regards composition, Haydn was from the beginning reserved towards Beethoven's works. His confusion and distrust increased over the years, as long as their artistic relationship was relatively close. Simply put, Haydn never understood or approved of Beethoven's style, innovations, rhythmic options and manner of interpretation, even though he recognized his student's immense talent. Talent is only the prerequisite, not the fulfillment of an artist's work. Haydn admired Beethoven's great talent, but he could not adapt to the style of his works. He did not dislike the accomplishment of such a young talented artist, on the contrary. Still, as Beethoven acquired a name and an aura as the celebrity of the music salons, as his compositions began to be appreciated and praised, their relationship evolved

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<sup>15</sup> "The 'Haydn's hands' story had short- and long-term benefits for Beethoven, as well. It was initially useful because it aligned him with Haydn and established his entitlement to publicity: Beethoven became 'the man to watch' (what Mozart reportedly said after Beethoven reportedly played for him, an entirely fabricated story about Beethoven that circulated later in Beethoven's career). In the long run the anecdote contributed to the restructuring of the musical field. It fostered modern conceptions of musical hierarchy and serious musical 'stars' or 'geniuses'."

"The 'Haydn's hands' story can be understood as providing a 'pre-text' for action or a guide for how to regard Beethoven in relation to other musicians. In sum, it provided Beethoven with a resource being aligned with the unimpeachable Haydn and, equally important, it created a space for talk about Beethoven and, implicitly, for talk about others who did not have access to that resource, those who were not recognized as Haydn's 'Heir.' At the same time, the story of 'Haydn's hands' transformed that space; it helped to create new and more imposing hierarchies in the field within which artistic reception occurred," Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

towards artistic adversity, competition and rivalry. Maynard Solomon<sup>16</sup> suggests that Beethoven was not content with being perceived as Haydn's student, at least not in the long run and not by the true connoisseurs of music. After 1796, Haydn would have increasingly come across references to Beethoven as the most innovative and original composer of the moment. While this was true, it was not necessarily flattering to the patriarch of German music, the living classic and laureate who had been glorified by various European music academies. Nonetheless, their relationship never degenerated despite their artistic rivalry. The two had learned to communicate from peer to peer and on several public occasions, Beethoven proved his respect for the master in a highly ceremonious manner. Shortly before Haydn's death, which occurred in 1809, he even knelt and kissed his professor's hand after the performance of the oratorio *The Creation*, inspired by the biblical theme of genesis and of Paradise Lost. Beethoven recognized that the work of the master was a masterpiece. In the aftermath of his professor's death, Beethoven was ever more attentive to his works, admiring and even commending them, as well as becoming seemingly more and more proud to identify himself as Haydn's former student.

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<sup>16</sup> "Solomon (1977) has observed in passing that perhaps Beethoven did not recognize Haydn's assistance because he did not want to remain known as a 'pupil of Haydn' all his life. It does seem the case that Beethoven was strategically conscious of how he could enhance his status as an 'important' musician; his letters and conversation books suggest a meticulous attention to self-portrayal as an autonomous, ideologically committed artist, as do his activities in the concert world. Beethoven was in a position that allowed him to take some initiative in his self-presentation and in his relationship with his teacher. Unlike Haydn's other pupils, he had the social capital that made creative independence possible, permitting him to purchase some independence from Haydn. From the start of his career, there was a group of elite aristocrats some of whom were Vienna's music controllers interested in observing and underwriting Beethoven's progress. The Beethoven-Haydn relationship had, from its inception, a high degree of visibility. It provided a public arena, a means for both musicians to enhance their profiles," Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

During the 1780s in Vienna, one of the most influential figures in the musical realm



was Baron Gottfried van Swieten (see image below), a friend and supporter of Mozart. The son of Empress Maria Theresa's personal physician, who had been ennobled by her, van Swieten had a period of military service, after which he became a diplomat with missions in Brussels (1757), Paris (1760-1763), Warsaw (1763-1764) and England (1764-1769). After the diplomatic period, he spent

the next six years in Berlin, where he had complex relations with Frederick the Great, including of a musical and literary nature. His political assignment had been to negotiate, at the court of the German king, the partition of Poland between three powers: Prussia, Austria and Russia. In Berlin, the baron came into contact with the innovative literary movement *Sturm und Drang*, which brought to the fore sensitivity and reverie at the expense of reason, free creation opposed to formalism and discipline, and which promoted spontaneity, the cult of the creative genius, etc. This bold reformist spirit of German Romanticism was adopted and, later, applied by von Swieten in the Viennese milieu.

A composer of lesser stature, whose musical taste was nonetheless exquisite, he succeeded in imposing the criterion of high music, inspired by baroque models of creation, in the world of imperial aristocracy, which patronized art. Acknowledged as the dean of musical patronage or, as Olleson called him, "the high priest of musical taste," the baron was involved in reforming the political, economic and education systems during the Josephine period, holding important positions, creating and supporting various institutions. One of them was the *Gesellschaft der Associerten Cavaliere* (GAC, 1786), the first Viennese concert ensemble, which performed oratorios by Handel and Haydn in private spaces, usually at the



palace of Prince Joseph Schwartzberg. The authority he enjoyed had reached anecdotal heights. Otto Jahn reported that if, during any concert, someone in the audience whispered or talked, the baron, deeply disturbed, would solemnly stand up and stare at the culprit with a reproving look, whose effect was that all chatter immediately ceased for the rest of the performance. No one risked being despised by Baron von Swieten for lack of manners or of artistic good taste.

Vienna began to develop as a European music center through the initiatives undertaken by the Habsburg Emperor Ferdinand, who came to power in 1619. He turned the city of Vienna into the main administrative residence, the capital of the empire. Through the influence of his wife Eleonora Gonzaga, he was able to make important connections and exchanges with musicians from the Italian space. Viennese art was to profit from these exchanges for more than two centuries. In addition, the emperor chose to develop, in the Viennese environment, the conservative, North German musical tradition of the Baroque rather than the Renaissance line, considered to be *stile moderno*. He also supported the organization of the court church choir – *Hofkapelle* – which the subsequent emperors, Leopold I, Joseph I and Charles VI, would develop even further, so much so that in 1700 it had about 107 members. In 1746, Maria Theresa decided to organize a new institution, an imperial opera troupe – *Hofoper*. Gradually, the court choir, *Hofkapelle*, lost some of its popularity and prestige. By the time Beethoven arrived in Vienna, the church choir had become an obsolete, well-nigh irrelevant institution. However, the court choir institution played an important social and artistic role through the effect it exerted on the behavior of affluent nobles. The most important of them, men of the court, belonging to families boasting coats of arms and nobiliary titles, found that the formation and maintenance of a music group was proof of one's importance, prestige and good position in the public perception. Thus, more and more families began to develop the institution of patronage.

Music had increasingly become the promotional environment of social status, an element through which one could build a very valuable image capital. Cultivated by some with pomposity, music patronage had been a mimetic phenomenon among the high aristocracy and, ever since the time of Mozart, it had also been embraced by the second-degree nobility and the newly enriched bourgeois without nobiliary titles. Specifically, the great patrons came from the most prestigious families of the imperial nobility, and they cultivated the artists they considered emblematic.<sup>17</sup> The patrons of the great artists ultimately determined the taste and artistic trend of the moment, earning thus, at the expense of the artists under their patronage, the right to exert their influence in artistic life. The differences of social status among the patrons were reflected, as expected, in the differences of style among the artists patronized and, at times, it was easy to notice the conflict between the *high, elitist, aristocratic taste* and the *popular, democratic, common taste*. Tia DeNora has come up with four reasons underlying the development of the institution of musical patronage: *one* – the great aristocrats were interested in imitating the imperial court, which supported the opera and the choir; *two* – noble families of second rank were interested in measuring their wealth and prestige against the leading nobles; *three* – the practice of patronage had become increasingly popular and the public expected wealthy nobles to carry it out; *four* – for some nobles, music was also a personal concern, and patronage ensured their contact with the foremost composers and performers.

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<sup>17</sup> “Although aristocratic leadership in music affairs remained constant, the substantive content of that leadership changed. The sources of distinction shifted from simple quantitative expenditure to qualitative demonstrations of discernment and ‘good taste’ and to a heightened emphasis on the appreciation of ‘greatness’ from which derived the notion of master composers. Praising Beethoven was simultaneously, albeit implicitly, praising his aristocratic patrons. Through the pursuit of the greatest composers (whose status depended on recognition by aristocratic, powerful patrons), Vienna’s social aristocrats could themselves be identified aristocrats of taste,” Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

From the artists' viewpoint, however, despite the advantage of being supported by the patrons, this amounted to a permanent obstacle on their path towards emancipation, that is, towards transforming their own skill into a craft based on which they could earn an income and live independently. Not much could be earned from tutoring, from private or church concerts, from the publication of works and charity concerts. Even the great instrumentalists could not afford to announce a public concert in Vienna if the sufficient number of participants was not guaranteed by subscription, given that a concert ticket was very expensive. At concerts held in private locations, ticket prices were more expensive than in public institutions, but the performers were thus provided with a consistent income from the patron. Hence, patrons were not interested in the growth of the music market, but rather in preserving their influence thereupon.<sup>18</sup> Figures like van Swieten even considered that music quality and taste would be adversely affected if public attendance of artistic performances expanded too much. If the lower classes acquired access to music, it would depreciate and even coarsen, and artists would be increasingly influenced and guided by the vulgar artistic sense of the listeners. *True* music was for the educated elites,<sup>19</sup> while the masses merely

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<sup>18</sup> "At aristocrat-sponsored public concerts, ticket prices were sometimes far higher than at nonaristocratic-sponsored events (Beethoven's 1803 benefit tickets, for example, were twelve times the normal price). In this way an event could remain exclusive while simultaneously providing a substantial benefit for the musician. Thus the absence of a highly articulated organizational basis for commercial musical activity in Vienna maintained the aristocratic monopoly over the consumption of serious music," Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> "One way to dramatize their identity was through the patronage of, as van Swieten put it, '*great men*' - heirs to '*true music*' and to the '*great*' tradition (that is, to the tradition before it became 'tainted' with new qualities outside the control and interest of the music aristocrats). In this way, van Swieten's version of an incipient canonic ideology may have coalesced with the practices by which some aristocrats during this period maintained and highlighted their particular position within the Viennese music world," Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58.

polluted the artists' sensitivity and style, leading them to create a *false* music. In short, the aristocratic artistic sense came into conflict with artistic plebeianism.

Beethoven's first Viennese patron, who was to remain one of the most important Maecenas until the end of his life, was Prince Karl Lichnowsky (1756-1814, see image), together with his wife, Princess Christiane. The Lichnowsky family and the prince's mother-in-law, Countess von Thunn were Mozart's main patrons, organizing music tournaments for him in the Empire. They had the reputation of an influential family, devoted to the great musicians, and a public esteem to match. To get an insight into the influence of Countess Lichnowsky, it would suffice to see the testimony provided by Countess Lulu von Thurheim in her autobiography. She said that a mere "gesture, a supercilious smirk or a slightly disparaging remark could destroy someone socially." Such an authority placed in Beethoven's service could only have the most spectacular effects. In fact, Carl Czerny was convinced that the Lichnowsky family had managed, in a very short while, to turn all the Viennese nobles into Beethoven's supporters. The family's relationship with van Swieten was old and solid and it may well be that they came to know Beethoven through the baron. For a period of about two years, between 1793 and 1795, the prince even accommodated Beethoven in his home without asking for rent money. In this favorable situation, Beethoven had the comfort and freedom to create at his sole discretion, enjoying the status of a freelance musician, a category that was just beginning to form in Vienna at that time.

The Lichnowsky family supported a quartet which included some of the best musicians of the moment – the violinists Ignaz Schuppanzigh and Louis Sina, the violist Franz Weiss and the cellist Anton Kraft. They were, from the outset, enthusiastic admirers of Beethoven. With Schuppanzigh, Beethoven studied the violin for a while, and the string quartets were composed with the interpretation of these artists in mind. In his enthusiasm, Schuppanzigh made every effort and used all his skill to showcase the expressive subtleties of Beethoven's

compositions. Moreover, these friends, master instrumentalists, contributed with valuable suggestions to improving Beethoven's compositions, a chance that not many composers could still benefit from. Every Friday morning, the quartet had a performance organized in Lichnowsky's residence. It was one of the artistic hallmarks in Vienna, along with Sunday morning concerts van Swieten organized.

In the two years, 1793-1794, when he regularly attended the concerts in the two salons, Beethoven became very well known,<sup>20</sup> and his style of pianistic interpretation reached standards of excellence. He seemed even more than that, he seemed unique, breathtaking. Carl Czerny explains the technical data of the performer, as compared with Mozart's style: "Mozart's clear and markedly brilliant playing is based more on staccato than legato [this] manner, which was so excellently perfected by Hummel, was more suited to the German Fortepianos which combine a delicate and shallow touch with a great clarity and thus are best adapted for general use and for use by children. Beethoven, who appeared around 1790, drew entirely new and daring passages from the Fortepiano by use of the pedal, by an exceptionally characteristic way of playing, particularly distinguished by a strict legato of the chords and thus created a new type of singing tone and many hitherto unimagined effects. His playing did not possess that clean and brilliant elegance of certain other pianists. On the other hand, it

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<sup>20</sup> "Beethoven was situated at the center of the Lichnowsky circle, connected with some of the finest musicians in Vienna, and relieved for a time of the need to pay for meals and rent. In return, during the next few years, from around 1793 to 1795, he participated in Lichnowsky's private concerts (and others as well certainly van Swieten's Sunday morning sessions). He became established within the world of aristocratic salons as *a major figure*. This acceptance, crucial to the launching of any musician, was especially important in Beethoven's case. *From the start of his career, Beethoven was known as a unique sort of pianist*. More than that of his contemporaries, Beethoven's style was recognized during the 1790s as unconventional, a quality evaluated in varying ways," Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

was spirited and, especially in the adagio, very full of feeling.”<sup>21</sup> If the criterion of the Mozart school resided in the strict control of difficulties, high speed, combined with delicacy and decorative flair, the ability to calculate, with accuracy and clarity, any type of atmosphere and to create elegant and tasteful declamations that anyone could perceive and appreciate, Beethoven, by contrast, shifted the focus onto the distortions of pace, the changes in tone, harmonic modulation and ambiguity, the utmost diversity of the emotional spectrum and the complex thematic register, which, as Professor Greenberg notes, reveals the Hegelian dialectic game of thesis and antithesis. The connoisseurs of music and the amateurs of salon concerts had divided their tastes between the so-called *Mozartian style* – which now, in around 1800, was most illustriously represented by Johann Nepomuk Hummel – and *Beethovenian style*. Each camp had its own reasons, ultimately pertaining to taste, for appreciating one style and criticizing the other. Hummel’s supporters condemned a certain violence<sup>22</sup> in Beethoven’s interpretation, insufficient tonal cleanliness and a lack of harmonic clarity, melodic distortions, a tension that bordered on noise and confused the listener. On the other hand, Beethoven’s supporters felt that Hummel lacked fantasy entirely, as he placed his fingers rigidly on the keyboard, like a spider, and played monotonously, like an organ-grinder. Of course, such assessments contained a dose of malice, but they indicated, on both

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<sup>21</sup> In Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

<sup>22</sup> The Viennese pamphleteer Andreas Streicher wrote that Beethoven played in a sadistic way, like an individual who mercilessly tortured his instrument: “A player of whom it is reputed, ‘he plays extraordinarily such as you have never heard’ operates in a fiery manner and handles his instrument like someone bent on revenge, someone who has his arch-enemy in his hands and, with sadistic pleasure, wants to torture him to death. He *pounds so hard* that suddenly the maltreated strings are put out of tune; several fly in the direction of bystanders who hurriedly retreat to safety in order to protect their eyes. But why does the player have such an obstinate instrument that it will only obey his fingers and not his gesticulations? His playing resembles a script which has been smeared before the ink is dried,” in Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

sides of the divide, the enormous stake entailed of imposing an interpretative style in the context of the music paradigm shift from the Viennese salons.

Prince Lichnowsky, his family, relatives and the acquaintance on whom he exercised his influence supported Beethoven also by ensuring good relations with the Artaria publishing house, which specialized in music publications and had collaborated intensely with Boccherini and Mozart, by placing significant orders for the works published here. In 1795, Lichnowsky arranged with Artaria that Beethoven's first trios should appear here, paying an advance of 122 florins. Also, to ensure the market, the prince and his relatives ordered 53 of the 249 copies published, that is, a percentage of 21%. Other 89 persons among the princes, barons, counts, countesses, lords and ladies who appreciated Prince Lichnowsky's tastes ordered a copy, which led to 117 copies being purchased quite quickly. This alerted the publisher and the market to the fact that Beethoven was already a market success. That was the prince's very strategy: to create a favorable public and institutional perception of Beethoven by overbidding his value and anticipating his success, in which he actually genuinely believed. For this, however, he needed to jolt the music market out of its inertia and tentativeness, even though this market was not so big compared, for example, with London at that same time. Prince Lichnowsky had taken upon himself to orchestrate Beethoven's success<sup>23</sup> and impose his name in the aristocratic society with which he had the

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<sup>23</sup> "This subsidy could contribute to the illusion that Beethoven's ties to the music public were more extensive than they actually were that his reputation was greater than it actually was and perhaps (if the fact of Beethoven's or Lichnowsky's initial downpayment was not publicized) that it was Artaria who was willing to 'speculate' on Beethoven. *This invention could be used to imply that Beethoven was a composer whom publishers considered to be a worthy investment.* Underwriting of the publication costs was a way Beethoven could be made to look like an already successful published composer. Once again, we see how the dramatization of Beethoven as corresponding to a preconceived imagery of success in this case the achievement of a highly successful first publication was part of the frame within which Beethoven could be constructed as worthy. It

strongest connections, understanding that in fact it was there that musical importance, value, taste and even the music canon were decided.

In 1795 Beethoven was also elected to compose the dance music for the prestigious annual ball from Redoutensaal, Hofburg Palace, which meant the recognition of his artistic prestige and high artistic reputation. In previous years, those elected had included Haydn (1792), Kozeluch (1793), Dittersdorf and Eybler (1794), some of the most esteemed composers. Given the importance of the event and the place, it is clear that Beethoven benefited from very good exposure at the level of a broader society than the Lichnowsky family's strict network of influence. The following year, the same Prince Lichnowsky took Beethoven on a visit to Prague, as he had done with Mozart in 1789, giving him the opportunity to make himself heard and known in the Bohemian aristocratic and artistic circles. From there, Beethoven wrote to one of his brothers with delight: "My art is winning me friends and renown and what more do I want? And this time I shall make a good deal of money."<sup>24</sup> Encouraged by his success in Prague, Beethoven did not immediately return to Vienna as originally planned, but continued his tour through Leipzig, Dresden and Berlin, where he was welcomed by King Friedrich Wilhelm II himself, who was extremely impressed with his artistic prowess. The *Cello Sonata, Op. 5*, performed in Berlin, in which the cello was given a very generous role, was also read symbolically by the king. As he was a

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provided, in other words, an additional piece of the evidence of Beethoven's talent to which supporters could point. Thus the dramatizations of already existing success, public acceptance, and achievement were in fact preconditions to the success that they were meant to index, and, in this case, the dramatization that Beethoven was 'ready' and deserved to be published contributed to his success. Conversely, the 288 florins that Beethoven earned from sales of op. 1 could function as proof of his (tacitly assumed) worthiness in the first place. In the circumstances surrounding Beethoven's first publication, we can glimpse the often tautological process of constructing the bases of perceived talent and success," Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>24</sup> Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 141.



cellist himself, what he heard in that composition, in the rapports between the instruments, was his own voice as a political leader. The Prussian king's special appreciation legitimized Beethoven once again, granting him, on his return to Vienna, the visibility and prestige of an outstanding artist who had also been recognized abroad. Even though, the success strategy, Beethoven's tournament and the connections with the authorities in the cities where he had performed had been orchestrated from Vienna by Lichnowsky and his network, the artist had enjoyed the public's unqualified appreciation. His standing, image and credibility increased, and proportionally with this he also received greater support from some generous patrons and the society at large. It may not be irrelevant to mention that by the year 1800, Beethoven had secured a very strong network of supporters and patrons: Prince and Princess Lichnowsky, Countess von Thun, Baron Nikolaus Zmeskall, Baron van Swieten, Prince Nikolaus Esterhazy, Count and Countess Brown-Camus, Prince Lobkowitz, Countess Brunsvik, Count and Countess Moritz Lichnowsky, Countess Keglevics, Baron Gleichenstein, Prince Schwarzenberg, Countess Guicciardi and Prince Kinsky. Beethoven's music was listened to in most of their salons, sometimes interpreted by the composer himself.

The permanent support and advertising campaign that he benefited from lessened in no respect Beethoven's artistic merits, as it did not have direct implications upon his quality as an artist or upon his music, but simply on their reception. If an artist and his art do not have an appropriate public framework, there is a risk that they remain unvalorized, unappreciated, and that they may even get lost. This was the case of very many other musicians and artists. Beethoven's rapid and enormous success should be seen, according to Tia DeNora, as the fortunate entwinement of three factors: *his artistic merit, the favorable circumstances and the efforts of influential personalities*. If we were to draw an analogy between the image strategy waged in support of Beethoven and artistic performances, we could say that *what the orchestra is for a soloist the lobbying society was for his artistic genius*: something that

provides power, amplitude, energy, relevance. Something that, taking into account the specificity of his art, ensures *audibility*, as the equivalent of the *visibility* constructed through the contemporary social media. Prince Lichnowsky acted like the veritable conductor of *the Viennese aristocracy as a great lobbying orchestra*, which never ceased to perform for about a decade, until the artist's figure reached the level of prestige and appreciation that allowed him to manage his image more freely.

### 3. Gladiators of the keyboards

Not once have the music competitions in the Viennese salons been compared with sports competitions, with fighting or boxing matches. The atmosphere of emulation, the separation of the camps into supporters or opponents of one or the other of the competitors, the competition frenzy and, proportionally, the exaltation of the supporters gave the impression of a sports arena<sup>25</sup> or, sometimes, of a duel field. It was difficult to pinpoint to what extent the stakes were aesthetic, whether the competition was waged between different performing styles and options, or whether it was simply a matter of public entertainment.<sup>26</sup> Some of the most prestigious performers took part in them. The contest that had taken place between Mozart and Clementi at the imperial court in 1783, arbitrated by the emperor himself, was legendary in Vienna. Because of the importance of the noble figures invited there, the competition had acquired international echoes. That competition had been an event that was part of a larger hosting ceremony organized by the emperor when he received the visit of the Grand Duke Paul, the future Russian Tsar Paul II, and Maria Feodorovna, née Princess of Württemberg. Mozart was to represent not only himself, but also the emperor and

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<sup>25</sup> “At their most basic level, piano contests appear to have been like sporting events. They provided not only ‘good music,’ but also the drama of combat. They additionally offered forums in which rival musical styles, both compositional and pianistic, could be compared,” Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>26</sup> “Taking account of the social position of the virtuoso through the 1790s and more broadly, the social position of the occupational musician as servant it seems that competing virtuosi occupied a place not unlike that of tennis players, wrestlers, boxers, or even race horses, in the sense that they were virtuoso practitioners pitted against each other in controlled contexts, for the purpose of entertaining spectators. In this respect, the piano duel was not qualitatively different from other forms of entertainment based around competition and combat,” Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

even the Empire, while Clementi, according to the emperor's introduction, represented the *Holy Catholic Church, Rome*. It was a friendly, benevolent competition, between two great representative powers of Europe. Involved in the game, the grand duchess began to play some of Paisiello's sonatas, in which Mozart had to pick up the allegros, while Clementi was to play the andantes and the rondos. After this stage, the two had to choose a theme from the duchess's interpretations, which they would then develop playing the pianoforte simultaneously. According to Dittersdorf's later account, included in his autobiography, Emperor Joseph had stated that Clementi combined art with artifice, while Mozart combined it with taste. What was already noticeable was an aesthetic differentiation between good taste and art seen as sheer Mannerist caprice or as technical ability.

Carl Czerny, a student and then a biographer of Beethoven's, depicted faithfully and accurately the salon atmosphere in which musical competitions took place, the types of competitions and the first-hand impressions of some of the participants. During the first recorded duel, held in 1793, Beethoven had a redoubtable opponent in the pianist Abbé Joseph Gelinek. Born in Bohemia in 1756, he had become known through his variations for the piano, easy to interpret, simple and predictable in terms of rhythm, quite commercial and popular among amateurs. As a musician, he came to be appreciated even by Mozart. In Vienna, Gelinek was the standard of fineness, interpretative ease and accuracy, the heir of Mozart's style. The competition was to provide connoisseurs with an opportunity to ascertain, by contrast, the features and qualities of Beethoven's style. The atmosphere of the competition certainly had its theatrical elements. As soon as the competition started, Gelinek, who was aware of his value and knew that he was acknowledged as the best Viennese pianist, stared at Beethoven, the impertinent and defiant novice, with a gaze of supremacy, betraying his resolve to annihilate his opponent. "I'll shatter him, I'll dash him to the ground," he said to himself, as Czerny's account reveals. But things went in another direction. Gelinek

recounts a story<sup>27</sup> told the day after the competition: “Yesterday was a day I’ll remember! That young fellow must be in league with the devil. I’ve never heard anybody play like that! I gave him a theme to improvise on, and I assure you I’ve never even heard Mozart improvise so admirably. Then he played some of his own compositions which are marvelous really wonderful and he manages difficulties and effects at the keyboard that we never even dreamed of.”<sup>28</sup>

Salon success does not mean, however, popular success, just like success today is no long-term guarantee. In the salon game of competition there were involved not only the competitors themselves, but also their patrons and diverse categories of admirers, supporters and those who bet on one or the other, which further complicated the mixture of art, game,

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<sup>27</sup> Tia DeNora believes that Gelinek’s account should not be taken as an entirely true testimony, for it is filtered through Czerny, but as a version of a story designed to maintain the myth of Beethoven’s excellence and genius, evidently created by the artist’s admirers and close acquaintances: “There are several points of interest here. First, whatever Gelinek thought of Beethoven is less relevant in this context than the ways his conversations with Czerny senior and Schenk were converted subsequently into topics in their own right material for further discussion within the music world. Once again, we see that *Beethoven’s reputation can be conceived of as the accumulation of a repertoire of recorded, publicized stories about his talent. His growing fame was a function of an increasing public stock of knowledge about his worth; that ‘stock of knowledge’ consisted of a body of accumulated tales, images, and other representative materials concerning Beethoven*, which became resources for putting together talk about the composer and his work. Beethoven’s ‘good publicity’ was, whether intended as such, a way of configuring a particular social space, of framing or providing conceptualizations of the objects and individuals who furnished the space of Vienna’s high cultural music world in ways that were accommodating to Beethoven. In telling the story of Beethoven’s talent, *Gelinek positioned himself as subordinate to Beethoven* (as a less talented but admiring colleague); thus *Gelinek testified to and helped to publicize a favorable view of Beethoven’s talent by aligning his own abilities as inferior to Beethoven’s*. In the stories about Beethoven and Gelinek, the latter’s talent was appropriated as an ‘indicator’ of Beethoven’s ‘greater’ ability,” Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

<sup>28</sup> In Tia DeNora, *idem*, pp. 120-121.

sport and business.<sup>29</sup> The winner, his supporters and his patrons always had something to gain, beyond the sheer satisfaction of having the upper hand over the opponent. In 1799, the opportunity arose for a competition (the second recorded by Beethoven's biographers), held, this time, in the house of Baron Raimund Wetzlar, a former patron and friend of Mozart's. Beethoven's opponent was Joseph Wölffl (see image). Born on 24 December 1773, in Salzburg, Wölffl had been a precocious violinist, who had first appeared in public at the age of seven. Between 1783 and 1786, he had sung in the choir of the cathedral in Salzburg. In 1790, advised by his father, he moved to Vienna to study with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. It is uncertain whether he became, indeed, the pupil of the famous composer, but they did become friends. It is certain that he took lessons with the father's composer, Johann Georg Leopold Mozart, and with Johann Michael Haydn, the younger brother of the other composer, the renowned Joseph Haydn.

From 1791 until 1795, he was employed as a composer at Count Orinsky's house in Warsaw. In parallel, he worked as a piano professor for students from various noble families. After 1795, he returned again to Vienna, where he worked as a pianist and composer. His Viennese career was fulminant and his work very vast, well received, appreciated, and represented in several public institutions: at the Burgtheater, the Kärthnerthor Theater, the Theater auf der Wieden (Wieden was a suburb of Vienna), where Mozart's *Magic Flute* had premiered. He put on stage several operas, among which the most successful were *The Mountain of Hell* (1795), *The Head without the Man* (1798), *Trojan Horse* (1799), and

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<sup>29</sup> "Thus the piano contest was a place where pianistic athletes were tested, where reputations were raised and lowered, where musical fashions were put on display, and where different types of taste could be compared and pitted against each other. In addition, it was a place where the identities of patrons could be asserted, reaffirmed, and undercut. It must not be forgotten that the musical combatants were by no means 'free agents' on the musical playing field. Like modern professional athletes, they had backers who would naturally be interested in seeing their representatives win," Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 152

composed string quartets, piano sonatas, sonatas for the violin and the piano, trios for piano, songs with piano accompaniment, and *The Grnad Military Concerto* (1799). At the time of the competition, Wölffl was well-known in the larger milieus in Viennese society, but did not have strong links with the high aristocracy and with the major patrons. The stakes of the two were somehow opposed.<sup>30</sup> Beethoven envisaged, in case of his victory over Wölffl, achieving greater success outside the aristocracy of the salons, while for Wölffl, winning the support of this very aristocracy was extremely important.

Wölffl's style of piano interpretation was different from Beethoven's. The characterization that the composer Tomaschek gave him after seeing him play in Prague in 1799 can help us form an opinion: "Wölffl played a Concerto of his own composition with unparalleled cleanliness and precision, which on account of the immense stretch of his hands, no one else could perform. Then he played Mozart's Fantasia in F Minor published in Breitkopf's edition for four hands, exactly as it is printed without leaving out a single note. As I said, he played this piece of music without any mishaps. Then he improvised, weaving in the theme Wenns Lieserl macht, and brought the concert to an end with several very beautiful and brilliant variations... Yet he overcomes difficulties which, for other pianists, would be impossibilities, with a somewhat weak but pleasant touch, and does not lose the quiet composure of his body. He often plays whole sections in a moderately fast tempo with only one finger, as in the Andante of the Mozart Fantasia... Such a pianist can certainly be

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<sup>30</sup> "In short, by March 1799, Wölffl was fairly well established in Vienna. Indeed, if we take his operas into consideration, he seems to have enjoyed as much if not more of a public career than Beethoven, who had not yet produced a large-scale work. On the other hand, Beethoven had stronger ties to important aristocrats and, increasingly, to the resource of being known as Haydn's protégé. For Wölffl, a triumph over Beethoven could have led to further support from Vienna's old aristocrats and thus enhanced access to privately supplied support and prestige. For Beethoven, a triumph over Wölffl would have provided a means to a broader public and to the public world of music consumption outside the salons," Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

regarded as unique in his own way.”<sup>31</sup> From the description of the same Czech composer, we find that Wölffl was very tall, thin, with baggy clothes hanging on him as if he were a scarecrow and with monstrously long fingers.

Ignaz von Seyfried, a conductor at the Theater an der Wien, who witnessed the show, compared the Beethoven-Wölffl competition with the legendary Mozart-Clementi duel that had taken place sixteen years before. Among the competitors’ supporters there were Prince Lichnowsky with a suite, endorsing Beethoven, and Baron Raymond Wetzlar with his suite, backing Wölffl. Through the two artists, there were in fact two styles that were dueling, two types of musical culture: popular, accessible to a wider audience, represented by Wölffl, and elitist, refined, complex, accessible to the connoisseurs, represented by Beethoven. The differences between the two musical styles and musical options were very great and the public supporting one or the other of the artists served as a social mirror encapsulating those differences. This time, too, the competition started with demonstrations of virtuosity in improvisation. Each of the two artists introduced elements of the newest compositions, giving free rein to imagination, to the delight of the audience. Then, each seated at one piano, they have one another a theme that the other had to develop, rapidly alternating roles, or they simultaneously interpreted caprices for piano four hands, which, if they could have been written, they would have stood out as samples of intelligence and virtuosity. Comparing the two competitors with gladiators, Seyfried showed the difficulty of designating a winner, since each excelled on different plans: “It would have been difficult perhaps impossible, to award the palm of victory to either one of the gladiators in respect of technical skill. Nature had been a particularly kind mother to Wölffl in bestowing upon him a gigantic hand which could span a tenth as easily as other hands compass an octave, and permitted him to play passages of double notes in these intervals with the rapidity of lightning. In his improvisations even

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<sup>31</sup> Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 155.



then Beethoven did not deny his tendency toward the mysterious and gloomy... It was the mystical Sanscrit language whose hieroglyphs can be read only by the initiated. Wölffl, on the contrary, trained in the school of Mozart, was always equable; never superficial but always clear and thus more accessible to the multitude. He used art only as a means to an end, never to exhibit his acquirements. He always enlisted the interest of his hearers and inevitably compelled them to follow the progression of his well-ordered ideas.”<sup>32</sup>

From the characterizations made by Seyfried, who was a great connoisseur of music, we may ascertain the evaluation criteria, the elements that determined how the performances of the two artists were judged. First, there was a contrast: Beethoven was mysterious and gloomy, while Wölffl was agile and clear. Then, Beethoven was difficult, inaccessible, while his competitor was easy to comprehend by all. For this reason, in the midst of the competition, it seems that Wölffl was better received, more warmly welcomed by a greater number of listeners. He was more popular and accessible. From a chronicle published in *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, we can extract other elements pertaining to the perception of the competition, on the one hand, and to the personalities and styles of the two artists, on the other: “Beethoven’s playing is extremely brilliant but has less delicacy and occasionally he is guilty of indistinctness. He shows himself to the greatest advantage in improvisation, and here, indeed, it is most extraordinary with what lightness and yet firmness in the succession of ideas Beethoven not only varies a theme given him on the spur of the moment by figuration ... but really develops it. Since the death of Mozart, who in this respect is for me still the non plus ultra, I have never enjoyed this kind of pleasure in the degree in which it is provided by Beethoven. In this Wölffl fails to reach him. But W. has advantages in that he, sound in musical learning and dignified in his compositions, plays passages which seem impossible with an ease, precision and clearness which cause amazement ... and that his

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<sup>32</sup> Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

interpretation is always, especially in Adagios, so pleasing and insinuating that one can not only admire it but also enjoy. That Wölffl likewise enjoys an advantage because of his amiable bearing, contrast with the somewhat haughty pose of Beethoven, is very natural.”<sup>33</sup>

From the anonymous chronicler’s characterization, we may see that following the competition, most of the witnesses appear to have preferred Wölffl, primarily for the accessibility and ease of his style, but also because he knew how to make himself liked in a natural way, which was not Beethoven’s case. Structurally, Wölffl was a showman who composed and performed music always with the public in mind, whom he wanted to draw close to and pamper. On the other hand, if we take into account the viewpoint of the connoisseurs of high, refined music, who do not represent social majorities anywhere, even in the aristocratic circles, then Beethoven shone through depth, ingenuity of improvisation, and gravity of expressiveness. Still, the more numerous applauses of the crowds always reduce to silence the applause of small groups. Without having lost, in fact, it is rather the case that Beethoven did not gain the expected popularity. However, it was obvious that a different type of musician patrons had entered the music market and, through them, a different criterion of appreciation than high music, which had been favored and supported by van Swieten and the aristocratic families. Second-rank nobles and even bourgeois *nouveaux riches* – “upwardly aspiring middle class or second society”<sup>34</sup> – had begun to deal new games, to support popular artists and to steer artistic taste towards accessibility and popularity. The two competitors illustrated both the differences of option, capacity and musical training at a personal level, and the differences between two musical tastes exhibited by distinct societies<sup>35</sup> in the

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<sup>33</sup> In Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

<sup>34</sup> Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>35</sup> “To put Wölffl forward as Beethoven’s rival, therefore, may have provided a second-society entrée into the high-status game of musical contests and helped to substantiate the Wetzlars as partisans of a musical aesthetic distinct from that associated with Beethoven. Wölffl can be understood, in other words, as a representative of an

Viennese environment. The experiment of this competition was to become, through its long-term consequences, relevant for the history of classical music.

#### **4. First validations as a composer**

Although the counterpoint lessons with Haydn had been a fiasco, Beethoven nonetheless studied the Viennese master's music seriously on his own. In Beethovenian historiography, the decade immediately following his arrival in the capital of the Empire is known as the *Viennese period* and was characterized by the assimilation of the style of the classical music produced by Mozart and Haydn. Despite the ambition to prove that he could make music at the level of the great masters, during his early years in Vienna Beethoven composed works in genres that he felt he fully grasped, avoiding, for the time being, symphonies or string quartets. His tactics, otherwise very skillful, always envisaged getting out on the market with compositions that were at the level of Haydn and Mozart, in their genres, and he succeeded at that. Moreover, his works always evinced thematic complexity and stylistic innovation, at the level of composition and interpretation, and these elements placed him above the two classics in the minds of the connoisseurs. The depth of his music, his power of expression had something singular, unheard of and were very poignant for the

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at least partly separate musical constituency, and the serious music ideology as represented by Beethoven can be further clarified as the property of Vienna's old and highest aristocracy. The Beethoven-Wölffl duel may have served as a vehicle through which two different social networks were distinguished."

"The Beethoven-Wölffl piano contest marks an important moment in music history. We can see perhaps the earliest emergence of the nineteenth-century ideology of serious music as a debatable issue and as in contrast to more conventional dilettante values. Simultaneously, it further enhanced Beethoven's emerging reputation as a highly original, specialist's composer," Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

listeners. The elements of interpretation, composition and style that individualized<sup>36</sup> him were: *the deeply layered texture of the melody, the ambiguity of the melodic structure, interpretative freedom in relation to the patterns of tonalities, the adventurous take on harmony, unexpected changes in dynamics, the length, sometimes doubling the standard duration.* For instance, in 1795 he stirred echoes with these few compositions, published and performed in Vienna, and regarded from the very beginning as musical revelations: a *Trio for Piano, Violin and Cello Op. 1* and *Piano Concerto No. 2*, whose theme had been started many years before in Bonn. The version of this concert known to us today is the third, considered the best by the author. Under the classical appearance that gives it clarity, a direct manner of address, making it pleasing to the listener, the concerto has absolutely original elements of rhythm and harmony that exceed the style ordinarily associated with classicism. In the third part, which allows the piano to reveal its personality, these elements are more visible.

If the trios of Mozart or Haydn were generally short length works and were considered secondary, for the use of amateurs, Beethoven by contrast suddenly turned his trio, as well as the sonatas for piano, into works of the size and complexity of musical dramas. Each is structured into four movements, each part is laboriously developed and requires exceptional interpretation virtuositities. There are genres that he practically changed radically and to which he conferred a new dignity, and this did not go unnoticed by the critics. Even for the general public, these works were challenging, interesting and original, something that only Beethoven

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<sup>36</sup> “Beethoven’s style and the empirical characteristics of his pianism, as these were recognized by his Viennese contemporaries, were considered unconventional, far more so than the music of most of his contemporaries. Beethoven’s music, especially during the early years of his Viennese career, fell outside conventional boundaries of musical worth. This difference provided a potential resource for Beethoven. To the extent that the acceptance of his works had implications for the way music recognized as more conventional was received, Beethoven could become a ‘force’ within the Viennese music world,” Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

could achieve. However, Haydn, who was present at the premiere interpretation of the trios in 1795 in a private space, seemed slightly confused by their structure and length, so he gave Beethoven a friendly advise that he should not publish the third, in C minor. Aware that of all these, this was actually his best composition, Beethoven limited himself to thinking that the old master was filled with envy and wanted to discourage him. The reality was altogether different, according to musicologist Robert Greenberg: “Haydn simply didn’t understand the function of a long, dramatic, minor-mode piano trio. In Haydn’s mind, a piano trio was a vehicle for amateurs; big, dramatic musical ideas belonged in a string quartet or a symphony.”<sup>37</sup> Eager to innovate with each composition, Beethoven also approached in a surprising manner the sonatas and the quartets he composed during this period. For example, *Piano Sonata in C Minor Op. 13*, known as *Pathétique*, starts with a huge, complex theme, of symphonic size, an utterly new and unexpected feature, while the second part develops a lyrical theme that became, in time, one of the most popular musical pieces in Beethoven’s entire composition; the work ends with a dramatic rondo.

In 1798 and 1799, Beethoven devoted himself to quartets for strings. The six quartets composed during this period show his full maturity and power of expression, which placed him alongside Mozart and Haydn in the critical and public perception. He felt that now he could measure up to the two in any genre. His great public appearance, which was, in many respects, a challenge too, was *Quartet Op. 18, No. 6*, where, contrary to the classical canon of four parts, Beethoven added a fifth. This *adagio*, actually inserted between the third and the fourth movements, is entitled *Melancholy* and, at the author’s recommendation, it must be interpreted with great delicacy. In this melancholy insertion, which he actually broadcast as atmosphere across the entire surface of the composition, his contemporaries perceived a deeply personal message from the composer. Ever more categorically, Beethoven had begun

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<sup>37</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 22

to express his artistic creed: music must be a deeply personal language that expressed the emotional fiber, the state, the sentiment and, actually, the entire being of the author as it is at profoundly relevant moments.

After the success of the quartets, Beethoven was finally ready for the big test, aware that anything he would compose would be immediately compared with Haydn and Mozart. In April 1800, he went on stage for the first time in a performance that was entitled Akademie, with his recently written *Symphony No. 1 in C major Op. 21*. An analytical listener could detect even now Beethoven's innovative conception, from the very beginning of the work. Beyond organic, fluent aspect, in a classical manner, which appeared to be paying homage to Haydn, Beethoven actually introduced changes of rhythm, of orchestral vision and, most importantly, of tonality. In the first part, the opening does not occur in the usual way, through a theme or two that are intertwined in a clear melodic line and in the announced tonality. The opening is actually conveyed through tonal ambiguity, unheard of before, through suites of harmonies and disharmonies that oscillate chromatically between C major and A minor. After moments of confusion induced by ambiguity, in which someone appears to be laughing at the expense of the listener, the theme truly clears into C major, seeming to make a concession to public taste, but underneath this apparent clarity, the disharmonies of secondary motifs quiver in lively vibrations, whose turn it is, in the following movements, to be developed and articulated in diverse versions. Although the rationale for this element of composition was well integrated in Beethoven's vision, the listeners might have surmised that he had simply intended to shock them. They were not accustomed yet to the thought that something totally was offered to them and that they had to adjust their capacity to listen to and perceive music.

The success of *Symphony No. 1* was tremendous and remained, for the rest of Beethoven's life, the most popular of his symphonies. His music for the piano and the quartets were also popular, so this might lead us to believe that Beethoven was an

accomplished artist, whose star shone bright on the music firmament. Still, as usual, no success came in his life without a chain of misfortunes to sully its brightness. These were the early 1800s, after the release of *Symphony No. 1* in force, but from an exchange of letters between Beethoven and his friends, as well as from his famous *Heiligenstadt Testament* (October 1802), we learn something dreadful. For several years, Beethoven had been losing his hearing and he suffered now from a terrible depression,<sup>38</sup> on the brink of suicide, for fear that he would no longer be able to do his job, that he would be unable to make music and would become the laughing stock of the world – a deaf musician and composer.

One of Beethoven's close acquaintances to whom he shared his concerns about the loss of his auditory acuity was Dr. Franz Wegeler from Bonn. In a letter sent on June 29, 1801, he confessed the following: "My hearing has grown steadily worse for three years...I was often in despair. To give you some idea of my extraordinary deafness, I must tell you that in the theater I am obliged to lean up close against the orchestra in order to understand the actors, and when a little way off I hear none of the high notes...Frequently, I can hear the sounds of a low conversation, but cannot make out the words."<sup>39</sup> Professor Ryan J. Huxtable from the Department of Pharmacology, College of Medicine, University of Arizona believes that the symptoms described by Beethoven indicate a typical case of nerve deafness, which translates as the inability to understand and describe/interpret the sounds heard. Auditory input exists, but it is not processed in accordance with a sound pattern, because the ability to distinguish between sounds is low. Simply put, the subject can hear but cannot understand. This was the first phase of Beethoven's disease.

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<sup>38</sup> "Whatever the cause, Beethoven's hearing loss had a devastating impact on his ability to deal with the world. For years, Beethoven vacillated between panic, anxiety, hope, and depression, between optimism and pessimism," *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> Ryan J. Huxtable, *The Deafness of Beethoven: A Paradigm of Hearing Problems*, Proc. West. Pharm. Soc. 43: 1-8 (2000), p. 2.

The same correspondence contains other important information about the composer's condition. Because he had hyperacoustic sensitivity (*hyperacousis*), he could not process either high sounds or extreme frequencies. Sounds that are too low are not perceived, while those that are too high seem aggressive and are reduced so that the intensity of the sound may be comfortable for the ear. If someone raises his voice or shout, he cannot be heard. In cases of hyperacoustic sensitivity, all audio signals above a certain intensity and frequency are either not perceived or they outrage the ear and are denied by it. Hyperacousis is a disorder of the nerve function responsible for the ear area and of auditory sensitivity, so the perception of certain tones or noises in the environment is distorted. The electrical signals produced by sound vibrations are misunderstood, confused or exaggerated. The signals entering the ear are identical to those in a normal ear, but the reaction is different: for example, the sounds in a quiet library may appear like a full-blown parade in the street for a person with hyperacousis.

The one suffering from hyperacousis has symptoms such as tinnitus, ringing and pain in the ears, often accompanied by loss of horizontal balance and psychic restlessness. It is the very state that Beethoven acknowledged he had in the same letter to Dr. Wegeler, whom he told that he had begun to avoid people and neglect his social functions so that his problem would not be noticed. It seems, from what he said in the letter, that the camouflage operation was successful, at least for a while. He even declared himself amazed that in various situations his partners had not noticed his difficulty of hearing ("it is surprising that some people have never noticed my deafness"). Beethoven confessed about the same problem to his friend from Latvia, Carl Amenda, on 1 July 1801, when he wrote: "My most prized possession, my hearing, has greatly deteriorated. When you were still with me, I already felt the symptoms but kept silent."<sup>40</sup> As seen from his accounts, his first hearing difficulties began in his left ear and then moved to the other. As the situation worsened, Beethoven became

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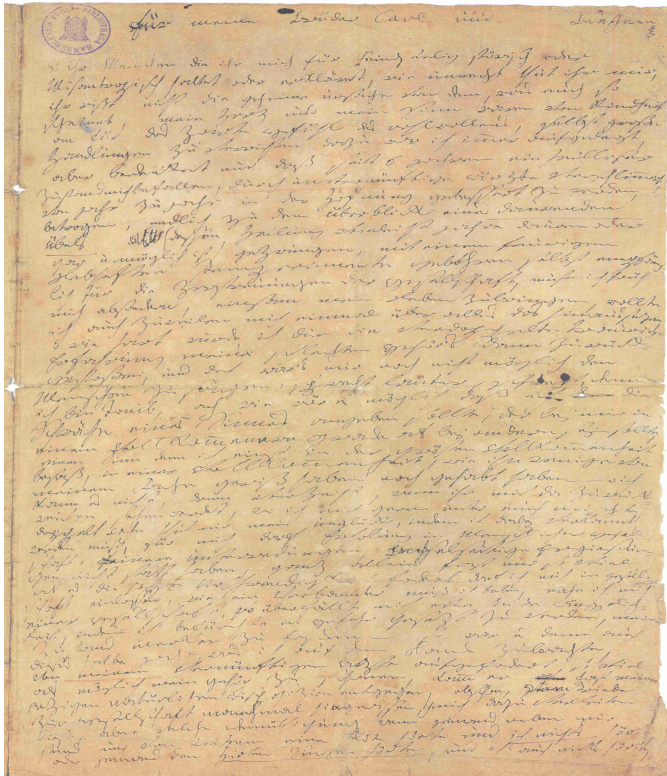
<sup>40</sup> In R. J. Huxtable, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.



increasingly anxious, withdrawn, and he even had bouts of anger and revolt, cursing<sup>41</sup> his life and the creator who had given him such a life.

