

Romanticism and Time

Literary Temporalities

EDITED BY SOPHIE LANIEL-MUSITELLI AND CÉLINE SABIRON





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3. Beethoven: Revolutionary Transformations

Gregory Dart

This chapter investigates Fidelio's relation to the French Revolution by looking at it as the last of a series of revisitings of a revolutionary 'spot of time'. First laid out by Bouilly and Gaveaux's 1798 rescue opera, Léonore, ou L'Amour Conjugal (1798), which was supposedly based on a true story of the Jacobin Terror, this 'spot' was then returned to, and reworked, by several European composers of the early nineteenth century, who produced operas with the same plot, most notably Beethoven, whose Leonores of 1805 and 1806, and Fidelio of 1814 betray a subtly unstable perspective on recent revolutionary history. Lastly, this chapter looks at the role of melodrama in Beethoven's opera, not only as a curious technical innovation, but also as a new means of conceiving of, and dramatising, historical action, and argues that one way of seeing the dénouement of 1814 is as an essentially conservative attempt to bury the traumatic vision of history—of history as sforzando—that its earlier incarnations had opened up.

GEFANGENE

O welche Lust! In freyer Luft
Den Athem leicht zu heben,
nur hier,
nur hier ist Leben.

PRISONERS

Oh what joy! In the open air!
Lift your breath slightly, only
here,
Only here is Life!

Chor der Gefangenen, Chorus of Prisoners, *Fidelio* Act I.¹

That Beethoven's operatic paean to freedom *Fidelio* has an intimate relationship with the French Revolution is well known. But what the

1 Ludwig van Beethoven, *Fidelio: Oper in Zwei Aufzügen* (Bonn: Simroch, n. d. [1815]). The English translations of the 1814 libretto, and of the words in the 1805 score, are my own.

work's precise attitude to the history of the period, or indeed to the idea of history more generally, might be, is less easy to determine, not least because of the way in which that relationship might be deemed to have changed over time, as the opera underwent significant revision between 1805 and 1814. *Fidelio*, the canonical form of the opera, was the final revised version, unveiled in the summer of 1814, shortly after the first fall of Napoleon, and only a few months before the Congress of Vienna. But the opera had first seen the light of day nearly ten years earlier, as *Leonore, or the Triumph of Conjugal Love*. That this work failed badly at its first attempt in November 1805 was hardly surprising, given the circumstances surrounding its premiere. Napoleon's army had entered Vienna only a few days earlier, and most of the city's population had retreated to the country.² On the night of the first and only performance the stall seats were mainly filled by French soldiers; although there was a certain strange fittingness in this, given the provenance of the plot. Six months later—in 1806—*Leonore* was put on again in Vienna, this time in revised form. Convinced that the initial failure had been for dramatic rather than musical reasons, Beethoven's supporters had persuaded him to cut the three acts down to two, and to rearrange and shorten some of the numbers.³ These changes were, however, very minor in comparison with the more significant refashioning that took place in 1814. Often, when assessing the various versions of the opera, critics have focused on purely aesthetic questions, debating which of the three works they consider to be the best musically, or to be the most effective on stage.⁴ In this chapter, however, I want to look at these versions as instances of a shifting political-historical consciousness, changing perspectives on a 'spot of time'.

2 Edgar Istel and Theodore Baker, 'Beethoven's "Leonore" and "Fidelio"', *Musical Quarterly*, 7.2 (April 1921), 226–51 (p. 231).

3 See Winton Dean, 'Beethoven and Opera', in *Fidelio: Cambridge Opera Handbooks*, ed. by Paul Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 40–42. Hereafter this volume is cited as *Fidelio: COH*.

4 Dean, for example, thinks that the version of 1814 is *musically* a great improvement on the two previous versions, but *dramatically* weaker (Ibid., esp. pp. 44–45, 49–50).

I

On the front page of Jean Nicholas Bouilly's *Léonore, ou L'Amour Conjugal* (1798), the original French opera upon which Beethoven's was based, there was a striking assertion, set forth in big capital letters, just below the title: FAIT HISTORIQUE (TRUE STORY).⁵ Before embarking on a career as a dramatist, Bouilly had been a government administrator in Tours during the Revolutionary Terror of 1793–94, and in his memoirs of 1837 he claimed that the character of Leonore was based on a real acquaintance, a woman who had disguised herself as a turnkey's assistant in order to free her husband, unjustly imprisoned in a Jacobin gaol.⁶ Whether or not this story had a genuine historical basis, all trace of its original context was effaced from the ensuing libretto. Like its later Beethovenian incarnations, Bouilly and Pierre Gaveaux's opera has a deliberately vague Spanish Renaissance setting, with a king on the throne and a villain named Pizarro, presumably in honour of the sixteenth-century conquistador. Not that any of this would have fooled the first-night audience of the Theatre Feydeau in Paris, where the opera was first produced in February 1798. No sooner would Leonore's covert search for her imprisoned husband have been presented to them, than the contemporary nature of the story would have become clear. Recent history would have furnished forth countless parallels—from personal experience, from the daily papers, from printed memoirs, and from gossip. Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, given *Fidelio's* reputation as a revolutionary or liberationist opera, the original emphasis of *Leonore* was pretty clearly counter-Revolutionary, or, at least, anti-Terrorist in nature: its victims were aristocrats and its perpetrator a rogue official, acting in a recognisably Jacobin manner.⁷

Leonore is a 'rescue' opera, a sub-genre that enjoyed a considerable vogue in the 1790s and early 1800s. One of the first to be staged successfully during the Revolution itself was Luigi Cherubini's *Lodoïska* (1791), a 'comédie héroïque' based on a romantic episode in J-B Louvet's

5 *Léonore, ou L'Amour Conjugal, Fait Historique, en deux actes et en prose mêlée de chants. Paroles de J.N. Bouilly, Musique de P. Gaveaux* (Paris: Barba, An Septième [1799]).

