Introduction

NANCY NOVEMBER

Eroica endures. This fact, discussed at some length in the final chapter of this book, was brought home strongly to me as I edited this volume. Escaping briefly from *Eroica*, or so I thought, after a day of proofreading, I turned to YouTube. Using a Google search with keyword 'Agatha Christie', I chanced upon a 1984 TV drama, *Second Sight – A Love Story*, starring Elizabeth Montgomery. The similarities to Beethoven's biography can be seen in the main character's stubborn and somewhat difficult temperament, and the painful irony that the sense that she most prizes and needs (sight) should be taken away from her. With hindsight – and with the help of this book's chapters on reception – it was clear that the choice of the *Eroica* finale for this movie's opening credits (fading in at bar 449) is overdetermined.

That the *Eroica* Symphony crops up frequently in popular culture is no surprise. It is one of the most discussed, performed and reinterpreted of Beethoven's symphonies, indeed of symphonies altogether. It is also one of the most controversial of his works in terms of interpretation. There is general consensus among past and present commentators that the *Eroica* is a 'watershed' work (there is a film about that, too: *Eroica,* 2003), but little agreement on why or how. Rather, there are continued efforts to locate the 'heroic' element or pin down the 'hero' of (or in) the work; this has resulted in a great deal of discussion of contextual elements – especially Beethoven's views of Napoleon, of revolution and of his conception and representation of heroism – but few detailed analyses. The work has attracted, and continues to attract, major analysts and thinkers, including Heinrich Schenker and Carl Dahlhaus. Lewis Lockwood explains: 'Its special status remains essential in modern discussions of his artistic career, despite inevitable reappraisals.'[1] The multivalent nature of the work makes for reappraisal, especially of its connections to biography, politics and society in the 'Age of Revolutions': *Eroica* lends itself to new and varied approaches, both cultural and musical. It is consistently invoked not only as a compositional model but also as a testing ground for music theory.

This *Cambridge Companion* functions, in part, to fulfil a need for a guide to the wealth of literature the work has spawned. The guiding takes place not so much through literature surveys or summaries as by addressing the main topics associated with the symphony – among them

political context, dedication, sources of the symphony's inspiration, 'heroism' and the idea of a 'watershed' work. These topics cut across the book's three sections, on genesis, analysis and reception history respectively. The *Companion* includes critical study of writings and analyses from Beethoven's day to ours, and a range of other relevant discourses relating to the work, especially compositions, recordings, images and film. The reader will find many fresh insights here, with consideration of little-studied analytical avenues (register in Chapter 7, for instance) and source material (arrangements and film in Chapters 11 and 12 for example). Thus the *Companion* alerts students and scholars to a range of evidence relating to *Eroica*, and suggests new lines of enquiry.

Above all, this book answers to a need to understand and critique the mythology surrounding the work, and to consider where it comes from and what it has to tell us. The first four chapters are important in laying out the groundwork here, starting from a broad consideration of heroism and moving towards a detailed discussion of the genesis of *Eroica*. Scott Burnham writes: 'the narrative urge associated with critical interpretations of this music may tell us more about ourselves than simply the way we hear the *Eroica* symphony'.[2] In evaluating previous viewpoints, this book attends to influential listeners and performers of the past, considering how their perspectives have influenced their interpretations, and ours. The final four chapters are key in this respect. This *Companion* is less Germanocentric than previous *Eroica* studies, while it still acknowledges important German scholarship and reception of the work. There is, for example, discussion of the special character of French reception of the work, including that of Hector Berlioz (Chapters 9 and 10); and consideration of how the symphony gets reinterpreted in light of shifting cultural and political aspirations and fears, including those in Europe and the United States (Chapters 10–12).

Two *Cambridge Companion* volumes of particular importance in this area are those on Beethoven and the symphony.[3] There are relevant articles on Beethoven's large-scale orchestral works in the former, and on structural principles and narrative strategies in the latter. The present volume departs from these with its focus squarely on *Eroica*. There are several books devoted to *Eroica*, but none that offers such a breadth of topic coverage and approaches. Martin Geck and Peter Schleuning's *'Geschrieben auf Bonaparte.' Beethoven's 'Eroica': Revolution, Reaktion, Rezeption* (1989) and Thomas Sipe's 1998 Cambridge Music Handbook devoted to *Eroica* are typical of *Eroica* studies in their emphasis on reception, and lesser attention to analysis.[4] Fabrizio Della Seta's *Beethoven. Sinfonia Eroica: Una guida* (2004) contains a wealth of analytical detail, albeit from one perspective.[5] The present volume places analyses in the

centre, with four chapters (5–8) that offer a synthesis of previous analytical discourse as well as new approaches. In this respect, the *Companion* helps fill some important gaps, including discussion of Schenker's approach to the work (Chapter 7), and detailed analysis of the finale (Chapter 8), which has been neglected in favour of the first two movements in previous studies.

