

9 Who is the Hero? The Early Reception of the *Eroica*

BEATE ANGELIKA KRAUS

Beethoven's Third Symphony, first performed in 1804 at Prince Lobkowitz's city palace in Vienna, differs in many respects from the First and the Second Symphonies. This had consequences for its reception. When the first reviews of the work appeared in 1805, the symphony was not yet published. But it had already been performed together with the Second Symphony in Vienna at one of the concerts given by the wholesaler and banker Joseph von Würth. On this occasion a critic was ambivalent about the work: 'A very new symphony by Beethoven . . . written in a very different style. This long, and extremely difficult to perform composition is actually a greatly elaborated, bold, wild Fantasia.'¹ Later, after another performance directed by Beethoven himself, the same critic went so far as to suggest some modifications and even that the work should be shortened:

To be sure, this new work of B. has great and daring ideas, and, as one can expect from the genius of this composer, great power in the way it is worked out; but the symphony would improve immeasurably (it lasts an entire hour) if B. could bring himself to shorten it, and to bring more light, clarity, and unity into the whole . . . Here, for example, in place of the Andante, there is a funeral march in C minor, which is subsequently developed fugally. But every fugal passage delights simply through a sense of order in apparent confusion . . . The symphony was also lacking a great deal else that would have enabled it to have pleased overall.²

The first commentaries on the *Eroica* Symphony are very similar to those on other works by Beethoven, such as his piano sonatas or string quartets: there is a mixture of admiration and shock, and the critics are often equivocal. Soon after the publication of the symphony, reviews appeared that analyse all the movements of the symphony and even give musical examples to help the reader or the listener to recognise certain themes and passages. The very long review in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, published in February 1807, is a good example of this kind of approach. The author defines his aim clearly:

in this essay the aesthetic aspects will certainly not be completely passed over, but inquiry will be made primarily into the technical and mechanical ones. The fact that the author will in the process deliver a series of individual observations and

analyses that offer little to those who read only for entertainment, and will even seem dry to them, cannot be changed and lies in the nature of the thing. One must not always wish only to be entertained!³

The critic's position is clear: Beethoven's music demands insight and comprehension, and the public will only appreciate the new work when they make the effort to study and understand it. The writer makes the point that even if listeners find some passages beautiful, and so might think that they do not need further explanation, they should nonetheless try to analyse the reason behind their aesthetic responses, to gain further insight. For example, concerning the *Marcia funebre*, the author addresses those who criticise extensive explanations: 'Let us just simply inform these people that this passage, the beautiful effect of which they hopefully will not deny, is actually a double fugue in which the countersubject is stated in half notes.'⁴

Very soon, reviewers dared not criticise Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony. The *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* reports in April 1807: 'The most educated friends of art in the city [Leipzig] were assembled in great numbers, a truly solemn attentiveness and deathlike silence reigned . . . Each movement unmistakably had the effect that it should have, and each time at the end of the entire piece loud demonstrations of applause gave vent to well-founded enthusiasm.'⁵ There are other reviews in the same style. Words used to describe the symphony include 'colossal', 'grand', 'rich', 'sublime' and 'ingenious'. Here the aesthetic of the sublime, which became important in the eighteenth century and later in the Romantic period, is clearly operating. The *Eroica* Symphony is placed in one of the most highly valued aesthetic categories of the time. The sublime, often associated with grandeur, refers to extraordinary experiences. A cultivated audience (and only such an audience was thought to be able to understand the sublimity of a work) would understand that there was a specific definition of the sublime, as distinct from the beautiful.

At times the praise might be even more extreme, for example, in the *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*:

Beethoven's new grand *Eroica* Symphony, the greatest, most original, most artistic and, at the same time, most interesting of all symphonies. It is a product that will remain an eternal monument to the outstanding genius, the rich imagination, the deep feeling, and the highly developed art of its composer. Indeed, one could offer it as a high ideal of this genre without thereby doing an injustice to the excellent symphonies of *Mozart* and *Haydn*, and without forgetting that this ingenious and grand work of art would itself not exist as it is now if these wonderful earlier symphonies (including Beethoven's earlier ones) had not led the way.⁶

Not Just for Pleasure

In 1809 Carl Maria von Weber began his ultimately incomplete novel *Tonkünstlers Leben* (*The life of a Composer*), which occupied him on and off until 1820/1. Among the fragments of this novel is the description of a dream. In this dream, the assembled instruments of an orchestra are getting excited about a symphony by a contemporary composer, and are discussing his music. The composer is not named, but Beethoven is certainly meant. At the end of this scene, the director appears and the instruments have to perform Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony. This text was first printed in a German journal, *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände*, on 27 December 1809. An English translation was published in *The Harmonicon* in 1829. The dialogue between the director and the instruments begins as follows:

At this moment, the Director entered the apartment; all was agitation and alarm, and the different instruments huddled into the corner together; they knew whose powerful hand could call forth and combine their powers.

