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The Relationship between Beethoven's Heiligenstadt Testament and His Nine Symphonies

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BEETHOVEN'S
HEILIGENSTADT TESTAMENT AND HIS NINE SYMPHONIES

BY

Thomas Mitchell
The main consideration throughout all the paper will be the correlation between Beethoven's symphonies and his Heiligenstadt Testament. Because the so-called "Battle" Symphony is not a true symphony at all (being written for a huge mechanical contraption), it will not be dealt with at all.

Many writers, among them Vincent D'Indy have attempted to divide Beethoven's compositional career into three periods. Such a division is not always necessary, but in this paper it will serve the reader to use the concept and keep the following divisions in mind. The First Period, sometimes called the Imitation Period, lasted until 1801 and includes the First and Second Symphonies. The Second Period, also referred to as the Transitional Period, spanned the years 1801 to 1815. The Third Period, 1815 to 1827, is commonly labelled the Reflection Period. There is some disagreement as to which symphonies belong to which period, but most authors on the subject feel that Symphonies Seven, Eight, and Nine belong to the last.

Naturally, there are disagreements on specific period dates and their symphonic output, but the reader will have a better general overview of Beethoven's musical frame of mind for each symphony if he follows the division of time given here. Before we discuss the symphonies, however, let us look at the minimum biographical detail needed for this paper.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) was one of the greatest composers this world has ever known, but very few people today would envy the conditions under which he lived.
He came from a family with a strong musical background. Louis van Beethoven, the composer's grandfather, was among the prominent musicians in the family. He held the position of Electoral Kapellmeister in Bonn. He also sold wine, which provided a substantial second income but resulted in a grave problem: his wife became a very heavy drinker. "This vice was inherited by Beethoven's father Johann, who was one of three children of Louis and his wife Maria Josepha Poll."1

In 1767, Johann (Beethoven's father) married a widow, Maria Magdalena Keverich. Together they reared seven children. Ludwig was the second born of the seven. "The eldest child was also named Ludwig (Maria), [was] born in 1769 and baptized on 2nd April [and] bore the names of his grandfather and Frau Courtin next door, who were his sponsors. The poor little mite lived but six days."2 When the composer was born, then, he inherited the name of Ludwig, presumably also after grandfather Louis.

Of the seven children, only two of Ludwig's brothers lived past infancy. They were Kasper Anton Karl, born in 1774, and Nikolas Johann, born in 1776. As we shall see, these two brothers played a very significant part in Ludwig's life. None of the children were raised in an ideal environment. Their father, a heavy drinker, made life miserable at times for them as well as for their mother. The mother once said that "Marriage is a little joy, followed by a chain of sorrows."3

3. Ibid., p. 9.
Johann, a music teacher and tenor in the Electoral Court Chapel, recognized that Ludwig, though but a youngster, possessed a tremendous musical talent. With this in mind, he began giving lessons to his son; this was not a pleasant situation for the boy. Johann, a rough character, sometimes even woke the child late at night and forced him to play for friends.

"In March, 1778, Ludwig performed his first concert, with the assistance of his father and a female court singer." At this time, he was reportedly six years of age, an impossibility for one born in 1770! Although it is true that dates such as these were not very accurately kept, it seems obvious that Johann gave the boy's age as six not only because it would make the concert more impressive, but more importantly because it would make Ludwig younger than Mozart when the latter gave his first performance. Johann also had commercial reasons in mind (for one, more money to support himself and the family) and went so far as to beat the child and lock him in the cellar to force results. Ludwig simply must be a prodigy!

Much has been written about Johann and his actions, but little (as is often the case) about Ludwig's mother. Maria had come from a reputable family and was not a poor servant girl, although this is the image often presented. She may have appeared to be of a lower class, however, after being married to Johann for several years. From all known evidence she was a good mother, considering the circumstances of her life. She and Ludwig were very close, and she was one of the

few people who really understood him as a child. "Only his mother understood him as a human being: no one comprehended him as a musician." Despite this love, it was his father's actions that overrode the relationship between the children and their mother.

It must be stressed that the information given up to this point is vitally important for understanding Beethoven's childhood, as well as for laying a foundation for the physical and emotional triumph of this man whose genius and power so overwhelmingly deserve the universal admiration they enjoy.

In 1802, in Heiligenstadt, Austria, Beethoven prepared a solemn document for his brothers Karl and Johann. It was not to be opened until after his death. The document, now called the Heiligenstadt Testament, reveals some of Beethoven's thoughts and feelings, especially those resulting from his growing deafness. It is the intent of this paper to establish a relationship between the Testament and the symphonies Beethoven wrote. No attempt will be made to invent relationships based on programmatic aspects of these works. "With regard to programme, Beethoven has told us that it was his custom in composing to write to a picture, and that he had always a scene before him." This statement, however, does not give anyone authority to invent whatever he may wish about each work. One must keep in mind that a "picture", as Beethoven refers to it, may well be a picture of feeling and emotion only. Nevertheless, the writer will try to establish possible relationships between the composer's life, music and the Testament. Because of


its vital significance to this paper, the Heiligenstadt Testament

will now be quoted in its entirety:

