

BEETHOVEN'S LETTERS TO "MEINE UNSTERBLICHE GELIEBTE"

As Beethoven lay in his bed in waning health on July 6th and 7th, 1812, the great composer authored three passionate love letters to a woman unknown. Discovered in Beethoven's bedside table shortly after his death in 1827, these intimate letters to "meine unsterbliche Geliebte" – "my immortal beloved" – have been a source of speculation for the past two centuries. They have simultaneously shed light on who Beethoven was as a man and raised questions about his personal relationships when he was at the height of his creative powers.

Two hundred years after the letters were written (almost to the day), I decided to set Beethoven's love letters to music. My chamber art song cycle, *Briefe an die unsterbliche Geliebte* ("Letters to the Immortal Beloved") was written in January and February of 2012, in a Leighton Colony studio for composers in residence at the Banff Centre for the Arts, in Banff, Alberta. The name of the studio – the "Valentine" (after its architect, Frederic Valentine) – only added inspiration to the serene beauty of the natural setting in which this work was created. Beethoven's letters provided me with passionate, rhythmically nuanced, sonorously beautiful and richly-textured poetic texts to work with, a compositional goldmine in terms of the evocative musical imagery they suggested. Perhaps I should not have been surprised to find that Beethoven's spoken and written language was somewhat expressive and musical!

On Friday, July 27, 2012, the première performance of the cycle was given by mezzo-soprano Julie Nesrallah and the Juno Award winning Gryphon Trio (violinist Annalee Patipatanikoon, pianist Jamie Parker and cellist Roman Borys) at the Ottawa International Chamber Music Festival ("Chamberfest"). The work is dedicated to Ms Nesrallah and the trio, since their inspiration, friendship, example and consummate musicianship were always in mind during its conception and composition. The foursome recently recorded *Briefe an die unsterbliche Geliebte* at CBC Toronto's Glenn Gould Studio, and the work will be featured on a new CD of contemporary Canadian works that have been commissioned by the Gryphon Trio. The recording is scheduled for release on the Naxos label in early 2015. Mezzo-soprano/piano and baritone/piano arrangements of the cycle were completed earlier this year. I accompanied the première performance of the latter by baritone Gary Dahl at Christ Church Cathedral, Ottawa, on October 17th, 2014.

More than a dozen "Immortal Beloved" candidates have been proposed by musicologists. Based on my own reading and research, my guess is that Beethoven's "Immortal Beloved" was the Countess Josephine von Brunswick, a beautiful young Hungarian aristocrat who the composer first met in 1799, shortly before her marriage to Count von Deym. After the Count died in 1804, the Countess's relationship with Beethoven increasingly intensified over the next several years. Sadly, it seems that the Countess's social status and parental obligations prevented her from marrying Beethoven, a suitor deemed unsuitable by her family (her hovering and matriarchal mother, in particular). In the third movement of my cycle, I quote the lyrical opening theme of Beethoven's "Andante Grazioso in F Major" for piano solo (popularly known as the "Andante Favori"), a piece that Beethoven secretly dedicated to Josephine von Brunswick in the spring of 1805, shortly after the death of her husband. The theme I quote in my last movement is therefore sometimes known as "Josephine's Theme."

Let me say a few more words about my inspiration to write *Briefe an die unsterbliche Geliebte*. I have long been fascinated by the ways in which historical composers have tried – often unsuccessfully, sadly – to balance their creative and personal lives. In the end, their single-minded devotion to their art usually won out, and made domestic happiness almost unimaginable. Beethoven and Brahms are classic examples. Both sought relationships with women who, for a variety of reasons – including age, marital and/or social status – were essentially unattainable. Yet their passionate devotion to the women they loved, often expressed more in correspondence than in a genuine personal or physical relationship, inspired so many of the great musical masterpieces that they left to posterity.

In both the popular and scholarly imagination, the name of Beethoven has become almost synonymous with a post-19th-century cultic concept of the divinely gifted creative “genius.” But while Beethoven may have been a prodigiously gifted human being, and he lived his life with a singular dedication to his art, he wanted above all to love and be loved, just like the rest of us. And just as we often think of Beethoven’s music as having a certain universal appeal that transcends time, place and culture, his letters also seem to express universal truths in their emphasis on the ineffable, unattainable, eternal and divine nature of love.

Let us now take a closer look at the letters themselves. Few documents in music history have been shrouded in mystery as much as the three passionate love letters that were found in a box in Beethoven’s bedside table after his death on 26 March 1827.¹ Determining the identity of the intended recipient – a woman Beethoven addresses as “*meine unsterbliche Geliebte*” (“my immortal beloved”) – has been rendered more difficult by the fact that no year or place is provided on the letters. Beethoven biographer Maynard Solomon published the first thorough study on the letters in 1977.² Using the month and dates given by Beethoven (July 6 and 7), knowledge of Beethoven’s whereabouts during the summers of the early nineteenth century, and the testimony of a few of the composer’s most intimate friends and contemporaries, Solomon and others have concluded that the letters were written during the summer of 1812, when the composer was at a spa in Teplitz, Bohemia, attending to his ill health. Virtually all of Beethoven’s many close female friends and acquaintances have been proposed as “immortal beloved” candidates, including the Countess Giulietta Guicciardi (to whom the “Moonlight Sonata” is dedicated),³ the Countess Thérèse



**Chalk portrait of Beethoven
by Louis Letronne**
(drawn in 1812, the year Beethoven
wrote three passionate letters to
his “immortal beloved”)

¹ The moving “Heiligenstadt Testament” was another document found in Beethoven’s bedside table after his death. Dated 6 October 1802, the testament – “to be read and executed after my death” – was addressed to Beethoven’s brothers Karl and Johann. Like the “immortal beloved” letters, the existence of the testament – in which the composer reveals how his agonizing deafness compelled him to live a solitary life – was unknown to anyone but Beethoven during his lifetime.

