Beethoven’s *grand Uomo*: Heroic Identification and the *Eroica* Symphony

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Abstract

Amanda Lynne Scott: Beethoven’s grand Uomo: Heroic Identifications and the Eroica Symphony
(Under the direction of Mark Evan Bonds)

Today, the story of the conception of Ludwig van Beethoven’s Eroica Symphony (1803) is closely entwined with Napoleon Bonaparte. However, this connection did not surface until approximately three decades after the Eroica was written. By the 1830s, critics were concerned with identifying the grand Uomo named on the title page of the first published edition of the orchestral parts, printed in 1806. Napoleon’s prominence in critical and biographical attempts at identifying the Hero of the Eroica was assured with the publication of Beethoven biographies, such as those by Ferdinand Ries and Anton Felix Schindler, that provided first-person accounts of Beethoven angrily changing the title of the symphony from “Bonaparte.” Later interpretations of the symphony show these biographies’ influence. A minority of writers disagreed with the Napoleonic interpretations; some, such as Richard Wagner, favored metaphysical interpretations that did not connect the symphony’s grand Uomo to any particular individual.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my committee for their helpful suggestions. The completion of this thesis proved to be, in unexpected ways, a greater test than one might imagine, and I am truly grateful for their assistance.
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Beethoven’s grand *Uomo*: Heroic Identifications and the *Eroica* Symphony

I: Introduction

“Sinfonia eroica...composta per festeggiare il sovenire di un grand Uomo”: Ludwig van Beethoven captured the imaginations of music-lovers with those words first printed on the title page of the published parts of his Symphony No. 3 in E flat, Op. 55 (published in Vienna in 1806 by the *Bureau des arts et d’industrie*). This cryptic expression gradually embedded the work in a web of music criticism concerned with describing the deeds of this “Great Man,” or the Hero associated with the music.

Originally, critics treated the subtitle of the work as an oddity, perhaps useful in explaining unusual aspects of the music, but not worthy of much attention. However, imaginative music critics eventually seized on the opportunity to fill in the blanks and suggested what must be the “real” program Beethoven intended for the work. By the 1830s, historical evidence (possibly combined with rumors) began to emerge that indicated that Napoleon Bonaparte was somehow connected with the symphony, as a dedicatee or as the actual subject of the work—the Great Man himself. The development of the idea of the Great Man can be traced from the earliest writings on this symphony, when little ink was spent on any supposed programs or dedications of the work, until almost everyone who wrote about the work weighed in with their opinion on these matters. Also, the connection of Napoleon with the work politicized this symphony in an age in which German intellectuals were still simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by
Napoleon. Historical accounts linking Napoleon to the *Eroica* influenced future interpretations of the symphony, so that later interpretations frequently connected the symphony with him.

This thesis traces the development of the identification of the *Grand Uomo* of Beethoven’s *Eroica* in the early and mid-nineteenth century, showing its growth over time in music criticism and Beethoven biographies. The connection of the *Eroica* with Napoleon became the strongest vein in these writings. I shall also draw attention to a few alternate readings of the symphony, none of which gained the popularity of the Napoleonic interpretations. I will begin by reviewing the history of the creation of the symphony, and then I will move on to early reviews that did not tackle the identification of the symphony’s Hero. The next section of this thesis covers early narrative programs. These programs’ action revolved around some Great Man, but the Hero is not named. Then classical programs that linked the *Eroica* to Greek or Roman mythology will be discussed. Historical accounts in Beethoven biographies come next, and they pave the way for subsequent interpretations to connect the *Eroica* to Napoleon. However, not all later writers agreed that the symphony was about Napoleon, and a sampling of these dissenters will be covered as well.

In this project I have been indebted to the work of others, and the scholarship of two individuals stands out. First, Scott Burnham has taken the first movement of the *Eroica* and its programmatic reception as an example of Beethoven’s heroic style in *Beethoven Hero*. Indeed, he sees this movement, as the first symphony written in the heroic style, as the epitome of “the type of plot most readily attributed to Beethoven’s

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heroic style.” In reconstructing the master narrative that most, if not all, programmatic interpretations of the first movement have followed, Burnham relied on critics that also played a key role in the development of the identification of the symphony’s Hero. 3 However, this reconstruction reveals that Burnham is not concerned with presenting a chronological account of Eroica reception, and he does not trace the blossoming of any particular feature of these interpretations.

The work of Thomas Sipe has also dealt with topics similar to mine. Sipe has been concerned with Beethoven interpretation, and has written on Eroica reception.4 As with Burnham, Sipe has relied on many of the same writers I do, although he covers a greater time period. Specifically, Sipe focused on modes of interpretation and hermeneutics. He presents a chronological account of Eroica reception, although the identification of the Great Man is not a primary concern in his work.5 What he has said on the subject is generally insightful.

II: Creation and Dedication

Because the identification of the Eroica with specific individuals has depended on what people knew (or thought they knew) about the symphony’s creation and Beethoven's inspiration for the work, I will review the compositional period and early publication history of the symphony. The title page of the copyist’s score of the Eroica, dated 1804, reads “Sinfonia Grande / Intitulata Bonaparte” presumably written in Beethoven's hand.

3 Ibid., xvi, 3-28.
5 See Eroica Symphony, 54-76.
and crossed out in ink; as Maynard Solomon points out, “Geschrieben / auf Bonaparte” is written in pencil by Beethoven and was not crossed out. 6 (On the facsimile of this score, “Geschrieben auf Bonaparte” is barely legible.) 7 It is not entirely clear how the score arrived in this state. On October 22, 1803, Beethoven's student Ferdinand Ries wrote the publisher Nikolaus Simrock that the composer was anxious to dedicate his newest symphony to Napoleon. Ries continued by saying that if Beethoven did not dedicate the piece to Napoleon, the composer would accept payment from the Viennese music patron Prince Lobkowtitz, dedicate it to Lobkowtitz, and name the symphony “Bonaparte.” 8 On May 18, 1804, the first public announcement that Napoleon would become the emperor of France was issued. Beethoven offered the symphony to Breitkopf & Härtel in a letter dated August 26, 1804, mentioning that it was “actually titled Bonaparte.” 9 Napoleon crowned himself emperor on December 2, 1804. The copyist’s score remained in Beethoven’s possession until his death; it was then sold to the Viennese composer Joseph Dessauer for 3 Gulden and 10 Kruezer. Dessauer gave the score to Vienna’s Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in 1870 in honor of the centennial of Beethoven’s birth, where it remains today. 10 It was mentioned in print by Gustav Nottebohm in 1880. 11

6 Solomon, 174-75.


9 Ludwig van Beethoven to Breitkopf & Härtel, Vienna, 26 August 1804, in Briefwechsel Gesamtausgabe, no. 188, 218-19.

10 Biba, 38-39.

As far as we know, the title “Eroica” was first used in 1806, when the published parts were printed in Vienna by Bureau des arts et d’industrie. The title page for this edition reads “Sinfonia Eroica / ... / composta / per festeggiare il sovenire di un grand Uomo.” If this was an authorized printing, there is no extant written communication between Beethoven and the publisher; however, as Otto Biba points out, Beethoven could have communicated with them in person, as the Bureau was in Vienna. In 1809, the Eroica’s first publication in score was printed by Chianchettini and Sperati in London. For this edition, the title of the symphony is given on the first page of music (rather than the edition’s title page: it was a part of a complete edition of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven’s symphonies, and the title page only carries the edition’s title, A Compleat Collection of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven’s Symphonies, In Score). This page reads “Symphony Eroica composed to honor the death of a hero [sinfonia Eroica composta per celebrare la morte d’un’ Eroe]. According to Biba, Beethoven did not authorize this score, but his reason for making this claim is unclear. The first German score was published in 1822 by Simrock, and it bears a dedication to Lobkowitz in addition to the now-familiar “Sinfonia eroica / Composta / per festeggiare il sovenire di un grand’ uomo” found on the parts. This score is not known to be authorized. (See Table 1)

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13 Biba, 25-26; a reproduction of the title page is found on p. 25.


