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Bringing Bakhtin to Beethoven: The Ninth Symphony and the Limits of Formalism

JAYME STAYER

FOR MUCH OF THIS CENTURY, CRITICAL WORK ON BEETHOVEN'S NINTH SYMPHONY has been concerned with the question: what is the form of the fourth movement?[1] As practically every scholar has noted, there are a number of references to traditional forms in the last movement: the dominant-tonic cadence that suggests the end of a recitative, the introduction of a second theme in a different key area that is characteristic of sonata-allegro design, the repetition of a thematic group with different (solo) instrumentation that signals double exposition, the operatic finale, the soloistic cadenza, etc. But for these critics, the problem of nailing down the overarching form of the fourth movement was that many of them disagreed as to what constituted a formal articulation. More embarrassingly, they even disagreed on the significance of those articulations. They could recognize, easily enough, the dominant-tonic cadence at the end of the cello interruptions, but should they account for it as the end of recitative and the beginning of an aria, or is it more loosely the cadential conclusion of a rambling introduction and hence the signal of the beginning of some other genre or form? To illustrate the wide critical discrepancy, consider the varying interpretations of the formal significance of the "Seid umschlungen" theme: is it the beginning of a new section (Schenker), the second part of a recapitulation (Sanders), an episode between rondo themes (Williams), the beginning of a second Abgesange (Baensch), or the beginning of the finale (Tovey)?

It is understandable then, that recent studies of the Ninth have repudiated, in varying degrees, the myopic formalism of twentieth-century criticism, particularly with regard to the fourth movement of the Ninth. Indeed, the impossibility of reading the Ninth with mere formalist tools could be said to constitute the one assumption most contemporary readings have in common. Dissatisfied with pat methodological explanations of such a problematic work, such scholars as Richard Taruskin, James Webster, Nicholas Cook and Phillip Friedheim have launched extensive attacks on the limits of previous interpretations of the Ninth.[2] In Webster's study, for example, he lays out eight different formal interpretations in a table that reveals all the points of divergences in those readings. His table marks out not only the contradictions of those readings, but their often mutually exclusive nature. It seems natural for scholars to haggle over fine points, but Webster's table shows us that so many mutually exclusive readings do not so much indicate the infinite richness of a single text so much as bespeak the poverty of those critical methods used to explain that text. In his own answer to the problem of the form of the last movement, Webster identifies eleven sections — each of them incomplete — and argues that its structure is through-composed. By arguing that the fourth movement is

Mikhail Bakhtin (photograph by Robert Louis Jackson)

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through-composed, Webster circumvents the question of form, insisting more emphatically than other recent critics: "'the' form of the finale does not exist."[3]

Although Phillip Friedheim divides the Ninth — not surprisingly — into different sections than Webster, he recognizes with Webster that the fourth movement has a peculiarly transformative logic which erstwhile obsessions with formal structure had missed. He argues that the Ninth moves from traditional structural patterns and arrives, by the end of the fourth movement, at a "state of rhapsodic compositional freedom."[4] For Friedheim, "the entire Symphony moves to the point where it will finally free itself from all formal restrictions."[5] Both Friedheim and Webster offer their own readings of the fourth movement to show that a recognition of the various references to form is not necessarily incorrect, but insufficient. As their readings show, to recognize the articulations of structural devices is not the same as getting at the logic which impels the movement.

In their own discussions of the Ninth, Taruskin and Cook do not make up for the limits of their discipline by posing alternative readings as Webster and Friedheim do. Rather, they pinpoint exactly what those limits are: Taruskin who mercilessly exposes lapses in formalist logic, and Cook who reveals the ideological underpinnings of various readings, arguing implicitly that every interpretation is in some sense a co-optation.

If it is no longer necessary to argue the folly of formalist readings, it is still necessary to interpret the Ninth, and to keep our eyes on the presuppositions that we bring to our readings. I am going to propose a reading of the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth, a reading that does not focus on key relationships or structural divisions, but rather on what I see as its narrative construction. By importing Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of discourse and narrative, I can argue for a coherent theory of the way I hear the Ninth. Further, my reading will reveal that those critics like Webster and Friedheim who claim to have moved beyond formalist concerns have not successfully revealed the relationship between the construction of the Ninth and its meaning. I will argue that the fourth movement of Beethoven's Ninth begins with the dialectical rejection and acceptance of abstract motives, and moves into dialogic transformation of specific, textual melody-ideas. This shift from monologic control of chaos into a freer, dialogic conversation is essentially linked to the message of the Ninth.

