The Sound of Revolution? On the Revolutionary Nature of Beethoven's Third Symphony (1805)

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1. **Introduction**

On April 7, 1805, Beethoven's Third Symphony (also known to us as the *Eroica*) went into its first public premiere at the Theater an der Wien. It was part of a benefit concert for violinist Franz Clement, a friend of Beethoven's, and it was dedicated to Prince Joseph Franz Maximilian Lobkowitz – Beethoven's chief noble patron at the time, whose Kapellmeister Anton Wranitzky is reported to had to have hired twenty-two extra musicians for this performance alone.[1] Word had already gone around that something unusual was coming. Some invited guests had already had the chance to listen to the piece at one of the private rehearsals in Lobkowitz's palaces. Georg August von Griesinger, in a report to publisher Gottfried Härtel, writes about '[a new] Symphony [that had been] heard at Academies at Prince Lobkowitz's' and was affirmed by both Beethoven's admirers and detractors as 'a work of genius'. He continues: 'Some people say that there is more in it than in Haydn and Mozart, that the Symphony-Poem has been brought to new heights! Those who are against it find that the whole lacks rounding out; they disapprove of the piling up of colossal ideas.'[2] A critic at the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, who must have been present at one of the private rehearsals, was less generous. Still before the public premiere, he warns future listeners for a 'long composition, exceedingly difficult to perform, [which] is actually a very broadly expanded, bold, and wild fantasia'. In listening to this work, one cannot get away from encountering 'much that is strident and bizarre, so that an overview of the whole is obscured and the unity is almost completely lost', he concludes.[3]

And indeed, the audience at the public premiere must have been befuddled. To early nineteenth-century Viennese ears, the music was 'puzzling' and 'profligate' to say the least. And there were no program notes to help them get only a slightly better grasp on this 'rambling piece full of bizarre ideas'. Swafford reports that Beethoven's conducting was outlandish. 'During loud passages, he rose up on his toes, windmilling his arms as if he were trying to take wing; in soft passages he all but crept under the music stand.' The audience sat through the strange, epic first movement, which was 'nearly impossible to digest at first hearing'. And even the best connoisseurs 'lost track of the seemingly half-formed themes bustling past, waited for familiar formal landmarks that never clearly appeared, for resolutions and climaxes that never quite happened'. They heard the (intentional) horn entrance over the wrong chord before the

[1] Tomislav Volek and Jaroslav Macek, 'Beethoven's Rehearsals at the Lobkowitz's', *The Musical Times* 127:1716 (1986), pp. 75-80, at 78.
[2] Quoted in: Jan Swafford, *Beethoven. Anguish and Triumph* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2014), pp. 396-7, to whom I am also indebted larger parts of the vivid description of this premiere.
[3] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 397.

recapitulation and assumed it was an embarrassing mistake.[4] Young Carl Czerny – the later renowned piano pedagogue – was present at the premiere and reported that somewhere in the middle of the first movement somebody yelled, 'I'll give another kreuzer if the thing will only stop!'[5] According to Swafford, listeners must have found the second-movement *Marcia funebre* easier to grasp, which, despite its rather unusual form, was by far not as complex as the first movement and was easily recognizable as a French-style funeral march. The energetic and delightful scherzo might even have garnered some applause. But for the Viennese audience, the finale variations 'with their tone of mingled ballet music and heroic perorations' would have been strangest of all. The applause Beethoven received after the last notes resounded was scanty at most. Beethoven was 'visibly piqued' by it and 'refused to acknowledge it'.[6]

The tone of the initial reviews was generally sceptical. Most were cold, but respectful nonetheless, such as the critic in *Der Freymüthige*, writing that 'to the public the symphony was too difficult, too long, and B. himself was too impolite, since he did not nod in acknowledgement of those who did applaud.' Others were less restrained and more direct, such as the critic in the *Berlinische Musikalische Zeitung*, writing that '[the] new Beethoven Symphony in E♭ is so shrill and complicated that only those who worship the failings and merits of this composer with equal fire, which at times borders on the ridiculous, could find pleasure in it.'[7] In spite of the fact that the general tone of the reviews definitely grew more approbative in the next few years, many critics, musicians, musicologists and historians have happily run off with the early reviews, stoking the Romantic myth of Beethoven as a genius that was never understood in his own time.

1.1: Which Beethoven? An Historiographical Overview

Debates surrounding the 'real nature' of Beethoven's music are not new and still keep many a historical and musicological mind preoccupied, but a quick glance at the literature on the subject reveals that a pervasive 'Romantic' way of thinking has taken a firm hold on it throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – and among many probably still has. Characteristic of this strand of thinking is that it transforms (and almost deifies, one could argue) the man Beethoven into a true *genius*, placing the composer totally outside the stream of ordinary time. One could regard E. T. A. Hoffmann's (1776-1822) enthusiastic 1813 essay on 'Beethoven's Instrumental

[4] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 397.
[5] From: Alexander Wheelock Thayer, *The Life of Ludwig van Beethoven*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1964), p. 375.
[6] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 398.
[7] From: Swafford, *Beethoven*, pp. 399-400.

Music' as a founding document for this Romantic approach to Beethoven's music – although the roots of this Romantic way of thinking in general reach way further back in time. This essay has grounded certain assumptions about music and musicians that have persisted ever since.

Taruskin characterizes Hoffmann's Beethoven as 'the idea of the romantic sublime multiplied to the *n*th power'.[8] A quote of Hoffmann gives us a sense of the exalted tone of his ravings:

> [Beethoven's instrumental music] opens to us the realm of the immense and immeasurable. Luminous rays of light shoot through this realm's deep night, and we become aware of the giant shadows surging back and forth, enclosing us more and more narrowly until they destroy *us*, but not the torment of endless longing, in which every delight, which has climbed aloft in jubilant tones, sinks back and falls, and yet in this torment – consuming love, hope, and joy, but not destroying them – which seeks to burst our breasts with a harmonious consonance of all passions – let us live on, delighted seers of the supernatural![9]

In response to the contemporary critics of Beethoven's music, Hoffmann writes with a tint of a pretentious smirk that they are simply not capable of understanding it. 'The musical rabble is oppressed by Beethoven's mighty genius; in vain they seek to rebel against it.'[10]

Hoffmann's exultant characterization of Beethoven has done far more than only to reflect some of the Romantic viewpoints of 1813. It laid the chief foundation for a whole new way of thinking about art and artists, Beethoven and his music in particular – a way of thinking that later Romantic generations eagerly clung on to. As Swafford writes, they saw Beethoven's music as 'a revelation of the individual consciousness and personality: the individual hero, fundamental to the Romantic vision of the world. [They] turned away from what Novalis called "the cold voice of Reason" and exalted the passionate, the unattainable, the unimaginable, the

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[8] Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music: Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Vol. II (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010), p. 648.

[9] E. T. A. Hoffmann, 'Beethoven's Instrumental-Musik' (1813), in: *E. T. A. Hoffmanns sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1, ed. C. G. von Maassen, transl. Bryan R. Simms (Munich and Leipzig: G. Müller 1908). The English translation from German is mine. The original: 'So öffnet uns auch Beethovens Instrumentalmusik das Reich des Ungeheuern und Un ermeßlichen. Glühende Strahlen schießen durch dieses Reiches tiefe Nacht, und wir werden Riesenschatten gewahr, die auf- und abwogen, enger und enger *uns* einschließen und uns vernichten, aber nicht den Schmerz der unendlichen Sehnsucht, in welcher jede Lust, die schnell in jauchzenden Tönen emporgestiegen, hinsinkt und untergeht, und nur in diesem Schmerz, der Liebe, Hoffnung, Freude in sich verzehrend, aber nicht zerstörend, unsere Brust mit einem vollstimmigen Zusammenklange aller Leidenschaften zersprengen will, leben wir fort und sind entzückte Geisterseher!'

[10] Hoffmann, 'Beethoven's Instrumental-Musik'. Original: 'Den musikalischen Pöbel drückt Beethovens mächtiger Genius; er will sich vergebens dagegen auflehnen.'

sublime, the great and terrible.'[11] Lockwood notes how Beethoven became a towering figure over all the music of the nineteenth century, 'like a figure on a high plateau, one that many later nineteenth-century composers aspired to reach, each in his own way, each with a sense of the need to integrate their experience of Beethoven with the current stylistic conditions of their own generation and to find their individual voices within that generation.'[12]

After Hoffmann's essay, it was primarily Adolf Bernhard Marx (1795-1866) who defined the parameters of Beethoven criticism in the first half of the nineteenth century. On the *Eroica*, he wrote: '[this is] not merely a great work, like others; rather it is […] decisive for the entire sphere of our art […] a work that brought music to a new and higher plane of consciousness.'[13] And just as Hoffmann and Marx were the foremost critics for the first half of the nineteenth century, nobody less than the towering figure of Richard Wagner (1813-1883) was so for the second half. Behind the *Eroica*, he wrote in an 1841 essay, sat a creative genius who 'saw before him the territory within which he could accomplish the same thing that Bonaparte had achieved in the fields of Italy.'[14]

And the Romantic Beethoven interpreters happily went on through the twentieth century – and their manner of thinking is still ubiquitous today. And since it is ubiquitous, their ideas come so natural to us that many of us have implicitly or explicitly subscribed to them – even those who have never read a word about or listened to a single note of Beethoven. In that sense, Taruskin is right when he speaks of a 'watershed that produced the modern musical world in which we all now live', continuing that 'to learn about it will be in large part to learn about ourselves' – and what is worth more the effort than that?[15]

In his monumental 1929 Beethoven biography, Robert Schauffler cast Beethoven as 'The Man Who Freed Music' – a catch phrase that has persisted ever since.[16] Similarly, and more recently, Scott Burnham described the *Eroica* as the 'one work [by which] Beethoven is said to liberate music from the stays of eighteenth-century convention, singlehandedly bringing music into a new age by giving it a transcendent voice equal to Western man's most cherished

[11] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 367.
[12] Lewis Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies: An Artistic* Vision (New York: W.W. Norton & Company 2015), p. 66.
[13] From: Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, pp. 64-5; see for a more extended discussion on Marx (as well as on other critics): Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1995) and Robin Wallace, 'Beethoven's Critics: An Appreciation', in: Wayne M. Senner, ed., *The Critical Reception of Beethoven's Compositions by His Germanic Contemporaries* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2001), pp. 1-14.
[14] From: Burnham, *Beethoven Hero*, p. xv.
[15] Taruskin, *Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p. 648.
[16] Robert Haven Schauffler, *Beethoven: The Man Who Freed Music* (New York: Doubleday 1927).

values'.[17] Carl Schmitt's pivotal work on Political Romanticism is steeped in the idea of the artist as Romantic creative genius, with Beethoven (of course) as leading figure.[18] In recent years, Steven Cassedy has even gone as far as to resolutely set his sights on the waxing group of scholars criticize the Romantic myth surrounding Beethoven, arguing 'How E. T. A. Hoffmann Got It Right'.[19]

Since scholars – historians in particular – are generally out on tearing down each other's ideas, it should not astound anyone that the Romantic myth has not gone without some serious responses. Aside from all nuances, these critics of the Romantic myth in general have one common denominator, namely that they pull the Romantic genius back down from heaven to the earth – making him into a mere human being who is primarily preoccupied with his own little interests and stripped of any special aureole whatsoever. This often boils down to something like: 'he just wrote what people wanted to hear' – which has in turn cleared the path for further-reaching accusations of a creeping conservatism, if not outright collaboration. As Rhys Jones writes, 'it is alleged that the music […] rings with the sound of reaction'.[20] Let me give just two examples here.

Nicholas Mathew has written that Beethoven 'was always in some sense a collaborator', locating the composer's political voice in the line of least resistance. He argues that Beethoven did care to behave politically indeed, but that the outcome was scarcely subversive. Works such as *Wellingtons Sieg oder die Schlacht bei Vittoria* and *Der glorreiche Augenblick*, both composed in honour of the recrudescent monarchs at the Congress of Vienna, testify to that.[21] Stephen Rumph goes even further in recasting Beethoven's music – that of his late style in particular – as an 'active embrace of counter-revolution, anti-Enlightenment mysticism, and medieval nostalgia, situating the music in an historical and philosophical trajectory much indebted to Schlegel, Novalis, and Müller.'[22] As early as 1809, he writes, Beethoven was forced 'to reconsider and temper his revolutionary enthusiasm.'[23]

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[17] Burnham, *Beethoven Hero*, p. xvi.
[18] Carl Schmitt, *Politische Romantik* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot 1997).
[19] Steven Cassedy, 'Beethoven the Romantic: How E. T. A. Hoffmann Got It Right', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70:1 (2010), pp. 1-37.
[20] Rhys Jones, 'Beethoven and the Sound of Revolution in Vienna, 1792-1814', *The Historical Journal* 57:4 (2014), pp. 947-71, at 948.
[21] Nicholas Matthew, *Political Beethoven: New Perspectives in Music History and Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2012), p. 13.
[22] Jones, 'Beethoven and the Sound of Revolution in Vienna', p. 949; Stephen J. Rumph, *Beethoven after Napoleon: Political Romanticism in the Late Works* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2004), pp. 49-57, 169-94.
[23] Rumph, *Beethoven after Napoleon*, p. 107; one might also include Barry Cooper, *The Beethoven Compendium: A Guide to Beethoven's Life and Music* (New York: Thames & Hudson 1992) in this list, where

Both the Beethoven-as-romantic-genius approach and the Beethoven-as-collaborator approach are not without problems. As Jones rightly mentions, the Romantics have sought to place the composer wholly outside the stream of ordinary time.[24] They reinvented Beethoven. They separated the human being Beethoven from a newly created artist-hero 'whose suffering produces works of awe-inspiring greatness that give listeners otherwise unavailable access to an experience that transcends all worldly concerns.'[25] In his *Kreisleriana* (1813), Hoffmann wrote of Beethoven that '[His] Kingdom is not of this world' – making an explicit reference to the world-redeeming figure of Christ.[26] The view of the Romantics is a sacralising one. It is Christian through-and-through. It transforms the artist into a Messiah-like figure. But in doing so, they only forget about the man behind it. The man that is inextricably intertwined with his place, time, and ideas.

The Beethoven-as-collaborator approach represents the other extreme, as it were. Instead of world-redeeming Messiah, it makes from the artist not much more than a slave of his time and place. Just as the Romantic view is Christian through-and-through, this approach is deterministic through-and-through. It is a relatively easy position to defend. It is 'the way of least resistance', to retaliate Mathews own words. That might also explain why scholars seeking to denounce the Romantic approach generally are so eager to adopt this one. After all, one only has to demonstrate that there are similarities between the work that Beethoven produced and the demands of those in power, the audience, or what have you – and one has confirmed one's own hypothesis. Placing a stronger emphasis on historical and political context than the Romantics do, this approach often comes to conclusions that might contain some valuable truths, but they are half-truths nonetheless. By neglecting the person behind the artist, they overlook some important things. The question which I am left to answer, then, is: what things?

Recently, Rhys Jones has cleared the way for a new approach. Namely, the approach of 'Beethoven as a man of the tumultuous moment'. And since Jones writes on the Beethoven of his 'heroic' phase that 'despite the politically muted outcome of this music in Vienna, the sonic and rhetorical properties of the French Revolution were absolutely central to the Beethovenian sound world', one could call this approach – specifically focused on Beethoven's 'heroic phase'

Cooper argues how Beethoven was not at all a proponent of *egalité* and the people as a whole were mere rabble to him. And indeed, Beethoven is reported to have said later in life: 'Vox populi, vox dei […] I never believed in it', *ibid.*, p. 145.

[24] Jones, 'Beethoven and the Sound of Revolution in Vienna', p. 948.

[25] Taruskin, *Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p. 649.

[26] E. T. A. Hoffmann, 'Kreisleriana' (1813), in: *Musikalische Novellen und Aufsätze. Vollständige Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 1, ed. Edgar Istel (Regensburg: G. Bosse 1921), p. 162.