15 Reproduced in Biba’s commentary, 26-27.
Table 1: Early History of the *Eroica*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event/Object</th>
<th>Location/Publication/Other</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1802-04</td>
<td>Beethoven writes the <em>Eroica</em></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Lockwood 208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 October 1803</td>
<td>Letter from Ries to Simrock, saying Beethoven wants to dedicate the symphony to Napoleon, but would be content with dedicating it to Lobkowitz and titling it “Bonaparte”</td>
<td>Ries, <em>Briefwechsel und Dokumente</em> (Bonn 1892), No. 14, 61f. (<em>Briefwechsel</em> 165)</td>
<td>Lockwood 210 (526)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>“Mystery sheet”: torn title page of Beethoven's copy of the score</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Ries and Schindler (also translated Solomon 173)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 May 1804</td>
<td>First public announcement that Napoleon will become France's hereditary emperor</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Lockwood 210-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late May 1804</td>
<td>Ries told Beethoven about Napoleon, acc. to Solomon and NG</td>
<td></td>
<td>Solomon 175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dated August 1804</td>
<td>Copyist’s score (famous image)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Biba 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 June 1804</td>
<td>First private performance</td>
<td>Lobkowitz's palace in Vienna</td>
<td>NG works list, Biba 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 August 1804</td>
<td>Letter from Beethoven to Breitkopf &amp; Härtel, offering them the symphony, saying it is titled “Bonaparte”</td>
<td><em>Briefwechsel</em> 188</td>
<td>Lockwood 211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 December 1804</td>
<td>Napoleon crowns himself</td>
<td>Nôtre-Dame Cathedral</td>
<td>Lockwood 211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After coronation</td>
<td>Ries told Beethoven, according to Lockwood</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lockwood 211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 April 1805 (Palm Sunday)</td>
<td>First public performance (under direction of violinist Franz Clement?)</td>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>New Grove works list, Biba 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1806</td>
<td>Parts published (grand Uomo)</td>
<td>Vienna: Bureau des arts et d’industrie</td>
<td>Biba 25; Lockwood 210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event/Object</td>
<td>Location/Publication/Other</td>
<td>Source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early 1809 (March/April)</td>
<td>First score published in <em>A Compleat Collection of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven’s Symphonies, In Score.</em></td>
<td>London: Cianchettini &amp; Sperati</td>
<td>Biba 26-27, Freedman x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1822</td>
<td>First German score published (title page names it <em>Eroica</em> and has the dedication to Lobkowitz—similar to parts page)</td>
<td>Bonn and Cologne: Simrock</td>
<td>Biba 26-27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### III: Early Reception

The earliest reviewers do not mention the connection to Bonaparte or try to create programs for the symphony. In fact, the title *Eroica* or the dedication “to the Memory of a great Man” does not seem to turn up in criticism until 1807, supporting Solomon's assertion that *Eroica* did not become associated with the work until after the parts bearing this name were published.\(^{16}\) Consciousness of the symphony's title or subtitle usually manifested itself through a concern with power or strength [*Kraft*]. A review of a concert held in Mannheim on 3 January 1807, printed on 28 January in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (*AmZ*), is the first to refer to the *grand Uomo* inscription, and the author tried to take this subtitle into consideration in his review. After describing the general character of each movement and calling attention to some of the oddities of the piece, the reviewer wondered if these features are necessary because of the object of the symphony, the “memory of a great man.” To the author, this cryptic expression might be the key to making sense out of the symphony:

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The finale has much value, which I am far from denying it; however, it cannot very well escape from the charge of great bizarrerie. At the very least, for example, no composer before Beethoven has dared to begin a piece in E-flat major in such a way that the instruments begin *al unisono* on the leading tone, and then continue with progressions that belong to the scale of G minor, until finally the fourth and following measures are merciful enough to extricate our ear from this predicament and remove us to the actual key! The theme that follows immediately afterward, repeated twice *pizzicato*, comes out, for the sake of novelty, a little too empty. Are all these peculiarities necessary: *per festeggiar il Sovvenire d’un grand Uomo*—as Mr. Beethoven describes the purpose of his work on the title page?

Although this review shows that while its author did consider the inscription when writing his concert review, it does not appear he was especially concerned in revealing the identity of the “Great Man” to his audience.\(^{17}\)

On 18 February 1807, the *AmZ* published a review that covered technical aspects of the work, as opposed to the earlier concert reports that chiefly related reviewers’ opinions after hearing the work at a concert. The author was working from either the parts or an unpublished score of the piece, and included musical examples in his article. Like the author of the previous piece (which he referenced in the opening of his own), this author called attention to the forcefulness of the first movement, but did not explicitly identify the “Great Man.” In fact, this review did not even mention the Great Man inscription. However, he did note that the second movement (*Marcia funebre*—the reviewer’s favorite) “dies away like a hero” at its conclusion, suggesting that the reviewer was aware of the *Eroica* title.\(^{18}\)


IV: Narrative Programs

Shortly after these early reviews, *Eroica* criticism became decidedly more programmatic, yet authors still seemed to have little interest in identifying the “Great Man.” These reviews saw the symphony as a narrative, although the stories they found in the piece were not identical. In 1814, “KB” wrote in the *AmZ* that “Certainly, a magnificent person is here being led to the grave; these tones tell us so in the clearest possible way. All the pain and all the joys of his earthly life resound once again in our breast…Assuredly, the departed one now walks in the kingdom of clarity of light.”19 Clearly, KB saw the second movement of the *Eroica* (and perhaps the entire symphony) as a piece that depicts an event or tells a story, either fictional or historical. This is a shift in the way the *Eroica* was regarded. Amadeus Wendt reveals a similar mindset in an 1815 series of articles on Beethoven's music when he wrote that “in the *eroica* [sic], Beethoven takes us onto the battlefield, where the golden hopes of nations and a glorious, heroic time perish.”20 Both of these articles show that some critics have started to view the *Eroica* as a piece in which Beethoven presents a sequence of events.

