

Beethoven's *Christ on the Gethsemane,*

If Friedrich Schiller is the poet of freedom, then Ludwig van Beethoven is emphatically its composer. Of all the great artists who follow Schiller, Beethoven is the closest to him in outlook, and potency.

Although his admiration for Schiller is well known, exactly to what extent Beethoven took ideas directly from Schiller, or generated them independently himself, we may never know. It doesn't really matter, however, for what *can* be demonstrated is, that Schiller created the intellectual environment; his aesthetical writings, plays, and poetry were all in circulation by the time Beethoven presented his first published works. More importantly, it can be demonstrated that Beethoven and Schiller were *thinking* the same way.

In his 1789 poem "The Artists," Schiller wrote:

How beautifully, O man, your palm branch holding
You stand at century's unfolding,
In proud and noble manhood's prime . . .



For Beethoven, as for Schiller, freedom is the freedom to develop one's cognitive powers, in order to carry out that necessary mission, on behalf of humanity as a whole, for which the Creator put us here in the first place.

It is only from this Promethean standpoint, that we can locate the true meaning of individual freedom.

Martin Schongauer (c.1430-1491), "Christ on the Mount of Olives," engraving from the series "The Passion of Jesus Christ."

Mount of Olives

As Schiller Would Treat It

by Fred Haight

Republicans such as Schiller and Beethoven had been inspired by the success of the American Revolution, and its institutionalization of the idea that “all men are created equal.” They believed that the Nineteenth century could truly become an age of reason. But, they were also horrified by the degeneration of the French Revolution into an enraged mob with a guillotine. Schiller’s response to this was, that the great moment had found a “little people,” and the burning concern of his aesthetical writings was how to elevate this “little people” to the level of a self-governing, republican citizenry.

Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetical Education of Man*, is a call for a revolution in great Classical art, to accomplish this republican transformation. He considered this a task for a hundred years. Art must not remain satisfied with itself, he said, according to an internal criteria of “art for art’s sake”; rather, it must freely change itself, to meet the necessity of saving Civilization.

How different from today’s degraded, so-called artists, who say they can only reflect the degeneracy and alienation of their times; or worse, think that they must be in the vanguard, leading us ever further along the road to Hell!

In the following essay, we examine Beethoven’s oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* (*Christus am Ölberg*), both in relationship to his subsequent opera *Fidelio*, and as a change in the treatment of

the same subject from the earlier “Passion music” of other composers, particularly J.S. Bach. Beethoven’s changes in the treatment of Christ’s Passion, are shown to be a magnificent fulfillment of the type of progress so ardently required of art by the poet of freedom Friedrich Schiller.

The Shared Idea Behind

Christ on the Mount of Olives and *Fidelio*

Before Beethoven attempted string quartets, he wrote three string trios, to develop his composi-



Portrait of Ludwig van Beethoven, 1814. (Engraving by Blasius Höfel, after the painting by Louis Letronne) (Reproduced by permission of the Beethoven-Haus, Bonn)



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tional skills. Similarly, the oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* was very likely Beethoven's preparation for his first opera, *Leonore*, later called *Fidelio*. Both works were commissioned by the same individual, Emmanuel Schikeneder, who is best known for having commissioned, and written the libretto for, Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*. The opera was commissioned shortly after the premiere of the oratorio, most probably on the basis of its success. Both premiered in the same theater, the Theater an dem Wien (Schikeneder's theater), *Christ on the Mount of Olives* in 1803, and *Leonore* in 1805.

Oratorio and opera both combine music and drama, but in different ways. In an oratorio, there is no scenery, the characters are not in costume, and they do not act. They stand and sing, letting the music tell the story. The chorus plays a much greater role than in opera. In *Christ on the Mount of Olives*, there are no acts, but six numbered sections featuring three soloists—Jesus, the Seraph, and Peter—as well as the chorus (playing different roles), and orchestra.

The opera *Fidelio* is in two acts, with sixteen numbered sections (and twenty scenes), and with seven soloists who must act, as well as sing. It is the story of the heroic Florestan, unjustly cast into the stinking dungeon of a royal prison by the evil commandant Don Pizarro; and, of the efforts of Florestan's courageous wife Leonore to free him by finding employment in the prison disguised as the boy "Fidelio." Leonore acts to save her husband's life when Pizarro, knowing of the imminent arrival of the Governor, and fearing the discovery of his crime in illegally imprisoning Florestan, is about to murder him. (The story bears a close resemblance to the actual events surrounding the imprisonment of the American Revolutionary War hero the Marquis de Lafayette, and the efforts of his wife Adrienne to enter the prison at Olmütz, Austria, to save him.¹)

What unifies these two works, is the conception Beethoven shares with Schiller of the Promethean idea of man—the idea that individual man, who is made in the image of God, can intervene into history to change its course. Beethoven was notoriously single-minded about which librettos (texts) he would, and would not set to music. Even the great moral operas of Mozart were not sufficient for his purpose.

In the *Aesthetical Letters*, Schiller calls upon the artist to give man a more powerful and true notion of his own humanity. These two works, and the contemporaneous *Eroica* [Heroic] Symphony,² are unified by a single burning preoccupation in the composer's mind: that the Promethean idea of man must be made comprehensible

to the public, as the embodiment of a republican citizenry.

In Aeschylus' play *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus, himself an immortal god, has stolen fire from the tyrannical Zeus; and given it as a gift, to the "creatures of a day"—mankind—whom Zeus wishes to destroy. Armed with fire, and other gifts of knowledge from Prometheus (his name means "forethought"), mankind is lifted above its bestial condition, and survives. Zeus, in anger, imposes hideous punishment on Prometheus: to be chained to a rock, where an eagle returns every day to eat his liver; but Prometheus, being immortal, cannot be destroyed, and rejoices in his foreknowledge of how Zeus himself shall be toppled by the folly of his own evil designs. All of Prometheus' so-called "friends," able to think only in the here-and-now, urge him to compromise with Zeus, in order to ensure his immediate survival. But Prometheus operates on a higher level, ordering his life in the present, and enduring great suffering, to bring about a future he knows *must become*.

Although Beethoven is still today often identified with the idea of individual freedom, this is usually interpreted to mean the countercultural vision of an individual, free from all moral and social responsibility—that is, freedom to do "exactly as I please."

