

Beethoven @ 250: Man and Music under Siege

Abridged

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Beethoven's 250th anniversary hides a paradox. Classical music lovers celebrate him as one of the most enlightening beacons not only of the Western world that produced him, but of the whole human species. Two hundred years after his death, he is our contemporary. More than any other musician, he voices for us and in our name the essential emotions of humanity in the universal language of music. On the other hand, Beethoven's anniversary falls at the end of a long period in which he has been under constant, relentless attacks by modern-day scholarship. Many scholars have speculated wildly along the lines of the modern "-isms," promoting their agendas and/or careers by spreading falsehoods rather than by pursuing new truths about Beethoven. Devotees of psychoanalysis put him on their couch as if to convince him (that is, to convince *us*) that he was a delusional psychopath. Physicians claim to diagnose him with psychopathic behaviors, invoking modern psychiatric criteria but twisted beyond recognition and disregarding all facts that do not fit their theories. Sociologists interested in music and musicologists interested in sociology alike put him on the center stage of both musical and non-musical politics, with equal neglect of the facts. Even his music, once hailed as the beacon of humanity, has not been able to defend itself against the attacks of modern-day feminism, which has portrayed it as the epitome of "toxic masculinity." These "novel" visions of Beethoven have never been subjected to in-depth scrutiny, but nevertheless have become part of mainstream scholarship.

The purpose of this book is to put to rest some such demonstrably fallacious speculations that have sullied Beethoven's image and his music for half a century—an appropriate way to honor him on his 250th anniversary, and to revive our unity around his music. This is not a book of opinions, but a repository of facts. It reveals, for the first time, incontrovertible facts invalidating some acclaimed post-modernist theories that demean Beethoven, the man and the musician.

Part I.

Beethoven on the Shrink's Couch

Beethoven's behavior—quite often described as "eccentric," "uncouth," or "psychopathic"—would have qualified him for a sensational post-mortem Freudian couch session, but the father of psychoanalysis abstained. Only in 1954 did Editha and Richard Sterba, both educated by Freud himself, undertake the first psychoanalytical study of the composer in their book *Beethoven and His Nephew*. Maynard Solomon took the baton and advanced his own Freudian diagnosis in his 1977 *Beethoven* book: a biography hailed by many respected music scholars as "a landmark" in scholarship. Although a few scholars have rejected both the Sterbas' and Solomon's views of Beethoven, they created the "mainstream Beethoven."

It's time to re-assess the contribution of the Freudian approach to the understanding of Beethoven's complex personality. My analysis will be, as the tone of this introduction may have suggested, a "negative" review. It does not necessarily reject evidence for possible psychotic "symptoms" displayed by Beethoven; these are established facts and have troubled the biographers, but the "diagnoses" advanced by the Sterba couple and Solomon is problematic. They are doubly misconstrued: first, because psychoanalysis is, as I argue in chapter 1, a scientific delusion that cannot lead a researcher to the truth; secondly, because these scholars built their cases by distorting or disregarding essential facts that clearly invalidate their claims.

1. A Look Under the Couch

A thorough review of the value of psychoanalysis as a scientific investigative method, or for biographical purposes, is far beyond the scope of the present research, but a conclusion is still reachable. In its broadest sense, psychoanalysis is the self-proclaimed science of the human brain. Its best-known component is the famous Oedipus complex, in which the son is, albeit unconsciously, the sexual competitor of his father and thus wants to kill him and have sex with his mother; daughters are a kind of subservient complement to boys, as they are dominated by their "penis envy." An essential part of psychoanalysis is the "theory of dreams": dreams would be, in the psychoanalytical view, the

mediated expressions of the human unconscious. Lying on the psychoanalyst's couch, and guided by the psychoanalyst, primarily by means of the "free association" thoughts, the "neurotic" discovers the hidden roots of repressions in dreams, internally traveling back in time until his/her childhood, where such roots normally reside.

Psychoanalysis has never been accepted as a legitimate field of psychiatry and has amassed plenty of criticism, but has seduced many, especially in academe, who professed devotion with a loyalty akin to fanaticism. Criticism accumulated during the last thirty-odd years: the new technological tools have helped the science of the brain, neuroscience, to make a great leap forward and tackle some basic tenets of psychoanalysis. Together with other scientific disciplines, neuroscience has gathered scientific proof that all the components of psychoanalysis are false.

The Oedipus complex is allegedly both a central trait of the modern nuclear family headed by a father and an ancestral trait of maleness, as old as the human species. These two traits are incompatible: according to modern anthropology, *Homo sapiens* is about 300,000 years old, while the family as an institution is far more recent in its history – 10,000 years old at most. The "nuclear family"—cohabitating partners with unmarried children—is younger still. Anthropologists have discovered modern-day tribal societies that share the concept of "multiple fathers" (scientifically named "partible paternity"); anthropologists understandably assumed that this was analogous to what was happening in those "beginnings" of the *sapiens* species. The very concept of "father" was fluid, if not entirely absent. This is certainly not conducive to an "ancestral" Oedipus complex.

In fact, in his 1904 book on *Adolescence*, American psychiatrist Stanley Hall had already identified the *conscious* behaviors—conflict with and hatred of parents as corresponding to symptoms of the alleged Oedipal unconscious in what he termed the "storm and stress" teenage years, when sexuality kicks in with predictable increases in specific hormones. In the meantime (especially during the last thirty odd years), the new technological tools (micro-electrodes, functional MRI techniques, psychoactive drugs, etc.) have shown that the as yet incompletely developed brain of the teenager undergoes a tremendous but uneven and conflicting growth: changes in the amygdala nuclei and the siege of fluctuating emotions emerge far sooner than the development of an adult prefrontal cortex, the center of critical thinking. The teenager's ascent to self-image and self-confidence—a product of the amygdala—conflicts with the lagging behind prefrontal cortex that holds the key to the evaluation of the consequences of one's acts, a conflict that creates personality turmoil, leading to rebellion against parental authority.

The dream interpretation theory. Neuroscience has also probed another central feature of the Freudian doctrine, Freud's theory of dreams, and has proven its mechanism to be false. In psychoanalysis, dreams are believed to be rare, significant occurrences in which the brain tries to be at rest, and so must disguise the disturbing emergence of internal stimuli, most of which are memories of unfulfilled wishes of a sexual nature, resulting in visual irrational fantasies. As consciously erotic dreams are very rare (only one in twenty!), the theory posits a "censuring" mechanism that "disguises" the omnipresent sexual impulses into non-sexual imagery, according to a "dictionary" of symbolism in which (any and all) elongated objects stand for the male organ or an erection, and all hollow objects represent female genitalia.

Neuroscience found instead that we dream repeatedly during sleep and that the brain is very active all through it, except for the frontal cortex that governs logical thinking – its "sleep" is sufficient to explain the apparent irrationality of dreams, without the need for any censoring or disguising mechanism.

After an initial recoil from the shock of findings from neuroscience, the psychoanalysis community followed the old adage that "offensive is the best defense" and actually tried to appropriate the findings of neuroscience for the benefit of their own theories, now re-baptized "neuro-psychoanalysis." This was easy because neuroscience is and will probably always remain incomplete; its current findings are

only a few individual “bricks” out of which this extremely complex cathedral, the brain, is made: an internal structure of connectivity that is still very little understood. Re-baptizing cerebral centers and systems of centers with Freudian names does not make psychoanalysis into a scientifically validated theory.

The free-association couch technique. Admittedly, the findings of modern neuroscience related to free-association began to accumulate only after 1980, so they were unknown to the adepts of psychoanalysis like the Sterba couple and Maynard Solomon. One could excuse them to have obeyed to the dogma in which they believed. However, from almost the very beginning of psychoanalysis, free-association has been recognized to be a weakness, even by the psychoanalysts themselves: they found that a well-guided approach could lead the person on the couch in any desired direction, and not necessarily to healing. We should not accept their distortions of the facts or simply ignoring inconvenient realizations when they constructed their speculations. One could sum up their approach in terms of one of “Murphy’s” famous Laws: “If your theory does not fit the facts, change the facts.”

Psychobabble sample. A final major problem with the Freudian approach is that its proponents treat it as an infallible dogma. They lose any common sense, and instead enthusiastically generate what popular wisdom has termed “psychobabble.” Here is an example from the Sterbas’ book (pp. 226-227). Drawing upon Beethoven’s “steadily increasing preoccupation with money” during his last years, they claim that “the depth-psychologist is not surprised to learn that Ludwig exhibited an increased interest in his intestinal functions at this time.” This implicit reference of the “depth-psychologist” is that, according to Freudian interpretations of dreams, excrements are “actually” money in disguise. Here follows an anecdote taken from the composer’s life with which the authors support their claim:

In the same house [where Beethoven lived] it also happened that a woman who lived on the same storey wanted to go to the privy, but found it shut. She waited a quarter of an hour, and since the door still could not be opened, she asked the housekeeper if the lock was defective. A violent knocking was now tried, and the answer came: ‘There, there! I am coming now!’ — Beethoven emerged, and on the door lines were found, drawn in pencil and filled with [music] notes!

2. Beethoven on the Sterba couch

The Sterbas’ book *Beethoven and His Nephew* deals with the last period of Beethoven’s life, when, after his younger brother Carl Caspar died of consumption in 1815, he became the guardian of Carl’s nine-year-old son Karl and waged a years-long war with the boy’s mother to exclude her from the child’s custody, as he deemed her a morally corrupt agent of evil. Through this, he created a prolonged period of great suffering for all the parties involved—the child, the mother, and even himself. This led to a final catastrophe: young Karl’s suicide attempt, a shock that aged Beethoven and very likely shortened his life. It seems a miracle that Beethoven was able to also create a large body of musical masterpieces during this period, almost equaling his level of productivity during his so-called “heroic period.”

Beethoven’s behavior has puzzled the scholars for a long time, beginning with the 19th century biographer Alexander Thayer. But the Sterbas were the first to try to explain it by viewing it through a Freudian lens. They dismissed almost all previous scholarship for crafting a “conspiracy” that highly idealized Beethoven, belittled his nephew, and criminalized his sister-in-law without justification; and they set themselves the task of cleaning the record to rehabilitate mother and son. However, their case is marred by serious scholarly errors and transgressions. Admittedly, some of the essential facts impacting the issue became known only after they wrote their book, but the Sterbas refused to change their view in later editions of their work, even after new and important facts were revealed. They also rejected as biased data originating with Beethoven or his friends, and deliberately ignored reliable

testimonies that disproved their theories, while promoting unreliable testimony if it fit their interpretations.

A hostile picture of Beethoven. The Sterba couple amassed many dark features on the psychological portrait of the composer (“tyrannical Führer-like” personality, “pathological distrust” of people, etc.). I will deal only with the essential issues, which involve wild Freudian speculations and the most relevant flaws in the scholarly approach. The two “shrinks” see two pathological—and essentially related—components in Beethoven’s behavior and in his relationship with his nephew:

1) An excessive, possessive love of his nephew, which, in their opinion, was not “fatherly” but a “motherly” love that resulted in horrible extremes of distrust and jealousy. Beethoven’s “motherly love” for his nephew would have stemmed from his “identification” with his mother during his childhood and teenage years. This interpretation, reminiscent of the modern concept of “role modeling,” may seem justified: Beethoven’s mother appeared far more loving of him than his father, who tortured him during his early childhood with exhausting music lessons and practice. On the other hand, Beethoven imitated his father when rigorously monitoring Karl’s education, from the very beginning and up to the end, therefore his love had also a strong “fatherly” component. The Sterbas never explain what “motherly love” might be and why it is pathological for a father (or an uncle acting like a father) to adopt it, probably assuming that the adjective “possessive” was sufficient to explain it. Whatever the case, the two scholars argue, “almost always when he [Beethoven] calls himself the boy’s ‘father,’ we must substitute ‘mother,’ for it was such that he experienced his possession of the boy” (p. 56). All the illustrative examples are only wild tautological speculations: for example, when a witness describe Beethoven’s devotion to his nephew as that of “the most tender father,” the Sterbas conclude that “the happiness of a mother finds voice in these reports” (p. 63).

2) An obsessive and delusional hatred for his sister-in-law Johanna, whom Beethoven vilified in the most ignominious way. She would have been an honest woman whose only mistake, “embezzlement against her own husband,” was as easily forgivable as that legal description was hard to understand (what could she have done?—stealing the family grocery money to buy jewelry for herself?). Beethoven’s attitude toward Johanna, the Sterbas would have us believe, would have been a result of the same “identification” with his mother, which was marred by the child’s “not [entirely] positive” or “ambivalent” feelings for her (p. 80), resulting in distrust of the other sex. The quality of the proffered arguments for Beethoven’s “ambivalence” toward his mother range from improbable (resentment because she did not prevent her husband from overburdening her child with music lessons) to callous (Beethoven’s fear of becoming sick with consumption, the disease that killed her). In fact, Beethoven left clear evidence of a sound affective relationship with his mother. And, as we will see, he had other reasons to dislike, distrust and reject Johanna.

Beethoven’s “ambivalence” toward his mother, engendering distrust of women and misogyny, would also supposedly explain his “unconscious homosexuality.” This homoerotic component of Beethoven is a myth, probably encouraged by his never getting married; in fact sociologists have discovered that the Western European “marriage pattern” of his time included a large number of people, men and women, who did not marry. There are also testimonies coming from Beethoven’s most intimate friends, like Wegeler and Ferdinand Ries, attesting to his definite interest in women, but the Sterbas discarded all of this reliable evidence. They quote instead a certain Friedrich Wähler, merely a short-lived acquaintance of Beethoven around 1820, who “asserts that love appears never to have any power over him” (p. 97) in some “reminiscences” about the composer. Quite characteristically, when the Sterbas published their 1954 book in German translation in 1964, they did not change an iota in their stand, even though Beethoven’s love letters to Josephine, the best testimony of his heterosexuality, had been published in 1957. The Sterbas simply ignored the new fact that refuted this tenet of their theory—the Murphy law in action again.

A very different 1816 portrait of Beethoven. We possess a very different portrait of Beethoven from the pen of Fanny Giannatasio. She was the eldest daughter of Cajetan Giannatasio, in whose

school Beethoven enrolled his nephew after taking custody at the beginning of 1816. The composer visited their school very often to monitor his nephew's progress and befriended the Giannattasios, talking to them quite freely and inspirationally, especially to the two young daughters. Fanny transcribed many of his utterances in her diary, which has become the most valuable evidence about Beethoven's life in 1816-17 and even beyond; the Sterbas themselves quoted it repeatedly—albeit quite selectively, excluding the composer's portrait that Fanny drew. She was so impressed by “the modesty and heartiness of his disposition,” his “goodness of heart which is his special characteristic,” that in March she was ready to fall in love with him and soon confided her feelings to her diary, although she felt that hers was an impossible dream. Although somewhat naïve and romantic, Fanny had plenty of common sense and, whether in love or feeling rejected and hurt, she always kept her balance, giving her testimony the ring of truth. She did not always agree with Beethoven and clearly did not trust his pedagogical aptitude, therefore she foresaw the disaster when, in January 1818, Beethoven decided to withdraw his nephew from Giannattasio's school. Overall, Fanny's portrait of Beethoven displays the real man, with both light and shadows—a man the Sterba couple missed.

The real Johanna was actually very much as Beethoven described her. We have nowadays three incontrovertible pieces of corroborating evidence:

1) The court file of Johanna's 1811 trial and the police investigation reports, which had been lost in a fire in 1927, but have been re-built by Siegmund Brandenburg and presented in a 1988 article on “Johanna van Beethoven's Embezzlement.” She liked to live beyond her family income (which was not unsubstantial); because her husband “kept her short,” she ran a sort of consignment business of her own, which was, however, registered under her husband's name, as the law required at the time. In 1811, when she had an expensive pearl necklace entrusted to her for sale, she designed a scheme to sell it for herself: she framed up a burglary and accused her former maid of the theft. But she was stupid enough to wear a necklace made from half of those pearls when the police arrived and had to eventually confess her crime. She was tried and convicted for a double felony, embezzlement against her husband (she tried to steal from the consignment business recorded as his) and calumny (because accusing her maid of the crime); she was sentenced to “one year severe imprisonment,” reduced to two months, because of mitigating circumstances. This was not Johanna's first rub with law: she had started with a similar theft and framing attempt in her parent's home in her teenage years, when she was pardoned, on her promise to amend her ways. In 1811, she seems to have served only a few days of light police detention, because her husband persistently appealed to higher levels, ultimately to the Emperor, each time having the sentence successively reduced. This was probably with Beethoven's help, who pulled some strings too, as he later claimed in a court memorandum draft.

2) A piece of evidence disclosed by George Marek in his 1969 biography *Beethoven, The Life of a Genius*: an entry in the diary of a certain Joseph Carl Rosenbaum. This city reveler otherwise unknown in the Beethoven literature, wrote in 1810, “Ten o'clock at the Redoute [masked ball] ... we remained until 4 A.M. Several pretty masks ... *the Beethoven woman* ... So I had a fairly good time” (original italics). The early 1800s Vienna appears, in the testimony of the contemporaries, as a hub of sexual depravation. “There cannot be a more dissolute city, one where female virtue is less prized,” wrote John Russell, an English memorialist who visited the city in 1821. And Johann Pezzl, the chronicler of the Viennese social life *circa* 1800, wrote in his book *Sketch of Vienna (1786-90)* that, during such balls, “many a virgin lose her innocence and many a matron her virtue.” In this context, the statement of a man about having “a fairly good time” at a masked ball with a woman whose husband was, obviously, absent is clear proof that “the Beethoven woman” had acquired already a reputation as a “*femme légère*” during her marriage. This evidence corroborates rumors of Johanna's adulterous affairs, already referenced (but not investigated) in the 1811 court file. It is also very likely that, contrary to the Sterbas' claim, Beethoven did not lie when reporting in letters and in a court memorandum draft rumors about Johanna's similar behavior immediately after her husband's death. Johanna turns out to be one of the “tribe of bad women” about whom Beethoven had warned his brothers in an earlier letter. We can, therefore, understand Beethoven's anger at “the Beethoven

woman” who dragged his name through the mud of Vienna’s scandals and his desire to not let her be part of her child’s education.

3) The child that Johanna bore, as a single mother, during her 1820 lawsuits with Beethoven unknowingly provides us the definitive proof that Beethoven was right about her character. When she asked her lawyer and in-law Jacob Hotschevar, in 1830, to be the co-guardian of her illegitimate daughter, he declined and explained in a Vienna court document that “her little praiseworthy lifestyle is not of a nature that could make it acceptable to me to come into closer contact with her as a guardian of her illegitimate child”—the same decision that Beethoven had taken, with the same justification, in 1816!

Granted, the Sterbas were not aware of these pieces of evidence, but this does not justify their rejection of similar testimonies as biased simply because they came from Beethoven himself or his circle. Obviously, Beethoven had very good reasons to consider his sister-in-law a morally dissolute woman. Certainly, he pushed his righteousness too far when trying to cut her off entirely from her child, but that does not make him the inhuman monster that the Sterba couple paints. Evidence in his *Tagebuch* (diary) show that he felt guilty for hurting “the widow” or “the mother,” because “even a bad mother is still a mother”—as he put it in a letter—and when she was bankrupt and sick after birthing that illegitimate child, he helped her financially.