– the ‘revolutionary’ one.[27] To continue using the words of Jones: ‘Through myriad compositional, instrumental and narrative devices, Beethoven’s musical mimesis not merely reinforced, but actually enacted the sort of political participation inspired by the ideological appeals of French Revolutionary rhetoric.’[28] The smell of Revolution hung in the air of the Vienna of the first decade of the nineteenth century. And the sound of Revolution seemed to resonate in the works of Beethoven. The Viennese public sensed that. In the words of Jones again: ‘Reviews of Beethoven […] developed an unusual descriptive vocabulary, one that seemed to mirror the imagery of natural violence that so coloured the rhetorical experience of the French Revolution.’[29] Apparently, even Emperor got some whiff of the scent of revolution surrounding Beethoven. In his recollections, the composer Karl Holz recalled that ‘Kaiser Franz wollte von Beethovens Musik nichts wissen’. The Emperor reportedly told the court: ‘Es steckt was Revolutionäres in der Musik!’[30]

Now, it is no small thing to label a man with the predicate ‘revolutionary’. It is definitely not a smaller thing than labelling him with the predicate ‘genius’, ‘redeemer’, ‘collaborator’ or ‘reactionary’. And indeed, Beethoven did not regularly rush to the barricades ‘pistol in hand’ such as Hector Berlioz did in 1830 and Richard Wagner did in 1848. And he was definitely not some kind of ‘musical Marat’. As Jones rightly notes, Beethoven’s revolutionary tendencies were rather more superficial. The picture is more complex.[31] Beethoven’s revolutionary rhetoric was not a revolutionary rhetoric of the streets. Instead, it remained contained in the concert venue. It was by a long way not Beethoven’s intention to rally his audience to the barricades – which was also very implausible in Vienna. As Jones writes: ‘the psychological and political make-up of Vienna at this time lent itself to a merely internal indulgence in revolution.’[32]

So if we want to uncover the ‘revolutionary’ in Beethoven’s music, we have to read meticulously ‘between the notes’. Just as much as to explore its biographical, historical, political and compositional context. We have to dive deeper than those that remain on the surface. Our approach should be more scientifically responsible than the ecstatic diatribes of the Romantics – but we must also dare to look further than the determinists do. That is not an easy task, but it is one which I am willing to take on in the rest of this thesis.

[27] Jones, ‘Beethoven and the Sound of Revolution in Vienna’, p. 950.
[28] Jones, ‘Beethoven and the Sound of Revolution in Vienna’, p. 952.
[29] Jones, ‘Beethoven and the Sound of Revolution in Vienna’, p. 951.
[30] From: Jones, ‘Beethoven and the Sound of Revolution in Vienna’, p. 950.
[31] Jones, ‘Beethoven and the Sound of Revolution in Vienna’, p. 949, 950.
[32] Jones, ‘Beethoven and the Sound of Revolution in Vienna’, p. 952.

Jones' paper might have one significant deficiency. Although he meticulously and eloquently paves a spacious way for a new 'revolutionary' approach to Beethoven's music, he tries to cover a historiographic debate, a historical, political and musical context, and significant parts of Beethoven's 'heroic' repertoire in just a 25-page article. Some superficiality is the inescapable result. That is not necessarily a bad thing – the academic world is in dire need of courageous scholars addressing the somewhat bigger questions. A community of scholars that is fixated on the details will inevitably lose sight of the bigger picture. Yet, the article by Jones calls for further supplementation. I seek to offer a part of that just here. I will do so by digging deeper into Beethoven's Third Symphony in E♭ major, Op. 55 (1806), also known to us as the *Eroica*. More specifically, I intend to use the following pages to shed a brighter light on the question of how this *Eroica* Symphony reflects the 'revolutionary' tendencies of Beethoven's 'heroic' phase (which I will define to cover the period 1802-1812). But before I continue to do so, some things are still in need of further clarification.

1.2: What's In A Name? On Beethoven's 'Heroic' Phase

One thing that I need to clarify is what I mean by Beethoven's 'heroic' phase. This phrase has already passed by a few times and forms a key part of the question I am addressing in this investigation. The fact that I speak of one phase, implies that there are others. And indeed, scholars generally divide Beethoven's music into three distinct 'styles' or 'phases'. A classification that was formalised in the middle of the nineteenth century by Wilhelm von Lenz and was used ever since.[33] For the sake of clarity and of brevity, I will for now leave aside the kind of discussions about whether this classification system is adequate or to what extent it does justice to the complexity of Beethoven's music. Let me spend some words instead on what these three distinct 'phases' are.[34]

The first Beethovenian 'phase' is the *early phase*. The music of this phase is steeped in the language of Viennese classicism and lasted until about 1802. During this phase, Beethoven adopted a style that very much resembled that of predecessors like Haydn and Mozart. Core elements in the compositions of this time are clarity, restraint, and balance. Aside from some larger works, Beethoven wrote countless smaller pieces, such as piano sonatas and string

[33] Wilhelm von Lenz, *Beethoven et ses trois styles* (St. Petersburg: M. Bernard 1852).
[34] For the following descriptions I am partly indebted to Rex Levang, 'The "three periods" of Beethoven's music', *yourclassical.org* (retrieved: 3 January 2024). Although the source is not very 'scholarly', it provides a very succinct description of what is the scholarly consensus.

quartets, but also dances and variations on popular melodies. They were mainly tailored for wider public appeal.

The *heroic phase*, then, covers roughly the period 1802-1812 and spans a tumultuous and rather remarkable decade, both in political and in musical terms. It showcases Beethoven at the height of his creative powers. It is said that it is here where Beethoven departs from the classical conventions toward a more assertive and individualistic type of writing music. Beethoven's 'heroic' compositions are regularly characterized by a continuous struggle between struggle and triumph. One need only listen to his Fifth Symphony in C-minor or his *Coriolan*, *Egmont* or *Fidelio* overture to know what I mean. And his *Eroica* Symphony of course. After all, the epithet 'heroic' does not come out of the blue. Although Beethoven was tending towards a 'New Path' for a longer time, scholars generally assume that it was exactly this symphony that heralded this new phase.

A composer that has an 'early' and a 'middle' phase, must also have a *late phase*. This phase began where the 'heroic' ended: in a profound creative crisis – and lasted until Beethoven's death in 1827. There are some occasional monumental works – sometimes verging on the megalomanic – such as the Ninth Symphony in d-minor, the *Missa Solemnis* or *Der Glorreiche Augenblick*. And sometimes there is a 'regular potboiler', such as *Wellingtons Sieg*. But in general, the late Beethoven tends to go inwards, becoming more and more introspective and intimate, making his music less and less easy to grasp. Chamber music and solo piano compositions dominate. Structures become less rigid, with compositions often eschewing traditional forms in favour of more fluid arrangements, yet losing none of their musical profundity.

1.3: Between Music and History. Some words on Methodology

This investigation stands at the crossroads between history and music. This is still in need of some further elaboration. Let me commence by stressing that I am aware of the fact that I am writing this thesis as a historian, not as a musicologist. Hence, one should not expect all sorts of many technical musicological feats here. Neither has that ever been my intention to do so – such an aspiration would rather be redundantly pretentious than actually necessary. The focus of this thesis will accordingly be historical, rather than musicological. Yet, I will not refrain from conducting my research 'with the score in hand'.[35] How am I going to do that?

[35] In doing that, I will use a 1989 reprint of the authoritative Litolff Edition: Ludwig van Beethoven, 'Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major (Eroica), Op. 55 (1803; dedicated to Prince Lobkowitz), in: *Symphonies Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4 in Full Score* (Mineola: Dover Publishers 1989; reprint from the Litolff edition).

What is notable when one takes a look at the work of historians and musicologists, is that they generally treat their domains as separate ones – which is incidentally a larger issue in the scholarly world. Historians have read the countless documents of our ancestors, the words of the people who created history, and they have looked at their pictures – yet, they seem to have a tendency to refrain from studying their sounds.[36] Vice versa, myriad musicologists have studied their sounds, but detached them from their historical context. This might have to do with a certain hyper-scientific – Maria Maniates has called it 'ratiomaniac' – attitude towards the study of music in the academic world. This has led to a 'scientist' approach to music, in which the only valid claims are those that (1) can be determined logically (i.e.: 'this dominant seventh must resolve to the tonic'), or (2) can be experimentally legitimized by the criterion of verifiability (i.e.: the statements describing the authentic cadence are true because we can experience the musical operation and subject it to repeated experimental conditions).[37] It is hardly surprising, then, that historians so abstain from the study of music. If they want to work in a 'scientifically responsible' manner, they cannot do it, for they lack the necessary skills – and if they have an opportunity to study the music from a historical perspective, they do not want to do it, for this is 'vague', 'speculative' and 'open to all kinds of subjective interpretation'.

And that is unfortunate, since a tremendous richness of musical material lies scattered everywhere, waiting to be synthesized into new ideas. As Maniates writes: 'in the history of ideas, structures are not rationally designed by anyone' – so nor are musical ones. Rather, they contain tacit structures, lying dormant waiting for a daring scientist or musician to uncover them. And, yes, that does an appeal to the historian's own creativity. But the historian has never known any better! History is not the mere sum of the bequeathed records. Instead, is characterized by a lack of access to the past. It would be indefensible to maintain that historians should restrict themselves to what the sources reveal to them directly. As Maniates writes: 'historical narratives are [just] temporally structured explanations that entail certain kinds of causes and conditions depending on the descriptive mode chosen by the historian.'[38] The historian is more than a computer making some logical inferences.

Yet, the fact that historians have a tendency to refrain from using music as a point of departure for their investigations, does not mean that they do not do so at all. Indeed, there is a rather developed historiographical scholarship concerning sounds, historical soundscapes, and

[36] Deane L. Root, 'Music as a Cultural Mirror', *OAH Magazine of History* 19:4 (2005), pp. 7-8.
[37] Maria Rika Maniates, 'Applications of the History of Ideas to Music (II)', *The Musical Quarterly* 69:1 (1983), pp. 62-84, *passim*.
[38] Maniates, 'Applications of the History of Ideas to Music', *passim*.

their contexts. I will leave aside detailed treatments of this for now. Instead, let me focus briefly on one specifical methodological strand of thought in particular: namely that of Quentin Skinner *cum suis*.

In his methodology, Skinner expands on developments in the philosophy of language made by Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin among others. One important insight that Skinner takes away from these thinkers, is that words are not mere carriers of 'meanings', but that they can also perform things. In other words: they can be bearers of speech acts. In the words of Skinner: 'whenever we use language for purposes of communication, we are always doing something as well as saying something.'[39] Merely examining the words of the people of the past is insufficient. Rather, the historian must delve deeper to understand the thinker's intentions behind those words – of which contextualization forms a crucial part. We cannot understand the words of our ancestors without placing them in their broader linguistic and cultural context, viewing them as a response to other thinkers, texts, or societal discourses.[40]

Speaking about the 'intentions' behind words immediately confronts us with a problem of intentionality – which will be important in the overarching argument I am going to make here. Skinner places a particularly strong emphasis on intention. The idea that we cannot study a text separately from its context seems a valid observation to me. But Skinner goes a step further by claiming that studying a text means as well that we should trace the intentions of the author that are expressed in the text.[41] Such an emphasis on intentionality is not entirely without problems, I would argue. As we shall see, there are many examples in which Beethoven's work is undeniably 'revolutionary' in nature, but in which this 'revolutionary' character need not be intentional at all. His revolutionary idiom may just as easily have been the product of passively appropriating and taking in the political, historical and intellectual context and then (more or less unconsciously) integrating it into his work. We do not need to identify all sorts of smoking guns of his alleged intentionality to call his work 'revolutionary'.

Before continuing, I should clarify one more thing. Skinner keeps speaking about 'words', not 'sounds'. What to make of this? Although Skinner hardly mentions the music explicitly, it might fit will within his framework. What is left for us to do is to determine that *musical statements are statements as well* – just as statements in 'ordinary' written language

[39] Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics. Volume 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002), p. 2. Italics are mine.
[40] Skinner, *Regarding Method*, *passim*, in particular Chapter 4: Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas; see also: Mark Evan Bonds, *Wordless Rhetoric: Musical Form and the Metaphor of Oration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1991).
[41] Skinner, *Regarding Method*, p. 61.

are. And indeed, for those to whom music speaks, sounds can carry a lot of meaning. Even more, these can have an immediacy of impact, compared to which the medium of 'ordinary' language might remain rather pale and inadequate.[42] Human beings are capable of telling more things than only their words allow them to!

1.4: The Structure of This Thesis

In what follows, I will treat my subject more or less thematically. I will commence with providing some necessary compositional and biographical background to the *Eroica* Symphony in the second chapter. In the four chapters that follow, I will sift through the piece in a thematical manner, shedding light on four different aspects of the piece. In the third chapter, I will elaborate on how this piece demanded from its audience a whole new, 'revolutionary', way of listening. In the fourth chapter, I will expand on the enigmatic figure of the 'Hero', around which the whole piece revolves. In the fifth chapter, I will spend some words on how the second-movement *Marcia funebre* is steeped in the musical models of the French Revolution. In the sixth chapter, I will examine the symbolism behind the theme from Beethoven's earlier *Prometheus* ballet, out of which the whole symphony has evolved.

Before continuing, I must make one more remark. As will become clear to the reader immediately, the investigation that follows is based on a wide array of primary sources and secondary literature. Yet, I will use some more than others. The reader will perhaps notice that I will refer fairly frequently to Swafford's Beethoven biography, for example. In conducting a research such as this one, one cannot escape finding footing in some particular works, to which one can return again and again. There are countless excellent works on Beethoven out there, for sure, but one can never get a grip on all of them. So one needs to choose one or more particular works to use as a kind of reference point. I chose to have Swafford (and to a slightly lesser extent Lockwood and Solomon) fulfil this function. There are a number of reasons for this particular choice. First, this biography was published in 2014 – which is still relatively recent. Furthermore, it is a book that is intended for a wider audience, but with an extensive note section attesting to a vast and profound research. Also, it is only one of hundreds of Beethoven biographies to have appeared on the market, but, as far as I am aware, the first major one that actually tries to integrate some of the more recent views of Beethoven's life and work by explicitly rejecting the Romantic myth. And finally, it is written by a musicologist, not a historian. I do not think this is either a particular weakness nor a particular strength of the book.

[42] Maniates, 'Application of the History of Ideas to Music', p. 76.

For the more profound historical analysis, I regularly had to turn elsewhere; but the way in which the music is discussed is full of insights and unprecedented in that regard. By choosing this particular book, I by no means mean to imply that this is *the* Beethoven book to choose. There is also enough to criticize about it too, which I will not refrain from. And, on the other hand, it is very possible that there are plenty of other books out there that are at least at good, but that I simply haven't had the chance to study so thoroughly. In the end, one has to make choices. I think I have done that in a responsible manner. Having said that, we can finally continue.

2. Compositional and Biographical Background

2.1: Beethoven and the Sound of Revolution

Beethoven did not write his Third Symphony in a political or cultural vacuum. Nor did he write it in a musical one. From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, scholars have become increasingly attentive to the fact that Beethoven was familiar with and profoundly shaped by the French Revolutionary musical repertoire. Already in the 1950s, Alfred Einstein noticed how the marchlike first movement of the French violin concerto could have been inspired by the music of the French Revolution. He also remarked that the First Piano Concerto 'should have earned Beethoven, like Schiller, an honorary citizenship in the French Republic.'[43] Boris Schwarz showed the ways in which Beethoven's works for strings were heavily indebted to the French violin tradition led by Rodolphe Kreutzer, Pierre Baillot, and Pierre Rode – all of whom Beethoven met at one time or another.[44] He also noted how 'Beethoven's two "heroic" funeral marches [in his Op. 26 Piano Sonata and in the Third Symphony] bring to mind the two great funeral compositions of the French Revolution – the *Marche lugubre* by Gossec and the *hymne funèbre* by Cherubini.'[45] This is a line of thinking that will be discussed at greater length at Chapter 5 of this thesis.