6 *Mes Récapitulations* (Paris, 1836–37). See also Istel and Baker, 'Beethoven's "Leonore" and "Fidelio"', pp. 227–28.

7 On the Théâtre Feydeau's strong links with royalism in this period, see David Charlton, 'The French Theatrical Origins of *Fidelio*', in *Fidelio: COH*, pp. 61–63.

Amours de Faublas (1787–90) which ends with the eponymous heroine being delivered from a Polish castle in a spectacular cavalcade of guns and horses.⁸ Cherubini composed another ‘rescue’ drama after the Terror, but this time the plot and characters were considerably less chivalric. *Le Porteur d’eau, ou Les Deux Journées* (1800) is the story of a lowly Parisian water-carrier who saves an unjustly proscribed politician by smuggling him out of the gates of the city in one of his barrels.⁹ Like *Leonore*, this libretto was by Bouilly, and although set in the time of Cardinal Mazarin, actually based on another real incident from the 1790s. The ‘rescue’ opera, as a genre, had considerable international appeal in this period, an appeal that was concomitant with the new fashion for melodrama. This is evident when we look at the rapidity with which examples were smuggled over and adapted in England. In 1794 John Philip Kemble produced a version of *Lodoïska* at Drury Lane.¹⁰ More tellingly still, in October 1802 Thomas Holcroft adapted *Les Deux Journées* as *The Water Carrier*, commissioning new music for the drama from Thomas Dibdin.¹¹

Beethoven admired Cherubini’s music for *Les Deux Journées* enormously,¹² having the score at his elbow when he composed *Leonore*, and one of the things that must have struck him about both stories was their interest in how ordinary lives are transformed when they get embroiled in politics and political history. When opera critics criticise Beethoven’s opera they often take issue with its generic and stylistic hybridity, complaining about the mismatch between the comic first act—which is very much in the spirit of Mozartian romantic

8 Interestingly, Pierre Gaveaux, the future composer of *Léonore*, played Floreski in the first Paris production of *Lodoïska*. In 1802 *Lodoïska* reached Vienna, being put on at Schikaneder’s ‘Theater an der Wien’ in March of that year.

9 *Les Deux Journées, Comédie Lyrique en trois actes, paroles de J.N. Bouilly, membre de la Société Philotechnique, Musique du Citoyen Chérubini* (Paris: André, [An Huitième], 1800).

10 On his *Account of the English Stage* John Genest notes its first night at Drury Lane, 9 June 1794: ‘This musical Romance in 3 acts was very successful—it was translated from the French by Kemble—it is a pretty good piece for the sort of thing—much better calculated for representation than perusal’ (vii, pp. 151–52).

11 ‘The Escapes, or, The Water Carrier’, a Musical Entertainment in Two Acts, first performed at Covent Garden on October 14, 1801. Genest’s comment is: ‘this musical Entertainment, in 3 parts, was acted 12 times—but is not printed—it is a tolerable piece’ (vii, pp. 548–49).

12 Like *Lodoïska* it came to Vienna in 1802, in a version translated by G.F. Trietschke, the future librettist of Beethoven’s own *Leonore*.

comedy—and the tense and heroic second.¹³ But what such criticism fails to acknowledge is just how much this combination was a conscious and deliberate feature of the post-Revolutionary ‘rescue’ genre within which Beethoven was working. There are many innovatory things about the dramatic spectacle that Cherubini creates in *Lodoïska*, but essentially the Revolutionary action is imagined in heroic, aristocratic terms. In Bouilly’s post-Terror libretti, *Léonore* and *Les Deux Journées*, however, most of the leading characters are resolutely, relatably ordinary—figures out of a comic milieu who are forced to rise to the challenge of history.

One of the main organising ideas in Beethoven’s opera—in all its versions—is the notion of the ‘*Augenblick*’—the eye-blink, or window of opportunity.¹⁴ This is a political conception, a reflection on the micro-level of that high French sense of the revolutionary ‘*journée*’, the intense, spontaneous, decisive moment of action. The second of the two days that make up Bouilly and Cherubini’s *Deux Journées* contains just such a moment. But the ‘*Augenblick*’ is also, at the same time, a religious moment, having links with the conversion experience, and with the advent of the Last Judgement. In *Leonore/Fidelio* Beethoven presents us with the paradigm of the ‘*augenblick*’ first of all in *negative* terms. News has arrived that the Minister is coming to investigate the prisons, having been informed that they contain several victims of arbitrary power. Pizarro, the governor of one particular gaol, has thus only a few hours to get rid of Florestan, the young aristocrat who had threatened to reveal him as a tyrant two years previously, and has been kept in secret and solitary confinement ever since. Pizarro is slenderly characterised in Bouilly and Gaveaux’s opera. He only has a speaking part, and there is nothing explicit in the libretto linking him to the excesses of the revolution. That said, I don’t think any French audience of the period would have had any difficulty identifying him with the many unprincipled usurpers of public authority that had flourished during and after the Terror. He is, to this

13 Paul Robinson runs through this argument in his ‘*Fidelio* and the French Revolution’, *Fidelio: COH*, p. 69: ‘The whole, for many critics, is dangerously contradictory—an opera whose conclusion explodes its musical and dramatic premises’.

14 Beethoven’s ‘*Augenblicke*’ in *Fidelio* and elsewhere have been discussed by several critics, most notably Joseph Kerman in ‘*Augenblicke* in *Fidelio*’, *Fidelio: COH*, pp. 132–44. Nicholas Mathew writes about the static, spectacular nature of Beethoven’s stretched-out moments in *Fidelio* in ‘Beethoven’s Moments’, *Political Beethoven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 59, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511794483>

extent, very much a villain of the *Directory*, a popular bugbear of 1798. In Sonnleithner and Beethoven's hands the implicit connection between Pizarro and revolutionary terrorism is, if anything, even stronger. One of the first and most important things that Pizarro gives to *Fidelio*, in that extraordinary opening aria of his 'Welch ein Augenblick!', is a powerful sense of—indeed an overriding commitment to—the moment, the '*Augenblick*', the transformational instant that will change everything forever. Like one of the *Septembriseurs* of 1792, he reads the imminent return of the old established order as an invitation to consummate his revenge upon a captive enemy. Fate has, he believes, effectively forced his hand, and is *impelling* him to triumph.

