16 Berlioz and Beethoven

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In the reminiscences of Berlioz which he addressed to Eduard Hanslick in the *Revue et Gazette musicale* ten years after the composer's death, Stephen Heller recalled his friend's response to a performance of Beethoven's E-Minor Quartet (the second "Rasumovsky"), which they attended together in the eighteen-sixties:

> During the adagio there was a look of rapture, of ecstasy on his face; it was as if he had experienced a "transubstantiation." One or two other fine works still remained to be played at the concert, but we didn't wait for them. I accompanied Berlioz to his door. On the way no word was exchanged between us: we were still hearing the Adagio and its sublime prayer. As I said good-bye he took my hand and said: "That man had everything . . . and we have nothing!"[1]

To that anecdote we may add Berlioz's account of a rehearsal of a late Beethoven quartet, perhaps Op. 127, which was in the repertory of the Bohrer Quartet when they played in Paris in February and March 1830:[2]

> To my mind Anton Bohrer feels and understands the popularly supposed eccentric and unintelligible works among Beethoven's output as few men do. I can see him now, at quartet rehearsals, with his brother Max (the well-known cellist, now in America), Claudel, second violin, and Urhan, viola, in ardent support. Max, at the strains of this transcendental music, would smile with the sheer pride and delight of playing it; he had the relaxed, contented air that comes from breathing one's native element. Urhan worshipped in silence, eyes averted as though from the radiance of the sun; he seemed to be saying, "God willed that there should be a man as great as Beethoven, and that we should be allowed to contemplate him. God willed it." Claudel admired the others for the depth of their admiration. But with Anton Bohrer, the first violin, it was a sublime passion, an ecstasy of love.
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> One evening, in one of those unearthly Adagios where Beethoven's spirit soars vast and solitary like the huge bird above the snows of Chimborazo, Bohrer's violin, as it sang the heavenly melody, seemed to become possessed with the divine fire and, suddenly taking on a new force and eloquence of expression, broke into accents unknown even to it, while his face lit up with the light of pure inspiration. We held our breaths, our hearts swelled – when, abruptly, he stopped, put down his bow and ran from the room. Mme Bohrer, worried, went after him; but Max, still smiling, said, "It's nothing – he couldn't contain his feelings. Leave him to calm down a little, then we'll start again. You must forgive him." We forgive you – dear great artist.[3]

The image of the bird soaring to unknown heights (taken from the passage on the condor in Alexander von Humboldt's *Tableaux de la nature*, a copy of which was in Berlioz's father's library) recurs more than once in his writings on Beethoven. For Berlioz, Beethoven's spirit and sovereign art inhabit regions beyond the reach of other composers, even of his beloved Gluck. At times he will seem to place the two on an equal footing.[4] But Beethoven is the greatest. It was the discovery of his music, in the winter and spring of 1828, that set Berlioz consciously on a new compositional path, and that would soon inspire him to become one of Beethoven's most dedicated and articulate champions.

The shock of that discovery can be compared only to the experience of hearing the full orchestra and chorus of the Paris Opéra six years earlier, after a boyhood in which the summit of musical life was the band of the local Garde Nationale. But the impact must have been in some ways even more powerful and profound on a sensibility as acute as Berlioz's and on a musician whose musical experiences had been quite circumscribed. There had been a vigorous French tradition of symphonic writing at the turn of the century, but it had petered out by the time Berlioz came to Paris in 1821. The French tradition he acquired, in the opera house and the library, was that of Gluck and his lesser followers, and Cherubini and Spontini. (Weber's *Der Freischütz*, at the Odéon throughout 1825, alone suggested perspectives beyond the confines of classicism.) The occasional Haydn or Mozart symphony, performed without conviction on the bare stage of the Opéra at the Lenten *concerts spirituels*, left little impression. The story of Berlioz exclaiming, after the first night of the English company's *Romeo and Juliet* in September 1827, that he would "write his greatest symphony on the play" (reported in chapter 18 of the *Mémoires*) – a story he himself denied – cannot possibly be true. At that stage, six months before the first Conservatoire concert, he would not have thought in those terms. An operatic *Romeo* could have been in his mind: a symphonic *Romeo* would not have occurred to him.