### 5. The *Heiligenstadt Testament*, the disease

What is now known as the *Heiligenstadt Testament* is a document found among



Beethoven's belongings after his death, a letter addressed to his brothers in the autumn of 1802, from a village located north of Vienna, by the Danube. He was there at the recommendation of Dr. Schmidt, who was aware of his hearing problems and considered that the discomfort created by tinnitus might lessen if he left noisy Vienna for a while. Their hope was that his hearing might be recovered to some extent in a

quieter environment. Unfortunately, after six months in Heiligenstadt, his condition had not improved clinically and Beethoven's mental state was deplorable. It is amazing, however, that in that place and in that state he composed the *Second Symphony*. The letter was never sent, which led Beethoven's biographers to believe that in fact the document had been written under the impact of very strong emotions and of depression caused by hearing loss, with the

<sup>41</sup> "Heaven alone knows what is to become of me. Vering tells me ... my deafness may not be completely cured. Already I have often cursed my creator and my existence ... You will realize what a sad life I must lead, seeing that I am cut off from everything that is dear and precious to me ... I must withdraw from everything," *idem*, p. 3.

main aim to confess (a somewhat therapeutic purpose) and also as an operation of catharsis.<sup>42</sup> Confession, the expression in writing of his deplorable state, disorientation and skepticism, anger against fate, the struggle against the heavenly forces, the horror of an obscure, solitary and depressing existence that was to be the consequence – in his view – of deafness, all of these are expressed here. The testamentary intent is clear, as the thought of suicide seems to have constantly hounded him at the time and the two brothers were the only people in his family. A detail, significant perhaps, has been noticed by researchers. Although the letter is clearly addressed to his two brothers, the name of the brother who had the same name as their father, Johann, is not written down. The space is left blank. Is it symptomatic, perhaps, that he was unwilling or unable to write his father's name? Greenberg's answer is that, indeed, Ludwig van Beethoven had such a strong Oedipus complex, such an aversion to his memory, that even 10 years after his death, he reacted with superstitious awe to his name, as though it were a magical reality.

As for the real causes of hearing loss, there is no commonly shared medical point of view yet. Over time, scientists have accounted for it as the result of typhoid fever, contracted sometime in 1787, of otitis or otosclerosis, or of a disease of the inner ear called labyrinthitis. During Beethoven's life, however, no physician managed to find a cure for the disease, whichever it was. We considered it important to have the whole document so as to read and analyze it, rendered below in the version, which is very good and clear. It is one of the most illustrative and relevant documents about himself that the composer left behind at a watershed moment, of unimaginable despair. Here it is, then:

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<sup>42</sup> "The Heligenstadt Testament is an amazing confessional: part apology, part last will and testament, part suicide note, part rant and rave against God, humankind, and intractable fate. The Testament was written as an act of catharsis. Clearly, Beethoven needed to catalog his despair over his hearing loss; once written, the letter was filled away and left unsent," *op. cit.*, p. 24.

*For my brothers Carl and [.....] Beethoven*

*Oh you men who think or say that I am malevolent, stubborn, or misanthropic, how greatly do you wrong me? You do not know the secret cause which makes me seem that way to you. From childhood on, my heart and soul have been full of the tender feeling of goodwill, and I was ever inclined to accomplish great things. But, think that for six years now I have been hopelessly afflicted, made worse by senseless physicians, from year to year deceived with hopes of improvement, finally compelled to face the prospect of a lasting malady (whose cure will take years or, perhaps, be impossible). Though born with a fiery, active temperament, even susceptible to the diversions of society, I was soon compelled to withdraw myself, to live life alone. If at times I tried to forget all this, oh how harshly I was I flung back by the doubly sad experience of my bad hearing. Yet it was impossible for me to say to people, "Speak louder, shout, for I am deaf." Ah, how could I possibly admit an infirmity in the one sense which ought to be more perfect in me than others, a sense which I once possessed in the highest perfection, a perfection such as few in my profession enjoy or ever have enjoyed.-- Oh I cannot do it; therefore forgive me when you see me draw back when I would have gladly mingled with you.*

*My misfortune is doubly painful to me because I am bound to be misunderstood; for me there can be no relaxation with my fellow men, no refined conversations, no mutual exchange of ideas. I must live almost alone, like one who has been banished; I can mix with society only as much as true necessity demands. If I approach near to people a hot terror seizes upon me, and I fear being exposed to the danger that my condition might be noticed. Thus it has been during the last six months which I have spent in the country. By ordering me to spare my hearing as much as possible, my intelligent doctor almost fell in with my own present frame of mind, though sometimes I ran counter to it by yielding to my desire for companionship. But what a humiliation for me when someone standing next to me heard a flute in the distance and I heard nothing, or someone standing next to me heard a flute in the distance and I heard nothing, or someone heard a shepherd singing and again I heard nothing. Such incidents drove me almost to despair; a little more of that and I would have ended my life -- it was only my art that held me back. Ah, it seemed to me impossible to leave the world until I had*

*brought forth all that I felt was within me. So I endured this wretched existence -- truly wretched for so susceptible a body, which can be thrown by a sudden change from the best condition to the very worst. -- Patience, they say, is what I must now choose for my guide, and I have done so -- I hope my determination will remain firm to endure until it pleases the inexorable Parcae to break the thread. Perhaps I shall get better, perhaps not; I am ready. -- Forced to become a philosopher already in my twenty-eighth year, oh it is not easy, and for the artist much more difficult than for anyone else. 'Divine one, thou seest me inmost soul thou knowest that therein dwells the love of mankind and the desire to do good'. Oh fellow men, when at some point you read this, consider then that you have done me an injustice; someone who has had misfortune man console himself to find a similar case to his, who despite all the limitations of Nature nevertheless did everything within his powers to become accepted among worthy artists and men. 'You, my brothers Carl and [Johann], as soon as I am dead, if Dr. Schmidt is still alive, ask him in my name to describe my malady, and attach this written documentation to his account of my illness so that so far as it possible at least the world may become reconciled to me after my death.'*

*At the same time, I declare you two to be the heirs to my small fortune (if so it can be called); divide it fairly; bear with and help each other. What injury you have done me you know was long ago forgiven. To you, brother Carl, I give special thanks for the attachment you have shown me of late. It is my wish that you may have a better and freer life than I have had. Recommend virtue to your children; it alone, not money, can make them happy. I speak from experience; this was what upheld me in time of misery. Thanks to it and to my art, I did not end my life by suicide -- Farewell and love each other -- I thank all my friends, particularly Prince Lichnowsky's and Professor Schmidt -- I would like the instruments from Prince L. to be preserved by one of you, but not to be the cause of strife between you, and as soon as they can serve you a better purpose, then sell them. How happy I shall be if can still be helpful to you in my grave -- so be it. -- With joy I hasten to meet death. -- If it comes before I have had the chance to develop all my artistic capacities, it will still be coming too soon despite my harsh fate, and I should probably wish it later -- yet even so I should be happy, for would it not free me from a state of endless suffering? -- Come when thou wilt, I shall meet thee*

*bravely. -- Farewell and do not wholly forget me when I am dead; I deserve this from you, for during my lifetime I was thinking of you often and of ways to make you happy -- please be so --*

*Ludwig van Beethoven*

*Heiligenstadt,*

*October 6th, 1802*

What did Beethoven say here? First, he defended himself before those who understood him but had misunderstood his behavior, attitude or character. This misunderstanding was based on ignorance of his real situation, that is, a clinical situation. Misanthropy, the social distance he had assumed, isolation from people, the fear to be in their company were not traits of his personality: they were not a feature of his character, but the result of the dramatic situation of his hearing loss that had lasted for about six years, that is, ever since 1796. In reality, the artist said, he had always been sensitive and compassionate, he had a sociable character, an ardent nature and had aspired, since childhood, to grandiose achievements. What had favored his artistic development was the fact that he had had perfect hearing, at a level of acuity and finesse, such as rarely had any musician been gifted with. But an unknown illness, the work of destiny, topped by the inability of the physicians he had consulted, had led to the gradual deterioration of his hearing, so at the time when this testament was drawn, it was clear that the disease was incurable, irreversible. The fact that he could no longer hear well had affected both his musical activity and his relations with people. Many of these he had begun to avoid because of a feeling of helplessness, shame, frustration, even panic, as he was unable to confess to them about his impairment. He had estranged himself as his hearing betrayed him and he had isolated himself because he had not had the power to ask his acquaintances to shout when they addressed themselves to him, since, in reality, he was deaf. In that situation, his relationships with his friends, acquaintances and society were no longer

natural and relaxed, because there was no longer any real communication between them – on the one hand, he could not hear, and on the other, he could not let them understand that he could not hear because their possible reaction terrified him. He had increasingly cut down on his contacts even at the risk of appearing misanthropic, simply to conceal his disease. A few concrete cases, described in the testament so that his brothers could understand him better, had publicly exposed him to the risk of his problem being detected.

His state pushed to a despair bordering on death. It is not clear how he saw death specifically, although there are allusions to suicide. What he claimed to have saved him was his faith in his art and in the need to express his inner being through music. In other words, the prospect of his future work snatched him from the dream of death, which is a very important explanation. He no longer lived for himself but for the work he hoped the future would give him the respite to compose. Also, after he showed his feelings of love for his brothers, he asked them to make the necessary arrangements with his doctor Schmidt, after his death, so that he would explain what he had suffered from and posterity could have an accurate idea about him. His tone indicates unequivocally that he considered death and was ready to face what destiny had in store for him. He could feel the pressure of destiny and did not understand why he had been chosen for such suffering, but had adopted a position of heroic resignation. After bequeathing his little fortune to his brothers and asking them to divide it equally and to keep the gifts and playing instruments cancel he had received from his patron, Prince Lichnowsky, until there came a good time to sell them, he adopted the figure of a post-mortem benefactor, certainly very important for him in those moments. It is undeniable that he loved his brothers very much and wanted to be helpful to them even after his death. A death that he rather expected and considered somehow natural, even though he had clearly expresses the fact that he had escaped the thought of suicide with the help of his art. The end of the testament end sounds like a romantic creed: “How happy I shall be if can

still be helpful to you in my grave -- so be it. -- With joy I hasten to meet death. -- If it comes before I have had the chance to develop all my artistic capacities, it will still be coming too soon despite my harsh fate, and I should probably wish it later -- yet even so I should be happy, for would it not free me from a state of endless suffering? -- Come when thou wilt, I shall meet thee bravely. -- Farewell and do not wholly forget me when I am dead; I deserve this from you, for during my lifetime I was thinking of you often and of ways to make you happy -- please be so --.”

Beethoven concealed his problem as well as he could to the others, but he could not hide it from himself and he could not avoid its consequences. This triggered a chain of complex consequences, accompanied by vehement emotional reactions, which were sometimes misperceived and misunderstood in public. Somewhere deep inside himself, his struggle against destiny appears to have begun and this long-term battle was to demand tenacity and strength. It is here, perhaps, that we must seek the origins of the Hero, to whom the *Third Symphony* would soon give expression. According to Greenberg, the testament indicates a symbolic or figurative death,<sup>43</sup> followed by a rebirth – the second in the artist’s life and career. While very significant and beautiful, as well as philosophical, we might say, this view of Professor Greenberg’s leaves, however, unresolved the question of Beethoven’s actual clinical condition, the medical perspective on his disease.

Let us see more closely the medical point of view on the problem, formulated by Professor Huxtable from the University of Arizona, mentioned above. He integrates deafness in a broader perspective upon the definition of man as a social being and, in this sense, upon the valorization of hearing as a decisive social sense in relating to the environment and to peers. Hearing is not only a physical sense of prime importance, but also an essential psycho-

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<sup>43</sup> “In the Heiligenstadt Testament, Beethoven imagined his own death in order that he might be reborn. In doing so, he recreated himself in a new guise, self-sufficient and heroic,” *op. cit.*, p. 24.

social state. Based on this assumption, hearing is a fundamental social connector, and hearing loss represents, thus, disconnection from the social environment. In other words, separation, isolation, loneliness. In his view, hearing loss is an even worse form of isolation than blindness. In deafness, which usually does not occur suddenly, but as a protracted process, there appears a phase of ambiguity in which the real problem is the lack of communication between the faculty of hearing, still active at certain levels, and the interpretation that the brain gives auditory inputs. One can still hear, but does not understand or misunderstands sounds. In the sound flow that reaches the ear, some sounds find their correct interpretation and are recognized, while others are not. The loss of some sound signals, misunderstanding or incorrectly interpreting them generates a state of disarray, followed by discomfort and insecurity, which can turn into panic. Why does this happen? Because, according to the American specialist, hearing is a sense with a function of equilibrium<sup>44</sup> at the biological, psychological and social levels. The ability of the brain to organize reality according to a plan that the subject is comfortable with is deeply disturbed and impaired by the lack of hearing and, with this, certain processes and behaviors become chaotic, disordered. The mind partially loses its ability of patterning reality.

In the impasse caused by hearing loss, the person can adopt one of the following attitudes: either start talking more and more, in order to take control of the relationship with the others, or stay isolated in order not to become even more embarrassed and self-conscious

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<sup>44</sup> “We want to make sense of the world; the ability of the brain in organizing sight, sound, and other sensory inputs into categories is not only the basis of science, but the very foundation of our biological existence; the chaos of reality is reduced to a calm, manageable hierarchy that by existing in the mind is reified in actuality. The wandering botanist keys the glorious disorder of nature with taxonomic exactitude, and returns home happy: this is a plant; a flowering plant, a composite, a dandelion, *Taraxacum officinale*. None of this intellectual patterning adds to our information about the world, but it does provide us with the ability to ‘handle’ the world,” Ryan J. Huxtable, *op. cit.*, p. 1.



than he is anyway, by virtue of the clinical fact as such. At those times when Beethoven was in the company of others or had to work with teams of artists for various performances, his hearing difficulties worsened, of course, because of the emotional impact, on the one hand, and of the fear that he might be caught out and disregarded as an interpreter and as a conductor, on the other hand. Social discomfort threatened to aggravate his condition, as emotional fluctuations had a continuous impact on his sensory/perceptual behavior, which is actually also the case even for people without disabilities. Perhaps in Beethoven's case, his self-image, which was usually very good, contributed to his reaction of social isolation. Kubba, one of his recent biographers, a medical specialist, estimates that the Viennese composer's hearing impairment gradually led to states of fear, lack of confidence, emotional turmoil, isolation and even self-denial. These reactions were sharpened and gradually accompanied by other, more violent physiological reactions, triggered by the other facet of the disease, the sensation of ringing in the ears or *tinnitus*, which Beethoven complained about in the same letter to his friend in Bonn in 1801. Sometimes the sensation was unremitting, lasting for days, and its intensity, which he described as *terrifying*, had left Beethoven so disturbed that he had reached the brink of suicide, as suggested by several testimonies, including his *Testament*.

The fact that in the immediate aftermath of the crisis expressed in the *Testament*, Beethoven entered a new creative phase that would last about 10 years and would also be the most prolific and expressive in his entire career does not necessarily entail that there was a causal link between the two, in the sense that his hearing loss had stimulated his creativity. There is no contesting of the fact that the two were coeval in time and that the physical condition exerted a psychological impact on the composer, but it is very difficult to account for the musical style Beethoven adopted in his compositions through the frustrations he experienced because of having lost his hearing. This aspect ought to be judged carefully and

with many arguments. Dr. Huxtable discards the view of Beethoven's most famous American biographer, Maynard Solomon,<sup>45</sup> who considers that by isolating him, deafness gave Beethoven the time and energy to focus exclusively on his music; hence, its novelty and originality. Likewise, the opinion espoused by E. Newman in *The Unconscious Beethoven* (London, 1968), namely that hearing loss was a blessing in disguise for the artist, does not seem accurate to Dr. Huxtable, because it ignores an essential point of view – Beethoven's. For him, the situation was terrible, almost unbearable, the worst imaginable ordeal, as he stated himself. Under these circumstances, how could one say that this was a blessing? We will have the occasion to return to this aspect, once we have drawn the full picture of the disease, of the composer's artistic development and of his destiny on a strictly human level.

After the period of panic and despair captured in the *Testament*, Beethoven began to integrate<sup>46</sup> his disease, to live with it and, as we shall see, to keep social relations at a good level, at least considering the given circumstances and his character. Although he was aware that his level of performance on stage would no longer be as before, he did not give up preparing his own premieres. During rehearsals for the premiere of the *Third Symphony*, in

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<sup>45</sup> It was to this that he referred in writing the following: "These early years of high anxiety for Beethoven were extremely productive musically ... This has led to some biographers to suggest that his hearing crisis was a necessary precondition for his creativity, allowing him to listen to inner sounds without distraction from the world. This is an impercipient suggestion: hearing loss and tinnitus are handicaps, pure and simple. It was a terrible affliction with which Beethoven had to struggle. One biographer has written that 'deafness may have heightened his abilities as a composer ... by permitting total concentration within a world of increasing auditory seclusion'. He continues, 'one begins to suspect that Beethoven crisis and his extraordinary creativity were somehow related, and even that the former may have been the necessary precondition of the latter,'" in R. J. Huxtable, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> "On sketches for the Razumovsky Quartets (1806), Beethoven noted, 'let your deafness be no longer a secret even in art.' This is an indication that he is accepting his condition, and its permanence – again, a not uncommon accommodation after several years of problems," R. J. Huxtable, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

1804, even though it was obvious that he could not hear the wind instruments, he stubbornly insisted on working with the orchestra. He wanted to prove to himself and the others that the disease would not cause him to relinquish his musical activity. Although he would increasingly, over the years, be placed in uncomfortable, even embarrassing situations, his refusal to surrender became entrenched in his so-called heroic attitude, spectacularly expressed in his creation. However interpretable in terms of its practical consequences at various moments, heroism became the secret of his resistance and, eventually, it even outlined the profile of his destiny.

In 1804 Beethoven composed the sonatas for piano Op. 57, *Appassionata*, and Op. 53. *Waldstein*, as well as the first version of the opera *Fidelio*. Towards the end of the year, in December 1804, the *Third Symphony* premiered at the palace of his patron Lobkowitz, and in April of the next year,<sup>47</sup> it was played at the Imperial and Royal Theatre in Vienna. In the

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<sup>47</sup> On the echoes of the Third Symphony, August von Kotzebue wrote, in 1805, lines full of excitement and enthusiasm: “Beethoven’s most special friends contend this particular symphony is a masterpiece, that it is exactly the true style for music of the highest type and that if it does not please now it is because the public is not sufficiently cultivated in the arts to comprehend these higher spheres of beauty; but after a couple of thousand years its effect will not be lessened. The other party absolutely denies any artistic merit to this work. They claim that it reveals the symptoms of an evidently unbridled attempt at distinction and peculiarity, but that neither beauty, true sublimity nor power have anywhere been achieved either by means of unusual modulations, by violent transitions or by the juxtaposition of the most heterogeneous elements. The creation of something beautiful and sublime, not the production of something merely unusual and fantastic, is the true expression of genius. The third, very small party stands in the middle. They concede that there are many beautiful things in the symphony, but admit that the continuity often appears to be completely confused and that the endless duration of this longest and perhaps most difficult of all symphonies is tiring even for the expert; for a mere amateur it is unbearable. One fears that if Beethoven continues along this road, he and the public will make a bad journey. Music could easily reach a state where everyone who has not been vouchsafed a thorough knowledge of the rules and difficulties of the art will derive absolutely no pleasure from it,” Tia DeNora, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

same place, a few months later, the opera *Fidelio* was mounted on 20 November. Several years later, there appeared again references to his problem of hearing. During the siege of Vienna in 1809, when the French cannons bombarded the city, Beethoven stood hidden with his head under a pillow in the cellar of his brother Carl's house. The sensitivity caused by his hyperacusis made him hear the explosions even more terrifyingly than the others perceived them. According to his own testimony, it seemed as if "a demon had found its abode" in his ears.

From a letter composed in 1810 and from a diary notation written in 1814, it appears that he was still haunted by the thought of suicide every now and then, but he had always found refuge in the belief that he was still able to achieve good things, probably not only in the artistic sphere. The opportunity to do good deeds seemed to him the most serious argument against suicide, even when it was clear that his life was a poisoned gift: "This life is indeed beautiful, but for me it is poisoned forever."<sup>48</sup>

At the suggestion of some physicians, from 1814, Beethoven began to use sound-amplifying instruments like ear trumpets (see image). His friend, the inventor of several musical instruments, among them the metronome, chose for Beethoven the trumpets which appeared to be the most appropriate for him. In reality, the small sound amplifiers did not help much, for a reason that Huxtable's medical explanation helps us understand. Given that Beethoven suffered from hyperacusis, his problem was that he could not perceive high frequencies, which were rejected by his nerve sensitivity, so the sound amplification through trumpets did not enhance in any way the sound palette processed within. His ability to distinguish and process sounds functioned at the level of medium frequencies, while those either above or below this level either appeared confusing, or entirely escaped his grasp. Moreover, when if they were heard louder, certain words and human voices were not

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Huxtable, p. 4.

recognized. In as early as 1812, his conversation partners had to raise their voices to be understood. His problem resided in recognizing and distinguishing sounds in certain frequency ranges, and hearing aids did not work to redress this aspect.

During an interpretation attempt of one of his works from 1814, attended and recounted by his friend, the composer Spohr, it became very clear to everyone that Beethoven could not hear. The piano was out of tune, which the musician did not seem to notice, and the sounds were extremely loud and jarring. In the parts where *forte* was needed, Beethoven exaggerated his keyboard strikes so much that the instrument simply screamed (*the strings jangled*), while in the *piano* passages, entire sound garlands and whole groups of notes were all paced down to the point of becoming imperceptible. Spohr's conclusion was that the performance sounded pathetic and, hence, that the sonata was imperceptible in interpretive terms. Understanding his limits, after January 1815, when he had played the piano for the last time in public, Beethoven relinquished his career as an interpreter, using piano solely in private and for composition in the future. Because he could not hear either music, or words even when using the ear trumpet, in 1817 the composer agreed to use notebooks for communication in writing. By the age of 50, that is in around 1820, according to all the medical data, Beethoven had turned completely deaf. However, a rebel with a cause he knew was lost, he occasionally still wanted to conduct. Such was the case of the performance of his opera *Fidelio*, in 1822, when he did not succeed to carry through the performance. Anton Schindler, an old friend who accompanied him home after the show, described the composer's desperate reaction as follows: "He flung himself on the sofa, covered his face with both hands and remained like that, motionless, until we had to sit at table. During dinner, he did not say a word; he was the very image of profound melancholy and depression."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Quoted in R. J. Huxtable, p. 4.

Although he used all the information available in 2000, when he wrote the study about Beethoven, Dr. Huxtable admitted with professional sincerity that the cause of the German composer's deafness was not and could not be exactly known. Medicine was still quite rudimentary two centuries ago, compared to its present-day advancement, in terms of both diagnosis and treatment. Researchers who have studied the Beethoven case have suggested, with more or less competency, various causes of the disease, some of these being, perhaps, suspect: syphilis, otosclerosis, neuronal atrophy, proliferative meningitis, labyrinthitis, chronic adhesive catarrh of the Eustachian tube, otitis media, acoustic neuritis, hyperparathyroidism, etc. Autopsy data confirmed only that the Eustachian tube was narrowed and the auditory nerve was atrophied, but did not ascertain the causes. It was also found that the arteries of the ear were narrowed, which indicates vascular insufficiency. This might explain a form of middle ear deafness, not one determined by the auditory nerve. In any case, Beethoven suffered from the latter form, primarily characterized by the inability to perceive tones and high frequencies.

By 1815, Beethoven had begun to believe that his disease is due to an incident he had suffered in his youth, when he had been thrown to the ground during a quarrel with a tenor and when he had been injured, finding, when he got back to his feet, that he was deaf. The identity of that tenor is uncertain, but since his father was a tenor and also an abusive alcoholic, Professor Huxtable wonders whether it would be reasonable to suspect a family quarrel with dramatic consequences. Throughout his problematic period, Beethoven tried various remedies – from almond oils, lavations with cold or hot water, with different teas, poultices with maceration extract of bay, galvanism – all of these useless, as it turned out. In addition, for his gastrointestinal problems, his physicians often recommended him various mercurates. All these medications, mixed and administered in the long run, could have led to an intoxication of the auditory nerve, which may have favored, in time, the aggravation and

loss of his hearing sensitivity. Therefore, from a medical standpoint, Beethoven's deafness was a problem than may be raised rather than resolved, and perhaps there will never be sufficient data to reach an enlightening answer. But even if there were, in our opinion this would bring no definitive, universally acceptable explanation as regards its connection with his musical creation.

P. Harrison provides a relevant diagnosis, even though it does not necessarily represent the ultimate perspective, impervious to critique. In an article entitled "The Effects of Deafness on Musical Composition," published in the review of the Royal Society of Medicine, vol. 81, 1988, the researcher illustrates through the examples of several classical composers, including Bach, Beethoven and Schoenberg, the notion that musical ideas and music writing do not require an external instrument and, therefore, an external sound source. After a certain composition is written, animated by the composer's internal music, it can be adjusted or verified through an instrument, such as the piano. The idea is that one can compose music of any kind and complexity without auditory contact with the external environment. Music is born in the imagination, sensibility and spirit of the artist, who hears it with the "mind's ear."<sup>50</sup> At the time of composition, the artist puts to work his knowledge,

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<sup>50</sup> "Composers have a clear idea, presumably arising from a mixture of innate ability and experience, of knowing which melodic and harmonic combinations go well together □ to use their 'mind's ear' as it were. Perhaps deaf composers can take this a stage further and remove the need for auditory feedback even after the work's completion. The mental capacity and flexibility needed to hold in one's mind the complete score of a symphony from the smallest detail of orchestration to an overall perspective of form seems immense. This is true even for those who can listen to the piece at times, let alone in those who are deaf. Whilst Beethoven's deafness may not have interfered with his creativity, his inability to hear the finished product may have been partially responsible for the long gestation period of his works, in that he needed to be absolutely sure he had written what he wished others to hear. It is possible that deafness may actually have helped composition in some ways, by shutting out extraneous noise and focusing his mind even more intensely on the melodies within," P. Harrison, "The Effects of Deafness on Musical Composition," 1988, p. 598.

experience, imagination, intuition, artistic flair and, sometimes, even inspiration, all of these representing the instruments of his laboratory and dictating to him the theme, the rhythm, the melodic and harmonic combinations, in short, the elements from which the work is coagulated. Still, musical imagination does not work separately from other art forms, such as pictorial, visual, or literary, poetic imagination. In the pastoral symphony, but also in other works, Beethoven used synesthesia, short-circuiting<sup>51</sup> sensitivity by merging visual and the auditory media, the pictorial and the musical, spatialized and temporal vision. Moreover, he recognized and consciously assumed the descriptive-narrative character of musical images, after the model of painting. Some compositions can thus have the status of *musical paintings*, of sound frescoes or pictures, just like others can have the character of poems, according to the examples of Goethe or Schiller, whom Beethoven found inspiring.<sup>52</sup> In certain works, composers do not need external verification or the echoes of their works produced through interpretation. In the case of composers who are deaf, such verification is not even possible, but they can still produce highly elaborate and complex works, fully tested only by their

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<sup>51</sup> “Perhaps the use of mixed modality metaphors, such as describing music in terms of ‘brilliance’ and ‘color,’ or endowing paintings with attributes of ‘tone’ and ‘loudness’ reflects a subconscious awareness of this; the French verb ‘sentir’ means not only to feel, but also to smell or to touch. Interestingly, Beethoven described the mental processes involved in refining and polishing pieces during their creation in spatial terms of ‘narrowness,’ ‘height’ and ‘breadth,’ and that ‘the image grows in front of me . . .’ This intimate relationship between the senses might help to explain how the absence of one input □ sound, in Beethoven’s case □ need not prevent expression and creativity in that modality, with central mechanisms compensating in some way. There may prove to be morphological correlates of auditory deprivation, and a role for such changes in musical creativity; similar changes in visual and somatosensory systems after afferent denervation are recognized,” P. Harrison, “The Effects of Deafness on Musical Composition,” 1988, p. 600.

<sup>52</sup> “Other inspiration came to Beethoven from Goethe’s poetry, which provided the basis for several works; he felt it contained ‘the secret of harmony,’ and a wish was to become the Goethe or ‘tone poet’ of music. Another literary figure, Schiller, inspired the *Choral symphony* with his *Ode to Joy*,” P. Harrison, *ibidem*.



internal musical sense. In their case, there may be a greater power of internal concentration and creation, given that no sound fluxes and messages come from the external environment, making possible an enhancement of acuity, accuracy, melodic and harmonic complexity, as well as of the musical vision itself.

The inertia of the auditory sense – which continually receives external sound messages if hearing functions normally – is now transferred within and produces additional sound elements as deafness slows down or disrupts connections with the outside. Basically, the inner musical sense generates auditory structures and messages, using memory and imagination, in order to feed the brain's need for an environment of sound, without which it risks losing its composure, balance and orientation. While for healthy people, the ear functions as a receiver, by contrast, in the case of deafness, the ear of the mind becomes a manufacturer of sonorous atmosphere. Deaf composers take advantage of this *productive mechanism*, which can proliferate spectacularly when associated with a musical genius, like in the case of Beethoven. It is true that this mechanism can also lead to psychotic manifestations, such as in the case of auditory hallucinations, but these are not the subject of our concern now. By way of a hypothesis, however, we can take into account the fact that the period of Beethoven's deafness boosted both his musical creativity and his hallucinatory universe, which would explain, to some extent, his depression, imbalances and his, sometimes, bizarre and inexplicable behaviors. At the musical level, Harrison notes some forms of emotional sensitivity and moods which are absent from previous works and in the quality of the works,<sup>53</sup> while at the practical level, deafness appears to have enhanced

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<sup>53</sup> Superlative assessments have been made about the quartets of the 1820s, highlighting their refinement, formal perfection, and even aspects of a metaphysical nature. Here is the synthesis that Harrison provides: "Whatever the motivation, the late quartets have been placed in the very highest rank of all, their quality being unquestionable though hard to define. Stravinsky said of opus 131: 'everything about this masterpiece is perfect, unalterable, inevitable. It is beyond the impudence of praise'; Wagner described it as a 'revelation from another

Beethoven's cyclothymic behaviors,<sup>54</sup> which are very evident in the episode of the *Testament*, and especially between 1815-1820, during the episode of the custody of his nephew Karl.

Like other medical specialists who have focused on Beethoven's case, Harrison observes a correlation between the progression of the disease, on the one hand, and of his musical creation, on the other, they representing two parallel phenomena whose intersections or causal relations can be, however, scarcely demonstrated. That is why, even though it is evident that Beethovenian composition became spectacular after 1803, it cannot be accounted

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world'. It is as though, with death approaching and having been deaf for 20 years □ with all its psychological and musical consequences □ that his abilities took him a step further into the unknown, the results being dissociated from anything else written up to that time, being unpredictable and genuinely creative without sounding false. Cooper emphasizes the quartets' 'metaphysical' quality, suggesting that they 'furnish evidence of the reality of an order that lies behind, beneath, 'after,' (and, it often seems, in blatant contradiction to) the everyday world of phenomena as perceived by our senses and interpreted by our intellects'. Griffiths identifies complex musical links between the quartets 20, adding to the impression that they represent a self-contained body of work, excluding Beethoven's previous compositions and in some way transcending a purely 'auditory' experience. However, the direct effect of his deafness on the late quartets remains speculative and hard to assess. Sensitive, personal passages, such as certain of the slow movements or the opening fugue of opus 131, contrast with the virtuosity of the Great Fugue or parts of opus 135. Cooper interprets these extremes as communicating 'evidence of an inner life of almost unparalleled reality and intensity, although he also accepts that deafness may have contributed to less successful harmonic and melodic experiments elsewhere," P. Harrison, *op.cit.*, p. 599.

<sup>54</sup> "Even if increasing deafness did not adversely affect Beethoven's composition, its onset certainly affected him psychologically and may have influenced the mood of subsequent works... Compositions changed noticeably around this time both in quantity and quality. Paradoxically, between bouts of severe depression he wrote some of his finest material; many of the seeds of ideas were sown during the 'lows' to come to fruition at the time of the 'highs' ... Perhaps the net effect of the increasing deafness was to exaggerate his cyclothymic personality □ shared by many composers □ and enable him to experience the extremes of mood that often seem to precede the great works," P. Harrison, *ibidem*.

solely or significantly through his hearing loss. While the question referring to how Beethoven might have created if he had not lost his hearing is naïve and bound to remain unanswered, the argument that his major works from the period of his deafness were due precisely during this drawback would be no less naïve, but downright narrow and dogmatic. This being so, we must continue our exploration on the terrain of biography, of the significant events and stages subsequent to the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, leaving a more convincing answer on the relationship between deafness and creation in the Beethoven case to the future, when more relevant data and more perfected research techniques may exist.

## 6. The heroic complex

Closely correlated with the crisis analyzed in *Heiligenstadt* is what biographers call the “heroic period” in Beethoven’s thematic and stylistic evolution. Our perspective would, however, be too narrow if we reduced heroism to its artistic dimensions, focusing on its motifs, themes, variegated musical modulations and stagings, from the *Eroica Symphony* to the triumphalist compositions from the period 1813-1815, which followed Napoleon’s defeat. Unquestionably, during this time Beethoven composed most of his masterpieces, as this was the most prolific and spectacular decade of his career, but I will try to argue that heroism was also a dimension of Beethoven’s attitude, whose initial catalyst had been the figure of Napoleon Bonaparte but which had also gained deep roots in the composer’s being amid frustrations related to his illness, sentimental relations and, ultimately, family relations, primarily as regards the tangled network in which he got entwined with his brother’s widow, Johanna, and her son Karl, his nephew, after 1815. Finally, I will try to demonstrate the thesis that there exists a *heroic complex* of Beethoven’s personality, where the term *complex* represents everything that is defining for the structure, form, attitude and self-identification of

a personality. Similar to the cultural complexes we are familiar with from psychoanalysis and literature, such as the Oedipus complex, the Pygmalion complex, the Ofelia complex, the Dionysus complex (from which Nietzsche suffered), is Beethoven's heroic complex, inspired indeed by the figure of Bonaparte, but even more so by the Titans of mythology, Prometheus, above all. A complex is a form of understanding, relating and behaving that gives the defining feature of a personality, which explains this individual's position in relation to society and life, in general, and which is the interpretative key to his or her significant decisions. In short, a complex is a psychological matrix according to which a personality type crystallizes. This matrix acts as a coercive force, but also as a source of power and energy, fostering the formation of purposes or ideals.

Let us clear matters up. What Freud called the *Oedipus complex*, inspired by the figure of King Oedipus from the tragedies of Sophocles, represents a relational complex in which, at the family level, there occur two capital transgressions: murder and incest. Oedipus becomes, without knowing, the murderer of his father, King Laius, and the husband of his mother, Queen Jocasta. He does all this unwittingly and without wanting these things. This is important to emphasize, lest Oedipus should be confused with an ordinary murderer and an abusive son. That is consistent with the spirit of tragedy – evil happens without the knowledge and despite the attempts of the actors to avoid this situation. The sovereign power of fate and of the gods, ultimately, subdues and destroys man. The case of Oedipus is the most relevant in the entire classical Greek culture. The prophet Tiresias foretells before the two young sovereigns – Laius and Jocasta – that if they have a son and if he stays alive, he will commit horrific things. Frightened by the prophecy, despite all their love for their newborn son, they decide to kill him, so as to prevent those horrors. However, the merciful hunter to whom little Oedipus is entrusted cannot bear to throw him into the precipice, but it takes him into the mountains, far away, and leaves him there, alive, in the care of fate. Should

the gods allow this, he will live, and if they should not, he will be torn apart by the beasts. There, the child is found by shepherds, taken to the sheepfold, fed on goat milk and raised by the strict rules and austere conditions of agrestic life. 20 years later, when he is a grown man, something from deep down summons him to the city of Thebes. It so happens that on his way to the city, he is attacked by a man in a chariot, and in order to defend his life, with the strength and agility gained in battles against bears for defending the sheepfolds, he overturns the chariot and defeats the aggressor with a single mace blow. Then, on his way to the city, he vanquishes with one answer the Sphinx guarding the entrance, which is why the population, liberated from the terror of the strange creature, declares him hero and proposes that he should be king instead of the recently vanished Laius. In short, Oedipus becomes King of Thebes. About his beautiful wife, Queen Jocasta, with whom he will then have four wonderful children, two boys and two girls, he will only learn a few decades later, from the mouth of the same somber prophet Tiresias, that she is his mother. As such, the former King Laius was his father, whom he chanced to slay with a mace in that scuffle on his way to the city, long ago.

Here is the revelation of the tragedy, of the terrible force with which fate determines people's lives. All evil happened inadvertently, without hatred towards someone else, without a hidden conspiracy, even unwittingly. In other words, evil is committed through a kind of transcendent mechanism that subsumes and modifies human goodwill, honesty, courage, wisdom and power. All human virtues are mocked and enthralled, as blind forces in the implacable mechanism of destiny. This is the perfect game of fate, in which all the actors involved are innocent in themselves, and yet the consequences are terrible. The forces that move the human pieces on the board of life are incomprehensible, unavoidable, and any attempts to oppose them are but sequences in vaster scenarios in which, in fact, they have been subjected. That is why Oedipus takes his eyes out when the truth is revealed. A

symbolic gesture. He was blind in the face of destiny, and his eyes were of little use to him in understanding truth. Oedipus thus becomes the paradigm of human blindness in the face of destiny. Such a lesson could not go unvalorized culturally. Through the Oedipus complex, Freud wants to say something other than the Greek tragedy, something that alters its spirit, namely that there are two transgressive impulses in man: murder and incest. The thesis is debatable, but either way, the two tendencies have been at work in many situations, very popular in mythology and literature, but sometimes also verified in history, in the relations of power and succession to power – the usurpation thereof through the murder, real or symbolic, of the father, and in sexual relations, where the mother is the model of the desirable partner and incest is a difficult latency that is not always kept under control.

All these complexes are about a fundamental characteristic – if not of human beings in general, then at least of specific characters and situations. One's way of being, one's dominant drives, types of values and, ultimately, one's model of personality are defined in certain exact conditions, circumstances and interpersonal relationships. Circumstances, the environment, the context and relations act upon a person in such a way that he will react, through his structure and will, according to the matrix defined by that complex. To clarify matters once again by reference to the case of Oedipus, what he does is the consequence of a long chain of causes and conditions that are not dependent on his person: his having been born into the royal family, the fact that the hunter did not kill him when his parents entrusted him thereto, that the shepherds found and raised him, that King Laius attacked him on the way to Thebes with the intent to kill him, that the Thebans recognized him as a hero and elected him king, that tradition demanded that he should marry the widowed queen and, finally, that neither he nor the queen and the king knew about one another when they met. Laius did not know that the young man he wanted to attack was his son; Oedipus did not know that the attacker was his father; Jocasta did not know that the young hero was her son

and Oedipus also did not know that Queen Jocasta was his mother. Blindness and ignorance represented the passive cause that destiny used or deployed to accomplish its tragic plot. It is essential, therefore, to understand that the tragedy, destiny and drama of these heroes was not strictly inherent in their character, but pertained to a relational complex in which they were placed. That is the very reason why tragedy is a group situation, not an individual one. In order for the idea to be relevant, I would say that unlike Oedipus, Laius, Jocasta and Oedipus's four children, who were also his siblings by his mother, all of these being tragic characters, in the case of Robinson Crusoe we are dealing with an unlucky man, a wretched and helpless individual, but not with a tragic one. He adapts, integrates the new conditions and even retraces his destiny together with that savage friend, named Friday. His Odyssey is unfortunate, exemplary, but it does not contain the elements of tragedy. Tragedy is a cultural topos, it implies the idea of destiny and of superhuman forces directing the show in which the tragic character is involved. If we take into account this complex scheme, we will not confuse it with other situations in which humans suffer, some of these situations being quite dramatic.

In the same way that the Oedipus complex helps us understand the characters, actions and relations of a social microstructure that participates in a tragic scenario, the Pygmalion complex helps us understand a certain relation of Paideia; the Ofelia complex, inspired by Shakespeare, helps us understand the suicidal melancholy leading to the drama of Ophelia; and the Dionysus complex helps us understand why in the last decade, when he was mentally ill, but continued to write books and correspondence, Friedrich Nietzsche signed some of his letters with the name of the Greek god. Why did this happen? A good question, which the first psychoanalyst who approached his case, his old friend Lou Andreeas-Salome, answered in a very subtle way. Nietzsche had come to substitute himself for the god he worshipped, to believe he was that god, to function mentally within the latter's coordinates. He created a second personality under the power of which, after a while, the real one faded away and

concealed itself. At moments of exaltation, which could also be considered psychic crises of his disease, he saw himself as the incarnation of the god Dionysus. Such identification is frequently encountered in the case of some literary characters, Emma Bovary's case being very relevant in this respect: from the Flaubertian heroine is derived the so-called *Bovaristic complex*, the correlated behavior of an imaginary personality, *Bovarism*. All these examples serve to illustrate the heroic complex adopted by Beethoven, whose real source was the figure of Napoleon and whose mythical source was the Titan Prometheus,<sup>55</sup> but who ultimately became Beethoven the Hero, a self-image that he had built and that he identified with in the second part of his life, after 1802.

Between 1803 and 1813, Beethoven composed major works such as the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Symphonies, *Concertos No. 4 and No. 5* for Piano, a *Concerto for violin* and the *Triple Concerto for violin, cello and piano*, the *Choral Fantasy*, the overtures *Leonore*, *Coriolan* and *Egmont*, sonatas for violin and piano, arias, the Mass in C major, and the opera *Fidelio*. Analyzing the thematic registers, it would be incorrect to subsume all of Beethoven's great compositions from this prolific decade to the heroic ideal. The polymorphism of the composition, thematic and stylistic diversity are realities that are equally obvious as the dominance of the aforementioned ideal in his personal life and in some of his works. The correct formula of this ideal, as Professor R. Greenberg attempts to convince us, is not mimetic, but achieved through processes of crystallization and permanent forging over his own life. Among other arguments is the fact that the *Third Symphony*, which was originally inspired by the figure of Napoleon and had, in a working version, the title *Bonaparte*, eventually became the musical narrative of a very strong hero-character created

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<sup>55</sup> "More important than Napoleon was the image of the mythic hero, Prometheus, a symbol of resistance against arbitrary authority, and, by extension, of the plight of the unappreciated artist," Robert Greenberg, *The Symphonies of Beethoven*, part II, The Teaching Company, 1998, p. 6.



by Beethoven, namely himself. Instead of a narrative apology of political inspiration, the symphony is a musical alchemy through which we witness the crystallization of the Hero as a musical figure.

To understand the temporary fascination that Napoleon exerted on Beethoven, we must first acknowledge that the former had become, very quickly after coming to power in France, in 1799, an ideal among young reformers throughout Europe, in a period in which, 10 years after the outbreak of the French Revolution (which rose against the monarchy, against the inherited privileges of the aristocracy, dominant in the state bureaucracy), he had endeavored to impose a new ideal of personality, predicated on the individual and on personal merit, as well as a new class – the middle class or the bourgeoisie. Napoleon's popularity among the masses, the intellectuals, the artists and the philosophers of the European nations with which France was in conflict may be explained not so much through his military merits, which had produced disastrous effects in Spain, England, Russia, Austria-Hungary and Germany, as through the ideal he embodied and the impetus he gave reformist ambitions. While Goethe held his bust in his study, Hegel considered him the incarnation of the absolute Spirit of the time, and poets and artists from all over Europe included him in their works, Beethoven also found biographical similarities that contributed to incorporating him within a personal myth. Napoleon was not descended from a family of noble extraction. He was a Corsican, that is, a stranger among the French, a soldier who, through ambition, talent and personal skills, managed to seize power in France and transform it radically, by turning it into the strongest power of Europe in just a few years. In short, this was a hero who had built his destiny through his own forces. These elements could be used, and for a while they were indeed used by Beethoven as corresponding to his own situation: he was not descended from the Viennese aristocracy, he was a foreigner who had come from the Rhine among the Viennese, he was a musician with serious hearing problems among other artists and musicians who were normal

from this point of view, and the style of classical music had to be surpassed through a new revolutionary musical form, just like the old regime in France had been dismantled. Simply put, Beethoven envisaged himself as a Napoleon of music and he fancied himself as a hero with the same merits and the same power to change the forms of his artistic world as Bonaparte was doing politically and militarily. He had hoped, at least at the beginning of the new European leader's political career, that Napoleon would set up a power that inspired by Plato's *Republic*,<sup>56</sup> which for Beethoven had the prestige of a sacred writing.

For a short while, Beethoven was even haunted by the desire to move to France, to Paris, which had become the center of the new Napoleonic, reformist Europe. He was interested in Paris music and was courteous towards influential figures such as Rodolphe Kreutzer and Louis Adam, for whom he composed the Sonata for Violin and Piano in A major, Op. 47, known as the *Kreutzer Sonata*. Lest there be any doubt about his appreciation, Beethoven mentioned them in the dedication as the best violin and piano artists in Paris. The message of liberation from tyranny, disseminated by the French Revolution, so impressively summed up in music by Hector Berlioz through *La Marseillaise*, became a theme in Beethoven's opera *Fidelio*, but was now applied to interpersonal, not to social-political relations. However, the precipitation of Napoleon's disappointing political moves led Beethoven to change the name of the *Third Symphony* from *Bonaparte* to *Eroica*, and to give up the thought of leaving for Paris. Among the events that revolted him were Napoleon self-

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<sup>56</sup> "In his political sentiments, Beethoven was a republican: the spirit of independence natural to a genuine artist gave him a decided bias that way. Plato's Republic was transfused into his flesh and blood, and upon the principles of that philosopher he reviewed all the constitutions in the world. He wished all institutions to be modeled upon, the plan prescribed by Plato. He lived in the firm belief that Napoleon entertained no other design than to republicanize France upon similar principles; and thus, as he conceived, a beginning would be made for the general happiness of the world. Hence his respect and enthusiasm for Napoleon," Anton Schindler, *The Life of Beethoven*, Boston, Oliver Ditson Company, 1900, p. 35.

appointment as *emperor* in 1803 and his attacks against Austria in 1805. According to the testimony of Ferdinand Ries, Beethoven predicted that the new French emperor would become a tyrant, as soon as he learned of his emphatic title. At stake was the same process of apotheosis, known from history, whereby all tyrants sought to pass as the offspring and equals of the gods. There was only one step before Napoleon would consider himself a god, as his military model Alexander III of Macedon had done two millennia before. Given Beethoven's fundamental contempt for authority figures, his anger and outrage against the French hero were understandable, proportionally in tension with his outburst of admiration for Napoleon only a few years before. As such, the protagonist of Beethoven's strongest heroic composition was, in reality, not the martial French emperor. Professor Greenberg leaves no doubt in this regard: "To the often-asked question of whether Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 is about Napoleon, the answer is: of course not. Napoleon was but the catalyst for Beethoven's emotional and compositional rebirth of 1804, much as Karl and Joanna would act as the catalysts for Beethoven's rebirth in 1819-1820."<sup>57</sup>

Sill, in terms of the theme and the technique of musical composition, something of Napoleon's profile is indeed adopted in the symphony. The theme actually creates a majestic character, triumphant, on the one hand, but destructive and self-destructive on the other, articulated in the musical register through the majestic opening in E-flat major imposed by the cello, with its baritone-like sonority, molded in grave accents also through the rhythmic distortions and tonal ambiguities that the theme evolves into, switching to G minor shortly after the opening in C. This C is actually an interval of distortion and ambiguity that suggests harmonic chaos, disruption, danger and darkness. In psychoanalytic terms, we may see here Beethoven plunging, through the character he portrays, into the abyss of the subconscious. From the very beginning of the symphony, his hero has a demonic and menacing tension,

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<sup>57</sup> Robert Greenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

which is revealed alongside his force, illumined by his and serving as the balance thereof. We are not aware whether Greenberg used the term *Faustian*, but we think it would be appropriate for the Beethovenian hero. This is a term derived from the well-known myth of Goethe, itself a reworking of the older Doctor Faustus. Essentially, the *Faustian* represents a characteristic of Germanic culture animated by the will of the Absolute, which differs radically from the faith or religious cult of the Absolute. Faust wants to win the Absolute and immortality, not to receive them as a reward from God. Beethoven's hero, who is, ultimately, the Beethoven-hero, wants to dominate his illness, to overcome the classical canon and triumph over destiny.