² Maynard Solomon, *Beethoven* (London: Granada, 1978). Solomon is also widely known as a pianist and recording-industry mogul.

³ Anton Schindler, *Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven* (Münster, 1840).

von Brunswick (Giulietta's cousin),⁴ Antonie Brentano (dedicatee of the Diabelli Variations, op. 120)⁵ and her sister-in-law Bettina,⁶ Magdalene Willmann,⁷ Amalie Sebald,⁸ Marie Erdödy,⁹ Dorothea Ertmann,¹⁰ Almerie Esterházy,¹¹ Therese Malfatti,¹² and the Countess Josephine von Brunswick (Giulietta Guicciardi's cousin and Thérèse von Brunswick's younger sister).¹³ While

⁴ Alexander W. Thayer, *Life of Beethoven*, 1866-79 (3 vols.); Mariam Tenger, *Beethovens Unsterbliche Geliebte* (Bonn: Nusser, 1890); Romain Rolland, *Beethoven the Creator: From the Eroica to the Appassionata* [Beethoven. Les grandes époques créatrices. I. De l'Héroïque à l'Appassionata.] Transl. Ernest Newman (New York: Garden City, 1928); Elliot Forbes (ed.), *Thayer's Life of Beethoven*, 2nd ed'n (Princeton: University Press, 1967).

⁵ Maynard Solomon, *Beethoven* (London: Granada, 1978).

⁶ Max Unger, *Auf Spuren von Beethovens Unsterblicher Geliebten*. [Traces of Beethoven's Immortal Beloved.] (Langensalza, 1910); idem., *Beethoven und seine Verleger* (Berlin and Vienna, 1921); Edward Walden, "Beethoven's 'Immortal Beloved': Arguments in Support of the Candidacy of Bettina Brentano," *The Beethoven Journal*, 17/2 (2002): 54–68; idem., *Beethoven's Immortal Beloved: Solving the Mystery* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow, 2011).

⁷ Theodor von Frimmel, *Beethoven-Studien*, 2 vols. (München: Georg Müller, 1906).

⁸ Wolfgang Thomas-San-Galli, *Beethoven und die unsterbliche Geliebte: Amalie Sebald, Goethe, Thérèse Brunswik und anderes; mit Benutzung unbekannter Materials* (Munich: Wunderhorn, 1910).

⁹ Dana Steichen, *Beethoven's Beloved* (New York: Doubleday, 1959); Gail S. Altman, *Beethoven, Man of His Word: Undisclosed Evidence for His Immortal Beloved* (Tallahassee: Anubian Press, 1996).

¹⁰ George R. Marek, *Beethoven: Biography of a Genius* (Chicago: Funk & Wagnalls, 1969).

¹¹ William Meredith, "Miscellanea: Mortal Musings Testing the Candidacy of Almerie Esterházy Against the Antonie Brentano Theory," *The Beethoven Journal* 15/1 (2000): 42-7.

¹² Virginia Beahrs, "The Beethoven-Malfatti Connection Revisited," *The Beethoven Journal* 13/1 (1998): 12–16.

