2 Beethoven's 'Watershed'? *Eroica*'s Contexts and Periodisation

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Few works of art have enjoyed so remarkable a reputation as Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony. All at once, it is said to define Beethoven's 'middle period' and 'heroic decade', to epitomise his 'new path', 'symphonic ideal' and 'heroic style', and to signal the birth of the Romantic symphony, perhaps of musical Romanticism in general. An 'authentic "watershed work"', writes Joseph Kerman, the *Eroica* 'marks a turning-point in the history of modern music'.[1] It is, according to Mark Evan Bonds, 'a work of singular historical significance, both for its emotional content and technical innovations'.[2] Nor have claims about the symphony's importance been restricted to its aesthetic value: in the words of biographer Jan Swafford, the *Eroica* is 'one of the monumental humanistic documents of its time, and of all time'.[3] The *Eroica* has hence been seen as a 'watershed work' on at least three levels: within Beethoven's career and oeuvre, within the histories of music and art, and within the history of ideas.

Upon what basis are these extraordinary claims founded? To what extent are they justifiable? In order to begin to answer these questions, it seems important to consider not only what critics and listeners have traditionally valued about this symphony, but also the ways in which it has been made to tell a particular set of stories – about Beethoven's life, about his compositional and 'spiritual' development, and about music and art more generally. As Tia DeNora has observed (in dialogue with the work of the sociologist Norman Denzin), 'lives are produced through words', and concepts such as '[p]eriods, turning points, stages, phases, crises, advances, setbacks, tragedy, comedy, and farce are all to be considered as examples of the convenient molds for shaping a life'.[4] This is the case with biographical subjects no less than with abstract ones such as 'the symphony', 'the Classical style' or 'music'. The concept of the 'watershed work', in this context, needs to be understood both as an aesthetic construct and as a literary device that helps to shape a certain type of narrative.

Seeking to provide a more nuanced assessment of the *Eroica* as a watershed work (both for Beethoven and more broadly speaking), this chapter pursues three interrelated lines of inquiry. First, what have critics typically viewed as the most distinctive features of the *Eroica*, and to what

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108524995.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

extent are these features truly unique or unprecedented? Second, why has this symphony, more than any other work by Beethoven, been viewed as a turning point in his career, and what are the critical foundations (and implications) of this notion? Lastly, might recent scholarship on Beethoven's 'middle' or 'heroic' period change the way we think about the *Eroica*?

The *Eroica* as a Musical Watershed

In his entry on the nineteenth-century symphony for *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Mark Evan Bonds summarises many of the features that critics have found most remarkable about the *Eroica*. They include the unprecedented size and 'emotional scope' of the first movement, the presence of the 'functional' genre of the Funeral March in lieu of a typical slow movement, the 'novel length and speed' of the 'through-composed' Scherzo, the 'proportionately substantial finale' with its complex integration of forms and styles (and the related sense of end-orientation), and 'an overarching emotional trajectory' that approximates 'a process of growth or development' and has often been 'associated with the idea of struggle followed by death and culminating in rebirth or rejuvenation'.[5] Bonds assesses the *Eroica* in terms of genre history: against the backdrop of earlier symphonies, the *Eroica* stands out for its expanded dimensions, its novel use of forms and the impression it creates of a dramatic trajectory or narrative arc.

While this list helps to articulate what makes the *Eroica* unusual, it does not account for the symphony's extraordinary impact on listeners and critics. Other commentators have attempted to explain this impact as a function of Beethoven's stylistic development. Carl Dahlhaus, for instance, argued that the *Eroica* represents the culmination of a new compositional direction that Beethoven pursued beginning in 1802, the so-called 'new path' or 'wholly new style' of which the composer spoke (in largely unrelated contexts) around this time:

> [I]n works written in and after 1802, Beethoven expressed the processual character of form in a way that justified his speaking of a 'new path' or a 'wholly new style' . . . [O]ne way of describing the compositional problem that Beethoven was trying to solve around 1802 – in combination with other problems – is as the difficulty of designing musical forms that create an impression of processuality in an emphatic sense by being simultaneously thematic and non-thematic: thematic to the extent that a thematic substance is the prerequisite of a formal process; non-thematic in so far as the composer avoids setting down a fixed, pregnantly

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> delineated formulation at the beginning of the work to provide the 'text' for a commentary. In brief, the 'thematic material' is no longer a 'theme'.[6]

For Dahlhaus, the idea of musical form as process – first expressed in such works as Beethoven's Op. 31 piano sonatas and the Opp. 34 and 35 piano variations – is the 'outstanding characteristic' of the *Eroica*'s first movement. Basing this movement not on a theme but on an inherently dialectical 'thematic configuration' (the E♭ major arpeggio followed by the chromatic descent to C♯), Dahlhaus suggests, allows Beethoven to create this movement's characteristic impression of 'urgent, unstoppable forward motion'. This technique, he argues, is among the main reasons that Beethoven's Third Symphony 'represents a "qualitative leap" beside the two earlier ones'.[7]