For Beethoven, as for Schiller, freedom is the freedom to develop one's cognitive powers, in order to carry out that necessary mission, on behalf of humanity as a whole, for which the Creator put us here in the first place. Such a mission can be carried out only by a sovereign individual, acting against self-interested and narrow "mainstream opinion." It is only from this Promethean standpoint, that we can locate the true meaning of individual freedom.

Love and Duty: Levels of Hypothesis in *Fidelio*

Great art is never concerned with merely telling a story, no matter how noble; it must instead develop according to the principles of Socratic dialogue. In the opera *Fidelio*, these principles can be efficiently identified by examining the arias, or solos, insofar as these are akin to soliloquies in a drama. Here, we see the innermost workings of the minds of the leading characters—their souls speak.

In this opera, the seven principal characters (five of whom have arias) are operating under completely different "hypotheses," or sets of axiomatic assumptions, which determine how they act, think, and respond to situations. These differences are revealed clearly in their respective arias, which are composed according to different musical

principles. This allows Beethoven to have great fun developing beautiful metaphors around the related concepts of love [*Liebe*], and duty [*Pflicht*].

Hypothesis (1) Florestan and Leonore are governed by the hypotheses appropriate to a world-historical sense of identity—the idea of living one’s life for a great purpose—to fulfill a mission, where all personal cares and desires are subsumed under it. Their arias are the high points of the opera.

After a long orchestral introduction that opens Act II, marked “*Grave*,” Florestan’s aria begins with a recitative, in which he has been startled out of sleep, and into awareness of his desperate situation. He sings:

God, what darkness here!
 O gruesome silence
 Around me, all is desolate,
 Nothing alive save myself.
 O heavy trial!

A change occurs in the recitative when Florestan accepts that

God’s will is just!
 I do not complain,
 The measure of suffering is His.

Then, the aria proper begins with a prayer-like *Adagio* (slow), where Florestan tells us that he

Dared to speak out the truth, boldly,

and that

Chains were my reward,

but that it is a

Sweet comfort in my heart:
 I have done my duty!

Beethoven has Florestan sing this line, and then repeat it, with only one change: the second time the words “my duty” [*meine Pflicht*] are sung, the notes rise into the tenor third (high) register on Gb-F [SEE Figure 1].

In Book Two of the *Republic*, Plato uses the term

FIGURE 1. “I have done my duty”

The musical score for "I have done my duty" is in Adagio, 3/4 time, with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The lyrics are: "sü - sser Trost in mei-nem Her - zen: mei-ne Pflicht hab' ich ge - than, sü - sser, sü - sser Trost in mei-nem Her - zen: mei-ne Pflicht, ja, mei-ne Pflicht hab' ich ge - than." The notes for "sü - sser Trost" and "mei-ne Pflicht" are enclosed in solid-shaded boxes, indicating the first register. The notes for "sü - sser, sü - sser Trost" and "mei-ne Pflicht, ja, mei-ne Pflicht" are enclosed in unshaded boxes, indicating the second register. The notes for "in mei-nem Her - zen:" and "hab' ich ge - than," are enclosed in open boxes with shaded outlines, indicating the third register.

To graphically represent the vocal registers: Notes which are to be sung in the first register are enclosed by a solid-shaded box (with the exception of the male voices, where an unshaded, outline box is used instead). Notes to be sung in the second register are left unmarked. Third-register notes are enclosed by an open box with a shaded outline.

“*agapē*” in speaking of the love of justice. It is this agapic love of truth and justice, which enables Florestan to face death with a peaceful soul. Like the Good Samaritan of Schiller’s parable, Florestan needs no one to impose his duty on him from the outside: Love creates its own duties.

In a third section of the aria, marked *Allegro* (fast), Florestan is inspired by a vision of

An angel, so like my wife, Leonore,

who leads him to freedom in

the Heavenly Kingdom [*himmlische Reich*],

as he soars up into the tenor third (high) register, to Bb [SEE Figure 2].

Leonore also operates under the hypotheses appropriate to a world-historical personality, for whom love is *agapē*. Her great aria is in Act I. In her recitative, where she must subdue “violent inner emotions” (she has just heard Pizarro talk of murdering her husband), a change also occurs, beginning on the words

FIGURE 2. “Leonore . . . who leads me to freedom in the Heavenly Kingdom”

The musical score for "Leonore . . . who leads me to freedom in the Heavenly Kingdom" is in Poco allegro, common time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: "ein En-gel, Le - o - no - ren, Le - o - no - ren, der Gat - tin so gleich, der, der führt mich zur Frei - heit, zur Frei - heit in's himm - li - sche Reich,". The notes for "ein En-gel, Le - o - no - ren, Le - o - no - ren, der Gat - tin so gleich," are enclosed in unshaded boxes, indicating the second register. The notes for "der, der führt mich zur Frei - heit, zur Frei - heit in's himm - li - sche Reich," are enclosed in open boxes with shaded outlines, indicating the third register.

Yet though like ocean breakers
 Hatred and rage storm in your soul,
 In me there shines a rainbow,
 That brightly rests on dark clouds.

Like Florestan's, her aria also begins in a prayerful mode, and at an *adagio* tempo:

Come, Hope, let the last star
 Not forsake the weary!
 Brighten my goal,
 Be it ever so far,
 Love will arrive at it. [SEE Figure 3]

In a third section of the aria, she strengthens her resolve, and sings, *allegro*, of a duty born of love:

I follow an inner drive.
 I will not waver,
 Strengthened by the duty [*Pflicht*]
 Of faithful married love [*Gattenliebe*]!

The original French play was entitled *Leonore, ou l'amour conjugal* (*Leonore, or Married Love*). Even great art is too often concerned with youthful "falling in love." *Fidelio* is unique in the way it treats the strength of married love. But, in Beethoven's mind, married love is not viewed in its "personal," everyday dimension. Leonore is not merely concerned with getting back her husband: she knows that Florestan's freedom is important for mankind. Both are married, not only to one another, but to their shared mission. When man and wife love each other for their world-historical identity, married love can soar to otherwise unobtainable heights, as Leonore does, rising up to a soprano third register B, on the final word "*Gattenliebe*" [SEE Figure 4]. Like Florestan, she sings with great strength through all three registers. When Beethoven wishes to make a point, he is always very bold.

