16 The four ages of Beethoven: critical reception and the canonic composer

SCOTT BURNHAM

Of the reception of Beethoven's music these last two hundred years, one thing is clear: there has been little trace of the tidal cycles of popular and critical approbation suffered by almost every other important composer. More specifically, no significant ebb tide has yet been charted in the reception of his music. Or it may be that his fortunes are subject to a tide table of an exceedingly grander temporal scale: perhaps Beethoven will go out of fashion for the next two hundred years, only to return with force in some unthinkable new world. And yet, his image – however abiding – has not simply stood in place over the last two centuries, like some historically inert monolith. One may mark discernible stations in the critical reception of his life and music, points in the historical flow that seem to gather into a larger narrative.

I would like to construct four such stations, each anchored to a symbolic milestone in the history of Beethoven reception: 1827, death of Beethoven and birth of the artist as Romantic revolutionary and hero; 1870, centenary of Beethoven's birth and symbolic rebirth of the composer as a spiritual and political Redeemer; 1927, centenary of the composer's death and symbolic death of the figure of the Romantic artist in favor of that of the law-giver and natural force; and 1970, bicentennial of the composer's birth and symbolic birth of the culturally constructed hero. Beyond tracing the vibrant afterlife Beethoven has enjoyed in mainstream Western musical thought, the resulting trajectory illuminates a perhaps typical process of canon formation, whereby a canonic subject is gradually transformed into a canonic object.

1827 Beethoven as Romantic hero

> Just as the behemoth storms through the sea, so [Beethoven] swept through the frontier limits of his art. From the gurgling of the dove to the roaring of thunder, from the most ingenious weaving together of idiosyncratic artistic materials to that fearful extreme, when cultivation passes over into the unruly caprice of nature's struggling forces, he has taken the measure of everything, comprehended it all. (Franz Grillparzer)

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Speaking on the occasion of Beethoven's funeral, the poet Franz Grillparzer describes the famous composer's music as something akin to a force of nature, equally at home with a bird's gentle song and with the senseless fury of a storm, knowing no externally imposed boundaries in the service of a comprehensive musical art. Grillparzer goes on to claim that Beethoven will perforce have no successors: anyone who comes after him will have to begin all over again, "for [Beethoven] only stopped where Art itself stops."[1] Grillparzer's oration thus sets the tone for much of the subsequent reception of Beethoven, a reception initially founded on the Romantic figure of the artist as hero. In a sustained effort of superhuman will, Beethoven creates his own world, a world coterminous with the world of musical art. His all-embracing musical activity notably includes that distinctly Romantic transit between the cultivated and the chaotic, the civilized and the primitive.

Some years later, Grillparzer privately condemned the crossing of this line, the relinquishing of cultivation. Here is a diary entry from 1834, in which Grillparzer felt compelled to list distinct reservations toward Beethoven's music:[2]

> Beethoven's harmful effects on the world of art, despite his inestimably high worth:
>
> 1. The first and foremost necessity of a musician – the refinement and rectitude of the ear – suffers under his audacious combinations and their all too often indulged admixture of musical howling and yowling [*Tongeheuel und Gebrüll*].
> 2. By leaving lyricism well behind him [*Durch seine überlyrische Sprünge*], he stretches the concept of order and coherence in a piece of music to the breaking point.
> 3. His frequent overstepping of the rules makes them appear to be dispensable, whereas such rules are the inestimable expression of a healthy and unaffected sensibility.
> 4. He replaces the preference for a sense of beauty with a taste for the engaging, the robust, the overpowering, the intoxicating [*das Interessante, Starke, Erschütternde, Trunkenmachende*] – and it is precisely music, of all the arts, which fares the worst with such an exchange.

Disregard for the rules, harsh, wild sounds, loose construction, and overpowering outpourings (note how the intensification of the nominatives in item 4 is itself Beethovenian – from something which engages one's interest to something which overwhelms and intoxicates): these things seem to injure Grillparzer's sense of musical propriety, even while he recognizes the overriding importance of Beethoven's music.

If Grillparzer's concern over such loss of cultivation marks his fundamentally Biedermeier sensibility – the classic Biedermeier novel, Adalbert Stifter's *Der Nachsommer* (1857), devotes hundreds of unruffled pages to

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the cultivation of gardens and the arts – his split judgment resonates with many characterizations of the composer and his music that were already in circulation. The combination of reverence for Beethoven's music and lack of understanding of, or even lack of sympathy for, certain less than decorous aspects of that music is fundamental to the view of Beethoven circa 1827. There was a growing sense that a full appreciation of Beethoven's music would be relegated to a more educated and experienced posterity. In his obituary for the composer, the critic Friedrich Rochlitz wrote: "If his boldest, most powerfully gripping works are not yet honored, enjoyed, and loved, it is only because there are still not enough people who comprehend them and can form an audience for them. This number will grow, and so too will his fame."[3]

Robin Wallace, in documenting the reactions of critics contemporaneous with Beethoven, has used the phrase "awed but skeptical" to characterize the general attitude toward Beethoven's music of critics writing for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*.[4] Somewhat belying Rochlitz's hopes for posterity, this combination of awe and skepticism is still in evidence decades later in the writings of the critics Wilhelm von Lenz and Aléxandre Oulibicheff.[5] Lenz, in particular, made frequent reference to Beethoven's "chimera," meaning those passages where the composer goes beyond the dictates of musical taste into something monstrous and willfully transgressive. Thus the difficulties in Beethoven's music are fabled difficulties, and they add to his stature as an uncompromising artist: the struggles of the embattled, heroic artist are more sublime than euphonious.[6]

In his fear of the loss of musical cultivation in the face of Beethoven's imposing greatness, Grillparzer adumbrates the terms of a dichotomy which was to galvanize nineteenth-century thought on music: that of beauty and the sublime.[7] We shall see this dichotomy raise its head again, now adorned with a Prussian *Pickelhaube* (spiked helmet), when we consider Wagner's 1870 monograph on Beethoven.