More recently, John Haag has attempted to show how Beethoven's encounter with the French Revolutionary repertoire may have accounted for the sudden upsurge in the young composer's creative life in 1790-92.[46] Lockwood has suggested that the keen eye (and ear) might already spot some thematic connections between Beethoven's Second Symphony and instrumental works by French composers such as Étienne Méhul, François-Joseph Gossec, and their contemporaries. Michael Broyles outlines the broad and general relationship between French Revolutionary musical styles and the newly emerging Beethovenian symphonic style.[47] And Paul Robinson has devoted an article to the question of how the French Revolution shaped Beethoven's one and only opera *Fidelio*. That the libretto of this opera came from the French Revolutionary Jean-Nicolas Bouilly is one thing, but the fact that the whole work is structured around the idea of liberty is truly revolutionary. The heart of the plot is that Leonore comes to

[43] Alfred Einstein, *Essays on Music* (New York: W. W. Norton 1956), p. 247.
[44] Boris Schwartz, 'Beethoven and the French Violin School', *The Musical Quarterly* 44:1 (1958), pp. 431-47; Swafford, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, p. 43.
[45] Schwartz, 'Beethoven and the French Violin School', p. 438.
[46] John J. Haag, 'Beethoven, the Revolution in Music and the French Revolution: Music and Politics in Austria, 1790-1815', in: Kinley Brauer and William E. Wright eds., *Austria in the Age of the French Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1990), pp. 107-24, at 111; something similar is argued by Maynard Solomon, 'Beethoven's Productivity at Bonn', *Music and Letters* 53:1 (1972), pp. 165-72.
[47] Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, p. 44; Michael Broyles, *Beethoven: The Emergence and Evolution of Beethoven's Heroic Style* (New York: Taylor & Francis 1987), p. 121.

liberate her husband Florestan, who is imprisoned by the tyrant Pizarro. A chorus of prisoners begins rejoicing the 'freie Luft' after they have been released temporarily from their musty cells and are given some time to roam around the inner courtyard. And in Florestan's infamously unsingable aria, the audience is confronted multiple times with climaxes on the word 'Freiheit'. It was this very notion of liberty that was the Revolution's most important locus.[48]

There is therefore ample reason to surmise that Beethoven was very well familiar with the both the compositional practices as well as the themes of the French Revolution. And this was far from all that there is. Already from his childhood in Bonn, he must have been influenced by the French Revolutionary repertoire, which is all the more interesting considering the fact that the younger a person is, the more readily he can be influenced by his milieu. For instance, in 1788, Elector Maximilian Franz hired Beethoven as a viola player at his newly found National Theatre. The programmes of this Theatre show that between 1788 and 1792 (when Beethoven left Bonn for Vienna), Beethoven regularly was involved in the performances of French pieces by, among others, Nicolas-Marie Dalayrac, André Gretry, and Pierre-Alexandre Monsigny – Dalayrac's notably revolutionary-tinged *Les Deux Petits Savoyards* included.[49] Provided that cities like Nancy and Strasbourg where barely 150 miles away from Bonn, it is also not unlikely that he was aware of some of the republican festivities going on there. *A fortiriori*, Clauda Palisca – to whose analyses I am particularly indebted regarding this and the Fifth Chapter – shows how soldier-composer Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle, best known for composing the *Marseillaise*, recalled in his *Essays en vers et en prose* (1796) how after the first performance of his *Hymne à la liberté*, set to music by Ignace Pleyel, in Strasbourg in 1791, the text was translated into German and the song was heard across the Rhine in Breisgau.[50] Considering all this, we could perhaps even better ask: why would Beethoven *not* have known the French Revolutionary repertoire?

Back to our problem of intentionality: Beethoven did not have to be present at any of the Revolutionary festivities that were so common in the 1790s, nor did he have to be particularly involved in other Revolutionary practices or events in order to become acquainted with its music. And the historical records provide – at least as far as most Beethoven biographers know – no particular reason to infer that Beethoven did. What the historical records do show, however, is how the republican music travelled throughout France and must have extended to

[48] Paul Robinson, '"Fidelio" and the French Revolution', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3:1 (1991), pp. 23-48.
[49] Thayer, *The Live of Ludwig van Beethoven*, pp. 108-109.
[50] Claude V. Palisca, 'French Revolutionary Models for Beethoven's Eroica Funeral March' in: Anne Dhu Shapiro, *Music and Context: Essays for John M. Ward* (Cambridge: Harvard University Department of Music 1985), pp. 198-209, at 201.

some cities in Germany and the Low Countries by 1795. Around that time, the Directoire had established the *Institut national de musique*, which turned it into its vocation to propagate the music of the Revolution and its public festivities, so that they might 'promptly circulate throughout the Republic'. The *Institut*, in turn, established the *Magasin de musique à l'usage des fêtes nationales*, charged with distributing as many copies of the music as possible. Its reach extended far beyond the French Republic alone. Palisca writes that particularly many of those copies ended up in Antwerp and Cologne.[51] Bearing in mind that Bonn was part of the principality of Cologne, and that the Elector and with his entourage regularly moved between his respective residences in both places, it is not unreasonable to suspect that this music also ended up in Bonn. Yet, we should not forget that by the time the *Magasin* had decisively quickened the spread of the Revolutionary repertoire, Beethoven already had settled in Vienna.

But if Beethoven did not encounter the Revolutionary repertoire in Bonn before his departure in 1792, he would have done so in Vienna. Not only because of his regular correspondence with the people back in Bonn (hence probably familiar with the Revolutionary repertoire), but also because of the strategy of the very *Magasin*, which was so vehement that a significant number of French hymns and marches had drifted to Vienna by the end of the century. Moreover, wind bands were a staple among the many noble families in Vienna. By the turn of the century, the wind music of the Revolutionary repertoire had turned into a desideratum of these bands. The directors of the Viennese wind bands could not have ignored the novel French repertoire. At the same time, French-style marches and choruses started to abound in Viennese operas. And the most popular of these operas were not even from Viennese soil. Instead, those were the operas written by Méhul – who is, together with Gossec, generally regarded as *the* composer of the French Revolution.[52]

In short: Beethoven simply could not have bypassed the music of the French Revolution. How explicitly or intentionally he was involved in this musical repertoire is not even that relevant a question. What should be evident by now, is that Beethoven most likely had some affinity with the music of the French Revolution. This is an important fact that will recur many times throughout this thesis.

[51] Palisca, 'French Revolutionary Models for Beethoven's Eroica Funeral March', p. 209.
[52] Palisca, 'French Revolutionary Models for Beethoven's Eroica Funeral March', p. 209.

2.2: A New Path

Sometime in 1802, Beethoven announced to his violinist disciple Wenzel Krumpholz: 'I'm not satisfied with what I've composed up to now. From now on I intend to embark on a new path.'[53] This little bit of hearsay recorded by Carl Czerny implies that Beethoven took a single, fully-conscious decision at one certain moment. Whether such a way of depicting his 'conversion' is accurate enough or not; what is clear is the fact that the *Eroica* Symphony represents the culmination of a new compositional direction that commenced somewhere around 1802. This 'new path' was the consequence of several deep personal and creative crises. His romance with Julie Guicciardi foundered. At the same time, his brother Kaspar started handling his affairs, leading to more quarrels with publishers than tangible results. Over time, he became increasingly dissatisfied with his own creative output, to the point where he could hardly get anything out of his pen. He was suffering from a severe writer's block. And perhaps even worst of all, he was gradually losing his hearing.[54]

On the advice of his doctor, Beethoven moved to the small town of Heiligenstadt in 1802, just outside Vienna. He stayed there from April to October. It was part of an attempt to come to terms with his condition. And indeed, throughout the summer of 1802 he was breathtakingly productive. Accordingly, the letters from this summer suggest nothing odd. His tone was quite the same as usual. If necessary, he wrote in a businesslike manner. But at most of the time his letters reflect a chipper and wry tone – and sometimes a mocking one. A good example is the high-ironic, almost cynical, occasionally irritated, but above all highly spirited letter that Beethoven sent to his publisher Hoffmeister in response to the request of a noble lady who had commissioned the famous composer to write a 'Revolutionary sonata' – something which is an interesting fact of its own, as it suggests that certain people associated Beethoven with the Revolution. Beethoven first rambles on about this proposal and subsequently about Napoleon's Concordat with the Pope, only to then accept the offer anyway, but on the condition that this lady will only have access to the piece for a year; and for the staggering price of five ducats:

> Do you mean to go post-haste to the devil, gentlemen, by proposing that I should write *such* a *sonata*? During the revolutionary fever, a thing of the kind might have been appropriate, but now, when everything is falling again into the beaten track, and Bonaparte has concluded a *Concordat* with the Pope – such a sonata as this? If it were

[53] Quoted in: Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 283.
[54] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 282.

> a *missa pro Sancta Maria à tre voci*, or a *vesper*, &c., then I would at once take up my pen and write a *Credo in unum*, in gigantic semibreves. But, good heavens! such a sonata, in this fresh dawning Christian epoch. No, no! – it won't do, and I will have none of it. Now for my answer in quickest *tempo*. The lady can have a sonata from me, and I am willing to adopt the general outlines of her plan in an *aesthetical* point of view, without adhering to the keys named. The price to be five ducats; for this sum she can keep the work a year for her own amusement, without either of us being entitled to publish it. After the lapse of a year, the sonata to revert to me – that is, I can and will then publish it, when, if she considers it any distinction, she may request me to dedicate it to her.[55]

Yet, there was a crash waiting for him, and he could not avoid it. It came in October, when he wrote the heartbreaking document which we now know as the Heiligenstadt Testament. It was addressed to his brothers Johann and Kaspar and is dated on the 6th of October. In this letter – which was never sent – Beethoven tells his brothers about his thoughts of suicide, but also about how only his art had saved him.[56] It would fall beyond the scope of this study to delve much deeper into this document. It suffices to say that it functioned as a moment of clarity. It was a turning point. Not only in Beethoven's life, but also in his music. It provided the decisive impetus to tread the New Path.

One of the works Beethoven produced during the prolific summer of 1802, was a set of piano variations in E-flat (op. 35), later known as the *Eroica* Variations. As this later act of renaming already implies, the thematic material of the Op. 35 Variations directly foreshadows the finale of the *Eroica* Symphony.[57] Beethoven had used this thematic material before twice: as a contredanse for a set of Viennese ballroom dances, and later as the finale of his ballet *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus*. We now know that he would also use it a fourth time. Immediately after Beethoven left Heiligenstadt and completed his Op. 35 Variations, he started jotting down his first ideas for a multi-movement work. What was taking shape is what Lockwood has called the 'Ur-*Eroica*'.[58] All based on that one theme and bass that apparently haunted Beethoven:

[55] Letter from Ludwig van Beethoven to Franz Anton Hoffmeister, 8 April 1802, from: *Letters to Beethoven and Other Correspondence*, transl. Lady Wallace (New York: Hurd and Houghton 1867), no. 25.
[56] Cooper, *The Beethoven Compendium*, pp. 169-72.
[57] Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, p. 58.
[58] Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, pp. 58-63; see for an extended discussion: Lewis Lockwood, 'Beethoven's Earliest Sketches for the "Eroica" Symphony', *The Musical Quarterly* 67:4 (1981), pp. 457-78.

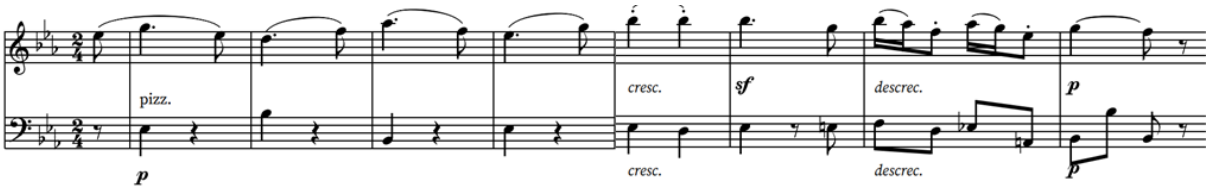

Figure 1

Prometheus theme and bass.

Swafford writes: 'often, the creation of great things begins with small things: an itch in the mind, a scrap of material, a train of thought that seems on its own leap into motion.'[59] Out of this little dance tune, Beethoven forged what was to become the finale of the *Eroica*. And, as I will further substantiate later in this thesis, there is plenty of reason to suspect that this finale was the anchor against which Beethoven composed the rest of the symphony.[60] In other words, that Beethoven composed his symphony *from back to front*.

From this idea, Swafford derives the argument that the symphony had to become a 'characteristic' piece – or, what later generations would call a 'program' piece. That is to say, the piece had to be based on or convey some sort of story. And so, Beethoven intended to write more than 'just' good music. He wanted to tell his listeners something. Since the symphony was composed back to front, one can argue that the piece was directly inspired by the Prometheus music from the aforementioned ballet.[61] Could the particular subject of the *Eroica* be another Promethean figure?

As the French consul Napoleon Bonaparte became incessantly more victorious throughout Europe – both militarily as culturally – his figure became surrounded with an ever grander allure. The early Romantics transformed him into a titanic figure – a Promethean figure. In the German-speaking countries, the Schlegel brothers, Tieck, Schleiermacher – all hailed him as the embodiment of some holy revolution.[62] They saw him as one of them: an individual of ordinary origin, and, like them, driven by revolutionary feelings. His breathtaking career offered them a sense of certainty. It offered them the idea that the natural force of genius breaks through everything and overthrows all tradition. It demolishes and creates anew. To them Bonaparte was the incarnate transcendental subject of history. History was now on horseback.

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[59] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 331.
[60] Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, p. 75.
[61] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 333.
[62] Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen. Deutsche Geschichte*, vol. 1 (Munich: C.H. Beck 2000), p. 164; Rüdiger Safranski, *Romantiek: Een Duitse affaire*, trans. Mark Wildschut (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Atlas 2007), p. 186; see for an extended discussion on the Romantic obsession with Bonaparte as an omniscient and omnipotent genius: Darrin MacMahon, *Divine Fury: A History of Genius* (New York: Basic Books 2013), pp. 116-24.

'I saw her riding through the city,' Hegel famously wrote from Jena in 1806, 'this world soul.'[63] He had transformed world history into a work of art. He played with the historical material like the romantic artist does with his. The bust of Napoleon was in great demand everywhere. Goethe could not get enough of it. Tieck had one, Jean Paul liked to give it as a gift, and the Schlegel brothers liked to drag it everywhere.[64] Beethoven too could not avoid the appeal of this colossus. As he was composing his symphony, he had decided rather quickly that the symphony was to be called *Bonaparte*. According to Swafford, the symphony would be not only dedicated to Napoleon in name, 'but also in some way modelled on his character and career and on the larger image of a hero who has the vision and capacity to create a new order, a just and harmonious society: free and respecting freedom.'[65]

But was it all abstraction and ideals then? As a letter from Beethoven's pupil Ferdinand Ries to his publisher Nikolaus Simrock from the late summer of 1803 makes clear, Beethoven had serious intentions to move to Paris by then.[66] It is plausible that Beethoven hoped to meet Napoleon. Or perhaps even more; that he did 'imagine himself as one in the French conqueror's stable of artists like the composer Étienne-Nicolas Méhul and the painter Jacques-Louis David.'[67] And indeed, if we take a look at Beethoven's musical output of that period, much points to the direction of an artistic campaign to prepare a relocation. Think for example of the Op. 47 violin sonata, dedicated to the leading French virtuoso Rodolphe Kreutzer; his Op. 56 French style Triple Concerto; and his plans to write a French style opera – which was to become *Leonore* (later renamed *Fidelio*).[68] Dedicating a symphony to the most famous of Frenchmen was just a part of a broader purpose. In that regard, self-promotion was woven into all of the symphony. Had it actually happened that Beethoven was going to make his aspired move to Paris, a Bonaparte symphony could have functioned as a calling card to the French government – even to Napoleon himself.[69]

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[63] Letter from Hegel to Friedrich Niethammer, 13 October 1806, from: *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. Clark Butler and Christine Seiler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1984), pp. 114-15.
[64] Safranski, *Romantiek*, p. 186; Friedrich Schultze, *Franzosenzeit in deutschen Landen*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: R. Voigtländer 1908), p. 10.
[65] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 333.
[66] Letter from Ferdinand Ries to Nikolaus Simrock, 6 August 1803, from: *Letters to Beethoven and Other Correspondence*, vol. 1, ed. Theodore Albrecht (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1996), no. 65.
[67] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 330.
[68] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 330.
[69] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 334.

