

HEILIGENSTADT

FOR MY BROTHERS KARL AND BEETHOVEN

Oh you men who think or say that I am malevolent, stubborn, or misanthropic, how greatly do you wrong me. You do not know the secret cause which makes me seem that way to you. From childhood on, my heart and soul have been full of the tender feeling of goodwill, and I was ever inclined to accomplish great things. But, think that for six years now I have been hopelessly afflicted, made worse by senseless physicians, from year to year deceived with hopes of improvement, finally compelled to face the prospect of *a lasting malady* (whose cure will take years or, perhaps, be impossible). Though born with a fiery, active temperament, even susceptible to the diversions of society, I was soon compelled to withdraw myself, to live life alone. If at times I tried to forget all this, oh how harshly was I flung back by the doubly sad experience of my bad hearing. Yet it was impossible for me to say to people, 'Speak louder, shout, for I am deaf'. Ah, how could I possibly admit an infirmity in the *one sense* which ought to be more perfect in me than in others, a sense which I once possessed in the highest perfection, a perfection such as few in my profession enjoy or ever have enjoyed. - Oh I cannot do it; therefore forgive me when you see me draw back when I would have gladly mingled with you. My misfortune is doubly painful to me because I am bound to be misunderstood; for me there can be no relaxation with my fellow men, no refined conversations, no mutual exchange of ideas. I must live alone, like one who has been banished; I can mix with society only as much as true necessity demands. If I approach near to people, a hot terror seizes upon me, and I fear being exposed to the danger that my condition might be noticed. Thus it has been during the last six months which I have spent in the country. By ordering me to spare my hearing as much as possible, my intelligent doctor almost fell in with my own present frame of mind, though sometimes I ran counter to it by yielding to my desire for companionship. But what a humiliation for me when someone standing next to me heard a flute in the distance and *I heard nothing*, or someone heard a *shepherd singing* and again I heard nothing. Such incidents drove me almost to despair; a little more of that and I would have ended my life - it was only *my art* that held me back. Ah, it seemed to me impossible to leave the world until I had brought forth all that I felt was within me. So I endured this wretched existence - truly wretched for so susceptible a body, which can be thrown by a sudden change from the best condition to the very worst. - *Patience*, they say, is what I now choose for my guide, and I have done so - I hope my determination will remain firm to endure until it pleases the inexorable Fates to break the thread. Perhaps I shall get better, perhaps not; I am ready. - Forced to become a philosopher already in my twenty-eighth year, - oh it is not easy, and for the artist much more difficult than for anyone else. - Divine One, thou seest my innermost soul; thou knowest that therein dwells the love of mankind and the desire to do good. - Oh fellow men, when at some point you read this, consider then that you have done me an injustice; someone who has had misfortune may console himself to find a similar case to his, who despite all the limitations of

Nature nevertheless did everything within his powers to become accepted among worthy artists and men. - You, my brothers Karl and _____, as soon as I am dead, if Dr. Schmidt is still alive, ask him in my name to describe my malady, and attach this written document to his account of my illness so that so far as is possible at least the world may become reconciled to me after my death. - At the same time, I declare you two to be the heirs to my small fortune (if so it can be called); divide it fairly; bear with and help each other. What injury you have done me you know was long ago forgiven. To you, brother Karl, I give special thanks for the attachment you have shown me of late. It is my wish that you may have a better and freer life than I have had. Recommend *virtue* to your children; it alone, not money, can make them happy. I speak from experience; this was what upheld me in time of misery. Thanks to it and to my art, I did not end my life by suicide. - Farewell and love each other. - I thank all my friends, particularly *Prince Lichnowsky* and *Professor Schmidt* - I would like the instruments from Prince L. to be preserved by one of you, but not to be the cause of strife between you, and as soon as they can serve you a better purpose, then sell them. How happy I shall be if I can still be helpful to you in my grave - so be it; - With joy I hasten to meet death. - If it comes before I have had the chance to develop all my artistic capacities, it will still be coming too soon despite my harsh fate, and I should probably wish it later - yet even so I should be happy, for would it not free me from a state of endless suffering? - Come when thou wilt, I shall meet thee bravely. - Farewell and do not wholly forget me when I am still dead; I deserve this from you, for during my lifetime I was thinking of you often and of ways to make you happy - please be so -

Heilgnstadt
6 October
1802

Ludwig van Beethoven

(Located here in
the original is
a big ink stain)

As you can see, Beethoven wrote the above in 1802. When he wrote it, he was thirty two. It's called the Heiligenstadt Testament, predictably enough, because he wrote it in a place called Heiligenstadt. Heiligenstadt was a village about an hour and a half's coach journey outside the walls of Imperial Vienna. Where is it now? Well, what do you know, they've left it off the map (*1993 Collins Road Atlas Europe*). I presume it's the place they now call Heiligenkreuz and all you can say about that is that it's a suburb outside Vienna on the A21. So let's return to calling it Heiligenstadt.