Exactly when Berlioz first became aware of Beethoven is uncertain. In his *Mémoires* (in chapter 14) he speaks of having seen two of the symphonies in score, and of "sensing" that Beethoven was a "sun," though "a sun obscured by heavy clouds." It is very likely that he knew of the Beethoven symphony rehearsals going on in the months preceding the inaugural season of the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire – many of the players were friends of his – and that it excited his curiosity. But nothing can have prepared him for the reality, encountered in the flesh in the resonant acoustics and intimate ambiance of the Conservatoire Hall – the *Eroica* and the Fifth played by the orchestral élite of Paris, diligently prepared under the violinist-conductor François-Antoine Habeneck and animated by a passionate belief in the holiness of their cause.

By the time Berlioz left for Italy three years later he had heard the first eight symphonies, some of them several times, as well as various other works including the *Coriolan* Overture (and the C-sharp-Minor Quartet), had studied the Ninth in the Conservatoire library, and had taken Beethoven to his heart and soul and mind. In Beethoven's music, in the rages and lightning emotions of the Fifth, the pantheistic joys of the *Pastoral*, the slow movement of the Seventh, "that inconceivable achievement of the great master of somber and profound meditation,"[5] he found the mirror of his own innermost self and the catalyst his creative being had been waiting for.

The revelation was both formal and expressive, or rather an interfusing of the two. It did not make him forswear Gluck or abandon the artistic beliefs by which he had lived. That would have been out of character in someone of such tenacious loyalties, and in any case not necessary. He remained a dramatist. But his whole conception of the dramatic was enlarged to include the symphonic, which, he saw at once, had become in Beethoven's hands a medium for dramatic music of a scope and on a scale not encountered before. Berlioz (like Liszt) was wrong when he accused Haydn of slavishly adhering to formal stereotypes in his symphonies; but he was right to see that the Beethovenian revolution was for him a crucial liberation. Beethoven's symphonic dramas were living organisms. Their endless variety of compositional procedures was the musical equivalent of what Shakespeare's plays taught – the formal freedom, after years of French classical drama turned out according to set rules. Form was each individual work's unique response to the poetic idea and material it embodied. Each work – the *Eroica*, the Fifth, the *Pastoral*, and the others – was a fresh dramatic utterance, with its own character and color, its own laws and structure.

This "pensée poétique" governing a whole symphony yet subordinate to purely musical logic was for Berlioz one of the revelations of Beethoven. Complementary to it was the revelation of the limitless expressive possibilities of the symphony orchestra. The language of instruments spoke. It was as eloquent as human speech – more so, in fact: when Berlioz wrote his love scene for Romeo and Juliet he entrusted it to the orchestra alone.

The consequence of 1828 was an upheaval in Berlioz's artistic being. Beethoven widened not only Berlioz's idea of what was possible in music but of what he himself could achieve. Like Columbus, Beethoven had discovered a new world. Why should he not be its Cortez or Pizarro? From now on, the Beethovenian symphony – what Berlioz calls the *genre instrumental expressif* – is at the forefront of his thoughts and ambitions. Already by the end of 1828 the symphony that will become the *Fantastique* is active within him.

The resulting work, and its successors, show us that Beethoven's influence on Berlioz was general rather than specific. Certainly the many detailed innovations – the harmonic freedom, the emancipation of the timpani, the combination of different rhythms and meters, and such things as the melodic disintegration at the end of *Coriolan* and the *Eroica*'s Funeral March, used as an image of death – were not lost on him. Particular echoes of Beethoven may strike us in the *Fantastique*, notably in the slow movement, the *Scène aux champs* – the *Pastoral*'s quail-call on the oboe, the successive *fortissimo* diminished sevenths of the opening movement of the Fifth, Florestan's ebbing paroxysm in *Fidelio*; and Berlioz has, clearly, learned from what Wilfrid Mellers calls "Beethoven's technique of thematic generation and transformation."[6] But the formal processes are quite different. Berlioz does not follow the Viennese classical tradition exemplified, however radically, by Beethoven's symphonies. The reprise of the *idée fixe* two-thirds of the way through the first movement is in the dominant; it represents not a sonata-form recapitulation but a stage in the evolution of the theme from monody to its integration with the orchestral tutti beginning at bar 410. The structure of the finale is like nothing in Beethoven – nor anyone else: the Witches' Sabbath not having been used as the subject of a symphonic movement before, Berlioz had to invent a form for it.