PIZARRO

Ha! ha! Ha! Welch' ein Augenblick!	Ha! What a moment!
Die Rache werd' ich kühlen!	I shall cool my vengeance!
Dich rufet dein Geschick!	Your fate calls you!
In seinem Herzen wühlen,	To plunge in his heart,
O Wonne! großes Glück!	O bliss, great joy!
Schon war ich nah', im Staube	Once I was nearly in the dust,
Dem lauten Spot zum Raube,	A prey to open mockery,
Dahin gestreckt zu sein.	To be laid low;
Nun ist es mir geworden	Now it is my turn
Den Mörder selbst zu morden...	To murder the murderer myself...

Pizarro, 'Ah! Welch ein Augenblick!' *Fidelio* (1814)

At the opposite pole to this is the moment at the end of the opera, when the returning Minister Don Fernando pays tribute to Leonore's heroic rescue of her husband by giving her the key to release him from his shackles.

LEONORE, FLORESTAN

O Gott! O welch' ein Augenblick!	O God! O What a moment!
O unaussprechlich süßes Glück!	O inexpressibly sweet happiness!

'O Gott' *Fidelio* (1814)

The expansive, yearning melody Beethoven deploys here is, it turns out, a piece of direct self-quotation, being lifted directly from his early *Funeral Cantata on the Death of Joseph II* (1790), specifically his setting of the words 'Then did men climb into the light, then the earth spun

more joyfully around the sun, and the sun warmed it with the heaven's light'. It was because of this connection that Alfred Heuss saw fit to dub it Beethoven's *Humanitätsmelodie*.¹⁵ In *Fidelio* its emergence arguably carries at least three layers of musical-dramatic meaning. It is a religious moment—a moment of awe and thanksgiving; it is a humanitarian moment—a moment of peace and reconciliation, and last but not least it is a moment that celebrates the power of the moment. As in Pizarro's first aria, this is music in praise of the transformational instant; the difference is that in this case it glows with utopian promise.

This dramatisation of the power of the revolutionary moment is brilliantly handled by Beethoven, and sings out most clearly in the final, revised version of the opera. 'Post a trumpeter on the roof!' Pizarro had said in Act I, on hearing of the Minister's intended visit, 'and as soon as you see a coach, have the signal sounded *immediately*'. But nothing could be further from the audience's mind in the middle of the Act II dungeon scene, when Leonore throws herself between her husband and Pizarro, pistol in hand, before shouting out: 'One more sound and you are dead!' The utopian theorist Ernest Bloch has written of the liturgical paradigm underlying this moment. As in a Requiem Mass, he says, the *Dies Irae* of Leonore and Pizarro's confrontation is suddenly and unexpectedly interrupted by a *Tuba Mirum*—the trumpet signal heralding the last judgment.¹⁶ It is a sound that we have not yet heard but are nevertheless absolutely prepared for. What had been intended by Pizarro as a warning for him, a merely literal herald of the Minister's arrival, is transformed by Beethoven into a moment of universal deliverance.

PIZARRO

Geteilt hast du mit ihm das Leben	You have shared life with him,
So theile nun den Tod mit ihm.	Now share death with him.

LEONORE

Der Tod sei der geschworen,	Death I have sworn you,
Durchboren muß du erste	first you must stab this heart!
diesen Brust!	

<i>Ihm schnell eine Pistole vorhaltend</i>	<i>Suddenly brandishing a pistol at him...</i>
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15 Alfred Heuss, *Die Humanitätsmelodie im 'Fidelio'*, *Neue Zeitung für Musik*, 91 (1924), 545–52.

16 Ernest Bloch, *Essays on the Philosophy of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 241–43.

Noch einen Laut – und du bist tot!	One more sound—and you are dead!
<i>Trombe auf dem Theater</i>	[<i>The trumpet sounds from the tower.</i>]
Ach! Du bist gerettet! Großer Gott!	Ah! You are saved! Almighty God!
FLORESTAN	
Ach! Ich bin gerettet! Großer Gott!	Ah! I am saved! Almighty God!
PIZARRO	
Ha! Der Minister! Höll und Tod!	Ha! The Minister! Death and damnation!
ROCCO	
O! Was is das? Gerechter Gott!	Oh! What is that? Righteous God!
<i>Pizarro and Rocco stand dumbfounded. Florestan and Leonore embrace. The trumpet sounds again, but louder. Jaquino, with two officers, and soldiers bearing torches, appear at the uppermost opening on the staircase.</i>	
Trumpet Signal, <i>Fidelio</i> (1814)	

In the 1814 version, no sooner is the trumpet heard than everyone on stage knows exactly what it means. It means the Minister has arrived; it means Pizarro's tyranny is over, it means Florestan and Leonore are saved. Rocco the jailer, hitherto a sleepy moral accomplice to Pizarro, races out of the dungeon after him, but not before making his virtuous intentions clear to Leonore and Florestan. Heartened, the two lovers throw themselves immediately into their breathless duet 'O namenlose Freude!' ('O unspeakable joy!'). The act closes, the scene changes, and the next time we see them Leonore and Florestan have been moved from the dungeon to the parade ground, and from the darkness to the light. Together, and with every other member of the *dramatis personae*, Rocco and Marzeline, prisoners and populace, in attendance, they receive the Minister of Prisons, Don Fernando, and the opera turns into a ceremonial cantata of public joy. 'Hail the Day, hail the hour' sing the Chorus. Brotherhood and amity abound; not only Don Florestan but also all the other captives of the prison are freed.