What does the Heiligenstadt Testament mean? It's a letter written by a composer about going deaf. Right? *Right*. What else? He's very upset about it. Right?

Right. So, it's all pretty straight forward. If you think the Heiligenstadt Testament is straight forward, then go straight forward to the next chapter. Otherwise, read on...

1. Don't forget the ink stain. The ink stain is like the world's biggest full stop. This is a letter with a distinct air of finality about it.

2. Look at the original of the Heiligenstadt Testament. The handwriting is measured and even. Beethoven is calm and considered. He has thought about what he is saying before he has sat down to write it. He's not in the grip of inspiration, his heart isn't pounding. There's no crisis in the writing itself, but the writing relates a crisis. Beethoven knows the score.

3. *What is the score?*

3a. Resignation to a painful future. The letter is almost a suicide note, but it isn't. It's an affirmation of life's purpose despite adversity. Nevertheless, death stalks Beethoven throughout. The man writing this is profoundly aware of his own mortality.

3b. "With joy I hasten to meet death". Why does Beethoven seem to think death so imminent? I think this is an *imagination of death* that made him *live* thereafter to the full. This *imagination of death* transformed him. There is an *imaginative* difference between the 2nd and 3rd symphonies for example, and the Heiligenstadt Testament was written between them. The difference is huge. The loss of a faculty (and especially one as crucial to Beethoven as his hearing) made Beethoven crucially aware parts of himself were starting to fail. It is this awareness that makes Beethoven strive towards musical *immortality* thereafter.

3c. Beethoven says at the start of the letter that he has been aware of going deaf for six years. Then he starts to romanticise his own condition. "I was soon compelled to withdraw myself...". He makes it sound as if he's been going deaf virtually all his life, almost since childhood. He has been compelled "to live life alone". This romanticisation of Beethoven's condition is not simple exaggeration. By imagining that he has been deaf for longer than he has been deaf, Beethoven is also imagining how he will be deaf for longer than he has already been deaf in the future. Beethoven extends his deafness towards childhood because he sees an increasingly silent future stretching out before him. At some point, I think, he *imagines his own death as a composer* because of this (this is another reason he is so preoccupied by physical death, which is acting, partially at least, as a metaphor). "A little more of that and I would have ended my life - it was only *my art* that held me back".

3d. *There's something else here.* It is not physical death that frightens Beethoven. It is the *living death* of not being able to compose. And then, a triumph! "Ah, it seemed to me impossible to leave the world until I had brought forth all that I felt was within me". His art, here, is not a hinderance, *it is also the reason he survives!* It is pushing him forward. He must, *somehow*, go on. *He must continue!*

4. *Did Beethoven have a problem about his age?* In the Heiligenstadt Testament, he says he's twenty seven. We know he was thirty two. Is there guile in this, or was Beethoven simply confused? Or with sleight of pen was he awarding himself a greater precocity than he merited? Or did Beethoven actually write the Heiligenstadt Testament in 1797 and for some reason date it 1802? *I don't know.* But I think we've already established that anything to do with Beethoven, days and dates can quickly turn into endless confusion. *Let's not pursue this one any further.*

5. Why does Beethoven miss his brother Johann's name out of the initial title to the letter, and later on in the letter too? *I don't know*, and I've never read a convincing explanation. There's nothing to suggest that in October 1802 Beethoven and Johann were having a row, for example. Most scholars simply ignore this one, and treat the letter as if Johann's name was there anyway. *I'm going to do the same*.

6. "Great men", wrote Marguerite Yourcenar of the Roman Emperor Hadrian, "are characterised precisely by the extreme position which they take, and their heroism consists in holding to that extremity throughout their lives". All I can say is the mind that wrote that is warped. If you follow the logic of this statement through, you come to the conclusion that the more extreme you are, the greater you are. Which can't be right. *So let's look at it another way*. Extreme positions do not have to be *taken up*. They can be *forced on us*, in which case our greatness, or more correctly I think, our triumph, corresponds to the way in which we respond to living subject to whatever adversity we have no choice but to learn to deal with. With Beethoven, this adversity, this extremity, was deafness. He didn't choose it, it was forced on him. *He had to live with this throughout his life*, or at least, live with the full realisation of it throughout his life subsequent of the Heiligenstadt Testament. His extreme position was to continue. Not to continue living, but to *continue living as a deaf composer*. Never forget that. It is an act of the uttermost courage. And there is more than one way in which Beethoven had no choice. He had no choice about going deaf, but he also had no choice about being a deaf composer. If you're musical, and you're going deaf, you would have thought you'd start to consider some pretty serious career changes. Well, Beethoven did. And he came to the conclusion that the affliction of deafness meant