Joseph Kerman similarly maintained that the *Eroica* displays the first fruits of Beethoven's 'symphonic ideal', an unprecedented fusion of technical and expressive mastery.[8] While the notion of 'musical form as process' certainly plays a role in this formulation, Kerman placed more emphasis on the integration of the multi-movement cycle. However, his attempt to claim the 'symphonic ideal' as unique to Beethoven has raised questions, and James Webster argues that its core elements were already apparent in Haydn's symphonies of the 1770s. Webster's summary of Kerman's thesis bears repeating:

> Kerman assumes not only the relevance of cyclic integration for Beethoven's music, but its status as a criterion of value – as unquestioningly as he assumes it had no role to play in earlier sonata-style music. It will be worth rehearsing in systematic order the features he claims Beethoven 'perfected at a stroke' in the Eroica: (1) radical intent; (2) moral and rhetorical characteristics (the impression of a psychological journey towards triumph or transcendence; extramusical ideas; an ethical aura); (3) techniques designed to bring this about, comprising (a) evolving themes and thematic connections between movements; (b) run-on movements, functional and gestural parallels between movements; and (c) the mutual dependence of contrasted parts, the projection of the underlying principles of sonata style over an entire work, integration ('a perfect mutual trajectory'), and the function of the finale as a culmination.[9]

As Webster argues, '[Haydn's] Farewell Symphony incorporates every one of these features, and it integrates them in a through-composed, end-oriented work, as radical as any from Beethoven's middle period.'[10] After a substantial discussion, he concludes that 'It was not "Beethoven's achievement" to "conceive the symphonic ideal," let alone to "perfect it at a stroke" or "develop the technical means to achieve it." It was Haydn's, and it was from Haydn (and to a lesser extent Mozart) that he learned it.'[11] Webster's point is well taken – in writings on Haydn (and Mozart), these features have been viewed merely as aspects of 'Classical style'; in writings

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on Beethoven, however, they have been made the basis of the 'symphonic ideal'. One could make an equally compelling case that it was Haydn, not Beethoven, who pioneered the techniques of 'thematic configuration' and 'musical form as process'. Consider, as one of many possible examples, the first movement of Haydn's String Quartet Op. 33, No. 1 in B minor, in which the tonally ambiguous 'theme' (first presented in D major/B minor) undergoes multiple transformations as it is placed in new harmonic and syntactical contexts.

It is not difficult to think of other pieces by Mozart, Haydn or their contemporaries with many of the characteristics often claimed to be exclusive to Beethoven at this moment in his career (or to the *Eroica* in particular). Both Paul Wranitzky's *Grande sinfonie caractéristique pour la paix avec la Republique française* (1797) and Anton Eberl's Symphony in E♭ major, Op. 33 (1804), for instance, contain funeral marches in C minor. Eberl's funeral march, though not so titled, is clearly an example of the type – rife with militaristic rhythms and pathetic outbursts, it shares several distinctive gestures with the funeral march of the *Eroica*. (Eberl's symphony, it should be noted, was premiered several months before the *Eroica* on 6 January 1804, was later performed alongside it in the Palais Lobkowitz and was also dedicated to Prince Lobkowitz.) Other works, such as Mozart's 'Jupiter' Symphony No. 41 in C major, offer more evidence that the idea of 'a proportionately substantial finale' (and related end-orientation) was by no means exclusive to Beethoven: both the topicalisation of fugal writing in this movement and the function of the coda as a kind of sublime peroration anticipate Beethoven's practice. Even some of the most quintessentially 'Beethovenian' moments in the *Eroica*'s first movement – the dissonant sonority on which the movement seems to grind to a halt, the 'new theme' in the development section, the early entry of the solo horn before the recapitulation – have precedents in the oeuvre.[12] The question remains: what, if anything, truly separates the *Eroica* from the other symphonies of this period? What makes it a 'watershed work'?

For Scott Burnham, the *Eroica* conjures an unmistakable sense of 'presence' which separates it from the music of Haydn, Mozart and early Beethoven, and which lies at the heart of Beethoven's 'heroic style'. This sense of presence foreshadows Wagner's conception of an 'ever-present fundamental line' and manifests itself in a new set of 'musical values':

> These include thematic development as a way of making ever-greater stretches of music coherent and plastic (often resulting in action-reaction cycles), the captivating presence of nonregular period structures, monolithic treatment of harmony, overall teleological motion, extreme and underdetermined closure, and the monumentalisation of underlying formal articulations. The resultant line is

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> of course not melodic in the everyday sense of a prominent and foregrounded voice set against a background accompaniment. Instead, the entire texture is heard to participate in the fundamental illusion of melody, that of motion through time, and thus to partake of melody's sense of unfolding presence. This type of presence is one of the primary metaphors ascribed to the heroic style, and it attracts other, nonmusical metaphors as well, notably including protagonist, Will, and Self.[13]

Burnham suggests that this sense of 'presence' and the new musical values it is said to embody distinguish the *Eroica* from other symphonies and help to explain the many metaphorical and programmatic interpretations of it that have been proffered throughout its reception history. In response to Webster's claims about Haydn, moreover, Burnham maintains:

> The precedence of some of the material features of Beethoven's heroic style in the works of Haydn permits us to give a more defined shape to what is truly unprecedented in Beethoven: the sense of an earnest and fundamental presence burdened with some great weight yet coursing forth ineluctably, moving the listener along as does earth itself. Broadly speaking, Beethoven's music is thus heard to reach us primarily at an ethical level, Haydn's primarily at an aesthetic level.[14]

In Burnham's view, the Beethovenian 'presence' is not merely (or even primarily) a technical phenomenon; it is also an 'ethical' one. Precisely because of this ethical aspect, he suggests, Beethoven's music is not to be confused with that of other composers.