Grillparzer was not the first, or even the most influential, literary personage to take a stand on the phenomenon that was Beethoven. A much more lasting contribution to the myth of Beethoven as an artistic hero was made by E. T. A. Hoffmann, the Berlin lawyer, musician, music critic, and fantastical man of letters. In a series of seminal essays and reviews he established a critical tradition that worked to substantiate the myth of Beethoven as an artistic hero.

As the representative of a more purely Romantic sensibility than was Grillparzer's, Hoffmann had no problems with the difficulties of Beethoven's music but rather heard in them the unmistakable signs of the presence of the inexpressible, the signature of the truly Romantic. Writing

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about Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in 1810, he suggested that "[Music] is the most romantic of all arts . . . Music reveals to man an unknown realm, a world quite separate from the outer sensual world surrounding him, a world in which he leaves behind all feelings circumscribed by the intellect in order to embrace the inexpressible."[8] Hoffmann went on to pronounce his now famous distinctions between Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven:[9]

> Haydn and Mozart, the creators of modern instrumental music, first showed us the art in its full glory; but the one who regarded it with total devotion and penetrated to its innermost nature is Beethoven . . .
>
> Haydn's compositions are dominated by a feeling of childlike optimism. His symphonies lead us through endless, green forest-glades, through a motley throng of happy people . . .
>
> Mozart leads us deep into the realm of spirits. Dread lies all about us yet withholds its torments and becomes more an intimation of infinity . . .
>
> In a similar way Beethoven's instrumental music unveils before us the realm of the mighty and the immeasurable . . .
>
> Haydn romantically apprehends the humanity in human life; he is more congenial to the majority. Mozart takes as his province the superhuman, magical quality residing in the inner self. Beethoven's music sets in motion the machinery of awe, of fear, of terror, of pain, and awakens that infinite yearning which is the essence of romanticism.

The triumvirate Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, the three pillars of the Viennese Classical Style, here find their classic characterizations: Haydn is but touched by the spirit of Hoffmann's distant realm – the result is a prelapsarian and pastoral music; Mozart crosses the threshold of that realm, and brings back intimations of infinity; Beethoven actually lives in the spirit-realm, takes on the full terrors of interiority, and sweeps the listener along with him into that infinite space.[10] By positioning Beethoven as the most powerfully possessed of the three, Hoffmann initiates the common view of the hierarchy and historical evolution implied in the succession of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Beethoven completes this dialectical triad and becomes the ideal Romantic artist, the only one truly at home in Hoffmann's spirit-realm of the infinite.

And how does Beethoven's music express infinity for Hoffmann? Through the music's teeming abundance and the way that its exuberant, almost chaotic, variety seems grounded by an underlying unity.[11] Perceiving that unity is an act of critical intuition akin to sensing the unity of creation amidst its overwhelming variety: the same mystical faculty of mind is put into play, and it brings with it the intimation of eternity.[12] Hoffmann helped create a situation rare in music history: the little understood works of a still living composer were accepted on faith as masterpieces of organic conception and sublime revelation, each held together

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by a deep and mysterious continuity which, in Hoffmann's words, "speaks only from spirit to spirit." In other words, Beethoven's music was heard to register less with the visible world of intellect than with the invisible domain of the spirit.

On the other hand, Hoffmann offers concrete evidence for his sense of coherence in Beethoven's music. In the Fifth Symphony review, he discusses the long-range development of thematic material, and he emphasizes the intense psychological engagement the music engenders. This combination of thematic process and psychological intensity clears the way for the anthropomorphic subject that is still frequently associated with Beethoven's themes and motives in criticism and analysis.

It is important to note that Hoffmann lived and worked in Berlin. In the early nineteenth century, Berlin was a city of growing cultural and political stature, home of a new university (founded in 1805 by Wilhelm von Humboldt) which professed a bold agenda for the merger of the concerns of the state and the arts. After Hoffmann's death (in 1822), the phenomenon of Beethoven's music would increasingly come to strike the perfect note with the cultural charter of this city of new beginnings. This was achieved largely through the proselytizing efforts of the Berlin critic and theorist Adolph Bernhard Marx, who was significantly influenced by Hoffmann's musical writings. Marx promoted the music of Beethoven not primarily from a literary perspective but from the cutting edge of contemporary musical thought.[13]

As one of the nineteenth century's most influential musical thinkers, Marx ultimately managed to institutionalize a view of Beethoven not far from Hoffmann's own. Although Marx spoke to Hoffmann only once (Hoffmann died shortly after Marx's arrival in Berlin), his first substantial publication was in fact an appreciation of Hoffmann's role as a musical thinker, which he wrote in 1823 as an appendix to Julius Hitzig's biography of Hoffmann and which adumbrates many of the great themes of his own critical agenda. In the following year, the Berlin music publisher Adolph Schlesinger appointed the thirty-year-old Marx as head editor of a new music periodical, the *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, a weekly newspaper which Schlesinger hoped would compete with the ever popular *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* of Leipzig. Given Marx's lack of journalistic experience, Schlesinger's choice was something of a gamble. And yet Marx's inexperience had a signal advantage that far outweighed any drawbacks: by not coming from an established journalistic tradition, Marx could more easily create a new ideal for the musical journal. Rather than concentrating on the detailed reporting of musical events, Marx's paper would provide a forum for higher-minded issues – it would treat music as a vital part of cultural and intellectual *Bildung*. Most impor-

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tantly, the *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* would prepare the public for a new age in musical art.