With its nearly 700 measures, the first part of the *Third Symphony* alone occupies the area of an entire four-part symphony after the Haydn-Mozart model. At the premiere, the duration of its interpretation was approximately one hour, twice the time that the Viennese public was accustomed to in the classical canon. With its complex structure, the composition comprised the rise and fall of the heroic character, his highs and lows, his contradictions and contortions, but also much irony, moments of exultation, buffoonery, anger and other sentiments that normally only found their place in dramatic performances. In fact, the complexity, difficulty and dramatic force of the symphony confused the Viennese listeners and even the music critics. Again, Beethoven had come with a new concept of symphonic composition, which included dramatic situations<sup>58</sup> expressed with settings and characters that

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<sup>58</sup> In composing the dramatic elements of the symphony, Beethoven used the script, the symbolism and the narrative music from the ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*, composed in 1801. Again, this is proof that Beethoven's artistic heroism did not have any modest ambition of glorifying the historical figure of Napoleon, but gained mythological overtones, and this became his personal myth: "The dramatic and symbolic elements of Beethoven's 'Prometheus' ballet □ struggle, death, rebirth and apotheosis □ become the essential dramatic elements of the third symphony," R. Greenberg, *The Symphonies of Beethoven*, part II, pp. 6-7.

mimicked the opera.<sup>59</sup> Rhythm, rhythmic changes and distortions had Beethoven as high a value in composition as the theme and its developments through motifs and tonalities and thematic movement itself was the equivalent of situation changes in dramatic pieces. Theme, rhythm and movement represent the basic technical elements through which Beethoven's musical narrative was made. This confusing stylistic option, incomprehensible to the contemporaries, had its explanation in what might be called the new aesthetic creed that the composer had embraced after overcoming the Heiligenstadt crisis and through the labor of forging his heroic ideal. The elements of this belief are simple, but profoundly innovative. The *first* is that instrumental music must be, in itself, dramatic, expressing the tensions, conflicts, contrasts and significant experiences at the level of human experience, in its various manifestations, ranging from the sublime to the abysmal. The *second* element of the creed says that instrumental music should be self-expressive, highlighting the individuality of the creator. A magisterial application of this creed is the *Third Symphony*, a revolutionary masterpiece.<sup>60</sup> While Beethoven's symphonies from the Third to the Eighth can be said to be profoundly narrative compositions, in which we may find the most relevant aspects of his vision and sentiment after his second musical rebirth, the *Third Symphony* can be seen as a saga, as a hymn to the Hero figure, whose reflexes are also found in the Fifth Symphony and, through episodic disseminations, in various other works of the same period. This aspect

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<sup>59</sup> "Beethoven's Third is an instrumental work of operatic proportions, operatic expressive content, and dramatic, opera-like contrasts and conflicts. Beethoven had, before its composition, been thinking operatically," R. Greenberg, *Great Masters: Beethoven, His Life and Music*, p. 28.

<sup>60</sup> "Beethoven's Third ... changed the history of Western music. It also marks Beethoven's musical rebirth and reinvention of himself, once again, in the face of terrific emotional and physical upheaval. In the Third Symphony, Beethoven found a compositional voice, an expressive temper, that allowed him to tap into his innermost emotions, his deepest fears, his longings, and his hopes," *idem*, p. 28.

legitimizes in fact the reference to the entire period between 1803 and 1815 as the *heroic cycle*.

## 7. Beyond good and evil

Because heroism is a personal complex, not just an aesthetic element, it also brought about a grim phase in Beethoven's life. Before seeing the consequences, we will try to see and describe the context of the period 1815-1826 and the composer's behavior toward his nephew Karl and Karl's mother, Johanna, immediately after the death, in November 1815, of Beethoven's brother, Casper Carl, who had suffered from consumption, just like their mother. To have a framework for understanding his "heroic" behavior, it is necessary first to unravel the ambiguities and complexities of his personal myth. According to all the data obtained so far, also with support from Beethoven's biographers, it is clear that his heroism is a personal complex, predicated on a personal myth. When an individual charts his life along the currents inspired by mythology, even a personal one, the result may be an amoral behavior, situated "beyond good and evil." I have chosen the phrase felicitously formulated by Friedrich Nietzsche because I find it to be utterly defining for Beethoven. To my understanding, both Maynard Solomon and R. Greenberg describe the composer's behavior in this circumstance in moral terms and, based on this, they draw some conclusions that are clinical in nature, using the theories of psychoanalysis with, perhaps, insufficient ability. In other words, Beethoven is observed, described and judged strictly in terms of an external criterion – what he did; references to the heroic matrix within which his psyche operated are shifted into the background or even omitted, even though this matrix generated unusual behaviors, unjustifiable by the rules of ethics, common sense or normality. Our goal is not to obtain evidence that Beethoven was in a serious clinical phase, that his mental and behavioral disorders drove him to commit reckless gestures, but to grasp, in an intelligible matrix, his very personal state, the state of his entire being as it manifested itself at that time.

Let us see the facts first. Carl Casper, Beethoven's brother, had married Johanna Reiss in May 1806, a situation that the composer had, of course, not agreed upon. Despite his overt disagreement with the idea of this relationship, Carl Casper's young wife gave birth to a boy only three months after the marriage, a reason for Ludwig to express his dissatisfaction through critical glances and malicious nose grimaces. Deep down, he had yet another excuse to believe that Johanna was not suited to be his brother's wife, just like, for one reason or another, no woman would have. His possessiveness over his brothers had grown after the death of their parents, often reaching unreasonable levels. Probably in adolescence, when he had assumed providing for the daily life of the family, Ludwig van Beethoven had formed the belief that his brothers were given into his care for good and that he had to protect and guide them, as well as to prescribe their lives to some extent. However, once his brothers had become grownups, they rightly considered themselves masters of their own lives and refused to accept their elder brother's permanent, tutelary interference in their decisions. Between Ludwig, who completely overlapped, at the psycho-affective level, by the figure of *the elder brother*, and his brothers, there smoldered a potential conflict, fueled by the possessiveness and authoritarianism of his attitude, which also had acute phases and which, in reality, never subsided.

Carl Casper's mistrust in his older brother's character is attested by his desire, expressed in an explicit codicil drawn up before his death, that his 9-year-old son, Karl, should remain in the custody of his mother, Johanna, and not of Ludwig, his uncle. In his sovereign insolence, immediately after the death of his brother, Ludwig violated Carl's testamentary desire, claiming that he was the sole guardian of the child, his nephew Karl. Within a month of his brother's death, Beethoven submitted a petition to the imperial (*Landrecht*) and royal service of Lower Austria, as well as to the Civil Court in an Vienna (*Magistrat der Stadt Wien*), requesting sole custody of his nephew Karl. Thanks to the



reputation he enjoyed also thanks to the interventions of his influential friends in Vienna, on January 9, 1816, Beethoven obtained sole custody of his nephew from the *Landrecht* of Lower Austria, as he had requested. An infamous victory, with disastrous consequences, as it would turn out, for his nephew, for himself and for Karl's mother, Johanna.

Following the right obtained by Ludwig, on February 2, 1816, the nine-year-old boy was snatched in tears from his desperate and hysterical mother, who was trying to keep his son with her, and placed in a private school for boys called Cajetan Giannattasio Del Rio. It appears that the desperation of the child and his mother did not impress Beethoven at all, as long as he could have his way. He had no doubt that his will and the reasons that animated him were the best and worth following. The triumph of his will was above the small private tragedies that he caused in the lives of others, his family, after all. His sister-in-law, Johanna, was not the type of person who would give up easily, especially since this was her own son, literally kidnapped from her through suspicious machinations. The infamous treatment that Ludwig gave his sister-in-law remains a mystery and is difficult to explain, psychoanalysis contributing with only a vague explanation to unraveling it. Beethoven's stubbornness, hostility and frustration could be, in a Freudian interpretation, only false forms of his attraction towards and repressed passion for Johanna. The hypothesis is taken into account, but psychoanalysis can only produce some plausible scenarios, some emotional-behavioral fictions, which may be descriptive but not explanatory, when applied to concrete circumstances. If a rigorous psychiatric diagnosis were issued in his case, Beethoven would probably have been considered fallible if not downright ill, at least in terms of his confusion between fantasy and reality.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> "The consensus of psychological scholars is that Beethoven truly believed that he was rescuing Karl from an unfit mother. Almost from the beginning, however, issues that went far beyond mere custody of Karl seemed to be driving Beethoven's actions. A number of delusions emerged that suggest that Beethoven was beginning to

Examples illustrating this confusion of levels exist and they do not do honor to the composer. Among them we can mention a few. Although his brother Carl Casper suffered from consumption, a disease that had afflicted their mother for a long time, causing her demise, an ailment without a cure at that time, Beethoven still indulged in allegations, without any basis, that Johanna had poisoned his brother. It took the refutation issued by the doctor who had provided medical care to Casper to free his mind from the fantasy of poisoning. However, his suspicions against his sister-in-law did not vanish. By February 1816, shortly after his nephew Karl had been taken away from his mother, Beethoven had begun to suspect that Johanna had been bribing his valet to acquire information and advantages from him that were not directly related to her son; in other words, that she had been spying on him. On top of this, also without any basis in reality, he started to claim that Johanna, his sister-in-law, was a prostitute. Regardless of their bearing on reality, all these elements – which would have really represented a big problem had they been true – were sufficient grounds for Beethoven to believe that, again, a *hero* was needed to rescue Karl from the entourage of his “denatured” mother. Who else could be the hero, but himself? He had again the stakes, the energy and the fervor of a high cause,<sup>62</sup> at least according to his own perception and his own phantasmal universe.

Beethoven’s delusion went so far as to claim that he was Karl’s father. This claim discloses, in the opinion of Professor Greenberg, who resorts to Freudian interpretations, a concealed and hardly controlled erotic desire for Beethoven’s sister-in-law. By claiming that

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have trouble distinguishing fantasy from reality,” R. Greenberg, *Great Masters: Beethoven, His Life and Music*, p. 16.

<sup>62</sup> “By 1816, Beethoven had come to regard his ‘rescue’ of Karl as heroic, divinely authorized mission. Certainly by 1816 Beethoven the composer had exhausted his symbolic exploration of heroism; the single, childless, almost-deaf, forty-six-year-old Beethoven was now creating and enacting a bizarre ‘heroic’ drama in an attempt to conquer his deepest fears and existential loneliness,” R. Greenberg, *idem*, p. 16.

Karl was his son, he also implied that he had been involved in intimate relations with Johanna, unless he deemed himself to be divine or attributed Karl's mother the immaculate conception – both of these situations being blasphemous. Even if this was not true, the fact had great symbolic depth. This could provide the key to understanding his aggressiveness and irrational behavior towards his sister-in-law. The stronger was his desire and erotic obsession, the more vehement his attacks were, as he sought to put a distance between them, to drive her away. In fact, the energy of his anger and the vehemence of his hostility were nothing but masks of his attraction and erotic obsession. By enacting the terrible show of Johanna's banishment, Beethoven in reality punished himself for his attraction to her. This Freudian interpretation may not express a verifiable categorical truth, but, frankly, human behavior is an object of interpretation and signification rather than an object of clear investigation. As long into everything we do is embroiled with the subconscious and the entire pulsional universe, it would be naive to demand ultimate truths about ourselves. In the case of Beethoven, while the psychoanalytic track is not completely haphazard, it delves again on a version of the Oedipus complex, conveyed through Beethoven's possessiveness over his nephew and his incestuous attraction to his sister-in-law, Johanna.

After obtaining custody, Beethoven was not the ideal parent for Karl. At times, indeed, he proved to be a good and thoughtful uncle, but at other times he was careless, impatient, and even severely punished the boy. Johanna never gave up the thought of getting her son back. Sometimes, because she really missed him, she dressed up like a man and went to the school where he studied, so that she could meet him on the playground during recess or in some hidden place. She submitted several petitions to the imperial and royal service (*Landrecht*), which had granted Beethoven custody, requesting a review of the decision, but in vain. In 1818 she received an encouraging sign from his son. He had fled from school on December 3 and run away to his mother, to whom he revealed his dissatisfaction with the

treatment administered by his uncle. Johanna decided not to leave things as they were, especially since the police had promptly showed up and removed her child from home again. Now, however, she hired a very good lawyer and organized the petition much more systematically than before. This time evidence about Beethoven was also brought before the court, namely that he had maltreated his nephew and that he was not, as he had often claimed or suggested, the bastard of King Frederick the Great, but the son of a mediocre alcoholic musician from Bonn, named Johann van Beethoven. In light of these revelations, the *Landrecht* decided to remand the case to a civil court, which, for Johanna, meant fighting on a ground where the composer no longer benefited from the support of his noble friends. The fact that his humble family origin had been disclosed, that he had lost the image privileges of his alleged royal origins and that the trial would be held in a civil court deeply affected Beethoven. To this was added the fact that his other brother, Nikolaus Johann, had joined Johanna in her attempt to regain custody of her son.

On September 17, 1819, the civil court magistrate granted guardianship of Karl to his mother. But the dispute would not end there. Beethoven was not willing to give up. His will was above the law. In fact, as we will argue a little below, his personal will was the law. He used his relations in high places, Archduke Rudolph Johann Joseph and Archduke Reiner Ludwig, both members of the imperial family, intervening with the court in his support. Following these interventions, on April 8, 1820, the court changed its previous decision, offering Beethoven guardianship of the boy. To escape Johanna's insistent petitions, in July 1820 all the court declared the case closed. Again, Beethoven had the satisfaction of a sad victory. He had won, but at the cost of destroying others. Johanna, hopeless, relinquished the thought that something could still be done to regain the boy and remarried. Shortly afterwards, she gave birth to a girl whom, ironically somehow, she gave the name of her detested brother-in-law, Ludovica.

In Beethoven's case, we can notice a strange, ambiguous phenomenon, which is nonetheless very characteristic of human behavior – *repeatedly falling into a trap you wish to avoid, fueling the attraction force of a damnable phenomenon through the very desire to escape it*. This fact demonstrates that, within certain limits, what a person becomes is not necessarily the consequence of his aspirations, plans and conscious will, but is sometimes the very result of the pulsional effluvia of his unconscious personality, where anxieties, fears and complexes have the capacity to magnetically coagulate emotions around them and to crystallize and behaviors. Only in this way could one understand why *a person becomes the exact opposite of what he desires and why he comes to embody an ideal that he is convinced he has always struggled to discard*. Driven by this unpredictable current of the mechanisms of life, Beethoven becomes an authority figure, abusive and sometimes ferocious towards his nephew Karl, that is, exactly what his father had been in relation to him and what he had most hated and condemned throughout his childhood and youth. A strange metamorphosis.

Throughout his becoming, the father figure gradually insinuated itself into Beethoven's character, who ended up being converted and internalizing his parent's personality. This was the *revenge of the dead* from the Oedipus complex. In other words, the detested father who had been slain, albeit symbolically, imperceptibly conquered his son's soul, imposing his features upon him. *Released through death, the father's character sought shelter in the son's personality*, which he continuously and discreetly molded, until it complied with his own features. If we wish to use the terminology of psychoanalysis, the murdered father – the Superego – was buried in the son's subconscious, whence it was resurrected over a while as the murderous son's character, fashioning a *self-as-another* for the latter. In short, in Beethoven's relationship with Karl, the composer adopted his father's role and attitude, without being aware of it and without being able to control this process. Once again, from beyond life, his father had administered him a blow, placing his own mask over

the son's face and his own character into the latter's personality. What more repulsive game of fate could have Beethoven have "indulged" in during his old age than to see himself as the incarnation of his father's ghost? Perhaps at moments when he became aware of the metamorphosis of his character, all the hatred he had accumulated over a lifetime towards his father burst out, with ruthless force, into self-hatred. Having been won decades ago, the battle with the living father was lost now, when Johann was a pure ghost of the past, an element of memory. Interestingly, the memory of the trauma, anxieties and complexes acted like a subconscious mechanism in articulating his personality, which transformed itself ceaselessly over the course of his life, just like the body perpetually does. The father's ghost had scored a grim triumph, and Beethoven's nephew Karl had to suffer most because of this.

The more Beethoven's authority was more oppressive and uncontrolled, the more virulent were the forms of the conflicts with Karl. As he aged, the nephew gained strength and opposed more categorically the demands of his uncle. By 1824, when Karl was already 18, Beethoven had developed an idiosyncratic concern that his nephew might engage in "relations" with women and that he would thus be exposed to the danger of contracting syphilis. In order to have him under constant surveillance, Beethoven hired a sort of detective who always followed in the footsteps of Karl. Real or imagined, those relationships generated such terrible strife between the two that the landlady, tired of their endless circus, simply asked them to leave the property. Not ready to admit his fault in their conflicting relationship, Beethoven again found it appropriate to lay the blame on Johanna. Thus, tormented by the image of his sister-in-law, whose demoniacal attributes he had striven to maintain, reproached Karl that he had been stealthily meeting with her and that this was the real cause of the conflicts between them. An untrue explanation, but Beethoven would not have admitted this for the world, overwhelmed as he was by the conviction that he was the supreme authority and the ultimate judge. Rather than admit some fault and wisely temper

down his conduct, he always preferred to push things further, failing to sense the fragility of the characters he was confronted with or the real risks of his aggressiveness. It took the suicide attempt of his nephew Karl in August 1826 to reveal to him the sinister circumstances he had created. Fed up with the nightmare in which he had been living for ten years, Karl pawned his watch, bought two guns and went into the mountains to kill himself, leaving an explanatory letter to his good friend, Joseph Niemetz. Fortunately, in his clumsiness, Karl had insufficiently loaded his gun and favorably miscalculated the angle of the pipe from the head, so in attempting to shoot himself he got only a mild bruising of the scalp. A passer-by through the area who offered to help him in that situation was asked by Karl to drive him home to his mother Johanna. Thus was enacted the last sad scene of his relationship with his “heroic” uncle, the brilliant composer Ludwig van Beethoven.

In the light of the above-mentioned perspective, of the *heroic complex*, I believe Beethoven had reached an amoral behavior, positioning himself *beyond good and evil*, like the Overman whom Nietzsche was to discuss a little later. That means that he defined his own values, guiding himself by them and severing himself from the ethical and behavioral conventions of society. In short, he was his own rule and measure. In support of our analysis plan and, implicitly, of the perspective in which we are placing Beethoven, comes the German philosopher himself, who illustrated his theory of the higher man by reference to personalities such as Goethe and Beethoven, among others: “Nietzsche provides several examples in his writings of those he regards unequivocally as ‘higher men’: Goethe, Beethoven, and (perhaps most importantly) Nietzsche himself.”<sup>63</sup> By far, the largest number of Nietzsche’s references to personalities who embodied his ideal of a higher man are focused on Goethe (135 references), but Beethoven’s name is also mentioned, about 27 times, in the

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<sup>63</sup> Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche, on Morality*, Routledge, 2002, p. 115.

same category. The qualities, behavior, attitude and style of this type, as presented by Nietzsche, will help us liberate Beethoven, to some extent, from the stigmata hastily appended to him by scholars specializing in ethics, psychoanalysis or psychiatry, after the series of his gestures with disastrous consequences for his family, but ultimately also for his personal life. The intention here is not to make excuses for Beethoven or to exonerate him, because that is the purpose of a comprehensive analysis, but to shed light, to the extent possible, on his psycho-mental matrix and the personality structure that guided his values, decisions and gestures. Understanding his psycho-mental form and the mechanisms coordinating his attitude in those situations will allow us to place him in the Nietzschean typology, that is, in an amoral grid, in a horizon of understanding untainted by the prejudices, judgments or conventions of social ethics.

Of course, ethical conventions are basic elements in the organization of social life, without which the existence of groups would be impossible, given the corrupt state of human nature and its conflicting dispositions. However, not everything is social in human behavior and not everything is inferable through a socially assumed ethical grid. In any case, the formation of the creative, artistic personality model does not have an ethical basis and the birth of works of art has nothing to do directly with the artist's moral assumptions. To understand Nietzsche's analysis of the higher human type, it is first necessary to accept his dissociation between higher and lower, on the basis of which he articulates the two types of morality: slave morality and master morality. We are not concerned here with his arguments for such a trenchant dichotomy, pushed sometimes to disagreement and dispute, or with his applications to or illustrations on various social and ethnic groups. The idea that helps us at this point in the analysis is that there is no single ethics, binding or valid for all the individuals, characters or persons included within the social body, because individuals are different structurally, mentally, as well as in terms of their skills, dispositions, talents,



qualities, intelligence, will, etc. The drive to impose a single ethics to all individuals may be useful and effective at the socio-political level, but it is detrimental to the formation of a creative personality. According to Nietzsche, there is a fundamental difference between weak individuals, with servile inclinations and a subservient morality, on the one hand and, on the other hand, strong individuals, with the will of masters and the ethics of sovereigns. A genuine artist, the higher man belongs to this second category, because the strongest element of his personality is the autonomy of his creative will and the ability to reconfigure the system of artistic values in keeping with his vision. Simply put, the artist is the master of the artistic universe he produces, the supreme authority that imposes the value and expressiveness of an artwork.

The higher man could be recognized by several features, formulated by Brian Leiter in his study on Nietzsche as follows:

1. “The higher type is solitary and deals with others only instrumentally.”<sup>64</sup> In *Ecce Homo*, the German philosopher believes that this type of man is always in “his own company,” regardless of his entourage, whether it includes other people, landscapes or books. His condition of solitude indicates a certain equipoise within himself, a certain focus upon himself, as well as a reference to himself as the measure of all things, beyond any merit or reproach. His own projects, his own path or, indeed, his creative destiny represent his sole horizon of interest, his unique target and last measure. His responsibility is decided strictly in correlation with those personal creative projects. There is a certain nobility in this capacity to

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<sup>64</sup> “A man who strives after great things, looks upon every one whom he encounters on his way either as a means of advance, or a delay and hindrance—or as a temporary resting-place,” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, English ed., aphorism 273. Also, with regard to the instrumental relations with others, the German philosopher writes in fragment 962 of *The Will to Power*: “A great man... wants no ‘sympathetic’ heart, but servants, tools; in his intercourse with men he is always intent on making something out of them.”

support oneself and to live with oneself, a state that includes the power to be different from the others, regardless of their own measures and criteria, detached from the primary instinct of association. An inevitable consequence of this attitude is the lack of public communication, which, in Nietzsche's opinion, is not a major problem. According to him, the higher man finds the desire to be liked by and familiar with the others to be devoid of good taste and ordinary.

2. "The higher type seeks burdens and responsibilities, as he is driven towards the completion of a unifying project." The responsibilities he assumes are *heavy*, to use an expression of Nietzsche's from *The Will to Power* (fragment 944), and the one who magnificently illustrates self-burdening with colossal tasks is Goethe. This type evinces a unique ability to carry out projects across vast areas of life, according to a systematic plan that has its own internal logic, which excludes whimsical and aleatory elements, as well as indulgence in frivolous matters. This power of systematizing one's will, talent and actions throughout a lifetime means, according to Nietzsche, having *style* and *character*. Also, this good arrangement of the creative personality indicates a *healthy* being. It is important to understand these occurrences with which Nietzsche operates, especially since, from a medical standpoint, he was a person with serious diseases, affecting him both physically and, at the end of his life, mentally.

3. "The higher type is essentially healthy and resilient." He seeks the company of favorable people and situations, which are good for him, but avoids those detrimental to him, attempting to convert accidents into situations that are advantageous for him. Even when it comes to illness or suffering, the higher man turns it into an opportunity and an incentive serving his purpose: "For a typical healthy person being sick can even become an energetic

stimulus for life, for living more.”<sup>65</sup> In this sense, the Higher Man cannot be a pessimist – here Nietzsche disagrees with his master, Schopenhauer, whom he appreciated more than any other German thinker – but must be utterly effusive and trustful, despite all the hindrances that may arise in life.

4. “The higher type affirms life, meaning that he is prepared to will the eternal return of his life.” We have here a different version of the myth of eternal return than in the cosmological version, which Nietzsche applied in formulating his vision upon the substance, organization and time of the world. This time, at stake is a vision of personal life, conceived in a Dionysian formula, derived from the vitalist aesthetics he formulated in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*. The essence of the Dionysian attitude is the total and continuous affirmation of life in all its aspects, as well as the projection in time of the force and energy of life as uninterrupted bliss. We should understand that this vitalist bliss has nothing to do with happiness, self-complacency or comfort – which represent quotidian, conventional measures of the positive state of life. Vitalist Dionysian ecstasy does not exclude; on the contrary, it includes and assumes the sufferings, difficulties, limits and even the tragedies of life, all of which are encapsulated in the broad concept of necessity. If all that happens in a lifetime is necessary, determined by fatality, then the only valid ethical principle is *amor fati*, the love of everything that pertains to necessity. This is the most generous and comprehensive possible assumption of human life, as a circumstance that might reproduce itself indefinitely,<sup>66</sup> under identical conditions. Personally, Nietzsche acknowledges this attitude on his part and his orientation in relation to destiny, in keeping with the aforementioned principle: “*amor fati*

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<sup>65</sup> Brian Leiter, *idem*, p. 119.

<sup>66</sup> “Higher men, then, are marked by a distinctive Dionysian attitude toward their life: they would gladly will the repetition of their life eternally,” Brian Leiter, *idem*, p. 120.

describes my innermost nature” (*Ecce Homo*). Again, permeated by awe, Nietzsche considers that Goethe embodies most relevantly this moral principle.

5. “The higher man has a distinctive bearing toward others and especially toward himself: he has self-reverence.” This Nietzschean principle is certainly surprising and it may generate false understandings. It may be, for example, mistaken for selfishness or narcissism, and the semantic interferences of the terms are so steep that it is difficult to dissociate their areas in a rigorous way. In the Nietzschean sense, self-reverence is a quasi-religious attitude, a form of faith,<sup>67</sup> which makes things even more complicated, because we are accustomed to thinking that faith is always a relationship oriented towards the Other, towards gods or God. In *Beyond Good and Evil* (287), the German philosopher writes the following about the noble or higher man: “It is not the works, but the belief which is here decisive and determines the order of rank—to employ once more an old religious formula with a new and deeper meaning—it is some fundamental certainty which a noble soul has about itself, something which is not to be sought, is not to be found, and perhaps, also, is not to be lost. The noble soul has reverence for itself.” That does not mean, however, either a hedonistic effusion in relation to oneself or the impassioned adulation of personal idols obtained through sublimation. Rather, Nietzsche argues, reverence for oneself entails a certain exigency, sometimes even severity towards one’s own life, guided by the overtowering principle of personal perfection. According to the characterization provided by the philosopher, such a

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<sup>67</sup> “The passion that attacks those who are noble is peculiar. . . It involves the use of a rare and singular standard cold to everybody else; the discovery of values for which no scales have been invented yet; offering sacrifices on altars that are dedicated to an unknown god; a courage without any desire for honors; self-sufficiency that overflows and gives to men and things,” (*The Gay Science*, English ed., 55).

noble soul has something of the discipline<sup>68</sup> of a spiritual master, combined with that of a knight-soldier. Ascetic self-control, the rigorous projection and pursuit of his high goals enables this higher man to set his values, criteria and cultural-moral assets over long periods of time, even millennia, Nietzsche believes. The spiritual-moral profile of that noble soul corresponds with all the great creators and artists, including Beethoven,<sup>69</sup> as well as to the image that Nietzsche had about himself. Maynard Solomon also considered that the profile of the noble man squared perfectly with Beethoven, whom he described as “possessed” by the conviction of his own mission and artistic vocation, to which he had subsumed everything else in life, sometimes even the people who were close to him. In a letter to Zmeskall, Beethoven had written: “I refuse to hear anything about your whole moral outlook. Power is the moral principle of those who excel others, and it is also mine.”<sup>70</sup>

What is very interesting and fully characteristic of his nature and personality is a testimony from 1801, in which Beethoven referred to some friends of his in terms of *instruments* he played when he so desired (“instruments on which to play when I feel inclined”) and which were useful to him only in terms of what they could do for him, not through what they were (“I value them merely for what they do for me”).<sup>71</sup> In this respect,

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<sup>68</sup> “The noble human being honors himself as one who is powerful, also as one who has power over himself, who knows how to speak and be silent, who delights in being severe and hard with himself and respects all severity and hardness” (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 260).

<sup>69</sup> “Considered all together, it becomes clear why creative geniuses like Goethe, Beethoven, and Nietzsche himself should be the preferred examples of the higher human being: for the characteristics of the higher type are precisely those that lend themselves to *artistic* and *creative* work. A penchant for solitude, an absolute devotion to one’s tasks, an indifference to external opinion, a fundamental certainty about oneself and one’s values (that often strikes others as hubris) – all these are the traits we find, again and again, in artistic geniuses,” Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche, on Morality*, Routledge, 2002, p. 122.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Brian Leiter, *idem*, p. 98.

<sup>71</sup> *Idem*, p. 122.

Beethoven's life appears to have been somewhat more coherent. Indeed, his social relations had already entered into his artistic, musical system of conceiving and valorizing life. Everything in his life was music and interpretation, and his various acquaintances, the people to whom he was connected in one way or another occupied a place in the great orchestra that social life represented for him, an orchestra that he, in his own way, compelled to play his own music. Professor Greenberg's statement that the piano was the instrument through which Beethoven saw and composed music is also true, but at another level, not just metaphorically, since *the Viennese society was the social instrument of his musical destiny or, in short, his orchestra*. Among other things, this approach to himself and to others helped Beethoven overcome the handicap of his hearing loss, using the energy of frustration and revolt for new forms of creation.<sup>72</sup> After all this was the very meaning that the composer gave heroism.

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<sup>72</sup> "Beethoven displayed a resilience to match these other traits; the 'several years of considerable anguish' (when, among other things, he began to lose his hearing) were also 'years of extremely high productivity and creative accomplishment'; indeed, Beethoven's biographer suspects that 'the former may have been a necessary precondition of the latter' and finally concludes that, 'All of Beethoven's defeats were, ultimately, turned into victories.' This is, in a nutshell, Nietzsche's very notion of the 'health' that is so distinctive of the higher human being," *idem*, p. 123.

## 8. Unhappy love

If we want to pull the curtain of discretion aside and look in the direction of the “mysteries” of Beethoven’s heart, we should first be sure that the object sought can be seen with the naked eye and properly understood. However, given the distance of over two centuries that separates us from the situation under discussion, it is clear that a direct look is inaccessible. Consequently, an archaeological perspective will be required at first, in order to discover the facts, the gestures and the events; then, analytical acumen will be necessary for their interpretation. Since the subject here is the style, the relief and the forms of the composer’s love, we will have to be content with the few testimonies remaining from him, with writings of his contemporaries and data taken from the biographies written during this long period of time. In other words, we will be content to cast indirect, furtive or, sometimes, tangential glances in our attempt to weave from images, mirages and shadows the thread of his love story, which ended, in typical Beethovenian manner, with a dramatic episode. It looks as if nothing good in his life could not lead to anything but a new disaster, nothing pleasant or happy could last, with mild echoes of tenderness and comfort, over the years, as it happens to many others in similar situations. Still, dramas also have their place in the broader register of destiny, as indicators of the fact that Beethoven had not embarked on a common existential journey. He did not have the comfort of a harmonious family, nor did he encounter that sublime love that, to use one of Goethe’s syntagms from *Faust*, would “elevate him the heavens above,” except once, and then his downfall was thunderous and his loss was irredeemable.

It seems that heroic apotheosis feeds on stigmata and the halo of greatness shines at the expense of the suffering incurred. Having experienced, throughout his life, many forms of

pain, misery and suffering, Beethoven was an exemplary romantic hero, who managed to transfigure his life into his oeuvre. If we are not afraid of superlatives, we can write Oeuvre with a capital O, in a manner reminiscent of the alchemists, for whom the point of human existence also resided in achieving enlightenment and immortality by transmuting lead into gold. What else is the transformation of misfortune, illness or suffering into immortal musical works such as Beethoven's symphonies but a most accomplished alchemical process? From the lead of natural life – with its complexes, anxieties, anger, deafness, rivalries, solitude, disease, humiliation, isolation, etc. – to the gold of the Oeuvres: this will have been the convoluted process whereby Beethoven redeemed himself, driven by the same tenacity and visionarism as those of the master alchemists. This explanation has no other claim but to provide a framework for possible analogies between Beethoven's creative process and alchemical processes, since it is evident that Beethoven's ability to transform the shortcomings of his life into works of art helped him save himself and be reborn in the three major musical stages that Robert Greenberg speaks about.

According to the American professor's germane characterization, Beethoven had the knack of falling for unattainable women. The circumstances of this unattainability were very diverse. On the one hand, there was the difference of class, social status, family and origin, as well as the marital status of the partner in question, while on the other hand, there was Beethoven's character, behavior, manners or appearance. According to the same professor, Beethoven, who was short, unattractive, sloppily dressed,<sup>73</sup> sometimes wearing filthy attires, misanthropic, arrogant, ill-mannered, always fell in love with tall women, with blond curly hair, from aristocratic families, who were, on top of that, betrothed or downright married,

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<sup>73</sup> “Although many women were initially attracted to Beethoven, they were quickly turned off by his shabby and uncouth appearance and behavior and his almost complete lack of social graces,” R. Greenberg, *Beethoven, His Life and Music*, ed. cit., p. 3.



always “ideal” options for the onset of a disaster. His physical build, resembling Napoleon’s (whence, probably, his temporary idolatry), placed him in the wretched situation of all attractive woman being taller than him, and as any partner knew, his charm and musical genius could not make up for his height. In its cynical mediocrity, the sentimental option often takes into account height rather than genius, and a few extra centimeters matter more than the opera *Fidelio*. However, in his love effusions, Beethoven expected that the tall blond curly haired women would greet him with rosy cheeks and throbbing hearts, ready to provide him with happiness and companionship until the end of his life. In fact, it most often happened that the reactions were different from, even contrary to his expectations, but the musical genius would not learn a lesson from this. A refusal could well be the prerequisite of a future acceptance – why not? – from one and the same woman or from another. Shortly after his impetuous arrival in the imperial capital, one of the first divas Beethoven fell for head over heels and whom he asked to marry him before even offering her a bouquet of flowers – not to mention that he was not a man of gallant gestures – was the opera singer Magdalena Willmann. At the musician’s hasty request, Magdalena answered with a flawless, cold diagnosis. Driven by rare sincerity that bordered on lack of tact and cruelty, she told Beethoven that he was “ugly and half crazy,”<sup>74</sup> a typical response for a woman of high aristocratic rank with blond curly hair.

Although his family had offered him the example of dysfunctionality and unhappiness, Beethoven longed, throughout his mature period, to make his own family, hoping that it was possible to reach emotional comfort, mutual understanding and support, and conjugal

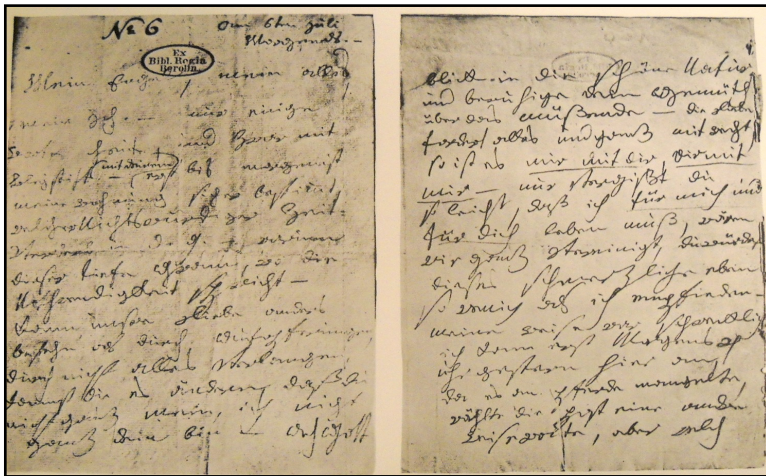
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<sup>74</sup> “His first crush in Vienna was on a singer named Magdalena Willmann. Beethoven was so smitten by Magdalena that he apparently proposed to her one day out of the blue. She rejected Beethoven’s proposal out of hand, telling him, according to biographer Alexander Thayer, that he was ‘ugly and half crazy,’” R. Greenberg, *Beethoven, His Life and Music*, ed. cit., p. 3.

fulfillment. However, he had not yet had the opportunity to prove that he was capable of assuming a relationship to the end, with everything this implied and with all the consequences that family obligations would have on his creativity and art. To some extent, his impaired hearing, which caused his loneliness and isolation from society, leading to anxiety, depression and frustration, also meant that he had developed a more acute need for sentimental companionship. One of feminine companions that he began, in around the year 1810, to cultivate was someone who appeared to be, at first, a very good friend, but who gradually became his beloved. They had met in the composer's house in 1810, when Antonia Brentano accompanied his sister on a visit to Beethoven. A sincere and lasting friendship quickly arose between them.

Who was this woman actually? By her maiden name, Antonia von Bierkenstock was born in a noble family in Vienna in 1780, and at the age of 18 she married a rich banker and merchant named Franz Brentano, fifteen years her senior, together with whom she moved Frankfurt. For Antonia, moving led to a culture shock. Accustomed to the cultivated aristocratic society of Vienna, the imperial center, and with the customs, rituals, events and celebrations specific to the Viennese lifestyle, once she found herself in provincial Frankfurt, she suddenly experienced social discomfort, which, over the course of time, turned into depression. Her strong affective connection with her husband (who was, unfortunately, too busy with his business and absent from home most of the time, sometimes even after dinner) failed to offset the emotional imbalance caused by the new space. Within a few years the family grew with four children, and yet the maternal cares and responsibilities did not prevent Antonia from slipping into depression. Her condition, triggered and sustained by the change of place, was comparable to what in recent cosmopolitan societies is called the "immigrant's depression." She felt foreign, different and out of place, even though, compared with the immigrants, she had the advantage of speaking the same language and having the same

homeland as the Germans from Frankfurt. Every city has its own style, a unique social profile, and Antonia did not like the provincial style of the city by the river Main.



When her father passed away, in 1809, Antonia used the pretext of administering her inheritance to return to Vienna and extend her stay there by a few years. Unconsciously, she emotionally refused to return

back to her family in the abhorred province, and by 1812, when she had to leave Vienna again, her condition was so serious that she had broken almost all social ties, sinking in despair and loneliness.

In the two years since they had make one another’s acquaintance, Beethoven had become her closest friend and one of the few people that she was still seeing during her depression. Their friendship, however, in this atmosphere of anxiety, uncertainty, frustration and unhappiness for both, imperceptibly changed into passion. Things went so far that Antonia behaved like a reckless teenager, ready to leave her husband and children and follow the composer into the turmoil of his romantic passion. On July 3, 1812, in a decisive, tumultuous and pathetic episode of their encounter, Antonia declared herself ready to leave everything behind and become Beethoven’s wife. In the opinion of the renowned biographer Maynard Solomon, this was the first time in Beethoven’s life that he had felt his love was requited and a woman wanted to marry him. More precisely, him too. The American biographer has clarified the identity of the one whom the German composer referred to, in a cycle of letters, as the “Immortal Beloved.” Obviously, this was Antonia Brentano.

On the identity of this immortal beloved historians have, in fact, pronounced themselves for 150 years, a series of candidates having been found – among them, Giulieta Guicciardi, Theresa von Brunswick, Amalia Seebald – because the composer’s love letters do not clarify to whom they were addressed or the date of their composition. It appears that 6 or 7 July 1812 were the most plausible dates, according to Solomon’s thorough investigations. During those days, the two lovers were supposed to meet in Bohemia, an encounter that was meant to be decisive. Beethoven’s letters were composed at Teplitz, the Czech resort where he was staying at the time. But what do the letters reveal, in fact? Let us read them first. Given their documentary importance, I will present them here in full. I have opted again for the English version.

*July 6, in the morning*

*My angel, my all, my very self – Only a few words today and at that with pencil (with yours) – Not till tomorrow will my lodgings be definitely determined upon -what a useless waste of time -Why this deep sorrow when necessity speaks – can our love endure except through sacrifices, through not demanding everything from one another; can you change the fact that you are not wholly mine, I not wholly thine -Oh God, look out into the beauties of nature and comfort your heart with that which must be – Love demands everything and that very justly – thus it is to me with you, and to your with me. But you forget so easily that I must live for me and for you; if we were wholly united you would feel the pain of it as little as I – My journey was a fearful one; I did not reach here until 4 o’clock yesterday morning. Lacking horses the post-coach chose another route, but what an awful one; at the stage before the last I was warned not to travel at night; I was made fearful of a forest, but that only made me the more eager – and I was wrong. The coach needs break down on the wretched road, a bottomless mud road. Without such postilions as I had with me I should have remained stuck in the*

*road. Esterhazy, traveling the usual road here, had the same fate with eight horses that I had with four – Yet I got some pleasure out of it, as I always do when I successfully overcome difficulties – Now a quick change to things internal from things external. We shall surely see each other soon; moreover, today I cannot share with you the thoughts I have had during these last few days touching my own life – If our hearts were always close together, I would have none of these. My heart is full of so many things to say to you – ah – there are moments when I feel that speech amounts to nothing at all – Cheer up – remain my true, my only treasure, my all as I am yours. The gods must send us the rest, what for us must and shall be.*

*Your faithful LUDWIG*

*Evening, Monday, July 6*

*You are suffering, my dearest creature – only now have I learned that letters must be posted very early in the morning on Mondays to Thursdays – the only days on which the mail-coach goes from here to K. – You are suffering – Ah, wherever I am, there you are also – I will arrange it with you and me that I can live with you. What a life!!! thus!!! without you – pursued by the goodness of mankind hither and thither – which I as little want to deserve as I deserve it – Humility of man towards man – it pains me – and when I consider myself in relation to the universe, what am I and what is He – whom we call the greatest -and yet – herein lies the divine in man – I weep when I reflect that you will probably not receive the first report from me until Saturday – Much as you love me – I love you more – But do not ever conceal yourself from me – good night -As I am taking the baths I must go to bed – Oh God – so near! so far! Is not our love truly a heavenly structure, and also as firm as the vault of heaven?*

on July 7

*Good morning,*

*Though still in bed, my thoughts go out to you, my Immortal Beloved, now and then joyfully, then sadly, waiting to learn whether or not fate will hear us – I can live only wholly with you or not at all – Yes, I am resolved to wander so long away from you until I can fly to your arms and say that I am really at home with you, and can send my soul enwrapped in you into the land of spirits – Yes, unhappily it must be so -You will be the more contained since you know my fidelity to you. No one else can ever possess my heart -never -never -Oh God, why must one be parted from one whom one so loves. And yet my life in V is now a wretched life – Your love makes me at once the happiest and the unhappiest of men – At my age I need a steady, quiet life – can that be so in our connection? My angel, I have just been told that the mailcoach goes every day – therefore I must close at once so that you may receive the letter at once – Be calm, only by a calm consideration of our existence can we achieve our purpose to live together – Be calm – love me – today – yesterday – what tearful longings for you – you – you – my life – my all – farewell. Oh continue to love me – never misjudge the most faithful heart of your beloved.*

*Ever Thine*

*Ever Mine*

*Ever Ours.*

Now let us see how and what Beethoven meant to say in these three short letters. The style and the message are very relevant for understanding the form of relationship the two were engaged in and the composer's failure to carry this relationship further, a situation that was all the more painful since their love seemed sincere, romantic, undeniable. The outcome was, again, decided by the fact that Antonia was actually a married woman, on the one hand, and by Beethoven's character, on the other. From the first formulations of the first letter one

can see how serious and deep their love was, especially as reflected through the eyes and the soul of the artist. It was a romantic love in style and expression, in which Antonia had taken on the aura of a madonna, of an epiphanic reality. Her image was transfigured, she had become sublime, celestial, angelic. Moreover, it appears that in Beethoven's perception, the two had arrived at a union of the hearts of the androgynous type, as long as he considered her the most intimate essence of himself, of his own soul. From the very beginning of the letter, he placed her across the firmament of divine, unalterable beings, to give her the true image of his love, just like troubadours did with their madonnas, to whom they dedicated extolling poems. In the typology of romantic love, which had actually taken over the model of chivalric love, predicated, in turn, on the inheritance of Cathar erotic mysticism, featuring the beloved in a divine hypostasis was a fundamental element. In fact, the amatory sky, with its impenetrable night and flickering constellations of requited sentiments revolved around this element.

However, immediately after turning his beloved into a Madonna figure, Beethoven became terrestrial and dejected. He felt that he wished to express some concerns to her, some sorrows or fears. He admitted that he was deeply sad when it came to expressing his feelings, his emotions. Therefore his statements were always allusive, indirect and ambiguous. His inner torment was visible, given the situation they were in: on the one hand, their romantic, sublime, fully requited love, and on the other hand, the fact that she was another man's wife. The situation itself was truly shattering, and Beethoven seemed troubled to the depth of his spiritual fiber. Therefore he asked himself and her in a letter: *can you change the fact that you are not wholly mine, I not wholly thine?* Love lasts only through sacrifices and it demands exclusivity, one lover belonging solely to the other. That was his position. What may be inferred is that he was tormented and deeply frustrated that she was a married woman. The sacrificed he hinted at here was, probably, her divorce. However, the word was never uttered,

but it made be assumed that, as long as this kind of message could be expressed in a letter, the subject had been touched upon in their private encounters.

After a few narrative digressions about his journey by coach to the resort from where he was writing to her, Beethoven returned to their sentimental situation towards the end of his letter. It may be assumed that they were soon to see one another, that they had planned a rendezvous. Certain thoughts that had been troubling him for a while could not be shared in the letter. These were probably the emotional uncertainties generated by the distance between them, including, above all, their separation by status, since she was married. Beethoven clearly stated this: if you were always with me (*If our hearts were always close together*, as the euphemistic formula goes), I would not be embroiled in these thoughts and this turmoil. Explicitly, in clear words and unequivocal ideas, however, nothing is said. Beethoven either did not trust words or did not have the power to express his fears to his beloved, lest they should have an undesirable effect. He may have wanted to conceal his anxieties or to spare her. Eventually, after enfolding their relationship in this ambiguity, the composer left the denouement to the gods.