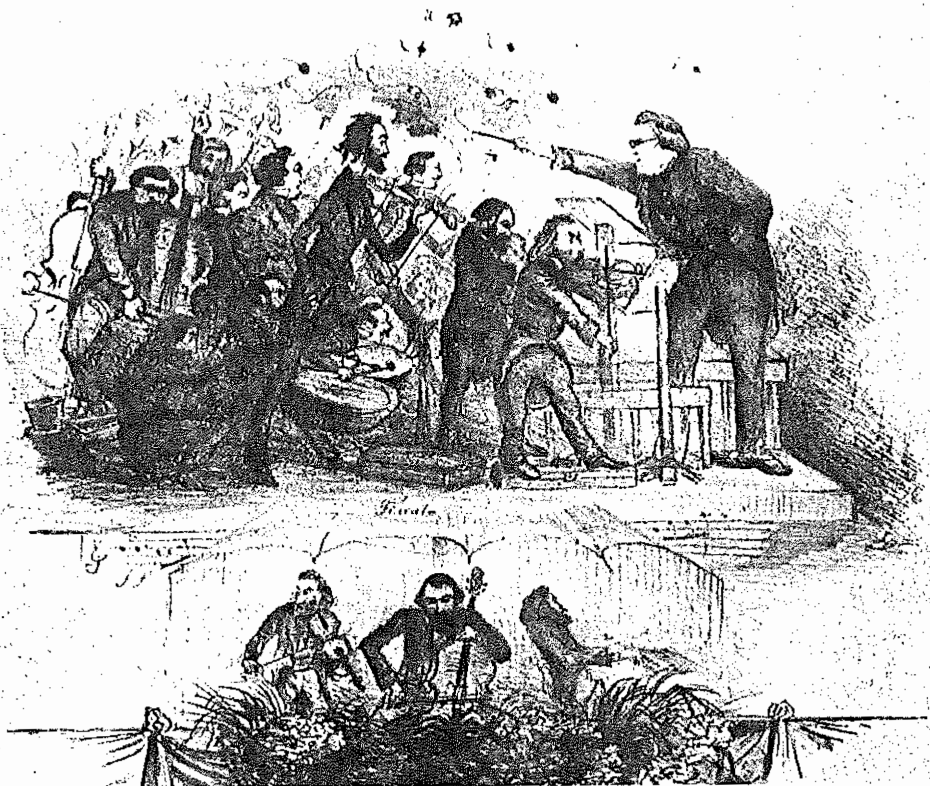
Mikhail Bakhtin

Mikhail Bakhtin wrote his theories of discourse and narrative in the early part of this century; although his important study, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, was published in 1929, Bakhtin's work was not widely studied in the West until it began to be translated in the late 1970s. A writer who suffered under the Soviet Union's repressive regime, Bakhtin was interested in how language could be put to more than one use, how its intentions and its authority could be undermined. Even though Bakhtin's writings are mainly concerned with language and narrative, they can be more broadly understood as theories of meaning, and have been used as interdisciplinary tools by numerous scholars.

The concept of dialogism, perhaps the most central of Bakhtin's ideas, articulates a system of meaning in which "there is constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others."[6] Since meaning must always occur in some context, a particular meaning can never be stable or singular, because the context that frames it will always be in flux. Art that is dialogic will foreground its interaction with other meanings that have shaped it, while monologic art (or speech, or language) will try to suppress other voices that might change, and hence challenge, its authority. Some monologic forms include the lyric poem, the epic poem, the tragic mode: all of these modes have a single, unitary purpose and voice. Parody is an inherently dialogic form. Although parody always implies ridicule, for Bakhtin there are other instances of language use that can be shot through with more than one intention (double-voiced discourse) which will not necessarily be parodic. For example, a story told from an unreliable point of view (a liar, a narrator trying to hide something, a despicable character) will necessarily be a double-voiced narration; there will be a difference between the author's intentions and the narrator's intentions.