that other musical options he might have had, such as being a travelling piano virtuoso for instance (a concert pianist in today's language) , or a Kappelmeister (nearest modern equivalent a conductor), were denied to him. And music was the only thing Beethoven knew. The family was musical, and he'd been trained in music since he was knee high to a harpsichord. So when Beethoven searched around for a career change, *being a deaf composer was the best (or least bad) option he possessed*. From which we arrive at a paradox. It is not so much that deafness constricted Beethoven's capacity to compose. *It is the very fact of deafness that turned Beethoven into a truly dedicated composer in the first place.*

6a. *Let's follow this through further.* In 1802, Beethoven had yet to write virtually any of the music for which he is now best known. The 3rd Symphony was a year away, and obviously, numbers Four to Nine lay in the future. He had yet to write his opera *Fidelio*. He had yet to write the Violin Concerto. He had yet to write three of the five piano concertos. True, he had written the *Moonlight* piano sonata, but he had yet to write the *Waldstein*, the *Appassionata*, or *Das Lebewohl*, or the *Hammerklavier*. Admittedly, in total, of the thirty two piano sonatas, by 1802 he had in fact already written twenty, but I'm not really contradicting myself here. *He hadn't written most of the ones for which he is now best known.* And besides, it stands to reason that the young Beethoven was likely to write a lot of piano sonatas before he tried writing concertos, symphonies, or operas. Beethoven was a pianist, after all! In general, the point holds good. In 1802, Beethoven had written only six of the sixteen string quartets, and none of the last five, which are generally considered the most significant. He was still a year away from writing the *Kreutzer* sonata, and he hadn't written the *Archduke* piano trio, and he hadn't written the *Missa Solemnis* either.

6b. If you're getting worried about references to lots of pieces of music you haven't heard, don't. It's the intention of this novel to confine all you really need to know about Beethoven to the *Moonlight* Piano Sonata, the 3rd Symphony, and the 9th Symphony, all references to which should appear self-explanatory as need arises.

6c. If at any point you don't find 6b. to be true, then write to me via my publisher (but don't expect your money back).

6d. You don't need even to have heard the three pieces of music listed in 6b. to follow all this. But, come on! Show some curiosity. Go out and buy copies! Or, if you're hard up, go and tape them from your local library.

7. If you listen to any decent piece of Beethoven written after 1802 with both your ears working well, I hope you'll notice the following. There will at some point be a prolonged rising crescendo which seems to say *things are going to get better, they really are*. This crescendo will then be followed by a development of a sequence of falling chords in direct contradiction to the spirit of *things are going to get better, they really are*. The sequence of falling chords will categorically state *things can only get worse*. The first movement of the 3rd Symphony is a classic in this regard. Another paradox, and one again related to living the life of a deaf composer. Beethoven passionately believed that the condition of humankind could improve. And yet his own condition, his own deafness, only ever got worse.

8. *Who was Professor Schmidt?* Dr. Johann Schmidt was Beethoven's doctor, and Professor of Medicine at Vienna University. Dr. Schmidt, the "intelligent doctor", was the reason Beethoven was in Heiligenstadt in the first place, and the only physician Beethoven ever fully trusted. The choice of Dr. Schmidt is indicative of how little

Beethoven trusted established experts on deafness because ears were not what Dr. Schmidt was about. Dr. Schmidt was an eye specialist. Dr. Schmidt advised Beethoven to try and save his hearing by going on *quiet* restoratives to the countryside as a means of escaping the *noise* of Vienna. *Noise*, Dr. Schmidt theorised, was likely to make Beethoven's deafness worse.

8a. Whether Dr. Schmidt's theory was true or not, by advising Beethoven to spend as much time in Heiligenstadt as possible, he was doing Beethoven a favour. The countryside around Heiligenstadt is the countryside which inspired the Sixth, *Pastoral*, Symphony.