In the second letter, Beethoven renewed his declaration of love, provided some details about the practical difficulties of sending letters from the resort and then engaged in some metaphysical meditations on the vastness of the universe and the smallness of man, in which, however, divinity finds its abode in the mysteries of the spirit and of love. Very much convinced of his sublime feelings, Beethoven found a flattering formula to express them, writing to Antonia that however much she loved him, he loved her still more: *Much as you love me – I love you more*. The end of the letter again placed their relationship of love in a Dantesque, apothotic universe, unfolding like a cosmic phenomenon across the entire celestial vault (*Is not our love truly a heavenly structure, and also as firm as the vault of heaven?*). The cosmic projection of love, the celestial metaphor expressing this sublime state



represented a poetic formula at hand, the trope used for centuries for conveying love. The romantic formula was not new as a cultural phenomenon, but it had enormous psychological and cultural relevance because it refined love from a sentimental vantage point, sublimating it into a form of religious experience, as did the Cathars, the troubadours, Dante, Petrarch, Bruno and Ficino, among others. Indeed, romantic love is a form of fulfillment, the most accessible mystical path and a form of divine revelation within the human soul. This truth is illustrated by Beethoven's case, too.

The third letter is the most tense, full of excitement and pathos, but also ambiguous at the rhetorical level. Here Antonia is referred to as the "Immortal Beloved," without her name being mentioned. She is recognized here as the only great love of his life, without whom he could not live and to whom he entrusted his heart forever. Before encountering her, his soul had constantly wandered blindly, but he was fulfilled in her company, he felt at home (*I am really at home with you, and can send my soul enwrapped in you into the land of spirits*). The composer uses here the fortunate Augustinian formula for expressing love as habitation, or as the sentiment of being at home in the other's self. St. Augustine claimed that love means "dwelling with one's soul," and Beethoven reiterates this notion, but in a new formula, no less poetic and beautiful, when he says *I am really at home with you*. He then continues this idea, expressing it in a manner worthy of Dante or Goethe: *I can send my soul enwrapped in you into the land of spirits*. A fantastic formulation, a veritable apotheosis of love, in which the composer's soul offers itself to heavens or to death wrapped in the beloved's love like in a mantle. We can also trace here the resurrection of the Orphic motif of love, but with the roles reversed. Beethoven's soul travels to the kingdom of the spirits, not to retrieve, but to display the wondrous glow of the love in which she clad him; a triumphant journey, not a dramatic one, as in the case of the Thracian poet.

Still, the apotheosis of love cannot completely transform the practical reality of their human life, and this aspect tortured Beethoven. Although he had sworn eternal love to the *Immortal*, although he thought himself redeemed by her love, the fact that they were actually separated – divided from each other by the state of facts, since she was married – made him profoundly miserable. The situation was, indeed, ravishing. On the one hand, their souls were entwined in a sublime, redemptive love, but in reality they were living separately, experiencing fragments of stolen life because of their illegitimate passion. To use an honest term, which is nonetheless too harsh for this sublime atmosphere of their relationship, the two were lovers. Beethoven realized the deception of their love and this upset him terribly. He was both the happiest man, because of her love, and the most unfortunate, because of the same fact (*Your love makes me at once the happiest and the unhappiest of men*). He was with her through their love, but without her due to their status and circumstances. On a practical level, Beethoven was thinking of a family, of organizing a home of his own, since his illness and loneliness had heightened his discomfort. Still, could their relationship provide the stability and tranquility of a home? Probably not, and both must have known it. Beethoven continued to hope in the possibility that they might live together, calling her, towards the end of the last letter, “my angel,” but said “goodbye” to her with tears in his eyes. He would continue to love her, but intimated to her that he would relinquish their relationship and asked that he should not to be misjudged for what he did.

In fact, Beethoven’s letters were never dispatched, just like the *Heiligenstadt Testament* was never sent to his brothers. This time, too, it was a matter of clarifying the terms of this relationship with himself rather than with Antonia. The letters were found among the composer’s personal documents one year after his death. The break with Antonia occurred, but we do not know on what terms. The fact is that since she had not received the letters, she

did not know what we know now, after having read them, about his feelings and arguments.<sup>75</sup> Historians have not been so interested in how she continued her life after this dramatic break-up, but about Beethoven it is known that the depression in which he flung himself at that time was not to cease until the end of his life, some fourteen years later. Maynard Solomon believed that the model of his family and his childhood traumas rendered Beethoven incapable of carrying a relationship through, having definitively undermined his confidence in his conjugal fulfillment.

This perspective with profound psychoanalytic influences is questionable from several points of view. The letters reveal that Beethoven was concerned with her status of a married woman, which he saw as a definitive hindrance against their romantic love, even if a divorce had been reached. He understood quite well – after all, he was a genius – that the dream of absolute redeeming love and the conjugal domicile were not one and the same thing. On the other hand, from subsequent letters and testimonies, some made towards the end of his life, we may infer that Beethoven was acquainted with Antonia’s husband, the banker Franz Brentano, the spouses being sometimes considered his best friends. Frankly speaking, a romantic affair with the wife of a man with whom you are on good terms is embarrassing, even invidious, even when her sentiments are encouraging. It is difficult to ascertain whether Mr. Brentano had got wind of his consort’s feelings for the composer, and we do not know what role he may have played in this drama. As such, Beethoven’s sublime and requited love for Antonia would have resulted in a disaster for both families, as several children were also

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<sup>75</sup> “Beethoven understood that for one moment of his life he had within his grasp a woman’s unconditional love. [But] Beethoven could not overcome the nightmarish burden of his past and set the ghosts to rest. His only hope was that somehow he could make Antonia understand (as he himself did not) the implacable barrier to their union without at the same time losing her love,” quoted from Maynard Solomon in R. Greenberg, *Beethoven, His Life and Music*, ed. cit., p. 5.

involved.<sup>76</sup> Could Beethoven have thought, in a sacrificial upsurge of heroic nature, that it would be much better for everyone if he put an end to the relationship with Antonia, that is, if he committed emotional suicide, so as not to cause suffering to all for the rest of his life? This would be the answer we are inclined to legitimize, since it is consistent with Beethoven's character and style, sparing us the all too frivolous and clichéd psychoanalytic interpretations. Yes, Beethoven chose a heroic end to love, so as to relieve Antonia and her family from life-long torment and misery. If she also understood this, then Beethoven's gesture will have redeemed them both.

Let us just say a few more words at the end of this passage about this strong *erotic/heroic* relationship, which we deem to be profoundly relevant for these circumstances. I did not accidentally use the word "redeemed" at the end of the paragraph above. In its major sense, which acquires mystical-religious tension and power, love is a redeeming passion. At the end of a literary-philosophical tradition that included the Cathar poets, Petrarch, Dante, Pico della Mirandola, Marsilio Ficino, Lorenzo the Magnificent, Marcellus Palingenius Stellatus, and Antonio Paleario, Giordano Bruno believed that heroism was the main quality and force of love, of eroticism, the ultimate target being the conquest of the divine image, the vision of the absolute and, hence, redemption.<sup>77</sup> In this sense, love recuperated the Platonic

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<sup>76</sup> It is significant that, over time, that is, after the episode of the *Immortal Beloved*, Beethoven maintained some ties with the Brentano family, and to one of the daughters of Franz and Antonia, by the name of Maximiliana Brentano, he dedicated, in 1820, the Piano Sonata No. 30 in E major, op. 101.

<sup>77</sup> What Bruno considered to be defining for the Renaissance philosopher □ the figure who epitomized erotic enthusiasm channeled towards knowledge and accomplishment □ holds true for artists in general and for the romantic model, in particular. Here is Bruno's understanding of love's heroic upsurge, expressed in the work *The Heroic Frenzies* and summed up by the Romanian translator of the famous philosopher's works, Smaranda Bratu Elian: "*The Heroic Frenzies* envisages the reformation of the individual: namely, a *high inner transformation*, a transmutation that leads to the achievement of the supreme, solitary experience of *merging*

sense of *mania*, a state of exalted and visionary inspiration whereby the lover, possessed by divinity, soars in ecstasy adoringly towards the god and becomes united with the deity, reaching completion. The transformation undergone during the *manic* trance is accompanied by the specific state, by heroic or divine momentum, at the end of which he becomes another being, fulfilled through vision and merged with divinity. The states of exaltation, frenzy, passionate momentum, boldness are signs of the heroic passion, and underlying them is the desire to conquer the absolute through love, to achieve the perfection of the soul,<sup>78</sup> and not merely to find erotic completion with the other person – the beloved.

As an outstanding figure of romanticism, Beethoven lived and manifested this exalted, heroic and redemptive form of love, visible in his relationship with Antonia Brentano. The Cathar type of erotic relationship in which the composer was involved should be emphasized, once again, and clarified. In its structure, the inaccessibility of the beloved is an essential element. In his book entitled *Love in the Western World*, Denis de Rougemont offers splendid analyses of the forms and models of love in the Western tradition. So does Ioan Petru Culianu in his doctoral thesis entitled *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, where explanations are given for the mystical, religious specificity of the lover's erotic adoration of *with the divine* in the ultimate erotic élan. This reformation is achievable only by the exceptional personality of the authentic philosopher. This is Bruno's new man, the prototype par excellence of the active man of the Renaissance: to benefit from anthropological transformation, he must be *a philosopher with a heroic personality who, impelled by love, turns his erotic frenzy towards divinity, through a superhuman effort of the fantastic faculty and of the will, through an elaborate technique and immeasurable audacity,*" Giordano Bruno, *Despre eroicele avânturi*, București, Humanitas Publ., 2009, translator's note, p. 14.

<sup>78</sup> "Bruno's unitary project, designed to respond to the global crisis of his time, culminates thus with this exceptional figure of the individual who is drive by the heroic élan, as an expression of the being and dignity of man, who manages to reach the highest possible goal through his our own endeavor and through the height of his thought: for, after Bruno, philosophy is the only true path, in man's real and individual existence, towards the truly divine," in Giordano Bruno, *ed. cit.*, p. 15.

the inaccessible partner, approached as a *Madonna*, that is, as the absolute archetype of woman. Cathar love feeds on the inaccessibility of the woman and it is in the void space engendered by the distance that the lover cannot annihilate that fantasies, erotic effusions and, finally, heroic adoration proliferate. The more inaccessible the beloved, the stronger the flame of passion and the higher the worshipping fervor. This is a special, apparently paradoxical situation of erotic relations, which makes it all the more relevant culturally.

Love that does not fulfill itself in terms of a practical, matrimonial relationship is transfigured. In the process of transfiguration, the woman becomes a madonna, acquiring a heavenly aura and a quasi-divine character, while the lover becomes a hero of love, an amorous warrior. Since she cannot be made a wife, the beloved is transformed into an object of mystical worship, which does not cancel, but enhances and modifies the register of erotic energy, sexual desire being transmuted into religious adoration. Psychoanalysis calls this process sublimation. I think we can also use the term of the alchemists, transmutation.<sup>79</sup> Just like the beloved, a woman in the flesh, is transmuted into a *Madonna*, the ideal, archetypal woman, so also the relationship with the beloved – carnal, sexual – is transmuted into a mystical relationship, predicated on adoration, veneration, exaltation. Therefore, at the end of the erotic process is not a happy family, joyful spouses parading kisses and embraces in the conjugal home, but two hallowed individuals engaged in a religious relationship. The

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<sup>79</sup> Professor Greenberg speaks about a similar process of transmutation with reference to the composer's last 10 years of his life, when he had become increasingly isolated, lonely, depressed and physically ill, managing, nonetheless, to transform somber moods into outstanding forms of musical creation, as are, for instance, several of his piano sonatas, the *Diabelli Variations*, the *Missa Solemnis*, his string quartets and the *Ninth Symphony*: “unlike most angry, paranoid, isolated, and lonely people, Beethoven translated his experience into action by composing music that, by some amazing alchemy, universalized his problems and his solutions, music that gives us an opportunity to learn and grow from his experiences and his solutions,” Robert Greenberg, *Beethoven: Piano Sonatas*, The Teaching Company, Part III, 2005, p. 15.

transformation of carnal love into mystical love and of the woman into a madonna leads to chastity, to the purification and sublimation of the lovers to the level of an apotheosis. In this process, spiritual perfection and redemption are achieved. The heroism of love is a religious path that leads to holiness: this is the meaning of Cathar love, of Renaissance philosophical love and of romantic love.

I stated at the beginning of this chapter, following in the footsteps of Robert Greenberg, that Beethoven had always been driven by passion and endeavored to form sentimental relationships with inaccessible women. Inaccessibility took various forms, besides those pertaining to aristocratic status, height and other physical details. The most radical and difficult to overcome was the situation in which the woman he aspired to was married. Somewhat unconsciously or perhaps out of an occult impulse steered by destiny, Beethoven was looking for impossible relations, walking very briskly down roads that had appeared, from the start, to be blocked. Although the marriage barrier was visible from the beginning, the feeling of love never ceased its natural movement, its aspiration, eagerness and enthusiasm for the beloved. On the contrary, the firmer the barrier and the stronger the dividing wall, the more inflamed the aspiration of erotic energy, the more powerfully winged the flight, the more heroic the force of the battle for love. The mystery of this heroic struggle was that it was simultaneously waged as a battle on earth and as a battle in heaven. On earth, the struggle aimed to win over and keep the beloved, while in heaven the battle was fought to perfect the spiritual bond and achieve the androgynous union.

Beethoven expressed his belief in sublime formulas: the two of them, he and Antonia, were united forever in heaven and they would journey together to the kingdom of souls. He felt he was a soul perfected through love, a hero in apotheosis thanks to the madonna whose heavenly aura he had won, by restoring her archetypal quality. As of that moment, the drawback of their earthly separation became a secondary matter, however painful it was. For

this reason we believe that Beethoven's breakup from Antonia should not be seen as a sign of cowardice, helplessness, emotional ambiguity or character weakness, as Professor Greenberg unfortunately does, but rather as evidence of the achievement of romantic ideal of ultimately sublimating the lover and reaching fulfillment at a higher erotic level. Only someone who had experienced such an apotheosis through passion and love, only someone who had reached the divine heights through fighting, agony, sacrifice and suffering, only a hero of love could have composed, a few years later, *Ode to Joy*, the most relevant, expressive and influential work in the music produced throughout the nineteenth century.



## 9. The encounter between Beethoven-Dionysus and Goethe-Apollo

If we take into account the argument advanced by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the two gods – the Olympian Apollo and the telluric Dionysus – represent the duality of the fundamental principles of the world, of life and of the human soul. The celestial, luminous god Apollo embodies the principle of reason, expressing balance in behavior, just measure,



the sovereign clarity of thought. The other, the god Dionysus, is telluric, dark, embodying the principle of passion and expressing himself through unleashed eroticism, the concupiscence of the flesh, dance and orgiastic revelry. In the terms of psychoanalysis, Apollo represents rational consciousness, while Dionysus stands for the pulsional subconscious. The two are adopted by Nietzsche for the symbolic

relevance of their figures in understanding the complementary principles that dominate life in the world and the psychic structure of man. Although they appear to be antinomian in terms of their attitudes and behaviors, in the complexity of the world they are, in fact, complementary. Each is the measure and hidden meaning of the other, in an infinite chain of realities entwined through *coincidentia oppositorum*. Apollonian reason is fuelled by Dionysian passion, just like the latter grants order and sense to the former. This dynamic rapport of elementary principles is present both in personal, individual experience and in that of groups. Even in the history of culture and cultural models, the Apollonian and the Dionysian are the original, determining forms, according to Nietzsche's thesis.

From the point of view of this study, the Apollonian-Dionysian relationship is relevant to the extent that it was superimposed over two contemporary German cultural figures whose attributes and generative cultural models were associated with the two Greek deities. More specifically, these figures were Goethe (see image above), considered by his contemporaries and by the historians of culture as an Olympian, an Apollo of German culture, and Beethoven, likened to the god Dionysus because of the telluric, eruptive and sometimes devastating force of his music. Simply put, Goethe stood for the principle of reason, balance, light and for the clarity of forms of cultural expression, while Beethoven brought forth the titanic, impetuous force of blind, terrestrial, uncontrollable and, sometimes, dismantling pulsions. However, beyond the divergent formal characteristics of the two, their complementary rapport indicates that Goethe's rational clarity concealed the ferments of overflowing passions, while Beethoven's eruptive, volcanic nature could be tamed in perfectly harmonious musical art forms, marked by outstanding sound architectonics, unprecedented in history. As Romain Rolland helps us to understand in his study *Goethe and Beethoven* (1931), these two represented the duality of principles that generated German culture on the cusp between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, with profound consequences for the entire European culture after them.

The two artists knew each other quite well, even though they had met only once, at Teplitz, in 1811, when they had the chance to take walks together and have enlightening talks. At that time, their images about the other were rather asymmetric. Beethoven had read Goethe daily over the course of several years and had memorized passages from his poetical work. In fact, he was Beethoven's favorite author, the only other writer who enjoyed Beethoven's sympathy being Klopstock. Goethe, however, knew little about Beethoven and his music, even though the connoisseurs regarded him as the most powerful German composer alive, something that the poet was not convinced of. Moreover, from the beginning,

from his first contacts with it, Beethoven's music had deeply disturbed, vexed and confused him, steering Goethe, down obscure paths, away from his Olympian empyrean calm. Even though he eventually recognized Beethoven's craftsmanship, beauty and creative genius, the musician embodied a creative formula and a style of expression that Goethe was afraid of and would never integrate within his tastes. His artistic admiration for Beethoven's compositions was always undermined by the anxiety that listening to his music caused him, since it was very different emotionally, thematically, stylistically and energetically from the music of Mozart and Haydn.

Sometimes a woman may forge the strongest connection between two men who do not know each other personally. In the relationship between Goethe and Beethoven, Bettina von Arnim-Brentano (1785-1859, image below) acted as a voluntary and enthusiastic agent that, on the one hand, informed Goethe and opened his eyes about Beethoven's music but, on the other hand, she also aroused his jealousy and grief at finding himself as an idol who was exposed to competition. Goethe could, undoubtedly, be most easily persuaded by a beautiful and intelligent woman, and Bettina boasted indeed all these qualities. In addition to this, she was cultivated,



talented as a writer, composer and singer, emancipated and very skillful in making relations. However, in his dignity as a jealous god Olympian who deserved exclusive adulation, Goethe would not have shared with anyone the adoration and love of that woman. Bettina's biography was closely entwined with Goethe, as she was actually the daughter of his former lover from his youth – a highly significant detail in their relationship, as we shall see below – and the sister-in-law of Antonia Brentano, who was Beethoven's deepest secret passion, as

we know from the episode of the *Immortal Beloved*. Thus, she was close to being the daughter of Goethe, whom she idolized all her life, and also close to being Beethoven's lover at the same time as her own sister-in-law, Bettina (see image), being the ideal link<sup>80</sup> between the two idols. Her keen intelligence and innate flair for creative geniuses, her musical talent and responsiveness to new artistic models helped her to persuade Goethe of the value of Beethoven's music.

To understand the exact nature of Goethe's relationship with Bettina, we should have some additional data. When Goethe was 23, his 16-year-old beloved was Maximiliana La Roche. However, at the pressure of her parents, she left the poet and married a prosperous merchant from Frankfurt, named Brentano. Bettina was the latter's daughter, born on April 4, 1785. Unfortunately, Bettina's mother died when the girl was not even 8 years old. Consequently, the girl was taken to a convent and educated there. In 1806, when she was in her father's house in Offenbach, she appears to have accidentally come across a pile of letters from Goethe, written between the years 1772 to 1775 and addressed to Sophia La Roche, Bettina's grandmother. In these letters, which she read at once, Bettina found the expression of the poet's romantic and sublime sentiments for her mother. Fascinated by letters, she transcribed each of them several times, so as to learn them by heart faster. The impact was so profound that Bettina magically took upon herself the entire sentimental message Goethe had addressed to her mother. She suddenly became infatuated with Goethe's love for her mother. Moreover, she came to believe that she was born of that love, even though her natural father was someone else. In a mystical way, at least, she felt Goethe was her real father, which

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<sup>80</sup> "If Bettina had a deep insight into Goethe's gigantic mind, she had an equally clear understanding of one who was his peer as no other, Beethoven. It was she who formed the link between these two, influencing the poet, championing the composer, appreciating both with a clairvoyance such as probably no other of their contemporaries has shown," Romain Rolland, *Goethe and Beethoven*, New York and London, Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1931, p. XII.

makes the relation between them all the more interesting. Albeit unconsumed, she felt that Goethe's love for her mother was now bestowed upon her and that she could bring to fulfillment her mother's sentimental fate. On October 21, 1806, she sent a letter to Goethe revealing her belief and feelings. With a letter of recommendation from Wieland, Bettina arrived at Goethe's door on April 23, 1807. Troubled by memories, Goethe had indeed the impression that his beloved from his youth had come back to life, now standing in front of his eyes. For Bettina, the emotion of meeting him was so overwhelming that she literally fainted, for a few moments, in the arms of the poet, who was very touched. The joy of meeting also disturbed Goethe emotionally and in order to indulge in the nostalgia of the past, he closed the doors and made sure he would not be hindered in any way by his inquisitive wife Christiana, whose eyes seemed to scrutinize him from everywhere.

In November of the same year, Bettina returned to Weimar, where he stayed for a period of ten days. Goethe, whom he saw almost every day, gave ever more explicit signs of joy, even enthusiasm, in the young woman's company. Their long walks arm in arm, their conversations and emotional revelations were so natural and profound that the two called each other by their first names, as a confirmation to the young woman that the poet had integrated her into the intimate sphere of his life. The proof came, if it indeed was needed, with the parting kiss that Goethe gave her at the time of her departure from Weimar on November 10. The exchange of letters that followed attests that the feelings of both were as strong and as noble as possible. The torrent of letters circulated in both directions throughout the year 1808, and Goethe felt rejuvenated, reborn by Bettina's sentiments for him: "Your letters give me great pleasure: they remind me of the time when I was perhaps as foolish as you but certainly happier and better than today."<sup>81</sup> Somehow, Goethe had begun to feed his self-love on the love Bettina offered him, so when, by the end of 1809, her letters had begun

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<sup>81</sup> In R. Rolland, p. 169.

to be rarer, the poet showed signs of unrest. He was a big child who had become accustomed at the bosom of inexhaustible love and who suddenly felt neglected. In a letter of May 1810, he expressed his concern for Bettina's state and their apparent estrangement. To reassure him of her affection, Bettina went to meet him at Teplitz on August 9, 1810, where she remained for three days.

Free from the inquisitorial eye of his jealous wife, Goethe was flooded by those beautiful passions he had attributed to Werther in his immortal book. We know that the wonderful resurrection of youth happened from Bettina's confessions, published, of course, only after Goethe's demise. It was a wonderful evening in August. The sun was setting across the horizon, strewn with the blood-red streaks of twilight. The two were together in the hotel room with the window open, caressed by the warm air coming from outside. He held her by her waist, her arms were around his neck and she was staring deep into his eyes. Luckier than his hero Werther, Goethe relished<sup>82</sup> these moments in the arms of his priceless young Bettina.

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<sup>82</sup> The scene is described in Bettina's memoirs and taken over as such by Romain Rolland in his book: "As I did not object, although I blushed, he undid my bodice, looked at me, and said: 'The glow of the sunset has reddened your cheeks.' He kissed my breast and rested his head on it. 'No wonder,' said I, 'for my sun is sinking to rest upon my bosom.' He gazed at me for a long time and we were both silent. He then asked, 'Has anyone ever touched your breast?' 'No,' I replied; 'it is so strange that you should touch me thus.' Then he showered kisses on me, many, many, violent kisses. . . . I was frightened. . . . He should have let me go; and yet it was so strangely beautiful. In spite of myself I smiled, yet feared that this happiness should not last. His burning lips, his stifled breath—it was like lightning. I was in a whirl of confusion; my curly hair hung in loose strands... 'When you undress at night, in the future, and the stars shine as now upon your breasts, will you remember my kisses?' 'Yes.' 'And will you remember that I should like to cover your bosom with as many kisses as there are stars in heaven?' . . . The memory of it tears me asunder, I long to dissolve in tears like a cloudy sky. Never repeat what I confide to you this lonely night. I have never told it to anyone before," R. Rolland, pp. 171-172.

A free and dreamy spirit, Bettina transformed her fascinations for works of art into genuine obsessions with their creators. As she was fascinated by Beethoven's music after she had heard one of his sonatas, she used her first visit to the family of her sister-in-law, Antonia Brentano, from Vienna, in 1810, to meet with Beethoven. In vain was she forewarned by all those who were familiar with the surly spirit and misanthropic moods of the composer, who was in fact worshipped, at that time, by the Viennese aristocracy and the art connoisseurs' milieus. Without taking anything into account, once she had learned Beethoven's home address, Bettina simply went unannounced to the composer's door, ready to overwhelm him with waves of admiration. As it happened, at the time of her arrival, Beethoven was leaning over the piano and playing, absorbed in music. Given his hearing impairment, too, he did not notice the stranger's entry into his room. Bettina listened enchanted to Beethoven's performance to the very end, experiencing the moment as a religious revelation. Here was the god of music, issuing sublime sounds from the murky depths of his soul before her very eyes. It was a moment of grace<sup>83</sup> and vision that she would never forget. Only after he finished playing his piece did Beethoven turn around on his seat and realize the presence of the stranger enchanted by his music, who introduced herself in a very natural and relaxed manner: *I am Betty Brentano!* She was obviously too graceful and flattering a presence to disturb him.

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<sup>83</sup> Romain Rolland describes the encounter in the terms of a mediumistic communion, a phenomenon of mutual energetic, emotional and spiritual transfer, at the highest intensity and accuracy: "She is so possessed by Beethoven that this giant, with his terrible loneliness, has become part of her; she shares the desert with him, and when the hot wind sears her she seeks refuge in the gentle affection and the fatherly tenderness of Goethe. Psycho-analysts should study the whole beginning of this letter to Goethe. It contains indeed a striking 'mediumistic' phenomenon. Bettina's mind was one peculiarly susceptible to the electric waves of other minds heavily charged with genius. The word electricity recurs often in her conversation with Beethoven," *op. cit.*, 11.

Which composer would have disliked the indiscretion of such a superb worshiper? On the contrary, it seems that her fascination with him found its echo in his inner mood, generating no lesser passion on his part. Beethoven fell in love with Bettina, attracted by the current of her own fascination with his status as a creator, at first, but he soon realized that this was a very bright woman, with a keen understanding of the arts and a person of rare enthusiasm and loyalty. During that very first meeting, Beethoven talked to her about his passion for Goethe's poetry, in which he had found musical rhythms and harmonies that had stimulated his own creativity. Melodiousness and musicality ensure and maintain the sensuous nature of poetry (*Melodie ist das sinnliche Leben der Poesie*),<sup>84</sup> which is connected with the rhythms of the body and of spiritual nature. Incidentally, he had written the music for Goethe's *Egmont* and in 1808 he had drawn the plan for a musical transposition of *Faust*. As the composer confessed to Bettina, he would have liked to discuss with Goethe himself the relations between the rhythms and mellifluousness of poetry, on the one hand, and those of music, on the other. Goethe was among the few contemporaries who, Beethoven hoped, could understand him. Beethoven was eager, he yearned to meet the poet and, especially, to be known by Goethe: "Speak to Goethe of me; tell him that he must hear my symphonies! He will agree with me that music is the single, the immaterial entry into a higher world of knowledge which envelops man but which he cannot understand... What the soul receives from music through the senses is spiritual revelation incarnate... It is thus, if you understand me, that you must write of me to Goethe! With all my heart I long for him to teach me."<sup>85</sup>

Her contact with Beethoven captivated Bettina so much that she gave up all her usual daily activities, her schedule of visits, meetings, going to the theater, to concerts, art galleries, etc., just to keep the composer company for as long as it was possible. Their walks and talks

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<sup>84</sup> Quotations from Bettina's notes, in R. Rolland, p. 5.

<sup>85</sup> R. Rolland, p. 6.



had gained the solemnity of a daily ritual. During the last days of her visit to Vienna, Bettina was almost seized by Beethoven, who, knowing that she would have to leave soon, felt gripped by unrest. He asked her to write him as often as she could, at least once a month, because her friendship was very precious and, in fact, he had no other true friends. From a letter written by Beethoven, dated February 10, 1811, we learn that Bettina had written him two delightful letters by that time, which the composer never parted from, just like a child refuses to part with its toys. We also learn that Beethoven had sent her several letters expressing his fervent love and imparting her countless kisses. He did not shy away from using superlatives, calling her *divine* at times, as it is clear from the letter of August 11, 1810:

*Dearest Bettine,*

*Never was a fairer spring than this year's: this I say, and feel too, as in it I made your acquaintance. You must indeed have yourself seen, that in society I was like a fish cast on the sand, that writhes and struggles, and cannot escape, until some benevolent Galatea helps it back again into the mighty sea: in very truth, I was fairly aground. Dearest Bettine, unexpectedly I met you, and at a moment when chagrin had completely overcome me; but truly your aspect put it to flight. I was aware in an instant that you belong to a totally different world from this absurd one, to which, even with the best wish to be tolerant, it is impossible to open one's ears. I am myself a poor creature, and yet complain of others! this you will, however, forgive, with the kindly heart that looks out from your eyes, and with the intelligence that dwells in your ears: at least, your ears know how to flatter when they listen. Mine, alas! are a barrier through which I can have hardly any friendly intercourse with mankind, else, perhaps, I might have acquired a still more entire confidence in you. As it was,*

*I could only comprehend the full expressive glance of your eyes; and this has so moved me that I shall never forget it. Divine Bettine, dearest girl! Art! Who comprehends the meaning of this word? With whom may I speak of this great divinity? How I love the recollections of the few days when we used to chat with each other, or rather correspond. I have preserved every one of the little scraps of paper on which your intelligent, precious, most precious, replies were given. Thus, at least, may I thank my worthless ears that the best portion of our fugitive discourse is retained in writing.*

*Since you went, I have had many uncomfortable hours, in which the power to do any thing is lost. After you had gone away, I rambled about for some three hours in the Museum at Schönbrunn; but no good angel met me there, to chide me into good humor, as an angel like you might have done. Forgive, sweetest Bettine, this transition from the fundamental key; but I must have such intervals, to vent my feelings. And you have written of me to Goethe, have you not? saying that I would fain pack up my head in a cask, where I should see nothing, and hear nothing, of what passes in the world, since you, dearest angel, meet me here no longer. But surely I shall at least have a letter from you. Hope supports me: she is indeed the nursing mother of half the world, and she has been my close friend all my life long. What would have become of me else? I send with this, written in my own hand, “Kennst du das Land?” as a memorial of the time when I first became acquainted with you: also I send another, which I have composed since I took leave of you, dear, dearest heart!*

*“Heart, my heart, what change comes o’er thee?*

*What wrings thee thus with pain?*

*What a strange sour world’s before thee!*

*I know thee scarce again!”*

*Yes, dearest Bettine, answer me this question: write, and tell me what shall become of me since my heart has become such a rebel. Write to your truest friend, BEETHOVEN*

Shortly after she had met Beethoven personally, Bettina wrote eagerly to Goethe about him, making the genius from Weimar both curious and jealous. He had become accustomed with Bettina's worship, which had acquired mystical overtones in Romain Rolland's opinion. In her way of loving and adoring Goethe, she was as ecstatic and zealous as Teresa of Avila, famous for her mystical nuptial fervors. Confiscated by his Olympian figure, Goethe was nourished by the emotions and energy Bettina enthusiastically devoted to him as if he were a vain god inhaling the smoke of sacrificial altars. If the energy of his dedicated admirer happened to drop during certain periods, Goethe immediately felt insecure, showed signs of concern and felt that his altar was threatened by decay. As proof of the importance he assigned to Bettina's devotion for him comes the fact that he carried her letters with him – exactly the gesture Beethoven also made – on his long trips across the length and breadth of Germany, finding, every now and again, the time to feed his soul with the young woman's inflamed formulas of adoration. Certainly, the fact that both Beethoven and Goethe always Bettina's letters kept close to their chest proves not only their strong attachment to her but also the literary value and writing talent of the young woman who had enthralled them.

Because it is highly relevant for understanding the nature of the relations that were being forged, during those moments, between the three artists, we will present here the letter Bettina sent to Goethe on May 28, 1810, containing her warm impressions of her first contact with the composer in Vienna:

Vienna, 28 May, 1810

... And now I am going to speak to you of one who made me forget all the world besides. The world vanishes when recollections spring up, indeed it vanishes. It is Beethoven who made it vanish before me, and of whom I would fain speak to you. It is true I am not of age; yet I would boldly assert that he has far outstepped our generation, too far, perhaps, to be come up with: (shall I be understood or believed in this assertion?) No matter. May he but live until the great and mighty problem of his mind has ripened into maturity; may he but attain his own noble aim, and he will carry us on to loftier regions, to bliss more perfect, than is yet known to us. Let me own it to you, dear Goethe, I do believe in a spell, not of this world, the element of our spiritual nature; and it is this that Beethoven calls around us by his art. If you would understand him, you must enter into his own magic circle; you must follow him to his exalted position, and occupy with him that high station which he alone can claim for a basis in this sublunary world. You will, I know, guess at my meaning, and extract truth from it. When could such a mind be reproduced? when equaled? As to other men, their doings are but mechanical clock-work compared to his: he alone freely creates, and his creations are unthought of. What, indeed, could the intercourse with this world be to him, who before sunrise is at his holy work, who after sunset scarcely looks up from it, who forgets his bodily food, and, carried past the shallow banks of every-day life, is borne along the current of enthusiasm? He said himself, "When I lift up mine eyes I must sigh, for that which I behold is against my creed; and I must despise the world, because it knows not that music is a higher revelation than science or philosophy. Music is like wine, inflaming men's minds to new achievements; and I am the Bacchus serving it out to them, even unto intoxication. When they are sobered down again, they shall find themselves possessed of a spiritual draught such

*as shall remain with them even on dry land. I have no friend, I must live all to myself; yet I know that God is nearer to me than to my brothers in the art. I hold converse with him, and fear not, for I have always known and understood him. Nor do I fear for my works: no evil can befall them; and whosoever shall understand them, he shall be freed from all such misery as burthens mankind.”*

*All this did Beethoven say to me the first time I saw him. A feeling of reverence came over me as I heard him speak his mind with such unbounded frankness, and that to me, who must have been wholly insignificant to him; and I was perhaps the more struck with his openness, having often heard of his extreme reserve, and of his utter dislike to converse with any one. Thus it was that I could not get any one to introduce me to him; but I found him out alone. He has three sets of apartments, in which he alternately secretes himself, one in the country, one in town, and a third on the ramparts (Bastei). It was there I found him, in the third floor. I entered unannounced. He was seated at the piano. I gave my name. He was most friendly, and asked me if I would hear a song which he had just been composing; and sang, with a shrill and piercing voice, that made the hearer thrill with woefulness, “Know’st thou the land?” “Is it not beautiful?” said he enthusiastically; “exquisitely beautiful! I will sing it again.” He was pleased with my cheerful praise. “Most people are moved on hearing music, but these have not musicians’ souls: true musicians are too fiery to weep.” He then sang another song of yours, which he had lately been composing: “Dry not, ye tears of eternal love.” He accompanied me home; and it was during our walk that he said all these fine things on the art, talking so loud all the while, and standing still so often, that it required some courage to listen to him in the street. He, however, spoke so passionately, and all that he uttered startled me to such a degree, as made me forget even the street. They were all not a little surprised at home on seeing me enter the room with him, in the midst of a large dinner-party. After dinner he sat down to the instrument and played, unasked, wonderfully,*

*and at great length. His pride and his genius were working that out together which to any mind but his would have been inconceivable, to any fingers but his, impossible of execution.*

*He comes daily ever since; if not, I go to him: and thus I miss all sorts of gayeties, theatres, picture-galleries, and even the mounting of St. Stephen's church-steeple. Beethoven says, "Never mind seeing these things: I shall call for you, and towards evening we shall walk together in the Schönbrunn avenues." Yesterday, as we were walking in a lovely garden, every thing in full bloom, and the open hot-houses almost intoxicating one's senses with their perfumes, he suddenly stopped in the oppressive heat of the sun, saying, "Goethe's poems exercise a great sway over me, not only by their meaning, but by their rhythm also. It is a language that urges me on to composition, that builds up its OWE lofty standard, containing in itself all the mysteries of harmony, so that I have but to follow up the radiations of that center from which melodies evolve spontaneously. I pursue them eagerly, overtake them, then again see them flying before me, vanish in the multitude of my impressions, until I seize them anew with increased vigor, no more to be parted from them. It is then that my transports give them every diversity of modulation: it is I who triumph over the first of these musical thoughts, and the shape I give it, I call symphony. Yes, Bettina, music is the link between intellectual and sensual life. Would I could speak to Goethe on this subject, to see whether he could understand me! Melody gives a sensible existence to poetry; for does not the meaning of a poem become embodied in melody? Does not Mignon's song breathe all her feelings through its melody, and must not these very feelings be reproductive in their turn? The mind would embrace all thoughts, both high and low, and embody them into one stream of sensations, all sprung from simple melody, and without the aid of its charms doomed to die in oblivion. This is the unity which lives in my symphonies, numberless streamlets meandering on, in endless variety of shape, but all diverging into one common bed. Thus it is I feel that there is an indefinite something, an eternal, an infinite, to be attained; and*

*although I look upon my works with a foretaste of success, yet I cannot help wishing, like a child, to begin my task anew, at the very moment that my thundering appeal to my hearers seems to have forced my musical creed upon them, and thus to have exhausted the insatiable cravings of my soul after my 'beau ideal!'*

*“Speak of me to Goethe: tell him to hear my symphonies, and he will agree with me that music alone ushers man into the portal of an intellectual world, ready to encompass him, but which he may never encompass. That mind alone whose every thought is rhythm can embody music, can comprehend its mysteries, its divine inspirations, and can alone speak to the senses of its intellectual revelations. Although spirits may feed upon it as we do upon air, yet it may not nourish all mortal men; and those privileged few alone, who have drawn from its heavenly source, may aspire to hold spiritual converse with it. How few are these! for like the thousands who marry for love, and who profess love, whilst Love will single out but one amongst them, so also will thousands court Music, whilst she turns a deaf ear to all but the chosen few. She too, like her sister-arts, is based upon morality, that fountainhead of genuine invention. And would you know the true principle on which the arts may be won? It is to bow to their immutable terms, to lay all passion, and vexation of spirit, prostrate at their feet, and to approach their divine presence with a mind so calm, and so void of littleness, as to be ready to receive the dictates of Fantasy and the revelations of Truth. Thus the art becomes a divinity, man approaches her with religious feelings, his inspirations are God’s divine gifts, and his aim fixed by the same hand from above, which helps him to attain it.”*

*“We know not whence our knowledge is derived. The seeds which lie dormant in us require the dew, the warmth, and the electricity of the soil, to spring up, to ripen into thought, and to break forth. Music is the electrical soil in which the mind thrives, thinks, and invents, whilst philosophy damps its ardor in an attempt to reduce it to a fixed principle.”*

*“Although the mind can scarcely call its own that which it produces through inspiration, yet it feasts upon these productions, and feels that in them alone lies its independence, its power, its approximation to the Deity, its intercourse with man; and that these, more than all, bear witness of a beneficent Providence.”*

*“Music herself teaches us harmony; for one musical thought bears upon the whole kindred of ideas, and each is linked to the other, closely and indissolubly, by the ties of harmony.”*

*“The mind creates more readily when touched by the electrical spark: my whole nature is electric. But let me cease with my unfathomable wisdom, or I might miss the rehearsal. Write of me to Goethe, that is, if you have understood me; but mark me, I am not answerable for any thing, although ready to be taught by him.”*

*I promised to write to you as best I could. He took me to a grand rehearsal with full orchestra. There I sat quite alone in a box, in the vast unlit space. Single gleams of light stole through crevices and knot-holes in the walls, dancing like a stream of glittering sparks. There I saw this great genius exercise his sovereignty. O Goethe! no emperor or king feels so entirely his power, and that all might proceeds from himself, as this Beethoven, who but just now in the garden was at a loss to find from whom it did come. He stood there with such firm decision: his gestures, his countenance, expressed the completion of his creation. He prevented every error, every misconception. Not a breath but was under command. All were set in the most sedulous activity by the majestic presence of his mind. One might prophesy that a spirit like this might, in a future state of perfection, re-appear as the ruler of a world.*

*I put all this down last night, and this morning read it to him. He said, “Did I say this? Well, then, I have had my raptus.” He read it again most attentively, erased the above, and wrote between the lines; for he wishes, above all, that you should understand him.*

*Bettine*



Judging by his position as a sublime idol, it is understandable that Goethe responded with jealousy and even anxiety to Bettina's confession from a letter sent shortly after her encounter with Beethoven in Vienna, stating that she had fallen in love with the composer – "Ich habe diesen Mann unendlich lieb gewonnen," meaning "I have come to infinitely like this man." Beethoven had conquered her with his musical genius and his imperial artistic dignity. How could Goethe share the soul of his precious worshiper with anyone else? Regardless of his view of Beethoven's music, the fact that Bettina had fallen in love with him and started to dedicate the musician the same ecstatic exaltation made Goethe feel like his altar had collapsed. It was more convenient for him to interpret Bettina's passion for Beethoven as a simple and "strange whim" (*Wunderlich Grillen*) than to grant it noble legitimacy. The young woman's enthusiastic devotion was legitimate and worth taking seriously only if it was addressed to him. The Olympian from Weimar was afflicted by a bleak divine jealousy, which was not replicated in Beethoven's case.

The composer himself was a devoted reader of Goethe's works and did not consider that Bettina's worship for him was unnatural. Insofar as she was concerned, Bettina had the talent, intelligence and power to appreciate and support her quasi-religious worship of both idols, without her enthusiasm for one weakening her appreciation of the other.<sup>86</sup> From this point of view, her tact, intelligence and spirit were superior to those of whom she adored. This was attested by the fact that when in March 1811, Bettina finally accepted the marriage

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<sup>86</sup> "Bettina's worship of Goethe should have prompted her to neglect Beethoven, to avoid hurting Goethe, who, on this particular occasion, is of secondary importance to her. But she does nothing of the kind. Bettina battles bravely and passionately for Beethoven against everybody. Nothing in her whole life does her greater honor. It is only when we see her thus at close range that we discover the depth of her loyalty, in contrast with her superficial shortcomings, and appreciate the instinct of justice which in her is even stronger than the claims of love," R. Rolland, p. 16.

proposal of the writer Achim von Arnim, Goethe felt deeply betrayed – even though he had also been married for some time, indeed, to the less young, less intelligent, less charming and rather rudimentary Christiana. Consequently, he spitefully cut off his correspondence with Bettina. From his Olympian height, Goethe, a man past 60 years of age and a national idol, found nothing more interesting to do when his tireless admirer got married than to display his disappointment. The fact that Bettina’s young consort, the writer von Arnim, also showed a deep respect and admiration for Goethe did not budge the latter from his sovereign desolation.<sup>87</sup>

Over the course of the year 1811, Goethe’s distance and coldness towards Bettina worsened. To that also contributed his jealous wife, Christiana, whose most obvious trait was mediocrity and whose most striking talent was her possessiveness over her eminent husband. Christiana had known Bettina for several years, having heart-wrenchingly tolerated, while gnashing her teeth, the young woman’s intellectual flirtations with Goethe, but nothing could guarantee that she would not lash out one day. Like any classic that arrogated godlike grandeur to himself, Goethe, divided his attention and feelings between the family home and the paths of enchanting flirtations, between his wife and his muse. Bettina was not his only muse and admirer. Placed in such a scheme, Christiana had always been torn by natural jealousy and many frustrations. Immediately after their wedding in the spring of 1811, the von Arnim couple decided to spend their honeymoon in Weimar. It seemed an ideal opportunity for the families to adjust their feelings in the new circumstances. Once Bettina

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<sup>87</sup> “Goethe thought himself betrayed, and smarted under the disappointment. The wound was above all intellectual. Achim von Arnim, a young gentleman of letters, was worthy of the highest esteem both for his talent and for his character; he showed for Goethe much respect and consideration, which the elder man appreciated; but in the domain of the intellect Arnim, like Beethoven, with due regard to the difference between the two, was the enemy. I am wrong, he was not; it is Goethe who was Arnim’s enemy,” R. Rolland, p. 27.

had got married, Goethe's wife could feel less suspicious, less jealous, and the poet had the opportunity to know the young von Arnim better.

Indeed, the first week in Weimar was enthralling, almost like a dream. The families met in Goethe's house for all three meals of the day. It seemed they could not get enough of one another, sharing the joy of their communion. But the von Arnim family could not comply with the golden rule: the most pleasant guest is the one that departs on time. One week turned into three, and Goethe felt diverted from his daily tasks, distracted from his public and private writerly duties. What is worse, Christiana noticed that the relationship between Bettina and her husband had not changed at all after the von Arnims' marriage. Her tension, anxiety and jealousy simmered threateningly. Her hidden anger, which turned the red of her cheeks into purple, gave her an even more primitive aspect than as usual. Clearly, the young muse, the sagacious, ironic and jaunty Bettina was driving her mad. One day, while the two women were visiting together an art gallery organized by Heinrich Meyer, a family friend of Goethe's, Bettina could not help ironically noticing the mediocrity and questionable taste of the exhibition. That is all it took to set Christiane on fire. She took it as a personal affront. The long jealous housewife with kitsch tastes in art suddenly got into a tantrum. Her entire primitive being erupted loudly into hysterical jesting and grotesque screams, and her flickering cheeks signaled the imminence of fainting. It was a splendid scandal that the city found out about. Secretly, the high society of Weimar, whose members did not sympathize at all with Christiana, took Bettina's side. Goethe, however, in his sad conjugal offense, took his wife's side. What was he to do? Obviously, the fall-off with Bettina was precipitous and long-lasting, probably to his own desolation. Bettina was not a woman from whom one could break away lightly or one who could easily be forgotten because of a scandal she had not caused. Romain Rolland drew a conclusion regarding the character of Goethe's private life. It

was not true<sup>88</sup> that the Olympian was an artist of life. On the contrary, his private life was often sad and depressing. He was, indeed, unmatched and quasi-divine only in writing, in literature.

Bettina's emotional emulation around the figure of Beethoven drew Goethe's curiosity sufficiently for the poet to use the first opportunity to meet him personally. Chance played a part here too. In July 1812, Goethe received a letter in which he was informed that the Empress of Austria was in Teplitz and that she would like to meet him. Without further ado, the poet packed his luggage and left for Teplitz. Just at that time, Beethoven was also staying in the resort for a week, with no connection to the empress. Still, her presence had led to the resort being invaded by counts, countesses, dukes, duchesses, princes, princesses, courtiers and nobles with blatant coats of arms and wigs solemnly flowing down their dignified shoulders, accompanied, of course, by ladies in elegant attires, wearing fancy hats and carrying their noses as high as possible. Such entourages overwhelmed Goethe and filled him with pride, usually causing him to frequently toss his head up and down, full of emotion. They did not have the same effect on Beethoven. The sullen composer was rather disdainful towards them, knowing that they were hollow, conceited and devoid of any personal merit. As soon as he learned that Beethoven was in Teplitz, Goethe made a request to meet him, and their encounter took place on July 19. Goethe was deeply impressed by Beethoven, writing to his wife, on that same day, that never in his whole life had he met "an artist with greater power of concentration, with more energy and more profound sincerity." The testimony is all the more valuable since Goethe had never made such flattering characterizations with

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<sup>88</sup> "Those who persist in seeing in him 'the supreme artist of life' are quite unaware of the hidden misery of his domestic life; they have no idea of all the compromises and the affronts which he must endure, of the bitter thoughts which he must hide, and, when things become unbearable, of his flights from home, lasting often for months. . . . No, he was a 'supreme artist' only in his art; his life, seen at close range, inspires us not so much with admiration as with pity," R. Rolland, pp. 42-43.

reference to any other artist. The two men, marked by strong favorable impressions, met during the following days too, going for walks and having dinner together. On the evening of July 23, Beethoven was invited over by Goethe, who wanted to listen to his music performed by himself on the piano. On July 27, Beethoven left Teplitz heading for Karlsbad. There are no data showing that the two had ever met again in the coming years.