In short, though Beethoven's influence is paramount, it is a matter of inspiration more than imitation. Beethoven himself may sometimes dispense with orthodox recapitulation (for example, in *Coriolan* and in *Leonore* No. 2, which, as it happens, were Berlioz's favorite Beethoven overtures); but Berlioz goes much further. In the opening Allegro of his second symphony, *Harold en Italie*, the second theme only hints at the dominant; the movement is soon merging exposition, development, and recapitulation in a free-flowing continuum. Even the echo of the finale of the Ninth Symphony – the recall of earlier themes – which begins the finale of *Harold* is adapted to ends opposite to those of Beethoven, as a means not of justifying the introducing of new elements – voices and text – into an instrumental work, but of sanctioning the excluding of elements previously integral to the score, the solo viola and its motto theme.[7]

Similarly, the Dramatic Symphony *Roméo et Juliette* takes Beethoven's Ninth only as its stimulus and starting point. The concept of a symphony with a big choral finale, introduced by instrumental recitative, is extended, if not altered, to one in which the vocal element and the overtly dramatic content are present from the beginning: graphic orchestral depiction of the street battles in Verona, brass recitative leading to choral prologue which sets out the action, and voices not entirely forgotten even in the central orchestral movements, so that the full-scale choral dénouement will be heard as the natural culmination of the work.

Berlioz summed up what was to be his relationship to Beethoven, and the decisive effect of the discovery of his music, in a letter written to his friend Édouard Rocher on 11 January I829, during that first momentous initiation:

> Now that I have broken the chains of routine, I see an immense territory stretching before me, which academic rules forbade me to enter. Now that I have heard that awe-inspiring giant Beethoven I realize what point the art of music has reached; it's a question of taking it up at that point and carrying it further – no, not further, that's impossible, he attained the limits of art, but as far in another direction.

Beethoven, for Berlioz, is a "benefactor," a tutelary spirit, both household god and "friend."[8] The decision, in 1845, to write a major work, after six years in which he has produced only small-scale compositions, is taken immediately after the Bonn Beethoven festival, in the solitude of Königswinter, the village where Beethoven used to go as a young man. And the shape of the opening phrase of *La Damnation de Faust* will reflect, consciously or not, in the calm stepwise ascent to the keynote followed by a falling sixth, its Beethovenian inheritance.[9]

By that time Berlioz was a devoted apostle of Beethoven; he had been expounding him in print for the past sixteen years.[10] That was not necessarily regarded in France as a respectable thing to do, especially where the works of Beethoven's final period were concerned. Fétis, in the *Revue Musicale*, made much of the many false harmonic progressions – some of them no better than schoolboy howlers – in the late quartets (Berlioz's soaring bird, he might have said, had crash-landed); even the Seventh Symphony, in its first and last movements, was "the improvisation of a gifted composer on an off day." Adolphe Adam considered Beethoven too flawed to be – as some misguidedly claimed – the leading composer of the century (that honor belonged to Auber). Rellstab, in the *Revue et Gazette musicale*, deplored the ruin of Beethoven's once noble genius, as exemplified by the follies of the Ninth Symphony.