'What!' cried he, 'again in open rebellion! Now, mind me – the *Sinfonia Eroica* of Beethoven is about to be performed; and every one of you who can move key or member will be then put in active requisition'.

'Oh, for heaven's sake, anything but that!' was the general exclamation.

'Rather', said the Viola, 'let us have an Italian opera; then we may occasionally nod'.

'Nonsense!' replied the Director, 'you must accomplish the task. Do you imagine that, in these enlightened times, when all rules are set at naught, and all difficulties cleared at a bound, a composer will, out of compliment to you, cramp his divine, gigantic, and high-soaring fancies? Thank heaven, there is no longer any question as to regularity, perspicuity, keeping, and truth of expression; these are left to such old-fashioned masters as Gluck, Handel, and Mozart. No! attend to the materials of the most recent symphony that I have received from Vienna, and which may serve as a recipe for all future ones'.⁷

This text has elements typical of the early criticism of Beethoven's works: the execution is considered very difficult, so the performers have to be skilled (see also Chapter 11). This is certainly not the kind of music one could play just for pleasure and without rehearsal. It is the music of a giant, worth the effort: one should accept the challenge to discover and understand the work. On the other hand, this means that 'true' performers of and listeners to Beethoven's music – a small elite of connoisseurs – can make fun of those who are too lazy or too stupid to understand the *Eroica* Symphony. Thus Beethoven's Third Symphony polarised the public at an early stage. One example of this polarisation, from a time when the public already knew eight of Beethoven's symphonies, can be found in the *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in 1824:

The royal general music directorship is to be thanked for the great satisfaction given by the magnificent *Eroica* Symphony of Beethoven, performed with the utmost precision at the concert that it organized on 19 January [in Berlin]. The audience, small in number but thoroughly sensitive to art, took up this rare gift with the greatest of thanks, which could be recognized in the loudest possible applause accorded to the creator of these harmonies and to the royal orchestra.⁸

Again, a certain exclusiveness is apparent in this review. The critic underscores this aspect of Beethoven's music, and the high degree of musicianship and sensitivity of the relatively small number of listeners who can appreciate that it is a privilege to attend the performance of such a masterpiece. Beethoven's music becomes a gift, and the public is grateful.

Whenever there was a crowd, rather than a small audience, and the musicians seemed not only challenged but also happy to perform the *Eroica* Symphony, these aspects were typically mentioned specifically by the critic. A review in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, published in January 1811, draws attention to just such an exceptional occasion, which took place in Berlin:

The second half was filled by Beethoven's grand, ingenious work, the *Sinfonia eroica*, to the lively satisfaction of the extremely numerous listeners, who listened with heightened attention until the final chord. It was performed by the orchestra with unmistakable enjoyment and love, with as much precision and fire, and yet also with as much delicacy as it demands if, with its length of fifty minutes, it is to bring about such an effect upon a mixed public.⁹

The *Eroica* as Political Statement

In addition to purely musical understandings of Beethoven's music, there were various other critical approaches, which included viewing the *Eroica* Symphony as a political statement. Apart from the length and new style of the work, other things also aroused the curiosity of the public: the title raised the question of who might be the hero behind the mask of a *Sinfonia eroica*. The second movement, *Marcia funebre*, in particular, raised the question: what was the loss that occasioned this mourning?

The title of the symphony, published during Beethoven's lifetime, gave rise to various interpretations. The original edition, published in parts in Vienna in October 1806 by Kunst- und Industrie-Comptoir, clearly states the intention of celebrating the memory of a great man: 'Sinfonia Eroica . . . composta per festeggiare il sovvenire di un grand Uomo.' This is also the title on the score published in Bonn and Cologne in 1822 by Simrock. But another score, published in London in March/April 1809 by Cianchettini & Sperati, is titled *Sinfonia Eroica composta per celebrare la morte d'un*

Eroe, the death of a hero. While ‘grand homme’ (a great man) might refer to greatness of mind, ‘la morte d’un Eroë’ implies a military hero, killed in battle. As we shall see, certain writers proposed a specific background to this difficult new symphony by trying to identify an actual hero, or an instance of heroism, that Beethoven perhaps had in mind. In this way, Beethoven’s Third Symphony became a piece of programme music, although it was to prove almost impossible to find an interpretation that would include all four movements.