For my brothers Carl and ------- Beethoven

0 ye men who think or say that I am malevolent, stubborn or
misanthropic, how greatly do ye wrong me, you do not know the
secret causes of my seeming, from childhood my heart and mind
were disposed to the gentle feelings of good will, I was even
ever eager to accomplish great deeds, but reflect now that
for 6 years I have been in a hopeless case, aggravated by
senseless physicians, cheated year after year in the hope of
improvement, finally compelled to face the prospect of a lasting
malady (whose cure will take years or, perhaps, be impossible),
born with an ardent and lively temperament, even susceptible
to the diversions of society, I was compelled early to isolate
myself, to live in loneliness, when I at times tried to forget
all this, 0 how harshly was I repulsed by the doubly sad ex-
perience of my bad hearing, and yet it was impossible for me
to say to men speak louder, shout, for I am deaf. Ah how could
I possibly admit an infirmity in the one sense which should
have been more perfect in me than in others, a sense which I
once possessed in highest perfection, a perfection such as few
surely in my profession enjoy or ever have enjoyed—0 I cannot
do it, therefore forgive me when you see me draw back when I
would gladly mingle with you, my misfortune is doubly painful
because it must lead to my being misunderstood, for me there
can be no recreation in society of my fellows, refined inter-
course, mutual exchange of thought, only just as little as the
greatest needs command may I mix with society. I must live
like an exile, if I approach near to people a hot terror seizes
upon me, a fear that I may be subjected to the danger of letting
my condition be observed—thus it has been during the last year
which I spent in the country, commanded by my intelligent phy-
sician to spare my hearing as much as possible, in this almost
meeting my present natural disposition, although I sometimes
ran counter to it yielding to my inclination for society, but
what a humiliation when one stood beside me and heard a flute
in the distance and I heard nothing, or someone heard the
shepherd singing and again I heard nothing, such incidents
brought me to the verge of despair, but little more and I would
have put an end to my life—only art it was that withheld me,
ah it seemed impossible to leave the world until I had produced
all that I felt called upon to produce, and so I endured this
wretched existence—truly wretched, an excitable body which a
sudden change can throw from the best into the worst state—
Patience—it is said I must now choose for my guide, I have done
so, I hope my determination will remain firm to endure until it
pleases the inexorable parcae to break the thread, perhaps I
shall get better, perhaps not, I am prepared. Forced already
in my 28th year to become a philosopher, 0 it is not easy, less
easy for the artist than for anyone else—Divine One thou lookest into my inmost soul, thou knowest it, thou knowest that love of man and desire to do good live therein. O men, when some day you read these words, reflect that ye did me wrong and let the unfortunate one comfort himself and find one of his kind who despite all the obstacles of nature yet did all that was in his power to be accepted among worthy artists and men. You my brothers Carl and as soon as I am dead if Dr. Schmid is still alive ask him in my name to describe my malady and attach this document to the history of my illness so that so far as possible at least the world may become reconciled with me after my death. At the same time I declare you two to be the heirs to my small fortune (if so it can be called), divide it fairly, bear with and help each other, what injury you have done me you know was long ago forgiven. To you brother Carl I give special thanks for the attachment you have displayed towards me of late. It is my wish that your lives may be better and freer from care than I have had, recommend virtue to your children, it alone can give happiness, not money, I speak from experience, it was virtue that upheld me in misery, to it next to my art I owe the fact that I did not end my life by suicide.—Farewell and love each other—I thank all my friends, particularly Prince Lichnowsky and Professor Schmid—I desire that the instruments from Prince L. be preserved by one of you but let no quarrel result from this, so soon as they can serve you a better purpose sell them, how glad will I be if I can still be helpful to you in my grave—with joy I hasten towards death—if it comes before I shall have had an opportunity to show all my artistic capacities it will still come too early for me despite my hard fate and I shall probably wish that it had come later—but even then I am satisfied, will it not free me from a state of endless suffering?—Come when thou will I shall meet thee bravely.—Farewell and do not wholly forget me when I am dead, I deserve this of you in having often in life thought of you how to make you happy, be so—

Ludwig van Beethoven.

[Seal.]

Heiligenstadt,
October 6th, 1802.

For my brothers Carl and to be read and executed after my death.

Heiligenstadt, October 10th, 1802, thus do I take my farewell of thee—and indeed sadly—yes that beloved hope—which I brought with me when I came here to be cured at least in a degree—I must wholly abandon, as the leaves of autumn fall and are withered so hope has been blighted, almost as I came—I go away—even the high courage—which often inspired me in the beautiful days of
summe—has disappeared—0 Providence—grant me at last but one day of pure joy—it is so long since real joy echoed in my heart—0 when—0 when, O Divine One—shall I find it again in the temple of nature and of men—Never? no—0 that would be too hard.7

With all this in mind, let us now turn to the symphonies themselves.

Symphony No. 1 in C-major, Op. 21

Beethoven's First Symphony was completed in 1800, two years prior to the writing of the Heiligenstadt Testament. This being the case, it cannot be directly related to the document. However, it is an important work for several reasons. First of all, it shows influences of both Haydn and Mozart in such places as the introduction to the first movement, and in the overall pattern of orchestration. Also, its form and length are basically those of symphonies composed during the Classical Period. It is understandable why it is considered a work of the Imitation Period.

However, there are, in this symphony, two compositional aspects truly Beethovenian in nature, pointing up the greatness and individuality of the man even this early in his career. In the third movement, the composer increases the tempo of the Classical menuet, breaks through the formal mold, and turns it into the scherzo. "This change was like taking a leap into a new world."8 In the same movement, too, there are some bold modulations (e.g., B-flat minor to


C major) and shifting colors which point strikingly to the future. These two features of the work are excellent examples showing Beethoven's masterful touch, already apparent even in this first attempt at writing a large orchestral work.

Despite his brilliance, Beethoven nevertheless worked very slowly and deliberately, reworking his themes over and over until they were perfectly to his liking. "Nottebohm reports on his purposes after a study of some sketches, and from him we learn that the theme of the present last movement was originally intended for a first movement. Beethoven must have worked on his composition in 1794-1795, perhaps at the suggestion of van Swieten -- a conclusion suggested by the fact that the dedication finally went to him."⁹

Such deliberate care and evidence of individuality make the First Symphony an excellent work despite what it might owe to Haydn and Mozart. "The finish and care observable throughout the work are very great. Beethoven began with the determination, which stuck to him during his life, not only of thinking good thoughts, but of expressing them with as much clearness and intelligibility as labour could effect; and this Symphony is full of instances of such thoughtful pains."¹⁰

Symphony No. 2 in D-major, Op. 36

Beethoven's Second Symphony was completed in 1802, the same year the Heiligenstadt Testament was written; also, it was written

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in that same town. In this symphony, he still uses the basic forms of the Classical symphony. He does, however, expand the introduction to the first movement, and also starts to develop codas to a greater extent. For the first time in a symphony, the third movement is called a scherzo. (One may note that in the First Symphony, Beethoven wrote what was in fact such a movement, but still called it a menuetto).