Beethoven’s nephew Karl appears as an angel in Sterbas’ book: first as an obedient, loving child and later as a dutiful youth answering Beethoven’s quite often excessive demands (including some secretarial work) and doing his best in his studies. His occasional trespasses, mostly his secret meetings with Johanna, were only the expected reaction of a child separated from his mother. If, in his secretarial duties, he stole some of the house servants’ pay, it would have been only because he imitated Beethoven, who was known to abuse his servants.

The evidence from Fanny Giannattasio’s diary (mentioned above) tells us a different story. As her father’s right hand in running the school, she had an opportunity to know little Karl, whom she describes as a gifted child but, unfortunately, “not naturally truthful, [which] may lead him to indulge in falsehood,” a description that the Sterbas fail to notice although they quote Fanny elsewhere. The boy’s inclination could only have been a result of growing up in his parents’ home, mostly under his mother’s influence. Karl himself entered later in a conversation book a lesson in stealing that his mother taught him and that she had received from her father, who told her: “I won’t give you any [money], but if you can *take* money without my knowledge, it belongs to you!” Beethoven’s claims in court that Karl had also learned to lie from his mother appear, therefore, justified.

Beethoven’s love of his nephew was quite real, not “motherly” but actually “fatherly” enough. Karl was the only one who could perpetuate the name that he, Ludwig van Beethoven, made a staple of humanity—a fact that Beethoven was fully aware of. Granted, his love was uneven, stretching between “almost cruel severity to almost limitless indulgence,” (Thayer) but this was the general pattern of his affection, well known to all those dear to him, including brothers and friends. And because Karl was by far more important to Beethoven than any other human being, he received a much closer experience than anyone of the ups and downs inherent in a relationship with Beethoven. The interdiction against his mother could only aggravate the friction between them. Fanny Giannattasio noted that in her diary and foresaw the worst when Beethoven decided to withdraw Karl from her father’s school to live with him and to educate him with tutors. Their closer interaction indeed worsened the situation.

Karl was, unfortunately, a mediocre nature and constantly disappointed Beethoven, whose unbalanced love made things worse, as altercations became more frequent. After a bad row in late 1818, when the composer remonstrated Karl very roughly—grabbing him by the neck and shaking him—the boy fled to his mother. Johanna promptly sued to obtain exclusive guardianship of her son and, with the help of an able lawyer who knew how to emphasize Beethoven’s “eccentricity” and

infirmity, won her case. A distressed but unrelentful, Beethoven appealed and the Appellate Court restored his guardianship in 1820, again excluding Johanna.

Beethoven's alleged scheming, lying and "influencing" in Court battles. In Sterbas' book, Beethoven won in the Courts only through gross manipulation, including lies about Johanna's character, distortions of facts (i.e., the details of her 1811 conviction) and corrupting the Courts through his "influential friends belonging to the highest aristocracy" (p. 55), while Johanna won her case rightfully in the second trial. Judging by modern standards, a court decision that strips a woman of her natural right to maintain a bond with her child is indeed morally—and should, therefore, also be lawfully—wrong; today, Johanna would most certainly retain custody, because she had paid her debt to society through her time in jail. However, Austrian Law provided an exclusionary clause: "persons unfit to be guardians [of a child] included those 'who have been found guilty of a felony.'" Johanna had been sentenced in 1811 for a double felony; therefore, Beethoven easily won his case in the first 1815-16 trial. The situation was different three years later: some courts had started to deem the exclusionary clause obsolete and unfair in certain cases, such as those of a mother, and the court judging Johanna's case in 1819 accepted her lawyer's claim that her 1811 felony must have "lapsed" by 1819 and should no longer be an impediment. However, the Law was clear that such a lapse did not apply, as Brandenburg found in the documents of the Vienna Appellate Court specifying the grounds on which it ruled in favor of Beethoven in 1820.

Karl's "martyrdom" and his suicide attempt. When Beethoven finally won back the guardianship of his nephew, the boy was thirteen years old—a teenager. For a very long time, biographers have paid little attention to this detail. Thayer briefly mentioned the "spirit of rebellion" that the Sterbas refined to "self-discovery and of rebellion," directed not against Beethoven's authority but against "the stigmata of childhood" (p. 218); they do not explain what these "stigmata" were, but one can infer that they meant the suffering of being separated from his mother, for which Beethoven was to blame, as for everything else. In a more sophisticated psychoanalytic interpretation, Beethoven was also guilty of pushing Karl to be bad: the boy "identified" with his mother and, since his uncle presented her as a bad person, he became "bad" too (p. 199). Karl himself had a much simpler explanation: "I grew worse because my uncle wanted me to be better," (Thayer) a confession that the Sterbas omitted in their take. Doesn't this sounds like a *déjà-vu*, more exactly a *déjà-entendu* [heard]?

Stefan Wolf demonstrated that the relationship between Beethoven and his teenage nephew turned into a typical "puberty conflict" in his 1995 book (in German) *Beethoven's Conflict with his Nephew*, an idea later endorsed by Barry Cooper in his 2000 biography of Beethoven. As I showed earlier, psychiatry and neuro-science have recently discovered that adolescence, which may even extend in the early twenties, is a very special and important period in the development of personality, marked by inward and outward conflicts that often lead, especially in boys, to bizarre and/or violent acts, more often than not directed at parental authority. These can include suicidal thoughts (statistically, affecting one high-school student in three) and even suicides. Karl failed so thoroughly in his attempt (one superficial head wound from two shots) that some in Beethoven's circle—as well as Barry Cooper among the modern scholars—suspected that Karl's act was a fake. Not Beethoven, though: he was devastated to learn, from his friend Holz, that his nephew blamed him for the attempt.

Liquidating Beethoven. The Sterbas' term "liquidated" is almost literally right. Karl's suicide attempt was an emotional—or, better said, physiological—blow that aged Beethoven overnight, as noted by all those who were close to him. It was the beginning of his end. He would succumb to the next sickness that struck him a few months later, probably because his mental suffering had very much weakened his immune system, which had helped him overcome such health crises before. And Karl very likely further hastened the process: Dr. Wawruch, the first physician to attend Beethoven, reported that, after being treated for a week, he seemed to have recovered; but he abruptly and dramatically relapsed because of a mysterious incident in which he suffered "ingratitude and undeserved insults"

from a never-named suspect who could only have been his nephew. From that moment on, as Wawruch writes, “sickness progressed with giant steps.”

De-Sterba-ing Beethoven. Even though Sterbas’ psychoanalytical approach to Beethoven in his dealings with his nephew and sister-in-law is altogether wrong, I agree with them (and other scholars) that Beethoven’s behavior was borderline psychopathic. I would describe it as “Sarastro Syndrome.” Sarastro is, of course, the character in Mozart’s opera *The Magic Flute*, a rescue story opposing two characters: Sarastro, the high priest of a prodigious brotherhood and promoter of light; and his antagonist the Queen of Night, personifying darkness with its allies—ignorance, obscurantism, fanaticism, sin and crime. The soul to be rescued is the Queen’s daughter, an exceptional child whom Sarastro abducted in order to rescue her from an evil mother who would have ruined her character and her great future. Beethoven modeled his relationship with his nephew and the latter’s mother after this opera. Like Sarastro, he kidnapped the exceptional child (Karl was, after all, a Beethoven!) to rescue him from an evildoing mother, whom he actually referred to as “the Queen of Night.” I do not intend to add the “Sarastro Syndrome” as yet another psychopathy to the long list of “personality disorders” in the psychiatric manuals. I see it as a specific form of “self-righteousness” that includes in Beethoven’s case elements of several psychic diseases, like narcissistic personality disorder, paranoia and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

3. Beethoven on Maynard Solomon’s Couch

Maynard Solomon kept Beethoven on his couch from cradle to grave in his 1977 biography of the composer, titled simply *Beethoven* (revised 1998). He subscribes to and modifies some of the diagnoses put forward by his predecessors, but his major novel contribution to the Beethoven portrait is the thesis that Beethoven lived with an alleged “Family Romance” delusion—the framework on which Solomon builds Beethoven’s whole personality and life course.

The Sterba inheritance. Solomon does not subscribe to Sterbas’ “identification with mother” theory, contending common-sensically that “there is abundant evidence that Beethoven’s strivings were of a paternal nature,” but only because it fits his Family Romance theory. However, he accepts some of the basic assessments of older psychoanalytical peers, like the “negative feelings towards mother” and “homosexual implications.” He also frequently wanders into pure Freudian speculations about Beethoven’s “violent alternations between incestuous and matricidal drives” or “vicissitudes of fratricidal and fraternal impulses.”

The alleged “age delusion”. Almost all his life, Beethoven stubbornly insisted that he was two years younger than he really was. What we may consider a strange misconception is, for Solomon, Beethoven’s “age delusion” (p. 3). However, Solomon does not spend much time on the issue in *Beethoven*, instead referring the reader to his *Beethoven Essays* book (which we will examine in the next chapter). In Solomon’s biography, the issue serves only to set the tone of the entire work, announcing its *leitmotiv*: delusion.

The alleged “Family Romance” delusion. The “Family Romance” is a lesser-known Freudian made-up mechanism to describe the development of a child within his family. The gradual liberation of the child from the authority of his parents—especially of his father’s—must go through several stages. In one of these, the child comes to fantasize himself to be the offspring of a different father, one of a much higher social standing, like a prince, a king or a celebrity. Almost all children, but boys in particular, and especially outstandingly gifted boys, would pass through this conscious fantasy stage, forgetting it later. Freud himself did not elaborate his concept in any depth; it was later taken over and expanded by Otto Rank (1884–1939), his younger colleague and disciple.

Solomon managed to link the Family Romance to Beethoven because of a detail in the composer’s life that barely appears in Thayer’s biography, and that most readers would discard with a laugh: the allegation purported in 1810 by the French *Dictionnaire des musiciens* and repeated a few years later

by the German *Brockhaus Konversations-Lexicon* that Beethoven was “said to be” the illegitimate son of the King of Prussia Friederich Wilhelm II. Beethoven was aware of the allegation, but ignored it and declined to formally refute it when friends—and also his nephew—asked him several times to do so, as recorded in his conversation books. He offered an explanation for this attitude only toward the end of his life, when answering his old-time friend Wegeler, who had asked him to rebut the rumor: “I have made it a principle never to write anything about myself nor to answer anything that is written about me [...] I therefore gladly leave it to you to make known to the world the integrity of my parents, and of my mother in particular.” Solomon does not pay any attention to Beethoven’s explanation and jumps to diagnose him with “Family Romance” delusion (p. 6). He goes further to ascribe this Family Romance diagnosis to almost every feature of Beethoven and major event in his life: to age delusion, his strained relations with his brothers, his relationship with his nephew, the dedications of his works (!), and the last years of his life, when the alleged delusion would finally succumb under the attack of “importunities of reality and to the harbinger of mortality.”

Solomon’s theory of Beethoven’s Family Romance is nullified, simply and totally, by one well-established fact. It is amazing that even Solomon’s critics seem not to have noticed it: Beethoven’s reverence for his paternal grandfather, well-attested to by Thayer from various testimonies, clearly shows that the composer was convinced that he had inherited his musical genius from him. Could he have been so intellectually delusional as to believe that he had inherited his paternal grandfather’s musical talent but had been sired by a man other than the son of his grandfather?

Solomon seems to have foreseen this irrefutable objection to his theory, and tried to contain it with the following argument: “It is worth noting, however, that a strong psychological identification with a grandfather *may* well go hand in hand with a repudiation of the father; a boy *may* try to come to terms with an unsatisfactory image of his father in idealizing a male grandparent” (my emphasis). This statement is not wrong but, in order to support Solomon’s thesis, it must distort the meaning of the term “repudiation” to include the delusional belief that it also entails the dissolution of the biological relationship. It is also worth pointing out one of Solomon’s favorite scholarly tactics: tentatively introduce an alternative with the word “*may*” but then using it as an established fact.

Beethoven and his sister-in-law. Like the Sterba couple, Solomon maintains that Beethoven unjustifiably denigrated Johanna (p. 301), but he discards the “identification with his mother” thesis proposed by the Sterbas to make room for another psychoanalytical offshoot: Beethoven would have been *attracted* to Johanna (a “love-hate” relationship) and “degraded” her to a prostitute so that he could, in this way, have sex with her in his fantasies. In a frenzy of wild Freud-like speculation, Solomon further claims that Beethoven’s desire that his nephew call him “father” was a “mystifying way” in which he “may have been participating in an illusory marriage to the ‘Queen of Night’ [Johanna] herself.”

Unlike the Sterbas, Solomon did not have the excuse of not knowing of the evidence revealing Johanna’s questionable morality. He quotes Brandenburg’s work about her 1811 trial; he lists Marek’s biography of the composer in his “Selected Bibliography”; he quotes a carefully truncated and inexact form of Hotschevar’s written 1830 testimony about Johanna’s “less than praiseworthy life.” However, he does not draw any inferences from all this evidence and qualifies Beethoven’s statements about Johanna’s morality as “persecutory and sexual fantasies.” “Murphy Law” strikes again: when facts do not fit your theory, change the facts.

After he had secured sole guardianship of Karl in 1820, Beethoven began to show more leniency toward his sister-in-law, who was by then sick, pregnant and destitute, even helping her financially. Solomon sees this change of heart as proof that “ultimately, Johanna’s heroic and passionate struggle for her son and for the preservation of her motherhood *may* have prevented Beethoven from losing contact altogether with the inner core of his own humanity” (p. 330, my emphasis). The scholar needed this “humanization” of the musician because he refused to be “forced to believe that the masterpieces of Beethoven’s last years were composed by a cruel and unethical human being” (p. 324). The

argument is clearly denied by the facts. The “de-humanized” Beethoven who had tortured Johanna before 1820 had also been able to create masterpieces like the *Hammerklavier Piano Sonata* (finished 1818), *Missa Solemnis* (begun in 1819, nearly completed by the fall of next year) and the *Ninth Symphony* (begun in 1818).

Beethoven’s nobility pretense as “living out” his Family Romance. Although Beethoven was a commoner, he took his lawsuits against his sister-in-law to the Vienna Nobility Court (*Landrecht*) in 1815. During the later 1818 lawsuit, his slip of the tongue—“were he noble ...” he said about his nephew—revealed the truth and the court inquired further and he admitted that the family had no title of nobility. Accordingly, the court sent his case to the lower court of the commoners, which greatly upset him: “I do not belong to this court of the plebs,” he complained in a conversation book. Solomon makes this happenstance into a “nobility pretense” that would have been Beethoven’s way of “living out” his alleged Family Romance. Moreover, he maintains that Beethoven’s nobility pretense was not an episode during his 1815-1818 court battle for the custody of his nephew, but an “imposture” that he launched and expanded from the very beginning of this time in Vienna, “when he permitted the assumption that he was an aristocrat, which flowed from the *van* in his name, to pass unchallenged” (p. 117). Solomon brings in an apparently irrefutable circumstantial piece of evidence: many of Beethoven’s contemporaries—including the newspapers advertising or reviewing his concerts, the great German poet Goethe, and the secret police—took the *van* particle in his name as proof of nobility, even replacing it with the German equivalent *von* beginning with his first years in Vienna (p. 117). And, while there is no evidence that Beethoven initiated this misrepresentation, there is also none that he tried to correct it, obviously a case in which lack of evidence could constitute evidence.

There are many pieces of evidence that throw into question this allegedly life-long “imposture” of Beethoven (for example, his well-known political stance for republican rather than monarchical systems, and his disdain for the aristocratic way of life), but the essential evidence that rebuts Solomon’s thesis is the Vienna “title craze” at the time, which is fully documented in Johann Pezzl’s already quoted *Sketch of Vienna (1786-90)*; he writes that custom assigned the upper strata of commoners the non-aristocratic (but still elevated) title of “Herr von.” Prominent musicians like Haydn and Salieri were “Herr von Haydn/Salieri,” so it was natural that Beethoven soon became a “Herr von,” too, after taking the aristocratic salons by musical storm ... with one difference: he was most of the time referred as *van* Beethoven, because that particle was assimilated with the German *von*. The “title craze” voids Solomon’s evidence of Beethoven’s alleged long-term nobility pretense.

As we know, Beethoven’s alleged Family Romance delusion is a scholarly misjudgment; therefore his “nobility pretense” cannot in any way fit into it. Expectedly, Solomon’s argumentation for the link is another misconstruction. He quotes a confusing entry that Beethoven made in a conversation book of 1820, noting that the court had “learned my brother was not of the nobility. It is singular, as far as I know, that there is a hiatus here which ought to be filled, for my nature shows that I do not belong with this plebeian M[agistrat, the commoners’ court].” Solomon claims that “Beethoven seems to be expressing the fantasy that he and his brother had different parents—this seems to be the only way in which the ‘singular hiatus’ could be filled” (p. 119). There are incontrovertible facts that nullify this claim. It was Beethoven’s sister-in-law Johanna who initiated the “nobility pretense” when having her late husband’s will delivered to the nobility court. She could not have invented her husband’s nobility; she must have held it from him. When Beethoven’s mishap in court revealed the fraud, the judge asked Johanna directly if her husband was of noble birth and she answered, “So the brothers had said,” which makes it clear they were together in the “nobility pretense.” In fact, Beethoven’s brother Carl had already claimed a nobility of sort much earlier: in 1800, he was recorded in his clerk job register as “Carl v. Beethoven,” which shows that he wanted to pass as a “Herr von,” like his older brother, and very likely following his brother’s advice.

Beethoven’s relationship with his nephew is, in Solomon’s theory, centered on the Family Romance, re-baptized as a “family constellation”: when he asked his nephew to call him “father,”

Beethoven was not following a long European tradition (adoption of orphans by the extended family), but building the boy's own "Family Romance," in which he would be the child of an exalted father, Beethoven himself. On the other hand, Solomon makes nephew Karl "heal" his uncle of his alleged Family Romance delusion twice: the first time, in 1816, when, "In becoming Karl's 'father,' [Solomon writes] he was giving the lie to his own Family Romance and affirming that he was indeed a Beethoven rather than the illegitimate son of a king" (p. 361); the second "healing" happened ten years (and twelve pages later), when Karl joined the army in 1826, after his failed suicide attempt, as "The structure of Beethoven's Family Romance was fast disintegrating under the pressure of these events" (p. 373). As if this incongruence within his theory was not enough, Solomon will offer a third "healing" later in his *Beethoven Essays* book, which I review in the next chapter.

Solomon also acquiesced to the Sterbas' explanation of Karl's suicide attempt as aggression towards Beethoven displaced against himself, adding also "Karl's desire to be reunited with his mother seems fairly evident" (p. 371). Although he lists, in his "Selected Biography," Stefan Wolf's book *Beethoven's Conflict with his Nephew*, which argues for Karl's conduct as typical teen-aged behavior, like the ones so often recorded today, Solomon does not even mention this possibility in his analysis.

4. Beethoven's Second Session on Solomon's Couch

The first part of Solomon's *Beethoven Essays*, titled "The Interior Dimension," is an compendium of what may be called posthumously applied psychoanalysis. Besides the Family Romance, we encounter here the acme of the Oedipal complex: the "parricide," Freud's theory of dreams in action, a completely novel "identification" theory, and more.