Hypothesis (2) The concept of love is completely different for someone whose identity is that of a "little person." All the hypotheses, or sets of axiomatic assumptions, are changed. Gone is the sense of mission, or any responsibility to historical humanity: instead, the little person seeks to adapt to whatever evil is in power, in

FIGURE 3. "Come, Hope, let the last star"



order to get along with his or her personal life, and love becomes *eros*—the erotic fixation on possessing objects.

The opera's first arias are those of Marzelline and her father Rocco, the chief jailer. Both are "little people," and a comparison of their arias with those of Leonore and Florestan is most revealing.

Marzelline has become infatuated with the boy Fidelio (who is actually a grown woman, Leonore, in disguise), and has capriciously cast off her boyfriend, Jaquino. She is literally "falling" in love! She knows little of her own mind, and sees love as an escape from a hostile world. She sings of Fidelio:

O were I now united with you
 And might call you husband!
 What it would mean, a maiden can
 Only half admit.
 But when I do not have to blush
 At a warm and heartfelt kiss,
 When nothing on earth can disturb us—

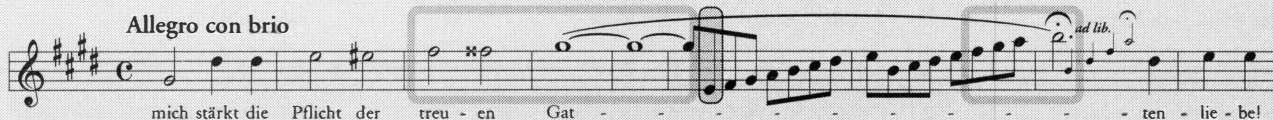
...
 In the peace of quiet domesticity [*Häuslichkeit*]
 I shall awake each morning,
 We shall greet one another tenderly,
 Toil will banish care. [SEE Figure 5]

Her father Rocco also expresses the notion of love as *eros*, or object possession—in his case, however, it is possession of money. In his "*buffo*" (humorous) aria, he sings

Now children, you love each other well and truly, do you not? But that is not all that goes to make a happy household

...
 If you don't have money [*das Gold*] too
 You cannot be really happy;

FIGURE 4. "I will not waver, strengthened by the duty of faithful married love"



Life drags sadly by,
 Many an anxiety sets in.
 But when it clinks and rolls in your pocket
 Fate is then your prisoner, and money
 Will bring you power and love
 And satisfy your wildest dreams.
 It's a lovely thing, is money,
 It's a precious thing, is money [*ein goldnes Ding, das Gold*]
 . . .
 It's a mighty thing, is money. [SEE Figure 6]

In contrast to this littleness, *agapē* is the emotion of creativity, of scientific discovery, and Beethoven awakens this emotion in his listeners through the music, which has the ability to fully realize the potential poetic content of the text. He is constantly making discoveries, and improving his compositional powers. His music instills in us a love of, and excitement about, our own and others' creative powers of mind. This helps solve a problem: Most citizens think of themselves as little people, and would more easily identify with a Rocco than a Florestan, but the music makes that impossible. The beauty of Florestan's, and Leonore's, music, is sublime, and makes us want to be like them. No one could conceivably prefer listening to, or singing, any of the other arias in the opera. Contrary to those who claim that as a composer, Beethoven did not write well for the voice, Beethoven, the scientist, would discover new capabilities for voices, strings, and keyboard, and then demand that the performers develop the appropriate technique! For the great composer, chorus, orchestra, and so forth, are his "machine shop," where new ideas can be tested. Leonore and Florestan take the dramatic soprano and heroic tenor to new heights. For the characters to function on a higher level of hypothesis, every aspect of the musical composition itself must be on such a higher level.

Both Rocco's and Marzelline's arias are strophic, or repeating, whereas Florestan's and Leonore's are thorough-composed, that is, constantly developing and changing. Strophic settings can be among the most beautiful, but here Beethoven means to contrast the fixed emotional quality of *eros*, with the growing passion of *agapē*. As we have seen, both Florestan's and Leonore's arias have three sections, each of which is governed by different, and advancing hypotheses. The emotional shift to a higher level and type of passion in each of the three sections, is in accordance with the advances in hypothesis, and makes such advances sensuous for the listener. Scientific discovery is the source of agapic passion, and the words in the arias are merely appropriate for what Beethoven accomplishes through musical discoveries.

Both Florestan's and Leonore's arias begin with a recitative in which they must conquer *eros*, in the form of

FIGURE 5. "In the peace of quiet domesticity"

Andante

In Ru - he stil - ler Häus - lich-keit
 er - wach' ich je - den Mor - gen,

FIGURE 6. "It's a precious thing, is money"

Allegro moderato

Das Glück dient wie ein Knecht für Sold,
 es ist ein schö-nes, schö-nes Ding, das Gold, das Gold,
 es ist ein schö-nes Ding, das Gold,

fear, rage, and despair; followed by a prayerful *Adagio*, in which they find great strength in *agapē*—a sacred love, and sense of duty; ending with an inspiring *Allegro*—an impulse towards action, which looks towards the freedom that shall be obtained.

Marzelline's aria is of an entirely different character than Leonore's. It is simpler, far easier to sing, and within a much smaller vocal range. It is also at a far lower level of musical hypothesis, not just in the vocal line, but the entire polyphony (multiple voices). However, both her and Rocco's arias are meant by Beethoven to appeal to us. It is only in times of crisis that the immorality of otherwise affable "little people" becomes clear (as in the French Revolution), and that we, the audience, become embarrassed at our previous sympathy with their outlook; and it is when we contrast these two arias, with those of the two heroes, that we see what is lacking in the former.

Marzelline's strophic aria is divided into A and B sections, which repeat A-B-A-B. Rocco's goes A-B-C-A-B-C. In both cases, the B section is a little faster, and captures a sort of manic elation at the contemplation of actually possessing the desired object. For Rocco, this occurs when he stops complaining about the lack of money, and dreams of what he might do if he had some. Compare Marzelline's A section [Figure 5], with her B section [SEE

FIGURE 7. “Beautiful Hope fill my breast”

Poco più allegro

Die Hoff - nung schon er - füllt die Brust
mit un - aus - sprech - lich sü - sser Lust;

Figure 7], where she reaches up to a soprano third register G, and sings of hope [*Hoffnung*] filling her breast, that she might have Fidelio as her husband. Then see how Leonore sings of hope [Figure 3].

