

TELLING STORIES No.1

6 July, in the morning

My angel, my all, my very self -

Only a few words today and at that with pencil (it is yours) - Not till tomorrow will my lodgings be decided - what a waste of precious time - Why this deep sorrow when necessity speaks? - can our love endure except through sacrifices, through not demanding everything from one another; can you change the fact that you are not wholly mine, I not wholly thine? - Oh God, look out into the beauties of nature and comfort your heart with that which must be - Love demands everything and that very justly - *thus it is to me with you, and to you with me.*

My angel, my all, my very self. A man in love with a woman in all heart and soul and thought and deed! Just like all love should be!

So opens Beethoven's Letter to the Immortal Beloved, but it belongs to all of us really, because everything about loving each other always must. So if you've got the idea into your head that love like this only happens to *artists* or *geniuses* or *great men* then get the same idea back out of your head immediately!

The first biography of Beethoven, published in 1840, assures us that the letter was written in 1806, and is addressed to the Countess Giulietta Guicciardi, then twenty two. "The Countess Giulietta Guicciardi". *Just listen to that name.* With a name like that, you've just got to be staggeringly beautiful, and by all accounts apparently, she was. Giulietta *inspired* Beethoven to write the *Moonlight* Piano Sonata, which just *sings of elegance, beauty and love!* Scholars however have almost totally failed to notice this and this is where the arguments about Beethoven's letter start. For example, Beethoven's first biographer says the Letter to the Immortal

Beloved dates from 1806, but the *Moonlight* dedication dates from five years earlier, in 1801.

The Bostonian Alexander Wheelock Thayer, the first reliable 19th century biographer of Beethoven, destroyed the Giulietta Guicciardi case by pointing out that in 1806, the 6th of July did not fall on a Monday, and a later portion of the Letter to the Immortal Beloved is dated "Evening, Monday, July 6". In establishing that the letter could only have been written in 1795, 1801, 1807 or 1812, Thayer appears to have felt very proud of himself, and proposed the recipient as one Therese von Brunsvik.

The evidence that supports this runs as follows. Therese gave Beethoven her portrait in oils, which he retained until his death. Beethoven wrote a letter to Therese's brother Franz that reads "Kiss your sister Therese". Hmm. *That's a bit weak, isn't it?* More convincingly, Beethoven dedicated his Piano Sonata Op.78 to Therese in 1809. And Giulietta Guicciardi (she was still in the plot, but now *the story had changed*) once commented to Otto Jahn "Count von Brunsvik... adored [Beethoven] as did his sisters, Therese and the Countess Deym". Or at least, that's Otto Jahn's story.

This evidence is plausible, but it's still *pretty thin*. And besides, Thayer casts dark shadows of doubt all over his own case by still insisting that the letter was written in 1806. What?! *But Thayer's the one who established that in 1806, the 6th of July did not fall on a Monday!* Yes, that's right. But Thayer also concluded that Beethoven got the date wrong. Another American, Maynard Solomon, a prominent modern scholar of Beethoven, delights in his destructions by pointing out this total

brain storm in Thayer's thinking, but Maynard Solomon has his own candidate to argue for, as we shall see. Thayer's conclusion that Beethoven got the date wrong, although totally speculative, nevertheless strikes me as reasonable. Beethoven frequently got his age wrong in Heaven's name! And surely, anyone who regularly gets their age wrong can get the day or the date of the year wrong easily. Maybe Beethoven didn't think your age had much to do with being in love! But that's a speculation all of my own.

Back to scholastic reality. If, in defence of Thayer, we accept that Beethoven getting the date wrong is plausible, we must also accept that the date of the letter *could be* 1806, in which case, the Countess Giulietta Guicciardi must surely come back into the picture. In other words, whether Beethoven got the date wrong or not, Thayer is contradicting himself after all, though not for the reasons advanced by Maynard Solomon!