This is what happens in 1814. But in 1805 and 1806, events had played out very differently. Following the original French libretto much more closely, the narrative in the first versions of Beethoven's opera moves forward much more anxiously and uncertainly. As in *Fidelio*, the trumpet call in *Leonore* No. 1 and No. 2 brings hope of deliverance, but almost

immediately this is thrown into doubt when Rocco the jailer seizes Leonore's pistol and rushes out without a word. In these incarnations, which are very much in the spirit of Bouilly and Gaveaux, the lovers' duet 'O namenlose Freude' is sung in the full expectation that Pizarro will soon return to kill them. So their joy is the joy of being reunited, with no expectation of being freed. What is more, in this version, the duet is prefaced by a long recitative, in which the fragile air of hope, which is strongly identified with the oboe in this opera, repeatedly blooms and dies (Figure 1). Thought to slow down the action unnecessarily, all such anticipatory yearnings were cut in 1814.

Nr. 17. Recitativ und Duett.
Leonore, Florestan.

Allegro ma non troppo.

Oboe Solo.

Recit. (Vivace.)
Florestan.
Ich kann mich noch nicht

fas-sen, zu den-ken wag ich's kaum— sie hat mich nicht ver-las-sen,

(Vivace.) *(più Vivace)*
o nein, es war kein Traum. Sie war's, sie ist's, dort sank sie

Fig. 1 Ludwig van Beethoven, Recitativ und Duett 'O namenlose Freude', *Leonore* (1805 version) (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1905), p. 221. Public domain.

After this duet, in both the 1805 and 1806 versions, Leonore and Floresten hear the prison echo with calls for Revenge—*Rache*—which

they interpret (wrongly) to be directed at them. In actual fact they are directed at Pizarro, and indicate a powerful retributive energy on the part of the prisoners, which now sound like a burgeoning Revolutionary mob.

CHOR/CHORUS

Zur Rache! Zur Rache!

Revenge! Revenge!

Die Unschuld werde befreit!

The innocent will be released!

Gott schuetzet die gerechte

God protects the righteous

Sache und straft die Grausamkeit!

And punishes cruelty!

'Zur Rache' from *Leonore* (1805, 1806)

Beethoven may have had Cherubini's early rescue opera *Lodoïska* (1791) in mind when he composed this, because there is a 'Revenge' chorus at the climax of that opera, based on a similar musical motif. 'Notre fureur est légitime!' the crowd sing in Cherubini: 'Engloutissez ces lieux affreux!'.¹⁷ Crucially, no change of scene takes place before the Finale in 1805 or 1806. In these versions Don Fernando, Father Rocco, Jaquino, Marzelline, Pizarro and the Chorus of Prisoners all enter Florestan and Leonore's dungeon, and it is there that Florestan is released from his chains. Both musically and dramatically, there is something infinitely more spontaneous about the glorious '*Augenblick*' in these incarnations. In 1805 Don Fernando hands Leonore the keys; 'O Gott' she sings, alone, before having her thought completed by the rest of the cast, 'O Gott, Welch ein Augenblick' (Figure 2).

17 *Lodoïska, Comédie Héroïque, en trois actes, mise en musique by le Citoyen Cherubini* (Paris: Naderman, 1791), pp. 424–25.

The image shows a page of a musical score for the opera *Leonore* (1805 version) by Ludwig van Beethoven. The score is for the scene 'O Gott, Welch ein Augenblick'. It includes vocal parts for Soprano (L.), Mezzo (M.), Flute (Fl.), Double Bass (D.F.), and Bass (B.), as well as piano accompaniment for Horn and Bassoon (Horn, Fag.). The lyrics are: 'Gott, o Gott, o wehch ein Augenblick! Ach un - aus - sprechlich, un - aus - sprech - lich sü - sses Glück!'. The score is in G major and 3/4 time.

Fig. 2 Ludwig van Beethoven, 'O Gott, Welch ein Augenblick', *Leonore* (1805 version) (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1905), pp. 246–47. Public domain.

In 1806 Beethoven was persuaded to cut this sublime number—the true climax of the opera in 1805—from 97 bars to 53, and also, intriguingly, to give the first line of it to the Chorus, the very same Chorus that had been clamouring for Revenge a few bars earlier, with the soloists, including Leonore and Florestan, only joining in afterwards.

But if we move on to the final version of 1814, the adjustments are far more profound. The melody, the spirit, are essentially the same, but this time they emerge after a scene change. Now everyone has been assembled on the parade ground, and in the conscious light of day. Arguably, what we have here is no longer the moment—the *augenblick*—itself but the formal commemoration of it; not the winning of the race but the presentation of the medals.¹⁸ Leonore begins by singing the first

¹⁸ As Joseph Kerman describes it, 'the entire last scene in the prison courtyard is ceremonial rather than dramatic', 'Augenblicke in *Fidelio*', in *Fidelio: COH*, p. 153.

line of the *Humanitätsmelodie*, Florestan supplies the second. Then Don Fernando joins in, followed by Rocco and Marzeline, and only in the fullness of time do we hear the Chorus. Notwithstanding the fact that Beethoven and Trietschke are less explicit about Florestan and Leonore's aristocratic status than Bouilly and Gaveaux, the musical arrangement of 'O Gott' in 1814 does make a point of calling everybody forward in order of socio-dramatic precedence: Leonore sings the first line, and is then joined by Florestan, who sings the next with her. There then follows Don Fernando, and only after that Rocco and Marzellina. Gone is the spontaneous, disorderly concussion of private and public feeling that had been such a feature of both 1805 and 1806.