Burnham is by no means the only commentator who has heard the *Eroica* as the harbinger of a new 'ethical' orientation in Beethoven's output. For Kerman, the ethical is a central aspect of the 'symphonic ideal':

> The combination of [Beethoven's] musical dynamic, now extremely powerful, and extra-musical suggestions invests his pieces with an unmistakable ethical aura. Even Tovey, the most zealous adherent of the 'pure music' position, was convinced that Beethoven's music was 'edifying'. J. W. N. Sullivan taught the readers of his influential little book to share in Beethoven's 'spiritual development'.[15]

Although Kerman mentions both a new 'musical dynamic' and 'extra-musical suggestions' as factors in this sense of an 'unmistakable ethical aura', precisely what this term signifies remains ambiguous.

What does it mean for instrumental music to be 'ethical'? The answer to this question is complex and may have less to do with the intrinsic quality of the music itself than it does with the external factors that have been seen as relevant to Beethoven at this moment in his life. Maynard Solomon, for instance, has suggested that Beethoven's participation in the musical and philosophical ideals of the French Revolution imbued his music with a newfound sense of the ethical:

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> The Revolution sought to transform French music into a moral weapon in the service of a momentous historical mission. The frivolities and sensuousness of *galant* music were abjured, and the 'scholastic' contrivances of Baroque and Classical forms were done away with; music was assigned, in the words of the historian Jules Combarieu, 'a serious character which it had not had since antiquity outside of the Church'. In brief, the Revolution introduced an explicit ideological and ethical function into music, which was later to become one of the characteristics of Beethoven's 'public' compositions.[16]

Solomon's hypothesis is, of course, supported by Beethoven's identification with Revolutionary politics and thought in the years leading up to the first French occupation of late 1805 (and intermittently thereafter). Nonetheless, one must concede that the Revolutionary music of Gossec, Méhul and Cherubini did not earn them the title 'hero', nor did it generate the same kind of response to their music as an 'ethical' art that Beethoven's has attracted. What are we to make of this situation?

Solomon's notion is also problematic because 'ethical' qualities can be (and have often been) recognised in the music of other composers. If the Revolution is truly what imbued Beethoven's music with an 'ethical aura', then what explains the existence of moral or ethical qualities in the earlier music of Haydn or Mozart (or Bach or Monteverdi)? Webster, for example, argues:

> Haydn's influence on Beethoven . . . also encompassed the art of projecting strong rhetorical impulses and deep ethical concerns (which Beethoven had from the beginning) in musical works which simultaneously exhibit the greatest craft and the profoundest coherence – which generate their rhetoric and their morality precisely by means of that coherence.[17]

The 'rhetorical impulses and deep ethical concerns' that Webster hears in the music of Haydn and Beethoven derive not from Revolutionary impulses but rather from the sense of 'coherence' that he understands as a component of the 'Classical style'. Such coherence entails the integration of the multi-movement cycle; the teleological processes of thematic development, formal departure and return; and the overall sense of an end-oriented process. The coherence of cyclic works has, in this sense, itself been imbued with an ethical or moral significance. Indeed, music of the 'Classical style' encourages the notion of an 'ethical aura', especially where 'transcendent' finales, large-scale minor–major trajectories and, of course, titles or texts are concerned. There are many examples of works before Beethoven that express the optimism of the Enlightenment age through the dramatic opposition of moral or emotional states: while Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (1791) dramatises the shift from ignorance to knowledge, Haydn's *The Creation* (1798) musicalises the shift from chaos to divine

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light, to take two well-known examples. Forgiveness, reconciliation and mutual understanding were also common themes in opera. (Is the climax of the *Eroica*'s finale, the Poco Andante during which the strings finally yield to the winds – and play the 'tune' for the first time – not a relative of that most sublime reconciliation in comic opera, 'Contessa, perdono' from Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*?) In this sense, Beethoven was building upon a whole tradition of artworks grounded in an ethical or moral perspective. Although the notion of the 'ethical' has been subsumed by the paradigms of the 'symphonic ideal' and the 'heroic style' and has been transformed into a Beethovenian musical convention, it arguably serves to situate his music within this cultural context, rather than to help him transcend it.

The valorisation of these interrelated concepts – 'musical form as process', the 'symphonic ideal', 'presence', the 'ethical' and the 'heroic' – and the attempts to reserve them for Beethoven are, of course, products of later reception history. They are critical strategies by which the music of Beethoven has been made to emerge as somehow 'greater' than that of his contemporaries and predecessors. After all, how else could one justify the notion of Beethoven as the 'man who freed music'?[18] This is not to say that these concepts lacked relevance to Beethoven, but rather that their importance for his art (and for his art alone) has often been inflated. This has had the effect not only of creating an artificial divide between Beethoven and other composers but also of marginalising works within Beethoven's oeuvre that do not fit the privileged aesthetic paradigms. The 'heroic style' has posed a particular problem in this regard, leading many critics to adopt a one-sided view of Beethoven and to ignore or attempt to suppress the works that do not seem to reflect the heroic ideal.