In England, a connection between the work and Napoleon seems to have been accepted as a fact, and the *Marcia funebre* was a focal point. A review published in 1836 in *The Musical World*, for example, underscored the idea that Beethoven’s music required an educated public and that listeners might be overwhelmed by its effects; then the critic focuses on the *Marcia funebre*:

The Sinfonia Eroica, which, but for his worthless ambition, would have been identified with Napoleon, is as massive in construction, and gorgeous in detail, as any descriptive poem of the same character, that ever was composed. A person of imagination, and unacquainted even with the commonest musical constructions, described the effect of the ‘*Marcia funebre*,’ what to his sense of seeing would be a multitudinous procession clad in *dark purple*. Such relative criticism (if criticism it may be called) may be nonsense to the man of musical science; the poet and the painter, however, would at once appreciate the full effect which that noble movement conveyed to the mind of this unlearned listener. The whole of this symphony was played as the best musical audience in the world deserve to have it played to them.¹⁰

In the same year, 1836, *The Musical World* published an anecdote about Beethoven dedicating his Third Symphony to Napoleon:

It is not generally known that Beethoven intended to have dedicated his ‘Sinfonia Eroica’ to Buonaparte, entitling it the ‘Sinfonia Napoleon.’ When the news, however, arrived, that the *First Consul* was about to assume the title of *Emperor*, the bluff musician exclaimed: ‘Oh! he is making an emperor of himself, is he? then he is no better than *the rest of them*: – He shall not have my symphony!’ – Shocking old radical! No wonder he died poor.¹¹

Beethoven’s supposed reaction to Napoleon was disseminated by Franz Gerhard Wegeler and Ferdinand Ries in their *Biographische Notizen über Ludwig van Beethoven*, published in 1838, after which the anecdote was quoted many times and in several languages. Ries, a former student of Beethoven, had lived in London between 1813 and 1824, and he may have already told this story in England. There is also a letter written by Ries in Vienna in October 1803 to the publisher Nikolaus Simrock in Bonn, in which he reports, concerning the Third Symphony: ‘He [Beethoven] is very much inclined to dedicate it to Bonaparte; if he does not do so,

because Lobkowitz wants to have it for half a year and to give 400 gulden, then he will entitle it Bonaparte.¹² This account fits closely with Beethoven's first intentions as reported in *The Musical World*. As we shall see, though, it is unlikely that the scene happened exactly as recounted by Ries:

In this symphony Beethoven had thought about Bonaparte during the period when he was still First Consul. At that time Beethoven held him in the highest regard and compared him to the greatest Roman consuls. I myself, as well as many of his close friends, had seen this symphony, already copied in full score, lying on his table. At the very top of the title page stood the word 'Buonaparte' and at the very bottom 'Luigi van Beethoven', but not a word more. Whether and with what the intervening space was to be filled I do not know. I was the first to tell him the news that Bonaparte had declared himself emperor, whereupon he flew into a rage and shouted: 'So he too is nothing more than an ordinary man. Now he also will trample all human rights underfoot, and only pander to his own ambition; he will place himself above everyone else and become a tyrant!' Beethoven went to the table, took hold of the title page at the top, ripped it all the way through, and flung it on the floor. The first page was written anew and only then did the symphony receive the title *Sinfonia eroica*.¹³

Anton Schindler also underscored the composer's political ideas and his relationship with Napoleon. Schindler had much influence on Beethoven's reception, since he claimed to have been very close to Beethoven in Vienna; he claimed that many details that subsequently appear in his Beethoven biography were communicated to him by Beethoven himself. In the first edition of his biography of Beethoven, published in 1840, Schindler wrote of Beethoven's politics: 'In his political sentiments Beethoven was a republican; the spirit of independence natural to a genuine artist gave him a decided bias that way.'¹⁴ Schindler goes on to argue that Beethoven believed that Napoleon was the man to republicanise France, and therefore in autumn 1802 he planned to pay homage to Napoleon in a grand instrumental work. Regarding the *Eroica* Symphony, Schindler brings into play the French General Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, who had been in Vienna: 'The original idea of that Symphony is said to have been suggested by General Bernadotte, who was then French ambassador at Vienna and had a high esteem for our Beethoven.'¹⁵ Then Schindler reports that, having finished his Third Symphony, Beethoven had intended to send a handwritten copy of it to Paris. His version of the story continues:

A fair copy of the musical work for the first consul of the French republic, the conqueror of Marengo, with the dedication to him, was on the point of being despatched through the French embassy to Paris, when news arrived in Vienna

that Napoleon Bonaparte had caused himself to be proclaimed Emperor of the French. The first thing Beethoven did on receiving this intelligence was to tear off the title-leaf of this Symphony, and to fling the work itself, with a torrent of execrations against the new French Emperor, against the 'new tyrant', upon the floor, from which he would not allow it to be lifted. It was a long time before Beethoven recovered from the shock, and permitted this work to be given to the world with the title of 'Sinfonia Eroica', and underneath it this motto: 'Per festeggiare il sovvenire d'un gran uomo'. I shall only add that it was not till the tragic end of the great Emperor at St. Helena, that Beethoven was reconciled with him, and sarcastically remarked, that, seventeen years before, he had composed appropriate music to this catastrophe, in which it was exactly predicted, musically, but unwittingly – alluding to the Dead March in that Symphony.¹⁶

Schindler's story was reprinted in later editions of his biography, and it was translated into many other languages. For a long time the public did not question its truth, possibly because certain details of this story seem to be close to those that Wegeler and Ries had already published in 1838. In fact Schindler did not have any contact with Beethoven until 1822. So he may have been a witness during Beethoven's last five years, but certainly not in the period of Bernadotte's visit to Vienna and the *Eroica* Symphony.

A crucial detail cannot be confirmed by the the material evidence: Ries's anecdote that Beethoven tore off the entire sheet of the title page of the score is not supported by the title page of the existing copy of the symphony. On this title page, the title originally read 'Sinfonia grande / intitolata Bonaparte / del Sigr / Louis van Beethoven'. Beethoven removed the second line ('intitolata Bonaparte') by heavy erasure, but later he added in pencil the words: 'geschrieben auf Bonaparte' (written on/about Bonaparte).¹⁷ In a letter written in Vienna on 26 August 1804 to the publisher Breitkopf & Härtel in Leipzig, Beethoven wrote: 'die *Simphonie* ist eigentlich betitelt Ponaparte' (the true title of the symphony is Ponaparte).¹⁸

Regarding the reviews connecting Napoleon and the *Eroica* Symphony, one point was never really discussed: there is a distinction to be made between choosing Napoleon as the title or subject of the work (which has to do with the inspiration, content and interpretation of the work) and choosing Napoleon as the intended dedicatee. The two matters became blurred in the reception history. But Beethoven always dedicated his large-scale works to a person who could be useful for his career and/or pay for the dedication. What is clear is that ultimately, in the case of the *Eroica* Symphony, this person was Prince Franz Joseph Maximilian von Lobkowitz.

The French Tradition

The way the public and critics understand a new work of music is always influenced by their own cultural heritage and the context in which the music is performed. In this respect, the French reception of Beethoven's symphonies was different from that in other European cities, and the *Eroica* Symphony is a prime example. In France there was a strong tradition of funeral marches, especially after the French Revolution. They were played in public, and it is clear that the political aim was not only to mourn the death of a person but also to salute the victims of the Revolution and to underline the hope of a glorious future. Pathos combined with a vibrant character, expressed in a relatively fast tempo suggesting a people on the move, typifies this French tradition. Examples are the famous *Marche lugubre* by François-Joseph Gossec (1790) or Luigi Cherubini's *Hymne funèbre sur la mort du General Hoche* (1797).¹⁹ Beethoven knew about this tradition. The third movement of his Sonata Op. 26 in A♭ major (1801/2), for instance, is entitled *Marcia funebre sulla morte d'un Eroe*. Later, an arrangement of this movement was played in Paris during the transfer of the mortal remains of Marshal Jean Lannes to the Panthéon. Lannes, a personal friend of Napoleon, had been fatally wounded in the battle of Aspern-Essling near Vienna in 1809.

François-Antoine Habeneck's performances of Beethoven's music in Paris at the *Société des Concerts du Conservatoire* after 1828 were particularly important in early Beethoven reception. This excellent orchestra performed all the symphonies of Beethoven regularly and at a high level, and the *Eroica* Symphony was the first piece played in the opening concert of the series on Sunday 9 March 1828. One can fairly say that this orchestra was founded upon the *Eroica* Symphony. On Saint Cecilia's day in 1826 Habeneck had invited some musicians to come to his home for lunch and to bring their instruments. The music he had prepared for informal rehearsal was Beethoven's Third Symphony, and the musicians were so fascinated that they nearly forgot their meal.²⁰

The *Marcia funebre* was always in the foreground and served as a key for understanding the work. Often the *Marcia funebre* was performed separately, in concert and on special occasions; this led Hector Berlioz to demand in 1838 that the symphony always be played in its entirety.²¹ Other reviewers confirmed that the public admired only this movement. For example, Joseph d'Ortigue wrote in 1844 that the symphony 'seems too long and, except the *Marche funèbre*, it makes little effect' on the listening public.²² This third movement was admired as a 'hymn of sorrow and pain . . . a funeral song'.²³ And François-Joseph Fétis noted: 'A delightful melancholia reigns in the first motive of the funeral

march.²⁴ Thus the question arose of the subject, and the trigger event, behind the work.