Dismissive criticism of the sort, however, was quite untypical of the *Gazette* under Maurice Schlesinger's editorship. The journal's regular writers worked on the assumption that music of the highest quality by definition challenged the listener and might well not reveal itself immediately. Foremost among composers of such music was Beethoven; and foremost among his advocates Berlioz. For him, the symphonies – the Ninth above all – were the beginning of modern music. In the eighteen-thirties Berlioz published "critiques admiratives" of all nine. He had first enunciated the idea in December 1825 when in a letter to *Le Corsaire* he took issue with Castil-Blaze's strictures on Gluck's *Armide*. The critic's duty was to write a reasoned appreciation of the music he

admired, to "reveal the strokes of genius in a work," many of which may have "escaped the notice of a public blinded by the prejudices of the moment."[11]

This principle, essentially, informs all Berlioz's writings on Beethoven. From time to time his admiration is qualified by a touch of Conservatoire pedantry (such as, ironically, will characterize subsequent French criticism of Berlioz's music). He is not immune to prejudices himself. He fails to respond to the humor of the sudden, brusque conclusion of the Eighth Symphony's Allegretto scherzando ("How can this ravishing idyll finish with the commonplace for which Beethoven had the greatest aversion, the Italian cadence? [. . .] I have never been able to explain this vagary").[12] Equally mystifying to him, and even more disagreeable, is the dissonance which opens the finale of the Ninth, and which is repeated, still more discordantly, just before the entry of the voice. The bee in his bonnet about "obligatory" fugues in religious works buzzes so loudly that it deafens him to the glories of "In gloria Dei Patris, Amen," and "Et vitam venturi saeculi, Amen," in the *Missa Solemnis*; the fugal treatment of "Amen" is like a red rag to a bull.

Such failures, however, are exceptional. In general he respects what Beethoven does, even when he can't see the reason for it. As he says in the Postscript of the *Mémoires*, "[I am] a freethinker in music, or rather I am of the faith of Beethoven, Weber, Gluck, and Spontini, who believe and preach, and prove by their works, that everything is 'right' or 'wrong' according to the effect produced." At the end of his long and detailed *critique admirative* of the *Pastoral* Symphony, he concludes:

> After that, can one speak of oddities of style in such a work – of groups of five notes in the cellos opposed to four-note phrases in the double basses without combining into a genuine unison? Does one have to point out the horn-call on an arpeggio of the chord of C while the strings sustain the chord of F? Must one search for the reason for such harmonic anomalies? I confess I am incapable of it. For that, one must be cool and rational – and how can one keep ecstasy at bay when the mind is engaged with such a subject![13]

Berlioz's method aims to lead the reader/listener into the music by a mixture of the two modes of criticism first defined by E. T. A. Hoffmann, the poetic and the pedagogic. He uses literary analogy and evocative imagery seasoned with technical description. A representative example, combining both modes, is this account of the second movement of the Seventh Symphony. Here he takes in his stride the unresolved chord which begins and ends the movement. Elsewhere he defends the chord against critics who, failing to see the reason for it, "point out as a fault one of Beethoven's finest inspirations."

> Rhythm – a rhythm as simple as that of the first movement – is again the chief element in the incredible effect produced by the Andante [*recte* Allegretto]. It consists entirely of a dactyl followed by a spondee, repeated uninterruptedly, now in three parts, now in one, now all together, sometimes as accompaniment, often focusing attention solely on itself, or providing the main subject of a brief double fugue in the stringed instruments. It is heard first on the lower strings of the violas, cellos, and double basses, played *piano*, then repeated shortly afterwards in a mysterious and melancholy *pianissimo*. From there it passes to the second violins, while the cellos utter a sort of sublime lament, in the minor mode. The rhythmic figure, rising from octave to octave, reaches the first violins which, while making a crescendo, hand it to the wind instruments at the top of the orchestra, where it bursts out with full force. The plaintive melody, now more energetic, becomes a convulsive wailing. Conflicting rhythms clash painfully against each other. We hear tears, sobs, suffering. But a ray of hope shines. The heartrending strains give way to a vaporous melody, gentle, pure, sad yet resigned, "like patience smiling at grief." Only the cellos and basses persist with their inexorable rhythm beneath this rainbow-like melodic arc: to borrow once again from English poetry, "One fatal remembrance, one sorrow that throws / Its bleak shade alike o'er our joys and our woes."
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> After further alternations of anguish and resignation the orchestra, as though exhausted by its struggle, can manage only fragments of the main phrase, before giving up the ghost. The flutes and oboes take up the theme with dying voice but lack the strength to go on; the violins complete it with a few barely audible pizzicato notes – after which, flaring up like the flame of a lamp about to go out, the wind instruments give a deep sigh on an incomplete harmony and . . . "the rest is silence." This plaintive exclamation, with which the Andante opens and closes, is produced by a chord, that of the six-four, which normally resolves. In this case the placing of the tonic note in the middle of the chord, while the dominant is above and below it, is the only possible ending, leaving the listener with a sense of incompleteness, and intensifying the dreamlike sadness of the rest of the movement.[14]