3. Heaven and Earth Will Tremble. The *Eroica* as a New Type of Music

'Beethoven played it for me recently, and I believe that heaven and earth will tremble when it is performed,' Ries wrote to Simrock upon hearing Beethoven's Third Symphony for the first time.[70] As Lockwood notes: 'with this new work, Beethoven not only created his most powerful large-scale composition to date, but also lifted the genre of the symphony onto a new level of expression.'[71] And indeed, Beethoven's contemporaries were befuddled by the length and immensity of the symphony.[72] In a single work, Beethoven greatly extended what were the traditional scales and frameworks for symphonic compositions. According to Lockwood, Beethoven was well aware of this himself and did this on purpose. 'What this work required was not simply that listeners extend their attention spans to unheard-of-lengths, but that they try to perceive musical content of greater density than they generally expected from symphonic works intended for large audiences in public settings, not for connoisseurs in private salons.'[73] In other words: Beethoven's Third Symphony demanded a new way of listening to music.[74]

Both Burnham and Jones understand this new way of listening to be a *revolutionary* way of listening. Burnham writes that 'the piece forms a musical cataclysm, thereby robbing the listener of all agency by making itself the revolutionary actor.'[75] The Third Symphony did not demand the sort of audience participation one might expect: it was Beethoven who simply did all the work.[76] Jones explains how 'Viennese audiences were set in political suspension' by the 'sublime effects' of this 'revolutionary' composition. The audience had apparently been so 'oppressed' by the 'violent transitions […] and continuous tumult' of the symphony, that they left the auditorium with 'an unpleasant feeling of exhaustion'. Where the Revolution brought about popular upheaval in Paris, the result in Vienna was 'controlled, internalized explosions'. 'The intellectual dimensions of these revolutionary experiences may have been congruent, but their expression was not: Paris had the Terror, Vienna had Beethoven.'[77]

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[70] Letter from Ferdinand Ries to Nikolaus Simrock, 22 October 1803, from: Albrecht, *Letters to Beethoven*, no. 71.
[71] Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, p. 51.
[72] Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, p. 52.
[73] Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, p. 67.
[74] See for a further discussion on the contemporary reception: Thomas Sipe, *Beethoven: Eroica Symphony* (New York: Cambridge University Press 1998); and Thomas Sipe, *Interpreting Beethoven: History, aesthetics, and critical reception* (diss. University of Pennsylvania ProQuest Dissertations Publishing 1992).
[75] Burnham, *Beethoven Hero*, p. 142.
[76] Jones, 'Beethoven and the Sound of Revolution in Vienna', p. 968.
[77] Jones, 'Beethoven and the Sound of Revolution in Vienna', p. 967.

One can go as far as to say that the *Eroica* was not only a watershed work for its dramatic and emotional narrative, but also for its moral and ethical contents.[78] The question that naturally follows is: what does it mean for instrumental music to be 'ethical'? Ferraguto suggests that it has not so much to do with the intrinsic quality of the music itself. Rather, it is about the external factors that have been relevant to Beethoven at one particular moment in his life.[79] To make this more concrete: Maynard Solomon suggests that Beethoven's participation in the musical and philosophical ideals of the French Revolution imbued his music with a newfound sense of the ethical. He writes the following:

> The Revolution sought to transform French music into a moral weapon in the service of a momentous historical mission. The frivolities and sensuousness of *galant* music were abjured, and the 'scholastic' contrivances of Baroque and Classical forms were done away with; music was assigned, in the words of the historian Jules Combarieu, 'a serious character which it had not had since antiquity outside of the Church'. In brief, the Revolution introduced an explicit ideological and ethical function into music, which was later to become one of the characteristics of Beethoven's 'public' compositions.[80]

The hypothesis of Solomon is supported by the fact that, at least until the first French occupation of Vienna in 1805, Beethoven arguably identified himself with Revolutionary politics and ideas. He grew up in a Bonn steeped in *Aufklärung* thought. And when the Revolution broke out in France, many in Bonn were electrified. The young Beethoven was a follower of the town's radical professor Eulogius Schneider, who moved to Strasbourg in 1791, equipped himself with a portable guillotine, and began serving the Revolutionary cause by chopping off heads – until he was sent to the guillotine himself in 1794.[81] Beethoven left Bonn for Vienna in 1792. Considering the activity of both the Army of the Rhine, whose aim it was to spread the Revolution throughout the German Rhinelands, and the armies of those Rhinelands themselves, whose aim it was to preserve their own sovereignty and keep the Revolution out, it is not unlikely that he regularly 'encountered armies, heard the bustle and rattle of troops on the march, the bugle calls and martial music' on his way – which could have made a lasting

[78] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 333; see for the late eighteenth-century idea of music as a kind of rational discourse: Bonds, *Worldless Rhetoric*.
[79] Mark Ferraguto, 'Beethoven's "Watershed"? Eroica's Contexts and Periodisation, in: Nancy November, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the* Eroica *Symphony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2020), pp. 24-42, at 28.
[80] Maynard Solomon, *Beethoven* (New York: Schirmer 1977), p. 71.
[81] Ferraguto, 'Beethoven's "Watershed"?, p. 29; Swafford, *Beethoven*, pp. 103, 113-14.

impression on the young composer and imprinted his creative mind. From 1792 until the Treaty of Lunéville in 1802, Austria was in a state of war with Revolutionary France. In it conceivable that military armies were regularly present in the city streets, preparing to fight the French – music and all included. So also while in Vienna, Beethoven could have been influenced by the military idiom. And in Napoleon he recognized the embodiment of the humanitarian ideals he endorsed – ready to turn the *Aufklärung* dream of happiness and brotherhood into a European reality.[82]

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Now, let us take a look at the symphony itself. The level of complexity of the symphony becomes apparent already from the very beginning of the first movement. It has a triadic beginning with two *forte* tutti chords, followed by a chromatic continuation. The very first theme that is introduced is *the* theme that sprawls out over the rest of the of the symphony. All other subordinate themes and motives are derived from it.[83] Beethoven based the beginning on the ending, as I already suggested. Let me now show in greater depth how he derived his first movement *Eroica*-theme from his last-movement *Prometheus*-theme.

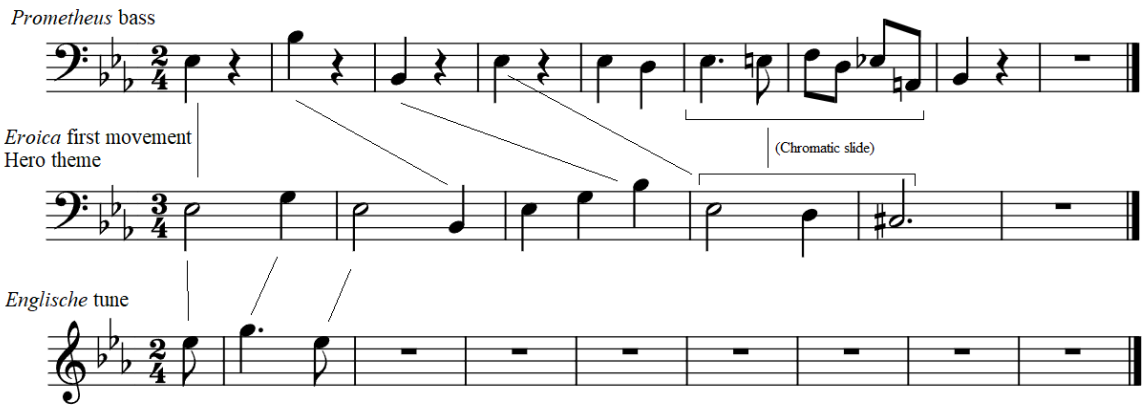

Figure 2

Comparison between the *Prometheus* thematic material and the *Eroica* First Movement Hero theme.

(Derived from: Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 339)

When looking at the Prometheus theme, one will notice that the first four notes all return in the Hero theme – in the same order. It starts with E♭; followed by the dominant fifth thereof, B♭

[82] Swafford, *Beethoven*, pp. 333-35.
[83] Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, p. 67.

(albeit with an octave difference); then goes to B♭ again; and then returns to E♭; only to lapse into the chromatic slide so characteristic of both themes. Additionally, the first three notes of the 'Englische' bass of the Prometheus theme and those of the Hero theme literally correspond (just for layperson's sake: note the different clefs). The similarities are crystal clear. And those people not convinced still I would highly encourage to listen to both themes alternatively. The similarities will not escape anyone.

This all happens in the key of E-flat. It is not likely that Beethoven chose this key by mere chance. Nor did he do this for purely aesthetical reasons. As Rita Steblin shows, to contemporaries this key had a strong noble, heroic and humanistic character. And in a sense, it was the *Aufklärung* tonality *par excellence*.[84] Even more so, this key might as well have had some Masonic associations for Beethoven, just as it did for Mozart. Mozart used it regularly in his 'Masonic' works, such as *Die Zauberflöte* – a Beethoven favourite.[85] This idea can be supported by the fact that Beethoven wrote down some Masonic symbols in the margins of some pages of his early *Eroica* sketches.[86] And while Beethoven was presumably not as closely connected to the Viennese lodges as Mozart was, Masonry in general may have had some important meaning for him.[87] In the Bonn where young Beethoven grew up, there were several active lodges. Although we have no evidence that Beethoven was ever involved in one of them, he had his connections there. More or less the same holds for his time in Vienna. The young Beethoven owed a lot to Christian Neefe in particular, who incessantly preached to him his idealistic *Schwärmerei* about freedom, reason and humanity.[88] And one particular lesson he imprinted Beethoven with: what gifts you possess are owed to humanity.[89] It was Napoleon who revitalized and embodied the *Aufklärung* ideals Beethoven had grown up with. Now it was his turn to set these ideals to music.[90]

The exposition that follows the bold opening statement of the symphony is restless and wandering. The themes that are introduced here are fragmentary, incomplete, and constantly in a flux. The first Hero theme gives rise to countless other themes. Each will start decisively, but then drift and dissipate. Nowhere is there a sense of closure. And nowhere is there a sense of

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[84] Rita Steblin, *A History of Key Characteristics in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press 1996), p. 111.
[85] Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, p. 68; Swafford, *Beethoven*, pp. 332.
[86] Lewis Lockwood & Alan Gosman, eds., *Beethoven's 'Eroica' Sketchbook: A Critical Edition*, vol. 2 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 2013), pp. 20-23.
[87] See for an extended discussion of Masonry in the life and works of Mozart: Katherine Thomson, *The Masonic Thread in Mozart* (London: Lawrence and Wishart 1977).
[88] Ludwig Schiedermair, *Der junge Beethoven* (Leipzig: Verlag Quelle & Meyer 1925), pp. 152-53.
[89] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 77.
[90] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 335.

clear formal articulation. The music simply will not arrive. It is constantly on the move. And its direction is *forwards*. There is no *being* in this music – only *becoming*. The exposition almost feels like a development. It is as if the Hero, with its incessant nervous energy, is striving toward something.[91] We only do not know what yet. Beethoven proves himself to be directly counteracting the eighteenth-century ideal of formal clarity here. He prefers the restless flow. Karol Berger connects this peculiar musical character to an Enlightenment trend in time-perception galvanized by the French Revolution, namely, the renunciation of the older, cyclical sense of time and eternity in favour of a one-way, future-oriented sense of time. 'Time's cycle had been straightened into an arrow.'[92]

The time signature Beethoven uses here is 3/4. When dealing with the evocation of a military hero, one might correspondingly expect a more 'military' meter, such as the 2/4 or 4/4 march time. But such a literal evocation of the army is far away. The fact that it is in triple meter might rather suggest that it is something like a dance, but even that is not the case. By constantly using displaced downbeats, the music gives the impression of persistently trying to break out of the boundaries of the meter. It is as if the Hero is aspiring to shatter boundaries and conventions – and making things anew. Yet, he is still uncertain and not fully formed. The whole exposition is hesitant. It is only in the development proper that he will continue his struggle for completion.[93]

But also the first development does not provide the Hero with a destination. Just as the rest of the first movement, the music here is characterized by an incessant harmonic and rhythmic tension. It is still not clear where the music is going. At certain moments Beethoven inserts a fugato (fig. 3). At others some loud and crashing dissonant chords (fig. 4). Sometimes dancelike character of the music appears to become plainer. Sometimes there is not much more in the music than a mere outburst of rage (fig. 4). The end of the first development section has become one of the most notorious moments of this piece. Beethoven lets the horn go into the recapitulation prematurely and over the wrong chord (fig. 5). Ferdinand Ries recalled himself exclaiming upon hearing this for the first time: 'That damned hornist! Can't he count!' Beethoven looked close to hitting him. Supposedly, he did not forgive Ries for a long time.[94]

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[91] Carl Dahlhaus, *Ludwig van Beethoven: Approaches to His Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1991), p. 75, Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 342.
[92] Karol Berger, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow: An Essay on the Origins of Musical Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p. 176; Scott Burnham, 'Beethoven and Heroism in the Age of Revolutions', in: Nancy November, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the* Eroica *Symphony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2020), pp. 7-23, at 7.
[93] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 338, 346.
[94] Franz Gerhard Wegeler, *Beethoven Remembered: The Biographical Notes of Franz Wegeler and Ferdinand Ries* (Arlington: Great Ocean Publishers 1987), pp. 68-69.

The orchestra quickly follows to cover up this apparent mistake. ‘As if the Hero has escaped the shackles of form and forces the music to sanction his transgression.’[95]

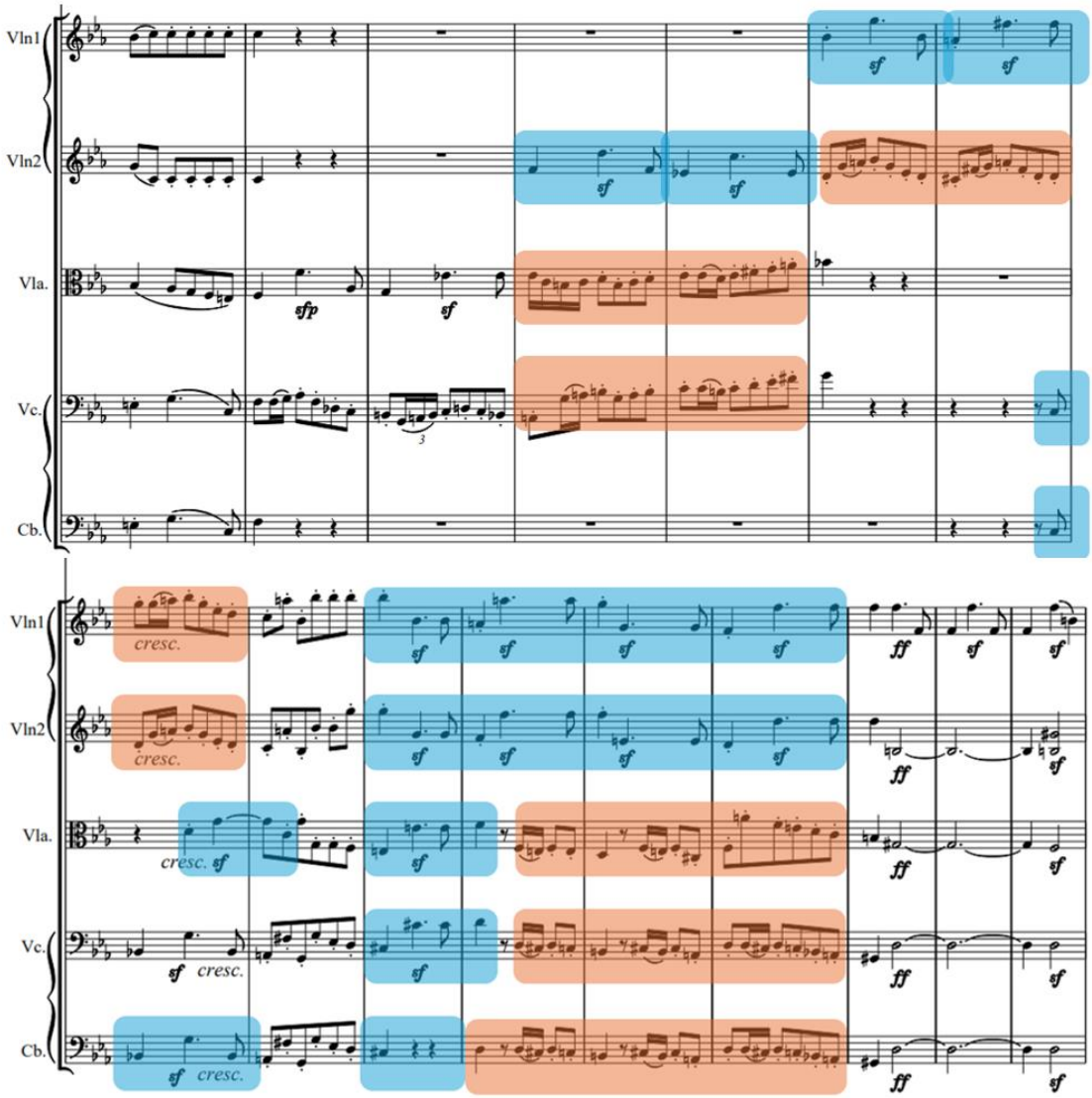

Figure 3

Fugato from the First Movement of the *Eroica* Symphony, mm. 239-254: the two different subjects are indicated in blue and red respectively.

[95] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 347.