Berlioz insisted that the title of the work was ‘Symphonie héroïque pour célébrer l’anniversaire de la mort d’un grand homme’, and even called it an ‘oraison funèbre’ (funeral oration). His interpretation reads as follows:

It is a mistake to truncate the title that the composer provided for the symphony. It reads: *Heroic symphony to celebrate the anniversary of the death of a great man*. As will be seen, the subject here is not battles or triumphal marches, as many people, misled by the mutilation of the title, might expect; but rather deep and serious thoughts, melancholy memories, ceremonies of imposing grandeur and sadness, in short a *funeral oration* for a hero. I know not a single example in music of a style where sorrow has been so unflinchingly conveyed in forms of such purity and such nobility of expression.²⁵

In the following review from 1837, Berlioz evoked a concrete programme, quoting verses from Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and referring to the funeral procession of young Pallas:

The funeral march is a drama in its own right. One believes one finds there a translation of Virgil’s beautiful verses on the funeral procession of the young Pallas: ‘*The richest spoils, gifts from the Laurentine battle, surround the last bed of the warrior; then follow chariots drenched with Rutulian blood; and the unhappy old man Acoetes, marring his face with his nails, bruising his chest with his fists; behind went the war-horse, Aethon, without his trappings, with hanging mane, follows the corpse of his master, wetting his face with great tear drops.*’ The ending in particular is deeply moving. The theme of the march returns, but now in a fragmented form, interspersed with silences, and only accompanied by three *pizzicato* notes in the double basses. When these tatters of the sad melody, left on their own, bare, broken and lifeless, have collapsed one after the other onto the tonic, the wind instruments utter a final cry, the last farewell of the warriors to their companion in arms, and the whole orchestra fades away on a *pianissimo* pause.²⁶

Such references to antiquity are common in the French reception of the *Eroica*. In 1835 the *Gazette musicale de Paris* gave the following summary of a concert: ‘The *Eroica* symphony . . . reappeared greater and nobler and more admirable of ancient grief than ever.’²⁷ In French dictionaries, the terms ‘héros’ and ‘héroïque’ refer to antique heroes such as Hercules or Alexander the Great, excelling in physical strength and bold military undertakings; so this kind of interpretation is not surprising.²⁸ We can observe the same construction from commentators in other Romance languages: in Italy in 1884, the critic Ippolito Valetta interpreted the *Marcia funebre* of the *Eroica* Symphony as the funeral of an ancient Roman hero.²⁹

Berlioz, an influential writer as well as composer, was among the few who did not merely concentrate on the interpretation of the funeral march. He analysed all the symphonies of Beethoven in long articles, mostly published in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*. He began his description of the beginning of the *Eroica* Symphony as follows:

The first movement is in triple time and in a tempo that is almost that of a waltz. What could be more serious and more dramatic than this *Allegro*? The energetic theme on which it is built is not at first presented in its complete form. Contrary to normal practice, the composer initially provides only a glimpse of his melodic idea, which is only revealed in its full power after a few bars' introduction.³⁰

Berlioz's style of writing about the music is meant to arouse interest. He understood that listeners might be surprised by certain aspects of Beethoven's music, and so he explained points where Beethoven did not meet the audience's expectations. In this way, Berlioz was not only one of the most important critics in the early reception of Beethoven but also an influential teacher. An example of his explanatory stance is found in his comments on the meaning of the Scherzo:

The third movement is entitled *Scherzo*, following normal practice. The Italian word means play, or jest. It is hard to see, at first sight, how this kind of music can find a place in this epic composition. It has to be heard to be understood. The piece does indeed have the rhythm and tempo of a *Scherzo*; these are games, but real funeral games, constantly darkened by thoughts of grief, games of the kind that the warriors of the *Iliad* celebrated around the tombs of their leaders.