Berlioz's Beethoven symphony analyses, as we have seen, appeared in the *Revue et Gazette musicale* (and subsequently in the *Voyage musicale* and *À travers chants*). The *Gazette* had a specialist readership. But he could also treat the subscribers to the *Journal des débats* to just as demanding a course of instruction. The long crescendo in the opening movement of the Fourth Symphony prompted one of his most detailed technical pages, which originally appeared in a feuilleton in the *Débats*:

> The second part of this same Allegro contains a totally new idea whose first bars seize the attention and which, after carrying one away by its mysterious development, astonishes one by the unexpectedness of its conclusion. This is what happens. After a vigorous tutti the first violins break up the main theme and make a game out of it with the second violins. Their *pianissimo* dialogue leads to two sustained dominant-seventh chords in the key of

> B-natural, each interrupted by two silent bars during which all that is heard is a quiet roll of the drums on B-flat, the enharmonic major third of the bass note F-sharp. The drums then stop, leaving the strings to murmur other fragments of the theme and then, by a new enharmonic modulation, to arrive on a six-four chord of B-flat. The drums, reentering on the same note, which instead of being a leading-tone as it was the first time is now a genuine tonic, go on with their roll for a further twenty bars. The force of the key of B-flat, barely perceptible to begin with, becomes stronger and stronger the more the roll continues; and while the drums rumble on, the momentum of the other instruments, scattering fragments of phrase as they go, culminates in a great *forte* which finally establishes B-flat in all its majestic energy.
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> This prodigious crescendo is one of the most extraordinary inventions in music. To find another like it you have to go to the one that concludes the famous scherzo of the C-Minor Symphony; and even then, despite its immense effect, the latter is conceived on a less spacious scale. It starts *piano* and proceeds straight to its climax, never leaving the main key – whereas the one we have just described starts *mezzo forte*, sinks down for an instant to a *pianissimo* colored by harmonies that remain deliberately imprecise, then reappears with more clearly defined chords, and bursts forth only at the moment when the cloud which veiled the modulation is completely dispersed. It is like a river whose calmly flowing stream suddenly goes underground, from where it reemerges with a roar, as a foaming cascade.[15]

Berlioz's account of the crescendo in the scherzo of the Fifth is perhaps too well known to be quoted here, though it provides a further example of his method and must have delighted the Beethoven-lovers among his readers and astonished those who were yet to be converted: the trio's theme, "played by cellos and basses with the full force of the bow, whose ponderous gait makes the desks of the whole orchestra shake, and suggests the gamboling of a herd of high-spirited elephants" – as "the sound of this mad stampeding gradually fades, the motif of the scherzo reappears, pizzicato, the silence deepens and all that is left are a few notes plucked by the violins and the strange gobble of the bassoons, playing high A-flat against the jarring juxtaposition of the octave G, the bass note of the dominant minor ninth" – "the ear hesitates, unsure where this enigmatic harmony will end" – "the dull pulsation of the drums gradually growing in intensity" – and so on.[16]

Almost his last Beethoven article, the *critique admirative* of *Fidelio*, in the *Débats* of May 1860, contains some of his most arresting images and at the same time a final declaration of faith:

> [*Fidelio*] belongs to that powerful race of maligned works which have the most inconceivable prejudices and the most blatant lies heaped on them, but whose vitality is so intense that nothing can prevail against them – like those sturdy beeches born among rocks and ruins, which end by splitting the stone and breaking through the walls, and rise up proud and verdant, the more

> solidly rooted for the obstacles they have had to overcome in order to force their way out; whereas the willows that grow without effort on the banks of a river fall into the mud and rot, forgotten.