That the *Eroica* has often been hailed as marking the emergence of the 'heroic' in Beethoven's oeuvre (both as a period and as a style) is unsurprising, given its musical character, its title, its suppressed Napoleonic paratexts and its references to Prometheus in the finale. But it is important to remember that, as with the 'ethical', in no sense did Beethoven create the 'heroic', or, for that matter, many of the musical features that later scholars have associated with his so-called heroic style. By titling his symphony 'heroic', Beethoven was relating it not only to an abstract philosophical ideal but also to a fashionable aesthetic trend and an extant cluster of works that relied on the imagery and metaphorical connotations of the heroic. The heroic had long been a genre designation in dramatic music, and the term '*heroische Oper*' (and its cognates) appeared on the title pages of numerous operas. It is in part by virtue of this convention that the original playbill for Beethoven's ballet *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus* (1801) referred to the work as a 'heroic, allegorical ballet'. As Nicholas Mathew has observed, in the wake of the French Revolution, Haydn composed numerous 'heroic' vocal

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and instrumental works in which he combined 'a martial and monumental tone with a broadly political function' and commanded a new sense of listener engagement.[19] The association of the heroic with the key of E♭ major, often credited to Beethoven, was also firmly rooted in contemporary practice. As John David Wilson has shown, this key was frequently chosen in dramatic works to represent the nobility of the hunt and the classically heroic sense of *Tugend* (virtue) it conjured up.[20]

Moreover, and crucially, there is evidence that Beethoven's contemporaries were already beginning to understand the symphony as an intrinsically 'heroic' genre, independently of the *Eroica*. Writing in 1805, the philosopher Christian Friedrich Michaelis noted that 'in many great symphonies by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, among others, one finds an order, a spirit similar to the grand plan and character of a heroic epic [*eines Heldengedichts*]'. That he was not referring in particular – or at all – to the *Eroica* is suggested not only by the date of the article (prior to the *Eroica*'s publication) but also by the first feature he describes as a characteristic of these heroic-epic symphonies: a 'simple introduction' which 'prepares and builds up expectation, which only gradually is to be fulfilled or exceeded'. Beethoven's *Eroica* includes no such introduction. Nevertheless, other aspects of Michaelis's description resonate with elements that later commentators have thought unique or special to the *Eroica*:

> Then other sections are added in which a great rich theme is developed. Its content becomes clearer in all its depth and opulence [thematic unfolding, musical form as process]. This theme expresses a heroic character by asserting itself in a struggle with many opposing motions [theme as protagonist, the impression of drama or narrative]. Here contrasts are appropriate, here the accompaniment and the polyphonic, figured treatment of the music are allowed to appear powerfully and place the principal subject in a brilliant light [learned counterpoint as means of thematic development] . . . Its melody is flowing without being weak, often sublime without being bombastic [a sense of melodic presence]. The individual features of its musical portrait [the implication of extramusical or programmatic content] intermesh marvelously, make one another necessary, and form a large, effective, magnificently organised whole [cyclic integration or coherence].[21]

Michaelis's description of the 'heroic-epic' symphonies of Haydn, Mozart and early (!) Beethoven, 'among other [composers]', suggests that many of the allegedly new musical values that later critics have specifically associated with the *Eroica* were, in the early 1800s, already viewed as aspects of a pan-Viennese or perhaps pan-European style of symphonic composition. From this perspective, what has come to be

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known as Beethoven's 'symphonic ideal' is congruent with at least one version of the 'ideal symphony' in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The *Eroica* and the Beethoven Myth

Now for a caveat. In laying out some of the ways in which Beethoven's *Eroica* reaffirms and reimagines – rather than rejects – late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century notions about what a symphony should be, I do not mean to deny its originality or to question, to borrow Kerman's term, its 'radical intent'. The *Eroica* is almost certainly the longest, most complex and most demanding (both for audiences and for performers) symphony that had yet been written. But by drawing attention to the critical strategies by which the *Eroica* has been elevated above other works from the period (not least the ascription of value to such attributes as 'length', 'complexity' and 'difficulty'), it becomes possible to historicise Beethoven's achievement and to bring it into sharper relief. It also forces us to think more deeply about how and why the *Eroica* has attained such extraordinary significance over the course of the last two centuries.