So how do we account for these differences between the three Beethoven *Leonores*? The composer was working with a different librettist in each case. Sonnleithner, his original librettist of 1805, was responsible for the work's initial obsession with 'augenblicks'; Stefan von Breuning, his 1806 collaborator, was mainly looking to cut supposed *longueurs*.¹⁹ Joseph von Trietschke's interventions in 1814 were of a more ambitious nature than von Breuning's—and served to redirect the dramatic and one might almost say the political impact of the piece. But from a certain perspective it could be argued that, finally, the differences between these versions have less to do with the biases of the individual librettists, as writers, or even with Beethoven's own changing musical inspirations, than with the historical moments in which these acts of revision took place—as landing-places in history.

1813–14, which saw the first fall of Napoleon, was a patriotic moment for many across Europe. In 1813 von Treitschke wrote a Cantata celebrating the Allied Forces entering Paris, to which Beethoven contributed a final Chorus 'Germania'. Shortly after completing *Fidelio* the composer also wrote a cantata entitled 'Die Glorreiche Augenblick' ('The Glorious Moment') to celebrate Vienna's hosting of the peace congress that was convened in November 1814. Unquestionably, this new conception of the *Augenblick* as a moment of awakening national consciousness had an influence upon Beethoven and von Treitschke's final revisions to *Fidelio*, encouraging them to make the climax of the opera more patriotic in nature. In the original French libretto Don Fernand had been almost

19 See Istel and Baker, 'Beethoven's "Leonore" and "Fidelio"', p. 234.

apologetic when he arrived late to rescue Florestan, only too aware of the extent to which his sufferings exposed a failure of public authority: ‘Let us try to efface the memory of this sad crime’ he says, ‘through a return to truth and justice’. In Beethoven’s first version of 1805, however, a different emphasis is made. As in Bouilly’s libretto, Don Fernando responds to the Chorus’s demands for revenge by condemning Pizarro to life imprisonment, while Leonore and Florestan appeal for mercy. But it is at this point that Sonnleithner makes a clear attempt to go beyond the spirit of Thermidorean revenge in his French source. Responding to the lovers’ wishes, his Don Fernando pulls back, promising to refer Pizarro’s fate to the monarch instead:

Don Fernando

Der König wird sein Richter sein; kommt, Freunde, laßt zu ihm uns eilen, er wird mit mir die Wonne theilen, verfolgte Unschuld zu befrei’n.	The king will be his judge; come, friends, let us hurry to him, he will share the bliss with me, to rescue persecuted innocence.
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Don Fernando, only in *Leonore* (1805)

This is a clear attempt on Sonnleithner’s part to dispel the atmosphere of political critique that was present in the French original, but even it can’t help raising certain questions about the wisdom and authority of those in power. Will the king side with Don Fernando and the people’s demand for just punishment? Or will he share the generosity of the two lovers? It is going to be difficult for him to satisfy both.²⁰ In 1806 Stefan von Breuning, who perhaps felt that there was something rather embarrassing—and exposing—about leaving it up to the king to make all these odds even, had simply cut this passage entirely, reducing Don Fernando’s judgment on Pizarro to ‘Away with this villain!’. In 1814, however, von Trietschke—and Beethoven—had returned to this moment with greater confidence, resolving the matter more fully into compliance with the master key.

20 See the more extended discussion of this problem in Martin Nedbal, ‘How Moral Is “Fidelio”? Didacticism in the Finales of Beethoven’s “Leonore” Operas’, *The Musical Quarterly*, 95.2/3 (Summer-Fall 2012), 396–449 (pp. 420–21), <https://doi.org/10.1093/musqtl/gds025>

Don Fernando

Der besten Königs Wink und Wille	Our best of kings' will and pleasure
Führt mich zu euch, ihr Armen, her,	Leads me here to you, poor people
Dass ich her Frevel Nacht enthülle	That I may uncover the night of crime,
Die All'umfängen, schwarz und schwer.	Which black and heavy encompassed all.
Nicht länger kniet sklavisch nieder,	No longer kneel down like slaves.
Tirannenstrenge sey mir fern,	Stern tyranny be far from me!
Es sucht der Bruder seine Brüder,	A brother seeks his brothers,
Und kann er helfen, hilfet er gern.	And gladly helps, if help he can.

The clear implication is that, even though (as far as we know) Florestan seems to be the only political prisoner in this particular gaol, *all* the inmates are going to be freed. After this intervention, it is difficult not to see the final version of *Fidelio* as an allegory for the liberation of Austria from the rule of the Napoleonic 'tyrant', a meaning that it singularly did not carry in 1805 or 1806.

But it is not simply a matter of the political message of the opera becoming more patriotic and conservative in 1814—there is also a transformation in the conception of the '*Augenblick*'—the revolutionary moment. In the final scene of *Fidelio* there is a chorus of public celebration—'Heil sei dem Tag! Heil sei der Stunde!' ('Hail the Day! Hail the Hour!')—which sets the cantata atmosphere, and introduces 'O Gott, Welch ein Augenblick'. But in 1805, as has already been mentioned, 'O Gott' had arisen spontaneously, with no formal introduction, and had been almost twice as long as in later versions. It is in this first *Leonore* that we find the greatest investment in the miraculous, unaccountable, even providential power of the moment—the moment as a virgin birth from the blind womb of history, quite outside of the 'Wink und Will' of power. But there is also, in 1805, a far greater interest in the various anxious steps leading up to that moment, and in the modern individual's increasingly uncertain relation to heroic action.