Its time will come:

> Who knows that light may not dawn sooner than one thinks, even for those whose spirits are closed at the moment to this beautiful work of Beethoven's, as they are to the marvels of the Ninth Symphony and the last quartets and the great piano sonatas of that same inspired, incomparable being? Sometimes, when one looks at a particular part of the heaven of art, a veil seems to cover "the mind's eye" and prevent it from seeing the stars that shine there. Then, all of a sudden, for no apparent reason, the veil is rent, and one sees, and blushes to have been blind so long.[17]

The need to expound Beethoven was for Berlioz the most important *raison d'être* of his work as a critic, and a compensation for the mental and psychological burden that criticism and his financial dependence on it increasingly became. He surely hoped, too, that initiating readers into the mysteries and splendors of Beethoven's music would help to make his own works more intelligible – works which Paganini was not alone among musicians in regarding as inheriting the mantle of Beethoven. But above all he celebrated Beethoven because he had to: he must share his enthusiasm, communicate to others the wonder of the discovery. He could not do otherwise. And it is clear that he often did, verbally and in private. Ernest Legouvé never forgot hearing Berlioz explain to him the Ninth Symphony:

> His articles, admirable as they are, give an imperfect idea of it, for they contain only his opinions. When he spoke, the whole of him was in it. The eloquence of his words was enhanced by his expression, his gestures, tone of voice, tears, exclamations of enthusiasm, and those sudden flashes of inspired imagery which are sparked by the stimulus of a listener hanging on every word. An hour spent in this way taught me more about instrumental music than a whole concert at the Conservatoire – or rather, when I went to the Conservatoire the following Sunday, my mind full of Berlioz's commentaries, Beethoven's work suddenly opened before me like a great cathedral flooded with light, the whole design of which I took in at a glance and in which I walked about as though on familiar ground, confidently exploring every recess and corner. Berlioz had given me the key to the sanctuary.[18]

There was, of course, another way of expressing his feelings about Beethoven and of communicating his understanding of the Ninth and the other symphonies to a wider audience: conducting. Berlioz's emergence, in the eighteen-thirties, as a conductor of a new school, who beat time with a baton, not with a violin bow, and who rehearsed the orchestra

sectionally and with numbered parts, was significant first of all for his own music, which till then he had generally had to hear performed "approximately" under the bow of Habeneck or Narcisse Girard. But as his renown spread he came to be in demand as a conductor of music other than his own, which to him meant, above all, Beethoven.

Opportunities, by modern standards, were admittedly infrequent for someone who, though regarded by many musicians as the finest conductor of the day, was never attached to a regular concert-promoting body. The first Beethoven symphony he is known to have conducted – the *Pastoral* – was part of a one-off Beethoven program put on by Liszt at the Paris Conservatoire on 25 April 1841, to raise money for the fund which Liszt had set up to pay for a statue of the composer in his native town, Bonn. (The *Emperor* Concerto, played by Liszt, the *Kreutzer* Sonata, with Liszt and Lambert Massart, and the overture *The Consecration of the House*, were the other works.) In January 1845, at the Cirque Olympique, Berlioz accompanied Charles Hallé in a Beethoven concerto (No. 4 or the *Emperor*, the evidence is conflicting).[19] And in London in November 1847 he opened the inaugural season of Jullien's Grand English Opera, of which he was music director, with *Leonore* No. 2, his excuse being that *Lucia di Lammermoor*, the main item of the evening, did not have a proper overture of its own.