The narrative element of *Eroica* interpretation may be seen in a stronger vein in an essay by A. B. Marx in an article for the *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (*BAmZ*) from 1824, the journal's first year of publication. This discussion of the *Eroica* is found in a larger essay in which Marx argued that Beethoven’s symphonies are the pinnacle of the genre. He regarded the *Eroica* as an example of Beethoven uniting

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“psychological development,” “extrinsic circumstances,” and “dramatic action” of musical instruments. He spent time developing the story told in the symphony and was quite taken by the idea of the celebration of a hero through this work: “There is no need for the reference in the title to know that a hero is being celebrated here.” Marx traced the progress of a battle in the first movement, using musical examples to supplement his text:

Right away the first movement with its bold principal idea, so accessible to the brass instruments, which is passed on to all the parts and right away in the beginning victoriously counters a ferocious conflict of the entire orchestra with the sound of trumpets and horns (p. 4 [mm. 30-40] of the [1822 Simrock] score), which after an even harder struggle (pp. 33ff. [mm. 247-55]) is extended overwhelmingly and still further through fifteen measures (p. 40 [mm. 308-22]) it resounds turbulently from all the parts like the encouraging calls of comrades-in-arms, and in the end is celebrated by the joyful flight of the violins (p. 76 [mm. 664-50 (sic)]). This entire movement shows the successful image of heroic life, and also the painful lament over much loss is lacking as little as is the lively tempo of bellicosity to complete the portrait of the hero and the war.\(^{21}\)

Next, the slow movement shows the aftermath of the battle:

The Adagio, entitled Funeral March, is too grand for it to accompany us to the gravesite of a single individual. After having heard the war song of the first Allegro, who doesn’t visualize in the Adagio the picture of a bloody battlefield, who doesn’t understand the dark thought that here must press upon the victor too, and who isn’t invigorated by the soft voices that seek to console in the change to C major until the heroically bold cry rises above mourning and solace as if reminding us of immortality? After the return of the Funeral March, individual voices of lament and sympathy rise. When feeling becomes intensified almost overwhelmingly, the voice of sacred solace enters (p. 118 [mm. 207-14]) in D-flat major, and the subject expires in terrible darkness and silence—as it were, the last stirring of life in this field of death. We need only these suggestions about the first two movements to find successfully the meaning of the last two and of the entire piece.\(^{22}\)


\(^{22}\) Ibid., 69-71.
The program in Marx's article is much more story-like than those by earlier reviewers: the second movement is the natural result of the first, and both are musical depictions of a war story. Even though Marx developed a more detailed battle account than earlier reviews, such the ones by KB and Wendt, he did not hazard a guess as to the identity of the symphony’s Hero. He may not have been concerned with it because at this point, Marx’s interpretation was not overly literal, despite the narrative elements he included. Another possible reason Marx did not try to identify the Hero because at this point, Marx did not connect the symphony to one individual as strongly as he would in the future. His seeing the second movement as being too grand for a “single individual” seems to support this. In a segue to the next symphony in his discussion, the Symphony in A Major, op. 92, Marx wrote that “if in the principal subject of the *Eroica* we discovered the struggle of melodies and instruments to attain definite form, then everything in the Symphony in A Major appears definite, formed, and unambiguously designed.” Marx heard a battle in the *Eroica*, but it was chiefly a musical battle, fought by melodies and orchestral instruments, not by men. At this time, for Marx, the identifying the Great Man was not a priority, although he would later argue for a more concrete interpretation of the symphony in his 1859 biography of Beethoven.

Less than a year later, another item in the same journal includes a poetic program for the symphony, submitted by “S. v. W.” The poem is similar to Marx's program, which is hardly surprising, considering that Marx was the editor of the *BAmZ*.

*Allegro.*

Rock against rock the heroes stand battling!
Shield against shield, knee against knee pitching
And helmet on helmet, and bush against bush quietening
Force with counterforce rings in Death’s threat

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23 Ibid., 71.
Marcia funebre.
The horrifying demise of the earthly heights!
Here approaches a platoon; it hesitates, pinching pain,
And wistfulness yet preserves, barely suppressing the tears,
The Hero-word, with whom the spirit [Geist] escapes!

(Scherzo.)
It blooms now, of the greatest name of the earth,
In children’s games to the shawm’s songs
And by the bugle’s joyful fanfares!

(Finale.)
Then out it storms, like flying young eagles,
You in tournament and to rush earnest gaming
The most beautiful thanks—often with nothing to gain!

In fact, it may not be too much to regard S. v. W.'s poem as a poetic retelling of Marx's prose program, albeit with a more thorough treatment of the third and fourth movements.24 Although both Marx's and S. v. W.'s programs do show a development in the narrative element of the Eroica myth, they do not contain any attempt to reveal the identity of the “Great Man;” it would be several more years before that would be a concern of critics.

V: Programs with Classical Themes

Even without any kind of reference to an individual in the poem, there still may be a specific reference in it: Thomas Sipe, noting similarity between its first quatrain and Homer's Iliad, suggests that the author of the poem saw a metaphorical connection between the two works. There are similarities between the Iliad and the Eroica poem, yet to see this short poem as only a gloss on the epic poem ignores the similarities

between the poem and Marx’s interpretation, as well as the fact that this poem appeared in Marx’s journal.  

However, Sipe also discusses critical accounts with stronger ties to classical themes. He points out that M. Miel in 1834 and Hector Berlioz in 1837 make further classical connections with the *Eroica*. Miel gave a lecture in Paris on the performance of Beethoven’s symphonies in France; part of this lecture was translated by Heinrich Panofka and printed in three installments in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. Miel, while disagreeing with those who said “admiration of Napoleon first gave [Beethoven] the idea” for the *Eroica*, argued that

the design points toward the Homeric period, which seems in fact to have pertained to the hero of our day. To paint the heroic courage of a soldier, to let the unfailing leader be lamented by an entire people, whose saviour he was and who came to his death through his courage, to lead his mortal remains to the place of burial, to celebrate him with games in his honor, and so forth,—this is the skeleton upon which this poetic work seems to be built; a work comparable to the song of the *Iliad*.

Miel concluded the section of the article on the *Eroica* by stating “Once more, Beethoven is Homer.” In addition to being one of the first to see a classical subject in the *Eroica*, Miel’s lecture is also the first published account to refer to Napoleon, even if he was contradicting the connection to Napoleon. Miel’s account shows that Napoleon was already associated with the symphony in some way, at least in Miel’s experience.  

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26 Ibid., 212-15.  
29 Miel, 216.
Unfortunately, Miel did not mention anyone who connected Napoleon to the symphony, or how he knew of this connection—the German translation of his address only reads “Man sagt, die Bewunderung Napoleon’s habe ihm die Idee zur ersten eingegeben.”\(^{30}\)

Like Miel, Hector Berlioz viewed the subject of the symphony in classical terms, but he included Virgil's *Aeneid* in his interpretation of the work instead of the *Iliad*. Berlioz originally saw the *Eroica* as a celebration on the anniversary of the death of a great man, but later publications of his article do not limit the celebration to one occurring on the anniversary of the man’s death.\(^{31}\) He begins by chastising those who interpret the work in other ways than his own:

> It is extremely wrong to tamper with the description placed at the head of the work by the composer himself. The inscription runs: ‘Heroic Symphony to celebrate the memory of a great man.’ In this we see that there is no question of battles or triumphal marches such as many people, deceived by mutilations of the title naturally expect…in a word, it is the hero’s funeral rites.\(^{32}\)

By emphasizing that the *Eroica* was written to honor a man who had already died, Berlioz revealed his impression that, like Miel, he did not consider Napoleon to be the subject of the symphony—Napoleon was still alive when Beethoven completed the *Eroica*.