Two other recent studies of the *Eroica* are comprehensive, but tend to adopt single approaches. Christoph Hohlfeld's *Beethovens Weg: Eroica op. 55* (2003) sets out to show the symphony's 'watershed' position in Beethoven's oeuvre by exploring a supposed 'evolution' in his works in C minor and E♭ major.[6] The compositional trajectory that he traces is based on a theory of proportions. Constantin Floros explores the close relationship between the *Eroica* and *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus*, Op. 43, in his *Beethoven's Eroica: Thematic Studies* (2012).[7] His book is based on his theory about Beethoven's planned dedication of the *Eroica* to Bonaparte. The *Companion* steps back for a broader, more critical look at the *Eroica*'s context, including but not dwelling on dedication. It encompasses discussion of factors that might demystify and de-emphasise the 'turning point' theory, including periodisation as it pertains to the work (Chapter 2), and a careful look at the context of symphonic writing around 1800 (Chapter 3).

Each chapter stands alone as well as illuminating a part of a contextual area. The reader will find loose chronological ordering within each of the book's three sections. Certain chapters naturally pick up closely related topics. So Chapters 4 and 9, respectively on genesis and early reception, both deal with the topic of dedication but from different angles. Chapters 2 and 11 both consider the symphony within the culture of nineteenth-century musical arrangements. And Chapters 11 and 12 both consider modern-day *Eroica* reception, one from the angle of performance, the other through film. Chapters 2 and 12 can usefully be read together with Chapter 7; Chapters 2 and 12 (and several others) consider the prevalence of teleological and 'triumph' narratives in *Eroica*'s reception; while Chapter 7 suggests an alternative reading, developing a narrative of 'failure' in the finale that runs contrary to the typical 'heroic' readings of *Eroica*.

Notes

1. L. Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies: An Artistic Vision* (New York, NY: Norton, 2015), p. 52.
2. S. Burnham, 'On the Programmatic Reception of Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony', *Beethoven Forum*, 1 (1992), p. 24.

3. *The Cambridge Companion to Beethoven*, ed. Glenn Stanley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and *The Cambridge Companion to the Symphony*, ed. Julian Horton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
4. Martin Geck and Peter Schleuning, *'Geschrieben auf Bonaparte.' Beethoven's 'Eroica': Revolution, Reaktion, Rezeption* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1989) and T. Sipe, *Beethoven, Eroica Symphony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
5. F. Della Seta, *Beethoven. Sinfonia Eroica: Una guida* (Rome: Carocci, 2004).
6. C. Hohlfeld, *Beethovens Weg: Eroica op. 55* (Wilhelmshaven: Noetzel, 2003).
7. C. Floros, *Beethovens Eroica und Prometheus-Musik* (Wilhelmshaven: Noetzel, 1978); and C. Floros, *Beethoven's Eroica: Thematic Studies*, trans. Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2012).

PART I

Context and Genesis

1 Beethoven and Heroism in the Age of Revolutions

SCOTT BURNHAM

This chapter seeks to contextualise Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony by surveying powerful elements of the cultural *Zeitgeist* that appeared in the dramatic literature Beethoven cherished. For it was an age of renewed interest in epic heroes and heroic dramas. The literary products of ancient Greece figured heavily in this enthusiasm. In Germany and Austria, Johann Heinrich Voss's artfully powerful translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* brought the epic heroic types of Homer to vivid life, while the Attic dramatists Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were increasingly studied, revered and emulated. Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, conceived around the second century AD, brought a profusion of real-life Greek and Roman heroes into the general cultural consciousness of late eighteenth-century Europe.[1] This modern passion for the ancients helped inspire a new age of German dramatic art. Novel heroic types emerged from the dramas of Goethe and Schiller, possessed of 'greatness of soul' and offering compelling models of self-sacrifice and of speaking truth to power. The revolutions in America and France provided a tumultuous world-historical confirmation of the anti-tyrannical heroic impulse at work in these dramas, while the complex aftermath of the French Revolution, including the campaigns of Napoleon, provided a nearly constant fascination and fear, as well as new arrays of heroic role models.

The general impact of the French Revolution on European culture can hardly be overestimated. By enforcing such a radical break with the past, the Revolution helped bring about a new aesthetic consciousness and a corresponding new sense of time.[2] Karol Berger has observed that the French Revolution galvanised an Enlightenment trend already present in Western modernity away from an older, cyclical sense of time and eternity into a one-way, future-oriented sense of time. Accompanying this transition was a pervasive sense of acceleration: 'Time's cycle had been straightened into an arrow, and the arrow was traveling ever faster.'[3] The continual presence of war in post-revolution Europe was also a ready source of the sublime, provided of course that one was at a safe distance. In the words of James Winn: '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.'[4] Beethoven

lived in tumultuous and unsettling times, and the *élan vital* of his heroic-style music expresses among other things the accelerating pace of the portentous events happening around him.