Another distinguishing aspect of the scherzo is the composer's highly original use of the woodwinds.

There is evidence that Beethoven reworked this entire symphony three times, another example of his endless drive for perfection. "The labour and pains involved in the process must have been immense, but, here as elsewhere, he never spared himself, and never relinquished a passage until it was as good as he could make it; and hence one great part of the secret of immortality of his music." 11

In this symphony (which he later transcribed for piano trio), it is evident that the composer has come to feel at ease in writing symphonic music. There is more individuality in this work than was apparent in the First Symphony.

There is sufficient recorded information to indicate that Beethoven had been bothered with hearing problems for as many as six years before the completion of his Second Symphony. No one is certain of the extent of the loss at this time; some days seem to have been better than others. It is apparent, however, that his drive to speak through music was stronger than any temptation to surrender to fate. There must, therefore, be far more important ties between the symphony and the Testament

than the fact that they were both written in the same year at the same place, for on the surface they seem to contradict each other.

Thayer well summarizes the profundity of one possible connection.

And yet in that retirement whence came a paper of such profound sadness was wrought out the Symphony in D; a work whose grand and imposing introduction——brilliant Allegro, a Larghetto "so lovely, so pure and amiably conceived," written in the scenes which gave inspiration to the divine "Pastorale" of which its serene tranquility seems the precursor; a Scherzo "as merry, wayward, skipping and charming as anything possible," as even Oulibichef admits; and a Finale, the very intoxication of a spirit "intoxicated with fire"———made it, like the Quartets, an era both in the life of its author and in the history of instrumental music. In life, as in music, the more profoundly the depths of feeling are sounded in the Adagio, the more "merry to the verge of boisterousness" the Scherzo which follows. But who, reading that in October hope had been abandoned and the high courage which had often inspired him in the beautiful days of summer had disappeared, could anticipate that in November, through the wonderful elasticity of his nature, his mind would have so recovered its tone as to leave no trace visible of the so recent depression and gloom? Perhaps the mere act of giving his feelings vent in that extra-ordinary promemoria may have brought on the crisis, and from that moment the reaction may have begun.\(^\text{12}\)

Certainly this is a logical deduction. It is possible, however, that there are even deeper reasons for the seeming contrast between the agony of the Testament and the general lack of it in the symphony. Thayer, after all, does not overanalyze. However, it is obvious that the powerful content of Beethoven's symphonies are now going to be more important than the conditions under which they were written.

Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Op. 55

Beethoven completed his Third Symphony early in 1804. It was his first in a largely new style. Beethoven himself stated: "I

am not satisfied with my works up to the present time. From today, I mean to take a new road."  

Many of Beethoven's early works express individual and powerful experiences in his life, but not life as a mastered whole. "It was only towards the end of his life that his music became the perfectly direct expression of his inner state." The Third, then, is the expression of still another, and very powerful experience; and could perhaps have been the reason for "a new road." It has several clearly observable changes in compositional technique. For one thing, it is much longer than either of the two previous symphonies. It is, in fact, one of the longest (if not the longest) symphonies written up to that time. The composer's ability to build length in such an organic fashion enabled him to devote more space to the development of thematic material, and thus also explains the expansion of codas in his works. In the Third Symphony, too, he uses rhythm with particular originality, accenting weak beats, introducing an alla breve into the middle of the Scherzo, and earning the right to be called the man who broke the tyranny of the barline.

The Third Symphony was at first to have been called "Bonaparte" (not a dedication, but a title), because the composer admired Napoleon Bonaparte, likening him to the great Roman consuls, a man interested only in the betterment of mankind. Despite succeeding events, in fact, Beethoven retained some of his hero-worship for Napoleon all his life. The event which touched off a great crisis in Beethoven's

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own life was that in 1804, the very year the Third was completed, Napoleon declared himself Emperor of France. When Beethoven heard this news, his view of the hero changed explosively.

He will trample all the rights of men under foot, to indulge his ambition, and become a greater tyrant than any one! And with these words he seized his music, tore the title-page in half, and threw it on the ground. After this his admiration was turned hatred, and he is said never again to have referred to the connection between his work and the Emperor till seventeen years afterwards, when the news of Napoleon's death at St. Helena (May 6, 1821) reached him. He then said: 'I have already composed the proper music for that catastrophe,' meaning the Funeral March, which forms the second movement of the work—-if indeed he did not mean the Symphony.  

Schmidt-Görg adds: "The original score of the Third———had not survived. A copy containing corrections by Beethoven still clearly bears on the title page the words 'intitolata Bonaparte'; they have been scratched out so violently that holes were made in the paper." The title-page of the 1806 original edition says "Sinfonia Eroica" with a subtitle which adds (in English translation) "composed to celebrate the memory of a great man." Schmidt-Görg also feels that too much has been written —much more guesswork— about the incident and therefore there has been a tendency to write programmes for the music without any real basis.

Added to the guesswork about Beethoven-Napoleon is the guesswork about the fact that Beethoven follows his famous Funeral March (second movement) with a boisterous scherzo. There are several views held about the Funeral March-Scherzo sequence, and some include the Napoleon crisis.


Marion Scott believes that Beethoven's beloved Plutarch supplies the answer.