Besides the aspect of double-ness in dialogic modes, there is an aspect of transformation as well. One of Bakhtin's many accounts of the dialogic is as follows: "The idea begins to live, that is to take shape, to develop, to find and renew its verbal expression, to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationship with other ideas, with the ideas of *others*."[7] The dialogic mode, because it recognizes its precarious place in a constantly shifting context, will shift and change as a result of the people and ideas it encounters. A Bakhtinian narrative is one that transforms itself according to the characters and ideas that enter its dialogue; hence, Bakhtin's notion of narrative "form" is very different from Aristotle's prescriptions for how a tragedy must proceed (*this* kind of character, *that* kind of flaw, *this* arrangement of events that lead to a climax, a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end). A Bakhtinian narrative is more like the path of a conversation than a pre-planned mold.

In addition to the encouragement of multiple meanings, and the transforming (or "unfinalizable") nature of dialogic modes, there is a related aspect about the nature of those "ideas" which transform narratives. An idea is not only constituted by "other ideas," but "the ideas of *others*." Ideas do not exist in the abstract, but have their relation with other ideas; furthermore, ideas are always held by living, breathing people. Bakhtin's theories usefully blur the traditional Aristotelean distinction between rhetoric and dialectic. In classical philosophy, rhetoric is the study of how to manipulate the beliefs of a particular audience regardless of the idea being pressed on them, while dialectic considers only the logical relationships among pure ideas. Bakhtin, on the other hand, emphasizes the inseparability of people from the ideas they hold. A person who lives in his or her own unique context will necessarily inflect generic "ideas" (whether large philosophical or religious systems like existentialism and Christianity, or simpler "ideas" about how to function in the world) with their unmistakable signature. What shapes the narrative of a Dostoevskian novel is not the formula of conflict-crisis-resolution, but the interaction of person-ideas with other person-ideas.



Caricature of an orchestral rehearsal of the Ninth Symphony's Finale with conductor Julius Rietz by the cellist Chr. Reimers (c. 1850).

One more concept before I turn to Beethoven's Ninth. A theorist of that which is subversive in language, that which cannot be monologically controlled, Bakhtin was extremely interested in the medieval concept of the carnival: that folk festival in which all of the decorous traditions and rituals of the Church are turned on their heads. Theorized fully in his dissertation on Rabelais, Bakhtin's account describes the carnivalistic love of flatulence, sex, and laughter that disperses life-draining rules and institutional control. Carnival makes authority accountable by parodying it, by placing it in a context it had not expected and cannot control. Carnival is essentially dialogic: it not only stirs up the flux which the Church tries to make stable, but it forces hierarchy to become fluid: clothes are worn inside out, mock popes are elected, the "material bodily lower stratum" (both excremental functions and the sexual functions), and "the entire system of degradation, turnovers, and travesties"[8] are celebrated. Churches and regimes can try to institute monological control, and authors, of course, can try to press their texts into giving up only a singular meaning, but for Bakhtin, the most interesting authors (like Dostoevsky) will admit of as much freeplay between the author's own intentions and the characters' intentions as possible.

This brief survey cannot possibly do justice to the complexity and interrelatedness of Bakhtin's theories. But I need to get to Beethoven before I've frightened my reader away, and this outline can at least serve as a starting point for my discussion.

The Ninth's Finale

The fourth movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony opens with the famous *Schreckensfanfare* that shatters the quiet of the Adagio which preceded it. Critics traditionally assign some version of the following interpretation to this inauspicious start: after three movements of relative cooperation, in which the orchestra stretched the limits of tonality and classical form, the orchestra is brawling about how to proceed. The cellos and basses try to bring order to the chaos by silencing the rest of the orchestra in an impassioned recitative. I hear what follows in terms of a dialectical dialogue: the cellos leading and the orchestra following in response. Various sections of the orchestra suggest themes which have been used in the preceding movements, all of which the cellos reject. Having run out of ideas, the oboes propose a theme that has not been heard before: a simple, squarely-composed folk tune, to which the cellos excitedly respond. *This* will work, and the rest of the orchestra concurs.