¹³ Ida Marie Lipius (La Mara), *Beethovens Unsterbliche Geliebte. Das Geheimnis der Gräfin Brunsvik und ihre Memoiren*. [Beethoven's Immortal Beloved: Countess Brunsvik's Secret and her Memoirs] (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1909); idem., *Beethoven und die Brunsviks. Nach Familienpapieren aus Thérèse Brunsviks Nachlaß*. [Beethoven and the Brunsviks: Family Documents from Thérèse Brunsvik's Estate] (Leipzig: Siegel, 1920); Siegmund Kaznelson, *Beethovens Ferne und Unsterbliche Geliebte* [Beethoven's Distant and Immortal Beloved] (Zürich: StandardKaznelson, 1954); Jean and Brigitte Massin, *Ludwig van Beethoven* (Paris: Club Français du Livre, 1955); Harry Goldschmidt, *Um die Unsterbliche Geliebte: Ein Beethoven-Buch*. [About the Immortal Beloved: A Beethoven Book] (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1977); Marie-Elisabeth Tellenbach, *Beethoven und seine Unsterbliche Geliebte Josephine Brunswick: Ihr Schicksal und der Einfluß auf Beethovens Werk* [Beethoven and his "Immortal Beloved" Josephine Brunswick. Her Fate and the Impact on Beethoven's Œuvre] (Zurich: Atlantis, 1983); idem., *Beethoven and the Countess Josephine Brunswick*, "The Beethoven Newsletter 2/3 (1987): 41-51; idem., "Künstler und Ständegesellschaft um 1800: die Rolle der Vormundschaftsgesetze in Beethovens Beziehung zu Josephine Gräfin Deym," [Artists and the Class Society in 1800: the Role of Guardianship Laws in Beethoven's Relationship to Josephine Countess Deym.] *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 2/2 (1988): 253-63; Rita Steblin, "Josephine Gräfin Brunswick-Deyms Geheimnis enthüllt: Neue Ergebnisse zu ihrer Beziehung zu Beethoven," [Countess Josephine Brunsvik-Deym's Secret Revealed: New Results on her Relationship to Beethoven], *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* 57/6 (2002); idem., "'Auf diese Art mit A geht alles zu Grunde': A New Look at Beethoven's Diary Entry and the 'Immortal Beloved'" *Bonner Beethoven-Studien* 6 (2007): 147-180; idem., "'A dear, enchanting girl who loves me and whom I love': New Facts about Beethoven's Beloved Piano Pupil Julie Guicciardi," *Bonner Beethoven-Studien* 8 (2009): 89–152; John E. Klapproth, *Beethoven's Only Beloved: Josephine* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2011); Virginia O. Beahrs, *New Light on Beethoven's Immortal Beloved?* *Michigan Quarterly Review* 11/3 (1972): 177-85; idem., "The Immortal Beloved Revisited," *Beethoven Newsletter*, 1/2 (1986): 22–24; idem., "The Immortal Beloved Riddle Reconsidered," *Musical Times*, Vol. 129/1740

British musicologists have tended to follow Solomon's lead in preferring the candidacy of Antonie Brentano, the overwhelming majority of Beethoven scholars in the rest of the world have preferred the candidacy of Josephine von Brunswick, to the point of considering the matter resolved.

Beethoven appears to have had an inclination to pursue relationships with younger women, liaisons he undoubtedly knew were doomed to failure. From the content of the letters it can be reasonably concluded that Beethoven's "immortal beloved" was an unattainable (likely married) woman. Josephine von Brunswick was nine years younger than Beethoven and involved in committed conjugal relationships during eight of the twenty-two years of her involvement with the composer (1799-1821). She was married to Count Joseph von Deym from 1799 until his sudden death in 1804,¹⁴ and later to Baron Christoph von Stackelberg, with whom she lived from 1810 until their acrimonious separation in 1812. In a letter of 8 March 1816 to Ferdinand Ries, his friend and student, Beethoven wrote:



Josephine, Countess Deym
(née Countess von Brunswick),
ca. 1803

kindest regards to your wife. Unfortunately, I have none; I found only one woman who will probably never be mine, yet on that account I am not a woman-hater.¹⁵

Beethoven first became acquainted with the von Brunswick family in May of 1799, shortly before her marriage to Count von Deym. Beethoven continued to see the young widow after her husband's death in 1804, and she continued to live in Vienna until the summer of 1808. The friendship intensified from 1804 to 1808, so much so that, according to Charlotte von Brunswick, her youngest sister, Beethoven's frequent visits to "Pepi" were cause for concern. "Beethoven is very often here to give Pepi lessons," she reported to her sister Thérèse in December of 1804. "This is a bit dangerous, I must confess."¹⁶ "Beethoven and Pepi, what is going to become of them?" Thérèse wrote in reply. "She must be on her guard! Her heart



Thérèse von Brunswick

(1988): 64–70; idem., "Beethoven's Only Beloved? New Perspectives on the Love Story of the Great Composer," *Music Review*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (1993): 183–197.; Carl Dahlhaus, *Ludwig van Beethoven: Approaches to his Music* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Ernst Pichler, *Beethoven: Mythos und Wirklichkeit* [Beethoven: Myth and Reality.] (Vienna: Amalthea, 1994).

¹⁴ For an interesting account of Count Deym's own musical interests, see O.E. Deutsch, "Count Deym and his Mechanical Organs," *Music and Letters* 29/ 2 (1948): 140-45.

¹⁵ Letter to Ferdinand Ries, 8 March 1816, cited in A. Eaglefield-Hull and J.S. Shedlock (ed. and trans.), *Letters of Beethoven* (New York: Dover, 1972), 193.

¹⁶ "Beethoven vient très souvent, il donne des leçons à Pepi - c'est un peu dangereux, je t'avoue" (excerpt from a letter of 19 December 1804, from Charlotte von Brunswick to her sister Thérèse). See Ida Marie Lipius (La Mara), *Beethoven und die Brunsviks. Nach Familienpapieren aus Thérèse Brunsviks Nachlass* [Beethoven and the Brunsviks: Family Documents from Thérèse Brunsvik's Estate] (Leipzig: Siegel, 1920), 51.

must have the strength to say no, a sad duty.”¹⁷

“Oh beloved Josephine,” Beethoven wrote in 1805, “when I met you for the first time, I was determined not to let a spark of love germinate in me.”¹⁸ Though no letters of reply have survived, drafts penned by Josephine to Beethoven in 1806 (or possibly 1807) suggest that Beethoven’s affections were returned by the widowed Countess:

My soul was already enthusiastic for you even before I knew you personally. This was increased through your affection. A feeling deep in my soul, incapable of expression, made me love you. Even before I knew you, your Music made me enthusiastic for you. The goodness of your character, your affection increased it.¹⁹

Beethoven composed the song “*An die Hoffnung*” [To Hope], op. 32, as a musical declaration of love for Josephine in 1805.²⁰ However, it appears that the lovers were keen to keep their affair a secret, as Beethoven felt the need to explain to Josephine that there was no need for concern when his patron, Prince Lichnowsky, discovered the autograph of this song – bearing its secret dedication to Josephine – on the composer’s desk:

The matter is not as bad as you, my beloved Josephine, might think. Lichnowsky accidentally saw the song in my home, but neither mentioned it nor concluded that I had special feelings for you.²¹

An die Hoffnung, op. 32, was later published without a formal public dedication. Beethoven’s yearning for Josephine is scarcely veiled in its poetic text:

¹⁷ Excerpt from a letter of 20 January 1805 from Thérèse von Brunswick to her sister Charlotte: “Beethoven und Pepi, was soll daraus werden? Sie soll auf ihrer Hut sein! Ihr Herz muss die Kraft haben nein zu sagen, eine traurige Pflicht”. See Ida Marie Lipius (La Mara), *Beethoven und die Brunsviks*, 51.

¹⁸ “O geliebte J., ... als ich zu ihnen kam – war ich in der festen Entschlossenheit, auch nicht einen Funken Liebe in mir keimen zu lassen...” (Beethoven to Josephine, March/April 1805, cited in Joseph Schmidt-Görg (ed.), *Beethoven: Dreizehn unbekannte Briefe an Josephine Gräfin Deym geb. v. Brunsvik* [Beethoven: Thirteen Unknown Letters to Josephine Countess Deym née von Brunsvik.] (Bonn: Beethoven-Haus, 1957). See also Joseph Schmidt-Görg, “Neue Schriftstücke zu Beethoven und Josephine Gräfin Deym” [New Documents about Beethoven and Josephine Countess Deym], *Beethoven-Jahrbuch* (1969): 205-8.

¹⁹ “Meine ohnedieß, für Sie enthusiastische Seele noch ehe ich Sie persönlich kannte – erhielt durch Ihre Zuneigung Nahrung. Ein Gefühl das tief in meiner Seele liegt und keines Ausdrucks fähig ist, machte mich Sie lieben; noch ehe ich Sie kan[n]te machte ihre Musick mich für Sie enthusiastisch – Die Güte ihres Characters, ihre Zuneigung vermehrte es.” (Josephine to Beethoven, Winter 1806/7, cited in Schmidt-Görg, 1957, p. 20.)

²⁰ “An die Hofnung” is excerpted from a larger poem, “Urania,” by Christoph August Tiedge (1752-1841). Beethoven would compose two settings of Tiedge’s “An die Hofnung”: Op. 32 (stanzas 2, 3, 4) in 1804-05, and op. 94 (stanzas 1-4) in 1814.

²¹ “Wie ich sagte die Sache mit L[ichnowsky] ist nicht so arg meine Geliebte J. als man sie ihm machte – L. hatte durch Zufall das Lied an die Hofnung bei mir liegen sehen, ohne dass ich es bemerkte ... L. sagt selbst, daß er selbst zu sehr mit Delikatesse Bekannt sej, als daß er auch nur ein Worte gesagt hätte, wenn er fur gewiß ein engeres Verhältniss vorausgesetzt hätte” (Beethoven to Josephine, March/April 1805, cited in Schmidt-Görg, 1957, pp. 12-14).

Is there a God?
Will he someday fulfill the promises for which longings yearns?
Before the court of the world, will this puzzle ever reveal itself?
Man can only hope. He dares not ask!

You, o hope, who so gladly celebrate on sacred nights
and softly and gently veil the grief that torments a tender soul;
raised through you, let the sufferer feel that there is an angel, above, who counts his tears!

When beloved and long-hushed voices are silenced,
and underneath dead branches memory sits desolate,
then your forsaken one mourns,
and, looking around at midnight,
supports himself against sunken urns.

And if he looks up to accuse Fate,
when, departing with his days, the last rays set,
then permit him to see, at the rim of this earthly dream,
the light of the cloud's hem from the nearby sun!²²

From another letter drafted by Josephine to Beethoven in 1807, it seems clear that the composer was pressing her to accept a proposal of marriage:

I would have to violate sacred bonds if I gave in to your request – Believe me – that I, by doing what is my duty, suffer the most – and that surely noble motives were guiding my actions.²³

What are the “sacred bonds” to which Josephine refers in this letter? Almost certainly she is referring to the bond between a mother and her children. Anna Countess von Brunswick, her mother, had

²² “Ob ein Gott sei? Ob er einst erfülle, Was die Sehnsucht weinend sich verspricht? Ob, vor irgendeinem Weltgericht, Sich dies rätselhafte Sein enthülle? Hoffen soll der Mensch! Er frage nicht! Die du so gern in heil'gen Nächten feierst und sanft und weich den Gram verschleierst, der eine zarte Seele quält, O Hoffnung! Laß, durch dich empor gehoben, den Dulder ahnen, daß dort oben ein Engel seine Tränen zählt! Wenn, längst verhallt, geliebte Stimmen schweigen; Wenn unter ausgestorb'nen Zweigen Verödet die Erinn'ung sitzt: Dann nahe dich, wo dein Verlaßner trauert und, von der Mitternacht umschauert, sich auf versunk'ne Urnen stützt. Und blickt er auf, das Schicksal anzuklagen, wenn scheidend über seinen Tagen die letzten Strahlen untergehn: dann laß' ihn um den Rand des Erdentraumes das Leuchten eines Wolkensaumes von einer nahen Sonne seh'n!”