The founding composer of Marx's new age, the age of ideal music, was Beethoven. Marx viewed the whole of music history as a grand three-stage process of music's spiritual development. The first stage is simply one of "blessed play" – music learns the nature of its own parameters through childlike play and experiment; the second stage involves the expression of feelings; and the third rises to the expression of transcendent, spiritual content. While the music of Mozart culminates the second stage, Beethoven is the composer of the crowning ideal stage. The spiritual content Marx sought and found in Beethoven's instrumental music was not some timeless ideational essence, Romantic, Platonic, or otherwise, but rather the concretion of idealized and – given Marx's and Beethoven's historical provenance – politically charged human values, such as freedom and overcoming. Marx's leap into the compulsions of the moral domain adds a crucial note to Hoffmann's view of music's spiritual nature as the Romantic intimation of the infinite. For now the spirit of music is anchored in the moral bedrock of the age; and perhaps here we have again passed from the ethos of Romanticism to that of the Biedermeier-Vormärz.

Like Hoffmann before him, Marx argued that it was up to the critic to attempt to understand Beethoven's works, a task that would take more than one hearing, as well as a certain gift for divination. Marx's brief for musical hermeneutics consolidated the first stages of a continuing tradition of interpreting Beethoven's music as a kind of secular scripture. And this was not all. Marx went on to write one of the ninteenth century's most influential treatises on musical composition. Best known as the theorist who codified sonata form, he did so almost exclusively on the model of Beethoven's piano sonatas. Thus the pertinacity of the theoretical model of sonata form is mutually symbiotic with the work-oriented Beethoven paradigm in music criticism and analysis.[14]

The journalistic, pedagogical, and theoretical writings of A. B. Marx went a long way toward the canonization of Beethoven's music, which served both as the model for Marx's influential theory of musical form (and sonata form in particular) and as the foundation for what he deemed a new age of music history, based on the high spiritual claims of Beethoven's instrumental music.[15] For Marx and his generation, Beethoven was both a revolutionary herald of the future of Western music and the culminating figure of that music's history; we shall next encounter Beethoven elevated beyond the flesh and blood artist-hero to a more supratemporal mythological hero. It is Richard Wagner who rolls away the stone from Beethoven's tomb and finds that he is no longer there, that he has been resurrected.

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1870 Beethoven as Redeemer

> [T]oday it behooves us to show that, through this musician Beethoven, who speaks in the purest language of all peoples, the German spirit redeemed the spirit of man from profound disgrace. (Richard Wagner, *Beethoven* [1870])

What can Wagner mean by this? His words fashion Beethoven as a Christ figure, who brings the word of a holy power (the German spirit) to concrete, redemptive expression: as a universally understood language, Beethoven's music is the purest speech of all.[16] But in what sense can Beethoven and the German spirit be said to have redeemed humankind from spiritual disgrace? What in fact is the German spirit? And how is Beethoven's music a pure language?

We need first to be reminded of a remarkable and momentous coincidence: the year 1870 marks both the composer's hundredth birthday and Bismarck's triumph over Napoleon III in the Franco-Prussian War. Wagner's commemorative monograph on Beethoven makes the connection quite explicit, and he is not alone in this. There were a number of birthday celebrations for the composer in which he was unabashedly proclaimed as a political hero of the first stripe.[17] Thus Beethoven's symbolic rebirth as a redeemer is made to coincide with the symbolic birth of German unity that was attended by the Prussian victory over that old adversary, the French.

In addition to providing an appreciation of the German spirit, Wagner wished his Beethoven monograph to be perceived as a contribution to the philosophy of music.[18] Like Schopenhauer, Wagner associates music with the immediacy of the Will. This allows him to make a case for music's unique ability to commune with our most inward beings. Throughout the monograph, Wagner exploits a facile dichotomy between the inner world and the outer world, in order to privilege music and the ear over and against the plastic arts and the eye. The outer world is governed and perceived by the eye, which is satisfied with beauty and semblance; the inner world is the realm of the ear, which listens for the sublime. The outer world is a waking state that offers only appearances; the inner world is associated with the dream and with things spiritual, with prophecy and transcendence.

But music can in fact be the means of reconciling the two worlds, for with music, the outer world speaks to us in a way that resonates with our deepest being. Here Wagner defines music as the art that emerges from "this immediate consciousness of the unity of our inner essence with that of the external world."[19] Thus music itself is now a form of revelation, a philosophy of deeply inward experience. And it was Beethoven who

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brought music from the status of a debased artform to this sublime calling.[20]

In an interpretative move that, according to K. M. Knittel, irrevocably altered the subsequent reception history of Beethoven's late style, Wagner treats the composer's deafness not as a rationalization for some of the perceived difficulties of his later music but as an enabling condition for his preternatural inwardness.[21] Not unlike the blindness of the seer Teiresias, Beethoven's deafness becomes a martyrdom that guarantees his immortality.[22]

Beethoven's enhanced inwardness accounts for the power and magic of his music. Unhampered by any superficial and outward reliance on appearances, his music is galvanic; its every aspect "is raised to the supreme importance of a direct outpouring of his spirit."[23] Hence Wagner's famous formulation that everything in this music becomes melody, even the silences: he hears Beethoven's music as an all-encompassing effusion that coheres like one great melody. In this way, Beethoven emancipates melody from the detrimental and inconstant influence of fashion, elevating it to a universal human *Typus*.[24] This is why Wagner feels able to describe Beethoven's music as "the purest language of all peoples." Its inwardness, as from a pure source unsullied by the circumstances of mundane reality, creates a universality that "seems to set our deepest being into motion."[25] Such inward depth is natural, universal, and pure. And its presence is sublime.