The "age delusion." In the section "Beethoven's Birth Year" of his essays book, Solomon deals with Beethoven's already mentioned mistaken belief that he was two years younger than he really was. This belief is epitomized in his rejection of his baptismal certificate, the document which certified (not explicitly but by inference) his birth date. It may seem strange, but Beethoven appears not to have seen this document until late in his life and relied on the information about his age that his family passed to him during his childhood. We know that in 1806 he got such a certificate from Ries (without soliciting it), but he seems to have disregarded it. In 1810, he asked his friend Wegeler (then living in Cologne, close to Bonn) to get and send him a copy of his baptismal certificate. When he received it and found that it bore the date "December 17, 1770,"—which implied that he was born on the 16th (or maybe the 15th) of the month—he wrote on its back "1772," meaning the birth-year he considered right, and his explanation: "The baptismal certificate is not correct, since there was another Ludwig before me." The traditional view, held by the scholarly world since Thayer, blamed the composer's father for the age mistake: he would have wanted to make his young son appear as a child prodigy comparable to Mozart and subtracted two years from his real age when presenting him in public for the first time in March 1778. This misrepresentation persisted when Beethoven published his youthful compositions and in the biographical notices published about him during his childhood and teenage years. The composer seems to have taken this "age deduction" with him to Vienna and stubbornly stuck to it even when he had proof of his true birth date.

Solomon rejects this view and claims to find in the data "a consistent pattern of deductions of one year from his age during his first two decades [showing that] apparently, Beethoven and his associates (and perhaps his parents as well) all believed that he had been born in 1771" (p. 36). This one-year difference (1770 vs. 1771) would prove that Beethoven's two-year "age delusion" was not rooted in the father's falsification but was "his own." The one-year difference is Solomon's arithmetical trick: he rounds down a fractional year difference. Here is, for example, the case of the specified first "age deduction" that Beethoven's father did in March 1778: at that moment, Beethoven was seven years and three months old; that is, by Solomon's criteria, seven (p. 36)—hence one year difference. Obviously, rounding down the year is today's rule but, during Beethoven's time, "in the seventh year" and "seven years old" were interchangeable. Ironically, Beethoven's rejection of his baptismal

certificate in 1810 (1772 - 1770) conforms to Solomon's "arithmetic," that is, a one-year age deduction: in 1772, Beethoven was "in his second year," that is, one year old.

One can easily understand why Beethoven persisted in the mistake. He had to solve a puzzle with three pieces: 1) his long-time conviction based on his childhood and teenage memories that he was born in 1771 or even 1772; 2) his awareness that he had an older brother, also named Ludwig (with the middle-name Maria), who had died a few days after his birth, and whose baptismal certificate Beethoven had never seen; 3) a certificate of a Ludwig child baptized in December 1770. These pieces would fit only if the said certificate belonged to the first Ludwig child of his parents. Beethoven was justified at least to doubt that it belonged to him. As we know, it was a mistake, but not a delusion.

The nobility pretense—more of the same. Solomon expands the scope of his research to add more support to and even reach beyond the two theses in his biography of Beethoven (as debunked in the previous chapter). He relies less to psychoanalytical speculations and focuses on facts, but his presentations always sidestep any exploration that would risk weakening his main theses. In support of his thesis that Beethoven had already started his pretense when he moved to Vienna, he quotes the testimonies of two people who knew Beethoven well: Wegeler and Schindler. But in fact, Wegeler only reproduces in the 1845 revised edition of his book what Schindler claimed in his 1840 biography of Beethoven:

Had the nobles not believed him [Beethoven] to be one of them, neither his genius nor his works of art would have won him the favored position he had enjoyed [; ...] the little word "van" had exercised a magic power.

This is just speculation not supported by a single example. Although he was very close to Beethoven during the so-called "exposure" of the latter's nobility pretense in December 1818, and wrote about its devastating effect on the composer, Schindler did not try to scratch beneath the surface of the issue. He could have talked to old-time aristocratic friends of Beethoven, like Count Moritz Lichnowsky, who could have testified about the composer's alleged nobility. Besides that, Schindler's explanation of Beethoven's enthusiastic reception in the aristocratic salons as a result of the latter's *esprit de corps* defies a known fact: Viennese aristocracy was, at the same time, enthusiastically recognizing the genius of the two commoners, Haydn and Mozart.

Solomon correctly notes that, after Beethoven's nobility pretense was exposed in court, he never formally acknowledged that he was not of noble origin but only that he had no documentary proof of nobility. To him, this is proof that Beethoven continued to believe in his "nobility of birth," without distinguishing the latter from what Beethoven had called "nobility by nature." Then Solomon invokes (p. 53) a letter the composer wrote in July 1819 to a magistrate in the commoner's court (to which the lawsuit had been redirected) to inform him about the incident in the nobility court: "I had sufficient personal pride to declare that I had *never worried about my nobility*." Solomon concludes that the 1819 letter "gives the impression that his [Beethoven's] nobility was so certain that he would not debate it with those who required proof of it." And this "impression" alone—not supported by any corroborating evidence—leads Solomon to reiterate the alleged link between a nobility pretense and the "Family Romance" that he had proffered in his biography of Beethoven (rebutted in chapter 3). An impression is not proof, especially when based on a single word in German, "*bekümmert*," which is not unequivocal: it could also mean "concerned" or even "grieved," a meaning that was frequent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Solomon speculates that Beethoven's "imposture," which the aristocratic establishment had accepted, actually prevented him from getting a nobility title. This was an age in which, according to Solomon's source, "talents, too, were rewarded with ennobling recognition: botanists, librarians, physicians, and archaeologists acquired the beneficent 'von' when their achievements were sufficiently noted." Solomon fails to notice that musicians are conspicuously missing in the above list of the ennobled, even though, when one thinks of the great achievements of the age in the German world, music is the first one that comes to mind.

More swings and misses by Solomon. Solomon finally discovers Vienna's "craze" for titles and the fake "Herr von" nobility (pp. 45-46), not in Pezzl's work, but in the book of the English memorialist John Russel, who visited Vienna around 1820, but missed Pezzl's explanation of the fact. Noticing that Beethoven's brother Carl was recorded in his clerk job register as "Carl v. Beethoven," Solomon claims that the latter had his own "nobility pretense" (pp. 46-47). Unaware of Pezzl's testimony, Solomon does not understand the facts; in the end, he did not include Vienna's "title craze" in his 1998 revised biography of Beethoven ... possibly because he became aware that it did not support his thesis.

Trying to disentangle the nobility pretense issue. Solomon's second take of Beethoven's nobility pretense does not offer any new or more convincing arguments to his original presentation of the issue. On the other hand, the pretense itself is a demonstrable fact during Beethoven's 1815-1818 lawsuits against his sister-in-law in the Vienna nobility court. Unfortunately, the facts make up such an entangled knot of contradictions that the issue may never be solved. I can only enumerate the most relevant facts that Solomon ignores and that might have played a role. In a nutshell:

1) Beethoven did not initiate the "nobility pretense" in 1815; he only accepted tacitly his sister-in-law's misrepresentation when she had the will of her late husband delivered to the nobility court.

2) The existing evidence does not contain any proof that Beethoven actually claimed to be of the nobility, but plenty of proof that he abhorred being treated as a member of the "plebs" in court. He might simply have not wanted to be seen "washing the family dirty linen" by the lower class.

3) A "mitigating circumstance" might have played a role: a possible ancient "lost nobility" of the family, which is mentioned in the literature and a trace of which can be found in Beethoven's conversation books.

The dreams of Beethoven. Solomon could not resist examining the few dreams that Beethoven narrated in letters to four of his friends through the Freudian lens. Predictably, Solomon re-discovered therein his old favorites—family romance, homosexuality, Oedipal inclinations (including parricide and incest), nobility pretense, etc. The first clue that Solomon extracts from these four dreams is a connection between their addressees: Ignaz Gleichelstein (in 1807), Archduke Rudolph (1819), Tobias Hasslinger (1821) and Karl Holz (1826). All of them were men younger than the composer at the time when he wrote them (the oldest, Hasslinger, was 34). He immediately infers that Beethoven's reason for narrating his dreams to them, in which these young men appeared, must have been his "sublimated homosexual feelings" (p. 64). He strings these four dreams in chronological order, as if to put Beethoven on his couch in four successive sessions (over an interval of nineteen years!), at the end of which he makes his patient diagnose his own psychopathy and thus helps him to cure himself (pp. 64-73). He identifies Beethoven's "core dream"—one that reflects the essence of a person's personality and psychopathic traits: sex and birth in each of the four dream narrations. I will not follow Solomon closely through his application of Freudian dream symbolism, which will be really tedious, but I will illustrate his favorite (and fallacious) tactics, with a few of the many possible examples:

1) Mixing up dream and non-dream narration (a deceptive trick exposed by Tellenbach). In the "Gleichelstein dream," Beethoven begins by narrating his dream, but then complains that a hat that the letter's addressee had bought for him "got a rip." Solomon turns this hat, which is not part of the dream, into a dream-symbol of "feelings of anxiety and castration" (p. 65).

2) Far-fetched "free associations." This is another primary technique for a Freudian interpretation of dreams. In a real couch session, the technique is an interaction with the patient, but Solomon's fantasy roams unbridled to take Beethoven where the shrink wants to go ... and we know very well where that is. The "Archduke Rudolph dream" letter supplies a perfect example of such absurd associations. Noticing that his pupil wanted to publish his set of piano variations under the pseudonym Falkenstein, Beethoven wrote to him, "it just occurs to me that the Emperor Joseph traveled under the name of Count von Falkenstein." The simple appearance of the word "Emperor" is to Solomon proof that the composer was "activating the constellation of [his] family romance and nobility pretense

fantasies” (p. 67), followed by another amplification: Beethoven’s alleged “quest for the father” would lead him to Emperor Joseph II himself, which would make him his imperial pupil’s cousin, and even “brother.” Similar associations appear on almost every page of Solomon’s essays.

3) Wrong translations of the original German. Tellenbach discovered this tactic in the “Gleichenstein dream” letter: “a couple of horses” becomes a stallion and a mare enacting “a primal scene”—that is, copulating—which (he believes) obviously points to the Family Romance (p. 65). The most interesting example of this tactic appears in Solomon’s reading of the “Holz dream” letter, in which he deciphers Beethoven being healed of his Family Romance delusion a third time (see the first two healings in the previous chapter). Beethoven wrote this to Holz in the summer of 1826, on his birthday:

I dreamed last night that your parents were begetting you for this world, and how much sweat it cost them to bring such an amazing piece of work into the light of day (p. 63).

Solomon assumes without any discussion that this is an openly sexual message: Beethoven dreamed that he was watching the parents of Holz having sex, a quite unique statement in over 1500 known letters by the composer. Solomon further points out that Beethoven does not use the term “I dreamed,” as it appears in the above (Anderson’s) translation, but the verb “I know,” which would suggest that the text was “no ‘dream,’ no imagining, but direct perception—‘knowledge’,” which, foreseeably, leads, again, to the Family Romance via the Freudian dream disguise of his own parents into those of Holz. In this way, “knowing” in his dream would mark Beethoven as having abandoning his fantasy, proved by his admission that he “knows” now that these were “his” parents. This interpretation has a major problem (aside from the psychoanalysis model that Solomon exuberantly elaborates upon): the original German does not read “I know” (“*Ich kenne*”) as he claims, but “I could” (“*Ich könnte*”). Granted, Beethoven’s letter with the “I could” beginning, which raises problems to any translation, is confusing (his texts are quite often confusing) but that does not justify Solomon’s mistake. It is clear that without the “I know” language scaffolding, his Freudian interpretation of this dream implodes: whatever Beethoven’s intent may have been, we can be sure that he was not saying he “knew” the truth about his conception.

Another alleged Beethoven fantasy: “identifying” with his dead brother Ludwig Maria. In the chapter of his essay book “The posthumous life of Ludwig Maria,” Solomon fuses all his favorites (family romance, age delusion, parricidal impulses, etc.) into a construct with inconsistencies of which he is utterly oblivious: the first born of “our” Beethoven’s parents, Ludwig Maria, who lived only six days, was “the brief happiness of the young married couple” (p. 76), while Beethoven, the second born, was “unloved and unwanted.” Therefore, (Solomon argues,) he developed a fantasy in which he “identified” with the “loved wanted” first born. This other fantasy would help “compensate” for his “disturbance in identity” (i.e., the Family Romance) by “holding fast to his tenuous family ties by allying himself with, even ‘becoming’ Ludwig Maria, who was, without any doubt, a Beethoven” (p. 85). Solomon does not realize that the two fantasies are not only not “compensatory,” but incompatible: if Beethoven believed that he was not his father’s son, he could not identify with another son of the same father—unless he suffered from “split personality” symptoms that would have certainly labeled him as insane, a logical inference that Solomon stops short of proposing.

Solomon claims to find the definitive “proof” of his thesis in two Beethoven documents dating not from his childhood, when the fantasy would have taken shape, but from 1810. As I mentioned above (p. 11), in that year the composer wrote his friend Wegeler, asking him to locate his baptismal act in the Bonn church registry, and to send him a certificate copy. In his letter, he draws attention that “there was a brother born before me, also called Ludwig, but with the addition, Maria,” so that “this brother must first be found” in the registry before looking further for Beethoven’s baptismal entry. Solomon makes the phrase “this brother must first be found” into an “existential” quest by Beethoven, “an expression of his inner conviction that Ludwig Maria, though somehow present, remained to be discovered” (p. 83), which is an absolutely illogical inference: it was not his brother that “must be

found,” but the entry of his baptism in the church registry. Equally illogical is Solomon’s reasoning about the second 1810 document: the baptismal certificate copy that Beethoven received from Wegeler, bearing the date “16 of December, 1770.” Also as mentioned above, Beethoven rejected it with a note on the verso reading, “1772. The baptismal certificate seems to be incorrect, since there was a Ludwig born before me.” To Solomon, this rejection is proof that “Beethoven was yielding up his own identity” assuming in “his inner certainty” the identity of his dead brother. I previously explained Beethoven’s act: because Wegeler did not make it clear that he had “located” the dead brother first (of course, it would have been even better to send copies of both certificates), Beethoven actually saw no reason to reject his conviction that he was born in 1772. He was simply rejecting (albeit for the wrong reason) a date of birth that he believed *was* that of Ludwig Maria, therefore proclaiming his “own identity” as distinct from that of his dead brother. Solomon’s scenario is the kind of a dream that some parents may recall their child telling them: “I dreamt last night that I was not myself, I was my brother.”

One more thing is relevant. The “identification” that Solomon advances is not exactly Freudian—in fact it is quite a novelty. All the various kinds of identification in the psychoanalytic literature apply to living people with whom the subject, a child or youth, interacts and whose behavior he takes for the role model. To the Sterbas, Beethoven identifies with his mother, at least in her “motherly love” for her children. How could he “identify” with a brother that he had never seen?

Beethoven’s deafness à la Freud. Solomon adds a Freudian diagnosis to the issue of Beethoven’s gradual loss of hearing. He recruits one of the object-symbols of Freud’s theory of dreams: the ear has “phallic attributes,” so losing one’s hearing is a symbol of castration. On the other hand, the ear can be “a nourishing female principle” (pp. 96-97); psychoanalysis always finds ways to project two opposite natures on the same apparatus. I see no need to refute a thesis stemming directly from Freudian delusion.

Part II.

Beethoven’s Mental Health File

The interest in Beethoven’s mental health is well-established, but was for a long time confined to his “eccentricities” and blamed essentially on his famous hearing problems, an affliction far worse for a musician than for any other profession. This position prevailed in the scholarly world until the infiltration of Freudian views presented in Part I. Psychiatry—which has never accepted psychoanalysis as science—joined in at the beginning of the third millennium, as several physicians have re-activated the issue of Beethoven’s mental health, invoking a scientific approach based on modern health science. Common sense would ask us to trust physicians to diagnose illnesses. However, this case is special, because in this post-mortem examination the physician must rely on the existing evidence, which is fragmentary, often controversial, and open to speculation.

5. The Case for Beethoven’s Alcoholism

Beethoven’s alleged alcoholism has been recently argued by three physicians: Peter J. Davies, a gastroenterologist and a music scholar, in his 2001 book *The Character of a Genius: Beethoven in Perspective* (especially pp. 97-104); François Martin Mai, a professor of psychiatry with the University of Ottawa in his 2007 book *Diagnosing Genius* (pp. 141-151); and Dr. Michael Lorenz in an article published in *The Beethoven Journal*, Vol. 22/2 (Winter 2007). The issue itself is not a novelty. Beethoven’s fondness of wine has been well-known from several pieces of evidence, but successive generations of scholars trusted the testimony of Beethoven’s friends that, in spite of his love of wine, he “lived moderately.” Because the argument revolves mostly about the use of alcohol, it is important to know the cultural context, which these three authors totally ignore.

A very short history of wine in Europe. Wine had been a staple of European civilization (and specific cultures in various countries) for thousands of years. It was part of social life as well as health care. As late as the middle of the nineteenth century, Dr. Pasteur, a founder of modern medicine, who also did extensive research on wine, recommended it as “the healthiest and most hygienic of drinks.” During Beethoven’s time, the Austrian Empire was the second largest grape cultivator in Europe (after France), and wine was on everyone’s dinner table, be they rich or poor—the difference consisted in quality—simply because it was a much safer beverage than water, as Johann Pezzl, a chronicler of Viennese life around 1800, testified. The still-rudimentary medical science had not yet made the connection between alcohol and cirrhosis of the liver, the disease that likely killed Beethoven.

Peter Davies’ weak case for Beethoven’s “drinking problem.” Davies speculates about a “conspiracy” led by Schindler, Beethoven’s private secretary during his last years and later his first biographer, intended to hide the composer’s “drinking problem.” In fact, the evidence points to Beethoven’s fondness for wine but also to the idea that he “lived moderately.” Davies relies essentially on the testimony of Johann Holz, a young violinist that became Beethoven’s friend in 1825, even acting as his private secretary on many occasions, “usurping” Schindler’s position. Taking a statement from Holz, that Beethoven would drink over a liter of wine daily, and assuming this 1826 testimony would apply to Beethoven’s entire life—without offering any evidence for it, because there is none—Davies concludes that the composer very likely belonged to the high-risk category of drinkers, twenty percent of whom “will ultimately develop cirrhosis of the liver.”

Even if all of Davies’ assumptions were right, by this description Beethoven would have been just a “regular” Viennese. Statistics of 1808 give a per capita consumption of the one quarter million Viennese at 185 quarts of wine and 165 quarts of beer; from this, one can estimate that the average Viennese adult male must have consumed about one quart of wine and almost as much beer per day. There should be no surprise about that, if we remember that the doctors prescribed wine rather than water for drinking. By this standard, all Viennese seem to have had a drinking problem. In fact, even Davies concedes that “Beethoven was not an alcoholic in the sense that he was unable to control his intake.”

Mai’s (failing) diagnosis based on modern DSM-IV criteria. Mai presents eleven pieces of evidence (collected from letters, testimonies of contemporaries and Beethoven’s conversation books) relating to the composer’s consumption of wine, in chronological order. He never discusses them in any depth, assuming that they speak for themselves, but actually they do not. For example, according to Mai, a “bacchanalia” that Beethoven mentioned must have been a drinking binge, while Beethoven clearly used the word repeatedly as a metaphor rather than a descriptive term: he told Bettina Brentano, “music is [...] the wine which inspires one to new generative processes and I am the Bacchus who presses out this glorious wine for mankind and makes them spiritually drunken,” and designed an “*allegro*, feast of Bacchus,” an anticipation of the *Scherzo* of his Ninth Symphony.