From the exchange of letters between Beethoven and Bettina we may find out more details about the meeting of the two artists. Although in the evening when he had listened to the musician playing the piano, Goethe complimented him with the formula “Er spielte köstlich,” that is, *he played charmingly*, this offended rather than flattered Beethoven. The composer was deeply distressed to realize that Goethe has neither sensitivity nor understanding for his music. Beethoven also disliked the servile manner, too obvious and full of ceremonious politeness, in which Goethe related himself to the aristocratic society full of affectation from Teplitz. While the two artists were strolling along the alleys of the resort, each time they met a couple or a group of counts, dukes or princes, Goethe would not cease taking off his hat and freezing in ceremoniously bent postures, which Beethoven regarded as ridiculous and undignified. After all, these were mere jesters belonging to noble families with inherited wealth, position and titles, not creative geniuses. In his pride, which bordered on insolence, Beethoven not only did not freeze in ceremonious postures like Goethe, but trod steadily, upright and dignified, down the middle lanes of the alleys, without taking off his top hat, waiting for the others to step aside. This happened on several occasions, proving that the nobles, if faced with such a situation, could show respect for geniuses. Beethoven deemed that his genius and artistic merits were above any noble rank and any public office. Details of the situation from Teplitz are included in a letter that Beethoven sent Bettina shortly after his meeting with Goethe, on the date of 15 August:

TEPLITZ, 1812

Dearest, good Bettine,

*Kings and princes can, indeed, create professors and privy councilors, and bedeck them with titles and orders; but they cannot make great men, spirits that rise above the world's rubbish: these they must not attempt to create; and therefore must these be held in honor. When two such come together as I and Goethe, these great lords must note what it is that passes for greatness with such as we. Yesterday, as we were returning homewards, we met the whole imperial family. We saw them coming at some distance, whereupon Goethe disengaged himself from my arm, in order that he might stand aside: in spite of all I could say, I could not bring him a step forwards. I crushed my hat more furiously on my head, buttoned up my top-coat, and walked with my arms folded behind me, right through the thickest of the crowd. Princes and officials made a lane for me; Archduke Rudolph took off his hat; the Empress saluted me the first: **these great people know me!** It was the greatest fun in the world to me, to see the procession file past Goethe. He stood aside, with his hat off, bending his head down as low as possible. For this I afterwards called him over the coals properly and without mercy, and brought up against him all his sins, especially those against you, dearest Bettine! We had just been speaking of you. Good God! could I have lived with you for so long a time as he did, believe me, I should have produced far, far more great works than I have!*

*A musician is also a poet: a pair of eyes more suddenly transport him, too, into a fairer world, where mighty spirits meet and play with him, and give him weighty tasks to*

fulfill. What a variety of things came into my imagination when I first became acquainted with you, during that delicious May-shower in the Usser Observatory, and which to me also was a fertilizing one! The most delightful themes stole from your image into my heart; and they shall survive, and still delight the world, long after Beethoven has ceased to direct. If God bestows on me a year or two more of life, I must again see you, dearest, dear Bettine; for the voice within me, which always will be obeyed, says that I must. **Love can exist between mind and mind, and I shall now be a wooer of yours.** Your praise is dearer to me than all other in this world. I expressed to Goethe my opinion as to the manner in which praise affects those like us; and that by those that resemble us we desire to be heard with **understanding**: emotion belongs to women only (pardon me for saying it!); the effect of music on a man should be to strike fire from his soul. Oh, my dearest girl! how long have I known that we are of one mind in all things! The only good is to have near us some fair, pure spirit, which we can at all times rely upon, and before which no concealment is needed. **He who will SEEM to be somewhat must really be what he would seem.** The world must acknowledge him; it is not forever unjust: although this concerns me in nowise, for I have a higher aim than this. I hope to find at Vienna a letter from you: write to me soon, very soon, and very long one. I shall be there in a week from hence. The court departs to-morrow: there is another performance to-day. The Empress has thoroughly learned her part: the Archduke and the Emperor wished me to perform again some of my own music. I refused them both: they have both fallen in love with **Chinese porcelain**. This is a case for compassion only, as reason has lost its control; but I will not be piper to such absurd dancing. I will not be comrade in such absurd performances with the fine folks, who are ever sinning in that fashion. Adieu! adieu! dearest: your last letter lay all night on my heart and refreshed me. Musicians take all sorts of liberties! **Good Heaven! how I love you!**

*Your truest friend, and deaf brother, BEETHOVEN*

From Goethe's perspective, Beethoven was a brilliant artist, but his character, manners and behavior were questionable. When they met, the musician's hearing deficiency was very serious, and this had also entailed his permanent social malaise, misanthropy and capricious irritability. Understanding his suffering, Goethe seemed tempted to judge him leniently, although certain forms of his behavior seemed gratuitous, stubborn outbursts, which did no good either to him or to others. In a letter dated September 2, 1812, addressed to his friend, the composer of lieder and cantatas, the conductor and music professor Carl Friedrich Zelter (1758-1832), Goethe expressed his appreciation for the artist Beethoven, but also his concern for his health condition and the consequences of deafness for his public and private life. Goethe had rightly noticed that deafness did not affect so much Beethoven's music and artistic performance as his social relations: "I have made Beethoven's acquaintance. His talent amazes me but, unfortunately, he has no self-control whatever. He is, no doubt, quite right in finding the world detestable, but by behaving as he does he really does not make it any more pleasant for himself or for others. We must forgive him a great deal, for his hearing is getting very bad; this interferes perhaps less with his musical than with his social side. He is naturally laconic, and he is becoming still more so as a result of his deafness."<sup>89</sup>

While Goethe could keep a polite tone and display a certain nobility even towards people for whom he had no sympathy, even if they were valuable, by contrast Beethoven was uncontrolled, abrupt, mischievous, often brutal. After his contact with Goethe, his old admiration for the great poet began to wane, not because of artistic reasons, but on account of

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<sup>89</sup> In R. Roland, p. 52.



the servility the poet manifested in relation to the royalty, the aristocracy and the civil servants and of his ceremonious stance in public relations. The difference of style and attitude between them was strident. Goethe was the polite, refined and even ceremonious aristocrat, an admirable *causeur* and public amphitryon, while Beethoven often seemed a semi-barbarous, rough, unpredictable character, who was hardly agreeable in fancy salons and societies. With all his malicious verve, after meeting with Goethe, Beethoven began describing to Bettina more and more details and situations in which Goethe appeared rather ridiculous. In addition, the composer would tell spicy stories and funny jokes about Goethe to all of his acquaintances in Vienna.

One of these described a stroll of the two artists down an alley in Teplitz. From time to time, they met, along the alleys, persons of high rank who bowed to and ceremoniously greeted them. With his Olympian dignity, Goethe answered the greetings with a flushed face, but after a while these seemed to overwhelm and even exhaust him. Indulged in his vanity by so much attention, Goethe made the mistake of sketching a false complaint before Beethoven, a somewhat mechanical gesture in the public theater that he was used to playing in. Beethoven replied promptly to the unfortunate hypocritical gesture of the poet who had wanted to reveal his grandeur underneath his false modesty: "Do not worry, Your Excellency! These men might be greeting me!" Such jokes which Beethoven's entourage heartily fed upon eventually reached Goethe's ears, who did not receive them with amusement. On the contrary. When a situation bothered or annoyed him, Goethe used a fatal weapon: silence. His silence had a devastating power of combat and could potentially destroy someone. Nothing remained of the one at whom Goethe targeted his silence: he simply dissolved away, like the contours of buildings in the acid of darkness.

Goethe began to cast his silence upon Beethoven. In 1813, Zelter discovered Beethoven's overture to Egmont and wrote to Goethe with the hope of obtaining a

representation. Goethe answered nothing. This time, however, Goethe's heart was again softened by a woman – the only available therapy in his case was love. His muse and lover Marianne von Willemer, the actress and dancer who had been Goethe's model for Zuleika in *The Divan*, expressed her disappointment when she received the lied for the Divan composed by a petty musician and tried to persuade Goethe that the only German composer who understood his work and was able to translate it into music was Beethoven: "I felt that very strongly last winter, when I heard the music to Egmont; it is heavenly (*himmlisch*); he has absolutely grasped your meaning. It can almost be said that one and the same spirit has inspired (*beseelt*) your words and given life to (*belebt*) his music."<sup>90</sup> Goethe gave a somewhat ambiguous answer to Marianne's enthusiastic appreciations, acknowledging that as regards the musical talent of illustrating his works, Beethoven had indeed worked miracles (*Beethoven hat darin Wunder gethan*). Even if Goethe did not explicitly accept Marianne's suggestion, she insisted, writing, in time, excited lines about the depth and greatness of Beethoven's music. Romain Rolland believed that this refined, passionate and persuasive game of his muse had softened Goethe's heart, causing him to make positive comments on Beethoven and his art in the 1820s.

In 1812, Goethe's entourage included professional or amateur musicians who were thrilled with Beethoven's music and who did not hesitate to express their appreciation or even play to the poet fragments that they considered exemplary. Among these was Johann



Heinrich Friedrich Scütz, a very good pianist and organist, who managed to inspire Goethe's special devotion for Bach, but also to cultivate his sensitivity for Beethoven, to some extent, performing the latter's compositions sometimes for

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hours on end. Another intimate friend of Goethe's, the state councilor Friedrich Schmidt was so enthralled with Beethoven's achievements that he composed sonnets in which he praised the composer's figure and memorized his sonatas, which he played whenever the opportunity arose. He hoped that his enthusiasm for Beethoven's oeuvre would contaminate Goethe as much as possible.

Beethoven's old friend, the musician and former disciple of Mozart's, Johann Hummel Napomuk (see image) was probably much more influential. He settled as Kapellmeister at Weimar in 1817, his credibility being assured by his artistic reputation and by his recognition as the greatest piano virtuoso at that time. From Karl Czerny's accounts, we know that the two, Hummel and Beethoven, were the best Viennese pianists in the 1800s and that their public competitions were the most attractive and exciting virtuoso performances. Different in terms of technique, both were very good, so it was always difficult to decide the winner. Hummel had good taste, finesse and clarity of line, so he was rightly considered the best interpreter of Mozart's music. Beethoven, however, was more imaginative, spontaneous, driven by the ardor of interpretation and exhibiting an energy and a rhythm that nobody else possessed. Their rivalry as pianists never affected their profound friendship and mutual respect. Moreover, the two were co-authors of the *Battle of Vittoria*, 1813-1814, an opera that extolled the victory of the Austrian allies over Napoleon. Once he arrived in Weimar, Hummel presumably steered Goethe – with whom he often met – as much as he could towards appreciating his Viennese friend's compositions. Even the composer Wenzel Tomaschek, who had translated several of Goethe's poems to music, Rellstab, Beethoven's patron, who had sponsored the *Moonlight Sonata*, and the prominent historian and music critic Johann Friedrich Rochlitz always pleaded before the Weimar poet in favor of Beethoven and his musical art.

Among the young talented and very intelligent musicians whom Goethe trusted was Johann Christian Lobe. At a meeting, the latter tried to explain to Goethe the difference between formal, antiquated (*antiquiert*) music, Zelter's genre, and the new, romantic music of Beethoven and Weber. Zelter's lieder, the young man explained, consisted strictly of rhythmic and harmonic accompaniments, that is, of line, cadence and formal substance, lacking emotion and spiritual tension, while romantic compositions were full of emotion and comprised a powerful atmosphere and a personal, relevant message. If played without a melody, solely with accompaniment, Zelter's music did not communicate anything because it was devoid of sensitive thematic inspiration. In the music of Beethoven and Weber one could feel the pulse and rhythm of sentiment, of the personal emotion that was accompanied, developed and molded by melody and harmonies. With a vision that history was to confirm, young Lobe expressed to Goethe his belief that "[m]usic will one day reach a stage in which each note of the accompaniment will play an integral part in the expression of the sentiment."<sup>91</sup> This is exactly what would happen, decades later, in Wagner's music.

Still, Goethe could never integrate Beethoven's music because of the abysmal depth of emotions that it emanated and fostered, because of the – magnificent and devastating -vital turmoil erupting from it at certain stages. Extreme passions such as tumultuous grandeur and melancholy depression disconcerted and alienated Goethe.<sup>92</sup> His was the helplessness and anxiety of an Apollonian spirit that felt threatened and devastated by the composer's murky Dionysian passions. In this sense, it is legitimate to contend that through the two German creators, there was enacted the relationship between the Apollonian and the Dionysian

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<sup>91</sup> In R. Rolland, p. 59.

<sup>92</sup> "But there were two things which he did not like, two types of music, the colossal and the melancholy romantic. To be crushed or to be depressed was to him equally unendurable," R. Rolland, p. 92.

metaphysical principles, in whose disputes and rhythmic conciliations the forms of the universal creative spirit were actually decided.

## Part Two

### Analytical elements regarding composition, style, expression

#### 1. Hallmarks of the romantic vision

**The genius.** In order to arrive at a proper understanding of Beethoven's personality, it is useful to integrate it within a cultural model consecrated by romanticism, which encapsulates symbols, archetypes and figures, which may, to some extent, be different – such as the hero, the titan or the genius – but unified through some crucial common features. This model might be referred to as a strongly outlined *individual personality*, which has the capacity to change the world according to new values, projects and rules. The hero and the genius are versions thereof, majestic embodiments of this Personality, which may change or revolutionize socio-political and artistic history. Individual personality is crystallized through a continuous effort, aspiration and self-adjustment under the ideal tension of a model. In a similar manner, historical epochs and societies adjust their collective personality through a joint effort to impose some models, deemed to be relevant, exemplary and worthy of being followed and through the reiteration of exemplary events – rituals, processions, liturgies, games, habituses, etc. – whose emulated process of signification releases the meanings vertebrating them. There is, using a broad term applied by the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, an *autopoiesis*<sup>93</sup> of

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<sup>93</sup> According to Luhmann, the basis for the foundation, conservation and reproduction of the optimal formulas of societies as a system is communication. Through communication, a society reflects itself, understands itself and adjusts to the external environment and the given circumstances in order to ensure its continuity. Social autopoietics means conscious self-creation, oriented by the community's value items: "For a theory of autopoietic systems, only communication is a serious candidate for the position of the elementary unit of the

societies as systems, just like there is an *autopoiesis* of individual personalities. The Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung referred to the process of individual personality formation as individuation. In this process, the image of a model, the effort of personal adjustment and the continuous aspiration to reach the ideal form are constant elements, whose joint operation determines the degree of similarity between one's own and the ideal personality.

Illustrating the way in which this mechanism works would probably facilitate a deep insight into the idea above. Let us refer to a few illustrious cases in history. King Alexander III of Macedon, the most famous conqueror in ancient history, formed his personality under the ideal pressure of the hero Trojan Achilles, whom he always took with him on his military campaigns, through Homer's *Iliad*, which he never parted from. Later, Napoleon Bonaparte took Alexander Macedon as his model, whose fame and conquest achievements he aspired to match. Interestingly, Beethoven, who had nothing to do with war and politics, nonetheless took Napoleon as a model. Why? Not for his military skills and his conquest campaigns, but for the power of his personality to change the world. In his own way, Beethoven envisaged himself as a Bonaparte of European music. On another level, of religion, the personality of Christian figures was formed through the imitation of Jesus Christ. Thomas of Kempis's book

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basic self-referential process of social systems. Only communication is necessarily and inherently social. Action is not. Moreover, social action already implies communication; it implies at least the communication of the meaning of the action or the intent of the actor, and it also implies the communication of the definition of the situation, of the expectation of being understood and accepted, and so on. Above all, communication is not a kind of action because it always contains a far richer meaning than the utterance or transmittance of messages alone. As we have seen, the perfection of communication implies understanding, and understanding is not part of the activity of the communicator and cannot be attributed to him. Therefore, the theory of autopoietic social systems requires a conceptual revolution within sociology: the replacement of action theory by communication theory as the characterization of the elementary operative level of the system," Niklas Luhmann, *Meaning and Life as Different Modes of Autopoietic Organization*, p. 4.

*Imitatio Christi* served for a long time as a guide in this direction. In fact, it is based on emulation around the figure of Christ that Christian religious ethics, the cult of martyrdom and the ideal of holiness have been articulated, and the institution of the Church has assumed the administration in perpetuity of the Christian society's rapports with Jesus Christ, integrated, of course, within the paradigm of the Trinity. In all these cases, at stake is the same process of personality formation by progressively conforming to an ideal model. The process of individuation involves, to a significant degree, mimicry, the imitation of deeds, qualities or personality features considered to be exemplary.

Thus, there exists a culture of the romantic type, in which the formation of an individual with an expressively outlined personality, whose inner processes and life are carefully displayed, analyzed, highlighted. Sometimes, this cult of the self<sup>94</sup> reached quasi-religious heights for the romantics, just like, in some cases, it became a means of narcissistic self-glorification. Narcissus remains, in any case, an effigy of romantic culture. By the very cult of individuality, romanticism contrasts the outstanding, meritorious, strongly individualized personality to the society, the group, the anonymity generated by melting

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<sup>94</sup> "No preceding age had placed such pressure on the individual to have, *experience, exhibit, prove, live and perform his or her selfhood*. For the Romantics, the self is not simply there, but is yet to be brought about by the individual, each individual facing the task of institutionalizing his own self. While Romanticism is certainly not a united front, the overall Romantic element in this response is the conceptualization of a spectral self—a self that, at least to some degree, is understood to be comprehensible by means of perception. As the optical metaphor of reflection indicates, *the Romantic self is, in its essence, a matter of appearance*. Thus, proving the existence of the self (even to oneself) requires some externalization and phenomenalization of the self that allows an observatory, perhaps even visual, relationship to it. While this emphasis on the visual and modes of appearance explains the underlying connection between Romanticism, the arts and aesthetics, it also has distinct implications for political, legal and economic thought, ranging from discussions surrounding political representation and equal rights to the legal assurance of individual property rights," *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth Century Thought*, ed. Gregory Claeys, Routledge, 2005, p. 554.



within a group or by becoming embroiled in collective actions. The romantic individual paints his own portrait, exhibits it in public and wishes it to be seen, perceived and appreciated as such, as uniqueness. The group, the crowd, society always poses the risk that the romantic individual might become anonymous, indistinguishable. In the German culture of early Romanticism, the sources of influence were religious pietism, on the one hand, and Kantian philosophy, on the other. From pietism, the romantics took over the reflexive attitude and permanent self-interrogation, while from Kant they learned that the process of knowledge has both an empirical basis, more specifically, the a priori conditioned sensory perception, and an abstract foundation, in the sense of a conceptual formation. The romantic individual or personality is not something given once and for all, but a form of transformation, an energetic, physical or attitudinal projection, guided by an ideal. This idea seems to have dominated European culture at the turn of the nineteenth century, reinforced theoretically by the innovative wave generated by the Enlightenment and practically by the French Revolution.

In literature, the shaping of individual personality is illustrated in the *Bildungsroman* narratives, among which *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, written by Goethe under the inspiration of Ugo Foscolo, the Italian author of *Jacopo Ortis*, was the most impressive example in terms of the effects it generated in European culture. Another remarkable illustration of this species is the work of Novalis, *The Disciples at Saïs*, while at the philosophical level, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* was spectacular and exemplary. Among others, Constantin Noica approached the famous Hegelian work as a species of *Bildungsroman*, assuming the risk to reconstruct it as a philosophical narrative in his book *Tales about Man*. Other typical elements of romantic culture are the cult of art, whose agent is the genius, romantic love, sometimes together with its sub-species, unrequited love, or the integration of suffering and suicide within the individual destiny. Many romantics perceived

their time as a period of decline, even alienation, from which they tried to escape through the passéist cult of the glorious past and of ancient heroes, as well as through a return to nature and a retrieval of magical communication with its mysteries, that is, in Max Weber's terms, through a *re-enchantment* of nature. Schlegel in Germany and Scott in Britain oriented themselves towards the Middle Ages and the heroes of this period, while Chateaubriand, Novalis, Hölderlin and Wordsworth aspired to a union with nature, whose mysteries they glorified.

In one form or another, romantic sensitivity and the vision of the most representative artists of this period have been interpreted through the vantage point of escapism, of the attempt to withdraw from immediate reality through ideal projections of the past, of some models, or by restoring the magical dimension of nature: "This Romantic self-description has led many later critics to see Romanticism as a conservative nostalgic by-product of the decline of the feudal order and the rise of industrialism. Whereas, within feudal society, each individual had a designated place according to religion, profession, family, age and sex, the eighteenth century uprooted the individual from these pre-determined positions, thus both necessitating and allowing for self-definitions. However, as other critics have pointed out, the claim for a state of disconnection turned out to be quite productive for the Romantics. The greater the distance between fragmented individuals is believed to be, the greater the intensity of perception, vision and feeling could be in compensating for this distance. Indeed, emphasizing distance and fragmentation allowed the Romantics to focus productively on those techniques that simultaneously unite and separate the individual spheres. Thus, the key tension at work within Romanticism, namely that between the radical uniqueness of the individual on the one hand and the desired self-annihilation and mystic fusion in a universal order on the other, opened the way for new modes of perception and communication."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *Idem*, p. 557.

An important component of Romanticism was the aesthetic vision of the world, coupled with the selection of an appropriate symbol as an element for the self-expression of personality. For Shelling, the symbol was the only language that could express the infinity of the world and feeling through finite forms because, unlike concepts or abstract categories, symbols do not retain or limit, but rather liberate meanings and significances against a horizon of semantic reverberations, allowing for unlimited interpretations. The symbol is a revealing instrument because it does not explain, it does not clarify, but suggests and allows an array of hermeneutic assimilations. The symbol, as an element of language, does not function by itself, but by being included in allegories and myths, as indicated by representative authors like Schlegel, Shelley, Novalis or Baudelaire. Irony, humor, paradox, fragmentation<sup>96</sup> also belong to the rhetorical instruments whereby these authors express their aesthetic conception, which means that they implicitly amount to techniques for the construction of the romantic

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<sup>96</sup> “It has been argued by critics such as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy that these fragments exemplify the essence of modern literature and perhaps modernity in general through their call for completion. Rather than being conceived of as incomplete parts of a previously existing whole, these fragments project a whole that is yet to come. More than a mere construction plan, the fragment reflects upon itself in such a way that this reflection opens up a space beyond that which is stated in the fragment itself, thus enlarging it beyond its contours. Simultaneously with the genre of the fragment, the discipline of hermeneutics developed rapidly (Schleiermacher). Hermeneutical thought sought to understand a text by means of executing the text’s own movements and reflections, thus adding to the complexity of the text, rather than reducing it to a single meaning. This hermeneutical approach resulted in incomprehensibility, which is the *modus operandi* of the fragment and the fragmented self, as they do not represent a whole but rather present and enact it. For Schlegel and Novalis, the self is such a fragment. The self strives to complete itself through self-observation, reflecting upon itself from a higher level. The self is a perpetual work-in-progress. However, these self-reflections produce an image of the self that is still incomplete, as it lacks a depiction of the self’s ability to observe itself. Thus, each self-observation has the very act of the observation as its blind spot, opening up an infinite process of reflection, including reflections on reflections, and observations of observations,” *idem*, p. 558.

self. According to the romantics, the I, individuality or the self does not entail isolation or radical differentiation, but the very universal, natural state of the personality, which, once discovered and expressed in its profound essence, speaks on behalf name of the general human essence. It may seem a paradox, but it is not. In the most pure and profound individuality, the romantics find the universality of the human being, and based on this philosophy, they may consider that the best articulated form of self-expression is predicated on the revelation of the state that epitomizes the human condition in general. Self-knowledge, the accurate and expressive configuration of one's own individuality implicitly entails a revelation of the universal state of the human self and amounts, at the same time, to acquiring knowledge of the other. We believe it would be useful to illustrate this idea by reference to the concept of monad developed in the work of the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716), *Monadology*.

The German philosopher believed that the universe was created by God on the grounds of providential knowledge, by choosing the model of *the best possible world*, which he structured according to the plan of a *predetermined harmony*. This pre-established harmony indicates the place, position and role of each element and of created being within the order of the world. The elements whereby God ordered the world are called monads, simple, indestructible substances that have the quality of containing infinity, the absolute, but that are reflected in particular entities, according to the place and position occupied in space and time by each individual monad. Human souls have the status of monads, according to Leibniz's thesis, since they reflect God in a particular manner. Even if in their mutual relations, monads are hermetically refracting, because they are self-sufficient in ontological terms ("monads have no windows"), because they contain the image and consistency of the absolute, each actually contains the image of the other(s) in absolute manner. Given that God is reflected in them, a rapport of indirect infinite reflection is established, by diverting the

infinite reflex of God's nature. If we maintain the phenomenon of reflection as characteristic of monads and, respectively, of souls, then it follows that they play the role of mirrors arranged in such a way that each contains, in a specific place and time, a singular position within the cosmic harmony of the very universality of being. A mirror<sup>97</sup> of the universal, each monad expresses its essence in a singular way. This was also the romantics' idea, but they did not call the individual self a monad. Still, the philosophical link with the Leibnizian monadology is obvious, because monads are individualities, individuations of the universal principle. The romantics invested the self, individuality with the same status of mirror of the universe and, ultimately, of the absolute. To the extent that it manages to shape the most relevant and comprehensive expressions of the individual self, art acquires religious dignity, since it expresses the divine. It is hardly inconsistent then to see the figure of the genius as a measure of divinity, the agent through which the essence of the universe is revealed in symbolic forms.

At the level of creation, the consequence of this fact is that a profound and relevant self-expression always entails the expression of the essential elements of any other personality. Based on natural similarities, of the essential similarity between human beings,

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<sup>97</sup> In a famous book about the formation, codification and interpretation of sentimental-erotic relations in Western culture, the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann also notes the influence of the Leibnizian theory about the mirror-individual on the romantic vision: "Leibniz had also defined individuality in terms of correspondence to the world, but had related this correspondence to representativity in *the factual dimension* (taking the mirror as metaphor). It was only in the course of the eighteenth century □ dare one say, on the basis of experience with the new principle of individuality? □ that the *temporal dimension* and above all the *social dimension* were added. It will be difficult to judge the influence of Leibniz on this development; in any case, both that which, as a world, constituted individuality and, conversely, what, as individuality, constituted a world, gradually began to be imbued with historical and socially practical references; and it was this triad of referential dimensions which brought out the element of personal individuality in all its worldly uniqueness, its uniqueness as being-of-the-world," Niklas Luhmann, *Love as Passion*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 133.

Schiller envisaged a political project of universal brotherhood, which became the subject of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy (An die Freude)*. This individual who finds himself in natural unity with others reaches a similar intimacy with external nature, the environment, the universe itself, which imagination and intuition allow him to penetrate and understand as something that is in communion with the natural human self. In other words, the human self is revealed in the natural universe and nature is expressed in the genuine, spontaneous states of the human self. This relation of mutual mirroring between the self/personality and nature on which the romantics relied, Wordsworth's work being very conclusive in this respect, has been described as "expressive selfhood"<sup>98</sup> by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (in *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

Schopenhauer's philosophical position probably exerted the greatest influence on the romantic vision across the entire European cultural space. In his view, expressed chiefly in the vast work written in his youth, entitled *The World as Will and Representation*, art in general is seen as the product of universal will, which reaches a level of aesthetic expression

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<sup>98</sup> "Expressing and articulating the inner voice was considered the proper access to 'nature,' a nature that did not operate along the lines of an inside-outside dichotomy, since the inward self was in essence natural. Wordsworth in particular dedicated many of his major works to transcending singular experiences, in an attempt to arrive at the natural self. Reaching this universal selfhood was essentially connected to acquiring a double vision that used images of nature as a means of entry into the world beyond the visible realm. Therefore, the ability to see beyond the visible world was the key faculty that unites mankind. Wordsworth considered individually acquired imagination to be this faculty. The most individualistic faculty is thus the very door to universality: the better one understands that which makes the individual an individual, namely imagination, the better one understands mankind in general. Wordsworth considered recollection to be the means of accessing an individual's formation of imagination—the topic of the *Prelude*. The work of recollection is therefore the key to understanding not just the individualistic, but also the universal self," *Encyclopedia of the Nineteenth Century Thought*, ed. Gregory Claeys, Routledge, 2005, p. 560

that is specific only to man and, within this species, only to the creator who is a genius. The entire movement of the living universe is determined by the energy of the will, a metaphysical category, which is expressed, at the primary level, through the sheer will to be. Everything that is alive in the universe inertially perpetuates the flow of the will, whose aim is its pure and infinite reproduction in forms of life. Man is no exception in this respect, but his intellectual, spiritual and artistic life provides the will with instruments of expression that no longer entail the sheer reproduction of life. The genius is the instrument prepared by nature through which the will is expressed in artistic forms and the creations of the genius are forms of the universal will on the aesthetic level. The difference between a genius and a talented artist is one of degree rather than of substance. The ultimate measure and sublime expression of art belongs solely to the genius. Using a relevant comparison, Schopenhauer stated that while the talented artist achieved goals that others could not reach, the genius achieved targets that others could not even notice.<sup>99</sup> A talented artist can be a virtuoso, but a genius is a visionary. A talented artist may be better than others, but a genius is unique.

Like Kant, Schopenhauer considered the sublime as the highest aesthetic category, whose expression was the sole prerogative of the genius. Among the forms of artistic expression, the one that reaches the purest and most refined expression of the principle of the universal will is music, because it is not in relation with anything in the world of physical,

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<sup>99</sup> “While genius belongs only to someone who has freed himself from subjectivity, talent remains within the province of ordinary, will-governed consciousness. The person of talent is simply someone who ‘thinks more rapidly and accurately than do the rest,’ and is therefore more effective in practical affairs; ‘the genius perceives a world different from them all – though only by looking more deeply into the world that lies before them also – since it presents itself in his mind more objectively’ (WR I: 376). ‘Talent is like the marksman who hits a target which others cannot reach; genius is like the marksman who hits a target . . . others cannot even see,’” Julian Young, *Schopenhauer*, Routledge, 2005, p. 126.

material objects. Music is related to the very fluid principle of universal will,<sup>100</sup> whose immaterial metamorphoses it captures and expresses. Because it has no other object to refer to and express other than the will itself, the metaphysical principle of the world, music is “the highest and most profound” of all the arts. In short, music is the very language of the will. In other words, it is the purest artistic form and the most refined metaphysical expression. Harmony in the world of music reflects and expresses the order of nature, which is but the material form of the will. Thus, according to Schopenhauer, there are the following analogies<sup>101</sup> between the regna of nature and voices/instruments: the mineral corresponds to the bass, the vegetable to the tenor, the animal to the alto voice and the human to the soprano voice. A complex musical composition, such as an opera or a symphony, gains the relevance of a cosmogonic project, since it presents, in sonorous versions, the pantheistic cycles of the universal will. In musical operas, this universality of the will gains thematic specificity through words, whose<sup>102</sup> descriptive-narrative character has the power to affix the emotional flow of the will into revealing scenes, poses and situations.

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<sup>100</sup> “Music is universally recognized as a ‘language,’ as *saying* something, something, moreover, of the utmost profundity. It follows that it *must* be representational, must be related to reality as a ‘copy (*Abbild*)’. But since it is not a copy of the world of objects, the world as empirical representation, there is, within the dualism of representation and will, only one thing left for it to be a representation of: the will. What music is about, then, is the will, the thing in itself,” *idem*, p. 151.

<sup>101</sup> “Music, then, copies the will. But so does the world of nature, the world whose fundamental pattern is represented by the Ideas. Hence there must be a ‘parallelism’ between music and nature, one which is revealed in the structure of musical harmony. The bass corresponds to the mineral, the tenor to the vegetable (can many tenors have taken kindly to this idea?), the alto to the animal and the soprano to the human. So here is a partial confirmation of Schopenhauer’s theory,” *idem*, p. 152.

<sup>102</sup> “That this is the nature of musical representation explains why, (to borrow Nietzsche’s phrase) music ‘gives birth’<sup>18</sup> to words. Since music, says Schopenhauer, gives the ‘universal’ aspect of an emotional sequence or narrative – that which is common to all instances of, for example, love, followed by loss, followed by grief,



**The sublime.** Because it is not a simple grammatical form, but one of the important aesthetic categories – akin to the beautiful, but sometimes placed on a higher level of expressiveness, at other times even placed in weak contradistinction therewith – the sublime must, above all, be defined, described, introduced within a semantic area that will facilitate its understanding and identification. Derived from the Latin *sublimis*, the term “the sublime” is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “something set or raised aloft, high up.”<sup>103</sup> The sublime can be attributed to natural, technical or artistic objects – mountain scenery, a waterfall, the Egyptian pyramids, certain cathedrals, the statue of Zeus created by Phidias. It may also be a form of judgments of taste or even of inner mood. The sublime has, therefore, at a first sketching, a natural-objective, an aesthetic-analytic and a psychological register. The sublime can also be an event, a situation, a chance happening – like the vision of Moses on Mount Sinai, the resurrection of Lazarus by Jesus Christ, the crucifixion, the moment when Socrates drank the hemlock potion, the burning of Giordano Bruno at the stake, the execution of Marie Antoinette by guillotine, a revolution, the Apocalypse, etc. The role played by an actor in a play or film can also be sublime. An artistic event or performance is sublime insofar as it produces the same uplifting emotion, the sensation of awesome grandeur or cathartic upheaval. In whatever form it may appear, the sublime strikes attention through an irresistible impression, it captures emotions and blocks<sup>104</sup> sensitivity in a reaction of dazed

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followed by acceptance of loss – we have a natural tendency to supply the music with a text which stands to the universal as an ‘example’. Hence, for example, we (not Beethoven) speak of the ‘Moonlight’ sonata and ‘Pastoral’ symphony ... Music, then, provides the secret history of the will; that is, the thing in itself,” *idem*, p. 153.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Philip Shaw, *The Sublime*, Routledge, 2006, p. 1.

<sup>104</sup> “Sublimity, then, refers to the moment when the ability to apprehend, to know, and to express a thought or sensation is defeated. Yet through this very defeat, the mind gets a feeling for that which lies beyond thought and language,” Philip Shaw, *idem*, p. 3.

bewilderment. The emotion caused by the sublime induces a bafflement of sensitivity that aesthetic judgment and language cannot immediately translate into words. It is the revelation of a situation bordering on the im/possibility of sensorial apprehension and comprehension, which aspires to the transcendent: “In broad terms, whenever experience slips out of conventional understanding, whenever the power of an object or event is such that words fail and points of comparison disappear, then we resort to the feeling of the sublime. As such, the sublime marks the limits of reason and expression together with a sense of what might lie beyond these limits.”<sup>105</sup>

From a historical point of view, the first known writing on the sublime is the work from the first Christian century attributed to Dionysius Longinus, entitled *Peri Hupsos*, in translation *On the Sublime*. Longinus focuses on the rhetorical dimension of the sublime, on the capacity of a discourse or a text to induce turmoil, strong emotions, the sentiment of grandeur and the divine. The sublime causes the listeners or the readers of a text to be enthralled, disturbed, entranced and transported to an unexpected level of feelings. In short, the rhetorical power of the sublime resides in inducing<sup>106</sup> states of higher sensitivity, in altering the emotional and mental state. This induction of the sublime depends on persuasion techniques, molding the sensitivity and mental state of individuals. In the modern period, literary and critical texts emphasized the vehement, distressing dimension of the sublime,

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<sup>105</sup> Philip Shaw, *idem*, p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> “For grandeur produces ecstasy rather than persuasion in the hearer; and the combination of wonder and astonishment always proves superior to the merely persuasive and pleasant. This is because persuasion is on the whole something we can control, whereas amazement and wonder exert invincible power and force and get the better of every hearer. Experience in invention and ability to order and arrange material cannot be detected in single passages; we begin to appreciate them only when we see the whole context. Sublimity, on the other hand, tears everything up like a whirlwind, and exhibits the orator’s whole power at a single blow,” (Longinus), quoted in Philip Shaw, p. 13.

sometimes with clear reference to the struggle of good and evil, or of God and Satan. In his book *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1684), Thomas Burnet (1635-1715) outlined an image of the Last Judgment, in which, terrified by the vehemence of divine power and the unfathomable glory of God, evil-doers and the allies of the devil would attempt to escape divine wrath by being buried alive underneath the mountains, which they would clamor to collapse over them. In Burnet's writing, the place where the sublime will be revealed is the Apocalypse, because then the entire creation will be shaken and shattered to the core, as Armageddon will be unleashed then, the final battle with the forces of Good and of Evil, with a view to cosmic purification and the establishment of the divine kingdom. The sublime, as a cosmic, natural dimension – revealed by the wild heights of the mountains, the fury of the storm, volcanic eruptions, or the stormy roar of the sea – and as an element of the extra-human reality was increasingly adopted and cultivated by artists and writers in European culture, finding its moments of climax during the period of Romanticism.<sup>107</sup>

If there is an aesthetic category that we may unreservedly associate with the romantic spirit, then this is the sublime. In the way in which it was aesthetically conceptualized and valorized by the theorists of the period, including John Baillie, Edmund Burke, G. E. Lessing and I. Kant, the sublime expresses the superlative features of the artistic situation or work that are comparable, through the impact exerted, with religious awe – something that disturbs,

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<sup>107</sup> "Burnet's work is important additionally for its analysis of the origins of the sublime. Whilst Longinus stresses sublimity as a purely rhetorical phenomenon, Burnet and his followers in the eighteenth century pay close attention to the vast and grand in nature. As the literary critic Marjorie Hope Nicolson (1959) has argued, interest in the 'natural sublime' initiated a major shift in British culture as poets and artists turned from the representation of politics and manners towards the exploration of mental and physical intensity. The lofty mountain peak or the swelling ocean, as depicted in the poems of Akenside and Thomson, and in the writings of the Romantics, thus became the scene for darker meditations on the nature of the self and its relations with the external world," Philip Shaw, *idem*, p. 5.

shakes sensitivity and compels admiration. European history itself seemed, according to some, to be exalted to a sublime value; it was an epoch of revolutionaries, geniuses and heroes. After a visit to France in 1779, ten years before the outbreak of the revolution, sensing the turmoil of the time, Abigail Adams, wife of United States President John Adams, wrote to her son, John Quincy Adams, the future President (in 1825, he was to become the seventh President of the USA), the following lines: “These are the times in which a genius would wish to live. It is not in the still calm of life, or the repose of a pacific station that great characters are formed. The habits of a vigorous mind are formed in contending with difficulties. Great necessities call out great virtues. When a mind is raised, and animated by scenes that engage the heart, then those qualities which would otherwise lay dormant, wake into life and form the character of the hero and the statesman.”<sup>108</sup> The French society she could observe had become a symptom of the times, carrying within itself the turmoil, tensions, forces and ideas that were to become unleashed, a decade later, quickly disseminating their revolutionary undertow across the entire continent.

The works *An Essay on the Sublime* (by John Baillie, 1749) and *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (by Edmund Burke, 1757) fixed the theoretical landmarks within which the two categories of art were conceived, also generating a series of replies and re-conceptualizations from various romantic theorists. John Baillie theorized the sublime in relation to the *heroic*, characterized by the desire for conquest and fame. Considering that the two great military strategists and fighters of antiquity – Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar – represented the eminent illustration of the category of the sublime, he emphasized that the inner source of its manifestation was in the Desire of Power and in the Passion of Fame. At the level of the concrete manifestation of the sublime-heroic passion, it is visible in the love of the motherland and in Universal

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<sup>108</sup> Quoted in Paul Mattick’s book, *Art in Its Time*, Routledge, 2003, p. 48.

Benevolence, which encompasses all humanity: “Indeed, Love to any of the Individuals, nay to all of them, when considered as Individuals, and one by one, has nothing of Exalted; it is when we love them collectively, when we love them in vast Bodies stretching over large Countries, that we feel the Sublime rise.”<sup>109</sup>

Edmund Burke resumes the Longinian line of thinking, stressing that the sublime is a state and a form of perception caused by language, that natural phenomena and external events are not sublime in themselves, but they become thus through the rhetorical, artistic techniques that describe and, respectively, shape them according to human sensitivity. The sublime is, according to Burke, an event of language and communication, rather than a natural fact: “Drawing on the legacy of the Longinian tradition, Burke directs his analysis towards the effects of the sublime in language. It is at this point, as many recent critics have noted, that the Enquiry begins to expose a fault line in the history of the sublime. Words have a power, Burke argues, to raise the idea of the sublime, such that the distinction between the sublime object and its description no longer applies; it is language, in other words, that brings about the transformation of the world, enabling us to hymn the vastness of the cathedral or the depths of the ravine. More radically, the stress on sublimity as an aspect of language leads Burke to undermine the privileging of human consciousness.”<sup>110</sup> The way in which Burke analyzes these two categories complies with the polarity of the female-male genders, or of the states of love and terror, pleasure and pain. Features such as *smallness*, *smoothness*, *roundness*, *softness*, *pale color*, *purity*, *sufficiency*, *malleability* are typically feminine and qualify the beautiful. Others, like *vastness*, *harshness*, *heaviness*, *strong color*, *hardness*, *stridency*, pertain to the masculine and qualify the sublime. The feminine beautiful arouses the emotion of love and the desire for closeness, even though it leaves the impression of

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<sup>109</sup> *Idem*, p. 62.

<sup>110</sup> Philip Shaw, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

imperfection and weakness. Weakness, helplessness, even suffering are qualities whereby feminine nature manages to attract and retain interest. On the contrary, the masculine sublime causes fear and maintains distance. It cannot be loved, solely admired. The relationship with the beautiful and the sublime is consolidated and adjusted, according to Burke, in the diversity of one's relationships with the parents.<sup>111</sup> The mother, who is gentle and indulgent, is loved, while the father, who stands for the principle of authority that also instills some degree of permanent fear is admired. Generalizing the idea, in life situations and encounters with people, everything that causes pain, fear or even terror induces a feeling of sublimity. Any situation, object or person that generates an emotional spectrum which is ghastly, terrible or colossal has a sublime potential. The analogy with the religious experience of the sacred is again evident. Like the presence of a mystical situation, the sublime maintains a sacred terror,<sup>112</sup> a form of profound turmoil.

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<sup>111</sup> "It should come as no surprise to learn that sublimity should be associated with 'the authority of a father,' beauty with a 'mother's fondness and indulgence'. As Burke's Freudian biographer, Isaac Kramnick, observes, in the *Enquiry* 'sublime virtues are embodied in 'the authority of a father,' venerable, and distant. ... Mothers and women in general are creatures of 'compassion,' and the 'amiable, social virtues' ... the masculine realm is [thus] authority associated with pain and terror; the feminine is affect – friendship and love associated with pleasure and compassion," Philip Shaw, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>112</sup> "The sublime, in contrast, causes not love but admiration. It 'always dwells on great objects' while the beautiful is found in 'small ones, and pleasing; we submit to what we admire, but we love what submits to us.' Sublimity is to be found, for example, in 'the authority of a father,' which 'hinders us from having that entire love for him that we have for our mothers, where the parental authority is almost melted down into the mother's fondness and indulgence.' Fundamentally, the source of the sublime is to be found in 'whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror'—at any rate, 'at certain distances' from danger, when fear gives way to the delightful *frisson* of an aesthetic experience," Paul Mattick, *Art in Its Time*, p. 49.

Edmund Burke made valuable observations, from the perspective of our theme, discussing the historical sublime illustrated in the French Revolution. Sublimity, which he described in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), is not only the wave of liberation, the popular effusion driven by the ideals of equality and universal brotherhood, but also the horrific violence and barbarism of the beheading machine used with wild enthusiasm in the capital of Europe's most civilized country. The revolution was a grandiose stage show, a sublime scene of liberating and punitive violence, that is, a monstrous – comic and tragic – public masterpiece in which mixed tears of laughter and crying were shed together, where threats and horrors seem stifled by a cosmic roar of laughter, worthy of Goya's paintings. At the same time, as a history show, the revolution was, according to the Irishman thinker, “the most amazing thing that has happened to the world so far,” but also the most absurd, ridiculous and reprehensible: ““For Burke, the Revolution is an event of sublime theatricality. It is, first and foremost, ‘a wonderful Spectacle’, a ‘paradoxical and Mysterious’ art work ‘exhibited’ for ‘Speculation’, an enigmatic ‘thing’, which causes the minds of those who gaze upon it to be ‘suspended’ by ‘astonishment’. To the man of taste, well versed in the discourse of painful pleasures, the French Revolution might indeed be regarded as a ‘curious matter’, even as an object to ‘admire’. But the more one gazes on this object, the less the artistic analogies hold true. As Burke adds, ‘the old Parisian ferocity has broken out in a shocking manner ...’<sup>113</sup> The Irish philosopher’s reaction of horror to that “chaos of levity and ferocity,” in which all crimes and follies were jumbled together, was justified, as it was accompanied by the concern that the wave of excitement and violence generated in Paris might extend to the neighboring countries, England being directly concerned. Indeed, the Revolution affected the entire European history from its aftermath through its political, ideological and cultural consequences.

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<sup>113</sup> Philip Shaw, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) examined, for the first time in European culture, the sublime as a value in aesthetic judgment, in the judgment of taste, based on what is called *apriorism* in his philosophy. The natural, innate drives of human sensitivity and thought are *a priori*. Kant called them *transcendental*, as they condition our ideational perceptions, representations and gestures. For example, the fact of perceiving anything as reality *in space* and any event as reality *in time* is conditioned *a priori*, because space and time are transcendental givens that predetermine the manner of perception and representation. Simply put, we cannot represent the world differently than by arranging objects and processes in space (side by side) and in time (one after another). We do not know how they exist in reality, that is, detached from the sphere of our perception, nor can we find this out. As things *in themselves*, they remain permanently hidden to us. Also, we cannot explain the production of phenomena except through causal relations, by deriving product B from cause A or from a more complex causal chain. By fixing the *a priori* conditions of human sensibility and intellect, Kant revolutionized European thinking more than any other modern thinker. While rational judgments are transcendently conditioned and universally valid because reason itself is universal, aesthetic judgments, however, do not have the same universal value. In the analytical of the sublime from his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant stated that judgments of taste have individual value, in the sense that they are conditioned *a priori*, but this time the *apriorism* is specific, personalized, and by no means universal. Simply stated, a judgment of taste says: *this thing is beautiful because it appears to me thus* or *this deed is sublime because it appears to me thus*. Taste is something particular, pertaining to each individual's structure, personality and even state of mind. The conditionings underlying the judgment of taste are many more than in the case of rational judgment, and its relevance is strictly individual. In other words, the judgment of taste is the result of the manner in which the taste of a certain



person is formed, which would require very elaborate archaeological efforts if it were to be known and described.