A large part of the *Eroica*'s appeal has been its perceived role as not merely a musical watershed but also a biographical one. The *Eroica* has become symbolic of the 'revolutionary' breaking of artistic, personal and spiritual bonds that is central to what Dahlhaus called the 'Beethoven myth'. Bruno Nettl provides a keen summary of this myth and what it has meant:

> Beethoven, the master of serious music, had a hard life; his deafness dominates our idea of him. He worked hard, sketched his works for years before getting them right, is seen as a struggler against many kinds of bonds – musical, social, political, moral, personal. He is thought to have seen himself as a kind of high priest, giving up much for the spiritual aspects of his music. He was a genius, but he had to work hard to become and be one. It is perhaps no coincidence that he has been, to Americans, the quintessential great master of music – for this is, after all, the culture in which hard work was once prized above all, labor rewarded; the culture in which you weren't born to greatness but were supposed to struggle to achieve it.[22]

Undoubtedly, a series of events as unusual and difficult as those in Beethoven's life has the makings of a tragic story, but as Beethoven's shadow has loomed larger and larger, these events have been made into a kind of tragic history, one with all the conventions of a Romantic plot.[23] As K. M. Knittel has pointed out, the desire to read Beethoven's life in this way has been 'overpowering' – on the one hand, Beethoven's personal

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'crises' and subsequent bursts of productivity have lent themselves to the Romantic narrative of 'struggle' and 'transcendence' towards which biographers have long gravitated; on the other hand, the music (or, more precisely, a carefully curated subset of Beethoven's works) has been seen as both reflecting and substantiating this narrative.[24] As a result, it is increasingly difficult to extract Beethoven from the complex of ideas associated with him, one effect of which is the tendency to misinterpret or over-interpret elements of both life and works to correspond with certain preconceived notions. The literary critic Michel Foucault famously described this problem as the 'author function', noting that the 'aspects of an individual which we designate as making him an author are only a projection, in more or less psychologising terms, of the operations that we force texts to undergo, the connections that we make, the traits we establish as pertinent, the continuities that we recognise, or the exclusions that we practice'; these are, in short, the means through which an author is 'constructed'.[25]

The particular ways in which Beethoven has been 'constructed' result from a complex and overdetermined merging of life and works. The *Eroica* has played a major role in this process, largely because it has been made to correspond with what has been interpreted as an especially profound experience in Beethoven's life: his 'overcoming' of the depression and suicidal impulses articulated in the so-called Heiligenstadt Testament of 1802. Here, for example, is J. W. N. Sullivan:

> The most profound experience that Beethoven had yet passed through was when his courage and defiance of his fate had been followed by despair. He was expressing what he knew when he made the courage and heroism of the first movement succeeded by the black night of the second. And he was again speaking of what he knew when he made this to be succeeded by the indomitable uprising of creative energy in the Scherzo. Beethoven was here speaking of what was perhaps the cardinal experience of his life, that when, with all his strength and courage, he had been reduced to despair, that when the conscious strong man had tasted very death, there came this turbulent, irrepressible, deathless creative energy surging up from the depths he had not suspected. The whole work is a miraculously realized expression of a supremely important experience, and is justly regarded as a turning-point in Beethoven's music. The last movement is based on what we know to have been Beethoven's 'Prometheus' theme. Having survived death and despair the artist turns to creation. By adopting the variation form Beethoven has been able to indicate the variety of achievement that is now open to his 'Promethean' energy. The whole work is a most close-knit psychological unit. Never before in music has so important, manifold, and completely coherent an experience been communicated.[26]

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The idea that Beethoven 'was expressing what he knew', 'speaking of what he knew' or 'speaking of what was perhaps the cardinal experience of his life', and the conjecture that the *Eroica* is a 'miraculously realized expression of a supremely important experience', demonstrate the tendency to assume a dialectic between Beethoven's private experiences and their alleged musical expressions. Sullivan's complex allegory involving Beethoven, Prometheus and the four-movement form of the *Eroica* shows how tempting it can be to use the life to understand the music, and vice versa.

Maynard Solomon's biography, arguably the most insightful psychological portrait of Beethoven yet written, is also problematic in this regard. His discussion of the relationship between the Heiligenstadt Testament and the *Eroica*, though less extravagant than Sullivan's, is in some ways more radical:

> In a sense, [the Heiligenstadt Testament] is the literary prototype of the *Eroica* Symphony, a portrait of the artist as hero, stricken by deafness, withdrawn from mankind, conquering his impulses to suicide, struggling against fate, hoping to find 'but one day of pure joy'. It is a daydream compounded of heroism, death, and rebirth, a reaffirmation of Beethoven's adherence to virtue and to the categorical imperative.[27]

In Solomon's conjecture, the Heiligenstadt Testament is 'the literary prototype' of the *Eroica*: the elements of 'heroism, death, and rebirth' that he identifies as covert expressions in the document reappear as overt expressions in the music. The symphony thus represents a kind of catharsis for Beethoven in which he purges the fears and destructive impulses that he mentions in the letter. Solomon is, of course, right to point out similarities between the document and the *Eroica*; but however plausible the connection may seem, there is no evidence to support his thesis – a widely adopted one – that the symphony relates to Beethoven's experiences in October 1802. The title *Sinfonia eroica* does not imply that the symphony represents 'the artist as hero' (as Wagner once suggested) nor do the events in the symphony (including the implied tragedy of the Funeral March) suggest that it is in any way connected to Beethoven's being 'stricken by deafness', as Solomon implies. Additionally, neither titles nor any other markings relate to Beethoven's 'conquering his impulses to suicide' or 'struggling against fate' or 'hoping to find "but one day of pure joy"'. In his letters, Beethoven makes no connection between the Heiligenstadt Testament (or the experience it describes) and this piece. On the contrary, what we know about the extramusical content of the *Eroica* – besides what we glean from the titles and other programmatic references – is that Beethoven insisted that the piece was 'about' Napoleon, even well after

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he had suppressed its original title and planned dedication.[28] The dominance of the heroic paradigm has hence led critics into drawing parallels between Beethoven's life and music, parallels that cannot be substantiated by fact and are often (as in this case) impossible to prove.