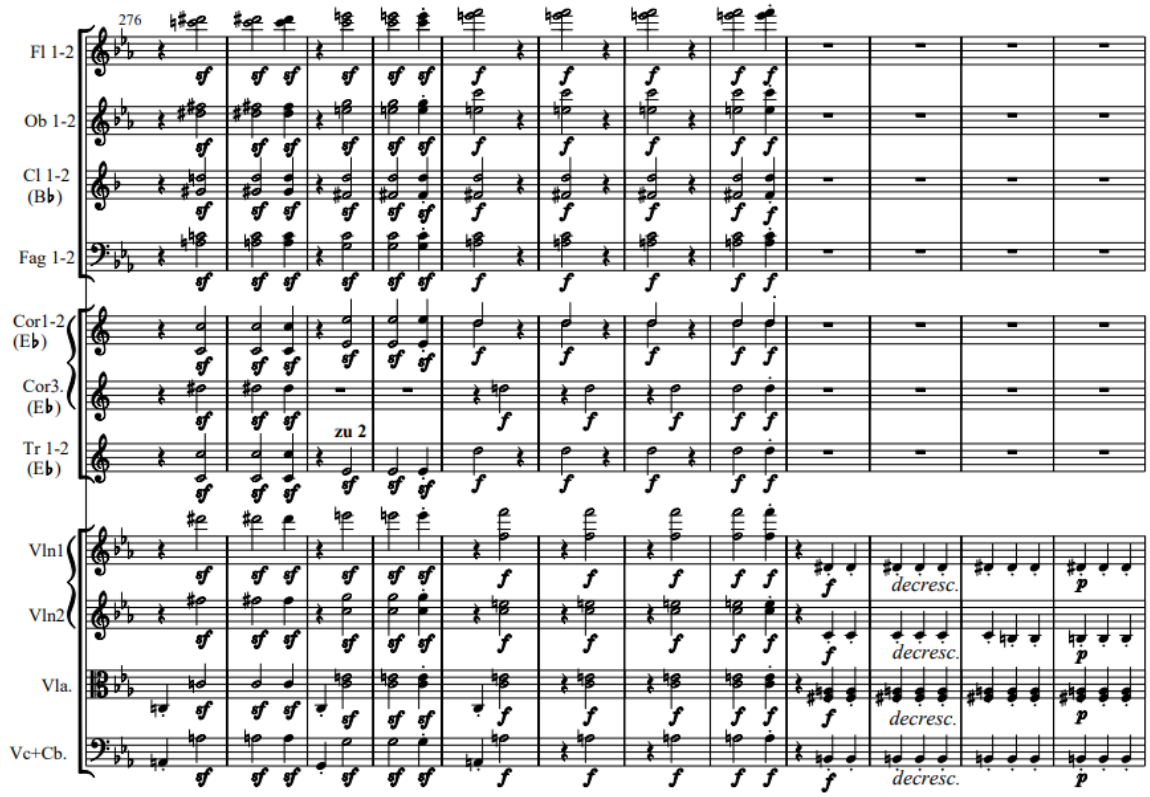

Figure 4

Mm. 276-287.

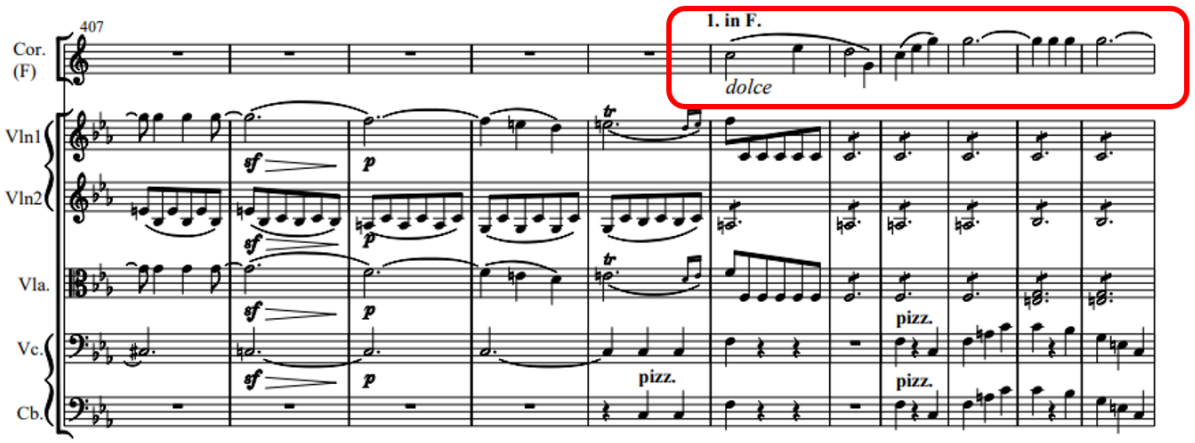

Figure 5

'Horn prank', mm. 407-417.

Before turning to the coda, Beethoven cannot help introducing yet another development theme – clearly a deed against the classical sonata form. Its lower voice is derived from the first movement Hero-theme. The counterpoint added above it already foreshadows the leading idea of the second movement, which is to be *Marcia funebre*:

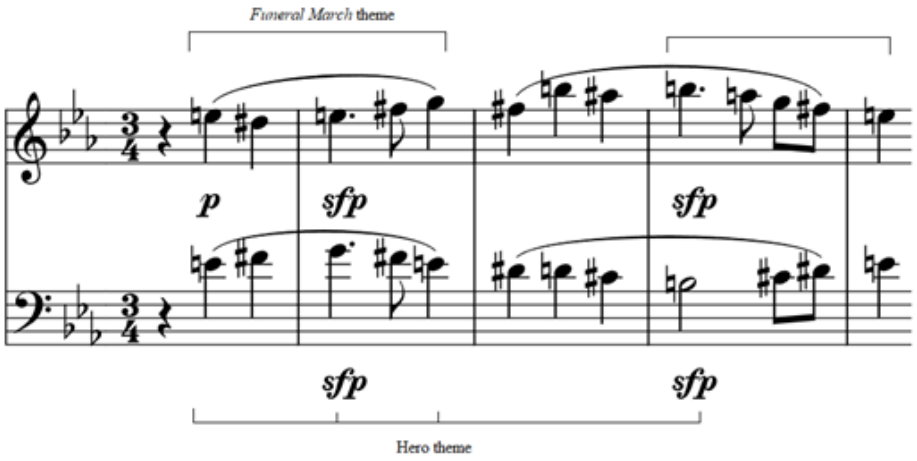

Figure 6

Comparison between the First Movement Hero theme and the Second Movement *Marcia funebre* theme.
(Derived from: Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 349)

The coda that concludes the first movement is enormous. It is nearly as long as the exposition. The cognoscenti among the listeners might have expected a firm final statement, providing a resolution of all conflicts and uncertainties. But Beethoven did not give them that. It makes a definitive assertion in the home key, as a proper coda should, but it eludes a sense of completion.[96] If it makes clear to us one thing, it is that the Hero has not yet completed his journey.

[96] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 350.

4. Which Hero?

> 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*.[97]

This story, recalled by Ferdinand Ries, has become a staple in Beethoven biography. It narrates how it was Beethoven's original plan to dedicate the symphony to Napoleon, but how his coronation as Emperor made Beethoven so angry that he tore up this tribute. Apparently, the Promethean bringer of Revolution Beethoven revered was not so Revolutionary after all.

However evocative this textbook anecdote may be, there is sufficient reason to assume that Beethoven had lingering doubts for a much longer time. In the letter from 8 April 1802 – the same one I quoted in paragraph 2.2 – Beethoven already shows some serious doubts on Napoleon, after the latter signed his Concordat with the Pope in order to suppress royalist counter-revolutionary movements in France.[98] Before Napoleon crowned himself Emperor on 2 December 1804, the French senate had granted him that hereditary title in May of that year. Beethoven's disenchantment already may have ballooned at this specific moment. Yet, in a letter to his publisher Breitkopf & Härtel from August of that year, Beethoven writes that 'die Simphonie ist eigentlich betitelt Ponaparte' – as if he still wanted to keep the door ajar for a dedication to the great Frenchman.[99] Apart from this letter the historical source material leaves us with few further indications. As far as I have been able to look, I have found no later letters

[97] Wegeler, *Beethoven Remembered*, p. 68.
[98] Letter from Ludwig van Beethoven to Hoffmeister & Kühnel, 8 April 1802, from: Albrecht, *Letters to Beethoven*, no. 84.
[99] Letter from Ludwig van Beethoven to Breitkopf & Härtel, 26 August 1804, from: Albrecht, *Letters to Beethoven*, no. 188.

of Beethoven referring to the idea of dedicating the symphony to Napoleon. The best we can do is to presuppose that Napoleon's official coronation in December put an end to any doubts left, definitively terminating any last thought of dedicating the work to him.

Beethoven eventually subtitled his Third Symphony *composta per festeggiare il sovenire di un grand Uomo* – 'composed to celebrate the memory of a great man'. But if Napoleon did not qualify for being this 'great man' anymore, who or what was it? One of the possibilities Lockwood proposes is that the subtitle still refers to Napoleon between the lines, albeit the Napoleon as he was *before* his coronation.[100] Some other scholars look for other 'great men' that might have seized Beethoven's imagination at the time. Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia, who died at the Battle of Saalfeld (1806), is among the best candidates.[101] But probably more convincing – and also the view that is most widely endorsed by Beethoven scholars today – is that Beethoven does not refer to any specific individual here, but rather to a more abstract and ideal mythic figure. Lockwood writes: 'Beethoven was not writing a sequential biography of a single hero, but composing a transcendent symphony on the subject of the heroic that would offer different perspectives on this ideal.'[102] Taruskin calls Beethoven's Hero 'the supreme symbolic expression of the chief philosophical and political ideals of its time and place.'[103] Burnham criticizes how 'the recognition of the unprecedented intensity and power of this symphony has often been entangled in attempts to identify specific literary sources, or actual heroes whose doings are somehow represented by the music.'[104] Instead, 'the "hero" of the *Eroica* is not a single figure but a composite of heroes of different types and different situations.'[105]

We cannot examine the figure of the Hero separate from its *Zeitgeist*. The age of Beethoven was an age of renewed interest in epic heroes and heroic dramas. This was particularly the case in the German-speaking lands, which in the second half of the eighteenth century suddenly developed a great interest in classical culture. The preoccupation with the ancients was widespread, reflected in a general drive to imitate and outdo the Greeks and Romans, by the foundation or revival of schools and colleges teaching classical literature, history, and philosophy, and by the appearance of great poets and men of letters inspired by

[100] Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, p. 55.
[101] A strong case for this hypothesis is made by Rita Steblin, 'Who Died? The Funeral March in Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony', *The Musical Quarterly* 89:1 (2006), pp. 62-79.
[102] Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, p. 71.
[103] Taruskin, *Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p. 659.
[104] Burnham, 'Beethoven and Heroism in the Age of Revolutions', p. 21.
[105] Lewis Lockwood, *Beethoven: The Music and Life* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company 2003), p. 213.

classical ideals.[106] At the same time, these started to become rigorously studied philologically; Herder had assigned them a crucial place in human history; they determined style in architecture and drama; Wilhelm von Humboldt turned them into an educational ideal; Goethe developed his classical dramaturgy from them; Novalis praised their vivifying power; Hölderlin started a quest after some deeper mythico-poetical layers in them; and Schiller felt compelled to warn others off the high fever of greacomania present in the German lands.[107] At the same time, as Burnham points out, Voss's German translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and the burgeoning interest in the Attic dramatists Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides – but Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* in particular – contributed to a huge revival of the heroic. At the same time, Burnham writes, the Revolutions in America and France provided a world-historical confirmation of the anti-tyrannical impulse to which this new heroic consciousness had given rise, 'while the complex aftermath of the French Revolution, including Napoleon's campaigns, provided an almost constant fascination and anxiety, as well as new sets of heroic role models.'[108]

Beethoven was familiar with the heroic role models the ancients provided. Throughout his life, he studied, absorbed, and drew inspiration from the Greeks and Romans. As a child, he frequently read the stories of political and military heroes written down by the Roman biographer Cornelius Nepos. Later in life, the extensively busied himself with Homer, Plutarch, Ovid, and Epictetus. His contemporaries observed how he frequently was taken up with the *Odyssey*. Plutarch's renderings of heroic virtues in his *Parallel Lives* captivated Beethoven just as often. Among Beethoven's favourite ancient stories was the story of Prometheus – the Titan stealing the fire from the Gods and helping the human race in turn. And, of course, this Prometheus theme eventually got its place into the Third Symphony.[109]

Beethoven's creative art was not only inspired by the ancient Greeks and Romans themselves. He also took a lot from the new dramatic art of Goethe and Schiller, as well as from the poetry of Hölderlin – all of whom were influenced by the German preoccupation with the classical past in their turn. They combined the 'noble simplicity and the quiet grandeur' of the ancient Greeks with enthusiasm, love, and intense feeling. They infused matter with spirit – as

[106] Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* (Oxford University Press 2015), p. 369; Burnham, 'Beethoven and Heroism in the Age of Revolutions', p. 7.
[107] Rüdiger Safranski, *Hölderlin: Biografie van een Mysterieuze Dichter*, transl. Wil Hansen (Amsterdam: Atlas Contact 2020), p. 63.
[108] Burnham, 'Beethoven and Heroism in the Age of Revolutions', p. 1.
[109] See for some exquisite work done on this topic recently: Jos van der Zanden, *Beethoven and Greco-Roman Antiquity* (London: Routledge 2021).

the Greeks did.[110] Beethoven may very well have felt an urge to create music of a similar power and urgency. And he may very well have striven to represent the transcendent impact of heroic action – no doubt about that – but not without also conveying it with a forceful intensity as the *Stürmer und Dränger* did.[111]

But it was not only the renewed appeal of the classical past or the effervescence with which some presented it that inspired Beethoven's musical heroism. Burnham notes that the continual presence of war in post-revolution Europe provided a ready source of the sublime – 'provided of course that one was at a safe distance'.[112] James Winn writes: 'Like the ocean, great fires, and destructive storms, war is attractive to poets as an instance of the sublime, an experience bringing together awe, terror, power, and reverence on a grand scale.'[113] Beethoven's time was a tumultuous and unsettling one, and 'the *élan vital* of his heroic style music expresses among other things the accelerating pace of the portentous events happening around him.'[114] In that sense, Beethoven's heroism and the revolutionary *Zeitgeist* are inextricably connected.

The question we are still left with is what such a 'revolutionary' or 'sublime' Hero is then. Swafford interprets the Hero as a being that is 'able to bring freedom because he has freed himself'. The Hero is a 'self-created man', who 'transcends convention, shatters barriers, electrifies every soldier and *citoyen* with the force of his will.' The Hero is the one that knows that 'to remake the world, you must remake yourself first.'[115] It sounds almost Nietzschean. By stressing the capacity of the individual (read: genius) to 'transcend conventions' and 'shatter barriers', the Romantic tint is clearly present in this interpretation. But in a sense Swafford is right, for Beethoven regularly busied himself with the question 'who is a free man?' – answering it with a Rousseauean: 'the man to whom only his own will, and not any whim of an overlord, can give laws' in *Der Freie Man* (WoO 117), a song for voice and piano he wrote somewhere between 1792 and 1794.[116] Still, Burnham is hesitant towards too Romantic an interpretation. We must for sure acknowledge that the titanic figure of Napoleon did temporarily enchant Beethoven – just as he enchanted many others. And to Beethoven, Napoleon was the consummate model of 'self-made greatness' indeed. His career epitomized the heroic rise of the

[110] Highet, *The Classical Tradition*, p. 374, 377.
[111] Burnham, 'Beethoven and Heroism in the Age of Revolutions', p. 20; Eleanor Selfridge-Field, 'Beethoven and Greek Classicism', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 33:1 (1972), pp. 577-95.
[112] Burnham, 'Beethoven and Heroism in the Age of Revolutions', p. 7.
[113] James Winn, *The Poetry of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008), pp. 4-5.
[114] Burnham, 'Beethoven and Heroism in the Age of Revolutions', pp. 7-8.
[115] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 344.
[116] George R. Marek, *Beethoven: Biography of a Genius* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls 1969), p. 188.

autonomous individual. Never before or subsequently did Beethoven consider naming one of his major compositions after an historical figure. The fact that he did now says a great deal. Apparently, Napoleon was heroic enough to be worthy of the only creative tribute Beethoven ever considered for one of his works.[117] But, according to Burnham, there were many other varieties of heroism into play as well – call them more 'revolutionary' in character. They involve 'upholding the necessity of rebellion in the face of tyranny, asserting the overriding importance of free thought and freedom in general, […] the ability to endure fated hardships, and the triumph of the free will in overcoming adversity and even overcoming one's own self, culminating in the moral commitment to sacrifice oneself for a higher ideal.'[118] In that sense, the Hero is a revolutionary figure through and through.