Wagner's association of the inward with the sublime is absolutely crucial to his view of the role played by Beethoven in the triumph of the German spirit. For the German, "that which is pleasing is denied; as compensation, his truest thoughts and actions are inward and sublime."[26] The German spirit dismisses all that is merely pleasing; it, in fact, cannot be pleased. And thus a deaf composer's difficult music becomes the warrant of Germany's sublime destiny.

At the end of his monograph, Wagner reaches the point of great moment for his contemporary readers: if the inner world is the realm of the Germans, the outer world is inhabited by – the French. And now is the time to throw off the French yoke: "While German arms are victoriously driving toward the center of French civilization, we are suddenly seized with shame over our dependence on this civilization, shame that openly demands a rejection of Parisian fashionmongering."[27] When Beethoven freed music from the fetters of fashion he already began the process of this "most noble conquest"; the Beethovenian symphony brought "the new religion, the world-redeeming annunciation of sublime innocence" to a desecrated paradise.[28]

We may now refine Wagner's earlier definition of music as that which

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emerges from the consciousness of the unity of inner and outer worlds. What seems clear from the entire thrust of his monograph is that it is Beethoven's music which emerges from a consciousness of the unity of inner German essence and the outer world. This is how Beethoven's music redeems the spirit of humankind; it recreates the world in its own profound image, rescuing the world from the beautiful snares of the merely fashionable.

In his oft-cited interpretation of the Quartet in C♯ minor op. 131 – the centerpiece of his Beethoven monograph – Wagner actually portrays the composer engaged in this formidable task of remaking the world.[29] For Wagner, this arguably cyclic quartet (transformed material from the opening movement features heavily in the finale) becomes a mythopoetic symbol – it is figured as a day in the life of "our saint," one which takes him from waking back to sleeping. Wagner's image of a passing day is not only a cogent way to portray the unity of the whole work (all its movements are heard as part of the same trajectory); it also enjoys a venerable symbolic patrimony, invoking the great myths of cyclic return.

Wagner construes Beethoven's fugal first movement as a prayer of penance, uttered upon waking, in melancholy apprehension of the day ahead. The composer's prayer is answered: the D major second movement is the lovely consoling memory of a submerged dream image. And now Beethoven is ready to work. During the transitional third movement, he turns to his magic world. In the ensuing variation movement, he fully exercises his restored magical powers, transforming a graceful and profoundly innocent figure with unheard of variety, to his unremitting delight. He then turns his gaze outward in the fifth movement (Presto), illuminating the outer world with his inner happiness. Next he regards life itself, sinking into contemplation (in the Adagio sixth movement) about how he might make life dance (in the seventh and final movement). He wakes once again, and creates the "dance of the world itself," standing above this wild storm of heaven and hell in the smiling security that it is but a playful fantasy after all. And then night beckons, and his day is done.

From daybreak to nightfall – for Wagner, the whole piece replicates and reflects this larger cycle by means of an alternating series of dream states and waking states, of inward contemplation and outward propagation. The melancholy of the first movement is a condition of waking; it echoes the great fall of humankind. The second movement, like some Platonic memory, harks back to an earlier dream (remembering the last time the cycle was enacted?). Next, the creator submerges himself again in his interior world, emerging to illuminate the world in his own image and then, after yet another submersion, actually recreating the world. Finally he rests, presumably to begin it all again at another dawn.

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The result is a typically Wagnerian mythic stew, a conflation of the Judaeo-Christian creation myth with cyclical/mythical history and "the works and days" of human life (waking, remembering, finding oneself, emerging, creating, resting, and so on . . .). Beethoven himself is portrayed as a creator, whose mythic day consists of so many border crossings between visible and invisible worlds, inner and outer states. As such, his quartet – in Wagner's reading – may also be said to embrace the rhythm of Western epic, replete with outward journeys and inward, chthonic episodes; in its urge to contain everything within the space of a single day it is not unlike the Bloomsday of Joyce's *Ulysses*. Wagner needs all of this in his attempt to describe the creative process of the redeemer of Western music and the German spirit.[30]

Ultimately, Wagner's conjunction of inward spirituality, self-aggrandizing metaphysics, and a fervent nationalism both political and militant stands as a modern instantiation of that age-old formula for empire building: the symbiotic combination of a powerful idea and material power. His easy equation of music and philosophical depth, of art and the spiritually sublime, and his claim for the natural superiority of the invisible and inward over the visible and outward, together spell the particular attractions of the nineteenth-century Germanic empire of the spirit. In this vision, Beethoven's music becomes a powerful transhistorical force, engaged in a much larger struggle than simply pointing the way to future developments in musical style.