In his subsequent analysis, Berlioz made frequent analogies to classical epics. He associated the second movement with the procession of Virgil’s Pallas, even quoting

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\(^{30}\) Miel, *NZfM* 105.


lines from the poet. To Berlioz, this movement ends with the winds giving a “last adieu of the warriors to their companion in arms.” Apparently, Berlioz felt a need to defend the Scherzo’s presence in an “epic composition”—another classical reference—such as the *Eroica*. He did this by connecting the Scherzo with funereal play like that “the warriors of the Iliad celebrated round the tombs of their chiefs.” Berlioz summarized the final movement by noting that “the hero causes many tears; but, after the last regrets paid to his memory, the poet turns aside from elegy; in order to intone with transport his hymn of glory.” In this article, Berlioz also stated that “a sentiment of sadness not only grave but, so to speak, antique takes possession of me whenever I hear this symphony.” This is not a direct allusion to a specific classical subject, but by calling the effect of symphony “antique,” Berlioz reinforced his direct references to antiquity earlier in the essay.33

Of course, Marx, Miel, and Berlioz’s programmatic interpretations of the *Eroica* were not unusual for their time. Program music had been around for some time, and it was becoming more popular. Berlioz wrote his *Symphonie Fantastique* with its prose program in 1830, and the imposition of newly-written programs on older music was not unusual. That the *Eroica* was one of these works should come as no surprise, with its title page’s references to the Great Man. The development of the *Eroica*’s Great Man myth is an expected result of both the cryptic reference to the Hero and the Romantic atmosphere of the nineteenth century.

**VI: Naming of the Hero: Historical Reports**

As the article by Miel shows, some people had begun to associate the "Great Man" with Napoleon by the 1830s, although this association is not known to have existed

33 Ibid., 44-46.
in print before Miel’s lecture (1834). By the late 1830s, these accounts were solidified in biographies of Beethoven that assured the spread of the *Eroica’s* connection to Napoleon by their accounts of the creation of the symphony. Although these first biographers did not provide their own programs or interpretations of the symphony, their work influenced later writers who would. These first biographies provided a foundation for later interpretations of the symphony: by claiming to have historical proof (sometimes through first-hand accounts) that the symphony was inspired by Napoleon, the biographies gave Napoleonic interpretations more credibility than they would have had otherwise. (For a side-by-side comparison of these historical accounts, see Table 2)

### Table 2: Historical Accounts of Beethoven’s “Napoleonic Episode”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Musical World</th>
<th>Ries</th>
<th>Schindler</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspiration for the <em>Eroica</em></td>
<td>Napoleon; the symphony would be called <em>Sinfonia Napoleon</em>.</td>
<td>Napoleon “during the period when he was still First Consul. At that time Beethoven held him in the highest regard and compared him to the greatest Roman consuls.”</td>
<td>General Bernadotte suggested Beethoven write a symphony to honor Napoleon, whom Beethoven admired for bringing order “founded on republican principles” out of chaos and war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnesses to the title page (before its destruction)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Ries and many “close friends” saw title page; Ries describes it</td>
<td>General Bernadotte, Ries, and Count Lichnowsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliverers of the news</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Ries</td>
<td>Ries and Count Lichnowsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beethoven’s verbal reaction</td>
<td>“Oh! He is making an emperor of himself, is he? then he is no better than <em>the rest of them</em> :— He shall not have my symphony!”</td>
<td>“‘So he too is nothing more than an ordinary man. Now he also will trample all human rights underfoot, and only pander to his own ambition; he will place himself above everyone else and become a tyrant!’”</td>
<td>Beethoven “[cursed] the ‘new tyrant’” (Beethoven hated Napoleon until sometime after the general’s death)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What happened to the page</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Beethoven “took hold of the title page at the top, ripped it all the way through, and flung it to the floor.”</td>
<td>Beethoven “tore out the title-page…flung it on the floor”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elements</td>
<td>Musical World</td>
<td>Ries</td>
<td>Schindler</td>
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<tr>
<td>Witnesses to the destruction of the title page</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Ries</td>
<td>Ries and Count Lichnowsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New title page</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>“The first page was written anew and only then did the symphony receive the title Sinfonia eroica.”</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But before these biographies appeared, a few sentences in London’s *Musical World* stated that Beethoven intended at one point to call the *Eroica* the “Sinfonia Napoleon.” The paragraph in its entirety reads

> It is not generally known that Beethoven intended to have dedicated his ‘Sinfonia Eroica’ to Buonaparte, entitling it the ‘Sinfonia Napoleon.’ When the news, however, arrived, that the *First Consul* was about to assume the title of *Emperor*, the bluff musician exclaimed: ‘Oh! He is making an emperor of himself, is he? then he is no better than the rest of them:— He shall not have my symphony!’— Shocking old radical! No wonder he died poor.34

As with Miel, this anonymous report does not indicate where the author heard this story—possibly from the same source as Miel, or possibly from Miel’s lecture or its publication. However, this notice does suggest that the *Eroica*’s connection to Napoleon was not yet well known in London. This tale is a shorter version of what biographers would soon publish. In fact, Sipe suggests that this report may have been a leaked version of Ferdinand Ries’s report, which was first published two years later. Sipe cites Ries’s eleven years in London (1813-24) and his English wife as evidence supporting this hypothesis.35 Sipe may well be correct; however, this anecdote was published a decade after Ries returned to London, which makes this theory less plausible, since Ries’s

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London contacts in 1836 must have been fewer than they would have been ten years earlier.

Franz Wegeler and Ries's biography of Beethoven was published in 1838, and while it is not the first work that connected Napoleon to the *Eroica*, it is the earliest documented source containing a first-hand account. The story in question is found in Ries's section of the work, which is a collection of anecdotes meant to supplement Wegeler's more methodical section:

In this symphony Beethoven had thought about Bonaparte during the period when he was still First Consul. At that time Beethoven held him in the highest regard and compared him to the greatest Roman consuls. I myself, as well as many of his close friends, had seen this symphony, already copied in full score, lying on his table. At the very top of the title page stood the word “Buonaparte” and at the very bottom “Luigi van Beethoven,” but not a word more. Whether and with what the intervening space was to be filled I do not know. I was the first to tell him the news that Bonaparte had declared himself emperor, whereupon he flew into a rage and shouted: “So he too is nothing more than an ordinary man. Now he also will trample all human rights underfoot, and only pander to his own ambition; he will place himself above everyone else and become a tyrant!” Beethoven went to the table, took hold of the title page at the top, ripped it all the way through, and flung it to the floor. The first page was written anew and only then did the symphony receive the title *Sinfonia eroica.*

The importance of Ries’s anecdote to the development of the *Eroica* myth can hardly be exaggerated. As Beethoven’s piano student, Ries often acted as the composer’s secretary and copyist, and would have had ample opportunity to have witnessed the title page and its destruction as he related. Although it is cannot be proven that Ries witnessed this account as he reported it, it is at least credible. Even though Miel and the *Musical World* reporter were aware of some kind of Napoleonic connection with the work, Ries’s first-hand account lends an air of credibility to the story. Later writers who identify the “Great

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Man” as Napoleon often cited Ries, suggesting that his account was the first to gain credence among music journalists and Beethoven biographers. Sipe made a similar argument when he wrote that the publication of Wegeler and Ries's biography marked a turning point in the history of the *Eroica*’s reception. Through this publication the now-famous story of Beethoven's destruction of the *Eroica*’s original dedication to Napoleon Bonaparte first gained authenticity and became common critical knowledge. This dramatic story excited the imagination of most critics; substantive connotation from the career of Napoleon Bonaparte increasingly came to the fore.37