Mai invokes the criteria for alcohol dependence and abuse developed by the *American Psychiatric Association* and concludes, without any further discussion, that his evidence proves that

It is likely that Beethoven had at least three (the required minimum) of the seven criteria of ‘dependence’: increased tolerance, use of larger amounts over a longer period, and unsuccessful efforts to cut down the intake, but he did not meet the criteria for alcohol “abuse.”

Invoking the authority of *APA* seems to convey an aura of objective science to Mai’s argument, but it is a thorough misconstruction. Mai disregards a basic requirement of the *APA* criteria: the qualifying events must be “occurring within a twelve-month period.” The *APA* criteria is based on comparisons (larger, increased), but the episodes in Mai’s evidence give no hint about changes in the “amounts” of wine involved to allow comparisons. Also, there is no evidence of an “effort” to cut down the amount. Holz’s testimony that Beethoven “could stand a great deal [of wine] at table” is the only one that might

indicate tolerance, but not an increase of it. Mai also evades the main ingredient of *APA*'s criteria of tolerance—the “desired effect” of drinking. What was the *desired effect* that Beethoven was trying to achieve? The typical, desperate purpose of the alcoholic is inebriation into oblivion. There is not even evidence that Beethoven ever got drunk; Mai himself acknowledges, like Davies, that the composer was not a “drunkard.”

Common sense and knowledge of Beethoven's life help us to better understand the two more general pieces of evidence that Mai brings forth to strengthen his argument:

1) The hereditary factor. Mai is right that “Beethoven had both familial and psychological predisposing factors that could have contributed to a tendency to overuse alcohol.” However, “could” is no proof that it happened, and even Mai accepts that Beethoven was not a drunkard as his father had been.

2) Beethoven's behavior— poor self-care, irritability and lack of social grace, particularly in the later stages of his life—was consistent with alcoholism. Poor self-care usually accompanies alcoholism indeed, but is not limited to it—many elderly men, especially bachelors, share it.

Lorenz' misguided verdict—alcoholism! This is based on a report written and later published by Dr. Wawruch, one of the physicians who attended Beethoven in his fatal illness, to which he adds, as evidence, the wine bills of the composer during those few months. Wawruch sketches a tableau of Beethoven's health—that is, his illnesses—with details showing that his source was the composer himself. However, he twists them to claim that, around 1800, when Beethoven noticed that he was losing his hearing, he “began to love alcoholic beverages” and continued unabated this new “way of life,” which was the cause of his final, fatal illness. Wawruch adds that Dr. Malfatti, who later joined him in attending the composer, “was able to acknowledge Beethoven's predominant inclination towards alcoholic beverages”—an alleged awareness of which one cannot find any other trace in the composer's biography.

Lorenz hails Wawruch's testimony as “the authentic voice of a medically qualified witness,” but an attentive reading of the text cannot fail to cast some doubts about its credibility, especially in Lorenz' translation, which seems deliberately twisted (although he is a native German speaker). For instance, he translates, simply, “he [Beethoven] began to enjoy [in original—“love”] alcoholic beverages” when the text explicates that “he began to love alcoholic beverages to increase his appetite.” Beethoven simply recurred to an “apéritif,” a stronger than wine alcoholic beverage, which is known to create appetite. Lorenz uses the term “alcoholic” without even noticing the apéritif that Beethoven drank—the punch, which was, at the time, an English “crazy” and not liquor, but a kind of lemon cocktail, in which the alcohol was supplied by wine brandy or, in weaker variants intended to teenagers, simply wine.

When he adds his own contribution to this thesis, Lorenz refers only to wine. Beethoven's love of wine is an acknowledged fact but there is no evidence that he ever drank any other kind of alcoholic beverage except, occasionally, beer. The great number of such wine episodes during Beethoven's last months is undeniable, but exceptional circumstances breed unusual behavior. Lorenz does not seem to realize that Beethoven lived his last months and died in horrible pain; his doctors likely decided to let him drink some wine under their control (there is evidence that he asked for their agreement) simply to make his agony more bearable.

Lorenz' final argument quotes from a letter that Schindler wrote to the publisher Schott, who had sent Beethoven a bottle of wine: “He enjoyed your *Rüdesheimer* [wine] by the spoonful until his death,” concluding that it conveys “the image of an addict who has to consume his drug until the very last moment of his life.” The *Rüdesheimer* was a Rhine wine, a token from Beethoven's native land, where he had been dreaming to return during his last years when, like any old man—to say nothing of a dying man—he travelled back in time to his childhood and youth. That spoonful of wine could not fill the need of an addict—wine is not heroin. Rather, it was the Proustian madeleine, the taste of

which allowed Beethoven to re-live the “time lost” of his youth in the native Rhineland. Lorenz’ claim that Beethoven’s “wine spoonful” was evidence of alcoholic addiction is only proof of Lorenz’ lack of empathy.

Beethoven’s real love relationship with wine. While none of the evidence nor the arguments advanced by these three physicians justifies a diagnosis of alcoholism, one cannot deny that Beethoven liked wine (possibly beer, too) and drank on a regular basis, especially at meals. He was, in that respect, a “true” Viennese. It becomes obvious now why the first generations of Beethoven scholars did not pay much attention to his drinking habits—they found this unexceptional because they grew up in the same culture as he did, which considered wine the safest drink, an excellent medicine and nutrient.

Beethoven seems to have drunk more than usual in 1825-26, when he befriended Holz, a young violinist and a fun-loving man who took upon himself, in Thayer’s words, “[the] charitable act to drag him [Beethoven] out of his isolation into cheerful company.” His testimony that Beethoven could “stand a great deal [of wine] at table,” suggests that Beethoven may have indeed developed “tolerance,” possibly as a result of the systemic disease that likely caused his gradual losing of his hearing. Several such diseases have been lately proposed (systemic lupus erythematosus, sarcoidosis, Whipple’s disease) and it is interesting to note that malabsorption—a deficient absorption of food nutrients as well as alcohol in the small intestine—is present in all of them.

The three scholars whose diagnoses of alcoholism I prove to be wrong are, however, very likely right that wine was responsible for Beethoven’s death. Increased alcohol consumption can indeed lead to cirrhosis of the liver. However, wine might have acted also in a different way. We know today that lead intoxication may produce its own kind of cirrhosis and the analysis of Beethoven’s hair, the results of which were made public in 2000, revealed a huge concentration of lead. The only reasonable explanation for this was the consumption of adulterated wine, in which lead salts were added to kill the bacteria that turn wine sour. As some specialists have claimed, the results of Beethoven’s autopsy suggest that his liver showed *lead*-induced cirrhosis. To make the issue even muddier, other specialists have challenged the assumption that lead intoxication has detrimental effects on health (the reader may find more in the 2007 and 2008 issues of *The Beethoven Journal* as well as in social media). Whether Beethoven’s cirrhosis was the result of alcohol in his wine or of lead in *adulterated* wine is still not clear, and may never be, but wine seems to be the cause of the composer’s too early demise.

6. The Case for Beethoven’s Psychopathy

Beethoven was certainly an “eccentric” whose behavior shocked many of those who knew him, and even those who saw him only occasionally. The epithet “crazy” was already attached to him during his life-time. He used to pour bucketsful of water on his hot head and chest, while bellowing scales like a raging bull, without caring about the people living on the lower floor. He would wake up at 5 in the morning and work on his music, with feet thumping and shouting. When walking in the streets, he shocked people by his loud strident voice and laughter and many took him for a madman. Nevertheless, it was not until the third millennium that he was “officially” diagnosed with psychopathic behavior by Peter Davies and François Mai in the books I discussed in the previous chapter: the former with paranoia, the latter with personality disorder. Also, both concur to add manic–depressive (or bipolar) disorder, a modern psychiatry fad, which claims it to be at the root of creative genius.

Both authors claim to found their diagnoses on criteria in the DSM-IV manual of the *American Psychiatric Association*, which has become the “Bible” of their specialty. Nevertheless, in order to get what they want, they constantly infringe on the elementary criteria of the manual. The most important of these criteria is one included in almost every psychotic disorder: any episode analyzed as a behavioral sample must not be “due to the direct physiological effects of a general medical condition.” We know too well that Beethoven lived most of his adult life with a medical condition,

deafness, which weighed heavily on his inner mental balance, a fact that Davies and Mai rarely take into account. Moreover, they don't even mention that a "not due to ..." caveat exists!

A note: Davies and Mai found their arguments on many episodes in Beethoven's life that allegedly reveal his psychopathic behavior. I found that, in almost all of these episodes, his behavior, albeit perhaps exaggerated, was justified. Tackling all of these would be impossible here, but I will give a few illustrative examples.

Mai's failed case for personality disorder. Personality disorder is a very large umbrella term for less severe forms of mental illnesses, many which actually go un-detected in many individuals or appear as simple "eccentricities"—and we could easily describe Beethoven as an eccentric. Axis II of DSM-IV, which Mai invokes, defines the following characteristics of the disease: An enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates markedly from the expectation of an individual's culture.

- A. The enduring pattern is inflexible and pervasive across a broad range of personal and social situations.
- B. The enduring pattern leads to clinically significant distress or impairment in functioning.
- C. The pattern is stable and of long duration and can be traced back to adolescence or early adulthood.

Another important condition is that the enduring pattern be not the result either of another mental disorder or of substance abuse.

Mai offers a table (3.3) containing 33 episodes in Beethoven's life, gathered from his letters, notes and conversation books, and other information in the previous chapters of his book, allegedly showing "psychiatric symptoms." He assumes that it is clear to which of the four cases of the DSM-IV Axis 2 they belong and claims that Beethoven "likely meets criteria A, B and C, but not D." He excludes the D criterion, acknowledging that "his characterological problems started around the time of the Heiligenstadt testament"; that is, they were related to his devastating hearing loss. In this case, he considers the special condition that the illness should not be the result of another mental disorder, but he does not apply it to the A, B, and C criteria! Eventually, he concludes that "[Beethoven] did not have a personality disorder per se, but his progressive character difficulties were the psychological and social consequences of his increasing deafness and his misuse of alcohol as he grew older," a diagnosis that does not make any sense: Beethoven "likely" meets the criteria, but does not have the illness ... but *kind of* has it, because he was an alcoholic. However, as we have shown in the previous chapter, Mai's claim that Beethoven was an alcoholic is plainly wrong.

The information in the table is actually irrelevant: the 33 examples cover a forty-year span (1786-1826) and range from "asthma" to "death wish," but many of them have clear causes outside Beethoven's will or brain, like his brother's death, a conflict with his nephew, or heavy prolonged illnesses. We could easily agree that Beethoven's well-known "eccentricity" may satisfy criterion A, but there is strong evidence that his "pattern" was not at all "inflexible and pervasive" (criterion B); indeed, he was quick to get into fits of anger versus his friends, but as quick to regret and humbly apologize, as his friends (Wegeler, Ries) repeatedly testified. Neither does Beethoven meet condition C: there is no evidence that he ever showed "clinically significant distress" or "impairment in functioning"; he not only maintained intact his essential "functioning"—that is, composing—but he was not an anti-social person, in spite of his eccentricities. The correct verdict, according to DSM IV criteria, is obvious: yes to "eccentricity" but no personality disorder.

Davies' failed case for paranoia. Davies builds his case on the DSM-IV criteria defined by APA for "Paranoid Personality Disorder":

- A. A pervasive distrust and suspiciousness of others such that their motives are interpreted as malevolent, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by four (or more) of seven criteria of "unjustified"—the term in essential—suspicion-mindedness, mistrust in people, fear of being hurt/cheated/abused, bearing grudges, etc.

Davies collected some fifty-odd examples of Beethoven's behavior (pp. 135-143) in which the composer's unwavering mistrust in people damaged his relationships with the most important human beings in his life: his brothers and his nephew, his best friends, his patrons and his publishers. These examples would fit five of those seven, which would thus qualify Beethoven as a paranoid. However, a closer scrutiny reveals a strange bias. Davies' relentlessly persists in finding faults with his patient, when a dispassionate approach would have found that in many, if not all, episodes, Beethoven's behavior was actually "justified."

I will illustrate this with the most meaningful such instance: Davies' reading of Beethoven's confession about losing his hearing to his closest friends, Amenda and Wegeler. Because he asked them, "treat what I told you about my hearing as a great secret to be entrusted to no one," Davies assumes that it was because of Beethoven's paranoid fear that "such information would be used against him" (p. 136). Wasn't that fear justified? Beethoven was losing the most precious sense of a musician, at the very moment when all his Vienna musician colleagues were united in their "hatred of Beethoven," as an impartial witness testified. Davies' implication is an astounding proof of insensitivity. And, because he also reads paranoia in Beethoven's relationship with his teacher Haydn (pp. 138-139), let us add that, according to the evidence, Haydn colluded with the Viennese musicians' cabal.

Among the proofs that Davies invokes to support his thesis we find Solomon's theory of Beethoven's alleged "Family Romance" (p. 168); this is one more reason to reject Davies' thesis: untruth cannot support truth.

Davies also looks for a genetic proof of his thesis, claiming (pp. 268-270) that Beethoven's ancestry had a long history of mental disease, and, when he cannot find any evidence of it in Beethoven's two brothers, he comes with this weird argumentation: "[...] in Beethoven's family two of his brothers [...] and also his two sisters [...] died during the first three years of life. Had they survived into adulthood, some of them may have developed and manifested evidence of bipolar or depressive illness or some other mental disorder" (p. 269). With this kind of argument one can prove anything.

Quite remarkably, Davies omits the mentioned general [B] condition required by the DSM-IV and he never takes it into account: "[The pattern] does not occur exclusively during the course of Schizophrenia, a Mood Disorder with Psychotic Features, or another Psychotic Disorder and is not due to the direct physiological effects of a general medical condition." This fact alone—ignoring the impact of Beethoven's acquired deafness, obviously "a general medical condition," on his behavior—should be enough to dismiss Davies' diagnosis.

The impact of Beethoven's deafness. What role did Beethoven's deafness—obviously an existential event in his life—play in the development of his personality and his alleged mental illness? Was it the cause of the illness or only an aggravating factor? If it was not the cause, what was the cause? Davies claims (pp. 163-169) to find the roots of the alleged paranoia in Beethoven's early childhood and young adulthood, but his argument relies heavily on opinions of scholars like Rank, Editha and Richard Sterba, and Solomon, who speculated wildly based on Freudian misconceptions. Of course, Beethoven showed some "eccentricity" in his young years, but his very friends (like Stephan von Breuning and Ferdinand Ries) who testified to them also noticed a clear change in his personality when he began to lose his hearing. In 1804, Stephan (then living in Vienna) wrote their mutual friend Wegeler (in Bonn), "You would not believe, dear Wegeler, what an indescribable and, I should say, truly dreadful impact the loss of his hearing has had on him." Indeed, from that moment on, paranoid traits (suspicion-mindedness, mistrust) became part of Beethoven's "nature," a description familiar to the clinical experience of the psychiatrist, who has become increasingly aware of the paranoia seen in patients with acquired deafness.

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Both Davies and Mai argue that Beethoven also suffered of Bipolar Disorder (a.k.a. Manic-Depressive Disorder) and both proceed in a two-step strategy: first collect evidence of many depression episodes in his life as proof that he had a depressive personality, then elevate the latter symptoms as proof of bipolar disorder. They have different approaches: Mai, a psychiatrist, constantly invokes the DSM-IV manual, while Davies introduces an extra, “exotic” element, music itself. Both approaches share one further point—they fail to persuade.

Mai’s failed case for Bipolar disorder. In his first step, focused on Beethoven’s alleged depression episodes, Mai invokes the Axis I of the DSM-IV, which defines a major depressive episode as having at least five of nine characteristics and including one of the first two, the most important (depressed mood most of the day nearly every day, diminished interest and pleasure) over a two-week period. The thirty-odd episodes in Beethoven’s life that Mai presents in his table 3.3 supposedly bear proof that Beethoven suffered from recurrent depression, spread over thirty years (1787-1826)—clearly off the “two-week period” required by DSM-IV. Few of them can actually qualify as “depressive,” and all of them had very definite causes. Mai himself eventually concedes (p. 169) that there are only four possible episodes of depression in Beethoven’s life that he cannot link to painful events, in 1809, 1813, 1817 and 1822—the evidence for the last being a simple “I am very sensitive and irritable” note! In fact, Mai could have easily found their causes—how could one miss, for example the link between 1813 and the famous “Immortal Beloved” story?

Convinced of having proved his case, Mai speculates further, linking Beethoven’s depression episodes to his alleged alcoholism, although he had admitted that the composer “was not a drunkard,” and that he did not drink to kill his depression. Finally, never does Mai consider that Beethoven’s deafness was enough reason for him to fall into depression and even to feel suicidal! He ignores recent findings in his professional field that has found that “the prevalence rate of clinical levels of depressed mood among people with profound AHL—acquired hearing loss—was found to be 4.8 times higher than in the general population.” If ordinary people losing their hearing can get depressed, how much more depressed should Beethoven, a musician, have been! It is indeed amazing and a proof of his extraordinary mental strength that he had not succumbed to suicidal thoughts, especially during his creative slump after 1812.

Convinced that he had identified Beethoven’s depression episodes, Mai needed only those of “hypomania” (euphoria) to support his Bipolar Disorder diagnosis. He invoked again Axis I of DSM-IV, but found only one symptom in the list of seven that, in his opinion, Beethoven exhibited in letters: “racing thoughts” expressed in words or writing, which “strongly suggest that Beethoven may have had transient hypomanic episodes.” The examples he offers either are plain wrong (no racing thoughts) or are ambiguous because one does not know their full context. Beethoven’s 1810 letter to his friend Gleichenstein, beginning “Your news has again plunged me from the heights of the most sublime ecstasy down into the depths,” is of the first category. Where are the racing thoughts? This beginning may be regarded, at worst, as a poor-taste tear-jerker. In fact, this letter is one of several ones reflecting Beethoven’s distress during his short-lived relationship with Therese Malfatti, whom many scholars hold as the object of his 1810 failed “marriage project.”