Plutarch's famous biographies, the Parallel Lives, are written in pairs, each pair consisting of a Greek warrior, statesman or orator, set side by side with a noted Roman counterpart—thus Alexander and Caesar, Lycurgus and Numa, etc. This arrangement would at once explain the duality and parallelism in the Eroica Symphony. I am disposed to believe that in the two opening movements Beethoven expressed everything that belonged to the glory, heroism and state of the hero in the material, contemporary world. For the last two movements—the parallel life—I like to think Beethoven removed everything into that ancient world which he looked upon as so much nobler than his own times—and took his music up on to its highest plane. Perhaps it is wild surmise, but the legend of Orion is the one I would guess for the scherzo; Orion, the great hunter, the hero of superhuman beauty, who, when slain, was translated to the skies, still to be seen there, with the shimmering stars of his belt and sword, and Sirius, his dog, leaping at his heel. 17

It is true that the composer considered using stories from Greek mythology for at least two other works, and we know that in the Finale of this Third Symphony he uses his own Prometheus theme (from the overture) and expands upon it in a series of magnificent variations. Thus, Scott's theory is not unconvincing, and it has no speculation about the Eroica and Napoleon.

Another theory is based upon the fact that the Symphony was already completed before Napoleon made himself Emperor, and that although the title page was certainly changed, all indications are that the music was left intact. The famous first theme of the first movement, a simple E-flat major triad, was a type of figure once used to represent heroism and could represent Napoleon as a hero. The Funeral March, according to this same theory, could then have represented a hero's

death, perhaps Napoleon's. However, the theory does nothing about the last two movements, perhaps because no credibility could be attached to anything imagined for them.

To the present writer, J.W.N. Sullivan's idea reveals a more believable viewpoint, since it takes in almost every aspect of the work and the people involved.

We have found that such a change is witnessed to by the Heiligenstadt Testament, and we shall see that the Eroica symphony is an amazingly realized and co-ordinated expression of the spiritual experiences that underlay that document. The ostensible occasion of the symphony appears to have been the career of Napoleon Bonaparte, but no amount of brooding over Napoleon's career could have given Beethoven his realization of what we may call the life-history of heroic achievement as exemplified in the Eroica. This is obviously a transcription of personal experience. He may have thought Napoleon a hero, but his conception of the heroic he had earned for himself. It has been objected to the symphony that the Funeral March is in the wrong place and that it should follow the Scherzo. But this objection entirely misses the organic connection of the whole work. The most profound experience that Beethoven had yet passed through was when his courage and defiance of his fate had been followed by despair. He was expressing what he knew when he made the courage and heroism of the first movement succeeded by the black night of the second. And he was again speaking of what he knew when he made this to be succeeded by the indomitable uprising of creative energy in the Scherzo. Beethoven was here speaking of what was perhaps the cardinal experience of his life, that when, with all his strength and courage, he had been reduced to despair, that when the conscious strong man had tasted very death, there came this turbulent, irrepressible, deathless creative energy surging up from depths he had not suspected. The whole work is a miraculously realized expression of a supremely important experience, and is justly regarded as a turning-point in Beethoven's music. The last movement is based on what we know to have been Beethoven's "Prometheus" theme. Having survived death and despair the artist turns to creation. By adopting the variation form Beethoven has been able to indicate the variety of achievement that is now open to his "Promethean" energy. The whole work is a most close-knit psychologic unit. Never before in music has so important, manifold, and completely coherent an experience been communicated.  

In other words, Sullivan seems to see the Eroica as a musical expression of the Heiligenstadt Testament itself, an expression of shock and pain brought on by the immense disappointment in Napoleon's act, another blow to bear for the composer already suffering from increasing deafness and other problems. But like the Testament, this work also expresses the greatest courage and defiance. This theory, at least, can lead one to a further look at a really credible relationship between the Testament and the Eroica.

Symphony No. 4 in B-flat major, Op. 60

Beethoven completed his Fourth Symphony in 1806, two years after the Eroica. Surrounded as it is by the heroic Third and the powerful Fifth, it has existed, to some extent, under a cloud. "No sketches for it seem as yet to have been found, and investigation by Mr. Thayer and Mr. Nottebohm disclose but little." It is known, however, that Beethoven originally planned to follow the Eroica with the C-minor Symphony (now the Fifth), and that the first two movements of the latter date from 1805. We do not know all the reasons for his change of plans, but the composer had a commission from Count Oppersdorff for a symphony, which Beethoven at first thought to fulfill with the C-minor. In the end, however, he decided to dedicate that work to Prince Lobkowitz, and so wrote the Fourth for Oppersdorff. Grove has the opinion that "...perhaps Beethoven's instinct showed him that it

would be an artistic mistake to follow so very serious a symphony as the Eroica by one equally earnest and profound. There certainly were more personal considerations, to be alluded to presently, which made it impossible for him to write in any other vein. At any rate, the B-flat symphony is a complete contrast to both its predecessor and successor, and is as gay and spontaneous as they are serious and lofty.  

Sullivan makes a similar but more general observation. "The greater importance the world has always attributed to the third, fifth, seventh and ninth symphonies compared with the fourth, sixth, and eighth, is not because of any purely musical superiority they possess, but because everyone is more or less clearly aware that greater issues are involved, that something more important for mankind is being expressed."  

The Fourth Symphony is a work animated throughout by a youthful exhilaration, a rare mood for Beethoven which makes it's preservation doubly fortunate for us. Considering the four-year gap between it and the Testament, the work may seem so contrasting as to be regressive in a sense. Obviously there must have been some special incentive that enabled him to write this symphony. According, at least to Grove, there was; "We now know, on evidence that, with some drawbacks of expression, has to unprejudiced minds every appearance of being genuine, that in the May of the year which Beethoven was occupied over this very Symphony he became engaged to the Countess


Theresa, sister of his intimate friend Franz von Brunswick, and that the three famous love-letters which were found in his desk after his death, and have been supposed to be addressed to the Countess Giulietta Guicciardi, were really written to that lady.\textsuperscript{22} If we accept this opinion, we can also understand the mood of the Fourth Symphony. It shows us a side of Beethoven's personality not expressed in the Testament, although the document does show the composer's great desire for love. All things being equal, perhaps the Fourth in its exuberance indicates that those desires have been fulfilled.