II

In every version of Beethoven's opera, the final act begins with Florestan in his dungeon, lamenting his abandonment, keeping hope alive by picturing his wife's fair image. Thereafter the proper action of the second half begins: Rocco and Leonore (disguised as Fidelio) enter the dungeon, Pizarro having told them to make a grave ready for the only prisoner in it. 'How cold it is in this vault!' Leonore says, as they descend: 'That is only natural', replies Rocco, 'It's so deep'. 'There's the man'. 'Where?' 'There—on the stones'. 'He seems not to move at all'. 'Perhaps he is dead'. 'You think so?' 'No, no—he is sleeping'. In 1805 this exchange was part of a short episode marked '*Melodram*'. '*Melodrama*' was a technical term in the operatic language of the period—referring to a scene which combined the use of music and spoken dialogue. New in standard drama, this was also a novelty in opera, occupying a position somewhere between the sung dialogue or recitativo that bridged the musical numbers in Italian opera, and the unaccompanied prose speech characteristic of German *singspiel*. The '*Melodram*' that Beethoven wrote for the first performance of *Leonore* in 1805 is short, but evocative; sufficiently inessential that it could be cut completely in 1806, and yet sufficiently suggestive that it could be reinstated in 1814 (see Figure 3). What is important about this '*Melodram*', one could argue, is not so much what it is *in itself* as a musical number, but the tone that it sets for the rest of the act, an atmosphere of naturalistic suspense.²¹

21 Istel and Baker, 'Beethoven's "Leonore" and "Fidelio"', p. 247. Winton Dean queries whether the short '*Melodram*' that has come down to us is precisely the one that was performed in 1805 ('Beethoven and Opera', *Fidelio: COH*, p. 37).

Nr. 14. Melodram und Duett.

Leonore, Rocco.

MELODRAM.
Poco sostenuto.

Leonore (thaiblast).
Wie kalt ist es in diesem unter-
irdischen Gewölbe!

Rocco.
Das ist natürlich! Es ist ja so tief!

Allegro.

Leonore.
Ich glaubte schon, wir würden den
Eingang gar nicht mehr finden.

Rocco. Da ist er.
Leonore. Wo?— Rocco. Dort... auf dem Steine.
Leonore. Er scheint ganz ohne Bewegung.

Rocco. Vielleicht ist er todt.
Leonore. Ihr meint es?

Poco Adagio.

Rocco. Nein, nein, er schläft.

Allegro.

Rocco. Das müssen wir benutzen,
und gleich aus Werk gehen; wir ha-
ben keine Zeit zu verlieren.

Leonore (bei Seite). Es ist unmög-
lich, seine Züge zu unterscheiden.

Andante con moto.

Gott steh mir bei, wenn er es ist!

Rocco. Hier unter diesen Trümmern ist
die Cistern, von der ich dir gesagt habe.

Wir brauchen nicht viel zu graben, um
an die Öffnung zu kommen. — Hole
mir eine Haue und stelle dich hieher.

Mir scheinst,
du zitterst?

Allegro.

Leonore.
O, nein! — es ist nur so kalt!

Rocco.
So mache fort! — Im Arbeiten
wird dir schon warm werden.

Andantino.

Fig. 3 Ludwig van Beethoven, Melodram (No. 14), *Leonore* (1805 version)
(Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1905), pp. 188–89. Public domain.

LEONORE.

Es ist unmöglich, seine Züge zu
unterschneiden.

Gott steh mir bei, wenn er es ist
(Andante con moto).

ROCCO.

It is so dark, I cannot distinguish his
features,

Oh, God help me, if it is my
husband!

Hier unter diesen Trümmern ist die Cisterne, Von der ich dir gesagt habe. Wir brauchen nicht viel zu graben, um an die Öffnung zu kommen Hole mir eine Haue und stelle dich hieher. Mir scheint, du zitterst? Fürchtest du dich? (Allegro). LEONORE. O, nein—es ist nur so kalt! ROCCO. So mach fort!— Im Arbeiten wird dir schon warm werden.	Somewhere under these ruins is the old well That I told you about. We shall not need to dig far, To get to the opening. Give me the pickaxe and come here. It seems to me you are trembling. Are you afraid? No, I'm only cold. Well then, set to work; That'll soon make you warm.
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At a similar juncture in the Second Act of *Les Deux Journées* Cherubini had interposed a more obviously melodramatic *mélodrame* as the soldiers began to interrogate Constance, the wife of the proscribed politician Armand, who was trying to pass herself off as Antonio's sister:

(Allegro) Le deuxième COMMANDANT Regarde-moi (plus brusquement encore). Regarde-moi donc. CONSTANCE, <i>full of emotion</i> . Vos regards sont si terribles! Le deuxième COMMANDANT Ce tremblement, tout annonce... ANTONIO. Dam, vous l'intimidez aussi. Le deuxième COMMANDANT Allons, allons, au corps-de-garde! (Plusieurs soldats saisissent Constance), <i>Dialogue en Chant</i> . COMMANDANT O mon frère! je t'en supplie! Antonio, ne m'abandonne pas.	Look at me (more roughly still) Look at me. Your looks are so terrible! This trembling says everything. False! you are intimidating her. Come, come to the guard-house! (Several soldiers seizing Constance), O my brother! I beg of you! Antonio, don't abandon me.
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ANTONIO, <i>l'arrachent des mains</i> <i>des gardes</i>	<i>tearing her out of the guards' hands.</i>
Il faut que l'on m'ôte la vie,	They'll have to kill me
Avant d't'arracher de mes bras	Before tearing you from my arms.
Le deuxième COMMANDANT	
Que fais-tu, jeune téméraire?	What are you doing, you rash young man?
Oser ainsi te révolter!	Daring to revolt!

And in the Trio that followed there is a good example of what Beethoven most admired and sought to emulate in Cherubini's musical style: its tense, spare urgency, its earnest, half-smothered passion.