Even in his most imaginative orchestral developments Beethoven has been able to preserve his serious and sombre colouring, the deep sadness which of course had to predominate in such a subject.³¹

True to French interpretations of the *Eroica* Symphony, Berlioz invokes ancient culture with his reference to the *Iliad*. Treating the work as comparable to outstanding examples of past cultures gives a sense not only of its greatness but also its authenticity. In his conclusion Berlioz emphasises that Beethoven's Third Symphony, with its poetic form, is in his eyes one of the composer's very greatest works. As it is typical of Berlioz, he reaches for depth of sentiment as a measure of greatness, and his own personal impressions are linked to thoughts of the ancient world when he says: 'Un sentiment de tristesse grave et pour ainsi dire antique me domine toujours pendant l'exécution de cette symphonie' ('Whenever this symphony is performed I am overcome with feelings of deep and as it were ancient sadness').³² One could conclude that he was trying to establish the canonic status of the work, by appealing to the longevity of the feelings it inspires, even if the work itself was relatively new and not yet really understood by the public.

For a long time, the possible connection between the *Eroica* Symphony and Napoleon Bonaparte was completely ignored in French reception. The first French review of a concert in which the name of Bonaparte was quoted appeared in 1841 in *Le Monde musical*. The author mentions Napoleon's burial in Les Invalides in Paris in December 1840, and suggests what Beethoven's attitude to the occasion might have been:

No doubt that if the great German composer had lived until this day, in the presence of the enthusiasm with which France had hailed the return of the glorious remains of her emperor, he would have returned his symphony to its first destination. And which music other than this sublime funeral march could have welcomed with more dignity the mortal remains of Napoleon at their entry into the chapel of Les Invalides!³³

The author recalls Ries's anecdote, but does not discuss whether the *Eroica* Symphony had been written for or about Napoleon. Rather, the critic seems to construct a posthumous reconciliation between Beethoven and Napoleon, writing that the *Eroica* Symphony would have been a wonderfully appropriate piece of music, in the tradition of the French *Marche lugubre*, for a ceremony like that of the funeral of a former statesman or emperor.

Napoleon and Other Heroes

In 1841 Richard Wagner published his interpretation of the *Eroica* Symphony in France, as 'Une Soirée Heureuse, Fantaisie sur la musique pittoresque' in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* (this French text was the first version to be printed).³⁴ The fact that young Beethoven was once fascinated by the young and victorious Napoleon, and thus inspired to write this work, was a new idea for the French public. Wagner underlined that there was no reason to understand the music as a 'symphonie biographique de Bonaparte' ('biographical symphony of Bonaparte').³⁵ This work itself was a feat, according to Wagner, and thus Beethoven was himself the hero of this heroic deed.

In Austria, another hero joined the reception story: Louis Ferdinand, Prince of Prussia (1772–1806). In 1843 *The Allgemeine Wiener Musik-Zeitung* published a contribution to the mythology around Beethoven's heroic symphony ('Zur Schicksalsgeschichte der heroischen Symphonie von Beethoven'). The article is about a cavalier who, after having seen that the public did not understand Beethoven's new symphony, had already left Vienna for one of his country houses when Prince Louis Ferdinand announced his visit. In order to surprise the Prince, another performance

of the symphony was organised, and Louis Ferdinand, very moved and fascinated by this new music, asked to listen to the work a second time. After this encore, Louis Ferdinand, even more impressed, asked if, after a break for the musicians, he could hear the symphony again, and thus it was performed for the third time. The article concludes by reporting that the day after this success Beethoven received a gift from the cavalier, but that the Prince would never hear this music again, because a short time later he died a heroic death.³⁶

The unnamed cavalier in this article was Prince Franz Joseph Maximilian von Lobkowitz, who was at Raudnitz castle (Roudnice) in Bohemia when Louis Ferdinand of Prussia joined him and attended a performance of the yet unpublished *Eroica* Symphony. Louis Ferdinand, a brilliant pianist and talented composer, had met Beethoven several times since 1796; and he visited Prince Lobkowitz at the end of September 1806 before he re-joined the army. He was killed by a French marshal on 10 October 1806 during a battle near Saalfeld. Even though the *Allgemeine Wiener Musik-Zeitung* writer did not conclude that Prince Louis Ferdinand was the intended dedicatee when the *Eroica* Symphony was published later in the same month, the Prince's name still appears in the lengthy journal article. Later authors, among them Walther Brauneis, believed that the *Eroica* Symphony, while officially dedicated by Beethoven to Prince Lobkowitz, was somehow anonymously dedicated to Prince Louis Ferdinand.³⁷ Surely Beethoven could not have had in mind Prince Louis Ferdinand's death in 1806 when he composed his Third Symphony, since it had long since been publicly premiered in Vienna.