²³ “Ich müßte heilige Bande verletzen, gäbe ich Ihrem Verlangen Gehör – Glauben Sie – daß ich, durch Erfüllung meiner Pflichten, am meisten leide – und daß gewiß, edle Beweggründe meine Handlungen leiteten.” (Josephine to Beethoven, Winter 1806/7, cited in Schmidt-Görg 1957, p. 21.) See also Tellenbach (1988).

apparently persuaded Josephine that she could not contemplate marrying Beethoven, since a union with a commoner would have resulted in the loss of her guardianship over her aristocratic children.²⁴

Beethoven had spent much of the summer of 1806 at the Brunswick's country estate of Martonvásár, eighteen miles from Budapest. In 1949, many Beethoven scholars felt that the "immortal beloved" riddle had been solved when a series of previously unknown letters from Beethoven to Josephine, dated 1807, were discovered.²⁵ These letters are of a passionate nature that is very similar in style to that of the "immortal beloved" letters. There is, however, one important difference. In the letters of 1807, Beethoven addresses Josephine with the formal "Sie," rather than the more intimate "Du" that he employs in the "immortal beloved" letters of 1812. It should be noted, however, that while Beethoven employs the formal "Sie" in a letter of 1805, it is clear that the relationship was already highly evolved at this point:

There can be no words for you, my only beloved, only music. For you – you, my everything, my happiness – notes are more faithful to me than words. No, not even in my music can my heart express itself. Although nature has given me some talent for music, it is still too little for you. Silently may my poor heart beat – that is all I can do – for you – always for you – only you – forever you – to my grave, only you.²⁶

Yielding to pressure from her family, Josephine began to withdraw from Beethoven toward the end of 1807. More than once she arranged to be away from home when he came to visit her. While this has been interpreted by some as a period of "cooling down" of the relationship between Josephine and Beethoven, it seems more likely to have been a consequence of the Brunswick family's increasing pressure on Josephine to terminate the relationship. In the "immortal beloved" letters of 1812, Beethoven would remind Josephine of this period when she temporarily withdrew herself from him. "Never hide yourself from me," he implores in the second letter of 6 July 1812.

Josephine was married for a second time in 1810, to Baron Christoph von Stackelberg. The marriage was a failure from the outset, however, and the Baron left Josephine in June of 1812, exactly one month before Beethoven's letters to the "immortal beloved" were written. Josephine gave birth to a daughter, Minona, on 9 April 1813, exactly nine months after the "immortal beloved" letters were written, and this has only added fuel to speculation. Is it possible that Minona – who became a fine

²⁴ Josephine's sister Theresa known to have frequently served as guardian to her sister's children during the period after the death of Count Deym, and her separation and divorce from Count von Stackelberg. See also Tellenbach (1988) for the effect of guardianship laws that were in force at the time.

²⁵ See, for example, Donald W. MacArdle, Katherine Schultze, "Five Unfamiliar Beethoven Letters," *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Oct. 1951): 490-500.

²⁶ Excerpt from a letter from Ludwig van Beethoven to Josephine Countess Deym, 1805 (Beethoven-Haus, catalogue no. HCB BBr 84f). See Joseph Schmidt-Görg (ed.), *Beethoven: Dreizehn unbekannte Briefe an Josephine Gräfin Deym geb. v. Brunsvik* [Beethoven: Thirteen Unknown Letters to Josephine Countess Deym née von Brunsvik] (Bonn: Beethoven-Haus, 1957), p. 15. "Von ihr – der einzig Geliebten – warum giebt es keine Sprache ... nur in Tönen ... die Töne wären mir williger als die Worte – Sie Sie mein Alles meine Glückseligkeit – Ach nein – auch nicht in meinen Tönen kann ich es, obschon [die] du Natur mich hierin nicht karg beschenktest [hat], so ist doch zu wenig für Sie. Stille schlage nur [o] armes Herz – weiter kannst du nichts – Für Sie– immer für Sie– nur Sie– ewig Sie – bis ins Grab nur Sie ..." (© 1998, G. Henle Verlag, München).

amateur musician – was Beethoven's illegitimate child? Is it coincidental that, spelled backward, her name is “Anonim,” which is Hungarian for “anonymous” (or, perhaps in this case, “the child whose name cannot be uttered publicly”)?