As Beethoven's corresponding '*Melodram*' slips into an A minor Duet, Leonore's disguise also begins to slip. This scene, and the action in it, is heavily emblematic. Rocco knows that his master is planning to murder the prisoner, but has apparently decided not to step out of line. Leonore, while continually seeking to get a better glimpse (an *augenblick*) of the poor man in the corner, and find out whether it is indeed her husband, continues to help Rocco with the digging. In the corresponding moment in the French original the instruction is for the Duet between Roc and Leonore to be sung '*à demi-voix*', and there is a similar naturalism in Beethoven's version, a latent tension:

ROCCO.	
Nur hurtig fort, nur frisch gegraben,	Come, set to work, for time is pressing;
es währt nicht lang er kommt herein.	We have not long to dig the grave.
LEONORE	
Ihr sollt ja nicht zu klagen haben,	With all my strength I'm here to help you.
ihr sollt gewiß zufrieden sein.	No fault to find with me you'll have.
ROCCO	
Komm, hilf, komm hilf	Then come, help, come help,
doch diesen Stein mit heben,	Stand by and help me lift the stone up;
hab acht, hab acht, er hat Gewicht!	Take care and hold it fast.
LEONORE	
Ich helfe schon,	I'm already helping

sorgt euch nicht, ich will mir alle Mühe geben. ROCCO	Don't worry I want to do my best.
Ein wenig noch! LEONORE	A little more!
Geduld! ROCCO	Patience!
Er weicht! LEONORE	It's moving!
Nur etwas noch! ROCCO	Just a little more!
Es ist nicht leicht! LEONORE	It's not light!
Laßt mich nur wieder Kräfte haben, wir werden bald zu Ende sein. Wer du auch seist, ich will dich retten, bei Gott, bei Gott,	Just let me get my strength back, We'll be finished soon. That man, whoever you are, I'll save you! by God, by God! I swear, I will not let him die;
du sollst kein Opfer sein, gewiß, gewiß, ich löse deine Ketten ich will du Armer, dich befreien! ROCCO	You shouldn't be a victim, certainly, certainly I'll loosen your chains, you poor man, and set you free!
Was zauderst du in deiner Pflicht? LEONORE	Why do you hesitate In your duty?
Mein Vater, nein, ich zauderst nicht!	My father, no, I'm not hesitating!
Ihr sollt ja nicht zu klagen haben, laßt mich nur wieder Kräfte haben, denn mir wird keine Arbeit schwer.	You shouldn't have to complain, Just let me get my strength back, Because no work is difficult for me.

This duet between a sleeping and an awakening conscience Beethoven dramatises with music that is, like Cherubini's, full of fear and suspense. Far less well known than Leonore's famous 'Hope' Aria, or the Prisoner's Chorus, it is nevertheless at the core of what is most original about the opera. Muted tremolando violins and a rasping trombone provide a

and gothic setting; but it is also appropriate in a broader, deeper sense, because of the way in which it encourages us to experience the passage of time. As a musical dramatist in the commonly accepted sense, Beethoven cannot compete with Mozart: he is no match for him as a storyteller, nor as a painter of character. But where he is exceptional, as an instrumental composer, is in his ability to conjure drama out of the movement of the music itself. So keenly are we made to feel the various forces that go into its making, and so palpably do we feel its progress as a kind of struggle, that at certain points we cannot help experiencing its forward development as a string of actions, a sequence of causes and effects, an allegory of history. This quality is everywhere present in Beethoven's non-vocal works—in the 'Eroica' symphony of 1803 for instance—but only briefly in his opera. Indeed, arguably, it is only really a feature of the music that runs from the '*Melodram*' to the trumpet signal in Act II.

Though the comic opera of the period—*opera buffa*—had proved itself capable of catching human emotions developing and changing in real time, *opera seria*, the heroic aristocratic form, had always retained a temporal etiquette all of its own. Conventionally, real time stopped dead during the performance of its arias. When it came to the expression of princely virtue, the clock never appeared to be ticking. One way of interpreting the invention of melodrama in the late eighteenth century is to see it not simply in its technical aspect, as a new way of combining music and drama, but as an attempt to subject serious music, that is, music attempting to convey a heroic message, to the larger pressures of what might be called 'real' or 'historical' time. Indeed, it might be thought of as being one of the unconscious motives of melodrama, as a genre born in the Revolutionary decade, to investigate and expose something that was only just beginning to be apprehended about modern history—namely, its status as a force above and beyond the control of mere individuals, latent with meanings yet to be revealed.

What Beethoven's Duet helps dramatise, one could argue, is the *sforzando* of post-Revolutionary history, with each successive accent representing another tentative footstep in the dark. How appropriate it is, then, that when Leonore comes to the universal moral realization that, in fact, she is going to try to save the prisoner, *whoever he is*—she

does so *in the very midst of this music*.²² She catches this insight, in other words, as the moment offers it to her; she weaves it out of the strands of what has gone before. Leonore is slow to action, preferring to lie low and bide her time. But so too is Rocco, for he too (or so it turns out) is waiting for the proper moment to make a difference—a loophole of agency. Where in another context we might have been tempted to interpret Leonore's patience as a product of her feminine marginality—her status as a victim, not an agent, of history—the circumstances of the dungeon scene are such that we cannot but experience it as archetypally modern, an illustration that the political virtue of the future will be all about timing.

Strictly speaking, of course, Beethoven's *Leonore* of 1805 is not a melodrama, but what is only too clear is the extent to which its second act has been influenced by this rapidly expanding new genre, in general spirit as well as in particular facets. For melodrama was a genre that, as Jeffrey N. Cox has recently argued, brought a new kind of 'sensational realism' to the theatre, 'a poetics and politics of speed'.²³ In neither of the other two contemporary versions of *Leonore* is there anything comparable to the effects that are created in Beethoven's A minor Duet, for example. In Ferdinando Paer's *Leonore* (1804) the corresponding number comes straight out of *opera buffa*, with Leonore giving a performance of general bluff good cheer, interspersed by occasional anxious asides. In Simon Mayr's *L'Amor Conjugale* (1805) this Duet is replaced by a tender folk-like '*Romanza*'—the story of a wretched wife whose husband was taken

22 'It is a significant assertion for our understanding of Leonore', Paul Robinson writes, 'because in it she announces her adherence to the humane principles for which her husband has been imprisoned. She is motivated, in other words, not simply by wifely devotion but also by a more impersonal and categorical imperative' ('*Fidelio* and the French Revolution', p. 79). See also Irving Singer, 'Beethoven: The Passion in *Fidelio*', in *Mozart and Beethoven: The Concept of Love in their Operas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), p. 132.