Yet, as always, Wagner's mirror distorts, tending to reflect and concentrate extreme elements. Other contemporary authors were decidedly less mythical in their treatment of Beethoven. In fact, this may well count as the great age of empirical musical biography. Surely Thayer's fact-centered approach to the biography of Beethoven seems the very antidote to Wagner's grandiose mythologizing. And Thayer's *Life of Beethoven* shared the reliable company of Jahn's biography of Mozart and Pohl's of Haydn. In line with literary Realism, the biographer was wont to stick to what were perceived as the facts; at the same time, music theorists began to invoke the natural sciences, with psychology and cognition replacing more Romantic views of the human spirit, while Gustav Nottebohm's groundbreaking work on Beethoven's sketchbooks provided evidence of all-too-human creative struggles on the part of the composer. Indeed these more empirical efforts form the level ground against which Wagner's enormous success may be gauged, for like his theater at Bayreuth, Wagner's oeuvre created a great resonant space extending above and below the German landscape, promising an ennobling escape into the billowing heights and boundless depths of the German spirit.

But the overarching theme of German musical thought toward the end

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of the nineteenth century – that to which all these different enterprises tended – was the emergent ascendancy of the Viennese Classical Style into something like an essentialist norm, the alpha and omega of Western musical history. And the ruling spirit of this imposing musical plateau was Beethoven, increasingly understood as a Classical composer in the broadest sense. In the section that follows, we will observe that Beethoven becomes not only Classical, but universal and natural as well, as the vision of what music could be shifted to a determination of what music should be.

1927 Beethoven as lawgiver and bearer of Classical values

> He did not revolutionize [musical] art; he did not invent new artistic means, laws, or forms; he released neither himself nor others from the traditional rules of his art . . . And just as he respected the laws of art, he respected those of reality. He never separated art and reality, never understood music as unconditionally absolute or used music as a surrogate for religion. His greatest works in fact serve the expression of moral concepts: the idea of Christianity and of the moral upbringing of man.
>
> (Arnold Schmitz, *Das romantische Beethovenbild* [1927])

Here, on the occasion of the centenary of Beethoven's death, the German musicologist Arnold Schmitz presides over the symbolic death of the Romantic image of Beethoven. In this manifesto-like peroration, Schmitz systematically deflates, point by point, the prevailing nineteenth-century view of the composer.[31] Schmitz's litany practically stands Grillparzer's nervous list on its head: we now discover that Beethoven did not overthrow authority; he did not dispense with rules; his music did not create its own religion but rather served Christian morality. In one century, Beethoven has gone from a symbol of exhilarating progress and enticingly dangerous revolution to one of upstanding normalcy and healthy morality.

If Wagner's vision of Beethoven and unconscious creation invoked a twilight state of dreams and wakings, we are now fully awake. For Schmitz purports to rub the sleep from our eyes, to dispel and banish all such fogs and vapors, to see Beethoven in the light of day, successfully delivered from the night sickness that is Romanticism. Where nineteenth-century critics portrayed the composer as genial child of nature, revolutionary, magician, and high priest, Schmitz seeks to recover the "genuine Beethoven" and his historical greatness – a greatness now seen to lie in Beethoven's service to the ideals of Classicism and moral well-being.[32]

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Schmitz's assumption that there is an identifiably genuine Beethoven, no longer in need of the distorting shadows that both unnerved and thrilled the likes of E. T. A. Hoffmann, grounded a more general agenda of sober reclamation undertaken by many prominent voices of German musical scholarship. This effort formed the common denominator of many of the German-language essays and books written to commemorate the 1927 centenary. In his own 1927 book on Beethoven, August Halm declared that "it behooves us to re-educate ourselves concerning Beethoven; to this end, a certain cool consideration may be more helpful than a purely emotive enthusiasm, such as has been far too often encouraged by custom."[33]

The call of writers like Schmitz and Halm to reject a tradition now perceived to be perniciously subjective found a receptive audience in postwar Germany. For they were addressing a wounded culture having every reason to distance itself from the ecstatic extremes of Romanticism and, more immediately, Expressionism, a culture more than ready for a *neue Sachlichkeit*. And there was a powerful political motivation for this view of Beethoven: downplaying the idea of Beethoven as a revolutionary worked to dissociate the composer from French revolutionary ideals. This proved crucial in many of the right-wing, ultra-nationalist readings of Beethoven which appeared around 1927 in Germany.[34]

In line with this new agenda, musical thought in 1920s Germany takes a decidedly objective turn, namely, the turn to form. Halm himself conceptualized music as an objective, spiritual power, made visible through its form.[35] And he celebrated Beethoven's music above all as a triumph of formative power, of *Gestaltung*.[36] Thus Beethoven's music registers on a supra-individual level – Halm discourages interpretative conflations of the music with the personality of the composer, claiming instead that even the most individually idiosyncratic passages in Beethoven's music serve a coherent whole. As an example of this, he cites the famously premature horn call in the first movement of the *Eroica* as an expression not of some personal whim but of Beethoven's overmastering sense for form.[37] Here we observe Beethoven's music becoming more and more objective, the personal idiosyncrasies of his musical style heard more and more as supra-individual, natural forces.

Beethoven enjoyed pride of place in Halm's grand view of the forces of music history. Halm understood instrumental music to be the highest testimony to the viability and power of music. And within instrumental music, he distinguished two great "cultures": the fugal and concerto forms of Bach, and the sonata forms of Beethoven and Bruckner. He described sonata form as the "conclusive form of great music." [38] It is an altogether higher *Gestaltung*, for in its dramatic temporality and a priori

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finitude it comes closest to life itself. As Halm exclaims: "This is a truly living music; this is earthly life!"[39]

As a life force, Beethoven's music counts as a natural phenomenon, but it is emphatically not to be heard as nature allowed to run riot. In the sentence that concludes Halm's book we hear that Beethoven's great achievement is to have formed a great unity out of the metamorphosing temporality of life: "Where Beethoven succeeded – and succeeded so perfectly that we can practically grasp the idea with our hands – was in [creating] a music of phases, of transformations, of ages and lifetimes, that nonetheless forms an inseparable, grandiose unity: this was an achievement [*Errungenschaft*] in the history of the musical spirit whose worth will never be exceeded."[40]

Halm's apotheosis contains all the reigning elements of what has been called the Beethoven paradigm: the music's message is utterly palpable (the idea that can be grasped with the hands); the music achieves a unique integration of compelling temporal process and oneness on a grand scale; and this achievement is understood to be an *Errungenschaft*, an achievement that had to be struggled for (as opposed to a *Leistung*, for instance). Beethoven is still a hero, his music is unmistakable in its message and force, and it attains and expresses the highest synthesis of the temporal and the spatial, the dramatic and the epic, the circumstantial and the monumental.