Let's forget about the scholastic evidence altogether. The French film maker Abel Gance made a film about Beethoven's Letter to the Immortal Beloved. It's called *Un Grand Amour de Beethoven*. Like anyone with a decent imagination, Gance leaves the scholarship in the library where it belongs, and comes up with the following plot containing pieces of everything:

The Immortal Beloved is Giulietta Guicciardi. Beethoven meets Giulietta in the Salons of Vienna in 1801. He loves her, but she feels only great friendship and admiration for him. One summer night, as Beethoven is improvising the piano piece that becomes the Moonlight Sonata, Giulietta confesses to Beethoven that she is about

to marry the young and handsome Count Wenzel Robert Gallenberg. Beethoven tries to dissuade her. Giulietta's mind is made up. Deeply wounded, Beethoven flees outside into a raging storm. He stays out all night, seeking sanctuary at the old windmill in the village of Heiligenstadt. Some time later, Beethoven returns to Vienna and shuts himself off. The one person to whom he will open his door is the sweet, selfless, loving Therese von Brunsvik, who is also Giulietta's cousin. An old friend, Therese has correctly guessed the story behind Beethoven's broken heart. Beethoven confides in her. At Giulietta's wedding, Beethoven angrily pounds out a funeral march on the organ, greatly upsetting the ceremony. Events prove Beethoven's prescience. After the wedding, Count Gallenberg quickly shows himself up for a gambler and a cad. Giulietta, despairing herself, comes to understand Beethoven's despair. But Beethoven has by this time grown so used to confiding his misery in Therese that the two have grown closer than Giulietta has realised. Unsure of herself, but knowing of no other course, Giulietta, deeply unhappy, confesses her marital error anyway and asks Beethoven to forgive her. Beethoven thinks it's all come rather late, and Giulietta leaves, the two still unreconciled. But reflecting alone, Beethoven is overcome by Giulietta's honesty, and sits down to write the Letter to the Immortal Beloved. At this point, Therese arrives, finds the letter and thinks it is meant for her. Beethoven dares not tell her the truth. In so lying, Beethoven spares Therese her feelings, but ruins his own hopes of happiness. And, by inference, those of Giulietta.

I like this story. It has most of the ingredients such stories need. It has an unhappy marriage, it has raging storms. In the *Moonlight* episode, it connects romantic love and artistic inspiration. In the funeral march episode, it has the romantic foreshadowing of doom, an essential element in all tales of unhappy love. It also has

two different cases of irreconcilable unrequitedness. Beethoven and Therese share each others' predicament, but cannot share a union. And it has torn obligations and incestuousness aplenty. Everyone in the story knows everyone else very well. By the end, everyone also knows they can never be happy in love. Beethoven can't hurt Therese, and in all probability, neither can Giulietta. Ironically, Therese is probably the least unhappy. She finds a limited happiness in mistakenly believing that Beethoven loves her, even if he doesn't. Whereas Giulietta and Beethoven, who do love each other, can never consummate their passion. In Gance's film, Giulietta is much prettier than Therese (in real life, Therese had a slight curvature of the spine). It's probably the case that Therese, inexperienced, has had a crush on Count Gallenberg. It's probably the case that Giulietta has always inadvertently lured the men Therese fell for towards her instead. This is ultimately the reason Giulietta cannot push Therese out of the way. It's happened too many times before. And then more irony. Therese wants to be attractive to men as Giulietta is attractive to men, but what Therese wants only makes Giulietta miserable. Therese finds more happiness than Giulietta without Giulietta's looks.

Another thing this story doesn't have is any foundation in fact. Does this matter? *Imaginatively*, of course not. *Evidentially*, yes, at which point we meet the scholars, ever more fusty, once again. If we are to concentrate on Giulietta Guicciardi and Therese von Brunsvik, we get stuck on 1806 again, regardless of the date or day of the week. Because Gance sets his story in 1801. And besides, Giulietta Guicciardi didn't marry Count Gallenberg until 1803, at which point she and her husband left to set up home in Naples. At this point we realise that all our previous concentrations on 1806 count for nothing. Giulietta wasn't around in 1806. *Of course she wasn't around!*

That's why Beethoven was sending her a letter! Yes, but the letter states "We shall surely see each other soon", which is extremely unlikely if Beethoven was in Vienna and Giulietta was in Naples. And Beethoven states that he's writing *his* letter with *her* pencil. So, *Giulietta was sending Beethoven pencils from Italy, was she?* And besides, later on, the letter states Beethoven intends to send it to somewhere entitled only "K.", and Naples starts with an N. In fact, 1806 has been foisted on us throughout by the complete unreliability of the first Beethoven biography. 1806 is a red herring.