23 'Melodramatic realism worked on its audiences the way our powerfully sensationalist movies work on us: we come away having had a "real" experience, having "really" felt something while we were in the theatre [...] music is an important part of this rousing of the passions, but music, a strongly temporal, forward-moving art, also increases the speed of the experience, with the structure of the plot being another important contributor to what Holcroft calls "anxious and impatient suspense", that is, a desire to get to the end of play so as to resolve the tension of the storyline', Jeffrey N. Cox, *Romanticism in the Shadow of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 51, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107786165>

away—which Leonore sings while digging.²⁴ Only in Beethoven is there a full dramatisation of the strange mixture of latency and emergency in the situation in which she finds herself, ‘a music of preparation and awakening suspense’.²⁵

This feeling was at its most expansive in the *Leonore* of 1805, but was progressively curtailed in 1806 and 1814. Where in *Leonore* No. 1 private anxiety—and private virtue—had taken centre stage, over and above the backdrop of contemporary politics, in *Fidelio* Beethoven and Trietschke had seen an opportunity to celebrate the final end of Revolutionary turmoil and the return of benevolent patriarchy.²⁶ Tempting as it might be to think of the three incarnations of Beethoven’s opera as amounting to three distinct works, with different emphases and different meanings, I think a better way would be to consider it as a series of revisitings of Bouilly and Gaveaux’s *Leonore*, its original ‘spot of time’. These returns, like those of Wordsworth to his vale of ‘visionary dreariness’ in Book XI of *The Prelude*, are to a particular scene of historical trauma, a scene that is at one and the same time a rich mine and an open wound.

What is palpable is that with each revision, Beethoven and his collaborators took the *Leonore* story further and further away from the spirit of 1798, a spirit that had been, to coin a Wordsworthian phrase, ‘interrupted by uneasy bursts of exaltation’.²⁷ But what is equally clear is that with each successive smoothing of the dramatic structure, the

24 ‘In place of the grave-digging duet Leonore sings a popular strophic song in popular French style, hoping that Florestan will recognise her voice’, Dean, ‘Beethoven and Opera’, p. 34.

25 The quotation is from Thomas De Quincey’s description of one of his dreams of historical conflict in the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (*London Magazine*, October, 1821, 377): ‘The dream commenced with a music which I now often heard in dreams—a music of preparation and awakening suspense; a music like the opening of the Coronation Anthem, and which, like *that*, gave the feeling of a vast march—of infinite cavalcades filing off—and the tread of innumerable armies.’

26 ‘The *Fidelio* of 1814 is now generally regarded as a glorification of contemporary political authority at a time when the balance of power was palpably shifting toward the restoration of the monarchies’, Louis Lockwood, ‘Opera and Republican Virtue: Beethoven’s *Fidelio*’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 36.3, *Opera and Society: Part I* (Winter, 2006), 473–82 (p. 474), <https://doi.org/10.1162/002219506774929827>

27 In Book XI of *The Prelude* (1805) Wordsworth described how, after hearing news of Robespierre’s death while walking on Leven Sands in the Lake District, he had ‘forth-breathed’ a ‘Hymn of Triumph’ and ‘Thus, interrupted by uneasy bursts/Of exultation’ pursued his way ‘Along that very shore which I had skimmed/In former times’ (XI, lines 560–63).

opera took on an ever more utopian aspect. Restored to the old parade ground of history, the final reconciliation of 1814 is, oddly enough, more thoroughly imbued with the abstract principles of liberty and fraternity than any of its predecessors. Never before had reminiscences of the patriotic amnesty celebrated at the first Bastille Day *Fédération* of 1790 been stronger. But if *Fidelio* is, to a measurable degree, more certain than any of its earlier versions about what it wants to *take* from the French Revolution, it is also more remote from it, as a source of power. In 1814 Leonore and Florestan deliver ‘O namenlose Freude’ in triumph—they know they have been saved. Back in 1805, however, their rendition had been, like that of the proscribed Girondins singing the *Marseillaise* in prison on the night before their execution, framed by doubt and despair. Melodramatic ‘spaces of irresolution’²⁸ that were awkwardly, thrillingly open in the first versions of the opera, had, by the time of the final revision, been narrowed.

The days gone by
 Come back upon me from the dawn almost
 Of life; the hiding-places of my power
 Seem open, I approach, and then they close;
 I see by glimpses now, when age comes on,
 May scarcely see at all; and I would give
 While yet we may, as far as words can give,
 A substance and a life to what I feel:
 I would enshrine the spirit of the past
 For future restoration. (Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805) XI, 334–43)

Arguably, Florestan’s dungeon is just such a ‘hiding-place’ of power—it is the wound that *Fidelio*, at the third attempt, has finally succeeded in healing, in an act of public enshrinement, or ‘restoration’, that must also involve, almost by definition, a semi-effacement of the past. ‘Our best of

28 Jonathan Goldberg talks of the Duet in Act II in particular as a melodramatic ‘space of irresolution’ in ‘*Fidelio*: Melodramas of Agency and Identity’ *Criticism*, 55.4 (Fall 2013), pp. 547–65 (pp. 547–48), <https://doi.org/10.1353/crt.2013.0033>

kings' will and pleasure/Leads me here to you, poor people', sings Don Fernando during the final scene in 1814, 'That I may uncover the night of crime'. The 'spirit of the past' that *Fidelio* restores is a French Revolutionary spirit, but it is one that has been shorn of its democratic aspirations and uncertainties. It is the Revolution as National Liberation—with all the old aristocratic ideas of history and agency surreptitiously repaired.

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