Other signal trends in the growing analytical literature around Beethoven rallied to the same call of synthesis and unity. The rise of motivic analysis, for example, culminating in the Schoenbergian ideal of the developing variation, can be understood as a way of charting both the music's temporal process and its synchronic integrity. The motive had already been characterized in the theoretical work of several nineteenth-century theorists (such as A. B. Marx and Hugo Riemann) as a kind of seed, an elemental, germinal utterance. But whereas this idea remained for them largely a suggestive metaphor, analysts now transformed it into unswerving law and sought to demonstrate it in case after case.

In one of the more proselytic treatments of this burgeoning agenda, published in 1925 and entitled "Die Sonatenform Beethovens: Das Gesetz," Walter Engelsmann describes Beethovenian thematic/motivic process with a metaphor that promises even more inevitability than the usual metaphor of organic growth: "We thus understand the Beethovenian motive as the germinal seed [*Keim*] of the sonata, from which the course of the work explodes outward – without addition – only through variation of its proper content."[41] The motivic seed now harbors an explosive force [*Explosivkraft*], and the unfolding of the form becomes an inevitable, supercharged trajectory. After thus bringing the organic

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metaphor into line with the age of modern warfare, Engelsmann closes his article with the following formulation, laying down the law of his title with stentorian capitals:

> He who is capable of understanding all [Beethoven's] remaining works as having grown in the same sense, will be able – with me – to form this law: EVERY SONATA OF BEETHOVEN IS DEVELOPED, IN ALL ITS PHRASES, SECTIONS, AND THEMES, FROM A SINGLE MAIN THEME OR MAIN MOTIVE.[42]

If Engelsmann's words articulate a directive that was to keep motive hunters happily motivated for decades to come, the inception and rise of Schenkerian depth analysis was to enjoy a more widespread credibility and respect, at least among Anglo-American scholars. For with its deeply submerged *Ursatz* and the various middleground stages lying between the *Ursatz* and the sounding foreground of the composition, Schenker's theory appeared capable of exploring and charting those trackless interior spaces that Wagner and others could only shadow forth. In the 1920s, Schenker promoted and developed his new analytical methodology in a series of analyses published in a journal entirely devoted to his own work and tellingly titled *Der Tonwille*. The metaphorical implication is clear: music has a will of its own, is a natural world unto itself. Schenker's elaborate subtitle includes the phrase "in witness of unchanging laws of musical art." Again the concept of natural law is invoked – music is a natural force, subject to its own laws. And Beethoven's music would, for Schenker, be a primary witness of these laws. For Beethoven's Fifth Symphony was the subject of Schenker's flagship analysis in *Der Tonwille*, and, indeed, each important stage of Schenker's thought is marked with an imposing analysis of a work by Beethoven.[43]

Both motivic analysis and Schenkerian depth analysis purport to objectify the intuitively perceived suasions of temporality, process, and unity in the music of Beethoven. This was the nascent age of structuralism, after all, an age of enhanced confidence in the ability of the human mind to plumb its own depths, to descry the very forms and structures of its thought. The emphasis on musical form – especially so-called inner form – in the writings of critics and analysts such as Halm and Schenker may well serve as the transitional link in completing the shift from nineteenth- to twentieth-century views. With the rise of psychology and notions of latency, a science of the unconscious continued to develop, wherein the inward is joined with the profound, and the two are shown to be subject to laws as immutable as those which govern the transactions of the natural world. This agenda reveals the kinship between these two ages, for all their cries to the contrary. Analysts of the twentieth century sought to objectify the still prevailing assumption about the profundity and

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interiority of Beethoven's music; continuing a trend begun so earnestly by Hugo Riemann, they sought to enunciate the invisible laws underlying the musical surface. The compelling quality of Beethoven's music is thus associated with the compulsions of natural law – anything so compelling must be law – as the process of objectification continues.

Related to the idea that Beethoven's music is best understood as an expression of natural musical law is the emergent view, in the discourse surrounding Beethoven in 1927, that his music expresses healthy normality and moral wellbeing. Here too, the values of form and balance are generally invoked – Classical values, to be sure. For example, even while railing against the "a priori fancies" of German music theorists, the great English critic Donald Francis Tovey advocated a similar emphasis on form.[44] The difference was in his approach: whereas Riemann went to great systematic lengths to develop his notion of the prototypical eight-bar period, Tovey concentrated on the proportions and details of individual musical forms as they moved through time; he insisted that such close study of foreground detail was a sine qua non for an understanding of form.[45]

Tovey was interested above all in demonstrating the temporal logic of Beethoven's forms. In a well-known essay written in 1927, Tovey undertakes to show the "fundamental normality" of the same piece celebrated so portentously in Wagner's 1870 monograph: the late Quartet in C♯ minor op. 131, a work that was generally considered to be Beethoven's most original and idiosyncratic. The burden of Tovey's analysis is a demonstration of how the various movements draw on the sonata-form ethos, by now the prevailing mark of musical normality. By the end of his analysis, Tovey's watchword is unity: motivic and harmonic links between the finale and the first movement prompt him to declare that "[t]he wheel has come full circle. The whole quartet is a perfect unity, governed by the results of the initial event of the first movement . . ."[46] With the detection of this unity, Tovey seems to consider his case clinched: op. 131 is, after all, a strict and reasonable conception.