Some scholars have been put off by this circuitous beginning of the movement. For example, Heinrich Schenker, perhaps the most rigorously formalistic reader of Beethoven, could not account for this previous review of motives from the first three movements. He goes so far as to say:

> If Beethoven was planning to choose a new theme, what entitled him to consider seriously the notion of examining for their suitability exactly those themes that, fully utilized and exploited by a previous representation, had no right (!) even to return, instead of proposing to the listener only new themes, one after the other? Whatever the circumstances, the business of choosing from among themes belongs in the sketchbook.[9]

Schenker is looking for a unitary structuring logic, and therefore cannot understand why a composer would parade second-hand motives for review. But as Ernest Sanders points out, these themes are not merely reference points, but are brought back up again, reconsidered in the light of the catastrophe of the last movement's opening. Schenker — whose formalist method searches for some relationship between notes, keys, gestures — has misread the rhetoric of this opening passage; the instruments are not merely "proposing [themes] to the listener," but to themselves and each other.

Having finally reached a dialectical point of agreement — the abstract folk tune — the orchestra now proceeds with a theme and variations. Even though the oboes suggested the tune, it is the cellos who are still in charge of the affair; they play the theme solemnly at first, like a hymn, which eventually passes up through the strings and finally blazes forth in the trumpets in the last variation: triumph, it would seem, over the cacophony of the beginning.

But a problem develops. In the tag, the oboe and violins stumble upon an incongruous minor key, and the variations of the theme seem to have worked themselves out, with nowhere else to go. The orchestra is

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angrily at war with itself again. Back to square one. This dialectical work — assert, disagree, agree — has counted for nothing; the instruments of the orchestra have proved themselves incapable of dealing with their problems, whether we understand those "problems" to be of form, tonality, development, or even meaning. Here the baritone soloist steps in, the *deus ex machina:* "O friends, not these tones! rather, let us begin to sing more pleasant and joyful ones!" Berlioz called these lines "a treaty of alliance entered into between chorus and orchestra."[10] An alliance forged, I will argue, in a true dialogic spirit which actively engages other voices, and is transformed by them in turn. The baritone transforms the folk tune by assigning a meaning to it: a stanza which praises the power of joy to make men become brothers ("Alle Menschen werden Brüder, / Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt"). To put this in terms closer to my thesis, the tune changes from being dialectically abstract (refering only to other melodies) to being rhetorically specific: it's now a melody-idea.

The human voice has begun to dialogize the symphony, but for now, the vocal soloists adopt the same role as the lower strings had previously. If we distinguish the dialogic from the dialectic by imagining the dialogic as accomodating of other person-ideas, and the dialectic as refering to abstract relationships as well as implying a Socratically authoritative mode, then the soloist's addition of text to a heretofore abstract medium is such a powerful move that it is initially treated as a *dialectical* move. The baritone sings the joy melody, and the chorus obediently repeats it in unison. The soloists then sing the second stanza in harmony; the chorus repeats those harmonies. In the third variation, the soloists sing a florid elaboration of the melody; the chorus repeats the decorative lines as best they can. For the moment, the addition of the human voice has only reinstituted another dialectical hierarchy: soloists play Socrates, the chorus agrees, and the orchestra plays along.

What follows the common tone modulation ("vor Gott") is often described as a breech of classical decorum: a Turkish military march complete with fife, drum, cymbals, and a triangle. Stylized marches "in the Turkish style" were familiar enough to Beethoven's Viennese audience, but not in the context of symphonies. To put this in Bakhtinian terms, the aristocratic symphony has been carnivalized by this earthy march. This march begins, amusingly enough, after an ominous silence, which itself is preceded by a thunderous invocation of angels standing before God. What follows such grandiosity? The bassoons, honking away in their lowest register. One often reads analyses that use such verbal constructions as "the juxtaposition of the earthly and the divine" to describe this and other moments in Beethoven's work. (I've only been able to find one brave enough to give the name "fart" to these plunky sounds.[11]) What could be more carnivalistic, what could more show up the pretentions of upper and middle class entertainment than the sound of flatulation after a tremendous fortissimo chord?

The tenor sings a jagged solo over the grunting bassoons and ringing triangles, and the men of the chorus join him, transforming this military march into a drinking song in the German Männerchör tradition. The transformation from march to drinking song is subtle, but is effected again through the introduction of voices, and hence, meaning. But this time, the text is dialogized by the music rather than the other way around: the text sings of heros and victory ("wie ein Held zum Siegen"), but the militaristic tones are muted, I think, by the raucous part-writing for the men's voices. This isn't strident victory over some Opponent, but the drunken enthusiasm of camaraderie. Another aspect that mutes the connotations of vanquishing is that this march / drinking song is Turkish: surely an objectified culture of nineteenth (and twentieth) century Germanic nations. If all "men" are to become "brothers," then such enthusiasm must include Turks.