Anton Schindler’s telling of the story also enjoyed circulation early on. His biography of Beethoven was published in 1840, and it added several twists to the basic outline found in Ries’s account. According to Schindler, the French ambassador to the Austrian court, General Bernadotte (the future king of Sweden), suggested that Beethoven write a symphony to honor Napoleon as “the greatest hero of the age.” Schindler then interrupts his account of the *Eroica* to expound on the composer’s view of Napoleon:

Beethoven’s admiration for Napoleon was not based so much on that general’s countless military victories as on his success in bringing within a few years’ space, political order out of the chaos of a bloody revolution. And the fact that this new order was founded on republican principles, even if they were not dictated by the First Consul himself, could only raise Bonaparte and the new régime in Beethoven’s estimation. For Beethoven already held strong republican sympathies, personally inclined as he was toward unimpeded freedom and independence.38

After taking time to root Beethoven’s republican sympathies in the writings of Plutarch and Plato, Schindler returned to the *Eroica*. He stated that Beethoven was ready to give the completed score to Bernadotte to carry to Paris when news of Napoleon’s claiming


the throne reached Vienna. Ries and Count Lichnowsky delivered the news to Beethoven, and Schindler documented Beethoven’s response to their news: “No sooner had the composer heard it than he seized the score, tore out the title-page and, cursing the ‘new tyrant,’ flung it on the floor.” Beethoven’s admiration for Napoleon became hatred, and he was able to forgive the leader only after his death. Schindler related that after Napoleon died, Beethoven remarked that he had already composed music appropriate for the event: the second movement of the *Eroica*. Beethoven also said that the C major section of that movement “was supposed to represent a new star of hope in Napoleon’s reversed fortunes…and finally the great hero’s powerful decision to withstand fate until, at the movement of surrender, he sinks to the ground and allows himself to be buried like any other mortal.” Schindler concluded his discussion of the *Eroica*’s creation and of Beethoven’s feelings toward Napoleon by warning readers against taking Beethoven’s later remarks out of their context. He declared that readers should not regard the composer’s later, off-the-cuff remarks about his music, such as what Beethoven supposedly said on hearing of Napoleon’s death, to be accurate representations of the program of any particular piece, as Beethoven protested programmatic interpretations of his work.39

Schindler’s take on the *Eroica* unites trends present in earlier accounts. Like Ries, he purported to offer a historical account of the creation of the symphony.40 He also provided a narrative for the march movement, which he claimed was suggested by none other than Beethoven himself. Even though he immediately warned against taking

39 Ibid., 115-17.

40 Much of Schindler’s writing is distrusted today; he is even known to have altered Beethoven’s conversation notebooks to create the appearance that he and Beethoven were in regular contact before they actually were. For more information, see K. M. Knittel, “Schindler, Anton Felix,” *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed 5 June 2007), <http://www.grovemusic.com>.
it literally, by telling this narrative at all he reinforced the idea that the *Eroica* can be interpreted as a narrative specifically about Napoleon. Other writers would carry this idea further, as will be shown.

More than any other writer discussed here, Schindler politicized his account of the *Eroica*. By attempting to establish Beethoven as a republican and a champion of classical ideals of freedom, he situated the composer as a predecessor to the German liberals of his own day. Furthermore, rooting the composer’s sympathies with ancient Greece allowed Schindler to portray Beethoven’s sympathies as having a basis in something other than the French leader who, at one point, controlled part of the German-speaking lands. In other words, Schindler was able to portray Beethoven as a proto-revolutionary who supported Napoleon’s claims to establish freedom and peace but not his tyranny. This made it possible for those calling for German revolution to claim Beethoven as one of their own.

**VII: Wagner and Thayer**

Richard Wagner’s take on the programmatic potential of the *Eroica* was different from the writers discussed so far. He did not see the symphony as a portrayal of any particular historical or literary individual and protested against interpretations that did. He first weighed in on the matter in 1841, in his series in the *Gazette Musicale*, on October 24 and November 7 of that year, in his “Une soirée heureuse: Fantaisie sur la musique pittoresque” (later appearing in German as “Ein glücklicher Abend”). This short story is a description of a meeting between friends, told in the voice of one of them; the friend is identified as “R.” The two have recently attended a concert, which leads them to philosophize on music in general and Beethoven’s symphonies in particular. Both do not
personally assign programs to the works, yet only R is disturbed by them. (The narrator thinks anything that increases the popularity of the symphonies is a good thing.)

Their discussion turns to tone painting, and R rejects it outright; the narrator dislikes it, but acknowledges composers do have specific things in mind when composing. He says that Beethoven had “philosophical ideas” before his “fantasy invented musical themes.” He cites the *Eroica*, positing that it was originally titled “Bonaparte”: Beethoven was inspired by this “outside idea” when writing the symphony.

R responds by asserting that his friend’s argument would mean that the *Eroica* was an “occasional piece,” an idea he finds hard to swallow because the last three movements do not fit any narrative structure (to him, at least) and because the battle-like sections in the symphony are not attached to any particular historical battle. Instead, R believes that the *Eroica* was inspired by a “grand, passionate, and lasting emotion.” He admits that this emotion could have an external cause, such as Napoleon, but by the time Beethoven was putting notes on paper, his mood would “turn to music.” Beethoven could have been inspired to musical deeds similar to the battle heroics of Napoleon. “[Beethoven] was no General,—he was Musician, and in *his* domain he saw the sphere where he could bring to pass the self-same thing as Bonaparte, in the plains of Italy.” Beethoven wrote “Bonaparte” on the title-page, because he recognized he owed that much to Napoleon for his inspiration. Instead of being a program piece, the *Eroica* is a

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42 Ibid., 76-78.
“gigantic monument of Art” in R’s eyes. The narrator confesses he agrees with R’s assessment. He says music expresses Passion, not the passion of a particular person.\textsuperscript{43}

Scott Burnham accurately points out that Wagner’s story presents Beethoven as the Hero of the symphony, rather than Napoleon or any other figure. The symphony is not a musical depiction of any event from the composer’s life; rather, the mere creation of the \textit{Eroica} is a heroic event. Burnham states that Wagner’s story has little effect on the greater body of interpretation of the \textit{Eroica}.\textsuperscript{44}

Early in 1852, American musicologist Alexander Wheelock Thayer gave his own spin to the \textit{Eroica} myth. Published in the second issue \textit{Dwight’s Journal of Music}, on April 17, 1852, but written in Germany, this version is different from that which would be published in Thayer’s biography of Beethoven, translated into German and edited by Hermann Dieters and completed by Hugo Riemann.\textsuperscript{45} In his article, Thayer appeared to have accepted Schindler's version of the conception, with its reliance on General Bernadot, the future king of Sweden. (By the time the biography was published, either Thayer relied more on Ries’s account of the inception, or Riemann edited this section of Thayer’s work quite heavily.) This essay includes a possible program for the symphony that is not in the biography.