8b. *Loud, banging noises* were the worst. Another paradox. As Beethoven's deafness increased, so *loud, banging noises* became the only ones he could reliably hear. Beethoven died when he was fifty seven. But even relatively early, when he was thirty six, this was already a problem. *How do we know?* Because the Violin Concerto, written in 1806, starts with four drum beats. No one had ever started a concerto or symphony with drum beats before. As Beethoven sat in the concert hall, the four drum beats helped him know when the Violin Concerto was beginning. We can extend this principle throughout a listening of Beethoven. The same paradox in a slightly different form comes back at us time and time again. *When Beethoven is most conscious of his deafness, his music is at its loudest.* He seems to first become conscious of this paradox himself in 1802. The incidental but delightful seven variations on the theme of *God Save The King* (WoO.78) date from this year. The last piano chord of these is quite *deafeningly* loud.

8c. *Did Beethoven have any other doctors?* Yes, several, all of whom he considered to be quacks. Some of them probably were. But before 1802, Beethoven seems to have considered any doctor who couldn't cure his deafness a quack anyway. And so we can

deduce that prior to 1802, Beethoven must have been living in a state of *profound nervous anxiety*, running from one doctor to another, seeking words of clean-bill-of-hearing-health with which he could temporarily delude himself.

8d. *So what was different about Dr. Schmidt?* Dr. Schmidt had empathy with Beethoven's predicament. And what was different was 1802. In 1802, Beethoven resigned himself to the fact that his deafness would only ever increase. That is, fundamentally, one of the things the Heiligenstadt Testament definitely tells us. I think this resignation to deafness was a distinct spiritual improvement on the state of *profound nervous anxiety* that had preceded it.

8e. The *profound nervous anxiety* had been profound indeed. Beethoven, despairing of "senseless physicians", had even taken to a "faith healing" priest, one Pater Weiss of the Metropolitan Church of St. Stephen. As well as the laying on of hands, Weiss claimed to be familiar with the physiology of the ear, but whether he was or he wasn't, Weiss couldn't do Beethoven's ears any good.

8f. *In the light of modern medical science, what theories have been put forward to explain Beethoven's deafness?* The answer is a very great many, and, unless you're an ear specialist, they don't enlighten you very much. Nevertheless, it seems probable that at least originally, Beethoven suffered from some kind of tinnitus in his left ear. When the ringing of the tinnitus departed, it seems his hearing was much impaired. When exactly the deafness extended to his right ear isn't known. There have been various diagnoses linking his deafness with a 1796 illness caused by Beethoven coming home on a very hot day, immediately undressing, and cooling himself in the draft of an open window. And there's the story that Beethoven, refusing to play for French officers who occupied Vienna in 1805, walked alone from Grätz to Troppau in the rain, aggravating his deafness by a heavy cold. And then there's the story that

Beethoven much aggravated his deafness by throwing himself to the ground in a rage and fury around 1810. And there have also been theories revolving around a typhoid infection. The last is probably the most plausible. In 1964, Dr. A. Laskiewicz diagnosed "*neuritis acoustica* after typhoid fever... smallpox, repeated head colds and influenza".

8g. *Does 8f. matter?* All advances in human comprehension matter. But obviously, modern medical science didn't help Beethoven much.

8h. *What did help Beethoven?* The countryside around Heiligenstadt. And earhorns. A bit. These were predominantly made by one Joseph Nepomuk Maelzel. Maelzel was a Viennese mechanic and inventor, operating in Vienna under the title of Court Mechanician. Maelzel was part Thomas Edison, part Phineas T. Barnum, and part fraudster. He invented ingenious mechanical appliances of all kinds, by which he profited hugely in an age that adored clocks run by steam and contraptions that could rise as if by magic into the air (the balloon was as new as a space rocket in 1960). Beethoven was fascinated by Maelzel's workshops. Maelzel invented the Metronome, which he persuaded Beethoven publicly recommend. As in, "*The new Metronome! A miraculous musical time keeper! As recommended by the fêted composer Ludwig van Beethoven!*". Maelzel made a fortune out of the metronome. Beethoven didn't. Nevertheless, the second *Allegretto* movement of the Eighth Symphony was inspired by the metronome's regularity. *Tick, tick, tick*, or "ta ta ta lieber lieber Maelzel" as Beethoven composed a song. Maelzel also invented the Panharmonicon, a most ingenious device that could mechanically imitate several instruments of the orchestra, such as the trombone, the clarinet, the viola and the cello. The Panharmonicon caused a sensation in Vienna, as did Maelzel's Mechanical Trumpeter, which blew an Austrian military march via clockwork driven bellows. There was nothing Maelzel

felt he couldn't invent, and what he couldn't invent, he stole or faked. He claimed, for example, to have invented a Mechanical Chess Player, which was actually constructed by one Kempelen, of whom sadly, little else is known. In any case, the Mechanical Chess Player was a fake. When the Emperor Napoleon was camped at Schönbrunn, outside Vienna, in 1809, he played a game against this machine and was much impressed. Luckily for Maelzel, the Emperor did not discover there was a man concealed inside.