When the joy theme is repeated, it occurs after a heated fugal development section, in which the orchestra winds from the B-flat tonal area of the march back to D Major tonic.

Vl.
Vla.
Sopran.
Freu-de, schö-ner Göt - ter - fun - ken,

Example 1.

Soprano
Freu - de schö - ner Göt - ter - fun - ken,
Alto
Seid — um - - schlun - gen,

Example 2.

chorus
cresc.
Deine Zauber, deine Zauber bin - den wie - der,

Example 3.

The orchestra — no longer servile accompanist — has begun to find its independent voice again, serving an important harmonic function. The following choral repetition of the joy theme is significant in several ways. It is the first time the chorus has done something unprovoked by the soloists, and the melody itself is dialogized by the undercurrent of triplets from the preceding development section (see Example 1).

After this repetition, the chorus takes the lead, introducing an entirely new melody-idea without the encouragement of the soloists: "Seid umschlungen, Millionen! / Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt!" The disjunct melodic contour contrasts clearly with the conjunct motion of the joy melody. The textual idea welded to this melody is likewise different. While the first theme praises the kinetic energy of joy to unite humanity, this second theme acknowledges that universal brotherhood is forged through a knowledge of a Creator who is greater than us: "Be embraced, o millions! This kiss to the whole world! Brothers – above the canopy of stars surely a loving Father dwells." This is the so-called "brotherhood" theme; wincing at the gender-bias, I would add "-united-by-God" to emphasize that the presence of God is essential to this unity, and is hence an intrinsic part of this melody-idea.

At one moment in this section, after invoking the love of the Father, the chorus stops singing, stupefied by his power. In a lush adagio, the orchestra re-enters the dialogue with a short phrase of hushed lyricism — a wordless meaning that both interrupts and dialogizes the choral ranting that precedes it. Reverentially, the chorus responds to this orchestral voice in kind: "Ihr stürzt nieder, Millionen?" (Do you fall prostrate, o millions?) The sobering effect of this four-measure orchestral interlude on the chorus should put to rest Wagner's partial reading of this symphony, which argued that Beethoven had reached the end of abstract music, that the expressive resources of instrumental music were depleted.

Thus far, there are two main melody-ideas that have yet to come into contact with one another: the joy theme and the brotherhood-united-by-God theme. What follows is a glorious explosion of sound which, in my reading, is the thematic climax of the fourth movement. Beethoven overlays the two melody-ideas in an elaborate double fugue: static unity dialogized by kinetic joy. Sanders provides a concise gloss on the significance of this fugal joining of these themes:

"By positing the divine and the human as contrapuntally complementary, Beethoven here gives a wonderfully grandiose interpretation to the word 'umschlungen,' which means not just 'embraced,' but 'joined, entwined, twisted together'; everything – including the 'heterophonic' variants of the main theme – contributes to a panoramic vision, in which all creation seems to be caught up in a cosmic paean."[12]

The baritone transforms the folk tune by assigning a meaning to it: a stanza which praises the power of joy to make men become brothers

When the women of the chorus begin the double fugue, the joy theme is further dialogized into a triplet movement that manifests itself on the surface of the melody, and the brotherhood-united-by-God theme is rhythmically diminished to fit with the joy melody (see Example 2).

Meanwhile, the soloists have been silent while the chorus and orchestra found their independent voices, and now Beethoven reintroduces them; they toss around elaborations of the joy theme in the form of a canon. The chorus, which used to take the soloists' lead, can no longer be followers, cannot be playful with this canon. Having dealt with the weighty issues of God, humanity and, joy, and been dialogized by these melody-ideas, they take up the canon and transform it into a boisterous melody that literally drowns out the soloists (Example 3). Unlike the decorous canon out of which it is born, this melody, with its fast pace and large leaps, is impossible to sing beautifully, which I think Beethoven intended. Here is the unmistakable effect of dialogism; as Bakhtin says that true repetition is never possible because contexts are always in flux, so the chorus necessarily re-accents the soloists' playful canon with the tones of their rough energy. The dialogic interaction of many voices — the voice of joy, the voice of humanity, of the orchestra, of the conventions of classical form, of the soloists and chorus — has turned this humble folk tune into an uncontrollable shout. Of the many different voices that enter in the Ninth, none are dominant, although some take more prominence at different times; each voice retains its distinct, yet dialogized, individuality.