Kant conceives the sublime in relation to the beautiful. He claims that the beautiful is something whose shape can be clearly perceived and conveyed to a sensitive intuition, and that sparks a reaction of appreciation. The sublime appears rather as a formless thing, impossible to be conveyed to a sensitive intuition, which, through the overwhelming impact of its boundlessness, troubles aesthetic judgment. The beautiful can easily be perceived and understood, but the sublime defies understanding, overwhelms sensitivity, and outrages aesthetic reason.<sup>114</sup> By way of illustration, the thrill of a storm on a choppy sea or the ecstasy entailed by the image of mountain peaks shrouded in mist can generate the feeling of the sublime. It is important to understand that the sublime does not belong to the natural phenomenon as such, but to our judgment upon it, derived from the *a priori* conditions<sup>115</sup> of

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<sup>114</sup> “Following on from this, however, Kant notes two important differences. In the first case, where the beautiful is concerned with ‘the form of an object,’ with that which is bounded and can thus be distinguished clearly and coherently, the sublime is ‘to be found in a formless object ... while yet we add to this *unboundedness* the thought of its totality’. The sublime, in other words, refers to things which appear either formless or which have form but, for reasons of size, exceed our ability to perceive such form. In either case, the object is considered formless because ‘we cannot unify its elements ... in sense intuition’. Our ability to discern boundaries or spatial or temporal limitations is brought into question by the sublime. The second, and for Kant most important, distinction is that ‘whereas natural beauty’ provides judgment with an echo of its own capacity for self-determination, so that nature appears ‘preadapted’ or ‘purposive’ to this faculty, the sublime, by contrast, appears to frustrate judgment, to the extent of calling its autonomy into question. The sublime, in short, is presented here as an affront or ‘outrage’ to our powers of comprehension,” Philip Shaw, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>115</sup> “Here again we must keep in mind the rigorously transcendental nature of Kant’s philosophy: in any philosophical enquiry worth its salt, the point is not to focus on the sensuous or empirical aspects of human existence, for knowledge, in the strict sense, is derived not from the world of experience but rather from the *a priori* conditions of experience. In a judgment of taste, therefore, it is not the object itself that is beautiful but the

the sensible structure. The sea and the mountain in themselves are simple landscapes, however spectacular they might appear. The way in which we perceive them and the impression on which we base our aesthetic judgment qualifies them as sublime. An example about the formation of the idea of the sublime is the contemplation of the heavenly vault. According to the Kantian theory, the sublime is something that we cannot comprise in a sensible impression, for it is something irreducible. When our gaze scans the heavens, what we see is actually the boundlessness of the sky, that is, the fact that its immensity exceeds our power to see, to perceive. We see boundlessness, that is, something that does not exist as such. The gaze staring at the sky takes on the impression of this immensity, indeed, but with it, the idea that is also revealed is that the sky is infinite, unseen in its entirety. Simply put, when contemplating the sky we see its vault, but we also understand the infinity of its expanse. This impression of the infinite and the unfathomable is actually the sublime of heavens, which is an aesthetic judgment. According to Kant's distinction, the impression of incomprehensible spatial vastness (*what is large or great beyond all comparison*) is a form of mathematical sublime. Along with the *mathematical sublime*, there is also the *dynamic sublime*, revealed in the impression of an external force, power or being that overwhelms us, whether it is a natural phenomenon such as a volcanic eruption, an earthquake, a water fall or a calamity, destiny or God.

A beautiful thing or phenomenon attracts, causes aesthetic pleasure, while the sublime determines ambiguous reactions of attraction and rejection, of intense aesthetic pleasure, but also of anxiety and disorder. These states are, in fact, reaction forms of our sensibility; they

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manner in which the mind apprehends that object, manifesting its accordance with an indeterminate concept of understanding. Like the beautiful, therefore, the sublime is not a property of nature. Given what has already been said about the sublimity of storms and such like, this might seem nonsensical. But here again we must bear in mind that judgments of taste refer more to subjective conditions of perception than to qualities inherent in the sensuous world," Philip Shaw, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

do not exist as such in the nature of the so-called sublime object. In other words, the sublime is an interpretation rather than an aesthetic state of the things or phenomena around us. For greater accuracy, it should be noted, however, that between the thing that is perceived as beautiful and the one acknowledged as sublime there are still differences in quality by virtue of which our subjective impressions interpret them as such. These qualitative differences support and justify the way in which our subjective emotion turns them into aesthetic judgments: “Kant, to reiterate, regards the sublime as an attribute not of nature, but rather of the mind. In the case of the mathematical sublime, it is the ability of the mind to submit formlessness, such as the random, excessive movements of a storm, or the imperceptible contours of a vast cathedral, to the rational idea of totality. Through the encounter with the vast in nature the mind discovers within itself a faculty that transcends the realm of sensible intuition. Similarly with the dynamical sublime, in contemplating might from afar, the mind realizes the rational idea of freedom – from its slavish dependence on nature and the faculty of imagination. In both cases what is uncovered is the rational a priori ground of cognition, a pure ‘idea’ of totality or freedom, which is not subject to the empirical, contingent conditions of nature. Significantly, both realizations arise on the basis of an initial failure in our ability to comprehend.”<sup>116</sup>

As regards the political expression of the sublime, Kant also illustrates, like Burke, by reference to the French Revolution, but his position is different. While the Irish philosopher described the horrors and chaos, the violence, cruelty and crimes of the revolution, Kant goes beyond the visible aspects of violence and finds an underlying Idea that animates the spirit of the revolutionaries, and the idea itself seems likely to liberate society; seen from outside, it causes great *enthusiasm* and *sympathy*. Kant does not justify the violence and the murders committed during the revolution, but understands that the its essence is rather the spirit or the

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<sup>116</sup> Philip Shaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-83.

idea that animates the crowds, the program of moral, social, political change in the name of *freedom, reason* and *progress*, that is, a program of ample and radical transformation of the historical world. A new order cannot be established, however, without destroying the old. This is the rule of any revolution. If at the practical level, the revolution is violent, criminal, at the level of the vision or idea, it can be sublime.<sup>117</sup> This ambivalence could illustrate, once again, the terrifying nature of the sublime, this time in Burke's sense. In Kant's analytics, the sublime retains its empirical-transcendental ambiguity all the way, but the step the philosopher took was decisive for the entire generation of German romantics, who had read him copiously and defended or rebutted him equally vehemently.

In his short essay *On the Sublime* (1793), the German poet Schiller (1759-1805) attempted to steer the sense of the sublime from the Kantian transcendental toward a psychological-emotional register, considering it as a mood in which are admixed the state of melancholy and the state of joy. For Schiller, the sublime includes, in its most profoundly romantic depths, the metaphysical sentiment of man's essential foreignness in the world – man is but a foreigner, a traveler on earth. This sentiment has very deep roots in the European tradition, going back to Plato, Orphism, Gnosticism, etc. Schiller's sublime also includes man's state of joy at the fact that he can, through meditation, reverie and imagination – forms of self-aggrandizement – wrest himself from the snares of this impermanent world in which he lives. It is the sublime<sup>118</sup> of a cosmic-anthropological vision, in which human smallness

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<sup>117</sup> “The enthusiasm generated in the minds of its spectators does, however, testify to the emergence of a secondary feeling of pleasure brought about from the realization that no phenomenon, no matter how great, can present the Ideas of Reason. The French Revolution is sublime, therefore, because it recalls us to the impossibility of granting sensual form to supersensible ideas,” Philip Shaw, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>118</sup> “As the literary critic Paul Hamilton comments, ‘melancholy arises from the imagination's loss of its empirical employment’. Consequently, ‘we are no longer at home in the world constituted by our experience when we are enjoying the feeling of being able to think beyond it. This joyful feeling of self-aggrandizement

and insignificance, regarded in a melancholic light, are at least temporarily redeemed in the metaphysical reverie of infinity.

German Romanticism, formulated as a radical innovative project by reference to the Enlightenment and the wider European tradition, was aimed at more than changing mentalities and cultural patterns, more than the replacement of some forms of artistic expression with others. In keeping with the very meaning of the term, formulated and articulated by Friedrich Schlegel in Jena, romanticism as a state and *to romanticize* as a verb signified features and behaviors of a new type of personality. The romantic is a person who perceives the world as a whole differently, in the sense that sensitivity to nature is intensified until it reaches a level close to animism. Although not explicitly used, the term animism often appears in the sense of a re-enchantment of the world, a rediscovery of the magic worldview and of the structures of sympathetic communion between man and nature, present throughout the archaic and pagan history and throughout the history of religious sensibility and practice. The romantic relates to nature in a religious and emotional rather than in a mechanistic manner (as proposed through the Newtonian model).<sup>119</sup> The romantic believes in spiritual purity and the relevance of love as a formula of communion and perfection at the personal level. Even in unhappy circumstances, when it is unfulfilled in immediate, human terms, love is a transfiguring suffering and force through which the soul is individualized, acquiring expressive force and cosmic dimensions.

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defines itself in relation to the unhappy consciousness of no longer belonging to the phenomenal world?," Philip Shaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>119</sup> "The Romantics were simply a rebellion against the Enlightenment, who aspired to re-enchant nature and replace the Newtonian picture of nature as a giant piece of clockwork with an 'organic' picture of nature as alive with various life-forces and as ultimately responsive to human wishes and plans," Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 132.

Suffering for love is assumed as a necessary stage in a process of continuous spiritual elevation, whose ultimate test is death, looming on the horizon of an ambiguous jubilation of the *amor fati* type. Suffering for love, which became a literary topos in Romanticism, has shaped public sensitivity to such an extent that it came to genuine suicidal rituals patterned after the model of Werther, the protagonist of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Novalis's mournful poems, caused by the loss of his beloved young Sophia, Schlegel's sentimental-erotic manifesto from *Lucinde*, the drama *Penthesilea*, as well as the suicide of Heinrich von Kleist are among the most representative events in the formation of romantic culture and sensibility. These apostles of suffering for love expressed their creed with the same fervor and conviction that usually accompany the establishment of a new religion. The poet Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811) is typical for the romantic hero. Eventually, maladjusted to life, depressed in a way that was enlightening, he committed suicide, but not alone. That would have been romantic to an insufficient degree, in his opinion. He committed suicide together with his last lover, Adolphine Henriette Vogel, on 21 November 1811, by shooting themselves. Their bodies were deposited in the same tomb, ensuring they would remain locked in an eternal embrace.

Between 1798 and 1800, a group of writers and philosophers formulated the first principles in the *Athenäum* review from Jena. These were, in fact, the guidelines of German Romanticism that were to spread rapidly in England, France and Italy. The most active and influential were the brothers August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, the literary critic Ludwig Tieck, the philosopher Friedrich Schlegel, the philosopher Friedrich Schelling, the poets Hölderlin and Novalis, the writer Caroline Michaelis Böhmer Schlegel Schelling, daughter of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, and Dorothea Mendelssohn Veit Schlegel, who became Friedrich Schlegel's wife. Their tutelary figure was Goethe, who was not part of the group but supported it as minister of culture and through his literary prestige.

Wilhelm von Humboldt collaborated with the movement from Jena, but he was also not a member of this group of young romantics. These young reformers were close in age and they represented, in fact, the generation to which Beethoven also belonged.

Herder's influence on the Romantics and on German culture in general was constant and decisive. Through his writings, he contributed to the replacement of the Newtonian mechanistic vision of the universe with the organicist metaphor, which had also been adopted by Goethe. Their universe was not a machine, but a living, dynamic being, constantly evolving and undergoing transformations, a universe that one could interact with in complex ways, not just at the cognitive-analytic or pragmatic level. Herder was among the first who considered that the individual personality was expressive in relation to the universe and that the linguistic level of expression, different from one language to another, was the prism through which the world was revealed. Human languages were the multifarious prisms of the absolute, each containing it in an all-comprehensive manner. They were actually self-sufficient spheres of expression for all that could be understood and communicated about the world. All the different languages and cultures contained their own criteria of excellence, expressiveness and accuracy of vision, as they could not be transferred from one culture to another, nor assessed from external perspectives.<sup>120</sup> Friedrich Schiller, who was active in both

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<sup>120</sup> "Herder was crucial in fashioning a view of agency as 'expressivist,' rather than mechanical: what distinguishes human agency, so Herder argued, is its capacity for meaning, for which the use of language is crucial, and no naturalistic, mechanical account of language is adequate to capture that sense of meaning. What we mean by words depends on an irreducible sense of normativity in their use, and our grasp of such normativity itself depends on our immersion in a way of life (a 'culture'), which functions as a background to all our more concrete uses of language. Since meaning and the expression of meaning is critical to understanding agency, and meaning is irreducibly normative, no third-person, purely objective understanding of agency is possible; one must understand both the agent's culture and the agent himself as an individual from the 'inside,' not from any kind of external, third-person point of view. This also led Herder to propose that we should

Jena and Weimar, was the one who elevated the aesthetic value of the beautiful to the level of an essential pedagogical category in the education of individuals and cultures. Reviving an ancient vision, more specifically, a Platonic vision, Schiller found that the orientation of human reason and sensitivity towards the beautiful was a prerequisite of moral refinement, of the achievement of good. The artistic creation of the beautiful also entailed the development of moral human sensitivity, rendering an artist as both an educator and a moralist artist. In fact, for him, artists,<sup>121</sup> not priests or scholars, were the new educators of humanity. It was not a matter of personal whim or taste, much less of chance that Beethoven chose Schiller's poem, *An die Freude (Ode to Joy)*, published in the Thalia review from Leipzig in 1786, for the celebration of human brotherhood in his Ninth Symphony, also using it as its title.

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understand human history as a succession of ways of life, or 'cultures,' whose standards for excellence and rightness are completely internal to themselves and which become expressed in the distinctive language of the culture; each such way of life represents a distinct type of human possibility and a different mode of collective and individual human excellence. No culture should therefore be judged by the standards inherent to another culture; each should be taken solely on its own terms. Moreover, the defining mark of a 'culture' or a people is its language (a notion that was to play a large role, in a manner completely unintended by Herder, in later nationalist movements), and the duty of poets, for example, is to refine that language and to create the works of art that display that culture in its excellence," Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy*, p. 134

<sup>121</sup> "[o]nly beauty (on Schiller's view) could shape or evince the necessary harmony between sensibility and reason (that is, between inclination and duty) which can provide us with the crucial motivation for the moral life (and which, both to Schiller and many others, was somehow missing in Kant's own alleged 'rigorism' regarding moral motivation). That beauty could be crucial to freedom and morality meant that the artist who creates a beautiful work contributes something decisive to the formation and education of humanity; this elevation of the artist as the 'educator' of humanity without a doubt exercised a strong influence on the thought of the early Romantics. That Schiller himself was first at Jena, then later at Weimar (just a few miles away), also helped to bolster Schiller's influence on the early Romantics," *idem*, p. 134.



Besides, Beethoven's admiration for Schiller was constant, like that for Goethe, both writers impacting, to some extent, his artistic vision.

**Novalis, the re-enchantment of the world.** Novalis develops the romantic sense of the world's individuality, expressiveness and re-enchantment in a manner similar to Schlegel's, as a reflexive action, free of rules and hindrances, through which the I defines itself, and as a creative action that fashions the world. Romanticism is, in Novalis's view, not only a form of sensibility and as an outlook upon the world, but a method through which the self increases its power (*a qualitative raising to a higher power*). The romanticizing action is that by which the self observes the phenomena of the world and acquires such in-depth understanding that he comes to see them as the expression of the infinite in the finite (*appearance of infinity to finite*). It is important to identify and recognize this methodological aspect of romanticism, thanks to which it could be disseminated and taught at generation level and further away, outside the German space, to a new plethora of European thinkers, artists and writers. Being romantic is something one can learn, that is, above all, it is a new method of knowledge and education, and only on a secondary level can it be regarded as a cultural fashion. By learning the romantic method, artists are more ready to express the beautiful in their creation and also to reveal themselves as specific individualities. Romanticizing the outside world and romanticizing oneself are, in reality, concurrent processes because the relationship of the self with the world is a continuous and infinite process of mutual mirroring, whereby the world makes man as he is and man makes the world as it is. Romanticism has both reflexive and active dimensions: "For Novalis, romanticizing thus involves poetically redescribing the world so that our own existence – fragmentary, incomplete, and unable to be fully articulated – is better disclosed to us for what it is, and we are thereby able to live out our lives as more meaningful and more self-directed, all the while remaining responsive to the world in itself,

all of which is accomplished by attending to the beautiful in nature and art. Novalis thus embodied the twin commitments of early Romantic theory in an intense, although highly aestheticized, manner: we have to be responsive to the world (or “being,” as he would say), but our responses must be creative, even be works of art themselves; as he put it, ‘life must not be a novel that is given to us, but one that is made by us’.”<sup>122</sup>

The poet Novalis’s philosophical thinking about the system of nature and knowledge was obviously influenced by Kantian criticism, but he did not limit himself to the conclusions of the thinker from Königsberg. Closer to the vision of Goethe, Novalis conceived nature as an organic whole that unfolded in space and time, constantly shaping and renewing itself. Nature could be understood and intuitively perceived at the level of its organic aspects, but the unpredictable, spontaneous character of its processes limited the possibility of acquiring knowledge thereof. The organic character of nature enabled relating to it from the vantage point of life, namely as to a living being or, in other words, as to an animated being. Nature, for Novalis, is full of mystery, full of ungraspable meanings and even specific intentions. Enchanted, saturated under the animist spectrum, nature magically communicated through signs, symbols, hermetic processes, whose meaning could be revealed in dreams or in artistic visions. Creators communicated and even corresponded with nature because they were part of it, they had structural similarities and a whole system of correspondences. In nature’s organic development and self-organization scheme humans were also included. Creators and thinkers functioned within the system of nature like dynamic mirrors, constantly reflecting and highlighting the way of the world. We could define this belief of the romantic type as the principle of mutual adequacy between man and nature. If, on the contrary, some inadequacy or distortion, at the level of principles, were to drive a wedge between man and nature, then

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<sup>122</sup> Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy*, p. 148.

the entire romantic system of thought would collapse. Man would not understand anything and would never express nature. The caesura would be total.

Poets and artists, in general, are visionaries, hermeneutic unravellers of the mysteries of nature, and this transforms the act of creation into a process of knowledge. Artists are not limited to reading the mysteries of the world as they are reflected in the mirrors of their own sensitivity and of their minds, but create forms and systems of knowledge. Their works are such structures that reveal the mysteries of the world, through which we can gaze at the core of being, if we can read symbolic language. Because they use symbolic, allegorical, indirect language for expressing their views, artists are equally hermeneutic agents – in the sense that they compose ciphers, generating ambiguous reflection systems – and revealing agents, who unravel the mysteries of the world. A symbol is by its very nature ambiguous. On the one hand, it shows, it reveals, it highlights, but on the other hand it hides, it envelops, it leaves something unexpressed, something that seems, by its very essence, meant for non-disclosure. Symbolic language is the rope that the artist must dance on when he gazes at the core of the world's being, always paying for a moment of enlightenment with the risk of falling down. He knows that there is a safer, more stable way towards the revelation of nature.

We believe that in accordance with the romantic understanding, the process of appropriating the mysteries of the world should be seen as *unravelling* rather than as knowledge acquisition. As a claim to all-comprehensive understanding and to rendering the essence of things in unequivocal language, knowledge would be difficult or impossible to reach because nature is not static, but active, dynamic and its reflection has the character of mirages on the surface of a crystalline river, not the fixity of a shape that is statically mirrored. Like the goddess Isis<sup>123</sup> in Egyptian mythology, nature does not lift the veil from its

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<sup>123</sup> “Moreover, on this poetic view, natural phenomena acquire an ‘inspired’ aspect. To see this, we must recognize that, for Novalis, my endeavor to know being is equally an endeavor to know what unifies me as a

face except in order to reveal the next veil. Its face will remain forever veiled, but not absent, not turned away from the viewer who aims to gaze at it with fervor and pure desire. The daughter of heaven and earth, Isis rests on the ground, but she is winged and can soar. Her figure is a synthesis of cosmic elements. The hieroglyphs, signs and animals associated with her indicate the world of mysteries that she controls, but that cannot be disclosed. The throne she holds on the head is the promise of power, authority and dominion for the man who comes to know the mysteries of the world. Her message is that he who comes to unravel these secrets and penetrate their meaning will become the master of nature, an enlightened monarch, consented to and integrated by nature in its majestic cycle. The revelation of the unity of nature entails the revelation of the unity of the artistic self in its spiritual form, adjusted to the spirit of nature. Just like Isis nourishes Horus with her breast milk, symbolically she feeds the minds of all those willing to know and unravel nature. In *The Disciples at Saïs*, but also in other writings, Novalis showed his profound interest in the Egyptian Mysteries and integrating them within his worldview.

In his essay of 1799, “Christianity and Europe,” Novalis surprised his contemporaries, even his friends from Jena, by vehemently criticizing modern Europe, which espoused a mechanistic, secular, rationalist vision that had been perverted by the Enlightenment and drained of all its mystery and meaning, and by reassessing the significance of the Christian

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self—what makes my subject-self and object-self identical. Consequently, if I perceive natural phenomena to point to the absolute, then I equally perceive them as images of the (unknowable) unity of my own self. As Novalis says, one who could lift the veil of Isis—who could epistemically transcend the finite sphere—would uncover his or her self.<sup>47</sup> From the poetic perspective, natural phenomena present themselves as embodying a reference to something spiritual—the unifying core of my (non-material, spiritual) self,” Alison Stone, “Being, Knowledge, and Nature in Novalis,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2008), University of Lancaster, p. 150.

Middle Ages, whose vision, he proposed, should be resumed.<sup>124</sup> The so-called European modernity had compromised the poetic, mysterious, sacred and animated dimension of nature, in other words, its very essence. For Novalis, the era in which he lived, the turn of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, was one of deep spiritual decay, in which nature was despised and devalued. Instead of being answered with awe and delight, it was responded to in a threatening and arrogant manner. In that context of cultural opacity, Novalis believed that the role of poets and artists was to re-enchante nature, to restore its soul and the mysteries of nature from which they had been eliminated. That was what the process of romanticizing meant. In his own words, it meant “endowing the commonplace with a higher meaning, the ordinary with mysterious aspect, the known with the dignity of the unknown, the finite with the appearance of the infinite.”<sup>125</sup> A mode of action in the romanticizing process, artistic creation in general and poetry in particular acquire magical and divination functions.

For Novalis, imagination is the essential faculty in relating to the world. With his mind fixed on the mysteries of nature, the artist does not get to know it at the level of absolute mirroring, but just to imagine it. Artistic imagination reproduces the image of nature in a subjective manner, becoming an active agent in its becoming. The resulting picture of the

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<sup>124</sup> “Novalis’s most explicit statement of his unhappiness with this disenchantment is his late essay, *Christendom or Europa* (1799). *Europa* offers a schematic history of European civilization which unfavorably contrasts modern, enlightened, culture to an idealized version of the Catholic Middle Ages. *Europa* particularly laments the rise of mechanistic science, secularism, and the Enlightenment commitment to rational explanation. Embedded in this lament is Novalis’s unhappiness that our ‘modern way of thinking’ denies that nature is poetic, sacred, animate or mysterious. This way of thinking, he adds, has ‘turned the infinite, creative music of the universe into the uniform clattering of a monstrous mill, driven by the stream of chance.’ *Europa* thus portrays the disenchantment of nature as a multi-faceted historical phenomenon, involving our loss of any sense that nature is divine, alive, and mysterious,” Alison Stone, p. 148.

<sup>125</sup> Quoted in Alison Stone, p. 150.

world is its artistic form, its pictorial image, which contains everything that could be understood and accounted for on the terms and from the vantage point of that subjectivity. Language is symbolic and the formula of expression is artistic, not philosophical or scientific. Art, as the most highly developed system of the imaginative function, is the most appropriate form of understanding and expressing that which, from the vastness of the entire world, can gain meaning for humans. Alison Stone has relevantly synthesized Novalis's position as regards the active function of imagination in composing the picture of the world: "Novalis stresses that, whenever we attempt to know the absolute, we end up only imagining it. He refers to "the element of imagination [Einbildungskraft]... the one and only absolute anticipated... through the negation of everything absolute." More specifically, if we acknowledge (as we should) that our items of knowledge about finite things do not confer knowledge of the absolute, then, simultaneously, we begin to experience these finite things differently, as indications – or signs (Zeichen) – that the absolute remains unknown, lying beyond their finite sphere. When we thus experience perceptible items as signs of the absolute, we are imagining the absolute, because we are recasting the finite things that are given to us as images (Bilder) or indications of something other than themselves -namely, inaccessible being."<sup>126</sup>

The problem that analysts of romantic and, in particular, of Novalis's thought have raised is whether nature or the world is, in itself, enchanted, magical, filled with mysterious and animated meanings or whether the romantic imagination makes it appear as such? Is nature poetic in itself, as it is represented by the poet, musical, as it is represented by the musician, or pictorial, as it is represented by the painter? Does imagination not induce forms into nature that it does not hold as such, forms through which it acquires value and meaning in the human subject, but that have no isolated existence in the objectivity of nature? Since it

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<sup>126</sup> Alison Stone, p. 149.

can be perceived in different ways, the spectrum of these perceptions hovering between the extreme limits of the mechanistic, Newtonian mode, on the one hand, and the animist, romantic mode, on the other, the perception of nature depends on certain *a priori* assumptions, on the grids of research and approach of the human subjects. Perhaps the Kantian solution is the most reasonable, namely that nature, being cannot be known in itself, but only as a phenomenon, namely through its representation in the *a priori* forms of our sensibility, which are the *spatial* dimension, the *temporal* dimension and the order of *causal* succession. Taken out of these subjective forms, the world remains hidden, unknowable, something that Kant called the Thing-in-Itself, for which we have no possibility of representation and knowledge. Although he did not profess himself to be Kantian, Novalis did not remain immune to the conclusions of the sage from Königsberg. Alison Stone's opinion, based on certain fragments<sup>127</sup> belonging to the German poet, is that in Novalis's project there was this indecision concerning the fact neither the content of nature, nor the representation relation that the subject had with this imprecise external substance had been definitively ascertained. What further complicated the data problem was that the subjects were not unitary, as they did not have the same cultural heritage and the same sensitivity to the natural given. Certain fragments reveal that Novalis considered the children's<sup>128</sup> genuine

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<sup>127</sup> For instance, in this fragment written in 1798: "... it is only spirit that poeticizes objects and changes of material, and . . . the beautiful . . . cannot be found already present in phenomena . . . All the sounds which nature produces are rough □ and devoid of spirit □ only the musical soul finds the rustling of the forest . . . the babbling of the brook melodious and meaningful [*bedeutsam*]," Alison Stone, p. 151.

<sup>128</sup> "Novalis argues that pre-modern cultures were more poetic and therefore encouraged people to romanticize their experience; because modernity is prosaic, it fails to do this and leaves people with their original mode of experience (*Schriften*, II, *Philosophical Writings*, 27). A less tractable problem is that Novalis values those □ especially children, including his late fiancée, Sophie □ who spontaneously find the world enchanted, not yet having been corrupted by prosaic modern ways. This clearly suggests that disenchantment is not our original

sensitivity as prepared to perceive the magic, mysterious, poetic dimensions of nature, but modern subjects, the secular heirs of European culture, no longer have the same perception

If we do not have objective, unambiguous data about the quality of the external world, then it is difficult to operate with the dialectic of the world's disenchantment-reenchantment for the simple reason that it depends entirely on the subjective lenses, individual or collective, through which the world is approached. If disenchantment is a fact, nature does not seem to react in any way to the grids of its perception, which may engender, as a conclusion, a new *quarrel of paradigms*. As we know from Thomas Kuhn and Michel Foucault, paradigms depend on subjectivity and on the consensus between the specialists of a certain determined historical period, not on natural, historical facts as such. Simply put, the problem is as follows: is nature enchanted and magical in itself, or does it appear like this because of our particular type of approach to it? The answer that we may incline to is that in keeping with the data of romantic thinking, the romanticizing<sup>129</sup> method makes nature appear as such;

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mode of experience at all, but must be learned. At this point, Novalis's epistemological views, with their implication that disenchantment is basic, again clash with his desire to think that disenchantment can be overcome (an overcoming of which he sees Sophie as a harbinger)," Alison Stone, p. 152.

<sup>129</sup> Novalis also proposes some form of practice integrated into what he considers to be the magic idealism (*magischer Idealismus*). The essence of this practice resides in the control exerted over our senses, so that what is received through them from the external world may be filtered according to our expectations. The training and control of the senses is not a simple process. On the contrary, it involves exercise, tenacity and technique, in the manner of the yogis or religious ascetics or Kabbalist masters, like Abraham Abulafia. All of them attempt, in various ways, to refine their senses and reach perfect control of their minds, so to transform their bodies and minds into active instruments at universal level or even in their relation with God. In this way, by means of the romantic method, Novalis envisaged a magical technique aimed at manipulating the universe or, at least, the influences exerted by the universe upon man. For him, "magic is the art of using the senses at will [*willkürlich*] to create impressions which depend for their existence upon only the self and not the external world" (cf. Alison Stone, p. 153).



hence, the enchantment of the world is already a hermeneutic contribution, not a neutral extract of the empirical approach. Thus, we are faced with a difficulty<sup>130</sup> that Novalis and the Romantic thinkers could hardly cope with.

However, method was what saved vision in the case of Novalis. In other words, if the worldview is culturally and *a priori* conditioned, then have available the method of magic idealism by which we can test the romantic representation of nature. Furthermore, through this we can verify the perspective that we cast upon the world: “according to magical idealism, we become able to experience anything poetically only through our prior activity of gaining control of our outer senses (so that we can perceive just those events that we opt to perceive). But to gain control of the outer senses, we must control the body through concrete medical and psychological practices. Novalis assumes, then, that the self can freely choose to engage in physical practices which transform the body and (somehow) bring it, and the outer senses, under the self’s control.”<sup>131</sup> This, of course, is an attempt of extreme courage and risk, which is also based, after all, on training the subject’s forms of perception. In essence, the idealist-magical method is opposed to Kantian transcendental idealism. While Kant considered the *a priori* forms of sensibility as common, natural, identical for all subjects,

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<sup>130</sup> “Why should it be problematic that Novalis presupposes that we originally find natural phenomena meaningless? This is a problem because he aims to explain how our current, disenchanted, view of nature could be overcome. In part, through his idea that we can reinterpret natural phenomena as signs of being, he shows how we could overcome disenchantment. But partly, too, his position entails that even a romantic culture could never completely overcome disenchantment, since the disenchanted view of nature will necessarily remain basic to every individual, each of whom must learn, individually, to transform his or her own experience. Novalis’s conception of romanticism, then, does not fully satisfy his goal of showing how disenchantment could be overcome, since according to his conception this overcoming depends upon disenchantment remaining present in the mode of experience original to each person,” Alison Stone, p. 152.

<sup>131</sup> Alison Stone, p. 154.

Novalis, on the contrary, believed that by training his senses and perception, the subject could obtain different representations and outlooks on the world. In Kant's case, the world was given, while in Novalis's case, the world was produced in the exercise of the acuity of senses.

The situation of nature's ontological consistency is so difficult to decide that the theses formulated on them could never deliver us from ambiguity. The question whether the world itself is enchanted, full of meanings and animated by spirits, or whether this layer of consistency is obtained only through the enhancement of the senses of the one who perceives it is suspended in ambiguity even for Novalis. Clearly, the idealist-magical method prepares the subject for newer, deeper forms of perception, but it is unclear whether the reality revealed thus has its properties disclosed because the romantic subject perceives them as such or whether it has them by virtue of its own nature. In his essay "Christianity and Europe," Novalis deplored the disenchantment, the secularization, the voidance of nature and civilization of meaning and sacredness. His diagnosis was correct. However, all his criticism targeted the situation of the individual and the European societies, that is, the becoming of the human subject or person, not the becoming of nature or the world itself. What had happened had been a degradation of human perception, vision and capacity of understanding, given that nature and the outer universe had continued to be enchanted, sacred, full of mysteries and secret meanings, but man could no longer valorize and perceive them as such. In short, this was a crisis of culture, not of nature. Through the proposed method, Novalis sought a restoration of the subject's sensitivity to the world, a recovery of sensitive and intelligible acuity towards mysterious nature, a process that was equivalent with romanticizing. The thesis subsequent to his approach would be that, in itself, nature had always been and remained as it was revealed through romanticizing; still, outside romanticizing, it would not reveal itself to us thus, but as a mechanical, opaque universe, devoid of mystery and sacredness.

Novalis's encyclopedic notations nature from *Allgemeine Brouillon*, during the years 1798-1799, indicates his concern to find the similarities, correspondences and links between various natural phenomena and sciences, so as to provide theoretical foundations for his idealist-magic vision. The idea he reached was that the sciences investigated processes, relations and interactions between phenomena and that individual entities qualified in the way we observed them through the network of connections and relations with other things. Between natural processes and individuals/entities there were various similarities, connections, relationships. By way of an illustration, Novalis said that the process of fluidity corresponded to human youth, while the process of rigidity corresponded to old age; another correspondence existed between feminine nature and oxygen, or between masculine nature and fire. Individual entities were links in an endless chain or, to use a more suitable image, branches in a giant tree that grew and proliferated at cosmic dimensions. Nothing was isolated, singular, separated from the whole. In the body of the world, every process and being had their place, determined by their relationships with the whole: "every phenomenon is a limb in an immeasurable chain – which comprehends all phenomena as limbs. The theory of nature must become... (a continuum) a history – an organic growth."<sup>132</sup> Nature as a whole contained an entire principle of self-organization, which was reminiscent of the Aristotelian system of nature, organized by the principle of *entelecheia*, its internal dynamics being oriented towards a finality that encompassed all component elements, that is, all forms of existence.

In complementary terms, used for the mutual adjustment of the meaning Novalis associated with nature, one could speak of a *system-nature*, a *body-nature* and a *soul-nature*.

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<sup>132</sup> Alison Stone, *idem*, p. 155.

The intuition of animated nature<sup>133</sup> sends us, again, to the philosophical systems of late antiquity, such as Stoicism, Neo-Pythagoreanism and Neo-Platonism. In these systems, the universe is perceived as a great animated being, as an organism that besides its physical part, also contains a universal soul and spirit. By structural analogy, man is an organic being endowed with a soul and a spirit, the three layers placing him in correspondence and in a continuous circuit with the universe as a whole. These ancient doctrines are relevant now, in the attempt to understand Novalis's romantic, idealist-magic project, because we will also find that the German poet had the intuition of tripartite nature, where besides the body and soul of the world, there was also a spirit thereof.<sup>134</sup> The fact that nature was regarded as a huge dynamic organism that continuously organized itself attested its spiritual content. To keep the analogy, Novalis considered that natural phenomena had a spiritual equivalent that was inferior to the human person, but of the same nature, i.e. a *self*, an *I*. As such, man could personally communicate with the *Self* of natural phenomena. From what we can infer, the

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<sup>133</sup> "As that which organizes all of nature, this whole system is also the 'world-soul' ('the world is the *macroanthropos* . . . there is a world-soul'), for the soul, according to Novalis, just is the form of organization of a material body or, in this case, of the material world. It follows that, since all natural processes and phenomena exhibit at least some level of organization, they too have souls, and are microcosms of the world-soul," Alison Stone, *idem*, p. 157.

<sup>134</sup> "However, Novalis claims that the organization of natural processes is never complete either; rather, these processes constantly strive to make themselves more completely formed and organized. Consequently, he sometimes □ and most consistently □ says that all natural processes and phenomena have 'spirit' too: they strain to render themselves more completely organized (a striving which must manifest an activity of the world-soul within them, endeavoring to articulate itself more tightly). Each natural phenomenon embodies spirit, understood as the striving for organization, and so each is a '*You*. (Instead of non-self □ *You*.)': each is another self, as is each human being. The spirit within human individuals is only a higher manifestation of the same kind of spirit which is contained in every natural thing □ higher presumably because it results from humans' distinctively conscious pursuit of unification," Alison Stone, *idem*, p. 157.

vision proposed by Novalis was not so much a new doctrine as a resurrection of some older philosophical doctrines that had been upheld for long periods but declined afterwards and were relegated to oblivion after the installation of Christian theological radicalism in Europe and the prohibition of religious cults and pagan philosophies.

By virtue of the chain of correspondences, all nature was arranged as a system in which each entity, each process and relationship had its proper place, containing a particular meaning and value, that is, represented the entire system *mutually*. By this, the system of nature was saturated with meaning, that is, it was an organic, living universe with which one could communicate in a romantic way. His expression was that “the universe speaks to us,” that it maintained a relationship of consented and veracious revelation with us, if our mind and sensitivity were ready for it: “Correspondences also obtain between the principles of the different sciences, since their objects of study correspond. In virtue of their manifold correspondences, natural processes and phenomena are intrinsically meaningful, each one pointing to an infinite variety of similarly structured processes. Novalis therefore refers to the ‘mutual representation of the universe’ and states that ‘the universe also speaks.’ Previously, he had thought that the conditioning of every natural phenomenon by its relations to all the others makes nature (in principle) meaningless. Now, based on his deeper acquaintance with scientific accounts of these relations, he concludes that they inscribe meaningful references in the internal structures of each natural thing.”<sup>135</sup>

The diverse forms of knowledge, the various sciences may contribute to the revaluation of the view upon nature, to the liberation from the mechanistic paradigm and from the exalted pretensions of modern rationalism and of the Enlightenment. Novalis considered that the system of nature, with all its network of phenomena and correspondences that man maintains

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<sup>135</sup> Alison Stone, *idem*, p. 155.

relations of the kind entailed by magic idealism, could be explained more accurately and adequately through science. Sciences can explain to man the meaning and magical depths of nature, contributing to changing the forms of perception, which may become commensurate with the romantic aspiration. Sciences and art can contribute thus to a radical change of vision, that is, to the process of the re-enchantment of the world, and by this, man can acquire full knowledge of the system of nature because all the phenomena, processes and entities within it are linked in a network and mutual correspond to one another. This integral knowledge, however, refers to the principle of organizing nature, not to the individual elements that compose it and to the relationships between them. One cannot know, for example, why there are precisely those physical-chemical elements, and not others, and why certain correspondences are established between phenomena, and not others, why there are certain cyclical reiterations and rehearsals, and not others. In other words, we may hope to understand the organizing principle of the world if it is given in the current formula, but we cannot justify the presence of elements or of regularities. We must simply ascertain and take them as such. In addition, the evolution of natural phenomena, guided by free and absolute organizational spontaneity, renders future forms as unpredictable, thus relativizing knowledge and even producing ignorance: “Our ignorance stems not merely from our practical inability to exhaustively decipher Nature’s organization, but also from the fact that this organization is shot through with unfathomable spontaneity. Moreover, since each particular phenomenon is a microcosm of Nature as a whole, each phenomenon must contain some spontaneity such that no amount of study can afford us complete knowledge of it.”<sup>136</sup>

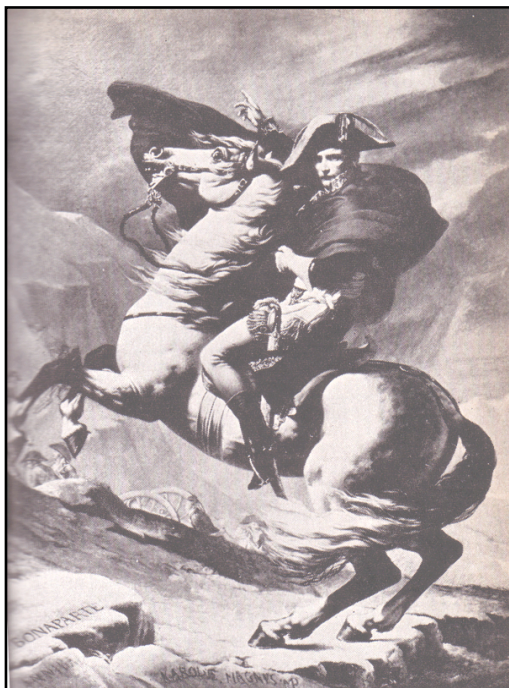
These few assertions can be taken as a conclusion to the vision espoused by Novalis, which encapsulates the most striking formulation of the romantic project for the re-enchantment of

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<sup>136</sup> Alison Stone, *idem*, p. 160.

the world. The universe is an organic, animated unity, which is dynamically organized in keeping with a systemic coordinate. Not all the individual objects and processes can be known, but idealist-magic thinking discovers the secret ciphers of nature by which the human mind can find correspondences between the known and the unknown things. Naturally, man encounters a disenchanted nature, which, however, he re-enchants by applying to it a perception of the poetic type, through the romanticizing process. There is a dialectic between the enchantment and the disenchantment of the world, which we cannot avoid and which calls for a redeployment and diversification of the romanticizing processes.

## 2. The heroic style



If we apply the romanticizing method to musical creation and attempt to find its specific meaning in Beethoven's works, we can consider Heroization as an outstanding form of expression, as a means of projecting the composer's personality type – and, above all, his self-image – beyond history, social and artistic conventions, even beyond destiny.

Obviously, Beethoven does not become a hero in the political and military sense. His music

should not be regarded as a celebration of Napoleon, of the Revolution, of the allies' victory over the French or of other strictly historical personalities and events. Beyond all these aspects, which had a stimulating role in the composer's thematic options and ideological orientation towards the renewal of society, institutions and the relations between the classes, what was at stake was the construction of a personality type, of a human model that embodied all the traits that Beethoven wanted to become endowed with. This was a model in which the martial spirit was refined and steered towards supra-historical dignity and nobility, towards Prometheanism, which ultimately entailed confronting destiny and the forces of nature, the divine powers. Promethean agony represented the personal, Beethovenian formula of the heroic type, not the aggressiveness and martial blindness associated with Bonaparte (image Jacques-Louis David, Napoleon, 1811) or any other military leader.



As an artist who was aware of the public power of his creation, Beethoven had to negotiate constantly the proportions that historical conjunctures and social circumstances, on the one hand, and intimate, personal visions, on the other, occupied in his work. In other words, he had to decide how much of his music was dictated by the public space and how much was the expression of his personality, his life and his strictly personal vision. In his doctoral dissertation entitled *Beethoven's Political Music and the Idea of the Heroic Style* (Cornell University, 2006), Nicholas Louis Mathew attempts to explain the history and morphology of the heroic in the work of German composer and to unravel the relations between occasional and aesthetically autonomous creation, or between the compositions that serve as a general horizon to certain historical moments or even to history,<sup>137</sup> in which life, destiny and art find their expression, and the compositions that are derived from external conjectures. Moreover, the American researcher endeavors to explain the elements strictly pertaining to the *heroic style*, which from the moment that Romain Rolland<sup>138</sup> defined and

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<sup>137</sup> "It thus appears that the heroic style emerges from history in the 1790s and dissolves back into history again in 1811-1815 □ but mysteriously transcends history between 1803 and 1812. By comparing the form, style, and reception of the heroic works and their historically contaminated Others of the Congress period □ in particular the *Eroica* and *Wellingtons Sieg* □ I aim to show that history remains audible in Beethoven's masterworks, despite the musical and mythic discourses of transcendence that resist it, and that Beethoven's 'occasional works' conversely borrow the universalizing language of myth, despite the explicit relationships they articulate with historical figures or events. This fundamental ambivalence, I argue, arises from Beethoven's status as a modern culture hero □ a quasi-mythic figure, even in his own lifetime," Nicholas Louis Mathew, *Beethoven's Political Music and the Idea of the Heroic Style*, 2006, p. 11.

<sup>138</sup> The French writer compared Beethoven's work with Bonaparte's effort to build a political empire, considering that the two forms of construction, political and artistic, essentially represented the results of the imposition of the imperial I. The different versions of these might be useful for understanding the diversity of heroism in Beethoven's music: "Conquerors abuse their power: they are hungry for possession: each of these free Egos wishes to command. If he cannot do this in the world of facts, he wills it in the world of art;

baptized it, received the most diverse interpretations, being applied without nuances and without rigor to almost all of the works Beethoven composed after 1803. Heroism quickly turned into an analytical cliché that escaped the control of music criticism, diverting Beethoven's image too much towards a political-propagandistic formula. Himself a historical symbol, Beethoven was taken by posterity and cultivated as a cultural hero, which was undoubtedly also the most natural and elevated effect of his work (see image Mähler, Beethoven, 1804).

The historical context had its own contribution to the emergence of the heroic style from the vantage point of artistic influences, not solely as a background of thematic inspiration. At the end of the eighteenth century, Vienna was dominated on the musical level by the classical style, refined and perfected by Mozart and Haydn. Beethoven came to Vienna driven by an innovative impulse, animated by the new ideals of the French Revolution, which had also been accompanied by a specific music – military music, pompous music for parades and public ceremonies – that was intended to arouse strong emotions and passions and to produce emulation among the masses. The purpose of this music was ideological, propagandistic, and political. It was an instrument in a comprehensive program of revolutionary change, of social engineering, we might even say. Moreover, as confirmed later in history, revolutions are fueled by certain musical styles and they use music for propaganda purposes. If we were to take only the example of the socialist revolutions of the twentieth century, we would still we have enough arguments to support this idea. We know that Beethoven was a great admirer of Luigi Cherubini, the opera composer of Italian origin who was active in Paris, especially for the monumental orchestral compositions of his dramatic works. The monumental and dramatic aspects constituted lessons that were well learned and

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everything becomes for him a field on which to deploy the battalions of his thoughts, his desires, his regrets, his furies, his melancholies. He imposes them on the world," N. L. Mathew, p. 91.

amply represented in Beethoven's mature oeuvre. If the anecdote recounted by Cipriani Potter contains a grain of truth, in 1817 Beethoven uttered the flattering appreciation that the Italian Cherubini was the greatest composer alive, besides himself, of course. In the 1790s, at least two works by Cherubini – *Ladoiška* and *Les deux journées* – were represented and very well received in Vienna. E. T. A. Hofmann, the Viennese writer who knew Beethoven very well considered that the overtures of these two compositions had stylistically shaped and inspired Beethoven's instrumental work. As dense compositions, with feverish rhythms and dynamic energies derived from sound modules specific to military bands, both works have the effect of stirring frantic emotions and moods. Their dramatism can be seen clearly in Beethoven's overtures to *Coriolan* and *Namensfeier* in C major, op. 115, composed for the Kaiser's name day. Arnold Schmitz identified Cherubini's musical motif from *Hymne du Panthéon* in the opening of the *Fifth Symphony*. Kinderman could hear echoes of French music in the triumphant march from the end of the *Eroica* symphony.

The French Revolution launched a wave of rapid and radical changes not only in the socio-political sphere, but also in that of art and music. Vienna quickly responded by the assimilation and formation of local versions of revolutionary music. In 1790, Haydn, the best known living composer, took over heroic themes and composed ideological-political music. In 1794, he composed a symphony entitled *Army*, in 1795 another, Symphony 103 entitled *Drumbeat*, and in 1796 a hymn bearing the title *May the Lord Protect Emperor Franz* (Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser). The *Mass in Time of War* (1796) and *Lord Nelson Mass* (1798), composed by Haydn while he was in London to celebrate, perhaps in laudatory terms, the English general's victory over Napoleon's troops in Egypt, is closest in terms of structure, rhythm and instrumentation – the use of percussion and trumpets – to what was later to become Beethoven's heroic style. *The Cantata on the Death of Emperor Joseph II*, composed by Beethoven in Bonn, is according to the researcher Maynard Solomon, the stylistic core of

heroic compositions and clearly marks the beginning of the composer's concern for exemplary, apothecotic figures, whose grave transfiguration through suffering and death were to be heard later in the *Piano Sonata no. 12, op. 26*, in *Christ on the Mount of Olives* (Christus am Olberg), the *Eroica* and even in *Egmont*. The funeral march of the *Eroica* and the march from the end of the *Fifth Symphony* are the most refined and sublimated forms of heroism as elements of composition. Heroic musical discourse is, as Paul Bekker noted, a form of public address whereby the composer calls the German nation to embrace a combative, fighting attitude.