8i. *Why didn't earhorns help Beethoven more?* Because he didn't like using them. *Why? How would you feel with the end of a trumpet sticking out of your ear?*

8j. Dr. Schmidt died in 1809, which upset Beethoven greatly. He was replaced by Dr. Johann Malfatti, who, like Dr. Schmidt, recommended the quiet of the countryside. But Dr. Malfatti clearly thought further afield than his predecessor. It is on Dr. Malfatti's recommendation that Beethoven first went to Teplitz, in the August of 1811.

9. *Who were Karl and Johann?* They were Beethoven's brothers, of course! *Yes, but who were they?* Their full names were Kaspar Karl and Nikolaus Johann. Karl was four years younger than Beethoven, and would die twelve years before him in 1815. Nikolaus was six years younger than Beethoven, and outlived him by nine years. Karl was a bank official. Nikolaus worked as a chemist's assistant in Vienna until 1808, when he bought his own pharmacy in Linz, and became wealthy, largely as a result of war profiteering during Napoleon's occupation of Vienna in 1809 which resulted in shortages of all kinds, including drugs. Eventually, Johann bought an estate in Gneixendorf, and took to signing himself "Landowner". Beethoven wrote back signing himself "Brainowner".

10. *Who was Prince Lichnowsky?* Prince Karl Lichnowsky was a friend and the first patron of Beethoven's, and one time pupil of Mozart. Lichnowsky was one of those jewel like individuals who all people with talent coming from relatively inferior social circumstances need, financially or otherwise, if they are to be allowed to succeed. Lichnowsky used all his influence to promote Beethoven, frequently gave Beethoven use of his private orchestra, and commissioned him to compose many pieces of music. Further, in 1800, perceiving Beethoven's need to compose and yet be financially independent, Lichnowsky granted Beethoven an income of 600 florins a year, an arrangement that lasted until at least 1806.

11. *More on Beethoven's income.* In 1809, Jérôme Bonaparte, Napoleon's youngest brother, and then King of Westphalia, offered Beethoven a very lucrative deal indeed to move from Vienna to the Court of Kassel. Now the Viennese, having just suffered the 1805 French occupation and diplomatic humiliation at the hands of Napoleon (and being just about to suffer the same thing again in 1809), were mighty displeased at the idea of losing their most fêted composer to the Bonaparte family as well. On the other hand, Beethoven was well aware that Mozart had been buried in a paupers' grave, and he was damn sure the same thing wasn't going to happen to him. With real intention or not, Beethoven made all the signs of accepting Jérôme Bonaparte's offer. If the Viennese wanted him to stay, they could match the deal, one much more lucrative to him than the income he had earlier been granted by Lichnowsky. Three other noblemen agreed to provide Beethoven with a regular income for the rest of his life. The three were Prince Ferdinand Kinsky, the Archduke Rudolph (the Emperor Franz's brother and ecclesiastic, to whom the *Hammerklavier* Piano Sonata is dedicated), and

Prince Franz Maximilian Lobkowitz, who together promised Beethoven 4000 florins per annum. With this Beethoven was hardly rich, but he was comfortable. On the 1st of March 1809, the Princes' Decree announced:

As it is proven... that man cannot entirely devote himself to his art except in the condition of being free from all material care, and that it is only in this way that he can produce those great and elevated works that are the glory of art, the undersigned are resolved to shelter Herr Ludwig van Beethoven from need.

There were some problems with this allowance, most notably caused by Napoleon's second occupation of Vienna in 1809. Napoleon demanded a levy of fifty million francs from the Austrians to withdraw, which, along with later battles against Napoleon, helped to almost bankrupt the Austrian aristocracy and devalue the currency by four fifths by 1815. However, the Princes' ultimately kept their word, and the allowance was index linked. This act of farsighted generosity is to my knowledge one of the first examples of long term public subsidy of any artist, and what a good idea it was. For 4000 florins at 1809 prices a year, the Princes' secured about half of Beethoven's entire works, almost two centuries of orchestras found employment, and a great many record companies have made an absolute fortune (and, since both records and CDs are made of plastic, a great many oil companies must have profited handsomely over the years as well). In taxation alone, this 4000 florins a year must have been repaid to the Austrian exchequer and the exchequers of the rest of the world many thousands of times over. *Moral; Subsidy, wisely given, is more properly public investment, and far more analogous to Research and Development than with charity handouts.* "But, ah" goes the sceptic, "not every artist is Beethoven". And I would argue in reply that very few are ever given the chance to prove they could be.