\textbf{Symphony No. 5 in C-minor, Op. 67}

The Fifth Symphony was completed, again in Heligenstasst, in 1808. It is, of course, one of the most famous musical compositions ever written. The unique four-note motif in the first movement has contributed to its fame, but there are many other factors involved. The force and intensity of the motivic development in the first movement seem to express the disordered sentiments filling a great soul preyed upon by despair. When asked the meaning of the opening motif, Beethoven replied, "Thus Fate knocks at the portals!"\textsuperscript{23} With this brief motif, Beethoven achieves a perfect organic unity containing within itself dramatic contrasts, thus enabling him to limit himself to one dominating mood for the entire movement. "And accordingly, here, in this movement, perhaps more than in any other, does Beethoven show his relationship


to Handel: he, as was said of Handel, 'knows how to draw blood.'"24

The second movement is of a wholly different texture and quality than the first. "In the symphony, it is a mere resting-place, a temporary escape from the questions aroused by the first movement."25 It is in variation form, but despite its gracefulness and beauty of sound it does not give the impression that everything is solved.

The Scherzo is a very different affair. Apprehension and defiance surge through it to form a gloomy, despairing picture. Near the end of the movement, Fate appears to have won, but at this very point there occurs the most impressive part of the movement. The timpani enter with a steady, somber beat; as this goes on, other instruments enter, all adding to a crescendo that builds to a gigantic sound -- and then, almost out of nowhere, the fanfare for the finale enters, and we know who is really the victor.

Beethoven's genius is equally apparent in the Finale, where he reintroduces part of the third movement as if to declare that the war is by no means over. The total effect makes words inadequate.

There is a significant relationship between this symphony and the Heiligenstadt Testament. Beethoven refers to Fate knocking on the door: Fate, in the Testament, is his deafness. In the symphony, the first forty-eight bars do little more than repeat the Fate motif, and Berlioz has this emotional reaction to the second movement (again


an emotion found overwhelmingly in the Testament).

The Adagio presents a characteristic relationship to the A-minor Allegretto in the Seventh Symphony, and to that in E flat in the Fourth Symphony. It offers equally the melancholy gravity of the former and the touching grace of the latter. The theme, first stated by the 'cellos and the violas, along with a simple pizzicato double-bass accompaniment, is followed by a certain phrase for the woodwinds, recurring continually in the same form and key from one end to the other of this movement, whatever the successive modification of the original theme.

This persistence of one and the same phrase in always adhering to its original simplicity is so profoundly sad it gradually produces upon the soul of the listener an impression impossible to describe although certainly the most powerful of its kind we have ever experienced.26

Beethoven himself, in a letter that echoes the Testament, ties the last two movements to the document: "I have often cursed my existence; Plutarch taught me resignation. I shall, if possible, defy Fate, though there will be hours in my life when I shall be the most miserable of God's creatures. Resignation! What a wretched resort; yet it is the only one left me!"27

This writer feels that the material above demonstrates a relationship between the Testament and the Fifth Symphony. Sir George Grove, it is true, working on the fact that the Fifth was originally to follow the Eroica, has a somewhat different and more imaginative explanation for the Fifth's format and expressiveness.

His engagement with the Countess Theresa Brunswick, in May, 1806, intervened, and inspired the record of that lovely time which is given in the B flat Symphony; and the C minor had to wait until that was completed.

The actual dates of the composition of the work seem to be as follows: It was started in 1805; in 1806 it was laid aside for the


B flat—the paean on the engagement; it was then resumed and completed in 1807 or early in 1808. It thus covered the time before the engagement, the engagement itself, and a part of the period of agitation when the lovers were separated, and which ended in their final surrender. Now, considering the extraordinary imaginative and disturbed character of the Symphony, it is impossible not to believe that the work—the first movement at any rate—is based on his relations to the Countess, and is more or less a picture of their personality and connection.  

Grove goes on to add:

Short as it is—-and it is astonishingly short—the working-out is most dramatic; a tremendous tragedy is crowded into its few pages. 'Fate is knocking at the door,' as Beethoven is reported to have said of the first theme, and does not enter the house without a fearful combat. Was it the Fate which at that early time he saw as advancing to prevent his union with his Theresa?—-prevent his union with any woman? At any rate, in this movement he unbosoms himself as he has never done before.

Symphony No. 6 in F-major, Op. 68

Beethoven finished work on his Sixth Symphony in 1808, the same year he completed the Fifth. Understandably, there arose, for some years, a certain amount of confusion as to the numbering of the work. When, in 1808, both were played on the same program, the Sixth was called the Fifth and the Fifth was called the Sixth! This problem was still present in 1813 and was magnified because the C-minor was not numbered on the autograph. However, Beethoven himself wrote in the number of the Sixth, thus clearing up at least that point.

The Sixth is the only symphony by Beethoven to be considered as programmatic. He even wrote into the score such things as

29. Ibid., p. 151.
"Cheerful impressions on arriving in the country" (first movement); "By the Brook" (second movement); "Peasants merrymaking" (third movement); "The storm" (fourth movement); and finally "The shepherd's hymn" for the last. None of this is surprising; it is well-known that the composer loved nature. He often spoke of taking walks in the countryside around Heiligenstadt (where some authors claim the Sixth was written), and always seemed to gain strength from his contacts with the outdoors. "My miserable hearing does not trouble me here. In the country it seems as if every tree said to me: 'Holy! Holy!' Who can give complete expression to the ecstasy of the woods! O the sweet stillness of the woods!"