Thayer’s account of the \textit{Eroica} begins by emphasizing Beethoven’s republican sympathies, which Schindler also did, but Thayer connected these sympathies even more strongly to Napoleon than Schindler. Since he was writing in the early 1850s, perhaps the political turmoil in Germany during the late 1840s influenced the political aspect of

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 79-81.
\textsuperscript{44} Burnham, xv.
his work. Also, Thayer’s American upbringing might have caused him to be less reluctant to connect Beethoven to Napoleon, since Thayer would not have experienced the Napoleonic wars during his childhood (he lived from 1817-97) or have been around many people who did live through the wars until he went to Europe in 1849. Before discussing the symphony at all, Thayer depicted a Beethoven who was a “firm and staunch republican” by the time he reached Vienna. According to Thayer, Beethoven was heavily influenced by Plato’s *Republic* and other classical texts. Thayer then argued that Napoleon was (deservedly) the hero of all forward-thinking intellectuals in Europe by late 1802, including Beethoven, who would have learned of Napoleon’s greatness from General Bernadotte in Vienna: “It is easy to conceive with what interest Beethoven would hear of this young hero from Bernadotte, and how naturally he would come to regard him as the one destined to regenerate the civil and political institutions of Europe.” Thayer suggested that Napoleon’s admirers, or at least Beethoven, compared the general to elected officials from the Roman Republic: “At all events, Beethoven at that time cherished a boundless admiration for him and likened him to the greatest of the Roman Consuls.” While Thayer argued that Napoleon was seen as a hero by republicans across Europe, he also drew faint, perhaps even unintentional, parallels between Napoleon and Beethoven. For example, he pointed out that Napoleon is only one year older than Beethoven. He also mentioned that both men “sprung from the people.”

Despite his conviction that Beethoven viewed Napoleon as hero until the latter declared himself Emperor, Thayer did not see the *Eroica* as a commemoration of Napoleon. Instead, he viewed it as a piece *suggested* by Napoleon’s career. In fact,

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47 Ibid.
Thayer wrote his article to counter assertions that the symphony was intended to commemorate Napoleon. He also protested the common interpretation of the second movement as a requiem for the Napoleon; here, he relied on the same anecdote found in Schindler’s biography in which Beethoven is supposed to have said, on learning of Napoleon’s death in 1821, that he unintentionally composed the perfect music for the occasion seventeen years earlier with the *Marcia funebre*. Thayer’s own interpretation of the funeral march is found in his program of the piece, which is also included in this article.  

After mentioning what seemed to him to be a jarring contrast between the second and third movements, Thayer summed up his interpretation of the *Eroica*: “May we not view it as Beethoven’s political testament and confession of faith,—a work in which he honored the French Consul more by making him the type of heroism universally, than by any labored attempt to paint the individual, as he is generally supposed to have done?” Next, Thayer offered a program for the work to demonstrate the universalization of Napoleon and to account for the difference between the second movement and the subsequent movements. In his program, the Hero does not “arrive” until the final movement of the symphony. The first movement depicts “the Hero announced and portrayed,” with music that is appropriately “bold” and “vigorous.” He describes the second movement as being “inexpressibly grand and affecting, a picture of the hopeless, desponding, despairing condition of the millions groaning beneath the weight of despotism—wild rage, anarchy, bloody and unsuccessful revolution,—the requiem of order and liberty.” The third movement is part prophecy, and part the excitement of anticipation: the pianissimo staccato notes (for example, see the opening of the

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48 Ibid.
movement) “whisper the tidings—for none dares speak aloud—of the Hero’s advent.”

The whispers are heard, and at the movement’s conclusion, “the joy which pervades all hearts, but which has thus far been per force hidden, dissembles, finds vent and bursts forth.” The final movement depicts the Hero’s arrival. “The Hero comes; a short struggle; chaos, anarchy, the rule of wild passion—all give way before him; and then the jubilant chorus, swelling and dying away, ever renewed and ever more joyous and unrestrained, rings to the praise of him whose strong hand has brought liberty and order and peace.” More than other programs, Thayer’s portrays the subject of the symphony as a Messiah figure. After his program, Thayer provided a short historical account of the composition of the *Eroica*, including Schindler’s version of Beethoven hearing about Napoleon becoming Emperor.49

Schindler’s influence on Thayer’s account is apparent, since at the time he wrote this, Thayer relied on Schindler for historical details. His insistent conception of Beethoven as a republican also resembles Schindler’s account. (Since Thayer’s first trip to Europe was originally to study German for a translation of Schindler’s biography, this influence is not surprising.) But his interpretation of the symphony also bears some resemblance to Wagner’s interpretation of the symphony in *A Happy Evening*. By rejecting the tendency to see the *Eroica* as a musical retelling of some event in Napoleon’s career, Thayer is echoing Wagner’s move ten years earlier. Also, the parallels between Napoleon and Beethoven in Thayer’s piece can be likened to Wagner’s comparison of the composition of the *Eroica* to Napoleon’s battle deeds. By having traits of both Wagner and Schindler in his work, Thayer reveals a kind of compromise between two modes of interpretation of the *Eroica*. In his piece, the tendency to view the *Eroica*

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49 Ibid., 10.
as a work inspired by positive ideals of the French revolution—equality and freedom from oppression, for example—is wedded to the metaphysical interpretations found in Wagner’s writings.

Wagner returned to the *Eroica* again in program notes for a performance of the symphony in Zurich, possibly while writing *Oper und Drama* in 1850-51. The notes were then published in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. Wagner begins by pointing out that the symphony is not easy to understand, and that the title—“*Eroica*”—is misleading. According to him, this title “instinctively misleads one into trying to see therein a series of heroic episodes, presented in a certain historico-dramatic sense by means of pictures in Tone.” Wagner argues that “heroic” should be understood in its “widest sense.”

Despite this introduction, which seems to promise a wholly metaphysical interpretation of the symphony, Wagner’s program notes for the work are not lacking in narrative, containing elements of drama itself. However, this narrative is not a literal story of a historical or even fictional individual: in it, Wagner maintained the metaphysicality he opened with. In this program, the first movement “embraces, as in a glowing furnace, all the emotions of richly gifted nature in the heyday of unresting youth.” These emotions spring from *Force* (undefined by Wagner), which reaches the “violence of the destroyer” by the development section. The second movement reveals to listeners the “serious import” of the “tragic crisis.” Wagner states that “the tone-poet

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50 In a footnote to his translation of this program, William Ashton Ellis remarks that the similarities between Wagner’s program for the *Eroica*’s fourth movement and *Oper und Drama* suggest that two must have been written concurrently. While this is possible, it is certainly not necessary. See Richard Wagner, “Beethoven’s ‘Heroic Symphony,’” in *Judaism in Music and Other Essays*, trans. Ellis (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995, reprint *The Theatre*, volume 3 of *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works* London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1894); originally published in Theodor Uhlig, “Ueber den dichterischen Gehalt Beethoven’sher Tonwerke,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 37, no. 16 (15 October 1852): 163-64.

51 Wagner, “*Heroic Symphony*,” 221.
clothes its proclamation in the musical apparel of a Funeral-march,” emphasizing that although it is labeled as a funeral march and composed in the style of one, this movement is not a concert funeral march for any specific individual—it is merely clothed as a funeral march. Out of the grief found in the second movement springs new Force. Having worked out the negative emotions of the march (and possibly the development of the first movement), the third movement reveals “Force robbed of its destructive arrogance—by the chastening of its own deep sorrow.” It is the opposite of the second movement, showing nature scenes with “buoyant gaiety.” Likewise, the finale is a “lucid counterpart and commentary” of the first movement. According to Wagner, it contains a Manly theme and a Womanly theme. This latter theme, which has “all tenderer and softer feelings,” ultimately reveals itself as “the overwhelming power of Love.” By the end of the movement, this power “breaks itself a highway straight into the heart,” taking “the inmost fortress of the man’s whole heart.” Wagner ends his program of the Eroica with the subject of his program claiming deity: “Once more the heart’s strings quiver, and tears of pure Humanity well forth; yet from out the very quick of sadness there bursts the jubilant cry of Force,—that Force which lately wed itself to Lover, and nerved wherewith the whole, the total Man now shouts to us the avowal of his Godhood.” Wagner closed by pointing out that this story is, in fact, impossible to tell in words—Beethoven’s music is required to proclaim it.52

Not only did Wagner reject a direct connection between the Eroica and Napoleon, he also rejected a connection to any individual in this program. As his story for the Gazette Musicale demonstrates, Wagner disliked program music and considered

52 Ibid., 222-24.
Beethoven too great a composer to write programmatic symphonies. However, this raises the question why Wagner was supplying a narrative for the *Eroica*. As Klaus Kropfinger points out, Wagner’s program represents “feeling,” not historical events. So Wagner’s dislike of program music was directed at those programs depicting physical events. Even in the narrative body of his program, Wagner avoided physical elements: for example, there is no procession of mourners in his interpretation of the second movement.