12. *What else happened in 1802?* After the then General Napoleon Bonaparte's earlier victories against the Austrians at Marengo and Hohenlinden, France's power in Continental Europe was further consolidated by the Concordat with Rome by which Pope Pius VII recognised the French Republic. In other words, the Vatican admitted that the French Revolution had happened, and wasn't going to go away. Given that Napoleon wanted the Pope to attend his Coronation in 1804, this is just as well.

In 1802 France signed the peace treaty of Amiens with a war-weary England. By this treaty, England gained recognition in Ceylon and Trinidad, but relinquished Egypt, Malta and the Cape of Good Hope. France agreed to evacuate Naples (which probably has some bearing on Giulietta Guicciardi's decision to move there the following year). In 1802, Napoleon Bonaparte was elected First Consul of the French Republic for life. In 1802, Napoleon Bonaparte first suffered from stomach cramps.

In 1802 in England, the Prime Minister Henry Addington was deeply unpopular for signing the treaty of Amiens, and William Wordsworth published *Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour* (Milton had in fact been dead for one 128 years). Wordsworth considered England "a fen/Of stagnant waters", full of "selfish men".

In 1802 in Bath, England, Jane Austen was writing *Sense and Sensibility*. She had begun writing it in 1797, and it was to take her another nine years. You would have thought this was some kind of a record, but it isn't (read on). *Sense and Sensibility* has nothing to do with the French revolution, nothing to do treaty of Amiens, and nothing to do with Napoleonic wars which tore Europe apart throughout most of Jane Austen's life time. These observations hold generally true of all Jane Austen's novels. *They have nothing to do with the Napoleonic wars whatsoever.*

Except that, in all of them it will be discovered there is a remarkable shortage of eligible young men.

In Weimar in 1802, the novelist (and dramatist, and poet, anatomist, botanist, politician and geologist) Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was still working on his version of *Faust*. He had started working on it in 1775, and didn't finish it until 1832. This must be something of a record, albeit an eggbound one, and to my knowledge it is.

In 1832, at Abbotsford in Scotland, Sir Walter Scott died. Sir Walter Scott was by far the most famous novelist of his age. Scott was also the writer of the first widely and internationally read *Life of Napoleon*, and saved the Scottish pound note and the Scottish deerhound from extinction in his spare time. In his un-spare time, Sir Walter Scott single handedly invented the historical novel, and thus inspired Alexander Pushkin, Victor Hugo, Honoré de Balzac, Alexander Dumas, James Fenimore Cooper and many more since. Without Scott, Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is impossible. In *War and Peace*, it will be discovered there are some rather fine descriptions of the Russian's campaign of attrition against Napoleon in 1812. Tolstoy's hero is General Kutusov, who he sees as perfecting the scorched earth policy. *But that's another story.*

So's this. In 1832, in England, the Great Reform Act passed through the Houses of Parliament. The Great Reform Act enfranchised the mercantile middle classes of England, who, due to the industrial revolution, were a growing body of opinion most urgently requiring representation. Many historians have seen the Great Reform Act as one of the principle reasons that, unlike virtually the rest of Europe, Britain had no revolution between 1789 and 1917. Sir Walter Scott apparently loathed the idea of the Great Reform Act, and loathed the idea of the French revolution as well, at least in retrospect. Presumably with Napoleon in mind, “the hour has come”,

he concluded, "but not the man". Scott, quoting Horace whilst returning through Macclesfield from his last trip to the Continent in 1832, is said to have uttered "Odi profanum vulgus et arceo", which means "I loathe the vulgar crowd, and I shun them" but I don't believe Sir Walter would ever say such a thing. Anyone who can write characters such as Jeanie Deans in *The Heart of Midlothian* is a man of the people, and history books can lie. In fact some of them I wouldn't touch with a barge-pole, which I believe to be a Macclesfield expression.

In Austria in 1802, one Antonie Brentano was described as being "like a glass of water that has been left to stand for too long" (read on). Also, the Emperor Francis appointed Prince Clemens Lothar Wenzel von Metternich to the post of Austrian Ambassador to Saxony at Dresden. Prince Metternich would subsequently become Austrian Ambassador to France, where, deftly, he saw fit to gain French intelligence by sleeping with Napoleon's favourite sister Pauline, one of the great classical beauties of her age and a famed nymphomaniac to boot. Napoleon had two other sisters, Elize and Caroline. Whether Prince von Metternich also slept with them is not known, but where Prince von Metternich is concerned, most things are possible. Most things, that is, except revolutions. Like Sir Walter Scott, Metternich loathed them. In fact, it is true to say Metternich spent a diplomatic lifetime suppressing them. Whilst Ambassador to France, Prince von Metternich was also the architect of the marriage between the by now Emperor Napoleon and the Austrian royal princess, Marie-Louise, but here we are stretching our narrative apace to 1810. Ultimately, Prince von Metternich was the chief architect of the Congress of Vienna of 1815, which concluded the post-Napoleonic European settlement, by which the old order of Europe re-established itself, and by which a great many of the dreams of the French Revolution were destroyed forever. Or rather, *so far..*