Perhaps this next statement of Beethoven's solidifies even more his vision of nature.

How happy I am to be able to wander among bushes and herbs, under trees and over rocks; no man can love the country as I love it. Woods, trees and rocks send back the echo that man deserves.

Nature is a glorious school for the heart! 'Tis well; I shall be a scholar in this school and bring an eager heart to her instruction. Here I shall learn wisdom, the only wisdom that is free from disgust; here I shall learn to know God and find a foretaste of heaven in His knowledge. Among these occupations my earthly days shall flow peacefully along until I am accepted into that world where I shall no longer be a student, but a knower of wisdom.

However, concerning any real "programme," Beethoven said: "[The] Pastoral Symphony is intended as rather an expression of feeling than a painting." This statement does not quite take away such things as bird calls, running brooks, and even a thunderstorm. No


31. Ibid., pp. 16-18.

one who reads Beethoven's own words for each movement will have any
difficulty recognizing the various scenes from nature. The composer
proved here what no one doubted; that he could write a kind of very
effective programmatic music, and that this outdoor scene could be
so perfectly painted by an essentially deaf man. Once again, it
is astonishing to note the contrast between two symphonies written
at the same time: the Fifth and this Sixth. Perhaps Beethoven;
realizing the power of the C-minor, felt it best musically to follow
it with a work of less defiant nature. If we refer to Sullivan's
already-quoted statement about the odd-and even-numbered symphonies,
we could surmise that the series of symphonies were in fact Beethoven's
own answer to what Sullivan calls "greater issues." In regard to
the Sixth Symphony, for example, nature's inspiration seems a
perfect answer to the agonies expressed in the Testament.

Some critics have criticized the work as too long and too
repetitious, pointing out, for example, that the second movement
alone requires nearly a quarter of an hour. Such criticism seems to
this writer to be superficial: no composer ever knew more confidently
what he wanted to express and the length of the expression. As for
the "programme"; the most important aspect of it is Beethoven's
own statement, although it is not forbidden for one to wonder just
how much of the Sixth is pure "musical expression" and how much is
little more than musical painting.
Symphony No. 7 in A-major, Op. 92

This work was completed in 1812 and had its first performance in Vienna, in December 1813. Again we find a work that will be bound to its successor, the Eighth Symphony, also completed in 1812 and performed at about the same time as the A-major.

The length of time between the completion of the Sixth and Seventh Symphonies is greater than that between any other of Beethoven's works in this form. Beginning in about 1810, there was a decrease in all areas of the composer's compositional output. Other composers, of course, (Handel, for example) have experienced such periods, often for such a simple reason as fatigue. More will be said of Beethoven's specific condition later.

He called his Seventh Symphony "one of my most important works." He called his Seventh Symphony "one of my most important works." Wagner titled it "the apotheosis of the dance." When one hears the brilliant orchestration and the persistent rhythmic "spring," one understands how Wagner felt, for the superb rhythms of the work are its highlights.

Sir George Grove makes an interesting point about the wide range of feelings expressed in some of Beethoven's symphonies.

In the opening movement of No. 5 he had shown himself severe and perhaps intolerant—what he did not approve of was crushed on the instant. In the Finale of No. 4 he is thoroughly gay and good humoured. But there was a temper or a mood which he had not yet tried in his compositions, and that is the boisterousness in which, as life went on, he was prone to indulge in his personal intercourse, both in writing and action.  


34. Ibid., pp. 172-173.

He goes on to cite two instances of this rough, boisterous side of the composer's personality. The first concerns Beethoven's brother Johann who, after buying an estate, gave a card to Ludwig on which were printed the words: "Johann van Beethoven, Landed Proprietor," this was quickly countered by one that said: "Ludwig van Beethoven, Brain Proprietor." The second incident arose when Prince Lichnowsky sent a letter to Beethoven asking him to play for some French officers. Beethoven replied: "Prince, what you are you are by accident of birth; what I am I am through my own efforts. There have been thousands of princes and there will be thousands more; there is only one Beethoven."36

This aspect of Beethoven's personality was, of course, bound to show up in his music sooner or later, and it is certainly present in the Seventh Symphony. "Here it will be sufficient to notice it in a general way, and say that when this boisterousness is combined with the force and character which are exhibited in the preceding six of these great works, as it is in the Finale of No. 7 and the opening and closing movements of No. 8, the effect is indeed tremendous."37 The point is well taken, but Beethoven himself in the Testament makes a statement which puts Grove's words into better perspective.

With joy shall I hasten forward to meet death; if it comes before I shall have had an opportunity to develop all my artistic capabilities, he will come too early in spite of my harsh fate, and I shall probably wish him to come at a later date. But even then I shall be content, for will he not release me from endless suffering? Come when you please, I shall meet you bravely. 38

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37. Ibid., p. 231.

Beethoven, in his suffering, knew he had much more to express in the Seventh Symphony than Grove could comprehend.

Symphony No. 8 in F-major, Op. 93

About four months after the completion of the Seventh Symphony, Beethoven finished his Eighth. Except for the First, it is the shortest of his symphonies. Contrary to this composer's custom, No. 8 bears no dedication.

Sketches of the work have been found in the Petter Sketch Book which dates back to 1809, but from all other evidence it would seem that this symphony, at least the major part of it, was done directly after the Seventh Symphony; it must have taken the composer, then, only four months to complete.

By the time of its completion, Beethoven was suffering very much. Not only was he extremely deaf, he was also suffering from a digestive problem severe enough to make him seek help in Teplitz.