Wagner’s concert program goes a step farther from the common Napoleonic interpretations than his earlier story. In “A Happy Evening,” Wagner’s chief concern seems to be to refute others’ assertions that the symphony is a programmatic work concerning Napoleon. However, in the Zurich program, he presented a fuller version of his own interpretation; this is to be expected in program notes for a concert. It is not clear if Wagner’s omission of the idea that Beethoven was inspired to his own heroic deeds by those of Napoleon in the program notes indicates that he no longer believed that to be the case or not. The program notes do not contradict the idea of Napoleon as inspiration, but it is surprising that Wagner did not mention this if he still (or ever) believed it to be a possibility.

Wagner’s program for the *Eroica* represents a minority view for the interpretation of the symphony. Although he is not the only writer to reject Napoleon as a subject for the *Eroica*, he is the only one from this time period to offer such a metaphorical interpretation.


VIII: Napoleonic Supporters

The most common view of the *Eroica* among later biographers and critics was as a program piece about Napoleon. A. B. Marx embraced this idea wholeheartedly in his biography of Beethoven. First published in 1859, the work contains an analysis of the Third Symphony that expands the program from his review from 1824. In this analysis, the hero is identified as Napoleon: “For Beethoven, Napoleon was *the* hero, who like any other of these world-shaking heroes—whether named Alexander, or Dionysus, or Napoleon—embraces the world with his Idea and his will and marches across it, as a victor at the head of an army of heroes, in order to fashion it anew.” However, this musical depiction of Napoleon is idealized, not historical: “This was no genre-idea [*Genre-Gedanke*], no portrait of Napoleon the man and his battles; what grew within Beethoven was an ideal image in the genuine Greek sense.” Even the battle represented in the work is ideal, not actual.\(^5\)

Marx wrote more on the first movement than he did on the other three, tracing the course of the ideal (and naturally victorious) battle through the music, including many musical examples in his programmatic analysis. Marx called the main theme the “heroic idea” [*Heldengedanke*]. The battle itself ran throughout the exposition and development, and victory was celebrated in the recapitulation. “The image of battle is now complete, the idea of the first movement fully realized and spiritually exhausted.” The second movement is a funeral procession for those fallen in battle, but not for Napoleon, who survived the battle. Between the second and third movements, Marx interjected a reference to Napoleon that emphasizes his belief that the *Eroica* was inspired by the

leader:

Had Beethoven sung his heroic poem after the demise of his hero, had he seen this Briareus of the hundred thousand arms, for whom the world had become too small, so narrowly confined in this exile on St. Helena, then perhaps even this second act (who can measure such things?) might have become for him a yet deeper revelation...but his task was not thus defined; he beheld his hero in the midst of a warrior’s career.

Marx suggested the third act represents “the fervor of camp-life,” and the fourth movement is indicative of “the joys and celebrations of peace.” His descriptions of these movements are much shorter than those of the first two; referring to this in while writing of the fourth movement, he wrote that “It is not our task to exhaust all the details but rather to mark the essential moments of the whole.” Marx concluded his program by linking Napoleon and Beethoven as heroes: “Thus the heroic consecration of Napoleon and Beethoven.”

The implications of Marx all but equating Beethoven and Napoleon (whom he had earlier equated with Dionysus and Alexander) in his analysis are not immediately obvious. However, the next chapter in Marx’s biography provides some clues.

Continuing his discussion of the Eroica, Marx positioned this symphony as the point at which music comes of age. He was careful to note that this is accomplished without poetry or drama—in other words, he is taking a stand against Wagner’s position in The Artwork of the Future. Later on, Marx criticized Wagner’s programmatic interpretation of the work from Wagner’s Zurich program. According to Marx, Wagner’s program is too abstract. Unlike Wagner, Marx supported taking the subtitle seriously, and since he was aware of much of the critical reception of the Eroica, he would have heard stories of the work’s conception involving Napoleon from multiple sources. By accepting the

56 Marx, Life and Works, 159-74.

57 Marx, Life and Works, 174-83.
idea of a Napoleon-inspired *Eroica*, he was defining himself as an opponent of Wagner. Whatever his analysis of Beethoven’s third symphony may reveal about Marx’s political beliefs, its primary “political” message addresses aesthetics rather than politics.

The final writer in this survey is Wilhelm von Lenz, a Russian of German descent who had studied with Liszt and Moscheles and knew Berlioz and Chopin. He wrote quite a bit about Beethoven: his most famous work is *Beethoven et ses trios styles*, which builds on Fétis’s categorization of the composer’s output into three periods. His biography of Beethoven relies on Ries, Wegeler and Schindler.58 His entry on the *Eroica* in the accompanying *Kritischer Katalog* also shows his dependence on these earlier writers, as he includes lengthy quotations of their accounts of the creation and naming of the symphony under the heading “Origin” [*Entstehung*]. Both of these accounts incorporate Napoleon in some fashion, as I have already shown. He would later call these two reports “notorious.” After briefly suggesting correct tempi for the first two movements, Lenz offered his contribution to the Napoleon myth through his interpretation and analysis of the work.59

Lenz opens his analysis with an anonymous quotation describing Jacques-Louis David’s painting of Napoleon crossing the Alps (David, *Bonaparte Crossing Mount St. Bernard*, 1801-02. Oil on canvas, 271 x 232 cm. Berlin, Charlottenburg) in order to compare Beethoven to David:

> “Paint me sitting quietly on a wild horse, said Napoleon to David, and so David painted him: sitting on a rearing [bäumend] steed, and the sharp

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edges of a rock carries the inscription Hannibal and Caesar.”

So also the Eroica Symphony paints Napoleon, the son of the most terrible changing of ideals, sitting quietly on a wild horse. A greater painter, Beethoven painted him in broad outline and colors of Geist for the Geist...

Napoleon and his marshals have survived the Eroica...

On your knees, old world! You stand before the idea of the great Beethoven symphony. Haydn, Mozart, your immortal creators of world oratorios and the world opera, play the violin or play the drum in the Eroica orchestra. Here one Reich ends and another begins. Here lies the mark of a century.

Lenz offered his own programmatic titles for the movements of the Eroica, after a lengthy analysis of the piece that supports titles he provided for the symphony’s movements: “Allegro: Life and Death of a Hero [Leben und Tod eines Helden]. Marcia: The Funeral [Das Leichenbegängniß]. Scherzo: Cease-fire on the Grave [Waffenstille am Grabe]. Finale: The Funeral Meal and Hero’s Ballad [Das Leichenmahl und Heldenballade].”