And in 1815, Prince von Metternich did more than run the Congress of Vienna. He also ran the Viennese secret police. On the 12th July 1815, at the height of the Congress of Vienna, one of the police reports is on Josephine Deym, *née* von Brunsvik. It reads "the morality of the Countess does not appear to enjoy a good reputation, and it is stated that she cannot be absolved from having given grounds for conjugal quarrels". Josephine had, at the very least, by this time had an affair with one Count Wolkenstein. Von Stackelburg, her second husband, had by this time upped it to pursue an illusory fortune in Russia. He took the three children Josephine bore him, Laura, Theophile and Minona, too. Josephine pleaded "Let me have the children. I have borne them in pain". But Von Stackelburg took them anyway.

In the summer of 1815, due to the Congress, Vienna was awash with foreign diplomats and dignitaries of all kinds. It was awash with parties and balls, and it was awash with sexual *frisson*. Josephine and her sister Therese had suspected they were subject to police attentions as early as 1802. This is possibly connected to the sisters' association with Beethoven. Beethoven had some very powerful friends, but was subject to police attentions himself, and was once arrested on a charge of public vagrancy. In the police cell, no one would believe who he said he was:

POLICEMAN What's your name then?

BEETHOVEN What?

POLICEMAN *(shouting)* What's your name?

BEETHOVEN Oh. Beethoven

POLICEMAN Oh is it now? And my name's Mozart

BEETHOVEN What?

POLICEMAN *(shouting)* My name's Mozart

BEETHOVEN No it's not

You can imagine the rest.

13. *The Heiligenstadt Testament is very melancholy. Is Beethoven's melancholy a symptom only of his deafness?* No. It represents more than that. It represents a romantic condition as well, the syndrome of the *artist-outside-conventional-society*, but in Beethoven's case, this outside-ness was forced on him, or so he would have us believe. Thus Beethoven laments the extent of his isolation.

13a. *Do we really believe this?* Hard to say. The life of a composer, deaf or not, is isolated by its very nature. What is certain is that Beethoven's deafness made him more isolated than he had been previously. Which is probably another way of saying he was more isolated than he wanted to be.

13b. *Was Beethoven really isolated?* In one sense, no. He had lots of very understanding friends and patrons. A great deal of Beethoven's isolation was largely in his own head (or ears). This should not be read, however, as making isolation any less isolating.

13c. *More on melancholy.* What is romantic melancholy, and *why is it different from what we would now call clinical depression?* I think the difference is melancholia loves itself, whereas depression doesn't. That is to say melancholia is potentially creative, whereas depression is simply depressing. **WARNING: JUST BECAUSE MELANCHOLIA CAN BE CREATIVE, DO NOT TRY IT!!! MELANCHOLIA, LIKE DEPRESSION, CAN ALSO LEAD TO SUICIDE.**

13d. *You want proof?* Take Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's hero Werther. Werther and Beethoven have a great deal in common. When Goethe published *The Sorrows of Young Werther* in 1774, he was twenty four. It immediately catapulted him into European literary stardom. It also caused a scandal, being seen by many as a

justification of adultery and suicide (activities in the popular mind not previously closely connected). Goethe feigned modesty, but loved every minute of it. Widely regarded as the first tragic novel in European literature, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* tells the tale of how Werther falls in love with Charlotte, who is betrothed to Albert. Werther gives himself up to Charlotte whilst Albert is away. When Albert comes back, Werther tears himself away, and takes a provincial job as a lawyer (if you're in any doubt here, read *spiritual death*). He tries to forget Charlotte, but fails miserably. Werther takes to a country retreat, like Beethoven after him. Eventually, knowing no hope of salvation from longing or pain, Werther kills himself. Werther was a hero for his time. Werther helped make the *Romeo and Juliet* the most performed Shakespeare of his day, Romeo's fate mirroring Werther's own.