One of the most competent and germane of Beethoven's critics, Maynard Solomon has argued that from a strictly compositional and stylistic point of view, heroism became entrenched in Beethoven's music through the thematic adoption of iconic historical or mythological figures and their narrative description in sonata-like music structures, the results being symphonies. Beethoven changed the musical architecture with a view to composing his own style. In French military music, the form of composition was the cantata, and during his Bonn period, Beethoven also composed cantatas on heroic themes. In Vienna, however, he understood that the most intricate musical form of the time, the sonata, was more suitable for defining a monumental, dramatic, complex style of instrumental expression. The tension<sup>139</sup> of organizing the sonata in keeping with the ample epic narrative needs imposed by the history of the heroic protagonist, whose pressures, rises and falls, defeats and triumphant comebacks took on a dramatic aspect, constantly forged the formula of musical expression, eventually leading to the heroic symphony.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> "Solomon has the heroic style congealing in the genre of the symphony in the aftermath of a big bang created by the epic emotional scale of heroic subjects colliding with sonata principles," N. L. Mathew, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>140</sup> In his essay *Inside Beethoven*, Eduardo Chibas asserted that heroism is equally a mythology, a style and a moral created by the Viennese composer, contending that his counterparts and, perhaps, models were Homer, Dante and Michelangelo: "Generally, most people do not associate mythology and music, but in Beethoven,

Dahlhaus considers that the distinction between the *heroic style* and what is known as the *symphonic style* is, in effect, terminological. In his opinion, the Beethovenian so-called *heroic style* is, in fact, just a new label applied over his innovative vision in symphonic composition, which includes of high narrative tension, vast movements and dramatic changes at the emotional and narrative levels, as illustrated by the first movement of the *Third Symphony*. Because of their dramatic content and the formula of monumental expression, many of Beethoven's overtures have been subsumed to the heroic style. An important aspect noted by Nicholas Cook concerns the fact that there are *monological* compositions with a heroic character, but also *dialogical* ones, such as those generated by the Congress of Vienna in 1814, which consecrated the allies' victory against Napoleon and in which the composer had participated, subsequently composing works in praise of the heroism displayed by the allied troops and their brave commanders. Wellington's victory is the most famous composition of this type, commemorating the triumph of the Duke of Wellington over Napoleon's brother, Joseph Bonaparte, at the Battle of Vittoria, Spain, on Saturday June 21, 1813.

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music is mythology. In the *Eroica* Symphony, Beethoven developed a myth of such magnitude that he had to expand the normal symphonic dimensions. A comparison that may help to explain the dimensions of this vision is Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling. From the 'Ancestors of Christ' to the climax of the 'Creation,' the *Eroica* Symphony traces the same steps but with an advantage: not having to use biblical images that can obscure the human sense of the work. This vision, of the *Eroica* Symphony as well as the Sistine ceiling, is no less than the fundamental myth of our civilization: the individual adventure that elevates the hero to a higher plane of consciousness, where he acquires the capacity to be a creator. It is an individual adventure because it will not accept any higher authority outside him, not even a god. We know this myth from *The Odyssey* of Homer, the different versions of the Grail story, in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, etc. It is this mythological platform that makes the West terribly creative and aggressive. And the complexity of this adventure imposed on Beethoven's work dimensions never before seen in a symphony."

The composer and music critic Adolf Bernhard Marx saw a dialectical process in the representative heroic compositions, such as the *Third Symphony* and *Wellington's Victory*. Even though they are very different in terms of their actual musical quality, vision and style, they are one and the same phenomenon from the point of view of the idea embedded in them, which is represented from two different perspectives. The *Symphony* expresses the internal, spiritual heroic process, while the *Victory* expresses it in externalized manner,<sup>141</sup> enacted on the stage of the battlefield. What in the *Eroica* is an implicit narrative becomes explicit in *Wellington*. What in the first composition is the personal, poetic version of the heroic style, in the second manifests itself as historical, dramatic version, expressed through military marches, fanfares and battle scenes. Using an idea felicitously expressed, Marx considered that, in fact, through *Wellington* Beethoven had provided the key to reading and interpreting the *Eroica* symphony, indicating the sense and the target of the heroic musical narrative in dramatic terms. In the *Eroica*, expression consists of rumblings, loud outbursts, rhythm breaks, dissonances, the syncopated struggle between wind and string instruments, i.e. of the dramatic clash of sounds and musical instruments, while *Wellington* externalizes this aesthetic-sonorous battle of the symphony, enacting it on the historical stage as a theater of war, where there are armies, assaults, attacks, anger, murderous rage, victims and heroes.

Operatic compositions, such as *Leonore-Fidelio* and the oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives*, are heroic in terms of their very themes, which are also brought as evidence in support of the thesis upheld by Lockwood, regarding the diverse nature of heroism in

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<sup>141</sup> "Everything now was united: psychological development, connected to a series of extrinsic circumstances represented in a thoroughly dramatic action of those instruments that form the orchestra ... Without any externally derived designation (as e.g. that of the nations in the Battle at Vittoria), the meaning of this symphony develops with such victorious precision that one need simply surrender oneself to the effect of the notes in order to visualize such an individual portrait □ or perhaps it is better to call it a drama □ as never before has been produced in music," N. L. Mathew, p. 139.

Beethoven's compositions. However, it would be more appropriate to speak about a *thematic and stylistic field* in which heroism prevails than about a typical formula. There is an entire horizon<sup>142</sup> of heroism, which requires a certain stylistic formula of expression to make the movement of the heroic narrative and characters intelligible as such. These characters are, in turn, very different, ranging from historical heroes to the supreme spiritual hero, Jesus Christ. In essence, what pertains to heroism in Beethoven's work is compatible with Thomas Carlyle's idea in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, that heroes are the great reforming spirits of humanity who found the strength to sacrifice themselves and the method to impose their own vision in history.

Whether, from a strictly artistic viewpoint, Beethoven gave up the heroic style after the disappointment caused by Bonaparte and his military defeat is a widely debated subject among Beethoven's critics and biographers. Romain Rolland detected an equivalent<sup>143</sup> of the Waterloo defeat in the artist's career, accentuated during the years that followed the Congress of Vienna. Lockwood also saw a direct link between the fall of Napoleon and the exhaustion of Beethoven's creativity and his decline as an artist. Maynard Solomon also took into

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<sup>142</sup> "Even though most Beethoven scholars recognize the importance of *Leonore-Fidelio* to any conception of the heroic style, the discussion of its music in this connection (aside from its multiple overtures) is scanty. Searching for the heroic style in Beethoven's opera, a critic has little more to go on than the heroic rescue story and the monumentality of much of the music in the last scene. The oratorio *Christus am Ölberg* presents even more of a problem. Few have argued that its music contributed substantially to the emergence of the heroic style, even though its earliest version and later revision practically frame the heroic decade □ and Tyson points out that its suffering Christ-hero is consistent with the themes of heroism that run through Beethoven's heroic phase. And yet, as Lockwood has since observed, even the portrayal of heroism itself in Beethoven's heroic phase is irreducibly diverse □ from the quiet endurance of Florestan to the public sacrifice of Egmont and the triumphant inner will of Leonore," N. L. Mathew, p. 45.

<sup>143</sup> "[W]hen the man of Waterloo has fallen, Beethoven imperator also abdicates; he, too, like the eagle on his rock, goes into exile on an island lost in the expanse of the seas," N. L. Mathew, p. 93.

account the actual changes undergone by the Viennese society,<sup>144</sup> mentality and taste during the nearly twenty years of warfare, which led to a decrease in the appetite for martial and heroic themes and for historical figures after the fall of Napoleon and the return to peace. Society needed other topics now, other styles, a different kind of artistic emulation. This quickly and exuberantly brought to the fore Italian opera music, the *opera buffa*, and made increasingly wider room for the Biedermeier style. Even though it was initially despised and considered frivolous by Beethoven, Rossini's *Barber of Seville* (which premiered on February 20, 1816, at the Teatro Argentina, Rome) imposed itself at the level of public taste everywhere in Europe, and Vienna<sup>145</sup> was no exception in this regard. Unexpectedly, Rossini had become the new creator of emotions and ideals, the new *designer of* (fashionable) *souls*, as Boris Groys might put it. Frivolous or not, his new music was more attractive and appealing now, in the societies exasperated by protracted wars and heroic obduracy.

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<sup>144</sup> “The heroic, exhortatory style had itself lost its historical *raison d'être* with the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the disintegration of the old connoisseur nobility, and the beginning of a new phase in Austrian national existence. After twenty years of war, many Viennese, returning to a torpid life of peace, stability, and conservatism, began to utilize music not as a stimulant to consciousness, but as a narcotic, perhaps to mask the humdrum reality of post-Napoleonic and post-Enlightenment society,” N. L. Mathew, p. 96.

<sup>145</sup> “The musical styles that ostensibly flourished on the corpse of Beethoven's heroic manner after the Congress of Vienna are a ‘bourgeois-Biedermeier mixture’ — in other words, styles defined primarily in terms of social history. And, of course, the most suitable genre for Vienna's newly hedonistic age was opera — the ‘new Italian style exemplified by the meteorically popular Rossini’ (Rossini's *L'inganno felice* came to Vienna in November 1816). In the Beethovenian context, to be Italian means to be in thrall to history. Martin Cooper approvingly repeats the conclusion of the German diplomat and Beethoven acquaintance Varnhagen von Ense that the public at the Congress of Vienna ‘preferred Italian grace and lightness to German seriousness’ — a taste that, Cooper goes on to add, ‘was to find ideal satisfaction’ in Rossini's operas. One might almost say that Rossini personifies the historical *deus ex machina* of Beethoven biography, intervening to destroy the heroic style — the ‘composer of the hour,’ as Kinderman calls him,” N. L. Mathew, pp. 97-98.



The stylistic conflict between Beethoven and Rossini actually meant that a cultural conflict was waged between the Germanic and the Italian spirit, between heroic gravity and playful levity, between symphony and the opera, between historical ideal and salon indulgence, between mythology and the aesthetics of the quotidian. Beethoven understood this phenomenon. The time of heroes had passed. The time had come for mundane revelers, petty bourgeois dandies and trivial boudoir adventurers. After 1815, Beethoven's heroic style fell into abeyance, being replaced, step by step. The composer did not feel usurped, just outmoded, outdated, which probably meant the same thing as incomprehensible. The world of his ideals had set. From now on, his heroes were regarded as inconvenient rather than exciting. As a personal symbol and as a formula for embracing destiny, his heroism was strictly a private matter, without public relevance. Besides this, he was deaf, almost alone and increasingly ailing. He had been going through a difficult period of personal crisis and only several years later was he to return with new, original compositions, defining for what we shall call *the last Beethoven*.

Wagner perceived Beethoven's music as epitomizing the rise and universal triumph of Germanic masculinity. The expression of this universal combative character through the force and majesty of musical creation is the highest form that music can reach, this, in effect, being the sublime. Beethoven was the one who carried heroic German music to the greatness and power of expression of the sublime. The meaning that Wagner granted the sublime was closer to Burke's than to Kant's: it was seen as a manifestation of nature – of musical nature, even – with an overwhelming force that enthralled and terrified at the same time. Let us remember that Goethe himself was frightened by certain elements of Beethoven's music, which he could never integrate, in its essence, within his own artistic taste. Wagner, however, saw in Beethoven's force, tumult, rhythm and energy precisely the argument in favor of the

articulation of a pan-Germanic ideology<sup>146</sup> that, as far as it is known, he shifted from the philosophical and artistic into the political sphere, with powerful consequences for the emergence of European anti-Semitism.

The artistic construction of Beethoven's style was related, in Wagner's opinion, to the modifications and innovations brought to the forms of expression in sonatas, the outcome of a *compromise* between the German and the Italian musical spirit. This musical form was brought to unparalleled levels of formal maturity and expressive quality by Emanuel Bach, Mozart and Haydn, and Beethoven conceived of music in its artistic essence through the sonata form, which he endeavored to refine and from whose cloth he intended to fashion his new style.<sup>147</sup> Just like the piano was the instrument through which he produced music, the sonata was the form in which he articulated the universe of sound he created in sort of cosmogonic process similar to Vedic emanationism. Musical genius emanated universes of sound that it arranged in forms of expression of the sonata type. Still, these were not typical

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<sup>146</sup> "In other spheres we have honored a Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, as having rescued us from that corruption; and it is to-day our task to show with reference to this musician, Beethoven, that as he spoke in the purest language to all men. The German spirit has through him redeemed the spirit of humanity from deep ignominy. For inasmuch as he again raised music, that had been degraded to a merely diverting art, to the height of its sublime calling, he has led us to understand the nature of that art, from which the world explains itself to every consciousness as distinctly as the most profound philosophy could explain it to a thinker well versed in abstract conceptions. *And the relation of the great Beethoven to the German nation is based upon this alone*; which we shall now try to elucidate by special reference to distinctive features of his life and works," Richard Wagner, *Beethoven*, William Reeves, London, 1903, p. 41.

<sup>147</sup> "It may be said that Beethoven was and remained a composer of sonatas, for in far the greater number and the best of his instrumental compositions, the outline of the Sonata-form was the veil-like tissue through which he gazed into the realm of sounds; or, through which, emerging from that realm, he made himself intelligible; whilst other forms, particularly the mixed ones of vocal music, despite the most extraordinary achievements in them, he only touched upon in passing, as if by way of experiment," Richard Wagner, *Beethoven*, p. 36.

worlds, pre-established after well-learned plans and recipes, but worlds in which there appeared, each and every time, with each composition, new elements of construction and expression, which had never been used by anyone before him and were confusing, misunderstood at times. The sonata, which represented the formal principle underlying the construction of these worlds always remained, however, integral, pure, unadulterated.

I have resorted to a comparison between cosmological and musical creativity to express the same intuition that Wagner characterized with the word *magical*. The way in which Beethoven produced music and in which, through listening, he allowed it to be reproduced within us is a magical process. Of course, the term itself has an ambiguous poignancy that promises much but delivers little, so we prefer to treat it as a simple metaphor. I believe it should more fittingly be called emanation, as this literally expresses the release, the emanation of a musical universe from a creative genius, similar to the emanation of the universe from the god Brahma in the aforementioned Indian cosmogonies. Emanationism is not a magical process, but a physical one, easier to understand and more gratifying for the rational spirit. However, the state generated by music in the listener – *enthralment*, *enchantment* – is a form of induction or magical manipulation, and here Wagner was quite right at the level of principles. The process applies to any creator of music and the effect corresponds to musical nature and suggestion. Through his music, Beethoven makes us feel joy, fear, lamentation and ecstasy as if they were gushing forth from his own soul.<sup>148</sup> Music acts on our sensibility, summoning it to gain sonorous shape in the forms through which

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<sup>148</sup> “The might of the musician cannot be grasped otherwise than through the idea of magic. Assuredly it is an enchanted state we fall into when listening to a genuine work of Beethoven’s; in all parts and details of the piece, that to sober senses look like a complex of technical means cunningly contrived to fulfill a form, we now perceive a ghostlike animation, an activity here most delicate, there appalling, a pulsation of undulating joy, longing fear, lamentation and ecstasy, all of which again seem to spring from the profoundest depths of our own nature,” Richard Wagner, *Beethoven*, p. 45.

Beethoven expresses itself, and if this process succeeds, then, as Wagner believed, that music expresses us too. Hence, its universality and power.

Beethoven's insight that man, the human body is a musical instrument perfectly tailored by nature to express dramatic situations helped him take the idea of the choral symphony from the moment of *Leonora-Fidelio*, *Coriolan* to the sublime level of the *Ode to Joy* and the *Missa Solemnis*. Moreover, as Wagner noted, Beethoven understood that the human body also produced music, rather than merely express it. In other words, human life in the world was a drama that went on uninterruptedly, and the forces maintaining it were to be understood and expressed musically. The end of the *Ninth Symphony*, in which musical expression returns to the choral cantata with orchestra, illustrates this idea. Taken by itself, Schiller's poetry does not have the force to represent the message it contains. Beethoven included it in the dramatic performance and thus gave it the force to emanate, to express itself, to incarnate itself against a much more profound emotional and spiritual horizon, with a much stronger impact. Dramatization<sup>149</sup> is a technical process whereby music and poetry acquire a visual and auditory atmosphere in which one can notice, hear and understand a message as performance and enactment. A performance, an enactment means *action*, that is, dynamic gestures and expressions, the process of accomplishing an idea, a message. Through drama, poetry and music become active, processual artworks, ways of activating and influencing the sensitivity of listeners. It is no longer a matter of simply listening to music or the recitative message, but a synesthetic circumstance in which the senses collaborate. What

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<sup>149</sup> "We know that the verses of 'text writers,' though they were Goethe's or Schiller's, cannot determine the music; the Drama only can do this, and indeed not the dramatic poem, but the drama actually moving before our eyes, as the visible counterpart of the music; wherein word and speech belong to the action, and no longer serve to express a poetical thought," Wagner, *idem*, p. 88.

is heard can be seen and what is seen can be heard, both perceptions merging at the level of sensing the spirit of the game.

In essence, musical drama represents the dialectic of life and putting it on stage is the spectacular form of the truth<sup>150</sup> of human life. Still, besides this, drama is also an *a priori* form of musical sensitivity. Here, obviously, Wagner applies Kantian philosophy to the sphere of musical composition, which is a novelty and a very ingenious step towards explaining the emergence of dramatic forms. Before being a style, drama is an ontological process that we can express in different abstract or plastic languages, as well as an *a priori condition* for the expression of truth. The reason why dramatic music is so expressive and relevant in Beethoven's creation is that it contains the truth of life in the world and reveals the pre-requisite of its expression modality. This interpretation of Beethoven's work also provides theoretical support for what in Wagner's creation becomes a total work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), the dramatic theater where music, poetry, theatrical performance, the art of acting and lyrical narrative combine their roles in a prodigious representation at a cosmological scale. The fact that he saw Beethoven as the creator of a new art form in which music became dramatic action allowed Wagner to place German art above French, Italian or

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<sup>150</sup> "As the drama does not describe human characters but exhibits them immediately, so the motives (figures) of a piece of music give the character of the world's phenomena in the abstract. The movement, changes, and shape of these figures are not only related analogically to the Drama, but the Drama representing the Idea can in truth be understood with perfect clearness only through those very musical motives that thus move, change and take shape. We might recognize in music man's *a priori* qualification for constructing the Drama in general... As we construct the world of phenomena by the laws of time and space which are prefigured a priori in our brain, so, again, the conscious exhibition of the Idea of the world in the drama would be prefigured by those inner laws of music, which unconsciously make themselves valid in a dramatist's mind, just as the laws of causality are unconsciously applied for the perception of the phenomenal world," Wagner, *idem*, p. 78.

English art, in the spirit of the same emphatic pan-Germanic theory.<sup>151</sup> Even if Beethoven's interpretation is correct, the diversion of artistic truth in the direction of a cultural conflict is not only a weakness, but a tendentious manipulation<sup>152</sup> of the spirit of art.

In outlining Beethoven's style and expressive force, Wagner found an interesting explanation, resting precisely on the composer's disease. Neglecting aspects of a physiological and medical nature, he read deafness as destiny. The comparison at hand was with the prophet Tiresias, the blind seer of Sophocles's great tragedies. Tiresias was a seer precisely because his eyes were closed to the outside world, because he could no longer be confused and deceived by looking at the facts of life. He sees truth itself revealed to his mind by the gods, who had chosen him to confess the will of destiny. Beethoven was, according to Wagner's felicitous comparison, the equivalent of Tiresias. He could hear pure music with an ear that was no longer disturbed or corrupted by external sounds. The music he could hear and convey came out of himself, from the depths of his being, invested with a heraldic mission. His internal hearing was already sensitive to sounds of the World itself, to the

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<sup>151</sup> "It is therefore not Beethoven's particular work, but the musician's unheard-of artistic deed contained in it, that we should take as the culminating point in the development of his genius; and we declare that the work of art entirely formed and quickened by that deed, would also present the most complete artistic form; for in that form, as regards the drama, and especially as regards music, every conventionality would be entirely abolished. This then would be the sole *new Art-form adequate to the German spirit* so powerfully individualized in our great Beethoven; a purely human form, yet indigenous, and *originally German*, a form that the modern world, in comparison with the antique, has hitherto lacked," Wagner, *idem*, p. 89.

<sup>152</sup> "What our thinkers, our poets, hampered by inadequate translations, have there touched unclearly, as it were with inarticulate sound, Beethoven's symphonies have already roused from the depths; *the new religion*, the world-redeeming announcement of sublimest innocence, is already understood there as with us. Let us then celebrate the great path-finder in the wilderness of degenerate paradise! But let us celebrate him worthily □ not less worthily than the *victories of German bravery*: for the world's benefactor takes precedence of the world's conqueror!," Wagner, *idem*, p. 113.

rhythms of Phenomena, to the turmoils and synopes of Life. He could hear the ceaseless melody of life's flow through time, he could understand the sonata of nature, the dance of light, the verve of joy, but also twilight, pain and night, the end.<sup>153</sup> He could hear the music created by this universe of forms that were illusory, capricious and transient, which we call reality. Like Tiresias,<sup>154</sup> Beethoven was a prophet who could hear, understand and transmit the music of future centuries. He could hear the music of paradise and convey it in the *Pastoral Symphony*, he could hear the sublime joy of human brotherhood and convey it at the end of the *Ninth Symphony*, he could hear the sounds of death and hell and render them into serious, funeral passages from the *Eroica Symphony* or the *Hammerklavier Sonata*. His visionarism could be due precisely to his impairment, to his illness, and this was a matter of destiny, in this interpretation.

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<sup>153</sup> "It is the World's own dance: wild delight, cries of anguish, love's ecstasy, highest rapture, misery, rage; voluptuous now, and sorrowful; lightning's quiver, storm's roll; and high above the gigantic musician bannng and compelling all things, proudly and firmly wielding them from whirl to whirlpool, to the abyss. He laugh at himself; for the incantation was, after all, but play to him. Thus night beckons. His day is done," Wagner, *idem*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>154</sup> "But we know of a blind Seer. Tiresias, to whom the phenomenal world was closed, but who, with inward vision, saw the basis of all phenomena,- and the deaf musician who listens to his inner harmonies undisturbed by the noise of life, who speaks from the depths to a world that has nothing more to say to him □ now resembles the seer. Thus genius, delivered from the impress of external things, exists wholly in and for itself. What wonders would have been disclosed to one who could have seen Beethoven with the vision of Tiresias! A world, walking among men, □ the world per se as a walking man! And now the musician's eye was lighted up from within. He cast his glance upon phenomena that answered in wondrous reflex, illuminated by his inner light. The essential nature of things now again speaks to him, and he sees things displayed in the calm light of beauty. Again he understands the forest, the brook, the meadow, the blue sky, the gay throng of men, the pair of lovers, the song of birds, the flight of clouds, the roar of storms, the beatitude of blissfully moving repose," Wagner, *idem*, p. 54.

### 3. Reflexiveness and stylistic reform

The evolution from the so-called heroic period of Beethoven's style to new forms of expression unfolded over a long time, through perceptible probings and apparent elements of composition, but also as a result of the composer's maturation and the changes affecting his personality, consciousness and sensitivity during those years of musical drought after 1814, when he composed almost nothing of relevance. His artistic infertility was, however, offset by intense study and meditation on traditional religious music and the forms in which it had been eminently expressed. On the other hand, his personal illness, social marginalization, which had slowly but surely set in after 1814, the problems with his nephew Karl and the custody trial, the lack of a family and a sentimental passion that could give him confidence and balance, all these made him more and more interiorized, focusing almost exclusively on the religious aspects of spiritual life<sup>155</sup> and their relations with the form of musical expression. Spiritually, Beethoven had reached a degree of religious devotion that bordered on mysticism and his art tended to be more and more devoted to the glorification of God.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> The following fragment from a letter addressed to Stumpff in 1824 is relevant in this regard: "The spirit should make itself free from matter, in which for a time the divine spark is imprisoned. Like the furrow to which the laborer confides the precious seed, his part is to make it germinate and bring forth abundant fruit; and, multiplied thus, the spirit will strive to ascend to the source whence it sprang. For it is only at the cost of unremitting endeavor that it can employ the forces placed at its disposal, and that the creature may render homage to the Creator and Preserver of infinite Nature," in Vincent D'Indy, *Beethoven - A Critical Biography*, The Boston Music Company, 1913, p. 92.

<sup>156</sup> "What appears unequivocally, both in his writings and his compositions, is a growingly accentuated tendency towards purely religious music. To the worship of God in nature there succeeded, in Beethoven, the longing for



The episode of the *immortal beloved* had him deeply and disconsolately shaken him, and other friendships from which he had expected more than artistic admiration and conversational amity were also lost. Giulietta Guicciardi had become the Countess von Gallenberg, Amalie Sebald was the wife of a State Councilor and Therese Malfatti was engaged to Baron Drosdik. An early twentieth-century biographer of Beethoven, the French composer and musicologist Vincent D'Indy, considered that the interval between the second and the third periods of Beethoven's creation had been essentially characterized by reflexive activity and the theoretical development of a new musical aesthetic, which was essentially a refashioning of traditional styles and forms. The reflexive aesthetics was to characterize, according to the French musicologist, Beethoven's entire artistic period of 12 years after *Wellington's Victory*. Consonant with Wagner, D'Indy also believed that it was not accurate to speak of a revolutionary project in the new musical aesthetics specific to the last Beethoven, but only of a series of reform processes,<sup>157</sup> which were nonetheless sufficient to redefine traditional forms, such as the fugue, the suite, to variation or choral music.

In a conversation he had with Poterat Nusdorff in 1817, concerning a work written in 1800 and its success, Beethoven gave a puzzling reply: "At that time I knew nothing about composition; now I know how to compose!" It seems surprising to learn from Beethoven himself, less than a decade before his death and after a period of two decades of outstanding compositions, that he knew how to compose only now. Like any disciplined creator who was

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God for God's own sake; and, as we have seen, it was the *Imitation of Christ* which took the place of Sturm's books on his table and among familiar objects," *idem*, p. 101.

<sup>157</sup> "[T]he entire aesthetics of his third manner are founded on ancient forms theretofore unemployed by him – forms whose noble and generous atavism endows the most venturesome compositions with a wholesome and robust temperament, a solid ancestral basis. And it is precisely his novel, "broadened" (as Beethoven himself said) employment of these traditional elements which imparts to the works of this period their profound and incontestable originality. These forms are the Fugue, the Suite, the Chorale with Variations," *idem*, p. 97.

exacting about his own art, he realized that inspiration did not suffice even if it was accompanied by genius. It took enormous culture, not only in the musical domain, vision, technical maturity and comprehensive knowledge of composition, because after all, the ultimate expression of any creation was its form. The forms, structures, styles and manners of expression were learned and invented, and this process needed much time and much practice. Like da Vinci, Michelangelo, Shakespeare or Goethe, Beethoven learned, instructed himself through study and practice throughout his life and always innovated the expressive forms of his art. Only from the height of the maturity he had achieved now, in the last decade his of life, could he observe the clichés, mimeticism, imperfections, redundancies, platitudes or idiosyncrasies of his previous creations and, in general, the imperfections of even the greatest composers.

His study of Bach's and Haendel's works was systematic, methodical, oriented towards discovering the secret complexities of the Baroque, the art of counterpoint, and from the Baroque Beethoven descended to the Renaissance and even further, to pre-Renaissance art, as he aimed to understand the language of pre-tonal music. In order to sense the secrets of composition, Beethoven copied entire works by Byrd and Palestrina, as well as illustrative counterpoint works by Georg Muffat and Antonio Caldara. Thinking, shaping a vision of composition through the form of the canon<sup>158</sup> occupied an increasingly important place in his

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<sup>158</sup> "The most important influence of the canon in Beethoven's 'late style' is not this motivic allusion within larger works. It is rather that Beethoven starts to think canonically. Canonic invention pervades his music, especially from the Diabelli variations onwards. Even in the odd allusion to his previously composed canons it is not the melody or motive being used that is of significance, but the whole complex of the canon, the act of imitation between voices. The knowledge of the words to a given tune only adds curiosity to the specific theme, whether it is meant as ironic or simply as a matter of motivic desirability. The canonic fragments within larger works are more revealing in terms of the language of the Mate style than textual significance, in the context of

work now. According to Martin Cooper's inspired words, the canon began as a whim for Beethoven or a play and ended up by becoming his second nature. His extensive contact with the works of Bach offered him a more profound and complex perspective on the musical form on the fugue, which he had adopted in the previous periods of his creation as a technical means rather than an end in itself. He now endeavored to work on the fugue in a manner similar to that adopted in the 1790s and 1800s, when he worked on the sonata, to offer it the tension and emotional substance of his own sensibility.

Keeping their usual form and respecting their consecrated architecture, Beethoven worked on combinations of rhythm and movement, introducing unexpected changes, and on their musicality as such, making them easily recognizable, different from what we know from Bach, Pasquini or Girolamo Frescobaldi. The new Beethovenian way of approaching the fugue is found in works such as: the *Cello Sonata*, Op. 102, no. 2 (1815); *Fugue for String Quintet*, Op. 137 (1817); the Piano Sonatas, Op. 106 (1818) and Op. 110 (1821); the *Diabelli Variations* Op. 120; the "*Zur Weihe des Hauses*" *Overture*, Op. 121 (1822); the *Missa Solemnis* (1818-1822); the *Great Fugue for String Quartet*, Op. 133 (1825); the Fourteenth Quartet Op. 131 (1826). A new approach to variation is found in quartet Nr. 12 Op. 127, in which the amplification of the theme leads to the emergence of a new melody, but also in the Fourteenth Quartet, when the simplification of the theme almost leads to melodic immobility. Reworkings in the form of variation are found after 1820 in the sonatas Op. 109 (*Adagio*), Op. 111 and, obviously, in the *Diabelli*.

#### **4. Compositions from the period of the *last* Beethoven**

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this discussion at least," in Gareth James Leather, *Models and Idea in Beethoven's Late 'Trifles,'* Durham University, 2005, p. 96.

If Beethoven's music says something and – even more – if, as Wagner suggested, it says something profound, visionary and prophetic, then it makes sense to seek to understand the forms through which the composer conveys his message and the musical strategies applied in his musical efforts. The compositions belonging to the period of the *last* Beethoven are marked by a disconcerting stylistic and imaginative diversity. I will attempt to mention the most significant here and to emphasize the thematic and stylistic specificity these compositions are individualized by. From among the researchers dedicated to this period of Beethoven's creation – roughly spanning the period between 1813 and 1827 – some, like William Kinderman, believe that the centerpiece around which the new stylistic vision revolved was the *Hammerklavier* piano sonata, while others find its debut in the cello sonatas Op. 102. Martin Cooper<sup>159</sup> considered that, in fact, this style was formed through a series of slow mutations occurring in Beethoven's biography and artistic vision. The new vision started from an inner impulse that signaled, above all, a change of his personality, his having reached artistic maturity, and only derived from this the quest for stylistic innovations and the reorientation at the composition level.

Beyond the differences regarding the origin of their ultimate style or the dominance of some or other of the compositions, these are anyway major works through their very structure, expression formula and the innovations they contain. *Sonata no. 28 in A major, Op. 101*, dedicated to Baroness Dorothea von Ertmann (see image), a pupil of Beethoven's, and



published in Vienna by Steiner in 1817 is the first of the last five piano sonatas he composed. Dorothea von Ertmann was a brilliant pianist, about whom Beethoven himself wrote that

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*Late Beethoven: Commentary and Performance*, Del Aguila, Cambridge,

she was the one “made music as he imagined” it.<sup>160</sup> Its rather lyrical opening and tonal ambiguity made Cooper compare it to a confidential discussion from another room that we can overhear through the door that is ajar, but that was not intended for us. In the second movement, which is much more lively, we hear a march in F major and a trio composed in the form of a canon, a continuously marked rhythm and a tempo in *sforzandi* in the second half. After the counterpoint of the march, through a series of downward chromatic sequences, slowed down, sustained in E, we are introduced to the severe atmosphere of mystery that is also encountered, in much more intricate form, in the *Missa Solemnis*. The conclusion is achieved through a rapid descent accompanied by the exaltation of the emotional vibration after the few sketched attempts at reconstructing the phrase, charged with a high sensitive voltage. The stylistic importance of this work also comes from the fact that it is the first composition in which the fugue is taken and integrated into the sonata form.

Sonatas Op. 102, no. 1 and 2 in C major, inspired by the cellist Linke, a friend of Beethoven’s and a member of the Razumovsky quartet, were composed in 1814 and dedicated to Countess Maria Erdödy. Considered by some experts as the beginning of a new way of composing, they contain elements of counterpoint and canon, elements ornamental rustling/trill undertaken in the thematic material, sounds of extreme heights, recitative passages, diverse forms of variation and harmonic modulation through which the type of composition was actually changed. Thematic cyclicality is introduced in the first sonata as an essential element in the configuration of the *ultimate/last* style.

The Piano Sonata no. 29, Op.106, *Hammerklavier*, composed between 1817 and 1820, is considered the *Mount Everest*<sup>161</sup> of the piano repertoire in Beethoven’s composition. Of unusual length, unprecedented in the history of style, the composition respects the

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<sup>160</sup> Luisa Guembes-Buchanan, *idem*, p. 6.

<sup>161</sup> See Luisa Guembes-Buchanan, *idem*, p. 20.

structure in four movements, introducing, however, ample elements of contrast at the level of the mood and the state expressed. Profoundly autobiographical, it describes the bleak period through which the composer was going, acknowledged in a letter dated August 21, 1817 and addressed to his friend Zemskall: “I often despair and should like to die ... if the present state of affairs does not cease, next year I shall be not in London but probably in my grave.”<sup>162</sup> Aware of the complexity, difficulty and innovations it contained, the author appreciated that this work would give pianists something to do<sup>163</sup> and would possibly come to be understood only half a century later. Moreover, it is known that at the time of its appearance, the sonata was considered impossible both for the piano and for the pianists, and that it was excessively long. Expressed through ascending and descending chords, applied and repeated obsessively, the state of tension and conflict maintain a state of vehemence, with tempered passages of sorrow, throughout the entire surface of the work. Amid the rhythmic unity, we hear from the beginning harmonic clashes and even shatterings, giving the impression of vitality and being disseminated throughout the entire work.

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<sup>162</sup> See *ibidem*.

<sup>163</sup> His opinion was confirmed, nearly two centuries later, by the pianist Luisa Guembes-Buchanan: “The op. 106 sonata was, and to a great degree remains, a work whose musical and technical complexity presents challenges for pianists and audiences alike. It is my opinion that in this sonata Beethoven presents and exploits all the elements of the classical four-movement sonata on an incredibly large scale while at the same time exploring every registration and dynamic range of the piano available to him. His use of the pedals to achieve shadings and to project particular colors is in my view of unparalleled mastery. Beethoven is pushing convention to its limits,” *ibidem*.

# Sonata in B-flat Major "Hammerklavier"

Op. 106

Allegro. (♩ = 138.)

ff

*ritard.* *p a tempo*

*cresc. poco a poco*

*f* *ff* *p* *f* *ff* *p* *cresc.*

Perhaps the most impressive movement is the *Adagio sostenuto*. On hearing it, in a performance where Franz Liszt himself was the interpreter, a spectator had the impression that it revealed to him “the world beyond the grave.”<sup>164</sup> Hans von Büllow noted a *painful nobility* in this and Lenz, slightly more emphatically, considered it a “mausoleum of the world’s collective suffering.”<sup>165</sup> D’Indy<sup>166</sup> found the same atmosphere of assumed suffering, of the sublime transfiguration of a profound and refined agony, an ambiguity in which the experience of somber oppression gave rise to outbursts of jubilation and hope. The introduction of the trill<sup>167</sup> in expressing these emotions was an important element to be noted, one that belonged to the characteristics of the *last* Beethoven. From a technical standpoint, that *Largo* in the introduction to the final part was a rewriting and rethinking of the fugue or,

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<sup>164</sup> *Idem*, p. 24.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>166</sup> “The forthbringing of Opus 106 comes to brighten these troublous times. One must have suffered one’s self to dare attempt the execution of the *Adagio* in i F# minor, of such intense emotional power, and hovering between the gloomiest resignation and the most radiant hopefulness! Aside from the fugue serving as finale – a strange fugue, unrestful, with a dash of blue sky amidst the clouds, but producing an overwhelming effect when the interpretation is worthy of the music – aside from this fugue, the entire sonata is built up in a fashion wholly traditional, and, in spite of that (perhaps because of it), it presents itself, through the choice of ideas and nobility of construction, in immeasurable grandeur,” Vincent D’Indy, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

<sup>167</sup> “Beethoven makes use of a by now common rhetorical device in his late period music: the trill. In Beethoven’s Mate style’ trills move beyond the function of empty decoration, becoming one of many rhetorical gestures in a highly rhetorical language. ‘Trills,’ writes Elaine Sisman, ‘are heraldic signs that welcome present time.’ Just as the trill had brought strength to the convalescent in the ‘Neue Kraft fühlend’ section of the third movement from the string quartet, op. 132, or had signalled the arrival of the grandiose fugal conclusion from the preceding *fantasia largo* in the *Hammerklavier* sonata, op. 106 it heralds a new life for the melody, one that has greater rhythmic animation and is brighter in texture,” in Gareth James Leather, *Models and Idea in Beethoven’s Late ‘Trifles,’* Durham University, 2005, p. 88.



in Charles Rosen's formulation, the very *birth of Counterpoint*, the *creation of the Fugue*. Kindermann identified precisely the theme of torment, of heroic struggle<sup>168</sup> in this composition, of unappeased anger and the need for purgation after a protracted moral suffering, for whose expression there emerged a new musical formula.

*Sonata no. 30 in E major*, Op. 109, was composed in 1820 and dedicated to Maximiliana Brentano. The work is structured in three movements. In the first movement, Kinderman notices this element of structural innovation, which he describes as *parentheses that comprise musical passages intertwined with contrasting sections*. What is also remarkable in the repetition of the final part is the separation of the performance of the left hand from that of the right hand, a scheme through which the lyrical form is transformed into an assertively triumphant one. The six thematic variations,<sup>169</sup> in the form of arias and hymns,

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<sup>168</sup> "The Hammerklavier Sonata implies a narrative progression of heroic struggle and suffering, leading to a rebirth of creative possibilities. After the purgatorial *Adagio sostenuto*, the return of the vital forces in the slow introduction to the finale, and the fiery defiance of expression in the fugue itself, embody one of Beethoven's most radical statements, a piece of 'new music' among the most uncompromising ever written," Vincent D'Indy, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>169</sup> Here we find an illustration of the *flowering* process, which we may encounter more often in variations and trifles: "The variation finale of the piano sonata, op. 109, for example, consists of six variations upon the original theme. Each represents a gradation in a scale of successive growth, rather than with different means by which to decorate the same unit of material. The first variation preserves the tempo, the essential melodic outline and the harmonic skeleton, despite a changed bass progression; variation two intensifies the rhythmic activity by fragmenting the melody and accompaniment in a similar manner to the principal theme of the first movement; the third variation switches to a duple meter and *Allegro vivace* tempo marking, where the two hands participate in a two-part invention of four-bar imitations, after which the fourth variation reverts to a slower tempo with more adventurous harmonies in a florid three-part texture; variation five reverts to the duple meter and imitative entries, retaining the three-part texture; the last variation restores the original triple meter and tempo but accelerates the rhythm of two inner pedals successively, until they reach trills, after which a bass trill signals a diminution of the upper part. This spiraling rhythmic increase then falls back onto the original

on which this third part is structured indicate the composer's concern, at that time, for exploring new rhythmic possibilities of texture and expressiveness, whose more elaborate form is found in the *Diabelli*.

*Sonata no. 31 in A flat major*, Op. 110, composed in 1821, is considered one of the most accessible of the last sonatas, but is also among the most profoundly musical works, thanks to the rhythmic succession of the same motifs and the uninterrupted melodic progression between the movements, the rich and well-articulated emotional contrasts of content, the intimate lyricism of the first movement, in which the quasi-choral opening melts into an arpeggio that exudes a highly refined emotionality. To the basic theme, launched in the first movement, Beethoven adds a new theme, inspired by Haydn and placed here as a tribute to the old master. The calm stillness of the opening is before long threatened by a scherzo, which prepares the entry into an instrumental recitative interspersed with interludes in the orchestral style. Based on the emotional experience of recent years, particularly the dramatic scenario involved in claiming custody of his nephew and his struggle to obtain it, with dire consequences both for him and his sister-in-law and his nephew Karl, the composition expresses an open battle with evil and the satisfaction of an episodic triumph. Through its tense atmosphere, it is reminiscent of "a cruel and desperate conflict with this Evil, the principle of annihilation, followed by a return to Life, celebrated by a hymn of triumphant jubilation."<sup>170</sup>

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theme. Each gradation serves to further propel the music forward, yielding a sense of growth (increase in tempo, thickening of texture, increasingly adventurous harmonies etc.) until the sixth variation reaches the zenith of the process with a flourish of trills and intense rhythmic activity. The process began with the seed (theme) of the metaphorical flower; the seed ascended through each variation until the veritable blossom of variation six, from which the seed (the original theme) was once again reached," in Gareth James Leather, *Models and Idea in Beethoven's Late 'Trifles,'* Durham University, 2005, p. 82.

<sup>170</sup> Vincent D'Indy, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

*Sonata no. 32 in C minor*, Op. 111 is longer than the previous ones, but is structured in just two movements. It was dedicated to Archduke Rudolph of Austria, a student and friend of Beethoven's, his most important patron, but also an excellent pianist and composer. As a token of his appreciation, the composer dedicated several major compositions to him, Trio Op. 97, the Piano Sonatas Op. 81a, Op. 106 and also the sublime *Missa Solemnis*, Op. 123. Right from the beginning we are challenged by that solemn mood, which appears to ominously foreshadow evil and calamity in C minor, emerging from a slow tempo that induces a dramatic effect on a theme of fugue, in which we appear to witness a series of unfinished gestures. The theme of the fugue in *Allegro con brio e appassionato* is gradually transformed, through the gradual intensification and quickening of the rhythm and sonority in the sonata, achieving a spectacular metamorphosis of the genres. In the second movement we hear a set of spectacular variations, *Arietta*, which remind us of Op. 109, presented in the same slow tempo of the first movement, but with a diminution of rhythmic cadence. In the final coda earlier passages are reworked and rhythmically transformed, and the closing is calm, solemn.

The *Great Fugue (Grosse Fuge)* Op.133, now known as an autonomous, complex and often confusing work, was originally conceived as the end of the *Quartet for Strings* Op. 130. After the first audition of the quartet, at the suggestion of his publisher from Artaria, Beethoven separated the end of the composition and turned it into what we know today under the title *Great Fugue*, published in May 1827. Beethoven's friend, the violinist Karl Holz, made the fully justified remarks that from the very first audition, the *Great Fugue* had imposed itself as a technically astounding work, but one that cannot be loved. What Joseph Kerman had said about the *Missa Solemnis* also holds true about the fugue, namely that it is a work that one can admire and respect, but not love. The arguments are related, obviously, to the listeners' musical maturity and sensitivity, and at that moment of his creation Beethoven

had reached a compositional complexity and difficulty that was almost ungraspable by the larger public. This drastically reduced the number of auditors and detracted the emotion with which his work was greeted. Its analysts have not yet reached an agreement regarding its structure. Some have opted for a traditional structure, a form like the sonata-allegro, the rondo or the symphony, while others have preferred to consider it the work that combines several distinct movements into one. Among the adherents of the latter option is Professor Dan Dediu, who sees in it a combination of several distinct and clearly defined forms. According to the Romanian professor, Beethoven attempted to rewrite the Baroque polyphony in a manner that would include the emotional versatility specific to the sonata, in other words, to align the technique of “detail” with that of the “ensemble,” of “tectonics.” Mozart has successfully carried out a similar experiment, but he created in the first theme of Part IV of the *Jupiter* symphony what the professor calls a “fugoid,” that is, a sonata with fugue elements. Beethoven, however, did not choose the Mozartian combinatorial technique, but a different one, based on inclusion, producing the form of an extended sonata, achieved at the level of detail with typical elements of polyphony and the fugue: “The *Great Fugue* is actually a Grand Sonata achieved from distinct fugues. It is therefore a musical form composed of other musical forms. A form of forms.”<sup>171</sup>

The model of analysis arguing that this is a form of sonata-allegro is proposed by Daniel K. L. Chua, who refers primarily to its structure into three main sections. The fact that the first part, the exposition (measures 31-272) ends in the B flat major tonality, with which the piece actually starts, represents a clear deviation from the traditional sonata form, which again raises the question whether or not the *Great Fugue* is a sonata. Chua acknowledges, however, that the fugue from the first part (starting from measure 31) is not accurately

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<sup>171</sup> Dan Dediu, *Ludwig van Beethoven – Marea Fugă Op. 133, Gigantismul formei*, conference delivered at New Europe College, 6 February 2009.

reiterated in the reprise, as the sonata model would demand. A more relevant and comprehensive model of analysis is the multivalent model proposed by James Webster, which is consonant with the synoptic model of Lewis Lockwood, following the structure of Beethoven's work reproduced below, in which, as we may see, we can lean towards either the sonata form or a form of fugue with multimovement:

<b>Sections</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Tonality</b>	<b>Tempo</b>
1. Overture	1-30	G - B flat major B flat major	Allegro; Meno mosso; Allegro
2. Double fugue	31-158	G flat major	Allegro 4/4
3. Double fugato	159-232	B flat major	Meno mosso 2/4
4. Episode – “The March”	233-272	A flat major	Allegro molto e con brio 6/8
5. Double fugue	273-414	E flat major	Allegro con molto e con brio 6/8
6. Fantasy	415-492	A flat major	Allegro molto e con brio 6/8
7. Double fugato + Transition	493-510 511-532	Preparation for B flat B flat major B flat major	Section 3 resumed Section 4 resumed
8. “The March”	533-564	B flat major	Allegro molto e con brio
9. Coda I	565-662		6/8, short tempo contrasts

10. Coda II	663-741		between 657-662 Allegro molto e con brio 6/8
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If we opt for the sonata form, then:

Overture = introduction

Sections 2 and 3 = exposition of themes A and B

Section 4 = coda of the exposition

Sections 5 and 6 = development

Sections 7 and 8 = reprise

Sections 9 and 10 = coda

If we opt for the form of fugue with multimovement, then:

Overture + Allegro (Sections 1 and 2) = first movement

Section 3 = slowed down movement

Section 4 = an interlude

Sections 5 and 6 = the equivalent of a scherzo

Sections 7-10 = composite end

Another researcher, Joseph Braunstein prefers to see the *Great Fugue* as a tripartite structure of the rondo type. Considered by this author a quartet within a quartet, the work is divided into three main movements, based on tonal regions and metric signatures, as follows: the first

section has 158, the second 73 and the third 510 measures. This last section is then divided into tonal regions, which, according to Braunstein's thesis, give way to a rondo with this structure: A (exposition, B flat major, measures 232-272) – B (development, A flat, measures 273-413 – AB (E flat, measures 414-442) – A (A flat, measures 453-492) – C (A flat, *Meno mosso*, measures 493-510) – (Bridge, measures 511-532) – A (reprise, B flat, measures 533-662) – coda (measures 663-741). The relations between the sections, that is, between measures 1-158, 273-532 and 533-741, are considered a coda in the A-B formula. John Daverio saw an even more structure complex in the *Great Fugue*, namely a multiple movement of the symphonic type structured into four sections, in which, however, the third and fourth movements were elided. Perhaps even more surprising is the interpretation of Beethoven's work as a theme with variations; this perspective belongs to Joseph of Marliave, who structures it into six sections, as follows: an introduction, two fugues, each with a set of short variations, a new exposition and a conclusion-progression.