In a compelling and sympathetic account of Tovey's achievement as a critic, Joseph Kerman emphasizes his Victorian sensibility.[47] It is this sensibility that prompts Tovey to characterize the values of form, balance, and unity (and even drama, the mainspring of the Classical style in his view) as healthy, normal values, values that evince a strongly positive moral force. And Tovey is not alone in understanding Beethoven primarily as a model of ethical wellbeing. In two other essays stemming from 1927, the renowned German musicologists Guido Adler and Hermann Abert independently arrived at the same conclusion: the combination of urgency, form and balance in Beethoven's music lends that music a moral force that is thoroughly Classical.

Both Abert and Adler talk about the music as holding great opposing

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forces in balance. According to Adler, in Beethoven's music "the demonic [*Dämonie*] . . . binds itself with crystalline reason and clear understanding. Each holds the balance over and against the other."[48] Above all, form is to be ranked over *Idee* as the determining factor in his music.[49] For Abert, Beethoven balances the heroic with the contemplative. He notes, for instance, that works with a fully developed scherzo always contain a big Adagio (which represents the urge to sink into the All, as opposed to the scherzo, which strives to maintain one's own self in the face of the All). This dichotomy of Self and All is initially presented in the first movement as a primal conflict (*Urkonflikt*), a powerful play of opposites, which are then separated in the middle movements and ultimately synthesized in the finale.[50] Again the values of balance and synthesis, Classical values, come to the fore.

Finally, both men find ethical force at the foundation of Beethoven's art. Implicit here is an admission that there is dangerous energy at large in this music – remember Adler's *Dämonie* – energy that is somehow contained and/or balanced by an act of will. Indeed, Abert talks about Beethoven's "powerful ethical will,"[51] Adler about his "urge for truth."[52] Beethoven confronts the entire range of human experience with unflinching honesty. Adler defines Beethoven's fundamental essence as straightforwardness (*Gradlinigkeit*) and true ethos (*wahres Ethos*).[53] And Abert, who studied Classics in Berlin and wrote a dissertation on the ethos of Greek music, culminates his essay by associating Beethoven with a beloved Classical ideal, that of beautiful nobility and goodness (*kalokagathía*).[54]

Beethoven's music became for this generation the unsurpassable model of a redeeming, Classical art. For Tovey, his music sounds as the epitome of Victorian normality and health; for Abert and Adler it is a viable moral force, a force for truth and goodness. Such things seemed in short supply in the wake of the Great War: the Beethoven of 1927 stands as a fitting representative for all that this battered age feared had been lost in the madness. Now his music no longer fights for a fabled future, as it was heard to do one hundred years earlier, but for a stable and reassuring past, increasingly capable of being objectified; there is now less of "the starry skies above" and more of "the moral law within."

1970 Beethoven as cultural force and cultural product

> Between Beethoven then and Beethoven now stands the history of Beethoven reception.
> (Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht)

Thus begins Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht's 1970 monograph entitled *Zur Geschichte der Beethoven-Rezeption*.[55] It would be hard to situate the

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subject of his study, the history of Beethoven reception, more immediately and dramatically; beyond this, Eggebrecht's words broach an arresting predicament: there is now no longer any such thing as direct, unmediated access to Beethoven. Schmitz's landmark book of 1927 already served to make one aware of Beethoven reception. But Eggebrecht goes further. If Schmitz's prevailing agenda was to get at the real Beethoven by cleansing his image of the intervening reception tradition, Eggebrecht argues that there is no "real Beethoven" waiting beneath the accretions of history; rather, Beethoven is fully and irrevocably a construction of that history. Eggebrecht's monograph articulates a broad shift from the study of an essential Beethoven to the study of the ways we construct him. As such, his work underwrites the last stage in our own trajectory: for the rise of reception studies signals the birth of our awareness of the constructed hero, now more fully an object, a product of cultural and ideological forces.

Eggebrecht's words, above all, emphasize our sense of distance from Beethoven. They signal a loss of faith in an immediate connection to Beethoven, a recognition that what we have been clinging to all these years is a myth, a construction. What happens when this connection is lost? We might be tempted to answer that it is no longer Beethoven himself who is the subject of our collective scholarly archeology but the Beethoven myth. If we can no longer hope to reach the master himself with our efforts, we can at least console ourselves with the fascinations of two hundred rich years of reception history. Following Eggebrecht, authors as diversely motivated and trained as Ulrich Schmitt, Martin Geck, David B. Dennis, Tia DeNora, and myself have traced this history, with its often nefarious appropriations and constructions of Beethoven.[56]

And yet there is much work that continues to flourish in the study of Beethoven's sketches, the clarification and interpretation of biographical issues, as well as interpretative studies that purport to get closer to Beethoven's actual compositional intentions. Thus it is not simply the case that we have collectively forgone the study of Beethoven himself; instead, what now characterizes all these studies is the urge to get behind and beyond the myth, to understand the phenomenon Beethoven not as something messianic and by definition larger than life but as the human object of various forces – be they cultural, ideological, economic, political, or psychological.