The Sorrows of Young Werther is the first European novel of loneliness, the first novel to emotionally aggrandise isolation. And it set a romantic trend of heroicising both. The book was translated into every major European language. Ladies wore Werther jewellery. There was Werther porcelain, Werther paintings and Werther plays and operas by the score. There were even several Werther imitation suicides. Werther became an archetypal romantic hero, seeing suicide as more noble than any kind of accidental death, or even, in many ways, death in battle (this is the tradition that insists Shelley did not die of drowning in an Italian boating accident, but abandoned himself heroically to the seas).

By the time Beethoven came to write the Heiligenstadt Testament, this tradition of epic suicide was *de rigeur*. And whilst Beethoven ultimately resists Werther's fate, we can note that he makes no bones about contemplating it. Far from the rest of the world seeing Beethoven as weak for so doing, to Beethoven, the contemplation of suicide confirmed his elementally valuable status in his own eyes.

As he had the right to *create* himself, so he has the right to *destroy* himself if he so chooses, and either way, he remains in charge of himself (I think there are serious flaws in this argument, but never mind). Further, Beethoven reconfirms his elemental valuableness by emphasising his loneliness and isolation. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* is epistolary, but comprises only Werther's own letters, and no replies. *Werther was essentially writing letters to himself*. There's at least a possibility with the Letter to the Immortal Beloved and with the Heiligenstadt Testament that Beethoven was doing much the *same thing*. And one other similarity can be noted between Werther and Beethoven too. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* established a romantic tradition that saw unhappy or unrequited or unfulfilled love as in some way more heightened or valid than fulfilled and happy love. *Isolation maketh the man*. Werther is the third person on the outside looking in on the fulfilled love of Albert and Charlotte. Note how this pattern constantly repeated itself in Beethoven's life also. With all the women Beethoven had any kind of romance with, Beethoven is always the outsider, the third person looking in at someone else's marriage or *d'alliance*. Beethoven is always the aspirer to female love, but never the instigator of a secure union.

14. There is an addendum to the Heiligenstadt Testament, dated four days after the main body you have already read. It reads:

Heilgnstadt, 10 October 1802

Thus I bid thee farewell - and indeed sadly. - Yes, that fond hope - which I brought here with me, to be cured to a degree at last - this I must now wholly abandon. As the leaves of autumn fall and are withered - so likewise has my hope been blighted - I leave here - almost as I came - even the high courage - which often inspired me in the beautiful days of summer - has disappeared - Oh Providence - grant me at last but one day of *pure joy* - it is so long since real joy echoed in my heart - Oh when - Oh when, Oh Divine One - shall I feel it again

in the temple of nature and of mankind - Never? - No - Oh that would be too hard.

14a. The Addendum reveals that the Beethoven of the main letter was not so resigned to the circumstance of increasing deafness as might have been previously presumed. *The Sorrows of Young Beethoven*. Here he really has relinquished "that fond hope ... to be cured to a degree". In the Addendum he has resigned himself to the fact that the clarity of his former hearing has gone forever. *Why? How?* In other words, *what happened to Beethoven in the intervening four days between the main letter and the Addendum?*

14b. *Here's one interpretation*. It is autumn, the summer has gone. With it, Beethoven's hopes of restoration fall away. We can imagine him walking around Heiligenstadt during these four days, watching leaves fall all around him. Colours fade as Nature shrivels and seemingly dies. The days grow shorter. Death - and increasingly *silence* - stalks him. And then in desperation some cry of hope, or at least, of desire. "Oh Providence - grant me at last but one day of *pure joy*".

14c. *This is a very great deal to continue to live for*, and Beethoven's ideas of joy were exalted indeed. This desire to find *pure joy* proved sufficient to live on for another twenty five years, and became the means towards self-regeneration. It is not in Providence Beethoven found *pure joy*, but in the act of his own composing. The last movement of the 9th Symphony is a choral rendition of Friedrich von Schiller's *Ode to Joy*. Anthony Burgess's idea of Heaven was the last movement of Beethoven's 9th Symphony playing forever. *Precisely*, and it was Beethoven's Heaven-sent task to compose it in the first place.

14d. "Grant me at last but one day of *pure joy*". I repeat it because it stands repetition. *Forever!* This is the cry of a man effectively inventing hope out of nowhere. *Where did the hope come from? And what is hope?* Hope, I think, is a *remembered future*.

The hope of a *remembered future* of return and restoration is all the Children of Israel had to sustain them in exile for example. Beethoven's hope is not only "one day of *pure joy*". It is also the *remembered future* of his lost hearing. *He finds a way of continuing as a deaf composer by utilising the memory of his almost perfect hearing when younger.* Essentially, out of deafness Beethoven conjures a miracle, a miracle more miraculous than any conquest of war, however grand, can ever be.

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