A position that seems well reasoned and justified is that of Lorne Dechtenberg,<sup>172</sup> who contends that this is the musical form of an opera from which the words are missing. This is, in fact, a very new position in the analytical spectrum of Beethoven's work. In supporting her position, the author makes the compulsory references to the previous operatic works and the structural elements of the dramatic genre comprised in the *Great Fugue*. The articulation of Beethoven's operatic vision and style occurred on the basis of significant influence, including, above all, Mozart's *Magic Flute*, Luigi Cherubini's comic operas and melodramas, but also Rossini's *Barber of Seville*, in which are also incorporated elements from Mozart and Cherubini, as Alex Ross explains very convincingly. In upholding the notion that the *Great Fugue* has the characteristics of an opera, Dechtenberg brings several convincing arguments that we will attempt to summarize. In this last period of his creation, Beethoven accentuated

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<sup>172</sup> Lorne Dechtenberg, *Beethoven's Grosse Fuge: An Opera Without Words*, 2009.

the dramatic themes. Beethoven's recourse to the Baroque tradition indicates that, thematically, any composition is organized around certain common typical elements. Kirkendale identifies the theme of the Great Fugue as a variation of hymnic typology, *Hymnentyp*, mainly used for expressing sorrow, suffering and crying. The work clearly indicates a dramatic structure also through its binary conception, which is however not achieved through the roles and the assumed opposition of the instruments, like in the opening of the quartet Op. 95, because here the fugue demands of all the instruments the same thematic approach.

Karl Gregory considered that a structural-functional analysis would be most appropriate to illustrate conflict or musical drama. If the theme is placed in a binary frame, then there are two distinct characters, which generate a duality of theme (A) – countertheme (B), evolving in a agonic, dramatic situation, with unpredictable changes and upheavals, just like in a rapier duel, as Karl Gregory subtly suggests. In the structure of the Fugue, the two conflicting themes illustrate the difference of two characters, one (A) that is cautious and reflexive, corresponding to the hymnal style, *Hymnentyp*, and another that is energetic, ambitious and active (B), expressed through rhythmic accentuation. The conflict between them is illustrated by frequent changes of tempo. The two rhythms he prevalently uses in the work, *Allegro con molto e brio* and *Meno mosso e moderato*, correspond to the differences of character, conduct and purpose between the theme and the countertheme, developing a dramatic function. The elements of this drama, as seen by Karl Gregory, with specific terms of literary structural analysis, are: *subversion*, *restriction*, *opposition*, *withdrawal*, *interruption*, *understanding* and *integration*. In this analysis, the relations between the sections of the work and the two subjects or characters are presented as an opera performance. The two characters, with their qualities, are introduced in the overture. Starting from measure 31, character B becomes the subject of the fugue and theme A moves into the



background, as a countersubject. The two seem as different as they are unequal, but their relations are adjusted, changed and even reversed during the dramatic performance. From measure 158 on, the musical movement in a slow tempo and the chromatic movement in the supradominant suggest the subversion triggered by the apparently weak or dominated character and a slight decline of the energetic, domineering character. The latter returns to the foreground starting from measure 233, when the music is resumed in the initial tonality and tempo, suggesting its limitation; its position gradually weakens again, starting from measure 273, which reflects the fragmentation of theme B and the short rounds of modulations. From measure 493 on, the weakening is even more visible, given the extremely rarefied occurrence of theme B, and its corresponding character withdraws. At that moment, through a movement of alternation, the foreground is occupied by theme A and its corresponding character, illustrated by the rhythm *Meno mosso e moderato*. The return of the opponent occurs again from the measure 533, which marks the resumption of music in the initial tonality. The linking passage, comprising measures 658-662, indicates character A's unsuccessful attempt to deal with the situation, the realization of its own limits and own failure. Like in the Hegelian dialectic game, where thesis and antithesis are integrated into synthesis, here the final coda integrates both subjects and their characters, as evidenced by the rapid execution of the themes A and B in a ratio of leading role – subordinate role, but undissociated. Based on these elements, Dechtenberg reaches the courageous and less popular conclusion that the *Great Fugue* is actually an opera<sup>173</sup> from which only the words are missing: “As I have

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<sup>173</sup> An allusion to the operatic character of the *Grosse Fuge* may also be found in the article of David B. Levy, “Ma però beschleunigend”: Notation and Meaning in Ops.133/134, from which we cite the following extract: “Throughout this article I have strongly suggested a programmatic link between the *Grosse Fuge* and a Passion narrative. But I am also well aware of the dangers inherent in projecting too specific a narrative onto a purely instrumental work. Although it is tempting to suggest that the entirety of the *Grosse Fuge* represents a narrative that takes the listener from the crucifixion through the resurrection, there are obstacles that mitigate against such

shown, opinions regarding the precise nature of the work's form vary widely, but all accounts seem to suggest that the Grosse Fuge encapsulates a complete musical journey. And there seems to be a great deal of evidentiary support for the argument that, while Beethoven never made a second attempt at writing opera, he had learned a great deal about it (both from others and from his own experience) and put that knowledge to use on his own terms. He did this when he set Schiller's text in the Ninth Symphony, and I believe that he did it again when he composed the Grosse Fuge, an 'opera without words'.<sup>174</sup>

The *Diabelli Variations*, Op. 120, written from 1819 to 1823, occupy a special place in Beethoven's creation. Through their originality, they represent an eventual achievement in the art of variation, which is why they are considered masterpieces.<sup>175</sup> An editor and

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a reading. How, for example, is one to explain the passage in 68 meter, *Allegro molto e con brio* (mm.233–72), in narrative terms? Nevertheless, the specific referential meaning of the tied eighth-note figure in the Baroque models compels us to consider how the story of the Passion informs the emotional and dramatic trajectory of the *Grosse Fuge*. This work, with its epic sense of struggle begins with a dramatic expression of tremendous struggle, pain, and anguish. The serenity in the Gb fugue offers momentary respite from the struggle. In partial answer to the question of the fleeting *Allegro molto e con brio*, it is helpful to be reminded that this relatively cheerful episode quickly devolves into further struggle and turbulence in the Ab fugue (mm.273ff.), reaching its apex in m.416 with the most jarring rhythmic displacement of all. At this point, the past events of the movement are paraded before our ears as a kind of abbreviated recapitulation, beginning with the Eb pedal tone in m.477, followed by a "reprise" of the *Meno mosso e moderato* in m.493. The final cadence is interrupted by a moment of doubt and hesitation (mm.511–32), finally resolving to the definitive release of the *Allegro molto e con brio* in m.533. All pain and anguish yield to joy, but not without one last brief recollection of the Overtura (mm.657-62) □ a reminder of all previous pain and suffering. One might view the entire *Allegro molto e con brio* section as a *lieto fine* from an opera seria. But we would do well also to recall that the anguished narrative of the Passion ends with the glory of the resurrection," *Beethoven Forum*, Fall 2007, vol. 14, No. 2, pp.148-149.

<sup>174</sup> Lorne Dechtenberg, *idem*, p. 17.

<sup>175</sup> "The 33 Variations on a Waltz by Diabelli, op. 120 represent Beethoven's most extraordinary single achievement in the art of variation writing. In their originality and power of invention they stand with other late

composer, Anton Diabelli was quite popular in Vienna through his sonatinas and guitar compositions, which were performed by small bands in the city taverns. Among those who appreciated and cherished them was the composer Schubert. In 1819, Diabelli invited fifty of the most famous composers to write a variation on a theme he had composed, aiming to publish the entire collection. Beethoven initially refused, but then changed his mind and began to work on them, dedicating them in 1823, when they were finished, to Antonia Brentano. These variations and the Bagatelles, Op. 126, published in 1825, are Beethoven's last compositions for the piano. In his book dedicated to them, William Kinderman considers that the main feature of the Variations is their parodic spirit,<sup>176</sup> for whose illustration Beethoven invented a wide range of effects at the level of the melody, the rhythm, counterpoint, and emotional expression. In the 22nd variation, for example, Beethoven parodies a fragment of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, identifying his own work – that is, the variation itself – with Leporello. The relationship of the Mozartian character with his master becomes a mirror of the relationship between the Beethovenian variation and the original theme – a faithful, albeit critical relationship, at the same time.

The changes operated at the level of the motifs of the harmonic vision, of the melodic line and in the structure of the waltz form render Beethoven's variations as inaugural

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masterpieces such as the Ninth Symphony, the Missa Solemnis and the last string quartets. The remarkable creativity of this composition makes it both a microcosm of Beethoven's work and a monument to musical art," Luisa Guembes-Buchanan, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>176</sup> "The issue of parody in op. 120 is complex. It is interesting that the overall formal progression of the variations relies heavily on parodying the melody of Diabelli's theme, an idea that, though prominent in the finished piece, is not in evidence in the 1819 draft. The descending fourths and fifths (inverted in the second part) of the theme are common to all the variations. However, Beethoven manipulates and transforms the original waltz, and it is only in variation 19 that we hear such sequences in their original form. The simple turn of the melody becomes the focus of variations 9, 11 and 12, for example," *idem*, p. 48.

moments of a new way to understand and practice the genre<sup>177</sup> as such. The transformation of the genre, the modification of the generally accepted vision, the supersession of conventional limits – whether through decorations at the melodic level, through distortions and alterations of the modulations, the harmonic progression or, even more radically, of the thematic level – entitles us to consider Beethoven’s variations as experimental artistic works with innovative results in the history of modern music. Variations acquired here the status of the formation process of a musical genre that was analogous to the natural processes of crystallization, involving thus a direct action of modification, permutation, transfiguration and combination so that the new formula obtained could be more than a replica of the original, namely so that it could be the very efflorescence with unsuspected facets and qualities of the original. Gareth James Leather appreciates that the flowering<sup>178</sup> metaphor is most suggestive for

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<sup>177</sup> “[B]y expanding the waltz’s dimensions, melodic and harmonic framework throughout each variation, by leaving behind the world and its hackneyed conventions of the ballroom, entering the sublime realm of musical invention in the fugue, and by culminating this multifarious journey with a transfigured minuet-cum-diminution variation, Beethoven has transformed not only the waltz’s material, the surface elements of musical construction, but its genre, its meaning. The ballroom can be trivial, but if looked on from a different angle, or reinterpreted with the appropriate musical tools, it can match or even surpass the sublime ideals of Baroque invention, as epitomized in the fugue,” in Gareth James Leather, *Models and Idea in Beethoven’s Late ‘Trifles,’* Durham University, 2005, p. 78.

<sup>178</sup> “The paradox of Beethoven’s dynamic variation genre lies in the static-dynamic dichotomy that governs the music. We saw in the Diabelli variations how Beethoven held a large surface area of disparate topics and styles together by projecting a sense of ‘journey,’ from a commonplace waltz to a transfigured realm of expanded invention, ending with a transformed minuet. This work is unrivalled in the genre of variation in terms of coherence of overall form: the whole imparts dynamic movement from one variation to the next, while each of these elements remains perceivable precisely as a variation of the original. Yet this dynamic movement that seems to grow organically and reach a transfigured climax toward its end finds its philosophical counterpart in contemporary metaphors such as *flowering*,” Leather, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-81.

understanding the mechanism of Beethovenian variation. Specific to this process is the simultaneous development, on multiple levels and in many directions, like in the biological evolution of plants from seed to flower, so that in the organic circularity of the return to origins, the process may restore the seed from which it started in the first place. Goethe indicated this organic circular morphology through the image of the seed in the ground that rose into the seed in the flower, altering itself in the process, dying and being reborn. The process of the seed's alteration is an excellent analogical image for the variation process practiced by Beethoven.

Among the last string quartets, the fourteenth, Op. 131, composed in 1926, indicates a new structure in six balanced movements, played without breaks between them, in the C sharp minor tonality. The fifteenth quartet, Op. 132, completed a year before his death, preserves in its thematic atmosphere the severity and ordeals of his ailment, suffering and crisis, which are nonetheless processed and sublimated, as well as converted into religious sentiment. Liturgical music, Gregorian hymn, Palestrina's lesson are profoundly assumed and incorporated into the composition.

The *Missa Solemnis* has been rightly considered one of the most successful compositions in the history of Western music, being placed alongside Bach's *Mass in B minor* and Wagner's *Parsifal*. While he worked on it, retreating within himself, but also touched by an ecstatic thrill, Beethoven seemed transfixed by this operation, just like master alchemists transfigured themselves spiritually while transmuting lead into gold. Although it represents music of glorification, sacred music of Catholic expression, it is not liturgical per se, nor is it intended for interpretation in church. Its complexity and the magnitude of the orchestral space exceed the canonical criteria of religious church service. The composer's

avowed aim<sup>179</sup> was to awaken, through the *Missa*, both in the performers and in the auditors, a profound and lasting devotional feeling, a state of elevation similar to that reached when the soul is completely entrusted into the hands of that unique God confessed by tradition and the Gospels. Creation itself, as act or gesture motivated by a profound religious sentiment, becomes thus a confession of faith even if it is not made in forms that are dogmatically established by the Church. We could classify it as mystical, transfiguring, ecstatic, rather than literally liturgical music.

The opening of the *Missa*, that *Kyrie* that has a musical equivalent only at the outset of Bach's *Mass in B minor*, expresses that devotion and elevation of the soul through which mercy and grace are requested from God. In its tonality, combining pathos with bitterness and suffering, there is presented the descent of the Lord's Son on earth, the King of Souls through suffering and redemption. Christ appears invoked here as the second person of the Godhead, in unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit. *Kyrie* is thus a form of celebrating the Holy Trinity through which the entire creation is made, protected and redeemed. After this opening, which spiritually represents the opening of heavens to let us see the King of the

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<sup>179</sup> "How can one venture □ even had the author not taken pains to tell us clearly □ to assert that this entire Mass is not an ardent 'act of faith,' that this Credo does not proclaim on every page 'I believe, not merely in a vague divinity, but in the God of the gospel and in the mysteries of the incarnation, the redemption, and the life eternal'? How gainsay the penetrating emotion □ so new in music □ which attends these affirmations, and which springs solely from a Catholic comprehension of these dogmas and mysteries? How, finally, can one misconstrue the piously meticulous care with which the sacred words are treated and translated into music, and the marvelous meaning of the expressive accents which unveil their signification to those who can and will understand? For the rest, it suffices to know and to feel, in order to be convinced. We shall endeavor to bring this knowledge home to the reader, hoping to inspire within him that sentiment for beauty and truth to which Beethoven himself laid claim when he wrote to Streicher: 'My chief design when writing the Mass was to arouse religious emotion in singers and auditors alike, and to render this emotion lasting,'" Vincent D'Indy, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-119.

World, there follows the *Gloria* moment. This is expressed through sounds of trumpet, which remind us of the biblical angel messengers, to whom the choir responds in contralto, giving thanks to the Lord. Moreover, throughout the entire piece, we hear the eruption of trumpet blasts, which appear to mark the imminent revelation of God, His approaching presence. The trumpet sounds announce us that God is coming, that he is near, that he has sent his Power over us. After the glorification cry, the formula *pax hominibus* is immediately uttered, and the music becomes calm, as if the state of peace has set in throughout the entire creation. The *Credo* moment, which brings us into the cathedral and even in the altar, is presented in three divisions. In the first division, there are presented two statements of faith – *In one God, the Father Almighty* and in the *Lord Jesus Christ* – using for both the tonality B flat major, with a transition to the subdominant; subsequently, these affirmations are reunited in the formula of the consubstantiality between the Father and the Son, tonically expressed. In the second division is presented God’s descent to earth, the mystery of the Incarnation (in the D major tonality), summarized in the formula *Et homo factus est*, then the Passion and Crucifixion scene, followed by the Resurrection (a progression from D major to F major). The Passion, the suffering of God who became man, the plight and the Resurrection find here one of the most eloquent musical formulations ever conceived.<sup>180</sup> In the third section, dedicated to the

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<sup>180</sup> “Succeeding the Incarnatus, written in the first Gregorian mode, there begins the awful ascent of Calvary. We can follow the Saviour’s faltering steps, so rudely underscored by the orchestra. And now there arises, under the bows of the first violins, the moan of the most moving plaint, the sublimest expression of suffering, that ever issued from musician’s heart; a plaint yet more intense than the sorrowful melody in Op. 110, in that here it expresses, not human suffering, but the anguish of a God made man. The final fugue is altogether of admirable luminosity. It requires a very slow movement... It might be called a representation of the joys of heaven, as they were imagined by Lippi or Giovanni da Fiesole. It is, in fact, like a fresco from the golden age translated into music; the fancy depicts a mystic dance, a roundel of the blessed pressing with naked feet the flowerets of the celestial meadows. It sounds afar off, this majestic round, scarce to be heard. It approaches, it is close at hand,

Holy Spirit, there is expressed the faith in the Church and the Unity of the Spirit with God, as well as the belief in eternal life. In the section *Agnus Dei* it seems as if entire mankind were apologizing to the Lamb of God, sacrificed at a Passover moment for deliverance from sin. The focus here is on forgiveness, liberation from hatred and the installation of peace in souls and among people. It is a moment of worship and devotion that requires the need for prayer. The moment of peace,<sup>181</sup> when souls are bowed in prayer, leads all of humanity towards the event of celebration and victory over suffering and death, musically expressed through fanfare sounds.

## 5. The workshop of musical miniatures

If the grandiose works from the last period evince the vastness and novelty of Beethoven's vision, the complexity of the composition, the technical exigency that he had reached, his shorter works, such as the Variations and the Bagatelles, enable us to understand his way of relating to traditional musical styles, themes and structures from the periods of the Renaissance, the Baroque and Classicism, as well as the way in which he succeeded in altering and transforming them, giving them new expressive structures and registers. Of the

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we are entwined in its hallowed circles □ it departs, well-nigh vanishes, but only to return as with an augmented host, yet more enthusiastic, to bear us away in its whirl and to subside, in adoration, before the throne of the Almighty!," Vincent D'Indy, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>181</sup> "And, in truth, it is Peace that anew intervenes. Tender, radiant Peace waxes like a miraculous plant, and while faraway drums are beating the retreat of the spirits of Evil, there spreads for the last time from the height of its upraised stem the brilliant bloom of the four incomparable measures, as if to exhale heavenward the perfume of the grateful soul's act of faith. Is there anything more beautiful in the realm of music? And, for the expression of peace won by God's aid, can one imagine a more sublime offering from a human being to his divine Creator?," Vincent D'Indy, *op. cit.*, p. 126.



twenty-six bagatelles composed throughout his career, *Für Elise* (1810) is perhaps the one that has drawn most of the attention on the part of the critics of and the public. Of the three sets of bagatelles, the first seven, grouped into Op. 33, were published in 1803, while the following, written on August 14, 1818, are grouped into Op. 119 and, respectively, those from 1823-1824 are grouped into Op. 126. Five of the eleven (7-11) that make up Op. 119 were composed for the Friedrich Starke piano school in Vienna. The last, in Op. 126, were conceived as autonomous works without the intention of being used for teaching purposes. These small pieces, which Beethoven called with false condescension *Kleinigkeit*, that is, *trifles*, actually resembled a jeweler's exercises while the artist was working on grandiose compositions like the *Ninth Symphony* and the *Missa Solemnis*, through which the composer crystallized his insights and technical-stylistic innovations into miniature pieces, whose content could also be found, at length, in his more extensive work.

Whether regarded as simple sketches, as technical-stylistic games or as ironic-humorous touches applied to certain consecrated compositional elements, bagatelles are, in any case, as Edward Cone considers, relevant musical experiments for understanding the *last* Beethoven. For Theodor Adorno, these works are genuine musical crystals,<sup>182</sup> *singing stones*,

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<sup>182</sup> “Unsociably, the very late Beethoven makes no concessions to domestic music-making. Faced with the last quartets the amateur violinist is completely out of his depth, as is the amateur pianist confronted by the five late sonatas and the Diabelli Variations. To play these pieces and even, for that matter, to listen to them is beyond such players. No easy path leads into that petrified landscape. But when Beethoven made the stone speak by carving figures in it with his chisel, the splinters flew from the terrible impact. And as the geologist can discover the true composition of whole strata from tiny, scattered particles of matter, the splinters bear witness to the landscape from which they come: the crystals are the same. Beethoven himself called them bagatelles. Not only are they splinters and documents of the mightiest productive process in music, but their strange brevity reveals at the same time the curious contraction, and the tendency towards the inorganic, which give access to the innermost secret not only of late Beethoven but perhaps of every great late style,” quoted in Gareth James *Leather, Models and Idea in Beethoven's Late 'Trifles,'* Durham University, 2005, p. 5.

samples of composition and style in which are concentrated the composer's visions and conception from that period in his evolution. Even though the term *bagatelle* had been used by some composers of the eighteenth century, such as Couperin or Boivin in France, with reference to a rondo and a set of dances, or Carl Wilhelm Maizier for compositions of songs and dances, Beethoven had applied the term for the first time with reference to short piano compositions and also had the merit of having invented this music genre, which was to develop much in the 19th and 20th centuries, being practiced, among others, by Franz List, François Schubert, Antonín Dvořák, Camille Saint-Saëns, Béla Bartók and Anton von Webern, Gerald Finzi, György Ligeti, Howard Ferguson, William Walton, Carl Vine, Jorge Villavicencio Grossmann.

Gareth James Leather introduced in the analysis of Beethoven's bagatelles the *splinter metaphor*, through which he sought to provide a correct intuition of the *miniaturization concept* with which the composer methodologically operated. In his opinion, the *last* Beethoven was a unified, organic vision, *pluralistically* expressed in stylistic terms, which integrated both the great compositions and these musical *splinters, fragments* or *shards*, their purpose being the formal subversion of classicism, mainly as practiced by Haydn, and the refashioning of older forms in the new style. Bagatelles were not, therefore, simple laboratory experiments, but also elements of a new musical language through which there were created new ways of expression, even a new genre. Although he did not abandon the sonata form in his late compositions, it is clear that Beethoven tried to experiment on other forms as well, becoming ever closer to chamber genres. The attempt to put together in unitary structures different forms, such as the sonata and the counterpoint, led to the birth of so-called *hybrids*, typical compositions of the *last* Beethoven's style. The hybrid formulas were seen by critics like Stephen Rumph as encapsulating the stylistic and musical conflict between the old and

the new, between classicism and romanticism, Beethoven representing, in many respects, the most prolific laboratory<sup>183</sup> of musical novelty.

Compression and concision clearly indicate also the ability to work expressively on tight spaces, to control a vision in a few movements; on the other hand, they also show the composer's desire to simplify and reduce the classical music syntax legitimated by Mozart and Haydn, to achieve new formal structures without losing the essence of the older ones. Carl Dalhaus observed in Beethoven's experiments certain preliminary operations to reduce classical forms – the sonata, the variation, the fugue – to their basic, structural, organic principles, and then to combine and *amalgamate* them so to obtain new musical forms, to *transform* some into others, which entailed taking the constituent elements from one form and moving them, without allowing them to be lost, into another. The collision<sup>184</sup> of forms led to their mutual fertilization, but also to the expansion of the expressive range, to the ambiguity and diverse functionality of the musical types obtained through hybridization. An illustrative example is Sonata Op. 130, where the first part uses the fugue technique to achieve an allegro in thematic exposition of the sonata. Also, in String Quartet Op. 127, in the first movement

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<sup>183</sup> “The notion of a smaller form as a ‘model’ for a larger one, therefore, is found as a gambit of the active composer within the late eighteenth-century. In an age when the larger dimensions of the sonata allegro were the focus of true artistic endeavor and merit, the miniature forms of the minuet and other such dances, as well as small song forms, were used as a compositional ‘laboratory’ in which certain formal, harmonic, or melodic elements could be ‘tried and tested.’ The central concepts of ‘model’ and ‘laboratory’ are inseparable when studying the individual forms of the op. 126 Bagatelles,” Gareth James Leather, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>184</sup> “The reversion to older models, whether it be the use of antiquated modes or reversion to forms such as the fugue, or the elaboration and manipulation of the Classical formal processes of Haydn and Mozart, is the primary stylistic constraint that underlies all that is seen to be eccentric and newfangled within the forms of the late period. *New paths were forged from the collision of existing models of musical structure, as well as the manipulation and distortion of conventional Classical ones.* The second set of late Bagatelles, op. 126, presents an illuminating case of such formal creation in the late period works,” Gareth James Leather, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

there are used the principles of the sonata and the ritornello to generate a new form from them, inexplicable and different from both, taken in their strict formal exigency.

Having been avoided and sometimes repudiated by post-Baroque composers, even by the Viennese classics, the fugue found an interesting place in Beethoven's late works. Thus, the Finale of Cello Sonata Op. 102, no. 2 is written in the style of a fugue; we find a fughetto in the *Diabelli Variations* no. 24 and 32, Op. 120; a fugue is incorporated into the final part of Piano Sonata Op. 101; in 1817 he composed a small fugue for String Quartet, Op. 137, and the Finale of Piano Sonata Op. 106, *Hammerklavier*, contains a grandiose fugue; also the end of the *Ninth Symphony* contains a fugue in the choral part at the end, the *Missa Solemnis* contains two fugues, in the *Gloria* and *Credo* parts, consecrating thus the art of the fugue as an element of his *last* style. According to Joseph Kerman, in the works of the *last* Beethoven, the fugue is the land most persistently cultivated by the composer and the one from which he hoped to harvest most of the fruit. The re-assessment of the formal principles of the sonata, so as to produce hybridizations with elements of the fugue and the counterpoint represent highly original technical-stylistic innovations. The classical principle of extensive and laborious thematic development, specific to the sonata,<sup>185</sup> takes over now the uniform texture and the tonal fluidity of the fugue.

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<sup>185</sup> "Specific techniques of 'thematic-motivic manipulation' are absorbed into the antiquated genre of fugue, just as contrapuntal elements were digested by the overarching formal organization of sonata form's deep-structure in the Classical style. Symptomatic of the shift in emphasis from one genre to the other is when Beethoven deflects a sonata form ironically with fugal processes; he often presents a sonata structure whose initial material resembles that of a fugal exposition. The *allegro* of the first movement of op. 130 is an instantiation of this, in which, says Dahlhaus, the 'fugue technique represents a way of creating a sonata exposition from a thematic idea that is only fit to serve the needs of a development passage.' The fugue is at once revived as an independent model, yet is transformed into a thoroughly late Beethovenian hybrid genre," *idem*, 67.

Beethoven's Experimentalism was not limited to musical forms and went further, to the level of style, so much so that some analysts deem that the characteristic of his last period was a particular *style of using styles*.<sup>186</sup> The brevity, the aspect of closure and structural circularity of the bagatelles – underlying the aesthetics of romantic musical *fragmentarism* – actually has an ambivalent function and produces a spiraling repetition movement, a return to the same sound module, which may continue indefinitely. In his workshop of bagatelles, Beethoven brings pre-classical and classical music forms, dissects them into their primary elements and then recomposes according to his own intuitive aesthetic rules. Even the sonata, the most elaborate form favored by the composers of Viennese classicism, including by Beethoven, originated, as Charles Rosen demonstrates, in popular compositions from the mid-eighteenth century, like the minuets and simple songs, with a binary or ternary rhythmic scheme or arrangement and a melodic span of three to four phrases.

Through permutations and combinations of such simple binary and ternary forms more elaborate forms are obtained, such as sonata.<sup>187</sup> The prototypes of large, elaborate forms are originally found in those miniatures, and their structuring processes, their composition

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<sup>186</sup> G. J. Leather, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>187</sup> “It is crucial that the theorists recognized within the compositional practice of the late eighteenth-century that the small forms of dance music were the *origins*, both structurally and idiomatically, of the extensive, resplendent sonata forms of the Classical style. As Leonard Ratner has noted, there was a growing consciousness in the latter half of the century of the origins of more grandiose forms, whereby the theorist and composer alike ‘acknowledged’ the debt owed by their ‘serious’ music to dance music ... Thus, Koch could demonstrate how the function of an initial eight-bar period from a binary dance form could fulfil that of an exposition from a sonata allegro: the establishment of the principle melody in tonic harmony, and subsequent rest four-bars later with an intermediary cadence, would become the ‘first subject’ or ‘tonic theme’; the second half of the eight-bar period, with the move to a related scale-degree (the dominant, for example) and cadential closure upon this harmony, would become the transition and ‘second subject,’ closing the exposition in this newly established key area,” *idem*, p. 16.

methods and rules function analogously. This splendid achievement of classicism, the sonata, is actually a product obtained through mutations, progressions and combinations based on primary, simple musical elements. This supports once more the idea that the process of artistic creation is similar to the natural processes of crystallization, as Goethe intuited. The most sophisticated forms are crystallized from primary elements and the most grandiose works consist of elementary pieces. The process itself of creation/crystallization, that is, the secret of aggregation and composition enables these changes to lead ultimately to irreducible works, whose value and expression can no longer be limited to the simple originating elements. Once accomplished, a work is a unit, not just a sum of elements incorporated into the composition.

Bagatelles – which were beautifully characterized by Lewis Lockwood as the *museum of small forms* – are applications, melodic, rhythmic and stylistic exercises of simple, primitive,<sup>188</sup> but fundamental musical elements. Beethoven’s experiments encompassed both the level of motif construction, harmonic progression, tonal relations and the level of formal construction.<sup>189</sup> The elements of formal irregularity in the compositions of the mid-eighteenth century, the rhythmic deviations present in the so-called immature styles of the pre-classical

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<sup>188</sup> “The origin of the Bagatelle, then, is from the eighteenth-century miniature piece, such as the small minuet or song form and other similar binary and ternary designs that abound, especially toward the middle of the century. These are simple in design, usually consisting of two, three or four phrases. As Rosen reminds us, it was the interaction of several permutations of such designs, which ‘may be classified roughly as binary or ternary,’ that brought the larger dimensions of sonata form into existence. In this sense Beethoven is not engaging with sonata form itself but with its origins,” *idem*, p. 15.

<sup>189</sup> “Within the ‘style of styles’ that is the late period works of Beethoven, then, one perceives in each Bagatelle a different way of handling one specific problem or part of the form. Because the Bagatelles are prototypical formal types, basic forms that embody in essence the elements of more elaborate and expansive designs, each strand of the multiplicity of the ‘late style’ may be uncovered as one facet of a specific Bagatelle. In this respect the Bagatelles are literally a ‘museum’ of stylistic constraints,” *idem*, p. 36.

period<sup>190</sup> were of particular interest to him, and the result of the intuitions attained here may be seen in the last piano sonatas, string quartets and, of course, in the bagatelles of Op. 126, namely in the flexibility of rhythmic evolution, the deliberate incongruities of the melody, rhythm and harmony, and in the purposeful tonal blurrings. However, all this does not lead to extravagant experiments, excessive of order or rebellious against any discipline at the level of the composition. The irregularities, the sought-after inconsistencies, the fractures between the basal parameters of the composition are surpassed through what is called double statements. These may be understood as follows: the theme and the rhythm remain congruent and the harmonic function is separated from both so that the entire ensemble of formal parameters may be achieved. The ways in which this reunification of the primary parameters in the order of composition is achieved, illustrated in the works of the last period,<sup>191</sup> such as Sonata Op. 110 or Bagatelles, Op. 126, represented Beethoven's novelty, his ability.

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<sup>190</sup> "Beethoven's reversion to older models seems to have given rise to a predilection for this non-fixedness of parameters and a certain irregularity of formal rhythm inherent in the 'immaturity' of the mid eighteenth-century. At most all his forms from the later years evince an adherence to the pre-Classical way of formal articulation. There is, of course, no one way of avoiding fixedness or regularity of structure, and this is evident in the differing instances of parametric non-congruence within the Bagatelles. The late piano sonatas and string quartets display flexibility, in which parameters are split, overlapped or blurred; these are miniaturized, explicitly or not, within the Bagatelles, op. 126," *idem*, p. 38.

<sup>191</sup> "In the sixth Bagatelle of op. 126, Beethoven presents, in miniature, a similar split of thematic and tonal functions to op. 110, staggering the (tonal) resolution of the exposition's material. The subdominant character of this Bagatelle is unusually strong; Beethoven eschews any strong articulation of the dominant key. In this sense, the sixth Bagatelle approaches the forms of the Romantics more so than in the other Bagatelles. Whereas a move to the dominant key area is the most significant structural event of a Classical form, as in the first Bagatelle, Romantic formal articulation has a proclivity towards the subdominant as a structurally significant event. A structure articulated by a central, climactic subdominant harmony, of course, induces relaxation, an attenuation of the tonic-dominant tension of eighteenth-century forms. Thus, it is easy to understand why commentators

Beethoven had assimilated the theoretical basis for such operations from the treatises of pedagogy and composition authored by Joseph Riepel (1709-1782) and Heinrich Christoph Koch (1749-1816). The way in which the operations of transfiguring the simple elements into complex musical forms was produced is enlightening: “once a small dance form is reached, one symmetrically punctuated by cadential phrase-endings, that Koch’s method for producing larger pieces such as the ‘sonata allegro’ resides in techniques of melodic expansion. This is achieved by either internal repetition or interpolation within a phrase, by extension to the phrase-ending by way of appendices and the elaboration of cadential material, and, finally, by the interpolation of subsidiary phrases alongside the more pertinent structural ones. This method is itself evidence that Koch considered the larger forms such as the Symphonic allegro to be merely an expansion of the smaller dance forms. For Koch, as well as other contemporary theorists, the smaller dance forms of the mid eighteenth-century embodied the essential functional syntax of the large-scale piece. The expanded form, despite its larger proportions, entailed nothing much more complex than in the smaller designs, but was essentially a temporal expansion and interpolatory elaboration of the periodicity, and consequent tonal rhythm, of the small form.”<sup>192</sup> The ninth in the cycle of bagatelles Op. 119, in rounded binary form, is the application of the procedure described by Koch, called mechanical periodicity. One can detect the geometric symmetry specific to the rhythm, thus: we have two perfectly symmetrical periods of eight measures each, separated by a passage of four measures, and in the middle of each period, we find an imperfect modulation in the basic tonality. The imperfect modulation from the antecedent is symmetrically responded by the

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attach such adjectives as ‘lyrical’ or ‘contemplative’ to this piece, where the subdominant governs the latter half of the form,” *idem*, 46.

<sup>192</sup> *Idem*, p. 16.



perfect modulation of the consequent. In the eighth bagatelle, however, the rhythm of the form is obtained through tonal punctuation, not through geometric symmetry.

Experiencing the process of establishing harmony is even more visible in Op. 126 than in Op. 119, where in piece no. 10 we find harmonic ambiguity and tonal harmony, and that mechanical scherzo induces the impression that it is possible to infinitely reiterate the motif, unrelated to the articulation of the form. The impression of a harmonic *perpetuum mobile*, of cyclical movement, the repetition in keeping with its own laws, uncoordinated from outside, is dominant here. The ability to leave the impression that sometimes music is



made by itself, that it produces and reproduces itself,<sup>193</sup> as if was the outcome of a natural, biological or mineralogical process and was manifested through infinitely reiterable

<sup>193</sup> “On a larger level, this ‘biological development’ in the horizontal axis of the musical discourse (the transformation of the triplet motif) works against the vertical axis, the putative ABA formal schema. The formal space of the sixth Bagatelle is used as a veritable arena by Beethoven, in which he plays out the tensions between the dynamic growth of the seed and the static, artificial divisions of the ABA schema, in short the static-dynamic dichotomy that permeated the shift from ‘Classicism’ to ‘Romanticism’ in the early nineteenth-century. This Bagatelle is perhaps Beethoven’s most Romantic creation, an essay in motivic *Steigerung* (...) Here, then, Beethoven’s musical *Veränderung* reaches its zenith within the miniature form, explicitly pointing towards a new conception of formal articulation, a ‘circular morphology’ of musical construction,” *idem*, pp. 92-93.

efflorescences, is one of the features of the *last* Beethoven, explained and appreciated, among others, by the German musicologist and philosopher Theodor Adorno.

Taking older musical themes and forms, reworking them and creating a new language for expressing them are accomplished through what Carl Dahlhaus calls *subthematic* connections. This term expresses the correlative level of the thematic, formal level that Beethoven sometimes leaves unaltered. If the form adopted is the sonata, for example, the subthematic level is observed not in the thematic evolution proper, but at the level of the intervals that permit the space of innovations and stylistic speculativeness, suggesting the impression of disparity, discontinuity or incoherence. However, the subthemes do not come as additions or enhancements of the classical form, which is apparently preserved, but as elements of calculated incoherence, tactical disparities incorporated into a new system that expresses the formal-thematic rapport on another plan and from a new perspective.<sup>194</sup> The coherence of the composition becomes visible now from the perspective of the whole and

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<sup>194</sup> “In this theory of formal and thematic relations in Beethoven’s ‘late style,’ then, the theme, in its Classical sense meaning the exterior presentation of melodic shapes, stands as a veil to the real formal process. This process is no longer a hegemonical relationship between form and theme, an ostentatious logic that relies on the assertiveness of the theme, which is ‘overpowered by subjectivity.’ Also, the formal schema stands outside of the real formal process. The real form and theme are amalgamated: the theme, or rather ‘subtheme,’ in order to differentiate it from the conventional meaning, is an ineradicable element of the music’s coherence and logic; it becomes the formal process. The coexistence of the two levels of form and theme (surface and sub-surface), despite the exterior level representing a mere facade, constitute the musical reality of the late works. The new musical construction, in which the (sub)theme weaves across and beneath the form, uniting the parts from within, unimpeded by formal boundaries, is given all the more potency by its being pitted against the very process to which it is antithetical, namely, the conventional exteriority of thematic conformance in a superficially defined schema. In other words, the new sense of musical construction, the freedom of the theme from functional obligations within an exterior form, is purposely concealed by the very construction that it aims to supplant,” *idem*, pp.112-113.

against the background of assuming the underlying texture of the subthematic level. The illustration of the *subthematic* connections is indicated, in Dahlhaus's opinion, by the structure of the two string quartets, Op. 130 and 132, in which there is no an initial thematic exposition, no central pattern, no first motif that will develop later after the consecrated forms; there is only a suite of motif variations that occupy the entire surface of the work.

The analysis of the bagatelles confirms Adorno's thesis that in the laboratory of miniatures of the last Beethoven, these small compositions are crystal shards in which we can see summarized, concentrated the composer's final insights, the crystals as such representing the piano sonatas and the string quartets. More even than some of the grandiose compositions, they strictly define the style of the *last* Beethoven. The same German critic mentioned here argued that, although composed in the past year of his career, the *Missa Solemnis* does not belong to the stylistics of *the last*: in his words, it is a late work without late style.<sup>195</sup> By drastically reducing dimensions, Beethoven brings to equal dignity and significance musical language – production techniques, the adopted rhetoric – and the genre in which it is expressed, whether it is a fugue or a canon. The minimal rhetoric and the simplified, even austere language allow the genre to express itself in a few basic, fundamental features, which are nonetheless perfectly carved like the faces of diamonds. If in the great works of the heroic period Beethoven overwhelmed the audience with a profuse, sometimes incomprehensible rhetoric and a grandiloquent, often tiresome style, now he limited himself to offering simple musical aphorisms or, if we prefer the poetic genre, musical haikus. It is only to this formula of classical Japanese prosody that may be likened the formal brilliance and thematic eloquence of the bagatelles. The creator of musical cosmologies, heroic mythologies and pastoral frescoes ultimately became a master jeweler.

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<sup>195</sup> *Idem*, p. 138.

With this we have a cohesive picture of the variety, depth and novelty encapsulated by the oeuvre of the last Beethoven. In the conclusions I will try to indicate the elements through which I built the image of the artist as a romantic hero, as the character of a modern mythology, to whose constitution a direct, if not decisive contribution was brought by his hearing loss – which we have called, in our interpretation grid, censorship, using Blaga's term, but not in the strict sense legitimized by the Romanian philosopher. In a dialectics between censorship and caesura, which we use here as explanatory illustration of the change that affected Beethoven's life and creation after the installation of deafness, we may appreciate that the stylistic, thematic and spiritual leap of the last Beethoven entitles us to claim that the profound tension, religious gravity and emotional depth of expression are directly related to his specific relationship with the Divine. Of course, this is not intended and cannot be taken as a scientific explanation of the meaning associated with the last Beethoven's religious leap, but is a form of applied hermeneutics.

## Conclusions

The theory that I wanted to develop in this thesis starts from the ideas of Blaga and Patapievici,<sup>196</sup> but goes beyond them. I have attempted to argue the thesis of an outburst or explosion of the transcendent in the last period of Beethoven's creation, which I call "the last music" or "the last Beethoven," relying on Wagner's interpretation of the decisive, prophetic, profoundly religious place of Beethoven's great oeuvre. Censorship, in the sense that we have developed here, can be discerned in Noica's expression "the limitation that does not limit."

The connections formed, over the nearly three decades of disease, between Beethoven's hearing impairment and musical creation compel us to assume this form of limitation in a broader interpretation of his musical destiny. The loss of hearing opened the horizon of an endless struggle in the composer's existence, the struggle with destiny. This was his theme, his perception, which would lead him to assume the image and role of a Hero, of a Titan, and it was from these endeavors that some of his most complex, powerful, expressive and innovative works gushed forth. The Titan always stood up against an unjust, illegitimate or unbearable authority. As I have already noted, Beethoven had a major problem with authority throughout his life, and this constantly fueled the crystallization of his personality in keeping with the *titanic archetype*. I have described the manner in which Beethoven formed a heroic complex, which had a real source in the figure of Napoleon and a mythical one in the Titan Prometheus, but which ultimately became Beethoven the hero, the self-image he built for himself and with which he identified in the second part of his life. The hero of Beethoven's creation, who was essentially Beethoven the hero, the sublimated self-

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<sup>196</sup> In Horia-Roman Patapievici – *Ultimul Culianu*, Humanitas Publ., 2010.

image, wanted to *dominate his illness*, on the personal level, to *overcome the classical canon*, on the musical level, and to *triumph over destiny*, on the transcendental level.

Applied here, the thesis above means that the loss of sensitive acuity, at some, auditory level, was converted into a condition of additional internal sensitivity and visionarism, that is, to inner de-limitation. Thus, the musical creation produced in this period was conceived with the sensitivity and new language arising from this de-limitation. Deafness, which appears at first to be a limit, or a censorship, is changed into a new potency or a gift. We could consider that the master's deafness was similar to the blindness attained by the great masters of Ottoman miniature that Orhan Pamuk talks about in his book *My Name Is Red*, who had the ability to draw and present reality impeccably from the moment they no longer perceived it as a sensitive external thing, but as an archetype, a model present in the divine light.

For the romantic way of judging the destiny of a genius, which was an even broader theme than that of the hero, Beethoven represents the ideal illustration, a fact which I relied on in supporting the thesis that *he became a universal paradigm of the romantic artist*, one whom suffering put in a position to shape and always reshape himself through creation, eventually leading artistic expression to the height of a messianic ideal. A true romantic artist is saved by his creation, which expresses his vision of the Absolute, its incarnation in an artistic language. In his singular way, through the caesura caused by hearing loss, Beethoven ascended in his creation to the expression of the Absolute. The tragic aspect is inevitable in the making of the hero figure, whether he is romantic or otherwise. In Beethoven's life, the loss of hearing acted as a constant torsional force exerted by destiny.

As Nietzsche said about Oedipus, the tragic hero does not perish; he is defeated by the gods. Time and death are not enough to subdue him, divine force is required for that. Blindness may be necessary to see that life itself is such a divine force that, in its whimsical

turmoil, brings us into being and destroys us with equal spontaneity, without malice and without guilt. The force of life is beyond good and evil, representing the most striking sign of the divine in the world. Beethoven's deafness seems to have been part of the scenario of a tragic hero's life and his final creation seems to have assumed this stance.

If Oedipus goes blind the moment he sees the truth of his own destiny, we can say that Beethoven goes deaf because for him all mysteries take the path of sound. It is through sound that these mysteries are revealed and in it that they must remain hidden forever. Beethoven's ultimate creation belongs to this register of boundless bravery and to the greatness of defeat. After all, a mortal being cannot walk out of life with a hero's crown on his head, and even if that crown were there, it would look like the somber triumph of a fallen hero, as can be seen in the legends of the Nibelungen, to which Beethoven was no stranger. The cosmic exuberance of destiny and the immense ease with which life is wasted, however, are ideas that permeate the last phase of Beethoven's creation. Despite the emphasis with which he sometimes expressed his views, the composer nevertheless wrote one of the most serious and solemn lessons about what man is allowed to be once he is sent into the world. In this situation, of a being that is thrown into time, always at the crossroads of life and death, of being and nothingness, there surges the triumph of greatness and the humility of utter precariousness. Any major creation testifies to our position in the world and few creators of music have managed to rise to the power of expression and visionary poignancy of Beethoven. Ultimate music is perhaps the ultimate truth, and because of that its epistemological function is no lesser than that of the great religious prophecies or philosophical visions.

Wagner perceived in Beethoven's music the rise and universal triumph of Germanic masculinity. The expression of this universal combative character with the force and majesty of musical creation is the highest form that music can reach, this actually representing the

sublime, the ultimate aesthetic value of human spirituality in general. Beethoven is the one who took German heroic music to the greatness and power of expression of the sublime. In essence, musical drama was perceived in a relation of representation with the dialectic of life, and putting it on stage is a spectacular form of the truth of human life. But besides this, drama is also an *a priori* form of musical sensitivity.

Wagner had applied Kantian philosophy to the sphere of musical composition, which at that time was a novelty and a very ingenious step towards explaining the emergence of dramatic forms. Before being a style, drama is an ontological process that we can express in different abstract or plastic languages, as well as an *a priori* condition of expressing the truth. This is why dramatic music becomes so expressive and relevant in Beethoven's case, because it contains the truth of life in the world and reveals the *a priori* condition of his modality of expression. This interpretation of Beethoven's oeuvre also functions as the theoretical support for what becomes a total work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) in Wagner's creation, dramatic theater where music, poetry, stage performance, the art of acting and lyrical narrative combine their roles in a prodigious representation at a cosmological scale. Wagner found an explanation that was not only interesting, but also terribly relevant and appropriate for Beethoven's figure, an explanation that confirms, from one point of view, our thesis, which also takes into account the composer's disease. Neglecting the physiological and medical aspects of deafness, he saw it as destiny, as a form of transcendental influence. He compared Beethoven with the prophet Tiresias, the great blind soothsayer in the tragedies written by Sophocles. The prophet Tiresias was clairvoyant precisely because his eyes were shut to the outside world, because he could no longer be confused and deceived by the sight of the facts of life. He saw truth itself as it was revealed to his mind by the gods, who had also chosen him, in their almighty capriciousness, to confess the will of fate.



Beethoven was, according to Wagner's very suggestive comparison, the equivalent of Tiresias. Thus, shifting between levels of expression, he could hear pure music with an ear that was no longer disturbed or corrupted by outside sounds. The music he heard and transmitted gushed out of himself, from the depths of his being, which was marked by dignity and prophetic drama in equal measure. His internal hearing was already sensitive to the sounds of the World, to the rhythms of Phenomena, to the turmoil and syncopes of Life. Like Tiresias, Beethoven was a prophet who could hear, understand and transmit the mysterious music of the world to the future centuries. He could hear the music of paradise and convey it in the *Pastoral Symphony*, he could hear the sublime joy of human brotherhood and convey it at the end of the *Ninth Symphony*, he could hear the sounds of death and hell and convey them in the serious, funeral passages of the *Eroica Symphony* of the *Hammerklavier Sonata*. He could hear the ceaseless melody of life's flow through time, he could understand the sonata of nature, the dance of light, the verve of joy, but also the twilight, pain and night, the end. He could hear the music from which this universe of illusory, transient and capricious forms was made, this universe which we call reality. This, I believe, is the "Last" Beethoven.

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