Although Lenz clearly believed that Napoleon is the subject of the Eroica, he was willing to concede that other Great Men were connected to the symphony: “Not only Napoleon, but all Heroes were represented in the Eroica. Hero is the Poet, whose great Idea represents great Men.” He opens the next paragraph, the beginning of his analysis, by associating [Julius] Caesar with the first movement. But perhaps this is a veiled reference to Napoleon; after all, his earlier quotation about David’s portrait includes the rock inscribed with Ceasar and Hannibal’s names at the bottom of the painting.

Throughout his analysis (and its subsequent titles for the movements), Lenz avoided referring to Napoleon or any other hero by name. This makes it possible for many individuals to become the Hero of the Eroica, yet Lenz appears to have favored

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60 Ibid., 290-91, 312.

61 Ibid., 295.
Napoleon. After all, he included extensive quotations from the biographers that identified Napoleon with the symphony without qualifying or correcting them; he was not so kind to some of the analyses he quoted (for example, he was quite harsh on Fétis).\textsuperscript{62}

Lenz united many texts from earlier writers, as his catalog has quotations from other authors. His entry for the \textit{Eroica} includes Schindler (p. 286), Ries (287), Fétis (294, 321), anonymous correspondents from the \textit{AmZ} (313-15), Berlioz (303, 316-18), and Robert Griepenkerl (318-20). By including these earlier writings, his own can be seen as the culmination of \textit{Eroica} criticism in this time period. Lenz’s interpretation not only shows he believed Napoleon to be the subject of the \textit{Eroica}, but it also shows his enthusiasm for the piece—it is worthy of the world's adoration, even worship. Through this symphony, Napoleon and his marshals live on, and the great master-composers of the past can only play in the orchestra with the beginning of this “new Reich.” Political undertones are implicit in the last paragraph in the quotation, setting Beethoven as the Leader of the Musical World in the same fashion that Napoleon sought to be the leader of Europe. Similar to Marx’s, Lenz's principal goal here seems to be to place Beethoven on a pedestal, and he has no qualms using Napoleon to do so. He does not appear to be reluctant to write about Napoleon, or try to minimize Beethoven's connection to him through the \textit{Eroica}. Unlike Schindler, Lenz does not try to connect the composer to classical ideals, even when mentioning Caesar. Perhaps his time studying in France favorably influenced his opinion of Napoleon.

It is not surprising that Lenz’s, Schindler’s, or any of the other Heroic identifications for the \textit{Eroica} had a political element, because the suggestion of a “Great

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 321.
Man” can easily be filled by world leaders. But once the Napoleonic vein of the Great Man myth became popular, the French emperor's reputation as both a liberator and a dictator ensured that those interpretations of the *Eroica* that named Napoleon as the Great Man would be remembered. The politically conflicted nature of their subject called attention to both the music and the interpretations themselves. Even critics that did not see the *Eroica* as a Napoleonic tribute were influenced by the same impulses that made the Napoleonic interpretations so popular; after all, writers such as Miel, Thayer, and Wagner were protesting the connection to Napoleon that was so common, and in doing so, they necessarily had to contradict or qualify others’ arguments.

Lenz’s catalog makes a good stopping point for this thesis because he compiled the work of others, as I have done. He was the first writer to take a comprehensive, retrospective look at the work of others, collecting these interpretations and historical reports and including them alongside his own interpretation. Of course, Lenz was not the final writer to attempt to identify the Hero in the *Eroica*, either by interpreting the symphony itself or by attempting to uncover its genesis. That tradition has continued into modern Beethoven scholarship today, illustrating that the questions about the *Eroica*’s Great Man that gripped critics in the nineteenth century continue to capture our interest today.
### APPENDIX: Table 3

**Sources and Notes on their Authors’ Interpretation of the *Eroica***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Author (Title)</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28 January 1807</td>
<td>Anon., “Nachrichten”</td>
<td><em>AmZ</em> 9/18: 285-87</td>
<td>Mentions “memory of a great man” and oddities; no program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 February 1807</td>
<td>Anon., “Recension”</td>
<td><em>AmZ</em> 9/21: 321-34</td>
<td>First(?) technical/analytical review; second movement compared to a dead hero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 November 1814</td>
<td>KB, “Miscellen”</td>
<td><em>AmZ</em> 16/48: 811</td>
<td>“Magnificent person is here being led to the grave”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 May 1824</td>
<td>Amadeus Wendt, “Gedanken über die neuere Tonkunst, und van Beethoven’s Musik, namentlich dessen Fidelio”</td>
<td><em>AmZ</em> 17/21: 350 (several)</td>
<td>Battlefield; hopes of nations perish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 May 1824</td>
<td>A. B. Marx, “A Few Words on the Symphony and Beethoven’s Achievements in This Field”</td>
<td><em>BAmZ</em> 1: 165-86, 173-76, 181-84</td>
<td>Anonymous hero: narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 July 1834</td>
<td>M. Miel, “Ueber die Symphonie, über die Symphonien Beethoven’s, und über ihre Ausführung in Paris”</td>
<td><em>NZfM</em> (Trans. From French)</td>
<td><em>Iliad</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 March 1836</td>
<td>Anon., “Miscellaneous”</td>
<td><em>Musical World</em> 1: 9-11</td>
<td>Anecdotal; sparse version of what Ries and Schindler would publish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 April 1837</td>
<td>Hector Berlioz, “Concerts du Conservatoire”</td>
<td><em>Revue et Gazette Musicale</em> 2: 121-23</td>
<td>Funeral rites: mentions Ries’s horn anecdote found in his and Wegeler’s biography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>Ferdinand Ries (Wegeler)</td>
<td>Biography</td>
<td>Composed for Napoleon, until he declared himself Emperor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Anton Schindler</td>
<td>Biography</td>
<td>Beethoven as republican; more dramatic telling of the Napoleon story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Author (Title)</td>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>Comments</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 October and 7 November 1841</td>
<td>Richard Wagner (&quot;Une soirée heureuse: Fantaisie sur la musique pittoresque&quot;)</td>
<td><em>Revue et Gazette Musicale</em> 10, nos. 24 and 25</td>
<td>Inspired by, but not representative of, Napoleon; Beethoven becomes a hero, symphony is heroic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 April 1852</td>
<td>Alexander W. Thayer (&quot;Beethoven and his Third Symphony&quot;)</td>
<td><em>Dwight's</em> 1/2: 9-10</td>
<td>Napoleon (after Schindler); universalization (see 1st Wagner essay); unique program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 March 1853</td>
<td>J. S. Dwight?</td>
<td><em>Dwight's</em> 2/25: 197-98</td>
<td>Concert report: refers back to Thayer's; mentions Ries again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>A. B. Marx</td>
<td>Biography</td>
<td>Napoleon: narrative continued from Marx’s earlier program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>Wilhelm von Lenz</td>
<td>Biography /Critical Catalog</td>
<td>Napoleon: Lenz is aware of other theories; exalts Beethoven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>Richard Wagner</td>
<td><em>Independent essay “Beethoven” (Leipzig)</em></td>
<td>Says Ries tells us nothing about the music; last movement is “archtype of innocence”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Italicized entries indicate works not discussed in the thesis
WORKS CITED

Primary


“Recension.” *AmZ* 21 (18 February 1807), columns 321-34.


Secondary