The next example belongs to the second category. It is confusing but can be clarified, which Mai did not attempt to. Beethoven wrote this to his close friend Zmeskall in 1802: “My dearest Baron, Barone, Baron! Domanowitz, Please sacrifice one friendship to another today and come to the Schwan—You will therefore greatly oblige, Your etc. Count Bthvn – Baron? – Baron – ron – aron – ron – etc. Hail und happiness and hail and hail and happiness, happiness, hail, hail, happiness etc. Baron Baron Baron Baron” (Anderson 68). Notice that Beethoven signs his message as Count, which is no sign of “grandiosity” (one wonders whether Mai saw it this way, since DSM-IV Axis I includes “inflated self-esteem or grandiosity” among the illness symptoms). Other earlier letters to the same addressee clear the mystery of the “racing thoughts.” In one of them (Anderson 29), Beethoven sets the two syllables of “Baron” to music. He ends his next letter (Anderson 30), “Adieu Baron Ba ... ron

ron/nor/orn/rno/onr (*voilà quelque chose* [here's something] out of the pawnshop).” More racing thoughts? No, as Anderson explains in a note, Beethoven makes a pun on the word “*versetzen*,” which means both “pawnshop” and “to transpose” in German. It becomes clear now that the 1802 letter quoted by Mai was a musical pun, one of those *canons* that the friends sang at merry parties and of which we have quite a few from Beethoven’s hand. Here “Baron” is the theme on which Beethoven “extemporizes” (“ron – aron – ron – etc.”) before attacking the cannon, which, as usual, is based on the repetition of a few words (Hail and happiness). He simply pokes musical and friendly fun at Zmeskall’s title of baron, which was almost meaningless to him. The letter certainly shows jollity, but does qualify as jollity “racing thoughts”? None of the other examples that Mai proffers is any better than this one, even though they cannot always be cleared the same way.

Davies’ failed case for Bipolar disorder. Davies’ approach to this issue is even less credible than Mai’s. One can dismiss from start his attempt to prove that Beethoven was a depressive personality, because ten of the eleven episodes in the list that he draws (p. 218), spread from 1787, when his mother died, to 1826 (i.e., his nephew’s suicide attempt). As the causes of the depression are indicated and reasonable reasons to feel depressed, this means that they do not fulfill the above-mentioned DSM-IV definition of a pathological episode not to be the result of an important event in the patient’s life. The only unexplained episode, a “suicide attempt?” [sic!] in 1812 or 1813 (that is, following Beethoven’s breakup with his Immortal Beloved), is so badly documented that it has no credibility.

There is also no logic in Davies’ intimation that the agitated or sad or tragic movements in Beethoven’s pieces that he may have created when he was depressed would be proof of psychopathological behavior. He forgets that many of these pieces end in optimistic major keys and that expressing various—and in particular, contrasting—states of mind (and heart) was an essential part of any composer’s skills in that era. Davies’ forays into the composer’s use of tonalities are equally misguided. Had Beethoven used primarily minor keys, we *might* say that he had a depressive personality (though this could be questioned), but a survey of the frequencies of keys of his works clearly shows the predominance of the major mode (accounting for 80% of cases); in spite of reputation, his preferred key was C major (40 pieces, 16%) and C minor, the first minor key in the list, comes as a distant sixth (19 pieces, 8%). Beethoven’s choice of tonalities bears proof of a tonic, an optimistic rather than a depressed personality.

Davies does not try to assess separate manic episodes in Beethoven’s life, but invokes Beethoven’s “raptuses,” a term used by the Breunings to describe Beethoven’s odd behavioral episodes during his teenage years. Davies wonders whether it was the “the spell of his creative powers” or “a manic or hypomanic phenomenon.” A well-informed Beethovenian knows the answer: a “stroke of genius,” as Wegeler, a close witness of those encounters, called it—a moment when musical inspiration abducted Beethoven from the social milieu (“Raptus” means “abducted” in Latin).

In fact, Davies jumps directly to the manic-depression diagnosis, claiming that Beethoven’s well-documented, frequent, fast and often dramatic mood swings would allow Davies to diagnose him at least with “significant bipolar tendencies” (pp. 255-262). The inference is dubious: such “super-fast” swings do not fit the pattern of bipolar disorder, in which the depression episodes are typically two or more weeks long, with manic episodes that can last for several days or weeks.

Diagnosing “Raptus.” Although all of Mai’s and Davies’ diagnoses are wide of the mark, I agree that Beethoven had a “personality disorder.” Its name is simply “genius.” Being a genius is not the norm in any culture, and thus, literally a “disorder.” One might say that there are two types of creative geniuses: the ones that possesses his art/craft and the one that is possessed by it. The former can draw the line between their creative and social functioning, but for the latter this is an almost impossible task. Beethoven is probably the clearest musical embodiment of the second type. One could actually describe his life like an immense “raptus” of total absorption into himself, out of which, paradoxically, the most extroverted music burst out. Such a “raptus” may be termed as a “mental disease,” whose closest medical description is that of “obsessive-compulsive creative disorder.” One cannot find it in

the DSM-IV, but Beethoven meets five of the symptoms proposed by DSM-IV for the non-specific “Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder,” the minimum that would diagnose him as suffering from it: he was a perfectionist that toiled on his scores; he was excessively devoted to his work; he was over-conscientious, scrupulous, and inflexible about matters of morality (recall his condemnation of his sister-in-law Johanna’s low morality); he showed rigidity and stubbornness; at least in his older age he viewed money as “something to be hoarded for future catastrophes.” This basic disorder may have been associated, in Beethoven, with other psychotic traits, such as paranoia (of the kind named “everyday paranoia”); I even propose, in chapter 2, something I named the “Sarastro symptom,” which at least partially overlays with the narcissistic personality disorder.

Part III. Beethoven politics

This part is concerned with the politics of musical life itself, namely the ones that implicate Beethoven’s music. Indeed, although clear evidence for this emerged only relatively late in the Western World (in the thirteenth century Florence), some kind of struggle that can be called political has always been part of the art world. Any change of style or school has always turned into “artistic politics” that fractured the field into opposing factions, pitting the New versus the Old in battles that could go far beyond the artistic principles involved. Beethoven embodied, alone, such a moment of change and he inevitably had his share of opposition and even loathing, even though he triumphed within his lifetime and was raised to the Canon soon after his death, as a central mythic figure who split the history of music in two: before and after Beethoven. In this nexus position, he attracts veneration but also incites antagonism, especially after the establishment of post-modernism in music. It was inevitable that some new kinds of “Beethoven politics” would arise.

7. Enrolling Beethoven in the Cause of the Twentieth-century Musical Avant-Garde

The grand question. The history of the twentieth century classical music and, by extension, of the beginning of our new century is dominated—perhaps only unconsciously—by a rhetorical question formulated in Beethovenian terms by the prominent German scholar Harry Goldschmidt in his 1974 book *The Beethoven Phenomenon: Why is Beethoven so beautiful and the modern music so ugly?*

Of course, by “modern music”—a term that Goldschmidt himself fails to define—one should understand the twentieth-century “Avant-Garde,” the post-WWI atonal/polytonal “-isms,” including serialism. As the situation has not substantially changed since 1974—Beethoven is still close to the music lover’s heart while Schönberg & Co. are still as far as ever from it—Goldschmidt’s rhetorical question has not lost its relevance.

The argument. Like most of his fellow scholars, Goldschmidt does not share the opinion that modern music is “ugly.” He claims that the novelty that it brings in is the implementation of Beethoven’s proclamation, “Art demands of us not to stand still. [...] Freedom, moving forward is the purpose in all of creation as in the art world. [...] There is no rule in art that could not be annulled by means of a higher rule.” He educated his contemporaries to receive the “newness” he represented and he must have also educated the next generations to receive the newness of their age. He who fails to accept modern music does not understand Beethoven’s music either, because perceiving it “conservatively.”

Goldschmidt’s approach was actually only a Beethoven-tailored installation of the “standard” defense of the musical Avant-Garde of the twentieth century, which was first theorized by Nicolas Slonimsky in his 1953 *Lexicon of Musical Invectives*. Slonimsky claims that almost every noted composer of the nineteenth and twentieth century was rejected in his time, because he proposed “non-familiar” music—the equivalent of Goldschmidt’s “newness.” Slonimsky’s *Lexicon* is illustrated with

quotes from the reactions of the audience to the “non-familiar,” as expressed by music critics claiming to speak for everybody. The lexicon begins, chronologically, with Beethoven, whose music inspired some utterances strikingly similar to the ones thrown at some of the most prominent members of the Avant-Garde (e.g., “so much rambling and vociferous execution” of his *Ninth Symphony*).

The facts. The argument might seem reasonable, but it stumbles on the known facts. All the vilified nineteenth-century composers, beginning with Beethoven, found acceptance sooner or later (most of them sooner) and few died without recognition equivalent to or premonitory of their induction into the Canon. In contrast, the Avant-Garde has been with us for more than a hundred years. In a similar span of time, between 1685 (when both Bach and Handel were born) and 1797 (Schubert’s birth-year), historians of music have recognized three distinct “styles” or “schools”—the High Baroque, the early Classical (also known as Rococo) and the First Viennese School—which precede Romanticism. All of which were accepted enthusiastically by contemporary audiences. The long-lasting (and not yet revoked) rejection of “modern” music by the public makes it clear that the “non-familiar” (another name of “newness”) it proffered, namely the dissolution of tonality, was something far more than another example of “Newness.”

The New-Old dialectics that the New/Non-familiar argument ignores. These facts show that the very idea that society—and especially Western culture—rejects “newness” is actually a myth that must be debunked. On the contrary, it welcomes and calls for newness, which is the engine of what we call “progress” since the beginning of history, progress in any domain, including the one of our topic: music. Newness is not linear, but generational, an aspect that is usually ignored, possibly because it is too obvious. Society re-news itself in human “material” with each generation; that calls for newness in all areas. The inevitable cohabitation of two (or three) generations often results in imprecations on both sides (of which Slonimsky recorded only one). Generational change—in conjunction with the technological advances, which are usually related to it—explains most of the changes in history, including in the history of music. This has been the mixed blessing of the Western world, for each generation to be driven by the search for novelty that it could call its own. This “generational” progress explains how, as mentioned earlier, in barely a hundred years four music styles were born, now constituting the bulk of our classical music canon. The failure of modern “newness” to be accepted in a hundred years is proof that it is “newness” of a completely new kind.

What science and rats can teach us. Physics and math have underlain the practice of music since the Ancient Greek Age, but science had the first insight into the perception of sound in the inner ear only toward the end of the nineteenth century. However, since perception of pitch in the ear is not “perception of music” by the brain, science had to wait until it got the help of the rats, some fifty years ago. Rats are genetically and biologically close enough to humans to offer some specific insights into the matter. Indeed, an experiment showed that rats, like humans, clearly prefer Mozart to Schönberg (the two kinds of music involved). Later experiments made in the wake of the popularization of “the Mozart effect” showed that Mozart’s music improved the rats’ performance in the customary maze tests, hinting to a physiological effect of this tonal music. This points to a significant difference between the “old” Classical and the modern one.

A few decades after the “rat connection,” neuroscience provided new insight into the brain’s perception of music of all genres. According to Levitin, the director of the Laboratory for Musical Perception, Cognition and Expertise at McGill University, where he also teaches, “expectation” plays a key role in music: a piece is “a game of expectation with pitch [the tonic of the key].” It is the subjective feeling that what comes next in a song of Elvis or a symphony by Beethoven is a fulfilled expectation which explains in large measure the pleasure of listening. In that respect Levitin tersely notices: “Modern composers such as Schönberg threw out the whole idea of expectation [...] thus creating the illusion of no home, a music adrift.”

On the other hand, Jonah Lehrer, a much younger scholar, claims to find neuro-science evidence justifying the Avant-Garde music in his book *Proust was a Neuroscientist* (which also touches painting and literature). In chapter 6 (“Igor Stravinsky. The Source of Music”), he maintains that the human brain is aptly built to find beauty in modern music that has destroyed tonality for the sake of “emancipating dissonance.” Every individual is the result of his/her “learning” to be, and perception of music is part of this process. Neuroscience has revealed that “learning” is actually the brain restructuring itself as a result of its interaction with the world, in this particular case with the world of sound. The brain listening to music endeavors a “desperate neuronal search for a pattern” of pitches or notes (we would call that a melody) and, by force of repetition in the learning process, the brain learns to recognize the new dissonant pattern. That is, dissonance will become a form of consonance for the brain. This, Lehrer claims, is what Stravinsky (the first one to shock the audience with avant-garde music) had intuited without being a neuro-scientist.

In reality, the audience’s brains have not had the Avant-Garde patterns “wired” into their brains for a hundred years. During this time, we could see, indeed, many new kinds of “musical patterns” wired into peoples’ brains on a huge societal scale, but those were several successive waves of the “pop” genre. The far smaller audience of classical music has consistently continued to reject the Avant-Garde production, a reality that Lehrer ignores.

Lawrence Kramer answering the grand question. Lawrence Kramer, a younger post-modernist colleague of Goldschmidt, may have best explained why the twentieth-century Avant-Garde and its apologists are wrong in his 2007 book *Why Classical Music Still Matters*: they ignore the very nature of classical music, and (for that matter) of music in general. The brain listening to music is hungry for melody. This is not a novel idea, but Kramer adds more to it: the essential “narrative” of a piece of classical music is the story of melody’s Fate in a succession of its returns, concluding: “So rooted, so culturally fraught, is the principle of melodic return that its own return is virtually irrepressible.” I would add the concept of “memorability” to Kramer’s thesis: a musical phrase must be “memorable” in order to be a melody; otherwise it would not be recognized in its returns.

Kramer thesis makes it clear that the “newness” promoted by the Avant-Garde is of a completely different nature from the one Beethoven promoted. Melody, understood as a “memorable” pattern, was the essential engine in Beethoven’s music (and in any great music). His freedom to break the rules for the sake of a “higher” artistic expression of melody was the opposite of the goal of the Avant-Garde—destruction of melody. It is, therefore, misguided to claim that Beethoven would have saluted the Avant-Garde as a legitimate descendant of his.

8. Tia DeNora’s Beethoven as a Socio-political Construct

In 1995, Tia DeNora, then a young lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the University of Exeter, published the book *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius*, subtitled “Musical Politics in Vienna, 1792-1803.” The book established her as an up-and-coming Beethoven scholar and one of the promoters of the relatively new discipline of “socio-musicology,” in which she identified and explored a distinct new niche—“musical politics.”

DeNora’s thesis, an overview. In DeNora’s view, musical politics is not simply the environment in which a musician lives, which may eventually condition his recognition during his life, but an important ingredient in the definition of his very talent. As she puts it in her book’s preface, she sees “talent and Genius as fundamentally social [not individual] achievements”; she indicts the Beethoven literature for having ignored this truth and sets her goal to build the right “sociology of Beethoven’s reputation” based on “the particularities of Viennese musical culture [that] were crucial to the shape of Beethoven’s success.” More exactly, she claims to prove that the aristocracy’s sponsoring him during the first ten years after he settled in Vienna would have been crucial both in assuring his position

in the history of music and in shaping his very genius. Indeed, she confines the scope of her work to that decade only.

At first sight, such a stance should not stir much controversy. Genius is obviously a social (I would prefer the higher concept of cultural) product. Contrary to DeNora's statement, traditional musicology had always relied on this premise, but has never made a fuss about it. DeNora makes more than a fuss in her book: she claims to prove that:

- 1) Beethoven was lucky to have chosen to settle in Vienna, a unique exceptionally propitious hub for new talents among all major European cities.
- 2) Vienna's "exceptionalism" was due to a sizable faction of the high aristocratic class that supported a "reorientation of musical taste" to "high music" and guessed that Beethoven would have been instrumental in promoting it.
- 3) This aristocratic faction carried out an intense advertising campaign for him around the slogan "receive Mozart's spirit from Haydn's hands."
- 4) It also helped him in many other ways, including financially, "sheltering him from criticism, assisting him into furthering his career."
- 5) The aristocracy's support even helped Beethoven in developing the mastery of his art.
- 6) The Viennese "Beethoven politics" involved a musical "class-warfare" between the high aristocracy supporting him as the herald of "high music" and what DeNora calls "the second society," comprising the lesser rank nobility and the rising middle class, adepts of the "lighter" music. This is a radically new theory that turns the table on the traditional stand, which held the middle-class as the main promoter of Beethoven.

The weight that DeNora assigns to the role of the Viennese aristocracy in the development of Beethoven's career and genius leads her to propose an unprecedented seventh point, a "what if" question:

- 7) *What if* another young aspiring musician would have settled in Vienna instead of Beethoven, getting the aristocracy's support? Wouldn't he have become the one who changed music instead of Beethoven? DeNora develops the issue at length, to hint to a non-Beethoven alternative in the history of music. And this thesis leads, in turn, to a post-modernist fixation—contesting the canon as relative and, possibly, irrelevant.

It was particularly this last assertion that made a few prominent musicians and musicologists take a stand against DeNora's theory, notably Michael Broyles and the reputable pianist and musicologist Charles Rosen (now deceased). They also shared the opinion that genius is a social product, but rightly emphasized that it was Beethoven's unique talent, not his "luck" or "political maneuvering" of a social class that positioned him in the history of music. I expand here this basic critique by getting into the details of DeNora's argument and proving that both her analyses and her inferences are too-often incorrect and her final assessment of Beethoven and his position in the history of music is misconstrued.

How DeNora's being right turns into being wrong. One can easily accept DeNora's particularizing the statement "genius is a social achievement" into a "success equation" that includes the personal talent and his audience (or what DeNora calls "reception"). The main fact on which DeNora founds her theory is also well documented: it was the Viennese aristocracy (or, at least, a large part of it) that embraced Beethoven and launched his career when he appeared as a new talent in the city. DeNora is also right that the artist-audience symbiosis is actually a matter of "marketing." An artist has to "sell" himself on a certain "market" and, in this regard, she argues, Beethoven was lucky to launch himself on a very propitious market (i.e., Vienna) and to find there the best possible marketers to act on his behalf (the Viennese aristocracy). That the favorable reception by his audience stimulates the artist and thus contributes to the development of his talent seems a common-sense statement that

does not need demonstration. DeNora claims that it is also a *sine qua non* condition of achieving complete recognition. “I argue,” she unequivocally claims when defending her thesis, “that Beethoven’s talent was a necessary but not sufficient cause of his *subsequent* acclaim,” which “could not have occurred without his lionization by aristocratic society during the 1790s and early 1880s” (p. 9). DeNora never proves this thesis because there are enough cases of artists who achieved recognition only posthumously. In music—and in Vienna itself—Schubert is such a case: he could sell only a few of his many works to publishers and was unknown beyond the narrow circle of his friends, yet he made it to the canon quickly after his death. Obviously, his talent was sufficient for that. Why would Beethoven have needed a “political” support to achieve what Schubert did without any? The Schubert factor clearly makes DeNora’s thesis look tenuous.

These fundamental flaws in DeNora’s argument are rooted in her methodological premises, which are, typically for the post-modernist view, grounded in a Neo-Marxist approach to the arts. Unfortunately, she handles that with a rigidity that is missing in Marx and Engels’ original design. One can easily accept the thesis that “talent and genius [are] fundamentally social achievements,” but the “social” is an extremely complex determinant; reducing it to the political maneuvers of Viennese aristocrats within only one decade is an over-simplification, the kind of which Marx and Engels were careful to avoid. A second essential premise of the post-modernist approach is what I would call “absolute relativism.” This oxymoron is intended: relativism is the only absolute principle that post-modernism accepts. If everything is a “social construct,” there are no values or criteria that could cross cultural lines in space or in time. We see this principle in action repeatedly in DeNora’s book. It is easy to accept that “our” Beethoven is not identical to the one of the 1800 Viennese aristocrats; there must be, however, some deep commonality, otherwise we would not still find him “great” two centuries after those aristocrats did.

These two lines of thought substantially undermine DeNora’s approach, but they are not the only flaws in her argument. It is also rife with misinterpretations of data, misconstrued logics, and, worst of all, disregard of well-known facts that do not fit the theory in all the seven major points enumerated above, and further scrutinized below.