In their emphasis on the ineffable, unattainable, eternal and divine nature of the love expressed, Beethoven's letters to his "immortal beloved" bear a striking affinity to the German courtly lyric tradition of the Middle Ages. Like Beethoven's letters, the “Minnesang” (“love song” in Middle High German) expressed “a love at once illicit and morally elevating, passionate and disciplined, humiliating and exalting, human and transcendent.”²⁷ It is perhaps not unreasonable to speculate that the first syllable of “Minona,” a rare name in the German-speaking world,²⁸ may also be a veiled reference to this tradition.



The only authenticated portrait of Minona von Stackelberg (1813-97)

On 31 March 1821, Josephine von Brunswick – Beethoven's “only beloved,” his “everything,” his “angel,” his “all,” the “immortal beloved” with whom he shared “a love made in heaven” – died at the age of 42, in misery, near poverty and in ill health. In 1821, Beethoven composed the last of his piano sonatas (op. 110 and op. 111), works believed by many musicologists to be requiem-like in character and to bear discernible thematic reminiscences to his earlier *Andante favori* (WoO 57), which was secretly dedicated to Josephine von Brunswick.

Unlike Beethoven's relationship with some of the other candidates whose names have been put forward, his relationship with Josephine von Brunswick was not one of brief infatuation. It

²⁷ Francis X. Newman (ed.), *The Meaning of Courtly Love* (Albany: State University of New York, 1968), vii. For example, compare the tone of Beethoven's letters to the following Minnesang from a twelfth-century Tegernsee monastery codex (translated from the Middle High German): “Du bist mein, ich bin dein, dessen sollst du gewiss sein. Du bist verschlossen in meinem Herzen, Verloren ist das Schlüsselein – du musst immer darin sein.” (“You are mine and I am yours, of that you may be sure. Deep within my heart you are safely locked away. But I have lost the key – and there you will ever stay”).

²⁸ Some additional commentary on the name “Minona” should be added here. In Ossianic verse, “Ullin,” “Ryno,” “Alpin” and “Minona” are the “bards of song.” “*Minona oder die Kunde der Dogge*” (D 152), a rarely-heard early song by Franz Schubert on an Ossian-influenced text by Friedrich Anton Franz Bertrand, was first published in 1894, more than fifty years after the composer's death. In the present context, it should be noted that, in Bertrand's poem, Minona defies the vengeance of her father to love whom she pleases, even if it is only possible in death (a context not unlike that of Josephine in 1812). Goethe also invokes the Ossianic “Minona” in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Gillian Fellows Jensen writes: “The poems of Ossian influenced both Klopstock and Goethe and the latter included translations from the 1765 edition of MacPherson's work in his first novel *Die Lieder des Jungen Werthers* from 1774. The German-speaking Danish poet Heinrich Wilhelm Gerstenberg, who was born in Tønder in 1737, and was responsible for arousing interest in Germany in Shakespeare and Danish ballads, composed a not very successful Ossianic ballad entitled *Minona oder die Angelsachsen* [*Minona or the Anglo-Saxons*] in 1785. The literary influence led to a minor fashion in Ossianic personal names in German cultural circles.” See Gillian Fellows Jensen, “Danish Place-names in Scotland and Scottish Personal Names in Denmark,” in *Denmark and Scotland: The Cultural and Environmental Resources of Small Nations*, ed. Gillian Fellows Jensen (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters (2001): 135.

appears to have been a relationship based on profound and lasting commitment between two lonely souls. Perhaps the best evidence is given in the testimony of Thérèse, Josephine's sister:

Beethoven ... a beautiful mind! Why did not my sister Josephine, as widow Deym, take him as her husband? Josephine's soul mate! They were born for each other. She would have been much happier with him than with Stackelberg. Maternal affection made her forego her own happiness.²⁹

"The letters found in Beethoven's bedside table," she wrote into her diary in 1860, the last year of her life, "must have been addressed to Josephine, whom he loved passionately."³⁰



**Thérèse von Brunswick
(1775-1861)**

²⁹ Excerpt from Thérèse's diary entry, 4 February 1846 (cited Schmidt-Görg, 1957, p. 23): "Beethoven! Ist es doch wie ein Traum, er der Freund, der Vertraute unseres Hauses war – ein Herrlicher Geist – warum nahm ihn meine Schwester J[osephine] nicht zu ihren Gemahl als Witwe Deym? Josephines Herzensfreund! Sie waren für einander geboren. Sie ware glücklicher gewesen als mit St[ackelberg]. Mutterliebe bestimme sie – auf eigenes Glück zu versichten."

³⁰ Cited in Marianne Czeke, *Brunszvik Teréz grófno naplói és feljegyzései* [Countess Thérèse Brunsvik's Diaries and Notes], Vol. 1, Budapest, 1938).

THE IMMORTAL BELOVED LETTERS

THE FIRST LETTER (Monday, July 6, 1812, morning):

am 6ten Juli Morgends.