[117] Burnham, 'Beethoven and Heroism in the Age of Revolutions', p. 8; Lockwood, *Beethoven*, p. 186.
[118] Burnham, 'Beethoven and Heroism in the Age of Revolutions', p. 8.

5. The Hero Dies. On the *Marcia Funebre*

The Hero that asserted himself in de first movement of the *Eroica Symphony*, dies in the second. This second movement consists of a C-minor, slow-step funeral march, followed by a C-major hymn-like *Maggiore* section, which eventually gives way to the C-minor *Marcia funebre* again. Hector Berlioz called it 'a drama in itself'. He added: 'I know no other example in music of a style wherein grief is so able to sustain itself consistently in forms of such purity and nobility of expression.'[119] Berlioz understood not only the second movement, but the whole work as a commemoration of a fallen hero. In 1821, when Beethoven heard that Napoleon had died on Saint Helena, he is reported to have said: 'I have already composed the music for that catastrophe.'[120]

Swafford, by contrast, suggests that the funeral march could as well have been a funeral for the masses of dead. Dedicated to the masses of dead or to the martyred hero himself, what stands beyond doubt is that the second movement is steeped in 'allusions to musical genres, styles, and even clichés practiced in the public memorials honouring heroes of the French Revolution, Directoire, and Consulate.'[121] Beethoven could have made these allusions to flatter Napoleon, or to stir the memories of the many civic festivals that had been going on at that time. Or he might not have had any explicit intentions at all, but just assimilated the musical material that he encountered, turned it into his own, and connected these presumably familiar elements with the otherwise so unfamiliar idiom of this symphony – making this difficult work more palatable along the way.[122] But ostensibly in the background are the countless funeral marches written in France in the wake of the Revolution. Keeping in mind what I have argued in paragraph 2.1, it is not unlikely that at the time of composing the Third Symphony many of these were well known in Vienna. And for the revolutionary festivals the composers of the Revolution developed a grand popular hymnlike style, simple and songful, 'often using massive sonorities featuring the military instruments of brass and drums'.[123] Both get their place in the second movement of the symphony. The funeral march in the C-minor *Minore* outer sections of the movement – the hymnlike festive music in the hopeful and almost utopian C-major

[119] Quoted in: Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, p. 70.
[120] Quoted in: Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, p. 70.
[121] Palisca, 'French Revolutionary Models for Beethoven's Eroica Funeral March', p. 198.
[122] Palisca, 'French Revolutionary Models for Beethoven's Eroica Funeral March', p. 199.
[123] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 352.

Maggiore inner section.[124] For listeners of the day, this might have been the sounding image of Revolution.[125]

Beethoven's *Marcia funebre* is so heavily indebted to the French Revolutionary repertoire that one might go as far as to argue (as Palisca does) that Beethoven could not have written it at all without knowing any of this.[126] The opening theme is an almost archetypical funeral march from the Revolution. We hear a mournful dirge in the darkest register of the violins. The basses evoke muffled drums. All in a very sorrowful C-minor mood:

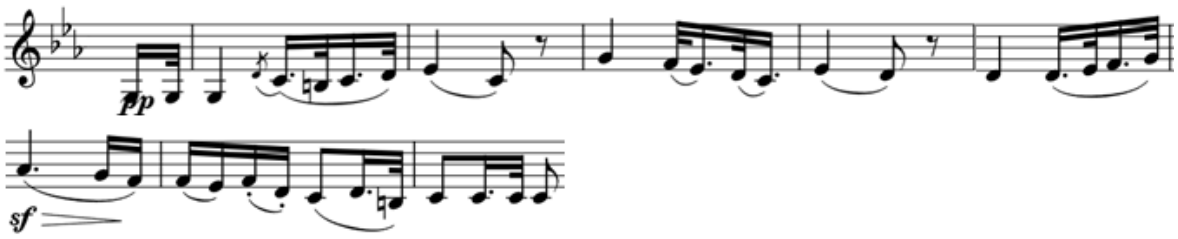

Figure 7

Marcia funebre theme; from mm. 1-9 of the second movement.

As Palisca notes, the *Minore* section borrows a number of musical devices from the French Revolutionary funeral march. Among the most obvious of them are the thirty-second notes pianissimo notes in the strings, which are not just intended to imitate the sound of 'some' muffled drums, according to Palisca, but to imitate the *caisse roulante voilée* in particular. This French drum was called for in many of the French funeral marches.[127] 'In the mind's eye, troops slowly march behind the catafalque, the masses gathered to watch the procession and to grieve.'[128]

Another way in which Beethoven's funeral march was shaped by the French one becomes evident when we compare it with Gossec's *Marche lugubre*. Beethoven clearly did not think up his funeral march 'out of the blue'. As Palisca tries to show, among the most obvious of models he might have used was this funeral march by Gossec. It was one of the best known from the French Revolutionary repertoire. A quick comparison between the two pieces makes plain the similarities between the two. At the very least Beethoven knew the piece and allowed

[124] Beethoven used the terms *Minore* and *Maggiore* in the score to refer to these respective sections. I will follow his terminology here.
[125] Broyles, *Beethoven*, p. 123.
[126] Palisca, 'French Revolutionary Models for Beethoven's Eroica Funeral March', p. 208; the exact opposite is argued by Richard Burke, 'Revolutionary and Operatic Models for the Funeral March of the *Eroica* Symphony', *The Beethoven Journal* 19:1 (2004), pp. 2-9.
[127] Palisca, 'French Revolutionary Models for Beethoven's Eroica Funeral March', p. 202.
[128] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 353.

it to 'inspire' him in writing his *Marcia funebre*, but the parallels are so close that it is at least as plausible that Beethoven intentionally paraphrased or parodied Gossec:

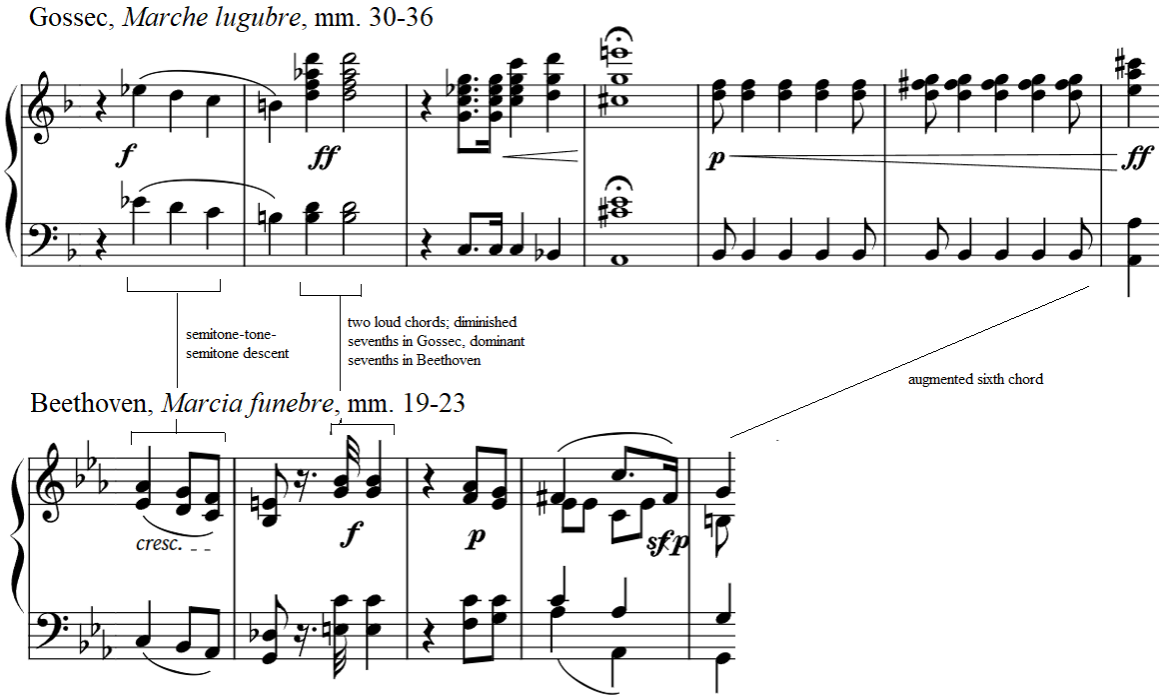

Figure 8

Comparison between Gossec's *Marche lugubre* (mm. 30-36) and Beethoven's *Marcia funebre* (mm. 19-23). (Derived from: Palisca, 'French Revolutionary Models for Beethoven's Eroica Funeral March', p. 202)

Both passages have in common the semitone-tone-semitone descent, followed by two loud chords – which are diminished sevenths in Gossec and dominant sevenths in Beethoven. In both passages, they lead to an augmented sixth chord in which they culminate. The augmented sixth was a common element of the Revolutionary repertoire, says Palisca, and 'always strikes one as a bold effect in the spare simplistic harmony of the revolutionary music.'[129] Gossec's phrase culminates in an orchestral unison. Beethoven also turns to this device multiple times throughout the second movement, but he saves them for the emotionally more strategic locations: just before the beginning of the *Maggiore* section, and again at its conclusion, when the music returns to the *Minore*. These orchestral unisons were a common element of the French Revolutionary repertoire as well. By the time of the composition of the Third Symphony it had almost turned into a cliché, borrowed from the many choral revolutionary hymns that were circulating. Such orchestral unisons hardly ever fail to make a strong impression, as the

[129] Palisca, 'French Revolutionary Models for Beethoven's Eroica Funeral March', p. 202.

ensemble that has been singing and playing in different parts suddenly converges into unisons and octaves on key parts, which may help explain why this musical device was so successful in the Revolutionary repertoire.[130]

As a 'psychologist in tones', Beethoven does not want to convey one event or one emotion in particular, but the whole process of mourning – its mingling of events and emotions included. By transitioning from minor into major, Beethoven transitions from dark into light. The formal public mourning and inchoate private sorrow makes way for the exaltation of the fallen Hero as martyr patriotic and transcendent.[131] The *Maggiore* section has the same tempo and the same meter as the march proper, but it has a totally different character. Rather than a solemn march, it is a hymn, punctuated by fanfares and drumrolls. Swafford calls it a hymn, not to God, but humanity. In that sense, it can be regarded as a secular ceremony through and through, 'as it would have been in revolutionary France'.[132] Beethoven highlighted his lyrical hymnlike theme in the oboe and flute. They are alternated by the fanfares and drumrolls, which have a transitional and cadential role. The whole is concluded by the orchestral unison that marks the return to the *Minore* section. These idiomatic 'Revolutionary' elements are arranged as follows:[133]

Elements from the French Hymn Repertory	*Hymn*	*Fanfare over Drumroll*	*Hymn*	*Fanfare over Drumroll*	*Unisons*
Measure in the Second Movement of the *Eroica* Symphony	m. 69	m. 76	m. 80	m. 96	m. 101

Again, Beethoven does not appear to have written his hymnlike *Maggiore* section without knowing of some other French hymns. Let us again make a comparison between Beethoven's *Marcia funebre* and some works of the Revolutionary repertoire and put side-to-side a fragment from the *Hymne à l'Égalité*, with text by 'citoyen' Malingre and music by 'citoyen' Beauvaret-Charpentier; a fragment from the *Maggiore* section of Beethoven's *Marcia funebre*; and a fragment from Gossec's *Le Triomphe de la Republique*:

[130] Palisca, 'French Revolutionary Models for Beethoven's Eroica Funeral March', p. 202.
[131] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 354.
[132] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 354.
[133] Palisca, 'French Revolutionary Models for Beethoven's Eroica Funeral March', p. 206.

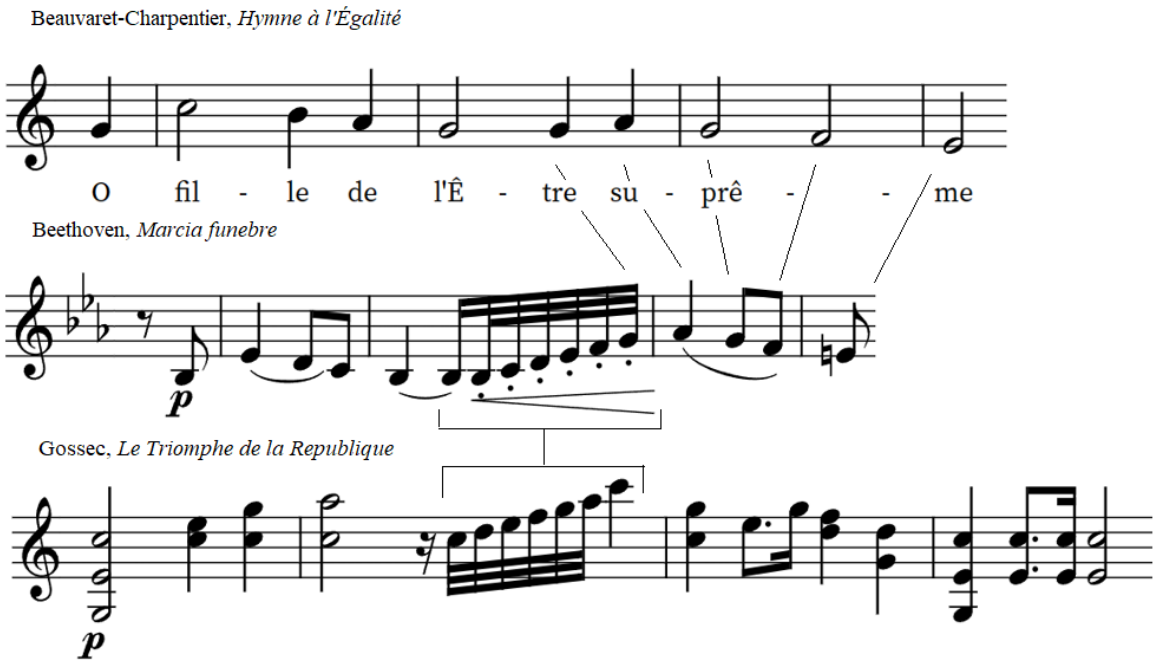

Figure 9

Comparison between Beauvaret-Charpentier's *Hymne à l'Égalité*, Beethoven's *Marcia funebre* and Gossec's *Le Triomphe de la Republique*.

(Derived from: Palisca, 'French Revolutionary Models for Beethoven's Eroica Funeral March', p. 206)

After the trio in C major, Beethoven moves to a double fugue, which transitions from F and C minor to E-flat major. The E-flat major theme Beethoven introduces then has a strong ring of the *Hymne à l'Égalité*. The last five notes in both fragments are even exactly the same. Reason enough for Palisca to claim that Beethoven must almost have copied this from Beauvaret-Charpentier – which is perhaps a bit too aggrandized a conclusion, given the fact that for example the note values are anything but similar.[134] And considering that it is 'only' about five notes, I cannot conclusively exclude the possibility that we are dealing only with an accidental similarity here. Yet, anyone listening to the two fragments back-to-back (something we unfortunately cannot do here) will immediately hear how similar both are. Should it be the case that Beethoven once heared the *Hymne* – which we can neither confirm nor rule out – it is not unlikely that such a musical mind as that of Beethoven picked up such as theme, appropriated it, and integrated it into his work later.

These five notes, in turn, are preceded by a run that was among Gossec's favourite devices. This gesture is used several times in *Le Triomphe de la République*, as well as in many other of Gossec's works. It was perhaps inherited from the Baroque French overture and had an unmistakable French sound to contemporaries. Again, this may point us to the fact that

[134] Palisca, 'French Revolutionary Models for Beethoven's Eroica Funeral March', p. 206.

Beethoven was profoundly familiar with the French Revolutionary repertoire. And again, they need not necessarily be purposeful imitations. What they testify instead is Beethoven's extraordinary sensitivity to the French Revolutionary style and his 'having assimilated it so thoroughly that the characteristic phrases and clichés poured forth effortlessly.'[135]

Having returned to the *Minore* section, Beethoven takes up a solemn and majestic double fugue once again. For one more time, it rises to a transcendent climax in E-flat. The horns soar upward. The strings accompany it by striding up and down. Swafford calls it 'one of the highest, most heart-filling, most intensely humanistic summits that music is capable of.'[136] And then, the music falls back to earth. Back in the C-minor mood. Back to the burial of the dead. Only to disintegrate into sighs and fragments in the coda – eventually sinking into a deadly silence.