So let's leave Giulietta and ask a new question. *Who are the other candidates for the Immortal Beloved?* The full list runs something as follows; Giulietta Guicciardi, Therese von Brunsvik, Josephine Deym, *née* von Brunsvik, who was Therese's sister. There is also Therese Malfatti, but Thayer's biography argues against her (she just shared a christian name with the first von Brunsvik sister, and was the niece of one of Beethoven's doctors). And then there is Dorothea von Ertmann, the singer Magdalena Willmann, the virtuoso pianist Marie Bigot, the Countess Marie Erdödy, the Berlin singer Amalie Sebald, the poetesses Rahel Levin and Elise von der Recke, the Princess Marie Leichtenstein (once described as "Vienna's most beautiful woman"), Marie Pachler-Koschak, the actress Antonie Adamberger, the writer and amateur painter Bettina Brentano von Arnim, and Antonie Brentano, who was Bettina's sister-in-law. Goodness gracious! What a list of fusty endeavour! How about that for the efforts of over a century's scholastic minds! There's an academic industry here. How do we pick our way through it?

Let's start with what we know for sure. Most of these women were well known Viennese beauties. And Beethoven knew most of them through his piano playing. He

either taught most of these women the piano, or, having met them socially, subsequently dedicated a piece of piano music to them, however minor. Most of these women were around ten years younger than Beethoven, and we know younger women frequently took his eye. In the caste bound atmosphere of Habsburg Vienna, most of these women were considered socially *superior* to Beethoven, whose initial position as a piano teacher gave him a status somewhere *above* tradesman but *below* court artist.

But what about the women? Forget about Beethoven's letter for a minute, and let's look for a letter going the other way. Let's look for a letter going from one of these woman to Beethoven. Unfortunately, there aren't many of these that have survived. But there is one, written by Josephine Deym, which at least acknowledges that there was *something* between them. Some of the evidence in Josephine's favour as the Immortal Beloved is the same as that for her sister Therese. "*Count von Brunsvik adored [Beethoven] as did his sisters, Therese and the Countess Deym*". And there is supporting evidence that Josephine's marriage to Count Deym, by whom she had four children, was deeply unhappy. The marriage was forced on Josephine by her father, and Count Deym was thirty years her elder. But it is Josephine's letter that lifts her up for serious consideration. In 1805, she wrote to Beethoven:

An inexpressible feeling that lies at the bottom of my soul has made me love you. Before I knew you, your music carried me away with enthusiasm for you. Your goodness of character and your fondness for me have done the rest. The favour you have accorded me, the pleasure of your visits would have been the most beautiful jewel of my life, if only you loved me in a less physical manner. Do not berate me if I cannot respond to this physical love. I would have to break sacred bonds were I to follow your entreaties. Please believe me that I suffer the more in fulfilling my duties and that my actions are certainly guided by noble intentions.

So, the love between Beethoven and Josephine was mutual, but then there were problems. Beethoven wanted to sleep with Josephine. But Josephine was unable to respond. Consider the drawing room scene this conjures up:

Beethoven arrives at the Deym Palace to hear Josephine's piano exercises. Josephine is excited to see him, but also apprehensive after Beethoven's intimations the last time. She also knows that Beethoven cannot for the life of him understand why she is married to the shrivelled up old Count. Josephine is nervous, and plays her exercises badly, conscious throughout of Beethoven's proximity at her side. Beethoven chastises her for not practising. Josephine assures him she has been. Beethoven asks her what is the matter. Josephine moves away to the window. After a silence, she asks Beethoven to play the piano. Beethoven, whose patience with social nicety never lasted long, finds courage in the fact that Josephine isn't looking at him. He proceeds to tell her exactly what he wants to do, and suggests they do it over the piano. Josephine turns around abashed. The passion that she loves in Beethoven's music terrifies her when it is unabstracted and stands before her as flesh and pulsing blood. But Beethoven persists. If not here and now, then how about a secret rendezvous? Josephine is appalled, not only at the suggestion, but also at the secret excitement it causes within her. This is not only because Josephine Deym is married. In fact, she knows full well that the Count will be dead within the year. It is also because, knowing of his own decrepitude, the dying Count has made Josephine take religious vows of chastity. What is Josephine to do?

I like this story. I like it because it is open about sexuality - well, almost. This gives it a certain honesty. It is possible, is it not, that Josephine's letter is a reply to

Beethoven's Letter to the Immortal Beloved, refusing him in the kindest possible way once again. In which case, Beethoven's letter dates from 1805 (we do get stuck again here on the date of Beethoven's letter being wrong, but we've discussed that one already). This suggestion is totally speculative, but at least it establishes a hypothetical dialogue between two lovers. And a great many fusty researches into the Immortal Beloved fall down at this point. They forget that where there is one letter, there is generally another, largely because the scholars are much more interested in Beethoven than they are in the women they are speculating about. It is probably no coincidence that all but one of the fusty scholars I speak of are men.

But let us believe in the Josephine Deym story for at least one glimpsing moment, and accept that the Letter to the Immortal Beloved dates from 1805. Then it follows on that the consuming passion between Beethoven and Josephine must have remained unconsummated for another seven years. And then Josephine's chains of chastity, so troublesome to her in 1805, were briefly released. The really truthful, but totally, utterly unsubstantiated evidence about Josephine Deym and Beethoven dates from 1812. According to Sigmund Kaznelson, what happened goes something like this:

In 1810, Josephine Deym, lonely and unfulfilled by her work for the church, remarries, to one Baron Christoph von Stackelberg. But this marriage, like her first one, soon proves unhappy. Von Stackelberg finds her unwilling to conjugal demands. Josephine, still feeling subject to vows of chastity Count Deym forced her into, feels unable to freely give herself. Von Stackelberg drinks, slaps Josephine around and takes to prostitutes. And then, the final ignominy. In 1812, Count von Stackelberg

abandons her, spreading rumours Josephine is frigid. Josephine seeks out Beethoven, and hearing he is at Teplitz, takes flight from Vienna. In Teplitz, she finds Beethoven's lodgings by asking the postmaster. As Beethoven opens the door, for the first time in her adult life Josephine Deym knows exactly what she must do. And she does it. She closes her eyes and gives herself, utterly, totally and completely. This time, it is Beethoven who is overwhelmed by another's passion. Josephine Deym opens her eyes, and finds she can see straight at last. And then she feels ashamed. Again. Exactly nine months later, Josephine gives birth to a little girl, soon christened Minona.

Hhhhhmmmm. I like this story. I like it because it relieves a very tortured and unhappy woman of the burden of vows she could not keep. And I like it because it provides Beethoven with the child he never had. But there as so often before, an otherwise good story breaks down. Evidentially, it's simply too speculative. If Josephine rendezvous-ed with Beethoven at Teplitz, then why are there no records of her being there? *Well, because Josephine was still a married woman, and she chose to travel incognito. Don't you see, that's also the reason the letter is to Beethoven's "Immortal Beloved"! It was too risky to write down Josephine's name.* Well, no, I don't see actually, because if the story's true, then how come Beethoven took no particular interest in Josephine's little girl? *Beethoven loved children.* Well, maybe Josephine didn't tell him. *But why not?* And it's even more unlikely she wouldn't have told her sister Therese. The two were very close, and Therese had first hand experience of the agonies Josephine went through. Whilst Josephine was married to von Stackelberg, Therese was governess to her children! If anything like this had really happened between *Pepi* and *Luigi*, as Josephine and Beethoven frequently called each other, Josephine would definitely have told Therese! And in all of

Therese's voluminous Diaries, there is not the slightest hint that Josephine's youngest child was Beethoven's.