He had more scope in the eighteen-fifties, with the founding of the Société Philharmonique, under his leadership, and then of the New Philharmonic Society, created for him by his London admirers. In 1850, in Paris, he gave the Fifth Symphony, and in 1852, with the New Philharmonic, the Fifth, the Triple Concerto, *Leonore* No. 2 again, and two performances of the Ninth which were reckoned incomparably the best ever given in London, with a first-rate orchestra and a choir far superior to its Parisian counterpart. Of those performances *The Morning Post* wrote:

> The most worthy execution of Beethoven's magnificent symphony, and at the same time the best orchestral performance, ever heard in this country. [. . .] We never before heard so much accent and true expression from an English orchestra.[20]

And the *Illustrated London News* wrote:

> [T]he greatest victory ever yet attained in the development of Beethoven's intentions. [. . .] We heard on Wednesday night professors of no little note, whose sneers and scoffs at the Ninth Symphony years back we had not forgotten, make avowal that it was incomparably the grandest emanation of Beethoven's genius. [. . .] [H]onor and glory to the gifted conductor, who wielded Prospero's wand and subdued all the combined elements to one

> harmonious whole. Well did Berlioz earn the ovation bestowed by the moved thousands who filled the hall on this memorable occasion, one to be for ever treasured in our musical annals.[21]

Such revelations were not achieved without much more thorough rehearsal than was customary in London then or for long afterwards. Berlioz had six for the Ninth, and it was partly because the cost was higher than the New Philharmonic's sponsors expected, and also because of the machinations of one of the sponsors, the aspiring but mediocre conductor Dr. Henry Wylde, that Berlioz was not invited back to the orchestra except briefly in 1855. In the late eighteen-fifties, owing to ill health and preoccupation with composing and then promoting *Les Troyens*, he virtually gave up conducting, except for an annual gala concert at Baden-Baden (where excerpts from Beethoven figured on some of the programs). But not long before he died, his career as a conductor enjoyed a belated flowering, thanks to an invitation to Russia in the winter of 1867–1868. Though chronically sick and in pain, he directed six concerts in St. Petersburg and two in Moscow. The main content of the programs was divided among Beethoven, Gluck, and his own music. He conducted the *Eroica*, the Fourth, the Fifth, the *Pastoral*, the *Emperor*, and the Violin Concerto. Ill as he was, the experience rejuvenated him. After the series opened he wrote to his uncle Félix Marmion (on 8 December 1867):

> At the first concert I directed Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony, with profound adoration for the poor great man who had the power to create so amazing a poem in music. And how we sang that poetry! What a splendid orchestra! They do what I want, these fine artists.[22]

What were Berlioz's Beethoven performances like? We have no way of knowing. All we have are fleeting indications. The composer and critic César Cui wrote in the St. Petersburg *Gazette*:

> What a grasp he has of Beethoven, how exact, how thoughtful his performances are, how effective yet without the slightest concession to the false and the tawdry. I prefer Berlioz as an interpreter of Beethoven to Wagner (who, with all his excellent qualities, is at times affected, introducing sentimental rallentandos). [. . .] Of all the conductors we have heard in Petersburg, Berlioz is unquestionably the greatest.[23]

From Berlioz's and Wagner's comments on each other's conducting, their interpretations and style of music-making seem to have been as different as Toscanini's and Furtwängler's (Berlioz being more like the Italian maestro and Wagner like the German). Where his music was concerned, Berlioz set great store by the metronome, but there is no evidence

of how much importance he attached to Beethoven's metronome marks. His calling the second movement of the Seventh Symphony (a work he never conducted) Andante instead of Allegretto may indicate that Habeneck took it more slowly than the score's ♩= 76, and that he too thought of it like that. On the other hand the press reports of the New Philharmonic's Ninth mention the very rapid tempo of the trio and of the finale's concluding variations – a startling difference from the Old Philharmonic's plodding performances, thrown on with one rehearsal, which London audiences had had to make do with till then.

All we can say for certain is that Berlioz found great joy in repaying something of what he owed to the mighty mentor who, together with Gluck and Shakespeare, had pointed the way for his own music.