[135] Palisca, 'French Revolutionary Models for Beethoven's Eroica Funeral March', p. 206, 209.
[136] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 994, n. 40.

6. A Dance of Freedom. On The *Prometheus* Theme.

In chapter 2 we have seen that Beethoven in all likelihood composed the *Eroica* Symphony more or less from back to front. He was obsessed with the little dance tune of the finale of the *Prometheus* ballet, worked it out into a whole movement of symphonic music, distilled a primordial theme from it, used it to work out the beginning of the symphony, and filled in the rest from that point onwards. But if the cradle of the *Eroica* symphony is to be found in the *Prometheus* ballet, the intriguing question that arises and needs to be addressed is the following: how does the dramatic plot of the *Prometheus* ballet relate to the *Eroica* symphony?

Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus. The title rightly suggests that the protagonist of the ballet is the Titan Prometheus. But it would be wrong to think that the demigod fire-bringer punished by the wrath of Zeus from Greek myth was exactly the same character as the hero of the ballet. It is rather about 'a benign maker of civilization who instils life into clay figures who become human and gain access to the arts and sciences.'[137] It is not only about *Prometheus*, but also about his *Geschöpfe*. Salvatore Viganò, the choreographer of the ballet, called Prometheus 'a sublime spirit, who came upon the men of his time in a state of ignorance, who refined them through science and art, and imparted to them morals.'[138] Prometheus makes a man and a woman from the clay and instils them with life. But as alive as they are, they are not yet fully human. They lack the soul. Prometheus needs to teach them feelings, wisdom, and moral awareness. He takes them to Apollo on Parnassus. Apollo in turn commands his subjects to humanize these beings by teaching them music, drama, and dance.[139]

Lockwood answers the question of the relationship between the *Prometheus* ballet and the *Eroica* Symphony by stating that it would be an exaggeration to claim that there is a close and significant narrative and intellectual connection between the two: 'The differences in musical weight between the two works are much greater than the similarities, for Beethoven's ballet music for *Prometheus* belongs to another world, that of theatrical dance music.' If Beethoven chose to use the same dance tune twice – and he did – he did if for aesthetic reasons only.[140] Lockwood is among the most venerable Beethoven scholars alive and I have turned to his work time and again, but here I depart from his interpretation. I think that the way in which he compares both works passes over too much. It is too simple. Too easy. It would not be an overstatement to say that there are more and deeper connections between the two works than a

[137] Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, p. 72.
[138] Quoted in: Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 265.
[139] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 265; the classical work on this: Jean Chantavoine and Maurice Léna, *Les Créatures de Prométhée* (Paris: Heugel 1930).
[140] Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, p. 72.

nice little tune of dance music: it would be an understatement – even a grave misunderstanding – to say that there is not. And even more so, a profound examination of these connections constitutes a fundamental part in our quest for the Revolutionary aspects of the *Eroica* Symphony. The rest of this chapter shows how.

The *Prometheus* story is a story about humanity being illuminated by art and science. We have already seen that this is a paradigmatic high-*Aufklärung* theme which must have struck deep resonances in Beethoven, reaching as far back as to his *Bildung* in Bonn. Somewhat later in his life, Beethoven would write: 'Only art and science can raise men to the Godhead.'[141] Beauty and art set a human being free. They make him moral and ethical. They help moulding lives and societies that are harmonious and happy. These ideas are still fairly foggy. But there is no doubt that perhaps the greatest intellectual influence on Beethoven in this domain came from Friedrich Schiller.

Schiller had initially – as many other young German intellectuals – welcomed the French Revolution. The Revolutionaries appreciated the contents of his plays so much that they turned him (Schiller not asking or even waiting for it) into an honorary citizen of the French Republic. But the way the Revolution developed displeased Schiller. After the September Massacres of 1792 – when almost two thousand people were put to the sword by a mob in Paris – and after the execution of the king, he began to devise a sort of aesthetic therapy that should help people learn to deal with their freedom. As a response to the French Revolution, Schiller made the attempt to *surpass* Revolutionary France with an alternative Revolution – a Revolution of the spirit.[142] And it is only art that can make man truly free. 'Art is a daughter of freedom,' he writes, 'beauty precedes freedom'.[143] Art is the ultimate purpose of life and society for Schiller, because it leads to liberty and brotherhood. It leads to what he would elsewhere famously call Elysium.

We know that Schiller had a substantial influence upon Beethoven. Already during his early teens in Bonn, Beethoven was fascinated by Schillers poem *An die Freude*. He made it almost into his life mission to turn this poem into music. In letters written throughout his life he frequently quoted from many different works of Schiller, attesting a profound familiarity

[141] Quoted in: Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 265.
[142] Safranski, *Romantiek*, p. 41.
[143] Friedrich Schiller, *Ueber die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, in einer Reihe von Briefen* (1795), Zweiter Briefe, accessed on 12 May 2024 through: https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/schiller/aesterz/aesterz.html; original: 'Denn die Kunst ist eine Tochter der Freiheit, und von der Nothwendigkeit der Geister, nicht von der Nothdurft der Materie will sie ihre Vorschrift empfange. […] Daß ich dieser reizenden Versuchung widerstehe und die Schönheit der Freiheit voran gehen lasse, glaube ich nicht bloß mit meiner Neigung entschuldigen, sondern durch Grundsätze rechtfertigen zu können.'

with it.[144] In a 1809 letter to his publisher Breitkopf & Härtel, Beethoven called Schiller his 'favourite poet'.[145] The humanistic and artistic implications of Schillers thinking galvanized Beethoven, and he gave them a place in his music. Keeping that in our minds, the symbolic meaning of the *Prometheus* dance may become even clearer.

The dance tune figuring in the finales of the *Prometheus* ballet and the *Eroica* Symphony was a particular festive dance. It was one of the most popular dances of the time: the *anglaise* or *englische*. The dance had notable symbolic dimensions. Although there were regional variations – and the dance the developed in Vienna was quite different from the original English one – the essence is that it was a contradance. A line of women and a line of men were constantly changing partners during its course. This had some 'progressive', almost 'Revolutionary' implications, in the sense that the constant interchange of partners led to a literal mingling of classes. A nobleman could end up hand in hand with a merchant's daughter. At least for the duration of the music, each individual was an *equal* participant of the dance. In that regard, the dance acquired a frisson of democracy. And the contemporary audience knew that.[146]

Schiller also knew the symbolic dimensions of the *englische*. He wrote of the dance:

> I can think of no more fitting image for the ideal of social conduct than an English dance, composed of many complicated figures and perfectly executed. A spectator […] sees innumerable movements intersecting in the most chaotic fashion […] yet never colliding […] It is all so skilfully, and yet so artlessly, integrated into a form, that each seems only to be following his own inclination, yet without ever getting in the way of anybody else. It is the most perfectly appropriate symbol of the assertion of one's own freedom and regard for the freedom of others.[147]

Given Beethoven's familiarity with the work of Schiller, it is very well possible that Beethoven knew this passage directly and was influenced by it. In that sense, the choice for this particular dance as finale for the *Prometheus* ballet and the *Eroica* Symphony might have been a very deliberate one, having more interesting underlying reasons than merely 'aesthetic' ones.[148]

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[144] Peter Höyng, '"Laufet Brüder eure Bahn": Zur Geistesverwandtschaft zwischen Schiller und Beethoven', *Monatshefte* 97:3 (2005), pp. 468-77, at 470.
[145] Letter from Ludwig van Beethoven to Breitkopf & Härtel, 8 August 1809, accessed on 12 May 2024 through: https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/loc.natlib.consortium.bh_b645/.
[146] Swafford, *Beethoven*, pp. 267-68.
[147] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*, ed. and transl. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1982), p. 300.
[148] Aldrich suggests that it does not even matter so much whether Beethoven knew this passage directly or not. It reflected a widespread reputation of the dance, which Beethoven could not have not known: Elizabeth Aldrich,

Just as Beethoven was familiar with the work of Schiller, he was familiar with the work of Goethe as well. Both artists even had some correspondence with each other and Beethoven took the liberty to write some music for Goethe's *Egmont* – an anti-tyrannical and 'heroic' work of its own. In 1812, some of their friends even went as far as to stage-manage a meeting between these two giants in Teplitz, hoping that a deeper friendship would spring forth from it. Between his chatting hours with two empresses, Goethe had fortunately found a bit of time for Beethoven. Beethoven used their first meeting to make fun of Goethe's nobility-tic. When he finally did deign to play something on the piano for him, Goethe was impressed, but he still found the music a bit too passionate and loud. Beethoven was offended by Goethe's subsequent applause, which apparently was not enthusiastic enough. On the way back they encountered the empress and a collection of other nobles. Goethe made way, gently took off his hat and bowed his head. Beethoven did not and strode straight through the crowd. Both kept respecting each other and continued to exchange letters afterwards, but their interaction remained rather courteous. They never developed an intimate friendship.[149]

Provided Beethoven was very familiar with the work of Goethe, he might as well have been familiar with his unequivocally anti-tyrannical sounding poem *Prometheus* (1785):

Ich kenne nichts Ärmeres	I know nothing more impoverished
unter der Sonn' als euch Götter!	under the sun as you gods!
Ihr nähert kümmerlich	You miserably nourish
Von Opfersteuern	your majesty
Und Gebetshauch	with sacrifices
Eure Majestät	and the breath of prayers,
Und darbtet, wären	and you would starve
Nicht Kinder und Bettler	if children and beggars
Hoffnungsvolle Toren.	weren't such hopeful fools.[150]

The tone is contemptible, self-aware and sometimes even plainly aggressive. One may rather recognise Beethoven in it that Goethe. The latter was ennobled himself in 1782 and had a lifelong deference to the aristocracy, as the Teplitz's example shows. Beethoven – as the example shows as well – had a lifelong dislike for the aristocracy. A good story may illustrate

'Social Dancing in Schubert's World', in: Raymond Erickson, ed., *Schubert's Vienna* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1997), pp. 119-140.

[149] Rüdiger Safranski, *Goethe. Kunstwerk van het Leven*, trans. Mark Wildschut (Amsterdam: Olympus 2015), p. 592.

[150] Translation from: Burnham, 'Beethoven and Heroism in the Age of Revolutions', p. 13.

this. On one evening in October 1806, Prince Karl Lichnowsky – one of Beethoven's patrons at the time – arranged a musicale for some French officers, who were there at their leisure after their trashing of the Austrians and Russians at Austerlitz. Lichnowsky wanted to show off his prize protégé and demanded that Beethoven play. Beethoven did not consider himself to be a servant, and refused. On top of that, there was also the fact that he had to play for enemies, of course. Lichnowsky was imperious in nature and used to being obeyed. He was not keen on being humiliated in front of foreign dignitaries. He demanded again multiple times; Beethoven kept refusing. The story goes that eventually, Beethoven was swinging a chair over his head and had to be restrained from smashing the head of the Prince by Count Oppersdorff. It appears that Beethoven then gathered his manuscripts, left the Lichnowsky castle and made the long journey back to Vienna. From there, he is said to have written to Lichnowsky: 'Prince! What you are, you are by circumstance and by birth. What I am, I am through myself. Of princes there have been and will be thousands. Of Beethovens there is only one.'[151] Keeping in mind Beethoven's disdain for the aristocracy, it is not all to difficult to understand that Beethoven may have identified himself strongly with this poem.

Back to the poem. Somewhat later, Goethe's Prometheus prides himself on his self-reliance. 'Hast du's nicht alles selbst vollendet, / Heilig glühend Herz?' (Didn't you do all this yourself, my sacredly glowing heart?), he says. Only a few lines later, Goethe asserts the role of Fate in the formation of the heroic self: 'Hat mich nicht zum Manne geschmiedet / Die allmächtige Zeit / Und das ewige Schicksal, / Meine Herrn und deine?' ('Did not all-powerful Time and eternal Fate, my masters and your own, forge me into a man?'). Even the gods themselves are to answer Fate and Time.[152] Such words could again have been a ready source of inspiration to Beethoven, which may also all the better help explaining Beethoven's surprise and dismay at Goethe's personal deference to the nobility at the time the two met.

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Let us now return to the fourth movement of the *Eroica* Symphony on a more musical level. Among the most provocative is the constantly returning four-note motif. We unmistakably

[151] Quoted from: H. C. Robbins Landon, *Beethoven: A Documentary Study* (London: Macmillan 1970), p. 209; I have taken the story from him, as well as from Thayer, *Life of Beethoven*, vol. I, p. 403. It is difficult to verify what exactly happened back then. As Landon, as well as other biographers show, we know that there was 'a scene' that evening, which led to a break between Beethoven and Lichnowsky. But for the more detailed description we are practically wholly reliant on what the daughter of Lichnowsky's brother told Thayer some decades later.

[152] Burnham, 'Beethoven and Heroism in the Age of Revolutions', p. 13.

recognize this motif as the first four notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony: a triple-note upbeat, followed by a single downbeat (ta-ta-ta-TA). But it is a musical device that Beethoven uses numerous times in the final movement of the Third as well.

As Jones notes, this four-note motif did not belong to Beethoven at all. Instead, it possessed many 'pre-existing revolutionary credentials'. It formed the rhythmic frame of the *L'Hymne du Panthéon* by Cherubini. And if Beethoven was not aware of this particular work, he must have encountered this motif in many of the other works from the Revolutionary repertoire which intruded Vienna at that time, for it was truly ubiquitous. 'This musical configuration swarmed the revolutionary soundscape: from Republican songs such as *L'Heureuse Decade* and *La Liberté des Nègres* to Méhul's G-minor Symphony and the anthem of the Revolution itself, *La Marseillaise*.' According to Jones, these four notes turned into the rhythm of the Revolution itself – 'a kind of "Jacobin" leitmotif that conjured images, initially, of liberty, then, of rattling tumbrils.'[153]

The finale opens with an abrupt, stormy introduction in which the strings play *fortissimo* in a turbulent, fugato-like manner. What follows is the orchestra playing *tutti* a short series of quarter notes, followed by a half-note fermata. Although it is not exactly the four-note motif we are looking for, it is not difficult to see how it is related to it:

[153] Jones, 'Beethoven and the Sound of Revolution in Vienna', pp. 953-54.

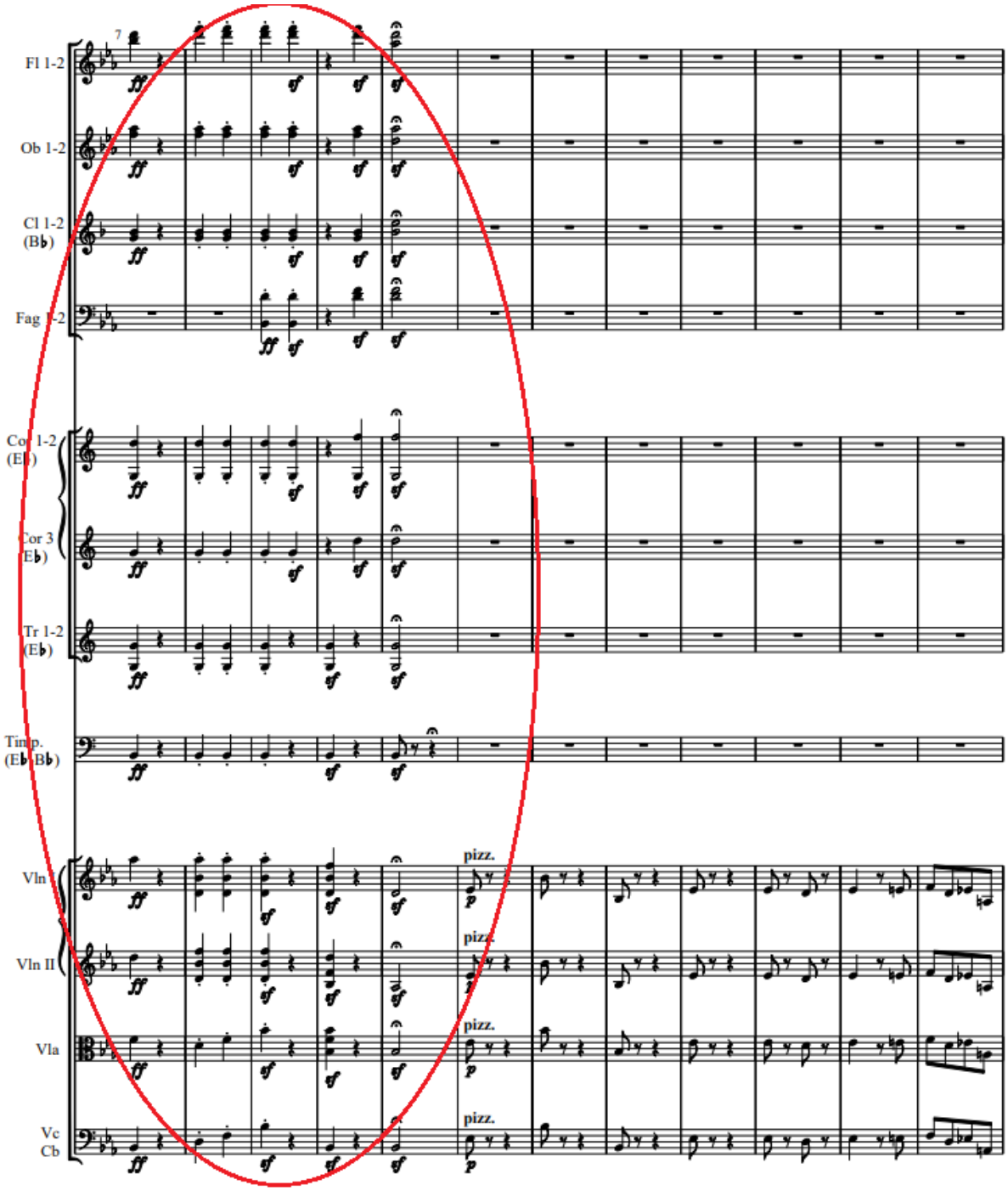

Figure 10

Eroica Symphony, Fourth Movement, mm. 7-18.