From Teplitz he proceeded to Linz, on the Danube. This trip was for one purpose only; to put an end to the irregular connection between his brother Johann and Theresa Obermeyer, a woman with whom Johann had been living for some time. What right Beethoven had to interfere in this matter is debatable, but we know that he caused such a commotion that the police were actually authorized to expel the lady from Linz. This event, of course, caused an uproar between the brothers, but Johann completely checkmated the furious Ludwig by marrying Theresa. This did not change Ludwig's feelings. His animosity towards her
continued to the end of his days. One of the names he called her was
"Queen of night." "These turbulent proceedings did not, however, interfere
with the composition of the Symphony, though they no doubt considerably
coloured it."39 Perhaps Beethoven used this episode as he did the
Heiligenstadt Testament: he seemed to have gotten rid of his most
brutal feelings by pouring them out upon his brother (the Testament,
too, is addressed to his brothers). Whatever the other results, there
is no doubt that his Eighth Symphony is generally considered an expression
of humor!

The hearer has before him not so much a piece of music as a person.
Not only is every movement pervaded by humour, but each has some
special stroke of boisterous merriment, which to those whose minds
were full often more dignified movements of the 'Eroica,'...the C minor,
or the No. 7, may have made it difficult to believe that the composer
was in earnest and that his composition was to be taken seriously.40

As usual, several critics have attempted to invent a programme for
the work. A few are noteworthy, not because they are valid, but because
they are so interesting!

Lenz, "treats the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies and the Battle
of Vittoria as intended to form a 'Military Trilogy'; finds in the
Finale of No. 8 a 'most poetical tattoo,' and quotes his favorite
authority, the Russian Seroff, for the opinion that the triplet figure
so frequent in the movement is 'an idealized roll of the drum.'
Oulibicheff again sees in the Allegretto a mere caricature of Rossini."41
(One critic felt that the second movement represented Maelzel's
metronome.)

39. George Grove, Beethoven and His Nine Symphonies (New York:
40. Ibid., p. 280.
41. Ibid., p. 281.
Berlioz states that, "The Allegretto was composed at a sitting—tout d'un trait—which is absurd—is probably more correct in stating that the opening Allegro was written three times; for though he gives no authority for his statement, it would, at any rate, be in keeping with Beethoven's tentative method of composing."  

Even Scott cannot refrain from the theory that Beethoven had someone specifically in mind when he wrote the Eighth, "I cannot get out of my head that Beethoven had Amalie Sebald in his thoughts when he wrote this Symphony." The composer's letters to Amalie do not show an overwhelming passion on his part, but perhaps the affair was more serious than it sounded.

Grove, who ridiculed attempts at a programme for No. 8, nevertheless admits, "That if one must label this immortal work, it is sufficient to say that, perhaps more than any other of the nine, it is a portrait of the author in daily life, in his habit as he lived: and we may be sure that the more it is heard and studied, the more will he be found there in his most natural and characteristic personality." He also points out that, in this work more than any other, Beethoven shows us "a child's heart within a man's body."

To this writer, however, Schmidt-Görg's simple statement about this symphony is the most realistic. "The entire work has a sense of subtle and quiet humour about it which reaches its climax in the last


movement, but behind the jolly foreground one can always see a backcloth
of spiritual purpose." This statement best expresses both the Beethoven
of the Testament and the Beethoven of the Eighth Symphony. Humor is,
then, not its sole expression.

The Eighth is one of the least performed of all of Beethoven's
symphonies. It was not well received even at first; it was simply
overpowered by the Seventh. "This non-success of his pet work greatly
discomposed the composer, but he bore it philosophically; and, as on
the occasion of the first performance of one of his great String
Quartets, he simply said 'it will please them some day,' so now he
remarked: "that's because it's so much better than the other.' It
is not even yet appreciated as it deserves, and as it will be hereafter."46

Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125

Beethoven completed his last symphony in 1824, about eleven years
after he composed No. 8. During this period, two events occurred that
deply affected the composer.

First of all, several of Beethoven's patrons died, leaving him
with much less income than he anticipated. He was not poor, but
this worry along with his constant hassles with publishing companies
disturbed him for a time.

The second event lasted for several years and started with the
death of his brother Casper in 1815. Casper left the guardianship
of his son Karl jointly to his wife and to Beethoven. The latter, who

45. Joseph Schmidt-Görg, Beethoven, 1770-1827 (West Germany: W.

46. George Grove, Beethoven and His Nine Symphonies (New York:
despised his sister-in-law, instigated a lawsuit for sole guardianship rights that lasted for over four years. Because of the depth of his involvement he spent much of his time during those years on the case, so his musical output could not help but decrease. Even after he was awarded his guardianship, he had no peace, for the results were tragic for both the boy and himself. All of his subsequent music was written under this burden.

We have seen that, throughout his career, Beethoven had made many significant advances in the writing of symphonic literature. By and large, these changes greatly expanded the symphonic form and left it more flexible. In the Ninth Symphony, he introduced still another aspect to the possibilities in such writing: He used voices, both solo and group, thus causing the symphony to be called "The Choral Symphony." Beethoven was not the sole pioneer in this matter, but he developed it and made it such an integral part of the work that it opened up a whole new outlook on the symphony.

When we come to look at this great work, however, we find it to be one of the most controversial and misunderstood works ever composed by the master. Amongst all the different viewpoints, only one is agreed upon by necessity; he used as a text for voices Schiller's "Ode to Joy." He had thought about using the poem as early as the 1790's and even tried to work it into another of his compositions.

Marion Scott states;

That he had a most definite poetic intention behind each movement of the work is certain, but it is easier to feel these meanings than to express them. The usual interpretation is that the first
movement is Destiny and the inexorable order of the universe; the second (the scherzo) is physical exuberance and energy; the third is Love. With the finale there is no uncertainty—Joy is its dominant idea; and Joy was to Beethoven what Charity was to St. Paul, the one thing without which all else was incomplete.  