Two Views of the Same Object

The audience should recognize that Rocco is not an evil man. Indeed, he has potential for good. He tells us that he hates all cruelty, and agrees to allow Fidelio to free the prisoners for a short walk in the garden; but, he is very fearful, and sees himself as a victim of the system—just a guy trying to avoid trouble. When forced to choose between good and evil, he hides behind a false notion of duty.

Whereas Florestan sings of a duty which is not dictated by any external authority, and for which he would give his life, Rocco, when asked by Pizarro to murder Florestan, protests

that is not my duty [*Pflicht*],

but quickly agrees that it *is* his duty to dig Florestan’s grave!

In the Finale of Act I, Rocco sings to Fidelio,

No, my good lad, do not tremble!
Rocco is not hired for murder, no no no no!
The governor himself will come down;
We two will only dig the grave.

When Florestan, who is starving, requests a drink of water, and asks to have his questions answered, Rocco replies:

What would you have me do? I carry out the orders that are given me; that is my office—my duty.

Beethoven develops this through a beautiful use of metaphor. One word—“duty” [*Pflicht*]—is seen from two completely different hypotheses. Both Rocco and Florestan think their definition is self-evident. There is a paradox here. To someone on Rocco’s level, Florestan’s

notion of duty is unfathomable. After all, who *told* Florestan that it was his duty to “tell the truth, boldly”? Isn’t duty something externally imposed? The paradox can only be resolved, if one discovers that a “world-historical” identity is the natural state of man, even if only a few ever rise to that level; and that the little person’s prejudices are false, *even if immensely popular*. Only Florestan and Leonore are right in their concept of duty, and only they know why they are right.

Beethoven has great fun with this. In this same Finale to Act I, Leonore and Rocco *seem* to be singing in parallel, about the same thing:

O let us delay no longer,
We follow our stern duty [*wir folgen unsrer strengen Pflicht*],

but Rocco is talking about digging Florestan’s grave, and Leonore/Fidelio, about freeing him!

Hypothesis (3) On the lowest level of hypothesis is Pizarro, a tyrant, who hates humanity. (Plato’s *Republic* identifies the tyrant as the lowest level of man, himself enslaved to the tyrant *eros*.) Pizarro’s aria follows those of Marzelline and Rocco, but comes before Leonore and Florestan. *Eros* no longer appears as a seemingly innocent flaw, but is now the very soul of evil. Pizarro is incapable of singing about duty, or love, and instead chooses vengeance [*Rache*], and the bliss [*Wonne*] he looks forward to from plunging a dagger into Florestan’s heart! The man is so enraged, that his aria really has no melody (it is never performed outside the opera), and keeps repeating a few notes:

Ha! what a moment!
My vengeance [*Rache*] shall be cooled!
You go to meet your fate!¹³ [SEE Figure 8]

Beethoven’s morality would not be satisfied merely to show the existence of these different levels of hypothe-

FIGURE 8. “My vengeance shall be cooled”

Allegro agitato

Ha! Ha! Ha! welch' ein Au-gen-blick!
Die Ra - che werd' ich küh - len!
dich, dich ru - fet dein Ge - schick!

ses—more important to him is the higher hypothesis, of how *change* from an inadequate hypothesis to a better one can take place. Here, we see that it is the activity of the world-historical individuals which alone uplifts and transforms the others around them. Positive change always comes from the highest levels of moral character, and never the lower.

In the great and joyous Finale, all the newly freed political prisoners, and townspeople, join in a chorus to sing

Hail the day, hail the hour,
 Long yearned for but unforeseen,
 Justice in league with mercy
 Appears at the threshold of our grave.

All are uplifted by the heroism of Leonore, and the strength of the married love of Florestan and Leonore; especially Rocco, who angrily denounces Pizarro to the governor, and pleads for justice for Florestan and Leonore. He is so moved, that he has lost his fear. When he angrily denounces Pizarro for attempted murder, the latter points to Rocco as an accomplice. Earlier, Rocco would have claimed that he was only following orders; now, he accepts responsibility for his actions:

ROCCO
 This very hour that villain would have
 Wreaked murder on Florestan.

PIZARRO
 Wreaked it, with him.

ROCCO
 We two in league
 (to Don Fernando)
 Only your arrival called him away.

Marzelline is also uplifted, through the beautiful quintet “O God! what a moment!” (“*O Gott, welch’ ein Augenblick!*”), sung at the moment Leonore unlocks her husband’s shackles:

You [God] test us, but don’t forsake us.

Here, Marzelline’s voice often rises above Leonore’s, and she follows Leonore in canon up to a third register B \flat for the first time in the opera. Under Leonore’s influence, Marzelline grows into full womanhood [SEE Figure 9].

Most important to Beethoven, the artist, is the change he knows he is creating in *us*, the audience of real live human beings (even though born centuries after his death), as we witness all these transformations! We leave the opera house better people than we arrived, as we begin to perceive that the story was only a vehicle for

FIGURE 9. “You test us, but don’t forsake us”

something more profound.

Or, as Lyndon LaRouche develops the idea in the case of tragedy,

In a valid performance, the mind of the audience is shifted from the literal drama as such, to the eerie sense of some principle of the mind which intervenes to change the character of the literal events on stage. The drama is thus shifted from the literal drama on stage, to the drama within the mind of the audience. . . .

In Schiller’s composition of the drama, the truth lies not in the selection of the literal events on stage; the truth lies in the artful juxtaposition of those conflicts of principle—those metaphors which account for the tragic, actual history of referenced, real-life events.⁴

Christ on the Mount of Olives

The oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* is unique in that, unlike earlier Passion music—such as that of Heinrich Schütz and J.S. Bach—it omits the trial and Crucifixion of Christ, and presents *only* the events around the garden of Gethsemane: and, also unlike the earlier works, it sets Christ in the primary singing role. Beethoven’s Christ is not a tragic figure, but a Promethean one—as is Florestan, who is man acting in the image of Christ.