1) Vienna’s musical exceptionalism had been acknowledged from the very beginning of the Beethoven literature (i.e., Schindler and Thayer). It was the great European city most appreciative of instrumental music, especially in the upper classes, by the aristocracy as well as the ascending middle class; Beethoven certainly took advantage of that. However, there were other European cities that offered musical opportunities that Vienna lacked. Paris and London, as well as Berlin and Leipzig in the German states, had well-established orchestras that stimulated a rich public concert life. Vienna lacked a public concert life, simply because it relied too much on aristocratic patronage that materialized only in a few small aristocratic “capellas” and in the orchestras of the opera houses, which were not readily available (more about it later). This hindered the development of Beethoven’s talent as symphonist, and DeNora ignores or willfully disregards this important fact: Beethoven’s early rise to the canon was primarily based on his symphonies, while his piano music and even his piano concertos went into oblivion for many decades after his death.

2) Vienna’s high aristocracy supported a “reorientation of musical taste” which benefited Beethoven. According to DeNora, Vienna was also unique in the taste for “high music,” shared by its high aristocracy or, at least, a sizeable part of it grouped around Baron van Swieten, as opposed to the “light” genre favored elsewhere in Viennese society. The “high” included Mozart’s and Haydn’s music as well as the High Baroque masters Bach and Haendel; the light comprised ball music and excerpts and potpourris from the much loved operas of the time. In fact, the taste for “high” music was not at all a Viennese peculiarity. Vienna actually “imported” it from Northern Germany (Berlin, Leipzig), where van Swieten lived for seven years (1770-1777) as the Habsburg Empire ambassador to the King of Prussia. Even DeNora accepts briefly (before thereafter ignoring it) that such “aspects of a northern German conception of ‘serious’ music—van Swieten’s interest aside—were not yet a

pervasive part of aristocratic Viennese musical life” in late 1790s and had to be imported (pp. 86-87). In England, Haendel was a national glory and Bach was also “imported” toward the end of the eighteenth century; it was also England that consolidated Haydn’s position as the greatest living composer. Therefore, Viennese aristocracy was not as “unique” as DeNora claims; aristocracy all over Europe had made patronage of the arts and music a point of honor since at least the Renaissance.

There was another and more important reason (besides the “high music”) for the Vienna aristocrats to love this newcomer above all others: the “generational change” that I have introduced in the previous chapter as the engine of “Newness.” A quick look at Beethoven’s Viennese aristocratic patrons shows that almost all of them were about his age or younger (Archduke Rudolph, his pupil and most important patron, was eighteen years his junior). He was the greatest novelty in town; his whole new generation (whether aristocratic or just simple musical people) loved him and wanted to call him their own.

3) The aristocracy’s intense advertising campaign for Beethoven, in which they actively involved Haydn, the musical living glory of the day. DeNora makes the entry of Count Waldstein in Beethoven autographs’ album urging him to go to Vienna and take lessons from Haydn in order to “receive Mozart’s spirit from Haydn’s hands” into a poster that the aristocracy would have spread all over Vienna and beyond. That the aristocrats spread the word about the “new genius” playing in their salons is common-sense—and it certainly helped, but making it into a marketing campaign is a gross exaggeration.

This theory’s weakest point is Haydn himself. He was indeed “collaborating” in the alleged campaign during the first years when Beethoven took lessons from him, but he turned into a strong critic of him a few years later, when the youth started opening new avenues with his Opus 1 piano trios. DeNora agrees that the relationship between the two was “more complicated” and “more ambiguous” than traditionally held, and that “from about 1796 to around 1803 [they] behaved openly like rivals,” but disregards the course of that rivalry. She claims that “whatever Haydn may have thought of Beethoven, he could hardly contradict any imagery of Beethoven as his prodigy that was projected onto their relationship by such august patrons as van Swieten, Waldstein, Lichnovsky, and Lobkowitz.” Actually, there are testimonies of Beethoven’s contemporaries (Johann Dolezalek, Aloys Fuchs – Thayer-Forbes, pp. 259, 272-3), which show Haydn joining the clique of musicians actively disparaging Beethoven’s newness.

4) The aristocracy’s helped Beethoven to further his career. Certainly, success with his aristocratic audience stimulated his creativeness; certainly, subscriptions to and/or purchases of his published works (sometimes in several copies) provided him a safety net beneficial to his creativity. However, DeNora is wrong to push such common-sense wisdom further, because she disregards known facts. She claims that the aristocracy “sheltered” Beethoven from criticism, but she could not indicate any tangible step that the Viennese aristocracy took to counterbalance adverse “public opinion” that arose toward 1800, as we have seen illustrated in Slonimsky’s *Lexicon* in the previous chapter. The only example DeNora offers of such aristocratic pulling-of-strings is just speculation: she claims that, when an initially rebuking critic of Beethoven’s music later acknowledged changing his opinion, he must have caved in to some aristocratic pressure, for which DeNora cannot offer any evidence.

DeNora also disregards the *failure* of the Viennese aristocracy to help Beethoven’s public career. As I already stated, unlike cities like London, Paris, Berlin or Leipzig, which had well-established professional orchestras and public concert venues, Vienna relied on private aristocratic sponsorship of instrumental music. When a musician like Beethoven wanted to reach to a wider audience, he had to organize a concert (an enterprise called “Akademie” at the time) and rent an opera-house hall. The two most important opera theatres in Vienna were in the hands of a certain Baron von Braun, who had bailed out their management between 1794 and 1807, and he did not let Beethoven rent his theatre for years. Beethoven’s aristocratic supporters could not or did not care to try to persuade von Braun to

relent; it was only in 1800 that the latter rented out the opera hall to Beethoven, probably because the latter “bribed” him by dedicating his *Piano and Horn* sonata to Braun’s wife. But the Baron turned down two similar requests by Beethoven in 1801 and 1803, despite renting his opera-houses to mediocre musicians all through his managerial period.

5) The aristocracy helped Beethoven to develop his genius. DeNora emphasizes Beethoven’s indebtedness to his aristocratic friends for offering him the opportunity to master the genre of the string quartet. Prince Lichnovsky gave Beethoven a present of a set of the string quartet instruments, so that the composer could have his music played at home by his music friends and thus improve his mastery of the genre. The princely gesture may have indeed speeded up Beethoven’s learning the craft, but he would have certainly striven to do so even without this facility, because Haydn had promoted the genre as the supreme proof of musical art and any serious musician was supposed to prove himself in it.

If DeNora may be half right about the string quartet issue, she is mistaken when claiming that the Viennese aristocracy helped Beethoven find his “initial identification of his pianistic identity” by pushing him towards the “high music ideal” as opposed to the “light” pianistry of his competitors. According to all testimonies, Beethoven’s success in the aristocratic salons relied essentially on his improvisations, which mesmerized his audience. There is indeed an “improvisational” musical style that can be identified in the works of some of his contemporaries (such as soon-to-meet Jan Dussek), but Beethoven’s piano legacy is hardly touched by it; glimpses of it may appear in some of the variations sets he wrote during the decade that DeNora deals with, but never in his piano sonatas, the works that he deemed worthy of receiving an opus number.

6) Musical “class-warfare” in Beethoven politics. According to DeNora, Beethoven was the center of a “musical war” between the high aristocracy supporting “high music” epitomized by Beethoven and the rising middle-class (lower nobility and bourgeois) who supported the “light” music of the time. In other words, the change happening around 1800 in the musical landscape, in which Beethoven played a major part and which defined the music canon we know, had nothing to do with the ascent of the middle-class promoting democracy, as the traditional view of music history holds, either from Marxist, Neo-Marxist or Romanticist perspectives. It was the Viennese aristocracy—or, at least, a faction of it—that promoted the change, primarily by taking advantage of the arrival of Beethoven and supporting him, at least in his first decade in Vienna. Indeed, this is a concept that turns the table on previous “Beethoven musical sociology.” According to DeNora, the aristocracy’s stand had, however, nothing to do with the ideals of the Enlightenment or with democracy, and was not entirely motivated by their real love of music either: their patronage of Beethoven as herald of the “high music” was also intended to justify and enhance their privileged social status.

The proof of this musical split in the Viennese society that DeNora offers is misconstrued. It consists in some sparse statistics (gleaned from works of other scholars) about the concert life in Vienna between 1791 and 1810, containing the composers listed most frequently in the five main concert venues of the city, which DeNora allotted to either the aristocracy or the middle-class. The statistics show that the “distinctly” middle-class venue (Leopoldstadt) performed predominantly second-rank masters writing operas (Cimarosa, Müller, Kauer), while the three venues allotted to aristocracy performed mostly pieces by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Haendel (interestingly, none by Bach). However, “predominantly” is a very relative term: in fact, almost half of pieces played at the three aristocratic venues belonged to composers (Pär, Weigl, Mayer, Paisiello, Eybler, Cherubini, Salieri, Auernhammer, Winter, Süssmayer, Cimarosa) otherwise assigned to the “light” category.” The split that DeNora claims to discover in the musical preferences of the Viennese is, at best, a gross exaggeration: aristocracy shared basically the same eclectic taste as the educated middle-class. A Vienna musical class-warfare is just baseless speculation. And thus, so is the inference DeNora draws from it that Beethoven’s raise to glory was the doing of the Viennese aristocracy; certainly, the latter loved his music and supported him, but they were a thing of the past and Beethoven was the future, as was the forthcoming new social order, democracy.

7) **DeNora's big "What If?"** What if another young aspiring musician would have settled in Vienna instead of Beethoven, getting the aristocracy's support? Wouldn't he have become the one who changed music instead of Beethoven? DeNora develops the issue at length, to proffer such a Beethoven-alternative in the Bohemian Jan Ladislav Dussek (born in 1760), who had not settled in Vienna but wandered for years in Europe before spending his most productive years in London. DeNora first tries to show that talented Dussek was at a disadvantage in all stages of his life (birth place, musical environment and education, wandering all over Europe) when compared with Beethoven, and she insists on Dussek's missing the "exceptionalism" of Vienna. Then she claims to prove that London was a very disadvantageous place, where Beethoven himself would, probably, not have achieved more than Dussek.

Some of the points she makes are real, but the whole thesis is irrevocably invalidated by the facts that she omits. Vienna's "exceptionalism" should not be exaggerated and the city's disadvantage, which I mentioned before, should not be forgotten: the mediocre quality of public concert life hindered Beethoven as a symphonist: he had only four concerts of his own in his 35 years that he lived in Vienna; later in his life, he very much resented his obligation not to leave the city in exchange for a rather modest allowance and expressed repeatedly his desire to move to the very city that DeNora deprecates, London. Indeed, London had its own "exceptionalism" that DeNora disregards: its public concert life flourished in the second half of the eighteenth century to a higher degree than in any European capital. It reached an acme in the 1790s, when Haydn presented there his last twelve symphonies, and then went into decline because there was no one to build on his example. Had Beethoven lived in London at the time, his symphonies would have made him a national hero, like Haendel before him; he would also likely have been incited into creating more than he did in Vienna. He would also have been exposed thoroughly to the great Haendelian tradition that the city cherished and he might have had a faster and easier transition to his so-called "third style." DeNora's claim, "It is unlikely that Beethoven in London would have become the prominent figure we know," is baseless speculation. He would have most likely been different, but differently great.

Summing up. As I have shown, all of DeNora's seven theses have serious weaknesses, especially misrepresentations built on baseless speculations with disregard of any facts that would not fit her basic tenets. Her theory is ambitious-but-failed socio-musicology that cannot in any way diminish the classical music canon and Beethoven's position in it.

9. Beethoven's Alleged Plagiarisms

Plagiarism had not been a real issue in the history of music until recently. Therefore, the well-known conductor John Eliot Gardiner raised quite a "stir" in the spring of 1996, when he claimed on British TV and radio that Beethoven would have "borrowed" music from some now forgotten composers of the French Revolution and made impressive use of it in some of his most important works. The main theme of the last movement of Beethoven's *Sixth* would have been borrowed from a *Hymn to Agriculture* of Jean Lefebvre, and the famous four notes that open his *Fifth* from Rouget de Lisle's *Dithirambique* [Hymn of the Revolution]. Gardiner stopped short for calling this plagiarism, qualifying it as "the debt genius pays to the second rate" in order to transform "ordinary lines of music into what was sublime." It was Gardiner's colleague Barry Cooper, a distinguished British scholar, who called the borrowing a "blatant piece of plagiarism," an indictment pointing to another kind of post-modernist "politics": Beethoven was the "big guy" robbing the "little one."

Gardiner's 1996 find was not exactly a novelty. The "borrowing" in the *Pastoral Symphony* had been signaled eight years before by John Humphries, in the booklet accompanying a Nimbus CD released in 1989, containing Lefèvre's *Hymn to Agriculture* among other French pieces; Beethoven's alleged French source for his *Fifth* had been pointed to almost a hundred years ago. And a worse kind of "borrowing," this time from a really "big guy," Mozart, had been documented even earlier: the main theme of the first movement of the *Eroica* strangely resembled the introduction to Mozart's overture

to his operetta *Bastien und Bastienne*. However, nobody had applied the word “plagiarism” before Dr. Cooper. Short sequences of notes, later called “motives” or “cells,” seem to have been a kind of “common property” of the musical establishment since the beginning of this art. The term “plagiarism” had a short life during the first half of the seventeenth century, when now-forgotten musicians living in England frequently complained that Haendel stole their melodies to make (better) use of them, but this was soon forgotten and music was not covered even after copyright laws were legislated all over Western Europe during the same century.

John Eliot Gardiner had introduced, implicitly, the criterion to decide when “borrowing” was not plagiarism—when transforming the ordinary into the sublime—and it clearly absolves Beethoven in all such known cases. Listening to the music instead of reading it is the best demonstration.

The Pastoral borrowing. This is a typical case of “transforming the ordinary into the sublime.” Lefèvre’s music is a naïve attempt to create a pastoral atmosphere, by overdressing the short motif with a rococo ornament meant to imitate birdsong !!link_Lefevre.mp3. What Beethoven did with the same notes is very different! !!link_Pastoral.mp3. If he indeed “borrowed” the notes, he did so because he must have realized the immense potential lying in that simple musical kernel, the potential of which the lesser musician had been completely unaware. The genius cleaned the superfluous from Lefèvre’s mediocre utterance, and revealed the pure, noble melodic line, an archetypal melody of nature—a “plagiarism” for which we owe him our deepest gratitude.

Borrowing from the great. The *Eroica* borrowing is a very similar case, because Mozart’s work, which he wrote when he was only twelve, is by no means sublime, but as “ordinary” as Lefèvre’s rococo !!Link_Bastien. What Beethoven made with the same notes, based only on a simple twist in the end, is beyond description !!Link_Eroica.

A second Mozart borrowing is very different because it involves two “sublimes.” The finale of Beethoven’s D minor Piano Sonata Op. 31 No. 2 is built from the notes of one of the soulful secondary themes of the first movement of Mozart’s D major Symphony No. 38. !!Link_Sym38. The notes may be the same, but the music sounds very different; in fact, Beethoven only “borrows” the four-note cell from which Mozart’s theme is built, changes the meter from $\frac{4}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{8}$ and the key from major to minor, changing the expression altogether !!Link_Sonata.

The Internet does its part. The plagiarism issue has been raised to a new level in the age of the Internet, with so many music lovers listening to forgotten pieces of classical music and triggering debates in forums and chat rooms far beyond what professional musicologists had been doing before. The Internet find is most interesting because it involves no less than Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy*, which was found to be strikingly similar to a motive in Mozart’s *Misericordias Domini* (K. 222), a short piece of sacred music that Mozart wrote in his teenage years, which entered the repertoire just a few years ago and is easily available on YouTube. The resemblance of the beginning of the second section of K. 222 !!Link_Misericordias with the beginning of the *Ode to Joy* is easy enough to discern, even though Mozart treats it in quavers and Beethoven in quarters. Did Beethoven really take inspiration from Mozart? Possibly, but probably not. The K. 222 was published only in 1880, but Beethoven could have heard it at a church service. In any case, the two masters use it very differently: Mozart builds a short, four-bars orchestral introduction to a beautiful fugue based on a different theme; !! Link_MisericordiasAll Beethoven melts the cell repetition with its mirror variant into a seamless flow to get what we know so well, probably the most fluid intonation of human voices.

All of Beethoven’s borrowings, whether intended or involuntary, are examples of his capacity to make a different, always much *better*, use of the potential hidden in the original—one more proof that “notes alone do not make the music.”

The case of the Fifth “borrowing”. I show in my essay “Short Story of the Most Famous Motive of Classical Music” (on www.BeethovenOurContemporary/IntruderInTheTemple!!) that Beethoven did not borrow the famous four-note cell opening the symphony from anyone, because it is the most

widely used motive in classical music, albeit in less conspicuous manner than in the *Fifth*. I also track its usage back to the beginning of the Renaissance and then forward to the middle of the Twentieth Century.

Part IV. Latter-Day Feminism v. Beethoven

Feminism has become a main—arguably “the” main—political movement of the last few decades and has pervaded all areas of life of the Western World. Unfortunately, what began a hundred years ago as the legitimate movement of the time has now turned into indiscriminate male bashing spurred by a feeling of revenge, blind to the non-gendered logics that two wrongs cannot make a right. As one of the most iconic names in the cultural thesaurus of the Western world, Beethoven became one of the most—probably the most—besieged individual male figure, indicted for the wrong “masculinity” in music. It began with the multi-layered theory of Professor Susan McClary, which grew into a “sacred war” on classical music as we know it. It then continued with further elaborations by some colleagues of McClary who took up the relay of Beethoven’s allegedly toxic masculinity, ending up, perhaps unexpectedly but convergently, in the Hollywood movie industry.

10. Susan McClary’s Jihad Against Beethoven and Classical Music

In January 1987, Susan McClary, then a little known musicology professor at the University of Minnesota, burst suddenly to fame in her field and even beyond by writing in a paper presented at a convention of her peers that, at a certain point of the first movement of Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*, the music “explodes in the throttling murderous rage of a rapist incapable of attaining release.” This blunt statement elicited a wave of indignation from her colleagues, but actually launched McClary’s career as a prominent member of the “New Musicology” and a leader of the rising discipline of “feminist studies” in the academic world. With her career thus propelled, McClary expanded her Beethoven’s *Ninth* thesis in her *Feminine Endings* book to build a theory indicting (Western) classical music as the emanation of oppressive patriarchal civilization and an expression of sexual violence against women. It includes three theses:

- 1) Beethoven the musical rapist
- 2) The sonata form is a sexist “man-subjugate-woman” pattern
- 3) Tonality—an expression of male sexuality

Ten years later, in a second book (*Conventional Wisdom*), McClary makes an almost 180 degrees turn, adding another thesis:

- 4) The eighteenth century tonality was the engine of the music’s “extraordinary period” of the eighteenth century,
- 5) which the German musicians, Beethoven and his followers, killed.

As a true postmodernist, McClary claims to ground her theory in Neo-Marxist materialistic methodology—renamed as “socio-historical context”—which is not objectionable *per se*. What is more than objectionable is that *all* of McClary’s theses are argued with misconstructions that defy facts and/or elementary logic.