Schmidt-Görg says that Beethoven had two concerns in mind when writing this work: "His two great concerns were the moral and the religious, the power of joy to unite men and its origins in the Godhead." Grove feels it remarkable "that so many of the themes have repeated notes and are scalewise in nature pointing to a consistent condition of Beethoven's mind throughout the work."  

Grove makes two more observations about the work, the first of which will be quoted in full to avoid misleading the reader.  

Here I would call attention, though with reluctance, to a singular feature in this great work—namely, to the occurrence more than once during the working-out of the first movement of vacillation or hesitancy in expression of which I know no trace in any of the other Symphonies, but which cannot but be recognized here by a loyal hearer; where the notes of flutes and oboes seem to tremble and falter as if they were the utterance of human lips, the organs of an oppressed human heart. These places need not be specified, they cannot but strike the sympathetic listener, and will almost suggest, if it be not disrespectful to entertain such a thought, that the great Beethoven was, with all his experience, too much overpowered by his feelings to find adequate expression for them. These tokens of human weakness may be safely left to the affectionate sympathy of the friends and admirers of this great poet.  

His third point is that Beethoven now reveals a side of himself which he has previously kept veiled.  

The sorrows which wounded the great composer during so many of the last years of his life, through his deafness, his poverty, his sensitiveness, his bodily sufferings, the annoyances of

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50. Ibid., p. 349.
business, the ingratitude and rascality of his nephew, the slights of friends, the neglect of the world—sorrows on which he kept silence, except by a few words in his letters, are here beheld in all their depth and bitterness. Surely if anywhere he had here produced his *proprio e proposto effetto*. We almost seem to see the tears on his cheek.\textsuperscript{51}

In the Ninth, Beethoven for the first time uses a scherzo for the second movement. Once more, Grove makes two major points about this movement, which has been called "a miracle of repetition without monotony. It may almost be said to consist of----one simple phrase of three notes, which is said to have come suddenly to Beethoven's mind as he stepped from darkness into brilliant light."\textsuperscript{52} Grove also deals with Beethoven's use of the drums in the second movement. "In the course of this it will not escape notice how the drum with characteristic audacity, puts the composer's direction at defiance by coming in four times at intervals of three bars, and the fifth time making the interval four."\textsuperscript{53}

There is a unique event in the third movement, where the composer introduces a fourth horn part, an eloquent and integral addition. Too little is said about this movement, although Grove fairly adequately sums it up. "The Adagio is absolutely original in form; and in effect more calmly, purely, nobly beautiful than anything that even this great master who knows so well how to search the heart, and try the spirit, and elevate the soul----has accomplished elsewhere in his Symphonies."\textsuperscript{54}


\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 355.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 357-358.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p. 362.
Although Beethoven chose Schiller's poem as the text for the final movement of the symphony, he did not use it verbatim, but rearranged some parts and omitted others. Because of the nature of this movement, the transition leading to it was crucial if the impression of a separate work were not to be given. Grove describes how Beethoven handled it:

Hitherto, in the three orchestral movements, Beethoven has been depicting 'Joy' in his own proper character: first, as part of the complex life of the individual man; secondly, for the world at large; thirdly, in all the ideal hues that art can throw over it. He had now to illustrate what Schiller intended in his Ode, and the method he adopts of connecting what he has done with what he has to do is truly a simple one, but it is effectual. He makes a horrible clamour and then says: 'O friends, not these noises! as we are to sing about this great thing in words, let us sing the words of the immortal Schiller.'

It would be unrealistic to expect total agreement on the merits of the Ninth Symphony. Some feel more strongly than others on this score. Spohr (who, according to Grove, was very knowledgeable about the work) tended to deprecate it. "While judging the first three movements to be, 'in spite of occasional flashes of genius, inferior to either of the previous eight Symphonies,' finds the Finale 'so monstrous and tasteless, and as an expression of Schiller's Ode so trivial, that he cannot understand how a genius like Beethoven can have put it on paper.'"

Berlioz objectively summarizes the various opinions.

Some critics regard it as a monstrous folly. Others only see in it the last gleams of an expiring genius. A few more prudent ones confess they do not yet understand it but hope to be able to

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56. Ibid., p. 377.
appreciate it, at least somewhat, later on. The great mass of artists deem it an extra-ordinary conception although some of its parts are not yet explained and seem to have no direct object.

But there are a few musicians who are driven by their nature to be very careful in examining whatever may tend to increase the field of art. They have reflected maturely upon the general plan of the Choral Symphony and, after having read it and listened to it attentively on many occasions, they are firm in the conviction this work is the most magnificent expression of Beethoven's genius. That opinion, as already hinted here, is the one to which we adhere.

Beethoven's opinion is, as usual, the most dependable; "I am just publishing the greatest Symphony I have yet written" was what he wrote to Prince von Hatzfeld.

The correlation between this magnificent work and the Heiligenstadt Testament depends upon how one interprets the Symphony itself. After everyone has spoken on it, it would seem that the two works almost fuse in their unity. The Testament describes the terrible conditions that Beethoven saw as lasting his whole life; the Ninth is the expression of Beethoven's whole life. Wagner saw the work as the arrival, after many attempts, at perfection in music, very nearly the "total artwork."

It is the conclusion of this paper that a definite relationship exists between the Heiligenstadt Testament and the Symphonies. The information that leads to this conclusion is valid, and is vitally important if one is to understand Beethoven and his symphonic works. Beethoven said the last word about himself and his music.

What will be the judgment a century hence concerning the lauded works of our favorite composers to-day? Inasmuch as nearly everything is subject to the changes of time, only that which is good

and true, will endure like a rock, and no wanton hand will ever venture to defile it. Then let every man do that which is right, strive with all his might toward the goal which can never be attained, develop to the last breath the gifts with which a gracious Creator has endowed him, and never cease to learn; for "Life is short, art eternal!"  

To know Beethoven's music, is to know the real Beethoven, the man so clearly revealed to us in the Heiligenstadt Testament.

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