This work is not often performed, and is usually considered inferior. One can scarcely encounter a dust jacket which doesn’t repeat how it was “a youthful work,” “written in two weeks,” and that “Beethoven later criticized the poet,” and so forth.

There is something suspiciously telling about this “mainstream” commentary, however. For example, press

reviews of its premiere in 1803 were almost unanimously critical of the work, and claimed that the performance was poorly received; but an unknown critic for the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, wrote that it was received with “extraordinary approval,” and added,

It confirms my long-held opinion that in time Beethoven can effect a revolution in music like Mozart’s. He is hastening towards this goal with great strides.⁵

A full three months later, another correspondent countered:

I am obliged to contradict a report in the *Musikalische Zeitung*: Beethoven’s cantata did not please.⁶

To this, Beethoven’s associate, and first biographer Anton Schindler, remarked:

Even the composer agreed with this to the following extent—that in later years he unhesitatingly declared that it had been a mistake to treat the part of Christ in the modern vocal style. The abandonment of the work after the first performance, as well as its tardy appearance in print (1811), permit us to conclude that the author was not particularly satisfied with the manner in which he had solved the problem.⁷

Schindler is notoriously unreliable, and Beethoven’s later biographer Alexander Thayer contradicts him, by identifying that after its premiere in 1803, the work was performed four times in 1804, and repeated every year, always drawing full houses, until it was *banned* in 1825 by the Hofmusikgraf.⁸

Beethoven himself wrote in 1804 that

[t]he oratorio has not been published because I have added a whole new chorus to it and have changed some things; for I wrote the whole oratorio in a few weeks, and several things since then have not entirely suited me.

It is important to note here that Beethoven was critical of himself in a way completely different from his scurrilous critics. He often was critical of earlier masterworks because he had gone so much further, just as *Fidelio* surpassed *Christus am Ölberg*.

At the heart of the matter, is Schindler’s remark about setting the person of Christ in the modern vocal style. That is an innovation essential to Beethoven’s purpose, and probably a large part of the controversy over this work. Bach’s Passions set Christ as a bass voice. He sings only in the recitatives, and has no arias.⁹ Beethoven sets Christ as a passionate tenor, in fact a Heldentenor (heroic tenor), and gives the first, and most important aria to Him. A Heldentenor is a baritone voice with a tenor register shift. He can sing with the power and depth of a

baritone in the lower registers, while carrying that power high up into the tenor third register. Although this is the first great Heldentenor role written—and Florestan the next—Beethoven developed this idea from the operas of Luigi Cherubini.¹⁰

Even Brahms’ friend Eduard Hanslick accepted the idea that it was a mistake to set Christ in this manner. In an 1862 review of Handel’s *Messiah*, he wrote:

. . . the person of Christ is not introduced as singing, a dangerous rock where even Beethoven was shipwrecked.¹¹

The Sublime Heroism of Gethsemane

Christ’s experience in the garden of Gethsemane, where he accepts his coming Crucifixion and death, is one of the most important moments in Christianity, but it is also among the least understood. How many Christians see the acceptance of their own, personal “cup of Gethsemane” as a central point of their religion? Do they not prefer, rather, to focus upon a covenant with God, whereby they might obtain entrance into a future heaven, and ignore their responsibility to carry out God’s work here on earth? In times of great crisis, such as war, this quality of Gethsemane may arise in the majority of the people; but in other times, such as ours, it is sadly lacking.

The account of Gethsemane in all four Gospels is very short. Christ’s decision to accept the cup is very quick. He prays three times:

O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. (Matthew 26:39)

Notice that the transition from asking to have the cup removed, to accepting God’s will over His own, is instantaneous. While it is always better to follow God’s will, and to choose one’s mission in life over personal well-being, it cannot be done as mere Kantian duty, or as passive resignation to a fate outside one’s own control. Schiller believed that beauty is nothing but an inclination toward duty. He would demand that even the sacrificing of one’s life must be done freely, *of one’s own will!* It must be *actively* willed, out of love of humanity, so that we could face death with joy, knowing that future generations will look back at us with love: knowing that we had lost our life, in order to gain it.¹²

But, in order for us to love the sublime heroism of Christ, his suffering must be real. The Biblical account of Christ’s suffering is powerful, but again, very short:

And his sweat were as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke 22:44)

My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.

(Mark 14:34, Matthew 26:38)

Christ's suffering was denied by the Gnostics, who rejected the dual nature of Christ as both man and God. In fact, some commentators believe that the Apostle John wrote his Gospel in refutation of a Gnostic named Cerinthus, who maintained that Christ's soul was made by God, but his body by the Demiurge; and that therefore, the true Christ, being pure spirit, died without suffering, and his soul returned to the Plethora of multiple deities.¹³

To this, John replied that

The word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

and

All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. (John 1:3)

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. (John 1:14)

All the Christian heresies stumbled over precisely this point, denying the consubstantiality of a Christ who was both fully God and fully man. Ironically, today's Christian fundamentalists, who can barely speak a sentence without praising "Jesus," seem not to identify at all with him as a heroic human being, but as something inimitable, completely separated from themselves, as a "supernatural" presence waiting to bail them out from whatever jam they get into. Beethoven and Schiller, on the other hand, would see Christ as a *passionate* figure, whose suffering must be adequately represented, in a way that would make both fundamentalists and the oligarchy very uncomfortable.

Schiller begins the first of his two essays on the sublime, "On the Pathetic," thus:

Representation of suffering—as mere suffering—is never the end of art, but, as means to its end, it is extremely important to the same. The ultimate aim of art is the representation of the supersensuous, and the tragic art in particular effects this thereby, that it makes sensuous our moral independence of the laws of nature in a state of emotion. Only the resistance, which it expresses to the power of the emotions, makes the free principle in us recognizable; the resistance, however, can be estimated only according to the strength of the attack. Therefore, shall the *intelligence* in man reveal itself as a force independent of nature, so must nature have first demonstrated its entire might before our eyes. The *sensuous being* must profoundly and violently *suffer*; there must be pathos, therewith the being of reason may be able to give notice of his independence and be actively *represented*.