Mein Engel, mein alles, mein Ich. – nur einige Worte heute, und zwar mit Bleystift (mit deinem) – erst bis morgen ist meine Wohnung sicher bestimmt, welcher Nichtswürdiger Zeitverderb in d.g. – warum dieser tiefe Gram, wo die Nothwendigkeit spricht – Kann unsre Liebe anders bestehn als durch Aufopferungen, durch nicht alles verlangen, kannst du es ändern, daß du nicht ganz mein, ich nicht ganz dein bin – Ach Gott blick in die schöne Natur und beruhige dein Gemüth über das müßende – die Liebe fordert alles und ganz mit Recht, so ist es mir mit dir, dir mit mir – nur vergißt du so leicht, daß ich für mich und für dich leben muß, wären wir ganz vereinigt, du würdest dieses schmerzliche eben so wenig als ich empfinden – meine Reise war schrecklich ich kam erst Morgens 4 uhr gestern hier an, da es an Pferde mangelte, wählte die Post eine andre Reiseroute, aber welch schrecklicher Weg, auf der vorletzten Station warnte man mich bey nacht zu fahren, machte mich einen Wald fürchten, aber das Reizte mich nur – und ich hatte Unrecht, der Wagen muste bey dem schrecklichen Wege brechen , grundloß, bloßer Landweg, [durchgestrichen: und di] ohne 2 solche Postillione, wie ich hatte, wäre ich liegen geblieben Unterwegs. – Esterhazi hatte auf dem andern gewöhnlichen Wege hierhin dasselbe schicksaal, mit 8 Pferden, was ich mit vier. – Jedoch hatte ich zum Theil wieder vergnügen, wie immer, wenn ich was glücklich überstehe. – nun geschwind zum innern vom äußern, wir werden unß wohl bald sehn, auch heute kann ich dir meine Bemerkungen nicht mittheilen, welche ich während dieser einigen Tage über mein Leben machte – wären unsre Herzen immer dichten einander, ich machte wohl keine d.g. die Brust ist voll dir viel zu sagen – Ach – Es gibt Momente, wo ich finde daß die sprache noch gar nichts ist – erheite dich – bleibe mein Treuer einziger schaz, mein alles, wie ich dir das übrige müßen die Götter schicken, was für unß seyn muß und seyn soll. Dein treuer Ludwig.

“My angel, my all, my very self – Only a few words today and at that with pencil (with yours) – Not till tomorrow will my lodgings be definitely determined upon³¹ – what a useless waste of 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 for me with you, and for you with me. But you forget so easily that I must live for me and for you; if we were wholly united you would feel the pain of it as little as I.³² My journey was a fearful one; I did not reach here until 4 o'clock yesterday morning. Lacking horses the post-coach chose another route,³³ but what an awful one; at the stage before the last I was warned not to travel at night; I was

³¹ At the time of the letter, Beethoven had no fixed accommodation. He first lived at the inn called “The Golden Sun.” The following day (July 7), according to the Teplitz hotel registries, he moved into an inn called “The Oak.”

³² In this section Beethoven speaks of the feelings and problems this forbidden love has brought him. He reflects on the pain it has caused him to be apart from his mistress. He also wonders whether he should refrain entirely from this love affair, and he wonders what this means for his feelings of abandonment.

³³ Beethoven's departure from Prague is specified in the Prague *Oberpostamtszeitung* of 4 July 1812. His arrival in Teplitz is confirmed by the Teplitz Hotel registry of 5 July 1812. The “other route” to which Beethoven refers is probably a side road. For the ordinary route, eight horses in harness were required.

made fearful of a forest, but that only made me the more eager – and I was wrong. The coach broke down on the wretched road, a bottomless mud road.³⁴ Without such postillions as I had with me I should have remained stuck in the road. Esterhazy,³⁵ traveling the usual road here, had the same fate with eight horses that I had with four. Yet I got some pleasure out of it, as I always do when I successfully overcome difficulties. Now a quick change to things internal from things external. We shall surely see each other soon; moreover, today I cannot share with you the thoughts I have had during these last few days touching my own life - If our hearts were always close together, I would have none of these. My heart is full of so many things to say to you – ah – there are moments when I feel that speech amounts to nothing at all – Cheer up – remain my true, my only treasure, my all as I am yours. The gods must send us the rest, what for us must and shall be – Your faithful Ludwig.”

THE SECOND LETTER (Monday, 6 July 1812, evening):

Abends Montags am 6ten Juli

Du leidest du mein theuerstes Wesen – eben jetzt nehme ich wahr daß die Briefe in aller Frühe aufgegeben werden müssen. Montags – Donnerstags – die einzigen Tage wo die Post von hier nach K. geht – du leidest – Ach, wo ich bin, bist du mit mir, mit mir und dir rede ich mache daß ich mit dir leben kann, welches Leben!!!! so!!!! ohne dich – Verfolgt von der Güte der Menschen hier und da, die ich meyne – eben so wenig verdienen zu wollen, als sie zu verdienen – Demuth des Menschen gegen den Menschen – sie schmerzt mich – und wenn ich mich im Zusammenhang des Universums betrachte, was bin ich und was ist der – den man den Größten nennt – und doch – ist wieder hierin das Göttliche des Menschen – ich weine wenn ich denke daß du erst wahrscheinlich Sonnabends die erste Nachricht von mir erhältst – wie du mich auch liebst – stärker liebe ich dich doch – doch nie verberge dich vor mir – gute Nacht – als Badender muß ich schlafen gehen – [durchgestrichen: o geh mit, geh mit –] Ach Gott – so nah! so weit! ist es nicht ein wahres HimmelsGebäude unsre Liebe – aber auch so fest, wie die Veste des Himmels.