As ever, we find ourselves in the situation where solving one problem creates another one. For example, if Beethoven wrote the Letter to the Immortal Beloved in 1811 (the earliest date he is known to have been in Teplitz), then Josephine's letter of 1805 can't have been a reply to it. *But there was a real ever-broken love story between Josephine Deym and Beethoven!* Years later, on the 4th February 1846, Therese von Brunsvik wrote in her Diaries:

Beethoven! It is like a dream that he was the friend, the confidant of our house - a magnificent spirit! Why didn't my sister J take him as her husband when she was the widow Deym? She would have been happier with him than with S.

Ultimately, this says it all. *There's not a story ever dreamt of that can save Josephine.* Whatever her traumas with von Stackelberg, she was doomed from her marriage to Count Deym onwards. After the death of the Count, Josephine's other sister, Charlotte, writes to Therese of Josephine's "dreadful nervous breakdown. Sometimes she laughs, sometimes she weeps, after which comes utter fatigue and exhaustion". Josephine rouged her lips, she made up her face, both to an obsessive degree. Josephine Deym was not a happy woman, and that's that. She was to die in 1821 aged a mere forty two, her nerves shot to pieces. Therese, however, whilst never marrying, lived on until the ripe old age of 86, finding consolation by working with homeless children and organising schools for orphans. She lived long enough to read the first biography of Beethoven when it appeared in 1840. Therese was no fool. Reading of the first investigation into the identity of the Immortal Beloved, Therese

notes:

November 12, 1840. ... letters of Beethoven's purported to be to Giulietta. Could they be a fraud?

So, Therese knew it wasn't Giulietta all along!

Who else shall we investigate? I'm not going to advance Bettina Brentano von Arnim's case. Bettina is very good at talking for herself:

When I saw him of whom I shall now speak..., I forgot the whole world - as the world still vanishes when memory recalls the scene - yes, it vanishes... It is Beethoven of whom I now wish to tell you... I am still not of age, it is true, but I am not mistaken when I say - what no one, perhaps, now understands and believes - he stalks far ahead of the culture of mankind. Shall we ever overtake him? - I doubt it, but grant that he may live until the mighty and exalted enigma lying in his soul is fully developed, may reach its loftiest goal, then surely he will place the key to his heavenly knowledge in our hands so that we may be advanced another step towards true happiness.

This is gushy and hifalutin to say the least, but also extremely enthusiastic. It's safe to say that Bettina, "still not of age", was more than a little infatuated. She goes on:

[Beethoven] himself said: "When I open my eyes I must sigh, for what I see is contrary to my religion, and I must despise the world which does not know that music is a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy..."

All this Beethoven said to me the first time I saw him; a feeling of reverential awe came over me... I was surprised, too, for I had been told that he was unsociable and would converse with nobody. They were afraid to take me to him; I had to hunt him up alone... I found him in the third story [of his lodgings and] walked in unannounced. He was seated at the pianoforte.

As you can see, Bettina was more than a bit pushy, and full of herself too.

Later,

[Beethoven] accompanied me home and on the way he said many beautiful things about art, speaking so loud and stopping in the street that it took great courage to listen to him. He spoke with great earnestness and much too surprisingly not to make me forget the street. [My family] were greatly surprised to see him enter a large dinner party at home with me.

Elsewhere, Bettina describes walking in "hand in hand with Beethoven". A romantic coup for a young girl indeed.

But what effect did this initial meeting with Bettina have on Beethoven? It had the following:

Vienna, August 11, 1810

Dearest Bettine:

No lovelier spring than this, that I say and feel it, too, because I have made your acquaintance. You must have seen for yourself that in society I am like a frog on the sand which flounders about and cannot get away until some benevolent Galatea puts him in the mighty sea again. I was really high and dry, dearest Bettine; I was surprised by you at a moment when ill-humour had complete control of me, but in truth it vanished at sight of you, and I quickly threw it off. I knew at once that you belonged to another world than this absurd one to which with the best of wills one cannot open his ears... Dearest Bettine, dear girl!... How dear to me are the few days in which we chatted...