One can never know, whether *self-composure* is an effect

of one's moral force, if one has not become convinced, that it is not the effect of insensitivity. It is not art, to become master of feelings, which only lightly and fleetingly sweep the surface of the soul; but to retain one's mental freedom in a storm, which arouses all of sensuous nature, thereto belongs a capacity of resisting that is, above all natural power, infinitely sublime. Therefore, one attains to moral freedom only through the most lively representation of suffering nature, and the tragic hero must have first legitimized himself to us as a feeling being, before we pay homage to him as a being of reason, and believe in the strength of his soul.

Pathos is therefore the first and unrelenting demand upon the tragic artist, and it is permitted him, to carry the representation of suffering so far as it can be done, *without disadvantage to his ultimate end*, without oppression of moral freedom. He must, so to speak, give his hero or his reader the full load of suffering, because it remains always otherwise problematic, whether his resistance to the same is an act of the soul, something *positive*, and not rather merely something *negative* and a lack.¹⁴

Beethoven succeeds beautifully in fulfilling Schiller's requirements. The oratorio begins with an orchestral introduction, followed by a recitative and aria by Christ. The introduction (marked *Grave*), recitative, and aria, cannot but remind us of the opening of the second act of *Fidelio*, which also begins with a *Grave* introduction, followed by the recitative and aria of Florestan, who is facing his own personal Gethsemane. (Compare the openings of both recitatives, as shown in Box I.)

The introduction, recitative, and aria in the oratorio are quite long, and expand on the Biblical texts:

Recitative

O God my father! send me comfort, power, and strength. The hour of my suffering approaches, which I chose long before the world was called from chaos at thy behest. . . . I would be the saviour and sole atoner for human guilt. How could this race, fashioned from dust, stand a sentence which crushes even me, thy Son, to the ground? See how dread and fear of death take their grip on me . . .

Aria

My soul is afflicted with torments which threaten me; terror seizes me, and my whole frame trembles. I shudder convulsively with fear of imminent death, not sweat but blood drips from my brow.

Father, your Son implores you, deeply bowed and wretched. All things are possible to your omnipotence; take this cup of sorrow from me!

Beethoven has set out not to alter the New Testament, but to fulfill it.

The first time Christ sings "Take this cup of sorrow

BOX 1. Compare the recitative entrance of (a) Christ in “Christ on the Mount of Olives,” with that of (b) Florestan in “Fidelio.” In both cases, the orchestra reduces to a descending arpeggio that ends very quietly, so that the tenor may enter, unaccompanied, addressing God. Both use the G of the tenor third (high) register. Conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler’s recorded performances of “Fidelio” show that this note must not be shouted: Florestan and Christ are addressing God out of reverence, not anger.

(a) Recitative entrance of Christ in *Christ on the Mount of Olives*

The score for (a) shows the recitative entrance of Christ. It features five staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Jesus (Tenor), and Cello & Bass. The tempo is marked 'Grave'. The orchestral parts (Violins, Viola, and Cello/Bass) play a descending arpeggio in 6/8 time, marked 'decresc. pp' and ending with a 'ppp' dynamic. The Jesus part is in recitative, starting with a whole note G in the tenor register, which is circled in red. The lyrics are 'Je - ho - vah, du mein Va - ter!'.

(b) Recitative entrance of Florestan in *Fidelio*

The score for (b) shows the recitative entrance of Florestan. It features five staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Florestan (Tenor), and Cello & Bass. The tempo is marked 'Grave'. The orchestral parts play a descending arpeggio in 3/4 time, marked 'f' and 'dim.', ending with a 'p' dynamic. The Florestan part is in recitative, starting with a whole note G in the tenor register, which is circled in red. The lyrics are 'Gott! ... welch' Dun - kel hier!'.

from me” [*nimm den Leidenskelch von mir*], he seems hopeful: by the last time, it has become so moving, that we find ourselves in the paradoxical situation of wishing that the bitter cup could be removed from Him, even though we know that the survival of Civilization, and thus our own existence, depends on His having accepted it.

Later, the Seraph informs Christ that mankind can

only find atonement with God, and eternal life, through His sacrifice. They join in a beautiful duet:

Great the torment, fear and terror
Which the hand of God pours upon me/Him;
Yet greater still is my/His love
With which my/His heart embraces the world.

This is the moment of decision—the turning point. In

FIGURE 10. "... my love"

Adagio molto

Seraph
doch grö- sser, grö- sser noch ist sei- ne Lie- be,

Jesus
doch grö- sser, grö- sser doch ist mei- ne Lie- be, ist mei- ne Lie- be,

Box I, we compared the opening recitatives of Jesus and Florestan. Now, let us compare this duet [SEE Figure 10] with the first part of Florestan's aria shown in Figure 1, which opens as a prayer on the words "*In des Lebens Frühlingstagen.*" Both pieces are in the same key, $A\flat$ Major. Earlier, we saw the repetition of the words "*meine Pflicht*" [my duty] first on $E\flat$ - $D\flat$, then in the tenor third register $G\flat$ - F .

Here, Christ rises to exactly the same tones, $G\flat$ - F on the words "*meine Liebe*" [my love], while the Seraph sings the same words slightly later on $E\flat$ - $D\flat$ [Figure 10]. Again, we see the idea of agapic love, and the sense of duty born from it, as a unity in Beethoven's mind.

But before Jesus can leave the world, this love must be put into action, as law. Section Six opens with Judas and the soldiers coming to arrest Christ. The disciple Peter flies into a rage, and sings

In my veins gather
Righteous anger and rage,
Let my vengeance be cooled
In the blood of these audacious ones.

Peter is not an evil man like Pizarro, but a good man overcome by rage; his aria lacks beautiful melodic development, although it has more of a melodic line than Pizarro's [SEE Figure 11]. Both men sing of "cooling their

FIGURE 11. "In my veins gather righteous anger and rage"

Allegro ma non troppo

Peter

In mei-nen A- dern wüh-len ge- rechter Zorn und Wuth,

vengeance in blood." Then, Jesus intervenes, singing

You must not seek revenge
I have taught you one simple thing,
To love all mankind
And forgive your enemies.

A trio begins, with Jesus and the Seraph singing

O children of man,
Grasp this holy law:
Love him who hates you,
Only thus can you please God.

Peter, however, still hanging on to his rage, continues to sing about cooling his vengeance, as an ironic counterpoint to the other two voices [SEE Figure 12].