“You are suffering, my dearest creature – only now have I learned that letters must be posted very early in the morning on Mondays to Thursdays – the only days on which the mail-coach goes from here to K.³⁶ You are suffering – Ah, wherever I am, there you are also – I will arrange it with you and me that I can live with you. What a life!!! thus!!! without you – pursued by the goodness of mankind hither and thither – which I as little want to deserve as I deserve it – Humility of man towards man – it pains me – and when I consider myself in relation to the universe, what am I and what is He – whom we call the greatest – and

³⁴ Sometimes coaches were damaged when the roads were very poor. Broken spokes were commonplace, for example. A flat tire would be the modern-day equivalent. However while an automobile tire can be changed quickly, with a carriage the problem was more serious, and often an axle might break. We do not know exactly what went wrong with Beethoven's coach, only that he had to wait until it was repaired.

³⁵ Prince Paul Anton III. Esterházy (1786-1866), Austrian ambassador at the court of Saxony in Dresden.

³⁶ At that time the mail was transported by carriage from city to city, and only on certain days. If you missed the coach, it could be that you could send only three or four days later another letter. By “K” Beethoven is likely referring to Karlsbad. The next day, Beethoven reported happiness that at the moment (during the high season in summer) the mail was moving every day on a stagecoach.

yet – herein lies the divine in man³⁷ – I weep when I reflect that you will probably not receive the first report from me until Saturday – Much as you love me – I love you more – But do not ever conceal yourself from me – good night – As I am taking the baths I must go to bed³⁸ – Oh God – so near! so far! Is not our love truly a heavenly structure, and also as firm as the vault of heaven?”

THE THIRD LETTER (Tuesday, 7 July 1812, morning):

guten Morgen am 7ten Juli

Schon im Bette drängen sich die Ideen zu dir meine Unsterbliche Geliebte, hier und da freudig, dann wieder traurig, vom Schicksaale abwartend, ob es unß erhört – leben kann ich entweder nur ganz mit dir oder gar nicht, ja ich habe beschlossen in der Ferne so lange herum zu irren, bis ich in deine Arme fliegen kann, und mich ganz heymathlich bey dir nennen kann, meine Seele von dir umgeben in's Reich der Geister schicken kann – ja leider muß es seyn – du wirst dich fassen um so mehr, da du meine Treue gegen dich kennst, nie eine andre kann mein Herz besizen, nie – nie – O Gott warum sich entfernen müßen, was man so liebt, und doch ist mein Leben in V.[ien] so wie jezt ein kümmerliches Leben – Deine Liebe macht mich zum glücklichsten und zum unglücklichsten zugleich – in meinen Jahren jezt bedürfte ich einiger Einförmigkeit Gleichheit des Lebens – kann diese bey unserm Verhältniße bestehn? – Engel, eben erfahre ich, daß die Post alle Tage abgeht – und ich muß daher schließen, damit du den B. gleich erhältst – sey ruhig, nur durch Ruhiges beschauen unsres Daseyns können wir unsern Zweck zusammen zu leben erreichen – sey ruhig – liebe mich – heute – gestern – Welche Sehnsucht mit Thränen nach dir – dir – dir – mein Leben – mein alles – leb wohl – o liebe mich fort – verken[ne] nie das treuste Herz deines Geliebten.

L. ewig dein ewig mein ewig unß.

“Though still in bed, my thoughts go out to you, my Immortal Beloved, now and then joyfully, then sadly, waiting to learn whether or not fate will hear us – I can live only wholly with you or not at all – Yes, I am resolved to wander so long away from you until I can fly to your arms and say that I am really at home with you, and can send my soul enwrapped in you into the land of spirits – Yes, unhappily it must be so – You will be the more contained since you know my fidelity to you. No one else can ever possess my heart - never - never – Oh God, why must one be parted from one whom one so loves. And yet my life in V is now a wretched life – Your love makes me at once the happiest and the unhappiest of men – At my age I need a steady, quiet life – can that be so with us? My angel, I have just been told that the mailcoach goes every day - therefore I must close at once so that you may receive the letter at once - Be calm, only by a calm consideration of our existence can we achieve our purpose to live together – Be calm – love me – today - yesterday - what tearful longings for you – you – you – my life – my all – farewell. Oh continue to love me - never misjudge the most faithful heart of your beloved. Ever thine, ever mine, ever ours. L.”

³⁷ Beethoven is quite philosophical here. It annoys him that the people around him are kind to him. He suspects that they have included him because he is hearing-impaired and ill. Beethoven believes that he does not deserve this mercy. This also reminds him of how compassion is not strong in him, and he wants to know why. Beethoven also compares himself to God and the universe, and thinks about how small and insignificant he is. He admits, however, that compassion makes people a little more like God.

³⁸ Beethoven had gone to the spa at Teplitz in order to treat his illnesses and his hearing disorder. During the day, spa guests were given treatments. Beethoven was therefore required to be in bed at an early hour.