The figure of Napoleon in particular meant much to Beethoven as a consummate model of 'self-made greatness', despite his ambivalence about dedicating the Third Symphony to Napoleon after he crowned himself Emperor in 1804. Never before or subsequently did Beethoven consider naming one of his major compositions after an historical figure,[5] so it seems clear that he at least once judged Napoleon to be a real-life hero worthy of such a creative tribute. And while aspects of Napoleon's career epitomised the heroic rise of the autonomous individual, many other varieties of heroism were in play, including those that Beethoven would have encountered in literature. They involve upholding the necessity of rebellion in the face of tyranny, asserting the overriding importance of free thought and freedom in general, the rise of the autonomous individual, 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.[6]

The French Revolution and Napoleon arguably provided real-life catalysts to Beethoven's sense of human heroism. But perhaps even more crucial to his broader sense of heroic potential were cultural forces that emanated from distinctively different places. At the time of Beethoven's birth, Germanic writers and thinkers were completing a momentous turn away from French Enlightenment models to those of England and ancient Greece. Encouraged by the polemics of Gotthold Lessing, and by Swiss critics Johann Bodmer and Johann Breitinger, German writers of the later eighteenth century rejected the rules-based poetics of Enlightenment France (quintessentially instantiated in the dramas of French classicism) in favour of a more directly expressive aesthetics.[7] This shift had many ramifications, chiefly including a celebration (and emulation) of Shakespeare as the single greatest modern literary artist, and of Homer as the *fons et origo* of Western literature as well as a potent source of transhistorical resonance with modern German letters. The modern reverence for the Greeks was also connected to a perceived similarity of language between German and Greek; both languages are root-based 'agglutinative' tongues, and German writers took great pride in this special connection.

Homer

Homeric epic counts as a hugely influential force in German culture of the *Goethezeit*. Goethe himself credited the reading of Homer (as well as

Ossian and Shakespeare) as crucial to his literary awakening. He also emulated Homeric epic in the creation of his bourgeois epic *Hermann und Dorothea*.[8] Schiller counted Homer as chief among the 'naïve' poets celebrated in his 1795 essay 'Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung'.

Beethoven was fond of citing Homer, as in this instance from his *Tagebuch*: 'But now Fate catches me! Let me not sink into the dust unresisting and inglorious, but first accomplish great things, of which future generations too shall hear.'[9] There follows one of the great scenes in the *Iliad*, the climax of Hector's heroism: the very moment when he realises he will die at the hands of Achilles, but resolves not to go down without a fight. It is easy to imagine Beethoven thrilling to passages like this, finding courage to push through in the midst of his own travails.

Although Beethoven expressed regret at not being able to read Homer in the original, the 1793 translation of the *Iliad* by Voss that Beethoven quoted deploys an accentual version of Homer's dactylic hexameter and thus transmits something close to the rhythm of the original.[10] Voss's translation reflects the values of his age, in that it strives to emulate Homer's achievement as closely as possible, while acting on the perceived affinity between the German and Greek languages. In turn, Voss's translation was deeply respected by Goethe and others.

What does Voss preserve of Homer's hexameter? Each line of Voss's accentual dactylic hexameter contains six stresses (marking the six feet), as well as the obligatory caesura in the third foot (often marked by a word ending that falls on the first syllable of the third foot). He also takes advantage of the occasional flexibility between dactyls and spondees characteristic of heroic hexameter (the two-syllable spondee sometimes substitutes for the three-syllable dactyl), while preserving the invariant dactyl–spondee combination of the last two feet (long–short–short/long–long, or in Voss, strong–weak–weak/strong–weak).[11] Compared with the rhymed couplets in iambic pentameter of English translators such as Pope and Chapman, Voss is thus much closer to the rhythmic life of Homer.[12] In addition, Voss's translation is often quite literal. A comparison of the two and a half lines from Book 22 of the *Iliad* cited in Beethoven's *Tagebuch* with the Homeric original will show both the rhythmic similarity and the closely literal tendency of Voss's translation (the obligatory caesura in the third foot is marked by a space):

	νῦν αὖτέ με μοῖρα κιχάνει.
μὴ μὰν ἀσπουδί	γε καὶ ἀκλειῶς ἀπολοίμην,
ἀλλὰ μέγα ῥέξας	τι καὶ ἐσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι.
	Nun aber erhascht mich das Schicksal,
Dass nicht arbeitslos	in den Staub ich sinke noch ruhmlos,
Nein, erst Grosses vollende,	von dem auch Künftige hören.