Later, after another, more powerful intervention by

FIGURE 12. "O children of man, grasp this holy law"

Allegro ma non troppo

Seraph
O Men- schen- kin- der fas- set dies hei- li- ge ge- bot:

Jesus
O Men- schen- kin- der fas- set dies hei- li- ge ge- bot:

Peter
In mei-nen A- dern wüh- len,

FIGURE 13. "O children of man, grasp this holy law"

Allegro ma no troppo

Seraph
O Men - schen - kin - der fas - set dies hei - li - ge ge - bot:

Jesus
O Men - schen - kin - der fas - set dies hei - li - ge ge - bot:

Peter
O Men - schen - kin - der fas - set dies hei - li - ge ge - bot:

Christ (there are three in all), Peter is finally recruited, and *all three* sing

O children of man,
Grasp this holy law:
Love him who hates you,
Only thus can you please God. [SEE Figure 13]

Only now can Jesus die happy. His success in changing Peter, and thus guaranteeing a line of succession, confirms that he has outflanked the enemy by unleashing a weapon that they cannot and will not understand: the idea of loving your enemy—not joining him at his level, but recruiting him to yours—because, in actuality, there is no stupid mass of humanity foredoomed to brutishness and ignorance: there are only confused, individual human beings, who are all made in the image and likeness of God, and thus can be changed for the better. This willingness to forgive one’s real and supposed enemies, is necessary to realize the essential political message of Christianity: that all men and women are created equal, and equally perfectible, by God.

This brings us to the greatest part of the oratorio—the Finale. Let Schiller speak again, from his “On the Sublime”:

“No man must must” . . . The will is the species character of man, and reason itself is only the eternal rule of the same. . . . All other things must; man is the being, who wills.

Precisely for this reason is nothing so unworthy of man, as to suffer violence, for violence annuls him. . . .

For everything, the proverb says, there is a remedy, but not for death. But this single exception, if it actually is one in the strictest sense, would annul the whole notion of Man. By no means can he be the being which wills, if there is but even a single case, where he absolutely must, what he does not will. This single terrible one, *which he merely must and does not will*, will accompany him as a ghost and, as is actually the case among the majority of men, deliver him as a prey to the blind terrors of the phantasy; his boasted freedom is absolutely nothing, if he is bound even in a single point. . . .

The morally educated man, and only this one, is entirely free. . . . Nothing which [nature] exerts upon him is violence, for before it comes up to him, it has already become *his own act*, . . .¹⁵

After the trio, Beethoven creates the greatest paradox of all. From the standpoint of the hypothesis of a “little person” such as Rocco, or the

disciples who forsake Jesus and flee, the idea of walking to one’s death with joy, is utterly incomprehensible: After all, what would be left, after the pleasures of the senses have come to an end? Yet, Schiller is saying, if man is to be truly free, even his death must be at the service of his will. This brings us to the sublime—something beyond even the state of beauty where inclination and duty meet. Again, let Schiller speak:

A man . . . shall possess all of the virtues, whose union make up the *beautiful character*. . . . This same man shall, however fall into a great misfortune. . . . [D]eath shall tear him from everything which he loves, everyone he trusts shall forsake him in his distress. In this condition, let one demand of the unhappy one the practice of the same virtues If one finds him in this event still entirely the same; if poverty has not reduced his beneficence; . . . ; his own misfortune his sympathy with another’s happiness; . . . —then one indeed no longer makes due with an explanation from the *concept of nature*. . . . This discovery of the absolute moral capacity, which is bound to no natural condition, gives to the melancholy feeling, . . . inexpressible charm, in respect to which no pleasure of the senses, however ennobled it may be, can contest with the sublime.¹⁶

The feeling of the sublime is a mixed feeling. It is a combination of *woefulness*, which expresses itself in its highest degree as a shudder, and of *joyfulness*, which can rise up to enrapture, and, although it is not properly pleasure, is yet widely preferred to every pleasure by fine souls. This union of two contradictory sentiments in a single feeling proves our moral independence [A]s it is impossible that the same object stand in two opposite relations to us . . . we *ourselves* stand in two different relations to the object, so that consequently two opposite natures must be united in us We therefore experience through the feeling of the sublime, that the state of our mind does not necessarily conform to the state of our senses . . . , that we have in us an independent principle, which is independent of all sensuous emotions.¹⁷

FIGURE 14. "Soon the might of Hell will be totally overcome and conquered"

Jesus *Molto allegro*
 Bald, bald ist gänzlich überwunden und besiegt, und besiegt der Hölle Macht,

Soldiers *f*
 Fort, fort, fort jetzt mit dem Missethäter, schleppt ihn schleunig vor Gericht, vor Gericht!

Jesus
 der Hölle Macht.

Disciples *p*
 Man wird uns in Bande legen, martern und dem Tode weihn.

Soldiers
 Man wird uns in Bande legen, martern und dem Tode weihn.

Aufgegriffen den Verräther,

A chorus of soldiers comes to arrest Christ. Suddenly, while the soldiers are singing

Up, up, seize the traitor:
 Tarry here no longer.
 Away with the miscreant:
 Hurry him to justice,

and the chorus of disciples sings

On his account we shall also
 Be hated and persecuted.
 We shall be bound, martyred, and condemned to die.

Christ breaks into a triumphant and joyous song that soars up into the third register, the same range as the third part of Florestan's aria shown in Figure 2:

My agony will soon be over,¹⁸
 The task of redemption accomplished;
 Soon the might of Hell will be
 Totally overcome and conquered. [SEE Figure 14]

Here, Beethoven has done something completely new and different. In the Passions of J.S. Bach, the passage where Christ is arrested and led away is always very sorrowful. In Beethoven's, it is victorious. Prometheus has given the gift of fire to man. The half-steps where Jesus sings of defeating Hell's might, are a transformation of the most sorrowful repetition of "Take this cup of sorrow from me," from Christ's first aria [SEE Box II]. What seemed a personal defeat, has been turned into a victory for all mankind.

Jesus' singing completely transcends the rage of the soldiers, and the fear of the disciples, whose choruses continue throughout [Figure 14]. Again, as in the later *Fidelio*, all three are operating according to different levels of hypothesis, which are combined ironically in musical polyphony. The soldiers are filled with rage, and denounce Jesus as a traitor. The disciples, like the friends of Prometheus, can only think of the consequences in the immediate here and now. Jesus is thinking about the future of humanity; He knows that His suffering will be short, and is able to locate His identity, and thus His emotions, fully in His mission. Only this supreme sacrifice, made out of love of humanity, will outflank and defeat the enemy. Killing Christ was the biggest mistake the Romans could have made: they thus assured the spread of Christianity throughout the Empire.