Here we have it, a burgeoning romance! Note how, as in all such romantic documents, the arrival of love brings Spring in its metaphoric wake, despite the fact it's actually late summer. I suppose if a man can get the day and date of the week wrong, he's allowed to get the season wrong if he's swooning. Beethoven's noble spirit (so beyond the comprehension of mere mortals like you and me!), has found its spiritual maiden at last! And, still young herself, there's no curvature of the spine, no

chains of chastity or unhappy marriages to overcome here. *Hurray for Bettina!* Surely that's the meaning of Beethoven's letter, save to add Beethoven knew nothing about frogs (there's not a sea-living frog on the planet. Frogs live in ponds and lakes, and just *love fresh water*). *Bettina's our girl!* It remains for me now to simply run the rest of the Letter to the Immortal Beloved, and construct a scenario which explains a rendezvous between our two star-crossed lovers in all its *secretiveness*, perhaps because Bettina's parents didn't approve, for example.

But there's just one problem. Beethoven never wrote the above letter in the first place. Bettina in fact wrote it for him, and published it, along with her other "correspondence" with Beethoven in 1839. *What an audacious fraud!* The rouse was discovered when Otto Jahn interviewed Bettina about these letters some time later. She immediately became "visibly embarrassed" and could produce no originals. This is disappointing so far as the identity of the Immortal Beloved is concerned, but at least Beethoven stands zoologically excused. Beethoven knew nothing about frogs, but then he didn't pretend to. Bettina's the one with the frog problem, with or without the added Classical allusions. By casting herself as Galatea (a statue of a maiden Aphrodite brought to life for the sculptor Pygmalion, whom had fallen in love with his own creation), Bettina presumably saw herself as both a reflection of and inspiration for Beethoven's art. Or, returning once again to the frog, perhaps Bettina saw herself as the Princess in the fairy tale who kisses her Prince to free him from the curse of frog-dom that the wicked witch had imposed on him so many years before (this would be Bettina's ultimate intention. In the letter, she's still at the point where she's simply keeping her frog-Prince alive, although putting a frog back in salt water would actually *kill any such creature immediately* from dehydration). Either way, we

really should have known all along the letter wasn't genuine, and Bettina's account of meeting Beethoven must be considered rather suspect too. The mature Beethoven, although reasonably well versed in Greek mythology and in fairy tales, seldom refers to either in his letters or in his music.

It's not so much that Bettina was an out and out liar, it's more that she's telling very big fibs in this particular regard. Various poet, essayist and short story writer, an amateur painter as well as being musical and fluent in several languages, there was not a lot Bettina Brentano didn't think she could do. And, to be fair, one thing Bettina could do it seems, was make Beethoven change his coat, however briefly. Beethoven, in today's parlance, was a *grunge* dresser. He dressed down to the extent that he bothered about what he was dressed in at all. Which leads us to the following *short* story:

Infatuated and awe struck after her first meeting, Bettina Brentano invites the great Beethoven, so far in advance of the culture of humankind, to dinner at her brother Franz's. Beethoven, as ever bent over his piano, absent mindedly agrees.

That's a *short* story if ever there was one. Now for the sequel:

Despite Bettina's constant attempts to sit closer by Beethoven at the piano stool, and despite her suggestion that the two of them play four hands, the great Beethoven eventually shows Bettina to his door. He stands there unshaven, head of hair standing on uneven ends, his torn shirt missing buttons, and holes in his shoes. Bettina looks him up and down from head to toe, knowing her brother Franz's will be