1) Beethoven as the musical rapist thesis is a perfect example. Professor McClary has certainly every right to dislike and even resent Beethoven’s *Ninth*—she is, actually, in a very select company—but she is not satisfied to claim a personal opinion; she must rationalize it. In the further elaboration of her initial thesis, in her book *Feminine Endings* she writes that “this explosive rage fuels most of the remainder of the symphony” (with the exception of the *Adagio*, which she spares). Her diatribe continues, engulfing almost all of nineteenth century music, of which Beethoven was a forerunner and which “turns violent [...] *more often and more devastatingly* [...] *than in heavy metal*” (my italics), an

assertion that she claimed to have been confirmed by her students. This latter statement simply defies reality: physics has long ago defined a measure of loudness of sounds (the well-known decibel) and determined a scale in which the rock music—of which heavy metal is the loudest—is of an entire order of magnitude louder than the symphony orchestra at its loudest.

2) The sexist sonata form thesis is developed in a more complicated argument culminating in scholarly fraud. This quintessential form of the classical age is a (musical) “narrative” about two contrasting themes: the principal, dynamic one in the main key of the piece and a secondary, usually a contemplative, one, in a different key. When, after the development of this material, the recapitulation wraps up the musical discourse, the secondary theme is resumed not in its original key, but in that of the primary theme. Since the two themes have long been described as “masculine” and “feminine,” McClary claims that the re-shaping of the latter into the key of the former during the recapitulation is in fact its “subjugation.”

This new thesis had to pass a hurdle: the gendered description of the two themes of the sonata form was introduced in the middle of the nineteenth century, a hundred years after the form itself was designed by the early classical age musicians and long after it was brought to perfection by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. There is no evidence that any of them ever thought of the themes they invented in terms of masculine versus feminine, nor understood their musical dialectics as “subjugation.” McClary rejects this objection claiming that the “subjugation paradigm” was there intentionally from the very beginning, because the sonata form was twice modeled upon the eighteenth century opera: first, it emulated the expression of the themes substantiating the male and female operatic characters (she parallels the “sighs” in the soprano arias and the themes in the instrumental music); second, the sonata form borrowed the typical opera narrative, in which the hero, always a male, encounters and conquers obstacles in order to achieve his manhood. And here McClary claims that her feminist colleague Teresa De Lauretis has “demonstrated” that in the “traditional Western narrative” (of which the opera genre is an instantiation) the male hero always confronts an obstacle which is by definition “morphologically female,” a statement which is, to my knowledge, unique in the history of Western culture. Actually, De Lauretis’ book invoked by McClary does not “demonstrate” anything of the sort; it simply claims it. Granted, female adversaries of a male hero are sometimes present in the Western narrative, but the typical conflict is “traditionally” between the alpha males, while the female is—sexist enough, I concede—the “prize” of the winner.

3) Sexual, sexist tonality thesis. “The tonality that underlies Western concert music,” McClary claims, “is expressly tied to male-defined *models of sexuality*.” This time, she offers as causal explanation the “socio-historical context” of the seventeenth century, when tonality crystallized: she claims that the French philosopher Michel Foucault would have demonstrated in his book *History of Sexuality* that the seventeenth century was the moment when sexuality took hold of social discourse in the Western world. In fact, Foucault states unequivocally, “*The seventeenth century, then, was the beginning of an age of repression emblematic of what we call the bourgeois societies*” (my italics). The reason why the seventeenth century was an age of increased repression of sexuality and its discourse was very simple (though never stated by Foucault): the arrival of syphilis around 1500, a disease as devastating as plague had been, had changed the social landscape. The “Foucault argument” is just another of many misconstructions by McClary.

4) The 180-degree turn about tonality. The tonality that, in McClary’s first book, was born guilty of expressing “male sexuality,” becomes in her second book, *Conventional Wisdom*, the device capable of giving birth to the music of the “extraordinary” eighteenth century. McClary never explains how tonality would have lost its sexuality imprint a century later, becoming such an “extraordinary” musical device, nor why she would have changed her opinion on the topic when writing her second

book. She is consistent only about her great nemesis, Beethoven: he would have led his co-nationals to killing tonality about 1900.

5) German composers killing tonality. This thesis is incongruent with the musical facts. Granted, German musicians like Schoenberg, Webern and Berg—the so-called “New Vienna School”—were major figures in the twentieth century Avant-Garde, which abandoned tonality, but they were the late-comers in an international “conspiracy” including the French Debussy and Satie, the Russian Scriabin, the Hungarian Bartok and the American Charles Ives, who began experimenting with atonality and polytonality. In fact, Germany resisted most to the new demolishing trend: Richard Strauss, whom the Germans claimed as their greatest composer of the twentieth century, is never associated with the New Vienna School.

Apparently unaware of these facts, McClary justifies her new thesis with another version of her “socio-historical context”: Germany would have been, during the nineteenth century, the only European country in which “genius was defined in ways that often made it indistinguishable from dementia.” I can gladly agree that killing tonality may be viewed as a symptom of musical pathology, but it has nothing to do with a particular German malady—or with Beethoven for that matter. McClary claims to draw this diagnosis from the German psychiatrist Klaus Doerner, in his book *The Madmen and the Bourgeoisie*. I read Doerner’s book (which can be found in English translation) and I vouch that never does he utter such a statement therein. I doubt he would ever have uttered it, because he was well aware that the connection between genius and insanity was debated among psychiatrists all over Europe and America. Its most active promoter was the Italian Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), the initiator of the now-discredited discipline of phrenology, in his four-hundred page 1891 book entitled *The Man of Genius*. McClary socio-historical explanation of her diagnosis of the “German malady” is just another fallacy.

6) More of the same. I have debunked here only the main theories of McClary in their essential lines. So many details just as fallacious are involved, especially when she is stirred by her feminist anger against anything appearing even metaphorically male. For instance, she claims that the castrati were intended to replace the female voices during seventeenth century opera performances; in fact, they were almost exclusively assigned to play male roles. At other times she does not notice the incongruence between her own constructs. She correctly connects music to sexuality through body and dance, but, if (male) sexuality is the basic “meaning” of Western classical music through tonality, as she maintains, she should be able to discover “the body” therein. Actually, she discovers the opposite: “classical music [she claims] is perhaps our cultural medium most centrally concerned with denial of the body.” She wanted both of “it”—tonality as sexual expression and as sexual repression, an antinomy that she fails to tackle, let alone solve.

None of the specialists who tackled Susan McClary’s theories—whether to endorse or to rebut them—discovered what I’ve exposed above, even though no extraordinary skills are required beyond the willingness to attentively cross-examine an argument. Her theories emulated other scholars into a “relay” of Beethoven’s “masculinity,” viewed as an emblematic element of the hated patriarchal society.

11. Lawrence Kramer Second Leg of Beethoven’s Violent Masculinity Relay

Lawrence Kramer, the Distinguished Professor of English and Music at Fordham University in New York, is, alongside with Susan McClary, a pioneering figure of the so-called New Musicology. The theory he presents in his 1997 book *After the Lovedeath*, subtitled “Sexual Violence and the Making of Culture,” is even more ambitious than McClary’s: it intends to show how “the forms of selfhood mandated as normal in modern Western culture both promote and rationalize violence against women.” The book has a loose structure, with many variations on the theme, primarily in the world of literature, but it involves Beethoven as “violent masculinity” twice: as a symbol of that fundamental

societal sin; and secondly exemplified in an individual situation framed in Leon Tolstoy's nineteenth century novella *The Kreutzer Sonata*, in which Beethoven's music allegedly triggered the protagonist's violent masculinity, leading to murder.

Marred from start. Kramer's theory is marred from start. His approach is grounded in a modern variant of psychoanalysis, based on the elaboration of the Oedipus complex by one of Freud's later disciples—a variant that has no chance of being more reliable than the original one (see chapter 1). Kramer brings his own contribution to the field, by speculatively introducing two opposing concepts: “gender polarity,” which would be responsible for igniting that violent masculine mentality in (only heterosexual) men; and its antithesis, the equally opaque concept of “gender synergy” proper to women as well as homosexual men, which is, he stipulates, the right mentality. Both concepts define an individual's two gendered “positions,” separated by a mysterious “barrier” that can be “rigid” with the polarized male and otherwise “permeable.” Such tautological definitions are no more useful in an analysis than the old concepts of good and evil; but psychoanalysis is a religion to its adherents, who are easily carried away in their wild, speculative discourse, forgetful of elementary logics. Kramer follows a similar pattern.

Beethoven's allegedly violent masculinity. It seems natural that Beethoven's manliness would reflect in his music, but Kramer (like McClary) is compelled to add “toxicity” to it. Unlike her, he does not look for it in particular compositions, but diagnoses his “masculinity” from the writings of Robert Schumann, who had, in the 1830s, compared Schubert with Beethoven in notes he published in the magazine *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* [The New Music Magazine]. Kramer claims that, in Schumann's reading, Beethoven “is a violent figure, or a figure—a personification—of violence [...] The man [Beethoven] commands, the woman [Schubert] pleads. [...] In this hypervirile role, Beethoven stands as the embodiment of musical culture itself: stern, unyielding, commanding, his name the name of the Father.”

In fact, Kramer frustratingly inflates a misleading translation of Schumann's original. The 1946 English translation of Paul Rosenfeld, which Kramer indicates as his source, reads simply: “Schubert is a more feminine character compared to the other [Beethoven].” “Compared to the other [Beethoven], Schubert has the character of a very talkative girl”; that is, he lets himself carried away by his musical drive, unlike Beethoven, who is far more concentrated. That is all that Schumann says about Beethoven's “masculinity.” Moreover, in the same notice, he describes Mozart and Bach as “masculine masters” (*männlichen Meisters*), as compared to the young generation of the romantics. Obviously, Schumann had a different concept of “masculine” than Kramer.

Moreover, the phrase that Kramer intends to epitomize his thesis, “Beethoven commands—Schubert pleads,” is also his invention, not Schumann's. Kramer has again inflated Rosenfeld's incorrect translation, which reads: “to be sure, he [Schubert] brings in his powerful passages, and works in masses; and still he is more feminine than masculine, for he pleads and persuades, where the man commands.” In fact, the original reads (my translation): “he [Schubert] also brings in his forceful side and mobilizes the masses; but it always happens like in a wife/woman toward husband/man relationship, [in which] he commands, while she entreats and persuades.”* This hyperbolization of Beethoven's masculinity into “gender polarization” is the result of Kramer's falling into a translation trap. One could perhaps excuse his oversight, because that trap was not of his making, but he elaborates the mistake further into an absurd thesis.

Beethoven's “masculinity” as allegorical “sexual violence.” With Beethoven indicted of occupying a uniquely pathological position of “masculinity” in the musical world, Kramer then explains that “this tale of the gender of musical genius gives, in allegory, the gist of [t]his book. Bluntly

* In the original: “Zwar bringt auch er seine Kraftstelle, bietet auch er Massen auf; doch verhält es sich immer als Weib zum Mann, der befiehlt, wo jenes bittet und überredet.“ In German, *Weib* and *Mann* can mean both woman or wife and man or husband, respectively.

stated, my argument is that in our gender identities, all of us—men and women alike—are Schuberts, none of us a Beethoven.” The question is immediate: If *all of us* are feminine, who is left to be the masculine that exerts violence against us *all*? Beethoven’s ghost?

Kramer muddles the issue further by claiming that this cultural setting happened “between the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries.” It seems that everything that’s bad in the modern world began around 1600, messing up a world that had lived in perfect harmony between the two sexes before! Kramer’s whole argument about Western culture as “all of us Schubert-like—none of us a Beethoven” does not make any sense.

A failed reading of Tolstoy’s *Kreutzer Sonata*. Kramer continues pounding on Beethoven’s “masculinity” by repeatedly turning to Tolstoy’s novella, alleging that it “shows gender polarity in its most self-conscious and also its most reprehensible form [...] and Beethoven’s music is somehow at the heart of the dilemmas of gender polarity.” At first reading, Tolstoy’s novella appears to be the story of a nineteenth century “honor killing” out of jealousy in an upper-class Russian family (but not an aristocratic one, which Tsarist censure would not have accepted). Beethoven’s sonata plays a double role therein: first, it created the conjecture, bringing together the wife, an amateur pianist, and the alleged seducer violinist; and secondly, participating, in the delayed recollection of the husband, which triggers his jealousy and murderous act.

There is, actually, much more under this appearance, but Kramer is only interested in wild speculations about the “gendered polarity” of the protagonist, named Pozdnyshev, triggered by his listening to the A minor *Presto* (following the slow introduction) of the first movement of Beethoven’s sonata. It would be impossible to quickly summarize and respond to these many speculations, but one can at least consider the facts that Kramer ignores or discards and that illuminate Tolstoy’s narrative. This is the most autobiographical of Tolstoy’s writing. An aristocratic child, he lived in debauchery in his youth, and later married following the new fashion of “Romantic love.” He did not turn murderous, but went through a moral reformation in his fifties, becoming an ardent Orthodox Christian. His novella preaches his new gospel, as he made known in an “Afterword” to his work that was published a few years later. According to his gospel, sexual life, as it is practiced by society, in both of the seemingly antagonistic forms of prostitution and “love,” including marriage for love (which is only “long-term” prostitution), is an infringement on Christ’s teaching and is, therefore, the great evil in history. Love—what we call romantic love—is as great a sin as lust; it perverts the souls of both men and women (whom it turns into seducers far less moral than prostitutes) and yields to marital and general infidelity. Love must be given only to God and to your neighbors, of whom your children and parents are merely the closest. Sexuality should be practiced only as God (as nature) instituted it—for procreation. Practicing it for “pleasure” is pure “depravity.” Any infringement on these moral laws can only result in evil.

Tolstoy’s moral reformation in his fifties also involved his relationship with music. As an aristocrat, he received musical education, played the piano well, attended concerts and sometimes even operas (a genre of which he was not particularly fond). His conversion changed his musical outlook. In his 1897 book titled *What Is Art?*, the intransigent Christian moralist unequivocally condemned almost all the artistic thesaurus of the Western world, including names like Sophocles, Euripides and Æschylus, Dante and Shakespeare, Raphael and Michelangelo, and, in music, “the whole of Bach, and the whole of Beethoven.” One can now reasonably guess why Tolstoy chose Beethoven’s *Kreutzer Sonata* to play a prominent role in his eponymous novella. It was the best possible literary device for illustrating the evil-permeated society: it was “bad” music—he called it “terrible” in the narrative—and also introduced the would-be seducer, the violinist, who would incite Pozdnyshev’s jealousy to break loose and turn murderous. It was also a very good, if transparent, marketing ploy: Beethoven was a world-known name. All of Kramer’s wild speculations (psychoanalytic or otherwise) about Beethoven’s masculinity are just that—speculations without basis.

12. Sanna Pederson's third leg of Beethoven's "Masculinity" relay

After Professors McClary and Kramer had indicted Beethoven's masculinity for sexual violence, Sanna Pederson, currently a professor of at the University of Oklahoma, resumes the issue in an essay on "Beethoven and Masculinity," included in the 2000 book *Beethoven and his World*, containing diverse contributions twenty-odd scholars. She claims to offer a new perspective, in which Beethoven would have embedded in his music the concept of masculinity of the oppressive patriarchal ideology of his time, and therefore contributed to "legitimizing male domination in a modern world which [hypocritically] recognizes that all people are born equal." In her final verdict, Pederson does not state, but clearly implies that Beethoven will probably be thrown into the garbage can of history once society has finally achieved the utopia that we all have grown used to seeing as embodied in the "*Alle Menschen werden Brüder*" [All men will be brothers] choir of his *Ninth Symphony*. Fortunately, Dr. Pederson fails as completely as her colleagues in all her arguments for her case.

Beethoven's masculinity. This very label is a forgery. Pederson succeeds more than Kramer, who had to twist his source; she finds an unequivocal statement in the 1927 book *Beethoven, the Creator* by Romain Rolland, one of the more prominent Beethoven scholars in the first half of the twentieth century, who described the composer as "the most virile of musicians." In fact, a closer look at Rolland's statement in its entirety discloses again a favorite tactic of post-modernism—truncated quotes that hide the true meaning. Rolland preceded his "masculine" sentence with this: "The Ego of Beethoven is not that of the Romantics [...] Everything that was characteristic to them would have been repugnant to him—their sentimentality, their lack of logic, their disordered imagination." The "masculinity" label was but Rolland's rebuttal of an opinion that was wide-spread at the time when he was writing, which held Beethoven to be a Romanticist. The gendered term was just a metaphor of a musical style, quite similar to the one used by Schumann, as noted in the previous chapter.

"Patriarchal masculinity." Pederson is quite right in the first half of her paper, in which she presents the "patriarchal ideology" of the nineteenth century, namely its views about the position of the two sexes in society, with women subservient to men and confined to "domesticity" or, at best, to a small "intimate world," which had in fact been the historical situation since the beginning of civilization. Pederson illustrates this new-old theory from the works of several influential ideologues of the time, philosophers like Hegel (1770-1831) and Fichte (1762-1814) or polymaths like Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), all of them educated during the Enlightenment Age and adepts of the ideals proclaimed by the French Revolution of "liberty, equality, fraternity," yet not ready to institute the equality of the two sexes. In a nutshell, their theory defined women as "born" and, unlike men, incapable of "becoming" through a learning process; the two sexes would have stood as "nature" (woman) versus "culture" (man), thus justifying patriarchal authority. Though Pederson is right to abhor this ideology, she derails thoroughly when presenting Beethoven and his music as imbued with it.

Failed attempts to link Beethoven to "patriarchal masculinity." Pederson proposes two "symptoms" that show that Beethoven conformed to the "masculinity" described above: one pertaining to his personality and the other to his music. The first refers directly to Beethoven's sexuality. Quoting Humboldt, who claimed that "women seem to be permitted to a very high degree to give in to their sexual natures, whereas men must at *a very early stage* sacrifice a great deal of theirs to other human values," Pederson speculates further: "if 'giving in' to sexuality is a feminine characteristic, it makes sense how Beethoven's renunciation of the Immortal Beloved, for instance, could actually enhance his masculinity." In other words, when Beethoven gave up his dream about the mysterious woman that he named "my Immortal Beloved" in his famous July 6-7 (1812) letter, he felt it as a tribute to his masculinity. If Pederson wants to put that mysterious episode of Beethoven's life in a formal math-

like equation, it is invalidated immediately: Humboldt's equation supposedly applies only to very *young* men, while Beethoven was forty-two at the time.

The second link that Pederson tries to establish between Beethoven and "masculinity" is more copiously developed, based on a particular aspect of the patriarchal ideology that somehow softens its sexism—the "complementarity" of the two sexes, that would help understand "a subsidiary issue of Beethoven's masculinity, the gendering of the sonata form." Obviously, the argument is founded on McClary's theory of the sexist sonata form, which I refuted in chapter 10.