Underlying this trope in Beethoven reception is what Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht called *Leidensnotwendigkeit*, 'the requirement of suffering for the production of art', or more precisely, 'the requirement of suffering of Beethoven the man (or rather that of humanity, which is exposed in Beethoven), so that Beethoven's art can emerge as music of "experience," "suffering and joy," or "overcoming"'.[29] From this 'requirement' arises a powerful conflation of biographical subject and musical utterance – the notion that Beethoven the man is the subject of his own music, rather than merely its author – that has governed Beethoven reception since the nineteenth century. In Beethoven's music, wrote the influential nineteenth-century music historian August Wilhelm Ambros, 'The painting of the powerful spiritual life of a titanic nature is unravelled before us – we are no longer interested in the *tone painting* alone – we are also interested in the *tone painter*. As a result, we stand in almost the same position with Beethoven as we do with Goethe – we regard his works as the commentary on his life', and vice-versa.[30]

One can see how the notion of Beethoven as hero has been so fundamental a part of the construction of the 'heroic style' and the reception of the *Eroica* in particular. One also sees how inextricable the musical features thought of as 'heroic' have become from notions of the 'heroic' that drive Beethoven's biography. The extent of the influence of the Romantic plot on approaches to the music is considerable: both sonata form and the multi-movement cycle, for example (especially, but not exclusively, when accompanied by extra-musical suggestions), have often been made to correspond with the pattern of struggle and transcendence central to the Beethoven myth. In this respect, even many purportedly structuralist approaches to Beethoven's music have been influenced by the Romantic plot archetype.

The *Eroica* and Beethoven's 'Creative Periods'

In part because of these biographical considerations, the *Eroica* has long been viewed as a turning point – perhaps as *the* turning point – in Beethoven's creative development. Despite the contrary views of scholars such as Carl Dahlhaus (who viewed the *Eroica* as the culmination of the 'new path' begun in 1802) and Alan Tyson (who considered it the 'most characteristic product' of Beethoven's 'heroic phase', also said to have begun in 1802), the scholarly consensus has tended to converge around

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the idea that the *Eroica* is the first unequivocal work of Beethoven's so-called middle or heroic period (*c*.1803–12).[31] Of course, periods, like authors, are constructions, and while convenient, they are also reductive. Periods or styles function in large part through synecdoche: select works are made to stand in for the period or style, while other works composed contemporaneously are marginalised or suppressed because they do not fit the aesthetic paradigm. Beethoven's Fourth (1806) and Eighth Symphonies (1812), for instance, have typically been thought not to be musically representative of the 'heroic style', causing critics either to ignore them or to attempt to explain them away as works of 'consolidation' or 'repose' during which Beethoven gathered steam for his next monumental (and truly Beethovenian) effort. Likewise, the String Quartet in F major, Op. 135, as Knittel has shown, has long been viewed as a retrogressive work because it is less outwardly radical than the other 'late' quartets.[32] Stylistic periods are often linked to events in an artist's biography; in the case of Beethoven, this link has been very powerful. For Solomon,

> the completion of each new musical problematic, that is, of each style period, is somehow connected to a shift in [Beethoven's] psychic equilibrium, simultaneously engaging both the past and the future. Archaic materials re-emerge at every such critical point in his biography, with attendant malaise and anxiety resulting from a deepening access to repressed memories and feelings. But Beethoven emerges from each crisis having momentarily mastered both his anxieties and his new structural and expressive issues.[33]

Solomon's notion of Beethoven's creative periods is hence teleological on multiple levels, with the struggle–transcendence paradigm being acted out both within each creative period and across the entire oeuvre.

The idea of Beethoven's three creative periods or styles has a long history, but the periodisation of his oeuvre has varied and did not assume a stable form until well after his death. In the first decade of the 1800s, critics were already hinting at the possibility of distinct creative periods in Beethoven's oeuvre, especially when they were confronted with his newest and most challenging works. One review of the *Eroica*'s first public performance outlined three different perspectives on Beethoven's art and noted that one group of listeners, situated between the staunch conservatives and the outright devotees, supported Beethoven but registered a dangerous break in his style with the *Eroica* (see also Chapters 9 and 12):

> They wish that Mr. v. B. would use his well-known great talent to give us works that resemble his first two Symphonies in C and D, his graceful Septet in E♭, the spirited Quintet in D Major [Op. 29 in C Major?], and others of his earlier compositions, which will place B. forever in the ranks of the foremost instrumental composers. They fear, however, that if Beethoven continues on this path, both he and the public will come off badly.[34]

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For these critics, the *Eroica* signalled a shift in style, but an undesirable one. A similar response may be seen in an 1816 review of the Fourth Symphony, a work which, ironically, later critics would view as a regression in the wake of the *Eroica*:

> That this composer follows an individual path in his works can be seen again from [the Fourth Symphony]; just how far this path is a correct one, and not a deviation, may be decided by others. *To me* the great master seems here, as in several of his recent works, now and then excessively bizarre, and thus, even for knowledgeable friends of art, easily incomprehensible and forbidding.[35]

Here, one clearly perceives a divide between an 'early' Beethoven, the works of whom had been accepted and normalised, and a 'recent' Beethoven (albeit a decade-old one, in the case of this critic) whose works were thought 'bizarre', 'incomprehensible' and 'forbidding'.

Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann and later Adolf Bernhard Marx were primarily responsible for turning the critical tides and preparing the way for the valorisation of the 'middle' Beethoven. While Hoffmann saw in the Fifth Symphony and other works the essence of Romanticism and absolute music, Marx believed that these same works, and the *Eroica* perhaps above all, were programmatic in the highest degree, reflecting concrete ideas or images (what he called a *bestimmte Idee).* The late works, by contrast, were not fully embraced until well after Beethoven's death. Initially written off as the products of deafness or madness, these works came to higher recognition in the era of Wagner (who particularly championed the String Quartet in C♯ minor, Op. 131, and the Ninth Symphony) and Liszt (who brought the late piano sonatas into the limelight). Hence, while the earliest critics valorised what we would call Beethoven's early period, associating it with the 'high Viennese modernism' of Haydn and Mozart, later critics championed the middle period, viewing it as the epitome of the new aesthetic ideals of Romanticism; still later critics argued that both of these periods were in some sense preparatory and that Beethoven's most supreme, transcendent works were those of his late period. As Webster has shown in a revealing study, these different emphases within the prevailing ternary scheme have roots in various biological, historical and artistic models.[36]

The most familiar ternary periodisation of Beethoven's oeuvre – early–middle–late corresponding to imitation–individuality–transcendence (and/or illness) – is often credited to Wilhelm von Lenz, who maintained in an 1852 study that 'like Raphael and Rubens, Beethoven has a first, a second, and a third manner, all three perfectly characterized'.[37] Lenz, who viewed these styles as continuous and interpenetrating, was among the first to systematically base his model on stylistic rather than biographical concerns.

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However, his was by no means the first attempt at a ternary periodisation of Beethoven's oeuvre, and the earliest efforts – undertaken in an era of incomplete work catalogues and limited source material on Beethoven's life – were often highly indebted to conventional models. Johann Aloys Schlosser's ternary periodisation (published as part of his – the first – Beethoven biography of 1827), for instance, has much in common with later approaches to Beethoven's oeuvre – but only in a superficial sense. For Schlosser, the first and second periods are reminiscent of Haydn and Mozart, with the second being 'transitional' but also 'looking back to earlier times'.[38] The second period, epitomised by the *Eroica*, is characterised by a 'serious' tone, which is 'interrupted at times by boisterous merriment'.[39] And in the third period, the works are 'shaped by inner necessity. Everything follows organically from what preceded, so that everything accidental, uncertain, or extraneous is excluded'.[40] But Schlosser's second period encompasses only Opp. 40 to 60 (*c.*1800–6), and, surprisingly, the 'watershed work' marking the emergence of the third and final period is the Fifth Symphony of 1807–8. In fact, Schlosser completely glosses over the tail end of Beethoven's career, not because he views the works of 1808 to 1827 as representative of a protracted 'late' style, but rather because his discussion reproduces, word for word, an anonymous article originally published in 1818 (in the short-lived Viennese journal *Janus*).[41] Nevertheless, one can easily map his description of the third period onto the works of Beethoven's final decade, showing how arbitrary these categories can be.

A decade after both Beethoven's death and the publication of Schlosser's biography, François-Joseph Fétis revisited and revised the ternary periodisation of Beethoven's oeuvre in his *Biographie universelle des musiciens.* According to Fétis, Beethoven's first period was characterised by a reverence for and progressive mastery of the style of Mozart. The second period, lasting 'about ten years', was characterised by stylistic independence, and the third period had elements of 'mysticism' and formal innovation but also a loss of 'spontaneity' and occasional bouts of 'incoherence'. Fétis viewed the second period as most representative of Beethoven's mastery, and his account is striking for the new emphasis it places on the *Eroica*:

> But it is particularly in the third (*heroic*) symphony, opus 55, that the genius of the artist manifests itself in the absolute character of the creation. There, all trace of earlier forms vanishes; the composer is himself; his individuality arises majestically; his oeuvre becomes the model of a period in art history.[42]

Fétis thus explicitly linked the *Eroica* with the advent of Beethoven's second creative period, a notion that would be echoed by many later critics. Richard Wagner similarly considered the *Eroica* to be

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the first work in which Beethoven struck out in a 'personal' direction because it contained the 'poetic content' that he believed to be central to Beethoven's most groundbreaking works. Despite the fact that no 'clear-cut division of Beethoven's output into separate periods is to be found in Wagner's writings', in his view, the *Eroica*, along with a handful of other works, paved the way for the summa of Beethoven's art, the Ninth Symphony.[43]