a very posh do indeed. She can't tell Beethoven he needs to overhaul his entire appearance, so she limits herself to the suggestion he buy a new coat. "Oh", replies Beethoven, "I have several good coats", and beckons Bettina back into his lodgings. "Is that your bed?" inquires Bettina, never one to risk an innuendo being too subtle, but Beethoven is oblivious. "Look!" he says, before opening his wardrobe to reveal a whole array of coats. Bettina goes through the wardrobe as Beethoven proudly eyes his collection. All the coats are shabby, but, sighs Bettina, they are at least less shabby than the one he normally wears, which hangs raggedly by the door. The one Beethoven normally wears is the oldest. "Which one do you think I should put on?". Beethoven changes into the coat Bettina thinks he looks smartest in, and off out into the street they go. Bettina has just succeeded in making Beethoven take her hand in his, when Beethoven insists on returning to his lodgings. He says he doesn't feel comfortable, and wants to put his oldest coat back on again. He says he doesn't feel happy in anything else. Bettina, keen to be with the great man whatever he's wearing (or isn't), acquiesces, and the two of them go off to brother Franz's for dinner, Beethoven looking as much like a tramp as usual.

I like this story. I like it because I think it's amusing. And I like it because whatever the *notorious* unreliability of any account by Bettina, it also has a ring or two of truth about it. And, if it's true, perhaps Bettina did have an altogether remarkable effect on Beethoven after all. Maybe she even persuaded Beethoven to buy a new coat, never mind change one! Because in 1810, the same year that Bettina speaks of first meeting him, something very odd happened to Beethoven indeed. *He started paying attention to what he was wearing.* Everyone around him commented on the change. This story goes something as follows:

In 1810, Beethoven returned from having dinner at Bettina's brother Franz's. It was a very posh do indeed, and Beethoven, suddenly socialised by romance, realises he looks like a tramp. "I look like a tramp" he says to himself. At the dinner party, he had felt thoroughly awkward throughout, and now, in love with his own brought to life Galatea, he decides to do something about it. For the first time in his life, Ludwig van Beethoven becomes concerned about his personal appearance! "I look like a tramp" he keeps repeating in the mirror, pausing only to notice the mirror is broken. And so he borrows a mirror from his friend Zmeskall, and, handing over some money, asks Zmeskall to buy him another one at the same time. Beethoven decides to transform himself. He still loathes shopping, and so he sends another friend, Gleichenstein, a considerable sum with which to buy fine quality Bengal cotton shirts and "at least half a dozen neckcloths". And loathsome of shopping or not, Beethoven himself pays a visit to Joseph Lind, the finest tailor in Vienna, and orders both a new suit and a new coat! Oddest of all, and by now Beethoven is feeling very odd indeed, he writes to his "old friend" Wegeler, and, after apologising for not having written in the previous nine years, asks Wegeler to secure a copy of his certificate of baptism, and to take great care he secures the right one, for there was another Beethoven born and christened Ludwig before him. As Beethoven, donning his new coat, puts the letter in the posting box, he remarks to himself how fortunate it is that Wegeler is now a doctor in Bonn, Beethoven's very birthplace. Wegeler receives the letter and concludes there is only one possible explanation. Astounded by the new sartorial king of musical composition, a great many Viennese, from shoe shiner to tailor to the Immortal Beloved herself, conclude there is only one possible explanation too. Ludwig van Beethoven intends to be married! As all and sundry

come to congratulate Beethoven on how well he's looking, only one question remains. Who is he getting married to?

I like this story. I like it because it contains a transformation, a kind of frog to Prince piece of magic all of its own. Made up letters or not, perhaps Bettina had the rapturous effect on Beethoven that he'd obviously had on her after all. Perhaps Bettina's still the Immortal Beloved despite her own dishonest efforts that have disqualified her so far. *Well no, I'm afraid not.* Because if Beethoven started to dress properly in 1810, it's safe to say Bettina had nothing to do with the reason why. Because in 1811, Bettina Brentano married the poet Achim von Arnim, and, by all accounts, the marriage proved a long and very happy one. Further, upon hearing of the marriage, Beethoven sent Bettina a very lame sonnet he'd composed himself for the occasion, which hardly suggests the marriage had broken his heart. So, if Beethoven was planning on getting married in 1810, the question still hangs there unanswered and seemingly unanswerable. *Just who was he planning on getting married to?* George Marek suggests he was planning to marry Therese Malfatti, but the evidence is all but invisible as far as I can see, and besides, Thayer had already pointed out that Therese Malfatti can't be the Immortal Beloved in his much earlier biography. It seems much more likely that Beethoven was preparing to marry Josephine Deym. We know her sister Therese at least retrospectively thought it a good idea, and Josephine did marry in 1810, albeit disastrously to von Stackelberg. Maybe she only married von Stackelberg because she, or Beethoven, changed their minds at the last moment. But there's no evidence either way. And so Beethoven's very strange and sudden flirtation with sartorial elegance in 1810 must remain tantalisingly unexplained. And besides, if Beethoven got the date of the Letter to the Immortal