The soloists, who have played out their usefulness as textual and melodic leaders, make themselves useful by providing harmonic leadership, moving from E Major to the second inversion of D Major. The baritone soloist makes the remarkable drop from B to A, the harmonic link which has been sought since the first movement,[13] and the chorus and orchestra are catapulted into the tumultuous finale, a bombastic, shouting free-for-all. Because of my interest in Bakhtin, I can recognize the direction of the fourth movement as starting in monologic control, and moving to dialogic freeplay; and it is this construction which I recognize as consonant with the meaning of the Ninth: Beethoven uses not the control of classical form, but the synergy of joy and faith to express the divine and human as "contrapuntally complementary," or in dialogic interaction.

The resemblances between my own reading and Webster's and Friedheim's should be apparent by now. Phillip Friedheim's compelling "On the Structural Integrity of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony" argues that the finale moves from traditional structural patterns and arrives at a "state of rhapsodic compositional freedom." I have argued that the fourth movement begins in a closed dialectical scheme (which feels much like the exposition of a sonata) and then moves into a series of dialogic accomodations. To a music theorist, Friedheim's argument will seem more coherently argued than my own, but his argument is based solely on the music, while I have emphasized that the direction of the symphony is justified by the interaction of text and music. Friedheim, amazingly, dispenses with the text in a footnote. "In dealing with the fact that this music is a setting of a poetic text," Friedheim asserts, "one should never forget that Beethoven chose only those few stanzas from Schiller's longer poem that suited his convenience and that these stanzas are not even consecutive in the original."[14] I am puzzled at why Friedheim terms the switching of stanzas a matter of "convenience." Like countless other composers of songs, operas, and oratorios, Beethoven meddled with

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the texts for his own artistic purposes: to create the meaning he wanted. But Friedheim goes on: "There can be no justification for assuming that the music changes its shape merely to accomodate itself to the succession of ideas in the poetry."[15] It has been my argument that the fourth movement is exactly a series of successive accomodations: text accomodated to music, music accomodated to text, soloists to chorus, chorus to soloists, voice to instrument, instrument to voice, melody-idea to melody-idea. Like my own reading, Friedheim's can recognize the direction of the last movement, but his formalist tools do not press him to ask *why* a symphony would seek to free itself from formal restrictions. It is telling that in Friedheim's reading, the stirring fugal combination of the two melody-ideas is for him yet another section that moves us from point A to point B.

Though Webster's argument about the Ninth (that it is through-composed) deals with the text in a more satisfying way than Friedheim, Webster still recognizes in formalistic terms what I see in terms of a narrative logic.

The Ninth's Meaning

Setting aside the question of its structuring logic, I want to consider a related matter: what does the Ninth mean? Nicholas Cook's study of the Ninth takes a hard look at the charge that the symphony has been co-opted by ideologies that have nothing to do with it, thus rendering it meaningless. If the Ninth has been performed as part of Hitler's birthday celebrations, Cook asks, "how can such a work be said to mean anything at all?"[16] Our present culture has its own problematic assimilations of the Ninth. Many recognize it as the tune which the murderer-rapist in *A Clockwork Orange* claims as his favorite, and my students identify it as the theme for the gratuitously violent *Die Hard*. It is a good question: has the Ninth been robbed of its meaning by a vacuous culture?