Three failed arguments about Beethoven in the "masculine sphere of politics." Pederson challenges the quasi-unanimous view of Beethoven's music as the embodiment of the ideals proclaimed by the French Revolution in 1789, "*Liberté, égalité, fraternité!*" She does not contest this allegiance, but invokes the argument of a feminist colleague, Carole Pateman, who claims to have identified a sexist, masculine undertone in his commitment to the concept of fraternity, because "fraternity means [also] membership in an exclusive male society," therefore "it simultaneously covers this male identification with universal mankind." Because neither Pateman nor Pederson can get out of the box of their native English, whose dictionaries define "fraternity" primarily (sometimes even exclusively) as "an association of male college students," they mistakenly assume Beethoven intended his *Ode to Joy* as the anthem of universal maleness! Of course, this was not Beethoven's concept of "fraternity." He got its meaning of "universal" solidarity of the human race from the French Revolution directly—we know that he, as a twenty-year young man, was imbued with its ideas. Moreover, his "*Alle Menschen werden Brüder*" verse in the *Ode to Joy* is definite proof: the German word "*der Mensch*" is a generic term for "human being," man or woman. Beethoven—via Schiller—clearly had universal, not exclusively male, solidarity in mind.

Pederson's second "political" argument brings in Beethoven's allegedly dubious adherence to a second concept of the French Revolution—"equality." Beethoven had declared (1798) in a letter to a friend, "*Power* is the moral principle of those who excel others, and it is also mine"; from this, Pederson states that Beethoven "did not subscribe to the idea that 'all men are created equal,' even when only men were indicated." Pederson assigns to the word "power" in Beethoven's letter a particular meaning—power over others. This implication is false: Beethoven used the German word *die Kraft*, the closest equivalent of which is "strength"—physical as well as inner (or moral) strength. He had in mind his inner strength, not his authority over other people.

Pederson's third argument intended to pinpoint the politically masculine Beethoven is more convoluted. She claims that "music, like woman, helped define the political sphere in the nineteenth century by being specifically excluded from it [and] in this context the importance of Beethoven's masculinity grew: it became a talisman that was used to ward off accusations that music had nothing to do with the real world." The assumption that music was excluded from politics, which is essential to her argument, is also at odds with the facts. Music was intimately involved in the political sphere of the nineteenth century. This was the century of nationalist movements all over Europe, which eventually resulted in the demise of several empires (beginning with that of Napoleonic France and ending with the Habsburgs). Nationalism became the war cry in music, too. "National schools" of music spread all over Europe, succeeding declining global romanticism, in Russia, Bohemia (not yet a country), Hungary (autonomous in the Habsburg Empire), Spain, Norway, Finland, Poland (not yet a country), to mention only the first most musically productive examples. Music was sometimes *directly* involved in nationalistic movements. In Italy, the most prominent such case, the opera was a symbol of the country: Verdi's choir "Va pensiero" from his *Nabucco* became a kind of national anthem, and "Viva Verdi" (Vittorio Emanuele Re D'Italia – VERDI)* was the salute of the freedom fighters against the Habsburg rule. Music played a less militant role in Germany, but it was a symbolic unifying treat in the consciousness of the nation, as a source of national pride. Ironically, all began

* Vittorio Emanuele, Duke of Savoy, was the popular figure that became the King of Italy after unification.

with Beethoven: in 1814, when Europe was engulfed in the last of Napoleon's wars, in which the Germans participated as in a nationalistic war of liberation, Beethoven became overtly "political" and composed two works celebrating the allies' victories over Napoleon's army; he became and remained for a long time the symbol of German nationalism.

The "Heroic narrative"—another failed argument. Pederson is obviously correct that "[Beethoven's] heroic confrontation with fate put him in a category apart from other musicians" but is wrong when claiming that "a narrative of [heroic] overcoming necessarily marks the music as masculine," therefore Beethoven's masculine music would have excluded women from the heroic narrative. This inference is clearly invalidated by Leonore, the heroine of Beethoven's only opera—an upside-down rescue story, in which the (mezzo-)soprano saves the tenor's life by risking her own and is hailed in the final choir—"Never will she be hymned enough!"

And there is more: in 1813, a young German woman named Leonore Prohaska, disguised as a man, fought and died in the liberation war against Napoleon's armies. Her heroism inspired the eponymous tragedy of a now-forgotten writer, Friedrich Duncker, for whose play Beethoven wrote in 1815 four pieces of incidental music. These may not count among his best works, but nevertheless vouch for his admiration of female heroism.

13. When DeNora meets McClary: Gendering Beethoven

Tia DeNora embraced McClary's feminist agenda in a 2002 article title (somewhat misleadingly) "Music into Action: Performing Gender on the Viennese Concert Stage, 1790-1810," in which she revisits Beethoven as a central figure enacting the wrong "patriarchal masculinity." The new idea she proposes is in full line with her dedication to her own form of socio-musicology: to demonstrate that the public performance of Beethoven's music by female and male pianists between 1790 and 1810 was instrumental in defining the nineteenth century "concepts and institutional practices" of masculinity and femininity. The alleged acting force in the process is not the unmediated "meaning" of music—revealed in its alleged content, as in McClary's analyses—but the mediating "music into action," that is, music as performed and received by the public.

Two time-line flaws in DeNora's approach must be mentioned up front:

1) Masculinity-femininity concepts. DeNora adopts the definitions of nineteenth century masculinity and femininity from Thomas Laquer's book *Making Sex*, a history of sexuality: in the nineteenth century, "masculine" meant active, stable and strong; "feminine" meant passive, unstable and constitutionally delicate. This delineation, similar to the "patriarchal ideology" presented by Pederson, may well be right (although it misses the "complementarity" aspect of nineteenth century perceptions of gender), but has a big problem: as DeNora herself writes, Laquer asserts that that definition of the genders was the product of the eighteenth century, when the concept of a "two-sexed" world rose to prominence. The concepts were already in place when Beethoven arrived, therefore there was no need for his contribution to enforce them.

2) DeNora makes her case based on what happened in Vienna between 1790 and 1810. It makes little, if any, sense to believe that a process allegedly defining the concept of masculinity and femininity of the nineteenth century through repeated reinforcements was decided during its first twenty years in one European city.

DeNora's demonstration of how "music into action" played a role in defining "gender" in the nineteenth century is a three-step process: in the first one, she "genders" Beethoven as an expression of musical "masculinity." In the second step, she genders the piano, separating the female and male performers by their playing (men) or not playing (women) Beethoven's music. With Beethoven's music performed only by men, the last step infers that Beethoven came to be associated with masculinity, "as this social relation was repeated over time, music following the Beethovenian 'model' came to be associated with a masculine musical sphere." In DeNora's final verdict, Beethoven's music

was not merely reflective of but helped to constitute gender formation during the nineteenth century, sanctioning the oppressive patriarchal position.

The idea that such “gendering” of the performing act might have a social impact cannot be rejected outright because it cannot be proven or disproven: rather, the problem is that DeNora’s theory is undermined by major flaws in all of its steps, as shown below.

Gendering Beethoven—a fallacious argument. The first step in DeNora’s demonstration is to enforce the idea that Beethoven was the prototypical “masculine” composer, which, in her opinion, can be better “demonstrated” in the act of performance. She essentially adopts McClary’s thesis, stripping off its more extreme elements (violence, hegemony) and “genders” Beethoven to force him into her “music into action” mechanism that would prove her thesis. As I have already argued, the whole idea of Beethoven’s “masculinity” must be taken with several grains of salt. The female contemporaries of Beethoven did not perceive his music as antagonistically male; several female pianists (Marie Bigot, Dorothea Ertmann, Marie Pachler-Koschak) were among the best performers of his music, as he himself testified. These women must have had a perfect synergy with Beethoven’s music, with both its “feminine” and “masculine” sides; Beethoven might have actually embodied their dream concept of masculinity: strong and tender at the same time, giving a woman protection against a world that can so often be hurtful.

Beethoven’s gendering of the piano—another misrepresentation. The piano had gradually become a “province of women” during the eighteenth century, most likely because the “piano physicality” conformed to what DeNora calls “bodily decorum”: playing it did not require a position that would have been considered “immodest,” like the one required by the cello, or bodily contortions that are inevitable when playing the violin. Of course, that “province” sat mostly in intimate or salon performances, but there were also women pianists performing in public concerts. DeNora claims that Beethoven changed this situation by “gendering” the piano: women could not play his works, which were too “incomprehensible and difficult to play,” forcing on them “somatic habits that broke with prevailing conventions of a gentle, delicate, and graceful performance style.” This thesis is refuted by the clear facts of Viennese life that I have previously quoted: *women played* his piano music during Beethoven’s lifetime and he hailed several of them as the best of all those who played his music. Also, those indecorous “somatic habits” supposedly required by Beethoven’s pianistry are a myth: Schindler testified that Beethoven showed “vigorous opposition to all bodily motion at the piano,” and Czerny, who had been Beethoven’s pupil between 1801 and 1804 (and thus had plenty of opportunity to see him playing) concurred.

DeNora’s alleged “statistical” proof of her thesis is also fallacious. It is a table showing that only one in five pieces of Beethoven played between 1792 and 1810 in Vienna would have been played by a woman, while women actually dominated the non-Beethoven repertoire. By definition, statistics are reliable only with large numbers: DeNora’s table includes only 79 pieces (33 by Beethoven) played by an unspecified number of pianists and over more than twenty years. One does not make statistical inferences with only four cases a year during twenty years, and then generalize them as representative of a whole century. Apparently aware of this flaw, DeNora tried to expand the scope of her case, invoking the research of Katharine Ellis, a musicologist and professor specializing in music history, particularly of nineteenth century Paris. Ellis would have proven that “increasingly during the century, women were edged out of performing the most fiery works in the repertory and, in Vienna and elsewhere, came to function as conservators of musical taste.” Actually, the examination of Ellis’s work proves the opposite,* albeit in an inconsistent manner: she begins by claiming, like DeNora, that the typical Paris “repertory that was gendered feminine [was] the keyboard music of Beethoven’s predecessors,” but then brings forward the names of several women pianists (Marie Playel, 1811-1875;

* Katherine Ellis, “Female pianists and their male critics in nineteenth-century Paris,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50 (1997), pp. 353-385.

Louise Mattmann, 1826-1861; Louise-Aglad Massart, 1827-1887; Therese Wartel, 1814-1865) who “declare themselves priestesses of the cult that the artistic world dedicates to Beethoven.” One can add to the list internationally acclaimed female interpreters of Beethoven such as Maria Szymanowska (1789-1831) and Clara Schumann (1819-1896).

The mistaken belief in Beethoven’s piano music ubiquity. DeNora’s thesis relies on a basic premise: that Beethoven’s piano music was widely performed all throughout the nineteenth century. Only by repeated enforcement could the “music into action” mechanism that she advances have succeeded in imprinting on the public’s mentality the concepts of masculinity and femininity embodied in the sex of the interpreters.

This assumption is false: Beethoven’s piano music was actually rarely performed during the first half of the century. He had been quickly “canonized” by the first generation of Romantics, but based almost exclusively on his symphonies, which were dominating the public concert stage. His sonatas and even his piano concertos fell into oblivion, in a *déjà vu* process, in Bach’s posterity: the dissociation between the interpreter and the composer had not yet happened, so the acclaimed virtuosos of the time (a couple of them, Ries and Czerny, Beethoven’s pupils) were essentially interested in promoting their own compositions rather than music of the previous generation. In his 1840 biography of Beethoven, Schindler complained, “A foreign visitor might find it strange not to find any opportunity in Vienna to hear a Beethoven sonata.” We find plenty of evidence to confirm that this happened in every European country in which classical music was a significant social trend: in Paris, which had become the intellectual capital of the world; in England, with London a thriving music hub; and in all German-speaking countries, too, notably in Leipzig, Berlin and Dresden, cities with proud musical traditions. In France, by 1850, “to present a Beethoven piano sonata was considered out-of-place.” In England, “the Beethoven solo pianoforte sonatas were still regarded as ‘abstruse’.” Incredibly, in Germany, his *Fourth Piano Concerto* was never heard after 1808, when he premiered it, until 1832, when Mendelssohn rediscovered it. It also took the dedication of the great piano talent Franz Liszt to really elevate Beethoven’s piano music to the canon, a slow process that gained momentum only after 1850.

As one can see, many of the premises on which DeNora bases her thesis are false. And so is her whole theory of Beethoven’s wrong masculinity acting through her “music into action” mechanism.

14. Hollywood Beethoven

Given the recent evolution of Hollywood, now firmly devoted to the “me too” movement in which it was both a perpetrator and a prosecutor, it is unsurprising that the studios emerged as actors in the postmodernist siege of Beethoven. They came out, in 2006, with *Copying Beethoven*, a rather paradoxical work: not made in the Los Angeles studios but in Europe, and yet a truly post-modernist/feminist manifesto in the spirit of the new Hollywood tradition. It also fits well a long international tradition of portraying Beethoven in the film industry—falsifying his life.

***Copying Beethoven*, a feminist travesty.** This movie, directed by the well-known Polish director Agnieszka Holland (b. 1948), supposedly dramatizes the composer’s last years, beginning 1824, purportedly viewed through the eyes of a woman: a young female student at the Vienna Conservatory (Anna Holz) was sent to Beethoven to copy the score of his *Ninth* Symphony (which he was finishing at the time), then remaining close to him: evolving from copyist into music consultant, helper, confidant, muse and finally to care-giver of the dying composer. The story is entirely fictional and goes against all known facts in Beethoven’s life, except the most basic—that he finished his *Ninth Symphony* and had it premiered in Vienna in 1824, and that he died a few years later, after having composed his last string quartets. The critics unusually reached a consensus in their negative reviews

and many of them perceived it as “feminist,” but none of them realized its main flaw—presenting a completely false, “feminist” image of Beethoven.

Distortion of biographical truth is acceptable only if it helps to achieve psychological truth, but everything about the Beethoven persona in this movie is false. The movie’s Beethoven is a bear in constant confrontation with his female copyist, while the real Beethoven was a teddy bear when it came to women, whom he treated with utmost delicacy. A second huge incongruity with Beethoven’s known character pertains to his relationship with God. “God and I are like two bears in one cage,” he says in one scene. This is a total misrepresentation. Beethoven was not a church-goer, because he did not like institutionalized religion nor any dogma, but he believed in the divine order. A third incongruity is Beethoven’s assumed “sexism.” When the heroine tells him that she studied composition at the Conservatory, and adds, for his knowledge, that “there have been many women composers” (a clear misrepresentation), he derides them commenting “like a dog walking on their hind legs;” later, when she shows him some compositions of hers, he disparages them. False again! We have the testimony of Bettina Brentano, a young woman who arrived un-announced to visit Beethoven in 1810 and found him very open and ready for friendship—and, possibly, more. Bettina showed him some songs she had composed and she wrote in a letter to a friend that “Beethoven [...] said many pretty things about them.”

One wonders how Holland could have made such a work after several well-received movies—among them, *Europa Europa* (1990) and *The Secret Garden* (1993)—and after stating, in a 1998 interview, that feminism was not a central theme of her films. It seems that, in the American tradition, the movie was the work of the two producers, Christopher Wilkinson and Stephen Rivele, who also co-wrote this utterly inaccurate and defamatory script.

The best summing-up of Beethoven’s career in Hollywood was given by Richard Roeper of the Ebert-and-Roeper team: “for now the best movie about any Beethoven I’ve ever seen stars a Saint Bernard,” referring to the family comedy irreverently bearing the composer’s name, centered on a dog and still popular twenty years after its opening night. Roeper also expressed his hope that “Someday someone will make a great movie about an immortal composer,” but the perspective looks grim even now, with Beethoven’s 250th anniversary getting near. And it is a great shame, because there exists the real but largely ignored story of *The Girl who Loved Beethoven* waiting to be movie-scripted.

15. Skimming the pandemic

All the theories that I have debunked in this book, with the exception of the one in chapter 7, are “Made in America.” Like all cultural developments of the Western world during the past hundred years, America was the “innovator” in Beethoven scholarship, with Europe joining a few years later. I cannot claim to be as familiar with European Beethoven scholarship, but my “skimming” of it suggests that, after a relatively long “incubation” period, “Beethoven’s masculinity” has become a modern scholarly pandemic. A typical example is the essay “Beethoven: Constructs of Masculinity in the Realm of Music” by the German musicologist Beatrix Borchard,^{*} in which the author invokes (without critical assessment) McClary’s theses, along with her own similar speculations. For instance, Beethoven’s “aggressive masculinity” would be confirmed by his becoming an “icon” of the Nazi regime, as well as by Anthony Burgess’ famous *Clockwork Orange*, whose psychopathic hero “loves Beethoven, whose music—particularly the *Ninth Symphony*—he associates with sexual violence.” In fact, the Nazi ideology appropriated Beethoven because he was very important to the German national identity and, therefore, an excellent tool for manipulating the nation. As for Burgess, he was also an aspiring but failed composer: his book reflected a personal vendetta against Beethoven, whose *Ninth Symphony* he detested and called a “damnable hybrid.” Borchard also claimed that a German woman

^{*} Beatrix Borchard, “Beethoven: Männlichkeitskonstruktionen im Bereich der Musik” [Beethoven: Masculine Constructs in the Realm of Music] (in the volume *Kunst, Geschlecht, Politik. Männlichkeitskonstruktionen und Kunst im Kaiserreich und der Weimarer Republik*, Martina Kessel Hsg. Campus Verlag Frankfurt, 2005. p. 65-84.

and composer, Johanna Kinkel (1810-1858), had preceded McClary by over a hundred years in perceiving the sonata form as expressing male aggressiveness toward women. In fact, the Kinkel quote Borchard offers never mentions aggressiveness, but a “conversation” between the first theme “husband” and the second theme “housewife,” in which everything ends “for the good of them all.”

15½. Feminist Beethoven

The attack of this “latter-day” feminism on Beethoven is a professional and intellectual sham, involving flagrant misrepresentations: non-existent “demonstrations,” fabricated and distorted statements, willful omissions of any well-known relevant facts that would undermine the proffered theses, as well as defiant disregard of elementary logic. However, my rebuttal should not be perceived as an attack on feminism. On the contrary, it is intended to restore “true” feminism—the one that had, before the advent of this “latter day” version, found solace, reassurance and inspiration in Beethoven’s music. I have already presented several such feminist stances in the previous chapters. Here is another example; the most emotion-loaded one—that of Hellen Keller. Keller (1880-1968) was struck blind and deaf before she was two years old, but with proper care and help, developed into an extraordinary person. She became a world-famous speaker and author, an advocate for people with disabilities, a fighter for women’s right to vote, a pacifist and a socialist. In 1924 she experienced Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*—McClary’s great nemesis—in her own way: by putting her fingers on the sensitive diaphragm of the loudspeaker of the radio-set broadcasting the performance, as she wrote, “feeling with my hand the magnificent symphony, which broke like a sea upon the silent shores of his soul and mine.”

How can we explain this general perception of Beethoven’s music by women in later times? “Explaining music” is a very subjective endeavor, and I having pledged to submit not my opinions; I offer here instead an explanation advanced by a more authoritative voice than mine, the distinguished pianist and Professor Russell Sherman: “[W]hatever the feminine may be, there has been no scribe more faithful to its careful and caring description than Beethoven. Not simply Woman idealized, but the characters of women who nourish, who dream, who endure are present and tangible in his music. This profound tenderness—in him, in them, in his blessing and insight—is unique and offers the most priceless lesson. Moreover, his feminism exceeded gender, and his humanity embraced all lifestyles of the living, the dead, and the nonhuman.”

It is high time that feminism got rid of its extremist deviances and stopped throwing baby Beethoven—and his ilk—out with the dirty patriarchal bathwater.