What follows is the strings playing in pizzicato what we will recognize as the *basso* of the *Prometheus* theme. It inaugurates the dance. It initiates the variation-final proper. The *basso* theme is echoed jauntily in the winds. The music conjures the atmosphere of the *Prometheus* ballet. And just as in the ballet version, what follows are three sudden and loud quarter notes,

followed by a half-note fermata. This time, it is unmistakably recognizable as the four-note motif of the Revolution:

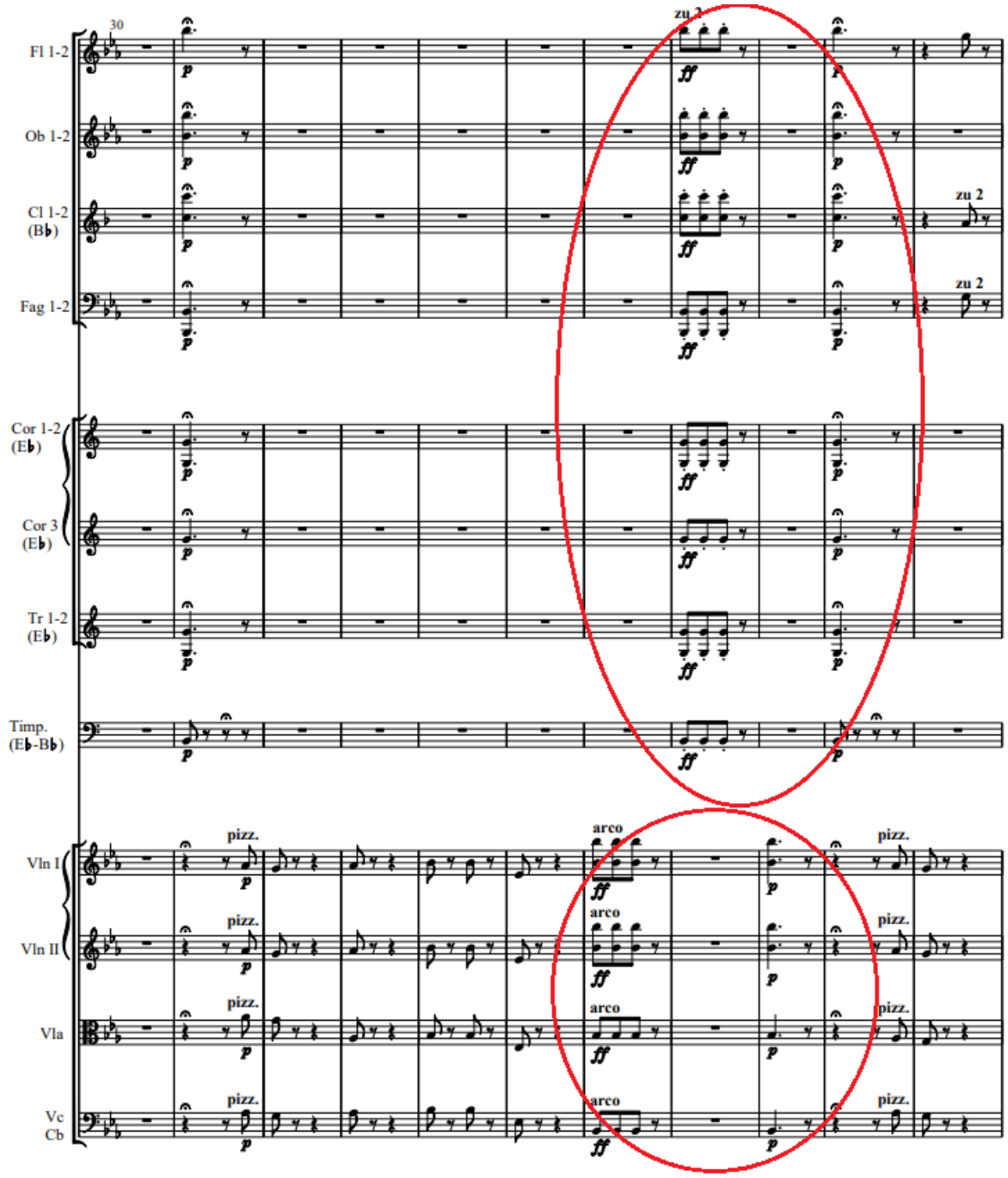

Figure 11

Eroica Symphony, Fourth Movement, mm. 30-40.

This figure keeps returning as a sort of refrain in the *basso*. But it also returns intermittently in the other voices. Beethoven gathers his variations just as he did in his *Eroica* Variations for piano. After we have returned to the home key, the music divides into two parts, then into three, and then into four. At times the voices play the sprightly *englische* tune. Some variations are in

the light mode of a dance. Others are loud and assertive, undergirded with rocketing bass lines. But all have one element in common: the constantly recurring four-note motif of the Revolution:

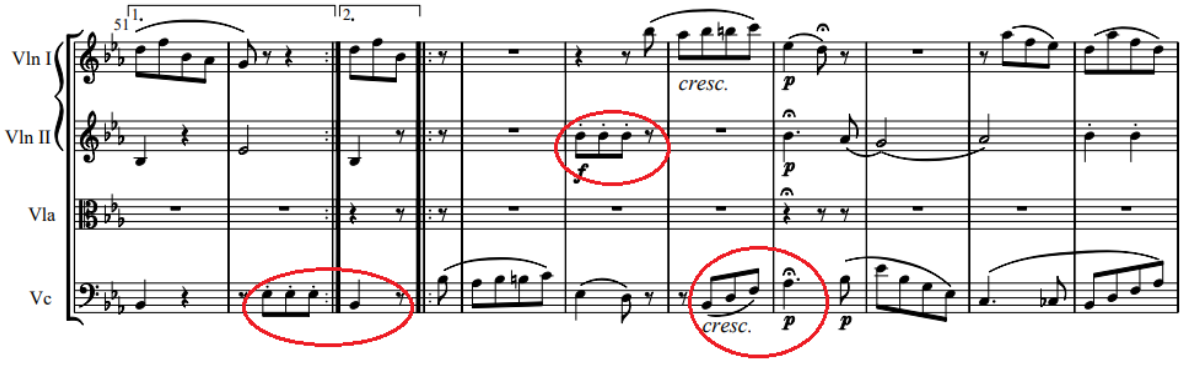

Figure 12

Eroica Symphony, Fourth Movement, mm. 51-61.

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The finale steadily intensifies from the light style of a dance to a heroic voice. It leads to the exaltation of the *basso* theme. And then, in the last section, the music suddenly turns inward again. It represents the apotheosis of the *englische* melody – not as some blustering ecstasy, but as a solemn hymn. It is all *poco andante*. Its protagonist is the poignant oboe. Beethoven transforms the sprightly little dance tune into a song of great tenderness and compassion. Just as in the *Marcia funebre*, it is a hymn – arguably not to God, but to Humanity. And in a contemplative, commemorative manner, Beethoven recalls themes, colour, textures, and feelings from earlier parts of the symphony – the Funeral March in particular. He gathers up more and more threads. The music that was once so primal and undetermined, begins to find its final destination. The symphony turns into a whole – finally. It retraces the symphony's journey from the first to the second movement; from victory to mourning; from outward to inward. And all eventually culminates into an explosion of jubilation, which is the climax not only of the finale, but of the whole symphony. Swafford writes of it: 'The final pages are what the unfulfilled end of the first movement was waiting for, the true victory, the completion of the Hero's task.' The coda is presented 'like the denouement of a great ceremony vibrant with horns and trumpets – like throngs, like all humanity exulting in a revolution triumphant, with a joy that obliterates everything else.' And on the theme the horns proclaim: '[it] is Hero and

englische, leader and people united; the harmony is nothing but the tonic and dominant of the *basso*. The end celebrates humanity's imagined triumph.'[154]

To conclude this chapter, it is worth it to take a glance at the overarching metaphor Swafford points to. Beethoven may or may not have seen this consciously as such – but like Napoleon, the 'enlightened' Hero from the symphony 'does not rise from aristocracy or from accident of birth but is self-created from his origin in the People, just as his theme is created from its origin in the *englische*.'[155] And indeed, it was central to Beethoven that Napoleon was not highborn but (more or less) self-made. The source material suggests that, for all his eventual disgust at the man that had turned himself into a dictator, at least that admiration endured. For example, a French visitor of 1809 reported: 'He was uncommonly preoccupied with Napoleon's greatness and often spoke to me about it. Although he was not well-disposed towards him, I noticed that he admired his rise from such a lowly position.'[156] One could argue, as Swafford does, that in the symphony the self-created hero turned into a paradigm of all human potential. 'To exalt this kind of Hero is to exalt the People, the common clay.' It is the Hero theme that turns that idea into sound. It is based on a triad – one of the simplest and most common things in music. And from that common clay, Beethoven forged one of the most marvellous pieces of music ever written.[157]

[154] Swafford, *Beethoven*, pp. 362-63.
[155] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 363.
[156] Quoted in: Dahlhaus, *Ludwig van Beethoven*, p. 26.
[157] Swafford, *Beethoven*, p. 363.

7. Conclusion

The somewhat curious premiere of the *Eroica* Symphony in the Theater an der Wien on 7 April 1805 marked in a sense Beethoven's final liberation from the giants of the past looking over his shoulder – Haydn and Mozart in particular. He had at least become their peer, but he may as well just have surpassed them at that moment. His ideas had become bolder and more pointed. His rhythms more dynamic. At the same time, his relation with the audience had changed. He would continue to produce pieces with popular pieces – a regular 'potboiler' was never far away – but in another sense Beethoven also became more detached from his audience. With the *Eroica* Symphony, he proved himself to be an *individual* artist *par excellence*. He was definitely more than just a 'collaborator' or composer who just wrote what people wanted to hear. In a sense, he was a very *genuine* composer. From his Third Symphony onwards, he finally dared to make far-reaching demands of his listeners – call them 'Revolutionary'. He imposed on them a new way of listening and by doing so he moved the Revolution from the streets of Paris to the concert halls of Vienna.

Through all setbacks and hardships, Beethoven managed to clear his 'new path'. This new path was particularly characterized by a fusion of Beethoven's individual art on the one hand and his *Aufklärung* consciousness on the other. Reason enough for the Romantics of the nineteenth century and beyond to regard his music as something intensely personal, which it was in a sense, but they went a step too far by glorifying and mythologizing the individual, thus placing him outside the stream of time. Beethoven became *the* composer for the coming Romantic generations, and in some ways he has always been ever since. It was none other than the *Eroica* Symphony that made him imperative for the entire Romantic movement. The divine individual had become the Hero of the story.

But before this symphony was Romantic, it was Revolutionary. For sure, the work is the expression of an individual artist. But we may never forget that this individual artist was a creator who created his creation in tumultuous times and at a breaking point in history, which must undeniably and inescapably have influenced and shaped his work. We cannot see the work separate from its context. Historians repeat such phrases so tirelessly that they have almost become cliches. But apparently they seem to have trouble doing something tangible with them – in the case of Beethoven scholarship at least, for this is a field of learning that is still under the heavy spell of the Romantic way of thinking, neglecting most sense of time and place. So I happily repeat this cliché once more. If one lesson should continue to resonate in the mind of the reader, it is that creator, creation, and historical context form a symbiotic and absolutely

inseparable whole. And it is exactly as such – and in no other way – how the *Eroica* Symphony should be approached.

Beethoven grew up in a Bonn steeped in *Aufklärung* thought. The young musician soon apprenticed with all kinds of Masons and sympathizers of the French Revolution being active there and tutoring him in the ideals surrounding freedom, equality, brotherhood, and humanity. In the meantime, the music of the French Revolution gradually spread over the German countries bordering France throughout the 1790s. In 1792 Beethoven left Bonn for Vienna. Along the way he may have encountered countless armies – with music and all. And the Revolution could not have escaped his attention in Vienna either. By the turn of the century, the repertoire of the Revolution had nested itself there almost as firmly as in France itself. The works of Goethe and Schiller, among others, only further affirmed the ideals he took up during his *Aufklärung* upbringing in Bonn. In the meantime, he – like many of his contemporaries – became captivated by the figure of Napoleon. He marveled at this Promethean embodiment of the Revolution. Never before had a single individual acquired so much power or enchanted so many minds. On top of that, this figure did not get his power from birth alone. He was – at least in the mind of Beethoven – primarily self-made. Beethoven fancied himself being among his staple of artists. He turned it into his mission to write a symphony worthy and appropriate to lay at his feet. All the greater was his disappointment when this 'Revolution on horseback' had himself crowned Emperor.

All this got a place in Beethoven's Third Symphony. The marches and hymns of the Revolution constantly resonate throughout the whole piece – but the *Marcia funebre* in particular, parts of which are clearly borrowed from or inspired by the Revolutionary repertoire. The entire piece is about a 'Hero', whoever he may be. Perhaps it remained Napoleon. Perhaps it became a Hero in a more abstract sense. Perhaps still with the 'old' Napoleon in mind. Or perhaps not. But in any case, what the Hero at least stands for is 'resistance to tyranny, asserting the overriding importance of free thought, and freedom in general, the ability to endure fated hardships, the triumph of free will in overcoming adversity and even overcoming one's own self, all culminating in the moral commitment to sacrifice ourselves for a higher ideal.' At the same time, this Hero is a Promethean figure. He already entered the stage in the *Prometheus* ballet. He endows man with a *Geist* by enlightening him. How? Taking him to Parnassus to teach him the arts. In line with Schiller, Beethoven turns the Revolution of the barricades and guillotines into a Revolution of aesthetics. Yet, the ideals of the French Revolution continue to resonate in his mind and in his work: Beethoven never loses sight of them. People are dancing on the boards where the aesthetic revolution is transpiring. And all the dancers – high and low,

rich and poor, old and young, wise and silly, nobleman and merchant's daughter – get caught up in the whirling patterns of the *englische*. In a sense, Beethoven may have proved himself to be able to realize the ideals of *liberté*, *égalité* and *fraternité* better than the French ever did.

This does not necessarily mean that Beethoven consciously was some fanatical revolutionary as such. His revolutionary idiom is not so much intentional in that sense. He was not some kind of 'musical Marat'. And there is also no reason to assume that he explicitly wanted to convey such a message. All that I have tried to show in this thesis is how he at least managed to absorb, assimilate and incorporate these ideals into his music. One more time: a creation is a reflection of its creator. And the creator is a reflection of his historical context, which constantly influences and shapes him – consciously or not. In that sense, it is hardly imaginable that the *Eroica* Symphony could not be Revolutionary. The work has showed itself to be an unmistakable and unavoidable reflection of its time and place. It offers us a mirror through which we see its historical context reflected. Beethoven's Third Symphony is by no means unique in that regard. But *how* it does this, definitely is.

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