But Cook's version of Beethoven's Ninth is not just threatened from the outside, by Hitlers and Hollywoods. Cook sees the Ninth as threatened by the very intentions of its composer. Cook is troubled by a Beethoven whose intended meaning

Our present culture has its own problematic assimilations of the Ninth. Many recognize it as the tune which the murderer-rapist in A Clockwork Orange claims as his favorite, and my students identify it as the theme for the gratuitously violent Die Hard. It is a good question: has the Ninth been robbed of its meaning by a vacuous culture?

could only be read as earnest: if Beethoven were merely earnest, then his message of brotherhood and unity would seem naive. "But can Beethoven really have been so unthinking," Cook wonders, "so *dumb*, as to remain unaffected by the history of his own time, holding true to the beliefs of the 1780s in the Vienna of the 1820s, with its censorship, secret police, and network of informers?"[17]

So Cook needs to find an ironic side to Beethoven as a necessary antidote to this direct earnestness, an irony that he happily locates in Beethoven's method of indirect expression. Cook, reading his own postmodern ambivalence into the score, argues that Beethoven's techniques of distancing, such as the "juxtaposition of the ultra-serious and the slapstick,"[18] are cues to the way we should read the Ninth. For example, Cook reads the fugal combination of the joy and brotherhood themes in two incompatible ways: "This can be seen as the climactic synthesis of two of the most disparate elements of the finale. But it can also be seen as a purposely exaggerated display of technical virtuosity that intrudes upon the message of both text and music."[19] But by solving one problem — Beethoven's supposed naivete — Cook only creates another: he laments that Beethoven's irony paradoxically calls into question the very possibility of Beethoven's dream of unity; Cook asserts that it may just be a dream: "saying that we need something to believe in, even if we don't believe in it."[20] When Beethoven's music "goes into quotation marks," Cook reads it as a sign of crippling irony.

Cook solves this catch-22 with an interpretive sleight-of-hand. He lifts this paradox — was Beethoven dead serious, or was he distanced from such a belief? — into a realm of abstraction where bald contradictions can coexist: Beethoven, Cook summarily concludes, "was both earnest and ironical."

It is ironic that Cook's study, an earnest analysis of various co-optations of the Ninth, should end with his own co-optation. It is not surprising however, that Cook should be concerned about the earnestness of that message of God-inspired unity. Post-Auschwitz Europe gives even more cause for qualifying one's joy than post-Napoleon Vienna.

Cook is not the first critic to equate indirect expression (or music in quotation marks), with insincere expression. In varying ways, both Theodor Adorno and Ernest Ansermet accuse Stravinsky of the same thing. Their argument could be distilled as follows: music that is self-referential, or music that is written about music, is necessarily music *against* music; to express oneself indirectly in art is a scandalous sign of loss of control. While the subject of direct expression is the composer's intentions (or, for Ansermet, the etbical signification of being), the subject of indirect expression is the music itself, technique, mere play divorced from humanity.

But for Bakhtin, what Cook recognizes in Beethoven is not a potentially crippling irony, but the sign of a self-conscious artistic creation. To put it simply, Bakhtin would argue that all works of art call attention to themselves *as* artistic creations. The kind of art that tries to present itself as a reality, and to mute its nature as a representation is usually considered propagandistic or sentimental, or to use Bakhtin's term, monologic. Art which is dialogic lives, breathes, and plays, witb its subject matter as well as its own conventions of representation. Yes, Beethoven's elaborate double fugue is unmistakably virtuosic, but are virtuosity and earnestness mutually exclusive?

To take a different tack, if we think more seriously about the carnivalized effects of the symphony, we can rescue Beethoven from Cook's postmodern abyss. Carnival recuperates irony as a positive force. The "juxtaposition of the ultraserious and slapstick" — as Cook terms Beethoven's techniques of distancing — does not destroy, but conceives: "To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously," Bakhtin argues, "in order to bring forth something more and better."[21] Beethoven's irony is, like Bakhtin's account of Rabelais' irony, a "regenerating ambivalence,"

not a crippling one. Beethoven's farts do not paradoxically intrude on the seriousness of his message; they are an intrinsic part of its seriousness. It is such carnivalistic effects as these that show up the pretensions of ultra-serious forms. Cook, following Rey Longyear, reads these effects as a representation of "the author's detachment from his work" and the destruction of illusion.[22] Such effects, for Bakhtin, neither mark distance between author and text, nor create distance between text and receiver. On the contrary, they collapse distance. "Carnival," says Bakhtin, "is a pageant without footlights and without division into performers and spectators."[23] The erasure of the division between performer and spectator — particularly after the last movement's dialogic motion gets under way — is an excellent description of the effect of Beethoven's adrenaline-pumping finale. Who, listening to Beethoven's Ninth, has not wanted to hum along?