Not only is Voss almost completely literal (the only exception here is that he deploys the figurative 'in den Staub sinken' for Homer's 'perish'), but his rhythms are almost exactly those of Homer (the first two lines are exact in the number of syllables and placement of accents, the last is very slightly altered). Beethoven himself paid attention to the scansion of Voss's lines, for he entered scansion marks in his diary, perhaps with a mind towards setting these lines to music.[13]

These lines are not the only Homeric citations in Beethoven's *Tagebuch*. Others echo the theme of Fate, as in entry No. 26: 'For Fate gave Man the courage to endure', which is from the *Iliad* Book 24, line 49.[14] The words are those of Apollo, who is decrying Achilles' desecration of Hector's corpse by comparing Achilles unfavourably to other men who grieve the loss of even a closer relation than was Patroclus to Achilles, namely the loss of a brother or a son, and yet can ultimately endure such a loss with dignity (rather than engage in acts of vengeful desecration).[15] 'The courage to endure' is thematised in Beethoven's opera *Fidelio* by the unjust imprisonment of Florestan.[16] In another diary entry (No. 169), Beethoven quotes from Penelope's lamenting prayer to Artemis (*Odyssey* Book 20, lines 75–6): 'Sacrifice once and for all the trivialities of social life to your art, O God above all! For eternal Providence in its omniscience and wisdom directs the happiness and unhappiness of mortal men.' The injunction to sacrifice social trivialities to art is Beethoven speaking to himself, while the reference to 'eternal Providence' is from Penelope's prayer (she is referring to Zeus' 'ewige Vorsicht').[17] Thus we see Beethoven reinforcing his own urge for self-sacrifice by invoking a God-given, God-driven destiny that mortals cannot control but can only resign themselves to. What Beethoven takes from Homer, then, is the injunction to endure, to sacrifice, and to attempt big things in spite of fated handicaps. The power of Fate is acknowledged and reckoned with, to be sure, but what remains is the countervailing power of the autonomous individual to achieve what it can in the face of fated adversity.

Dramas of the *Sturm und Drang*

Joining Homer as the other great 'naïve' poet in Schiller's reckoning is Shakespeare. Both Schiller and Goethe sought to emulate Shakespeare in their early dramas. Part of shedding the influence of the French was the urge to partake in a new freedom of expression, manifest in a teeming variety of language and character as well as a sublime disregard for the classic unities of time and place observed in the dramas of Racine and Corneille. Moreover, the French requirement of *bienséance* (decorousness)

was also regularly violated, both in luridly dramatic scenes and in downright vulgarity. German dramatists also embraced Shakespeare's potent mix of tragic and comic elements, which would have been anathema in French drama and its cherished *vraisemblance* (verisimilitude). Shakespeare was a natural model for writers who sought to heed Lessing's call for German authors to put less description and more drama into their writing.[18] The rhapsodic odes of Pindar and the exclamatory poetic style of Klopstock also served as powerful models for the younger generation of German writers. These proclivities and directives made the '*Sturm und Drang*' ('Storm and Stress') movement all but inevitable.

Although the designation *Sturm und Drang* arose from the title of a play by Friedrich Maximilian Klinger, the two most famous dramas in this manner were Goethe's 1773 *Götz von Berlichingen* and Schiller's 1781 *Die Räuber*. The heroes of these dramas, Götz von Berlichingen and Karl Moor respectively, represented a new type of hero, the 'erhabene Verbrecher' or 'sublime outlaw'. Götz was based on a real historical figure from the sixteenth century who was involved in the German Peasants' War. The plot of Goethe's play is complicated, and the fate of its real-life hero is altered, such that he now suffers an early death. As a heroic figure, Goethe's von Berlichingen is a man of action and instinct who finds himself opposed by schemers of a more modern age. He dies in prison while exclaiming the word 'Freedom'.

Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen* was explicitly intended to emulate Shakespeare's dramatic range. Moreover, Goethe composed the drama in prose, which in itself represents a decided turn away from more traditional dramas. *Götz von Berlichingen* was written less than ten years after the death of an earlier literary giant, Johann Christoph Gottsched, who championed French literary models and the ideals of the Enlightenment. Gottsched, like other writers of his era, composed his dramas in rhyming Alexandrine couplets, in direct imitation of the French classical dramatists. An Alexandrine line has twelve or thirteen syllables (depending on whether the last syllable of the line is accented or unaccented), with invariant accents on the sixth and twelfth syllables. Here is an excerpt from Gottsched's drama *Der sterbende Cato*, which was premiered in 1731 (the extra space in the middle of the line indicates the caesura):

Wie sanft, wie süsse schläft	ein tugendhafter Mann,
Den sein Gewissen nicht	im Schlummer stören kann!
Ich kam und habe selbst	den Cato liegen sehen,
Es ist ihm zweifelsfrei	ein harter Fall geschehen,
Da er den Sohn verlor;	doch bleibt er tugendhaft!