Apart from published interpretations of the work, other attempts have been made to construct a political context for the *Eroica* Symphony. Otto Jahn, in his handwritten records, refers to Dr Joseph Bertolini (1774–1857), one of Beethoven's doctors in Vienna. Bertolini had been the student and assistant of Beethoven's doctor and friend Johann Baptist Malfatti and so came into contact with Beethoven. According to Jahn's notice from 1852, Bertolini recorded that Beethoven first had the idea of composing the *Eroica* Symphony when he heard about Bonaparte's campaign in Egypt; he also observed that the rumour of Admiral Horatio Nelson's death in the battle of Abukir was the origin of the funeral march.³⁸ In fact, Nelson (1758–1805) was only wounded on 1 August 1798; it seems very unlikely that this event influenced the composition of a work that Beethoven began to sketch no earlier than 1802/3.

In the notes of Carl Czerny (1791–1857), who knew Beethoven personally, Dr Bertolini is again invoked. Czerny wrote: 'After the indication of his close friend for many years, Dr Bertolini, the first idea for the *Sinfonia*

eroica was given by the death of the English General *Abercrombie*.³⁹ Ralph Abercromby had defeated the French in the battle of Alexandria on 21 March 1801, where he was wounded, and died on 28 March 1801. Despite the fact that this was not when Beethoven started composing his Third Symphony, and that Bertolini attended Beethoven only from 1806, there was a second effort to understand the *Eroica* as tribute in honour of Napoleon's English war opponents when he was still first consul. However, it seems that this idea did not really convince the critics and the public, even though the possible connection to Napoleon was often discussed. Czerny wrote that perhaps Beethoven, known for his changeable mood, may have had in mind a connection between the *Eroica* Symphony and Napoleon.⁴⁰ Since Abercromby and Nelson are both key figures in British history, one might assume that English authors would be interested in making any possible connection between them and Beethoven's music. Yet British music critics did not make any connections at all between Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony and British history.

The first half of the nineteenth century produced not only many performances of the *Eroica* Symphony, but also manifold documents of its reception. On the one hand, there were authors specifically interested in music, who studied the score and tried to help others to understand Beethoven's art of composing. On the other hand, there were writers – among them composers such as Weber, Berlioz and Wagner – who gave literary interpretations, and did not write as music experts in the narrow sense. In doing so, they communicated to their readers their own understandings of what constitutes a musical masterpiece, and their own reception of Beethoven's work in particular.

There has always been a strong desire to understand music by relating it to biography – and this tendency increased as the nineteenth century wore on. In the case of the *Eroica* Symphony the result was a focus on the title, and on the unnamed great man or hero (which is perhaps also the case with the Piano Sonata, Op. 26). Today, the public is still interested in such stories, factual or fictional, which reappear in CD booklets, films and concert programmes and in biographical literature. They have made Beethoven's Third Symphony one of the best-known works of classical music. This thirst to link works and biography means that even today the *Marcia funebre* remains a focus of interest, like the finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and the first movement of the *Sonata quasi una fantasia*, Op. 27, No. 2.

The early reception of Beethoven's *Eroica* proves to be a complex phenomenon, in which several strands intertwine: especially influential in this reception history was the emergence of new forms of organisation in musical life, with new orchestral cultures and new audiences interested in

understanding music through listening and reading. The question of performance practice is linked to these changing circumstances. The changing image of Beethoven, and the status of his works, played and play an important role in determining performance practices. It makes quite a difference, especially to the *Marcia funebre*, if it is played in the manner of French revolutionary music, or in a sad and slow tempo, close to the funeral procession after Siegfried's death in Wagner's *Twilight of the Gods* (*Götterdämmerung*). It makes a difference for the performance practice, and for the listeners, if the symphony is understood as part of a political statement in the time of Napoleonic wars, or if it is associated with the idea of the sublime and of timeless grandeur. As the reception of the *Eroica* Symphony changes, so too does performance practice, and vice versa.