Some might say that the reason Christ faces death without fear, is because He has foreknowledge of His coming Resurrection; but, that would turn the Passion into a facile game. The Son of Man has feared, and overcome fear, by replacing concern about His personal well-being, with true joy in knowing how the gift He has given mankind, will shape everything to come after Him.

His aria leads directly into, and is itself transcended, by a chorus of angels, who sing

Worlds sing thanks and honor
 To the sublime [*erhab'nen*] Son of God.

This chorus is introduced by a *maestoso* (majestic) orchestral introduction. This slow and stately march,

BOX II. Excerpt (a), on the words "Hölle Macht," where Christ sings of defeating Hell's might, is a transformation of excerpt (b) from Christ's opening aria, where He sings "nimm den Leidenskelch von mir" [take this cup of sorrow from me]. What was heart-wrenching then, becomes triumphant now. This is not Wagnerian symbolism—there is no "cup" leitmotif! It is accomplished by simple musical means. For one thing, they are in different keys, the first in C minor, the last in Eb Major, so that the half-steps E-Eb-F-F#-G have a different meaning in each key. The Bb's in excerpt (b) are in the same high part of the third register as that in which Florestan sings of the "Heavenly Kingdom" [Figure 2]. The tempo is much faster in the second excerpt, and the irony is in the polyphony [Figure 14]. Beethoven, as usual, would have worked backwards, from the effect he wished to achieve at the end, to create a lesser version of it in the opening.

(a) "Hell's might"

Molto allegro

Jesus

der Höl-le Macht, der Höl-le Macht.

Detailed description: This musical score is for a vocal line in C minor, marked 'Molto allegro'. It features a treble clef and a common time signature. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a prominent half-step sequence (E-Eb-F-F#-G) highlighted by a box. The lyrics 'der Höl-le Macht, der Höl-le Macht.' are written below the notes.

(b) "Take this cup of sorrow from me"

Allegro

Jesus

nimm den Lei - - - dens - kelch von mir,

Detailed description: This musical score is for a vocal line in Eb Major, marked 'Allegro'. It features a treble clef and a common time signature. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a prominent half-step sequence (E-Eb-F-F#-G) highlighted by a box. The lyrics 'nimm den Lei - - - dens - kelch von mir,' are written below the notes.

very powerfully turns this moment into a moment in the simultaneity of eternity. Christ's decision has instantly transformed past, present, and future; in that sense, he is the Alpha, and the Omega: suddenly, entire worlds are singing his praises. One can almost envision brigades of saints, and angels, in a solemn procession.

A great fugue begins on

Praise Him, you angel choruses
Aloud in holy tones of exultation!

This fugue develops with the kind of exhilarating and accelerating joy that we hear later, in a more developed way, in the Finale of *Fidelio*, and the choral movement of the Ninth Symphony. One is exalted by the effect on

humanity's future, which a single life brought into atonement with God can have.

In the Ninth of his *Aesthetical Letters*, Schiller talks of how the poet must be in his time, but not of it. He must be nurtured

under distant Grecian skies, to full age. If he is then become a man, he thus returns, a strange form, to his century; but not, in order to please it with his appearance, but rather, frightful as Agamemnon's son, in order to purify it.¹⁹

Beethoven the composer, is a great poet of the sort desired by Schiller; and perhaps, he deserves also to be admitted into the company of humanity's handful of truly great dramatists.

NOTES

1. Donald Phau, "Fidelio: Beethoven's Celebration of the American Revolution," *The Campaigner*, August 1978 (Vol. 11, No. 6).*
2. Beethoven originally dedicated the Third ("Eroica") Symphony to Napoleon Bonaparte. When Napoleon crowned himself Emperor, Beethoven angrily scratched out the inscription, and dedicated it to "the memory of a great man."
3. More industrious readers may wish to compare this aria to that of the Queen of the Night, in Mozart's *Magic Flute*, who sings of Hell's vengeance, in the same key of D minor. Also, compare Pizarro's obsessive notion of a moment ["Ha, welch' ein Augenblick!"] with the idea of a moment in the simultaneity of eternity, in the beautiful quintet, in number sixteen, the Finale, "O Gott! welch' ein Augenblick!" Here, the same words signify very different things, in the two different contexts (hypotheses).
4. Lyndon H. LaRouche, "The Substance of Morality," *Executive Intelligence Review*, June 26, 1998 (Vol. 25, No. 26), p. 30.
5. *Thayer's Life of Beethoven*, rev. and ed. by Elliot Forbes (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), Vol. 1, p. 330.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 330.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, p. 331.
9. This is not to belittle in any way Bach's enormous achievement. The older master would surely smile on the advances of the younger.
10. John Sigerson (unpublished communication).
11. *Hanslick's Music Criticism*, ed. by Henry Pleasants (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), p. 87.
12. Cf. Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., presentation to the Second International Food for Peace Conference, Chicago, Ill., Dec. 10, 1988, *The New Federalist*, Dec. 23, 1988 (Vol. II, No. 65).
13. Bishop Irenaeus, *Five Books Against the Heresies*, in *The Writings of Irenaeus* (Edinburgh: T. & J. Clark, 1874), Vols. I and II.
14. Friedrich Schiller, "On the Pathetic," in *Friedrich Schiller, Poet of Freedom, Vol. III*, ed. by William F. Wertz, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Schiller Institute, 1990), pp. 227-228.*
15. Friedrich Schiller, "On the Sublime," in *op. cit.*, pp. 255-257.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 261-262.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
18. "My agony will soon be over." Years later, Beethoven set the final words from Schiller's *The Virgin of Orleans* as a canon: "Kurz ist der Schmerz, ewig ist die Freude."
[Brief is the pain, eternal is the joy.]
19. Friedrich Schiller, "Letters on the Aesthetical Education of Man," in *Friedrich Schiller, Poet of Freedom, Vol. I*, ed. by William F. Wertz, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Schiller Institute, 1985), p. 241.*

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