One manifestation of this effort is the work being done to assign Beethoven a meaningful place in a broader cultural history (or ideological history), to reinsert him into the flow of human time, above which his music has always been heard to rise, as a timelessly valid aesthetic force, whether Romantic, Classical, or natural. Beethoven is now often studied

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as a cogent element of history-bound cultural practice: William Kinderman, Thomas Sipe, and Maynard Solomon, for example, have argued that Beethoven's music projects certain Schillerian aesthetic values;[57] the work of Adorno – who came to light for Anglo-American musicology in the late 1970s, thanks to the brave efforts of Rose Rosengard Subotnik – linked Beethoven with Hegel;[58] and some of my own work has situated Beethoven within the value system of the *Goethezeit* as a whole. All of these authors attempt to find Beethoven within the image of his culture, to bring his music back into the arena of cultural practice after years of formalist exemption from the perceived contamination of history.

Another symptom of our age is the way in which we attempt to reconstruct an image of Beethoven in the fashion of a mosaic, as we collectively fill in the picture of Beethoven's personal and compositional paraphernalia, the contents of his pockets, the types of paper he wrote on, the specifics of the concert and patronage scene, the hard data of his popularity and his presence, what he was worth, etc. Our once highly touted spiritual bond with the composer is bracketed off as the insidious sign of ideological prepossession, or, at the least, as something irrelevant, personal, and anecdotal. Taking its place is a perhaps sublimating mania for knowing everything external that we can about him. In this sense, we have traded invisible bond for visible surfeit. Thus we are busy reconstructing something like a Beethoven for the digital age, a Beethoven of ever finer resolution, each square of the mosaic requiring its own team of specialists, each square becoming itself a mosaic, in a kind of fractal proliferation. No longer can any one person control a vision of the whole.

Related to this tendency is a process that may well be analogous to the ritual dismemberment of the hero, namely, the translation of the mythic composer into the objects of kitsch. Here is perhaps the ultimate objectifying of Beethoven, his imposing figure pulverized into a steady tide of commercial flotsam, representing a new kind of universality: the Beethoven doorbell, busts of all sizes and materials, refrigerator magnets, T-shirts, a popular disco version of the Fifth Symphony, and the movie *Beethoven*, not actually about the composer but about a slobbering St. Bernard of the same name who galvanizes a nineties family in suburban America. Kitsch objects that involve musical sound invariably rely on the amputated opening motive of the Fifth Symphony as both sound-bite and talisman; there could hardly be a more cogent symbol of the dismemberment of Beethoven.

If the proliferation of kitsch objects is a way of undermining the myth by turning inside out the exalted attractions of the reliquary and bringing Beethoven's alleged universality up to speed in the age of global

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communication and commercialism, there are other, more studied attempts to debunk the myth and destroy its hold on us. Within the realm of reception studies, these include the work of Ulrich Schmitt, who associates the nineteenth-century taste for Beethoven with the taste for power and speed that was propagated by such technological advances as the railway system. This kind of linkage is demythologizing in itself, for the bond of the spirit is explained away as a fascination with technology. Another striking move toward the demythologization of Beethoven is Tia DeNora's analysis of the politics of musical patronage in Vienna; she argues that the perceived greatness of Beethoven's music might be largely a politically motivated construction of the Viennese aristocracy, who were fostering an emergent ideology of "serious music." Or consider those studies whose authors explore the sinister side of Beethoven reception, charting the many insidious political appropriations of the composer: Martin Geck on the *Eroica*, Andreas Eichhorn on the Ninth, David B. Dennis on Beethoven and German politics. Nothing curdles one's awe of this music faster than the realization of the extent to which it was useful to fascism. Another contemporary mode of demythologizing the composer is represented by the rise of psychoanalytic biography, finding its high-water-mark in Maynard Solomon's 1977 *Beethoven*; here the great composer becomes a sympathetic object of powerful psychological forces.[59] Finally, the last decade has witnessed attempts not only to debunk the Beethoven paradigm but to indict it as perniciously masculinist. This latter trend constitutes a more proactive way to get beyond the myth, or "get down off the beanstalk," in Susan McClary's memorable phrase.[60]

The case of Beethoven and his reception offers a distinctly profiled history of the trajectory of canon formation and deformation in the modern Western world. Though admittedly somewhat arbitrary, our parsing of the history of Beethoven reception into four separate stages has at the least allowed us to capture some of the shape-shifting ways of the canonized figure: first, Beethoven points to the future as a preternaturally empowered subject; then he becomes a suprasubjective, almost godlike, redeemer; then an objective, essentialized dispenser of natural law, pointing, if anywhere, to the past; and lastly he is rendered a mere product, or symptom, of a now suspect bourgeois culture.

Of course, strong traces of each earlier stage still inform the succeeding stages, and running through them all is the undiminished viability of Beethoven's music – whether as the ultimate "music of the subject" (or, according to Adorno's view of his late style, the ultimate critique of that music), the ultimate realization of the Viennese Classical Style, the ultimate embodiment of the German artistic spirit, the ultimate exemplar of

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Victorian musical soundness, or the ultimate music of masculinist power. Even now, after a century seemingly intent on annihilating all formerly comforting illusions of greatness and transcendent authority offered by the leading figures in our history, we have not yet managed to put the Beethoven myth behind us. For Beethoven continues to require that we grapple with him, continues to ask much of us, to call us out. This, more than anything, is why we cannot let him go: his music remains a sounding provocation to what we are pleased to think of as our better selves.

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