From the perspective of Derridean skepticism, the image of a Beethoven who doesn't call his claims into question is certainly a naive, indeed a *dumb* image. But if contemporary critics are embarrassed by such things, then I hope we can soon develop more sophisticated strategies of interpretation — strategies that can help us grasp Beethoven's simplicity and complexity, his earnestness, vulgarity, and profundity. It would have to be an interpretive strategy that could hold all of these things in an economy that includes the critic/spectator as well. Until then, we have Bakhtin.

Notes

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[1] A comprehensive listing would be prohibitive, so I will limit this note to the more famous readings as well as those summaries of the Ninth which contradict each other in fundamental ways. Charles Rosen describes the last movement as a four-movement design superimposed on a classical concerto form (*The Classical Style*, New York: Norton, 1972, 439-40). Leo Treitler argues that its form is "an extraordinary concatenation of instrumental genres," and similarly to Rosen, argues that its formal structure is a "four-movement symphonic form," while its "overall dramatic shape . . . describes a large-scale sonata form" ("History, Criticism, and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," *19th Century Music* 3(1980): 193-210. See also his "'To Worship That Celestial Sound': Motives for Analysis," *The Journal of Musicology* 1(1982), 153-70.) Heinrich Schenker divides it into four uneven sections (*Beethoven: Neunte Sinfonie: Eine Darstellung des musikalishen Inhalts*, Vienna: Universal Edition, 1912). Leon Plantinga argues that it consists of three sections plus a coda ("The *Missa solemnis* and Ninth Symphony," *Romantic Music*, New York, 1984, 60-68). Rey M. Longyear posits that the "structure is essentially that of theme and variations" (*Nineteenth-Century Romanticism in Music*, 3rd ed., Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1988, 51). Ralph Vaughn Williams argues that it is "a set of variations with episodes, like the slow movement" (*Some Thoughts on Beethoven's Choral Symphony*, London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953). Donald Francis Tovey identifies two large sections, an "exposition" and a "finale," and fills in the rest with descriptions of smaller sections ("Symphony in D minor, No. 9, Op. 125 — Its Place in Musical Art," *Symphonies and Other Orchestral Works*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989 (reprint of 1935), 83-127). Ernest Sanders argues that it is an expanded sonata form ("Form and Content in the Finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," *Musical Quarterly* 1 (1964): 50-76). Sanders also points out in a footnote that the Philharmonia and Kalmus editions of the miniature score describe the movement as "a cantata in Rondo form." Otto Baensch argues that it is in bar form, with two related *Stollen* and two *Grossabgesänge* (*Aufbau und Sinn des Chorfinales in Beethovens neunter Symphonie*, Berlin: W. de Gruyter & Co., 1930).

[2] Richard Taruskin, "Performers and Instruments:0 Resisting the Ninth," *19th Century Music* 12 (1989): 241-56. James Webster, "The Form of the Finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," *Beethoven Forum 1*, ed. Lewis Lockwood and James Webster (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1992). Nicholas Cook, *Beethoven: Symphony No. 9*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993. Phillip Friedheim, "On the Structural Integrity of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," *The Music Review* 46 (1985): 93-117.

[3] Webster, 36.

[4] Friedheim, 94.

[5] Friedheim, 94.

[6] Michael Holquist, "Dialogism," glossary of Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 426.

[7] Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), 88.

[8] Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984), 81-82.

[9] As quoted in Sanders, 65. The exclamation mark is Schenker's.

[10] Quoted in Plantinga, 65.

[11] David Cairns and Roger Norrington, as quoted in William Meredith, "Conference Report: 'The Beethoven Experience,' PepsiCo Summerfare, Purchase, New York, August 5-6, 1989," *The Beethoven Newsletter* 4 (1989): 61.

[12] Sanders, 69.

[13] See Taruskin.

[14] Friedheim, 114, note 11.

[15] Friedheim, 114. A footnote in Sanders' article relays a similar claim in Walter Riezler's *Beethoven* (London: M.C. Forrester, 1938), 211: "[Beethoven] took little account of the poem itself, still less of any philosophical meaning that might underlie the words" (quoted in Sanders, 70, note 35).

[16] Cook, 99.

[17] Cook, 102.

[18] Cook, 103.

[19] Cook, 103.

[20] Cook, 102.

[21] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 21.

[22] Cook, 103.

[23] Bakhtin, *Problems*, 122.