Notes

1. *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 7 (1805), col. 321. Translations are by the author unless stated.
2. *Ibid.*, cols. 501–2; trans. R. Wallace in W. Sennner, R. Wallace and W. Meredith (eds.), *The Critical Reception of Beethoven's Compositions by His German Contemporaries*, vol. 2 (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), p. 17.
3. *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 9 (1807), col. 322; trans. R. Wallace, *Critical Reception*, p. 20.
4. *Ibid.*, col. 325; trans. R. Wallace, *Critical Reception*, p. 25.
5. *Ibid.*, col. 497; trans. R. Wallace, *Critical Reception*, p. 33.
6. *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*, 22 (1807), p. 444; trans. R. Wallace, *Critical Reception*, p. 35–6 (emphasis original).
7. *The Harmonicon*, 7 (1829), pp. 32–3.
8. *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 1 (1824), p. 41; trans. R. Wallace, *Critical Reception*, p. 40.
9. *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 13 (1811), col. 66; trans. R. Wallace, *Critical Reception*, p. 38.
10. *The Musical World, A Weekly Record of Musical Science, Literature, and Intelligence*, 1 (1836), p. 173.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
12. *Ludwig van Beethoven. Briefwechsel: Gesamtausgabe*, 7 vols., ed. S. Brandenburg (Munich: Henle, 1996–8) (BGA), 165, vol. 1, p. 190.
13. F. G. Wegeler and F. Ries, *Biographische Notizen über Ludwig van Beethoven* (Koblenz: K. Bädeker, 1838), p. 78; trans. F. Noonan in *Remembering Beethoven. The Biographical Notes of Franz Wegeler and Ferdinand Ries* (London: Deutsch, 1988), p. 68.
14. A. Schindler, *Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1840), p. 56; trans. in I. Moscheles, *The Life of Beethoven, Including His Correspondence with His Friends, Numerous Characteristic Traits, and Remarks on His Musical Works*, vol. I (London: Henry Colburn, 1841), p. 89.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 55; trans. Moscheles, *Life of Beethoven*, p. 88.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 56–7; trans. Moscheles, *Life of Beethoven*, pp. 90–1.
17. See Beethoven's score, copied by Benjamin Gebauer, housed in Vienna, Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, A 20; Ludwig van Beethoven, *Symphonie Nr. 3 Es-Dur op. 55 "Eroica", Partitur-Manuskript (Beethovens Handexemplar), Vollständige Faksimile-Ausgabe im Originalformat*, vol. 1, ed. O. Biba (Vienna: Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, 1993).
18. BGA 188, vol. 1, p. 219.
19. See F. Robert, 'Beethoven en France', *Europe*, 48 (1970), p. 119.
20. A. Elwart, *Histoire de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire Impérial de Musique* (Paris: Librairie Castel, 1864), p. 62.
21. *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 5 (1838), p. 34.
22. *La France musicale*, 7 (1844), p. 73.

23. *Revue musicale*, 15 (1835), p. 230.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
25. *Gazette musicale de Paris*, 4 (1837), p. 122.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
27. *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 2 (1835), p. 31.
28. See, for example, A. Furetière, *Dictionnaire Universel, contenant généralement tous les mots françois, tant vieux que modernes, & les Termes de toutes les Sciences et les Arts: Divisé en trois tomes*, 3 vols. (The Hague and Rotterdam: Leers, 1690); *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, Seconde Édition (Paris: Coignard, 1696); *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers, par une Société de Gens de Lettres* (Neufchâtel: Faulche, 1765); E. Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française, contenant la nomenclature la plus étendue*, 4 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1863–72).
29. See W. Witzmann, 'Zur italienischen Beethoven-Rezeption des Ottocento: Eine Zwischenbilanz', in 'Studien zur italienischen Musikgeschichte', *Analecta Musicologica*, 22 (1984), p. 474.
30. *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 4 (1837), p. 122.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
32. H. Berlioz, *Voyage Musical en Allemagne et en Italie. Études sur Beethoven, Gluck et Weber. Mélanges et Nouvelles* (Paris: Jules Labitte, 1844), vol. 1, pp. 284–5.
33. *Le Monde musical*, 2 (1841), [p. 1].
34. *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 8 (1841), pp. 463–5 and 487–9.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 489.
36. *Allgemeine Wiener Musik-Zeitung*, 3 (1843), p. 28.
37. W. Brauneis, "... composta per festeggiare il sovvenire di un grand Uomo". Beethovens "Eroica" als Hommage des Fürsten Franz Joseph Maximilian von Lobkowitz für Prinz Louis Ferdinand von Preußen', *Studien zur Wiener Geschichte. Jahrbuch des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Wien*, 52/53 (1996/97), pp. 53–88.
38. *Beethoven aus der Sicht seiner Zeitgenossen in Tagebüchern, Briefen, Gedichten und Erinnerungen*, ed. K. M. Kopitz and R. Cadenbach (Munich: Henle, 2009), vol. 1, p. 64.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 227.
40. *Ibid.*