Beloved right, then 1810 doesn't fit in, lying awkwardly between the acceptable dates of 1807 and 1812. And if Beethoven didn't get the date right, then we still have no real candidate for the Immortal Beloved in 1810 anyway. No matter how hard we try to make Bettina Brentano fit the evidence, she keeps *proving she's not the one we're looking for*. She made up letters Beethoven was supposed to have sent her, and she married someone else the following year anyway. So how do we explain Bettina's inventions?

Bettina was brought up in a convent, where she quickly astounded the nuns not only by her quickness of mind but also by her excessive vanity. She read avidly in many languages. Her heroine was Helen of Troy, the face that launched a thousand ships, and she fancied herself as an Heloise in search of an Abelard (though preferably not castrated). She studied all she considered to be "beautiful and spiritual", and could quote romantic poetry by the yard. Above all, the young Bettina Brentano had style. As a teenager, she loved to pose in the convent gardens beneath a Weeping Willow tree and next to a trickling stream, forlorn and pale and wan. As far as Bettina was concerned, there was only just enough water flowing to keep her alive. She was a princess locked up in a tower. As far as Bettina was concerned, there were only two things the convent lacked. One was a mirror, and the other one was men. Bettina early determined to be somebody, but in a society so lacking in opportunities for women, this proved difficult to achieve in its own right. And so Bettina Brentano early took to seeing herself as the Muse for a Great Man.

I like this story. I like it because it sympathises with constriction without taking the subject's frustrations too seriously. Bettina as *Muse for a Great Man* is of

course where Beethoven comes in, and also where Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Germany's most famous poet, comes in too. Bettina managed to inveigle herself with Goethe far more than with the Ludwig you are hopefully growing to love. In 1832, Bettina published her *Goethe's Correspondence with a Child*, and the child it was she. Whilst a great deal of this correspondence is as fictitious as Beethoven's letter Bettina made up for herself, it is beyond doubt that Bettina grew to know Goethe very well. Apparently, when Goethe walked into a room, all conversation ceased. He was always impeccably dressed, he walked with a purposeful and elegant gait. He was the most famous son of Weimar, and famously irresistible to women, most of whom however could only gaze from afar. But not Bettina.

Bettina Brentano soon learnt to play the Muse for a Great Man to perfection. She would sit wrapped in Goethe's cloak whilst looking up at him with her piercing black eyes. In Goethe's head of full-grey hair Bettina saw wisdom and sagacity. In his proud and unbowed back she saw worldly strength and resolution. As Goethe recited his poetry, Bettina's sensuous bosom would rise and fall rhythmically. Bettina, blushing, admitted she wrote poetry herself. Would the Great Man like to read it? The poem Goethe read was a poem written by a woman about sitting at the feet of a Great Man and acting his Muse. Bettina Brentano knew exactly what she was doing. And she knew also that her mother, Maximiliane Laroche, whom she much resembled, had been a lover of Goethe in her own youth. Like mother like daughter. Bettina came to have such an effect on the sixty year old Goethe that she and Goethe's wife Christiane came literally to blows. Christiane had seen off the mother as a rival, and she wasn't going to lose out to the daughter at this late stage...

I like this story. I like it because it encapsulates Goethe's vanity, Bettina's beguiling charm, and Christiane's perfectly predictable and righteous fury. *And I like it because it is true.* Two things can be safely said about Bettina Brentano. She wasn't the Immortal Beloved, but she sure was some girl! And it is definitely through Bettina Brentano von Arnim that Beethoven and Goethe came to meet one another.

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