To give a more recent example of the part the *Eroica* has played in narratives about Beethoven's creative development, consider Michael Broyles's account of the emergence of the 'heroic style'. For Broyles, the *Eroica* is a 'pivotal' work which 'marks the end of a phase in Beethoven's artistic life' and 'inaugurates a new one'.[44] Beethoven's tendency to maintain 'a rigid stylistic dualism' between sonata and symphony styles, he argues:

> reached a critical turning point with the *Eroica*, at which time a third factor, the music of revolutionary France, began to affect Beethoven's compositional direction. Grafted upon the stylistic tension already ensuing from the dichotomous tendencies of the sonata and symphony styles, the French revolutionary element provided the catalyst for a volatile situation which almost guaranteed significant change. The 'heroic' style of Beethoven, that is, the style that characterizes his music during the first decade of the nineteenth century, is essentially the result of the interaction and finally the synthesis of these three stylistic currents of the late eighteenth century.[45]

This is, on one level, an elegant attempt to weave together several aesthetic and philosophical trends and to explain the uniqueness of Beethoven's art. At the same time, it is a narrative of struggle and transcendence in which conflicting tendencies (the eighteenth-century sonata and symphony styles), spurred on by the intrusion of French Revolutionary elements, are not so much resolved as sublimated in the 'synthesis' of Beethoven's 'heroic style'. Familiar literary structures of this kind continue to shape much writing about Beethoven.

The three-period model and its associated constructions have come under scrutiny in recent years. The reasons for this are manifold and include 1) the tendency to collapse Beethoven's Bonn years and early Vienna years into a single period; 2) the tendency to undervalue or dismiss Beethoven's early music by virtue of its being 'early'; 3) the tendency to elevate the music of the canonically 'heroic' and 'late' Beethoven at the expense of 'other' works understood as not being in the mainstream of Beethoven's development; and 4) the desire to broach alternative and/or more integrative models of Beethoven's life, career and compositional development. One consequence of all this is that the *Eroica*'s status as a watershed work for Beethoven has become more ambiguous. Giorgio

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Pestelli and Stephen Rumph, for instance, have advocated taking the year 1809 as the start of Beethoven's second creative period, thereby placing less emphasis on the *Eroica* as a benchmark of style. This scheme has several advantages in that it registers major changes in Beethoven's life and music *c*.1809, which the traditional ternary model papers over, such as the signing of the 'annuity contract' (guaranteeing Beethoven income as long as he remained in Vienna), the political upheaval of the second French occupation, the death of Haydn and the turns towards antiquarianism and lyricism in Beethoven's music. Nancy November has also advanced an alternate model, advocating for a 'theatrical epoch' spanning roughly 1800–1 (*Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus*, Op. 41) to 1815 (*Leonore Prohaska*, WoO 96) and marked by 'intensifications' in 1804–6 (*Leonore/Fidelio*, Op. 72) and 1809–10 (*Egmont*, Op. 84). This model accounts for the *Eroica*'s significance in quite a different way by encouraging us to view the piece through the lens of Beethoven's theatrical experiences and professional tenure as a composer at the Theater an der Wien (instead of through the lens of his symphonic or compositional development). Ultimately, no single model will satisfy all needs, and there will always be varied opinions depending on which realm or realms one chooses to privilege (personal, professional, stylistic, aesthetic, philosophical, cultural, political, economic etc.). Rather than attempting to streamline our understanding of Beethoven's life and oeuvre, embracing multiple models offers us perhaps the best possibility of registering the *Eroica*'s continuities with earlier styles, trends and philosophies while still appreciating the discontinuities for which it has long been admired.

Notes

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7. Ibid., p. 173.
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9. J. Webster, *Haydn's 'Farewell' Symphony and the Idea of Classical Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 368.

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10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 372.
12. The dissonant sonority is used prominently in the slow introduction of Mozart's Symphony No. 39 in E♭ major (on the notes F, A♭, C and D♭); many sonata-form movements included 'new themes' in their development sections (see B. Churgin, 'Beethoven and the New Development-Theme in Sonata-Form Movements', *The Journal of Musicology*, 16, (1998), pp. 323–43); a solo horn anticipates the recapitulation in the first movement of Haydn's Symphony No. 6 in D major ('Le matin').
13. S. Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 61.
14. Ibid., p. 65; see also p. 151.
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16. M. Solomon, *Beethoven*, rev. edn (New York, NY: Schirmer, 1998), p. 71.
17. Webster, *Haydn's 'Farewell' Symphony*, p. 373.
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26. J. W. N. Sullivan, *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development* (London: Unwin Books, 1964; originally published 1927 by J. Cape), p. 77.
27. Solomon, *Beethoven*, pp. 157–8.
28. When asked about composing funeral music to commemorate Napoleon's death in 1821, Beethoven reportedly responded, 'I have already composed the proper music for that catastrophe', presumably referring to the Marcia funebre (Solomon, *Beethoven*, p. 182).
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30. Quoted in ibid., p. 35.
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34. 'Vienna, 17 April 1805', *Der Freymüthige*, 3 (1805), p. 332, quoted and trans. in *The Critical Reception of Beethoven's Compositions*, ed. Senner et al., vol. 2, pp. 15–16.
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